

DEATH DIAMONDS

Maxwell Grant

Table of Contents

<u>DEATH DIAMONDS</u>	1
<u>Maxwell Grant</u>	1
<u>CHAPTER I. CANDID CRIME</u>	1
<u>CHAPTER II. A FRIEND IN NEED</u>	5
<u>CHAPTER III. DEAD MAN'S CROSSING</u>	10
<u>CHAPTER IV. TRAIL TO CRIME</u>	14
<u>CHAPTER V. CROOKS PREFER DIAMONDS</u>	17
<u>CHAPTER VI. THE CHASE REVERSED</u>	21
<u>CHAPTER VII. DEATH FOR TWO</u>	24
<u>CHAPTER VIII. FIGHT BRINGS FLIGHT</u>	28
<u>CHAPTER IX. FRIENDS MEET AGAIN</u>	32
<u>CHAPTER X. CREDIT TO RUY LOPEZ</u>	35
<u>CHAPTER XI. FOUR CASTLES</u>	39
<u>CHAPTER XII. ROUTES REVERSED</u>	43
<u>CHAPTER XIII. THE TRAIL AHEAD</u>	47
<u>CHAPTER XIV. CRIME TO COME</u>	51
<u>CHAPTER XV. VANISHED PEARLS</u>	55
<u>CHAPTER XVI. CRIME'S CONSEQUENCE</u>	60
<u>CHAPTER XVII. EVERYBODY HAPPY</u>	65
<u>CHAPTER XVIII. THE FASHION SHOW</u>	69
<u>CHAPTER XIX. CROOKS MAKE CLAIM</u>	73
<u>CHAPTER XX. THE FINAL BLAST</u>	77

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- [CHAPTER I. CANDID CRIME](#)
 - [CHAPTER II. A FRIEND IN NEED](#)
 - [CHAPTER III. DEAD MAN'S CROSSING](#)
 - [CHAPTER IV. TRAIL TO CRIME](#)
 - [CHAPTER V. CROOKS PREFER DIAMONDS](#)
 - [CHAPTER VI. THE CHASE REVERSED](#)
 - [CHAPTER VII. DEATH FOR TWO](#)
 - [CHAPTER VIII. FIGHT BRINGS FLIGHT](#)
 - [CHAPTER IX. FRIENDS MEET AGAIN](#)
 - [CHAPTER X. CREDIT TO RUY LOPEZ](#)
 - [CHAPTER XI. FOUR CASTLES](#)
 - [CHAPTER XII. ROUTES REVERSED](#)
 - [CHAPTER XIII. THE TRAIL AHEAD](#)
 - [CHAPTER XIV. CRIME TO COME](#)
 - [CHAPTER XV. VANISHED PEARLS](#)
 - [CHAPTER XVI. CRIME'S CONSEQUENCE](#)
 - [CHAPTER XVII. EVERYBODY HAPPY](#)
 - [CHAPTER XVIII. THE FASHION SHOW](#)
 - [CHAPTER XIX. CROOKS MAKE CLAIM](#)
 - [CHAPTER XX. THE FINAL BLAST](#)
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CHAPTER I. CANDID CRIME

IT was a strange setting for crime. From the second-floor veranda of his Spanish stucco home, Glenn Belmar could survey the entire scene, thanks to the hillock upon which his house stood. He had studied that vista often, at this hour when day was fading into dusk, but never before had thoughts of an impending menace loomed heavily upon his mind.

The panorama was one of palm-lined driveways and lazy lanes, broken by the blue stretches of half a dozen lakes, which seemed like one larger body of water exhibiting its sheen from many angles.

In a sense, the lakes could be regarded as one, for they were connected by canals, traceable because they were lined with a wilder growth than the cultivated palms that adorned the roadways.

There were other spaces among the trees, and from them reared many mansions, with traces of green lawns surmounted by great oak trees draped with Spanish moss.

Those houses were the real pride of Palm Park, which, in its turn, was the pride of Lakedale. Famed as a resort city of inland Florida, Lakedale needed a showplace, and had it in Palm Park, where dwelt the

DEATH DIAMONDS

wealthiest of winter visitors, including Glenn Belmar.

It was around those fancy residences that crime's menace clung. A real threat, for it had already struck, and could be expected soon again. The menace was robbery, of a specific sort. Clever thieves were steadily rifling Palm Park residents of their chief commodity, jewels.

Three such robberies in a week, yet no whisper had reached the public. Palm Park residents preferred to keep such doings to themselves and the police, who, in turn, were unwilling to let it loose until they had a clue.

Since a clue, in the estimate of the local constabulary, meant lodging the perpetrators in jail, with their signed confessions lying on the police chief's desk, the solution of these crimes seemed very unlikely.

So far, no one had walked into the city hall to give himself up. Instead, the crooks were still walking into houses and out again, with jewels as their trophies. Yet all the residents of Palm Park were keeping very mum, on the theory that they mustn't let the perpetrators even know that their crimes had been suspected.

Such was the way in Palm Park, exclusive suburb of thriving Lakedale.

Glenn Belmar had decided that he must do something about it. That, in itself, proved how pressing the situation was, because Belmar seldom did anything that required unusual exertion, with the exception of playing polo.

This evening, however, he was forgoing his usual trip to the dog track, to hunt crime instead. His long wait for darkness was at last fulfilled.

With a determined air, Belmar stepped from the sun porch into his upstairs living room and called for Brock, who promptly appeared.

Master and servant formed a distinct contrast. Both were of average height, but Belmar was inclined to the portly side, whereas Brock was underweight. Belmar's face was broad; Brock's quite thin. The master was brusque at times; the servant always diffident. One had made it a habit of giving orders; the other, of accepting them.

"My camera, Brock," ordered Belmar. "I am ready to call on the Wilkinhams."

"It is here, sir." Brock supplied the camera. "The flash bulbs, also. Two dozen a dozen in each box."

Belmar gave a cross between a chuckle and a snort.

"Candid-camera nights are a thing of the past," he said reprovingly. "Why I indulged in such a silly pastime, I haven't yet understood, Brock. Tonight, I shall be lucky to get a few good shots, let alone two dozen."

Brock gave an understanding nod and placed a box of flash bulbs on the table, carefully setting the other box on the mantel. From the box on the table, Belmar took three bulbs and placed them in his pockets.

"I only ordered one dozen, sir," said Brock, "but they sent two. I shall return the other box tomorrow. You use them so seldom –"

"Never mind the details, Brock," inserted Belmar. "You know how I hate details. Go get me the evening newspaper. I must look at it before we leave."

DEATH DIAMONDS

BROCK hurried downstairs, and Belmar was following slowly, when he paused with a worried air and tapped the pockets of his tuxedo jacket. It annoyed him, having two flash bulbs in one pocket, a single bulb in the other.

Turning back, he stopped at the mantel, because it was nearer, and took another bulb from the box that lay there. Hardly had he dropped the bulb into a pocket, when he remembered that Brock was sending the extra box back.

So Belmar dug a hand into a pocket again, brought out a bulb and put it in the mantel box. Going over to the table, he supplied himself with the required bulb from the original box.

It took Belmar a mere three minutes to scan through the flimsy Lakedale newspaper. Not a word in it about jewel robberies. The reception that the Wilkinhams were giving rated half a page quite justifiably, too, since the Countess del Rondo was to be a guest.

A smile played upon Belmar's lips, as he tossed the newspaper aside. The Countess del Rondo meant jewels. She was, to use a term which Belmar thought very descriptive, "lousy with them." Naturally, no one would have told the countess that jewel thieves were prevalent in Palm Park; otherwise, she would have flown to Miami and the Wilkinham reception would be off. So the countess would certainly appear in all her jeweled splendor.

Glenn Belmar intended to watch the Countess del Rondo.

It was a three-mile drive to the Wilkinham mansion, though a duck could have swum or flown it in a third the distance, for it was straight across the nearest lake.

Belmar let Brock do the driving, so that he could expend his own exertions upon the camera. When they drove into the grounds, other cars had already arrived, but Belmar was quite sure that the countess would not be among the early guests.

"Park in a convenient place," he told Brock. "We shall await developments."

During the wait, Belmar observed a few important facts. Guests, as they arrived, passed through a portal flanked by two local detectives. It didn't perturb the guests in the least, for none of the Lakedale detectives looked the part. They reminded Belmar more of the Wilkinham servants, who were present in abundance both inside and outside the mansion.

The servants were like the members of an ant hill, engaged in tasks that had no seeming rhyme or reason. They came out to see that cars were properly parked, though there was plenty of available space. They inspected the hibiscus bushes and the hedges with flashlights, the latter very unnecessary, because the glow from the house was more than sufficient.

Of course, the servants were cooperating with the police, which was very nice. But it didn't help Belmar, because he wanted to stow himself in a vantage spot from which he could better witness the arrival of the countess.

Knowing his master's problem, Block put a suggestion.

"If you want, sir," said the servant, "I can pace along the line of cars and choose a suitable space between them. Time is quite short. Mr. Haudlin will be here soon."

DEATH DIAMONDS

Belmar gave a nod. Brock had reference to Richard Haudlin, founder of Palm Park and its most important resident. Haudlin would be bringing the countess, of course, unless Wayne Medrith had usurped the privilege.

As Brock alighted from the car, Belmar stroked his chin and thought over the probabilities. Richard Haudlin was getting older, though he didn't show it. Sooner or later, he would have to relinquish his control of affairs in Palm Park, perhaps to Wayne Medrith.

Haudlin, a retired manufacturer, represented the staid days when the exclusive colony was formed. Medrith, a comparatively youthful adventurer, was in keeping with the modern trend. A change from the old to the new might shake Palm Park to its foundations; a serious problem for everyone, including Glenn Belmar.

CARS were coming into the driveway. By the glare from their headlights, Belmar saw Brock beckoning. Climbing from the car, Belmar performed his idea of a furtive sneak over to the space where Brock awaited, and summarily ordered the servant back to the car.

By then, the lights were close, so Brock had to take a roundabout way behind the parked cars. Nicely situated, Belmar made ready with his camera.

The first car stopped. From it stepped Richard Haudlin, tall but heavy-built, to extend his hand to another passenger, who was probably the countess. There wasn't any question, when the resplendent glitter of gems came into the light of the car that stood behind Haudlin's. Belmar was close enough to see how heavily the middle-aged countess was loaded with the precious freight.

Her fingers were massed with rubies and sapphires. She had "headlights" of her own, in the diamond bracelet on her left wrist. From her neck dangled the famous Del Rondo emerald, its huge green brilliance sufficient to start traffic coming her direction.

In fact, the emerald proved to be a "go" signal.

From somewhere in the shrubbery, two men appeared with a leap. One shoved Haudlin back against his limousine; the other grabbed the countess. They were robbers, these, for both wore handkerchiefs as masks.

Gleefully, Belmar took a camera shot of the attack. Then, while he was discarding one bulb and putting in another, Belmar saw a man jump out of the second car. He recognized Wayne Medrith, lithe and limber, coming top speed to join the fray.

Medrith grabbed the masked man who clutched the countess, but the fellow who had settled Haudlin came upon Medrith from behind and sent him sprawling.

By then, a third masked entry was in it. He was stripping the countess' rings from her fingers, like huckleberries from a high bush. The countess gave a horrified scream; as soon as her hands were loose, she clapped her right upon her left wrist to save the diamond bracelet.

The robber who was holding the countess gripped the famed emerald pendant with one hand and gave the lady a shove with the other. He kept the pendant, and the countess landed upon Medrith, who was getting up. Belmar popped out from between the cars to get an excellent flashlight picture of that scene.

Then, since the masked men were dashing across the driveway, Belmar went the same direction, putting a third flash bulb in its socket. He heard shouts from all about him, voiced by the Wilkinham servants.

But the men who grabbed Belmar didn't shout. They were the Lakedale detectives. They'd seen the flare of

DEATH DIAMONDS

the flash bulbs, accompanying the screams from the countess.

As Belmar landed on the turf beside the driveway, he warded off the blows of the two detectives. Belmar was intact, and so was his camera; he'd taken enough polo spills to choose his landings properly.

Up ahead, one man had met the surge of two of the masked robbers, and was doing quite nobly. The lone man was Brock.

A big bulk heaved into the struggle. Haudlin had recovered and was coming to Brock's aid. He arrived too late; by then, Brock was spilled and Haudlin received the return drive of the bandits. He should have been helped by Medrith, but the younger man had taken another spill while starting to the chase.

Punched back by the masked robbers, Haudlin saw the detectives turned toward Belmar. Angrily, Haudlin yelled:

"You fools! He isn't one of the robbers! There go your men!" The detectives dropped Belmar and started after the pair who were disappearing in the shrubs. His elbows perched in a bougainvillea bush, Belmar took a candid flash of the scene. He had a glimpse of Brock as the detective shoved the man aside. Then, on his feet Belmar was inserting his last flash bulb. All about was chaos. Servants galore had rushed from the mansion to join the detectives. People were getting into cars, to skirt the grounds and round up the three daring robbers. Two had gone together; the third had managed a lone escape.

Belmar thought a picture of the excitement would be excellent, until Brock reached him and gave a perfect suggestion:

"If you can only find the masked men, sir –"

Belmar nodded. Brock took the wheel, and Belmar joined him in the car. They sped out from the grounds, along with the other pursuers, Belmar holding his camera tightly and guarding the last bulb as though it were as priceless as the stolen gems.

His mind reverting to the candid-camera nights which he had once so greatly relished, he was highly pleased. He felt that this was one night when he had taken the full show for his own.

But Belmar was wrong. He and his one-man camera act were not the main attraction.

Crooks had stolen the show with candid crime!

CHAPTER II. A FRIEND IN NEED

FOR nearly an hour, cars roved the byways of Palm Park, meeting each other so often that it became both troublesome and monotonous. Men in tuxedos were constantly jumping out of cars to question other drivers who wore the same attire. At times, there were near-accidents, particularly at the narrow bridges that crossed the winding canals.

One close mishap worried Glenn Belmar.

"We'd better go home," Belmar told Brock. "I'm thinking of the camera, not myself. I have important evidence recorded on this film."

Brock drove back to Belmar's house. The servant dropped his master by the front door and put the car into the

DEATH DIAMONDS

garage. Standing on the lower porch, Belmar listened to the hue and cry.

Occasional shouts came through the darkness, when hunters thought they'd found some traces of the hunted. The spurting sounds of automobiles were drowned by the louder roars of speedboats, starting out to scour the lakes.

A light came from Belmar's sun porch. Brock had put away the car and was in the house. Belmar decided to go inside. He thought that it was time he had refreshments, having missed them at the short-lived reception. The thing that halted him at the front door was the approach of cars that came right into his drive.

Thinking that the chase had reached his front yard, Belmar tried another flash picture, but it didn't work. Evidently, he hadn't screwed the flash bulb tight enough.

Before Belmar could adjust the matter, men approached him. They included Haudlin, Medrith, and other important Palm Park residents. The Lakedale detectives were with them, and they pointed toward Belmar quite accusingly. It suddenly struck him that the camera was the reason.

It was Medrith who explained the situation, while Haudlin was motioning the detectives back.

"Hello, Belmar," greeted Medrith in an easy way, "These chaps want to ask you a few questions."

"Very well," returned Belmar, with a sober nod. "Suppose we go upstairs."

They reached the second-floor living room, and the two detectives included Brock in their suspicious stares. Then, one said to Haudlin:

"We want to search both these men."

Haudlin didn't consider it necessary; nor did Medrith. Belmar, himself, supplied the solution. Realizing that he and Brock were under suspicion, he favored the search. So it began.

As a preliminary, the detectives wanted to examine the camera. Belmar stopped them, until he could remove the film.

"These pictures may be evidence," he declared. "Keep the film and have it developed yourselves."

The detectives complied. They searched Belmar and Brock; then proceeded to scour the house, omitting nothing. Meanwhile, Belmar silenced the protests of Haudlin, Medrith and the rest, by inviting them to have a drink.

He learned, during the period following the accepted invitation, that the masked robbers had completely disappeared, which was why the detectives had insisted upon treating Belmar as a suspect.

FINISHED with a thorough search of the house, the detectives reappeared long enough to state that they were going to scour the garage, and Belmar's car, as well. When they had gone, Belmar poured another round of drinks.

"Silly of them," he said indulgently. "If Brock and I had taken those jewels, we could have disposed of them by this time."

"Of course!" agreed Haudlin in his booming style. "You two were searching with the rest of us."

DEATH DIAMONDS

"And I didn't see Brock throw anything from the car," declared Belmar. "Nor did Brock see me perform such an action. Did you, Brock?"

"You threw out the dead flash bulbs, sir," reminded Brock. "But they were all."

Medrith gave a laugh.

"So those were the shots some people thought they heard," he said to Haudlin. "No wonder the wild-goose chase continued!"

"No wonder!"

Haudlin stared hard as he spoke, and his gaze was toward Medrith, who returned it steadily, lifting his glass as he did. Swinging to Belmar, Haudlin gave him the same straight look.

"Adhere to fact, Belmar," advised Haudlin, "and advance no theories. We know that you are above suspicion, and your servant, likewise, since you can vouch for him. But these Lakedale detectives are anxious to arrest someone. Neither Medrith nor I would care to have you put to such inconvenience."

The detectives reappeared, both sullen. They'd found nothing in the garage or in the car. Haudlin and Medrith said good night, and the detectives went with them.

Brock began to grumble about having to tidy up the place, whereupon Belmar gave a headshake.

"I hope those pictures develop," said Belmar. "If they don't, we may both be accused of duplicity, Brock. This matter is getting beyond me; very much beyond me."

"What can you do about it, sir?"

"I can send a telegram," replied Belmar, "to my friend Lamont Cranston. You remember him, of course?" Brock shook his head.

"I forgot," said Belmar. "I didn't hire you until I came here. Cranston is an old friend of mine; we belong to the same club in New York City. And Cranston" Belmar gave a wise nod "is very well acquainted with the New York police commissioner."

Brock stared, rather puzzled.

"Don't you understand?" queried Belmar. "Cranston has a first-hand acquaintance with the methods of police investigation. If I invite him here, telling him his presence is imperative, he will certainly come. So call the telegraph office, Brock."

When Brock made the call, Belmar worded the telegram, stating that he would need Cranston's advice tomorrow night; not later. That done, Belmar declared in satisfied tone:

"Actually, Brock, I believe that I shall value Cranston's advice more than that of the commissioner's, himself!"

Belmar was speaking more wisely than he knew. He was sending an urgent call to someone who could prove more than a friend with advice. To Palm Park, where crime was as serious as it was unheralded, Belmar was summoning the master crime-hunter of all time: The Shadow!

DEATH DIAMONDS

Never could Belmar have guessed that the man who called himself Lamont Cranston was actually the famed champion of justice who fared forth, cloaked in black, to conquer every branch of evil that he could uncover.

Not only did The Shadow conceal his identity with such garb, but his very presence, as well, which made him a double terror to all who dealt in crime.

WITH morning, Glenn Belmar awoke feeling that he had never slept better in his life. Perhaps he had received some impressions of Cranston that his waking self could not recognize.

Reading the morning newspaper, Belmar smiled at the society news, which mentioned the very successful reception held in honor of the Countess del Rondo. The newspaper didn't add that the countess was in the local hospital, battling a nervous breakdown caused by the loss of jewels valued at a quarter million dollars.

At least, the countess still had her diamond bracelet; otherwise, the nervous breakdown might have ended in heart failure. Belmar learned those details from Haudlin, by telephone. He also learned that Haudlin and Medrith would be stopping by some time that afternoon, along with the police and the developed photographs.

There was a telegram from Cranston, later. It stated that he would arrive by plane late that afternoon. Belmar showed the telegram to Brock, so that the servant would remember to drive over to the airport at the right time.

The airport was on the other side of Lakedale, but it could be reached in half an hour by avoiding the city traffic. An old highway that skirted the town was the route that Palm Park residents preferred.

Meanwhile, Belmar busied himself by voicing theories on crime, with Brock as a patient listener. Seated in his favorite armchair, Belmar scanned the landscape visible from his sun porch, and tried to reconstruct last night's crime. Though his talk lasted for hours, it summed into a single statement.

"Plague take it, Brock!" expressed Belmar. "The thing happened like clockwork! Those masked men vanished from the midst of us, and the Del Rondo jewels with them. We were all tearing about like the wind of a hurricane, and the culprits floated balmily away in the storm center."

"But the storm came our way, sir," reminded Brock. "Though it was late getting here."

"Late because they questioned the Wilkinham servants first," explained Belmar. "Haudlin told me about it when he phoned today. They even searched the servants, and ransacked the house, to make sure that none was working with the criminals. All proved innocent. Well, we shall see what Cranston has to think of it."

Brock reminded Belmar that there were some errands to be done before his guest arrived. So Belmar told the servant to drive into town and attend to them. Brock left, and Belmar continued his reflections for another hour, until the sound of arriving cars disturbed him.

One car contained Richard Haudlin and the local police chief; the other held Wayne Medrith and a very dazzling young lady, whose reddish hair caught a startling burnish from the setting sun.

Belmar recognized her, from the sun porch. She was Arlene Hamil, daughter of a wealthy Palm Park resident, Augustus Hamil.

Belmar met the visitors and brought them to the sun porch, where the police chief displayed prints of the developed photographs. All three pictures had come out well, which pleased Belmar, particularly when the

DEATH DIAMONDS

police chief said:

"These clear you, Mr. Belmar. You couldn't have been shooting pictures and helping those robbers at the same time. The only trouble is, none of these photos gives us a good enough view of the crooks."

The chief was right; they didn't. The first two pictures showed Haudlin and the countess, plainly. The second included Medrith, sitting on the gravel, a very surprised look on his face. Viewing it, the chief turned to Medrith with a snort:

"Seems to me you were slow getting into it, Mr. Medrith, and mighty fast getting out. If you hadn't been the last person to arrive at the reception, the crooks wouldn't have spotted the countess like they did. Your car lights helped them."

"Sorry, chief," said Medrith blandly. "I was late because I drove over to get Miss Hamil, only to learn that she was not coming to the reception... Right, Arlene?"

Belmar was already looking toward Arlene when Medrith and the others turned her way. Thus Belmar caught a preview of her face, quite like a candid-camera flash.

For the moment, her expression was defiant, her lips firmly closed, unready to speak. Then, before eyes met hers, Arlene relaxed. She compromised with a nod; then, slowly, steadily, she said:

"Yes. It was my fault that Mr. Medrith was late."

PERHAPS the dimming daylight prevented others from noting the traces of restrained emotion that Arlene displayed. Another interruption helped. Brock was returning with the car, and men turned to look from the window as he drove into the garage.

Brock came upstairs, loaded with packages, and Belmar showed him the photographs. Brock was naturally interested in the third picture, which showed him being shoved aside by the detectives.

"Now, Mr. Belmar," declared the police chief, "I want your entire story, to go with these pictures. Or, perhaps, your servant can give a better running account, since you were busy taking the photographs."

Belmar turned to his servant and smilingly said:

"Your privilege, Brock."

"Perhaps you should give your statement first, sir," said Brock. "You wanted me to meet Mr. Cranston at the airport. It is about time I started."

"Quite right," agreed Belmar. "I can give my account while you are gone, and be free to entertain Cranston when he arrives."

"Suppose we go over to my house," suggested Haudlin. "Brock can bring your friend there, Belmar."

Brock left, and the others started out, calling to Medrith to come along. He was over in a corner of the sun porch, staring reflectively at Belmar's side lawn, when he heard them.

Downstairs, Haudlin swung his car about and picked up Belmar and the police chief. Medrith promptly followed with Arlene.

DEATH DIAMONDS

Looking back as they left the grounds, Belmar observed that Brock hadn't brought the car from the garage. Probably he was taking the new coupe instead of the old sedan. Trouble, possibly, finding the right keys, or maybe he was waiting for the other cars to leave the driveway.

It didn't matter. Brock would get started soon enough. If he had trouble with the coupe, he could use the sedan.

Brock wasn't having car trouble. His problem was more serious, though very brief. In the garage, he was standing between the cars, his arms shaking as he held them half lifted.

Three men, their faces obscured in the semidarkness, were prodding Brock with guns. Belmar's servant was trying to splutter words, but couldn't.

The fading sounds of departing motors proved the signal. One gun left Brock's back, was lifted behind his head, and came down with a skull-cracking force that crumpled him upon the concrete floor. The man who had been facing Brock spoke approvingly to the fellow who had delivered the blow.

"Good work!" he declared. Then, to the other thug: "See, Raiford? That's the way Reidsville handles them. Get him in the car, you two. I'll do the rest."

As the pair complied, the thug called Raiford questioned:

"What about us, Tony? Want us to come along?"

"Not a chance!" declared the leader. "You might have to show your mugs, and that wouldn't do around here. You duck back where you belong. I've got two other guys waiting for me."

Belmar's coupe nosed itself from the garage with Tony at the wheel, the motionless form of Brock beside him. Brock wasn't merely stunned; the hard blow, smashed behind his ear, had killed him. To all appearances, crime's murderous job was done.

Such was not the case. Crime's job, in this instance of Brock, had just begun as events were soon to prove!

CHAPTER III. DEAD MAN'S CROSSING

THE inbound plane had reached the airport early. Hence, Lamont Cranston was not surprised when he found no one waiting for him.

In very leisurely fashion, he produced a cigarette case, opened it, and extended it to his companion, Margo Lane, who shook her head. Margo wasn't in any mood for a quiet smoke.

"Why don't you call your friend Belmar?" she queried. "Perhaps he hasn't started here, yet."

Cranston's calm face showed slight traces of a smile.

"Anxious to get on to Miami, aren't you, Margo?"

"Why not?" queried Margo.

"You knew I'd been planning a Miami trip, Lamont. I was glad enough to come by way of Lakedale in order to have your company on the trip, though why, I don't know, for you were half asleep all the way."

DEATH DIAMONDS

"You'll enjoy Lakedale, Margo –"

"Maybe you will, Lamont, if it's as dead as I've heard it is. One evening will be enough for me. So the sooner we reach Belmar's, the better, since I'll have to get back here and catch the late plane for Miami."

"Very well. I'll phone Belmar."

The phone call brought no results. Lack of a reply indicated that Belmar might have started, but when Cranston returned to state the case, Margo had already scouted up a taxicab. The driver spoke about a short route to Palm Park, and said he would flag Belmar's car if they met it on the way. So Cranston obligingly agreed to go by cab; wearing his slight smile all the while.

Actually, Cranston was quite as eager as Margo to reach Belmar's early. He had caught deep inferences in Belmar's telegram. Margo hadn't yet.

"What's bothering Belmar?" she questioned as they rode along. "Has he slipped a few goals in his polo rating? Or is he getting bored, with no one to talk to after nine o'clock at night?"

"You have the wrong impression of Palm Park, Margo," returned Cranston. "Lakedale may deserve its reputation as a haven for superannuated winter visitors who roll up the sidewalks every night, so that those who ignore the evening curfew will not stumble. But Palm Park is distinctly different –"

How different it was, Cranston didn't specify. At that moment, the cab driver applied the brakes so hard as to send the passengers bumping against the front seat, with their baggage.

"Sorry," said the cabby. "I'd just remembered we were coming to Dead Man's Crossing. Only, I was kind of soon. It's still a piece ahead."

Poking his head up from behind the front seat, Cranston saw what the driver meant. A hundred yards ahead this old road, paved with brick, crossed a wider concrete highway at what could have been termed a "bloody angle."

It was worse on the other side, than here, for the brick made a slight upward slope beyond the concrete. Besides, the corner had an old abandoned filling station that cut off visibility.

At this hour, with the haze of dusk upon the scene, the danger was at its greatest point, for only occasional cars were using lights. The cabby was turning his on, but their glare, falling short of the crossing, made the stretch beyond look darker.

The glow did catch the glitter of a glass-studded stop-sign, which was obviously duplicated on the other side of the through highway.

Cranston's eyes, however, were roving the main road, and they took in the widespread events that happened.

A CAR coming up the superhighway blinked its lights, as though the driver couldn't tell whether he wanted them bright or dim. The car crossed the brick road and kept along its way, but the sound of its moderate motor was drowned by a roar from the other direction.

Another car, without lights, was coming down the highway at an increasing speed; but even before it reached Dead Man's Crossing, a third machine appeared. Likewise without lights, it was nosing down from the slight slope beyond the filling station, which, in turn, cut off the view of the driver who was roaring in along the

DEATH DIAMONDS

superhighway.

Right into the open poked the car from the side road; the cab's lights gave a glimpse of its driver, tilted beside the wheel, as though trying to peer around the edge of the service station.

He might have been looking, but he certainly wasn't listening, for the slight sound of the motor in his new coupe couldn't have drowned the uproar of the outmoded sedan that was coming like a flying juggernaut toward the blind crossing.

The cab driver jammed his brakes again. From a hundred feet, his headlamps bathed the climax like spotlights focused upon a stage.

Veering when its driver saw the coupe in his path, the onrushing sedan performed a series of gyrations. Its brakes were on again, off again, sliding it into a zigzag that required the full width of the concrete highway.

Cranston could feel Margo's fingers digging into his arm, as she watched the speedy preliminaries of the threatening collision. A relieved gasp started from her lips as the sedan took a swerve away from the coupe.

Then, like a whiplash, the swerve recoiled and the sedan did a spin. But for that mischance, it could have whisked in back of the doomed coupe; instead, it smashed the luckless car amidships.

Over went the coupe in a long, bouncing roll, that finished, wheels upward, off the highway. The other car, half wrecked by the impact, cavorted to its left, across the path of the oncoming headlights, and turned on its side away from approaching vehicles.

Though they sprang immediately from their cab, Cranston and Margo were not the first to reach the scene. Others were there, from cars that had stopped on the concrete highway, and more were coming up. The coupe being nearer, Cranston stopped beside it and saw the driver pinned beneath the wheel.

There wasn't a question that the man was dead. His head had pounded against the interior of the car all during those rolls. Even his face was no longer in a recognizable state.

Cranston motioned Margo away. Leaving their cabby gawking at the mess, they crossed the road to the wrecked sedan. Its driver wasn't so badly hurt, though one leg doubled under him as people helped him from his car. He had one hand pressed to the side of his face, and he was gasping out words:

"Couldn't see it... don't know how it got there. All of a sudden... there it was. Thought I wasn't going to hit it... but I did. Hope... nobody was hurt –"

From what could be seen of the fellow's face, it was blunt and square-jawed. Cranston saw that much in a glimpse, but Margo still was gazing at him when people loaded the man into a car and started for the Lakedale hospital. Margo could hear comments from other witnesses.

"Lucky, the way he came through that crash."

"He deserved some luck. It wasn't his fault."

"Absolutely not! He had the right of way, a hundred percent! The other man was to blame."

"He won't be taking the blame; he's dead!"

DEATH DIAMONDS

"The fifth in three months! No wonder they call this 'Dead Man's Crossing'!"

The term was more apropos than the speaker realized. This was a dead man's crossing. The "driver" of the other car was dead even before he took his last ride! The mishap at the crossroad merely added to the damaged condition of his skull.

CRANSTON had not seen Belmar's new coupe before; nor had he ever met Brock, the servant hired by Belmar in Florida. He'd expected Belmar to meet him in a sedan driven by a chauffeur, as Belmar usually did. Hence, he didn't link his friend directly with the accident. But there were phases of that "accident" that impressed the astute Mr. Cranston, otherwise The Shadow.

Though he had never met a certain crook called Tony, The Shadow could see the probability of the fellow's hand. The wrecked coupe had come across the road much as if someone had let it start into a coast, and then abandoned it; someone other than the driver, who had peered so oddly from behind the wheel, yet who must have been stone deaf not to hear the approach of the old sedan.

Odd, too, that it should all have happened just after a passing car had blinked its lights, much like a signal. Looking up the road, The Shadow saw a car parked at the next bend, its taillights visible. There was still enough daylight for his keen eyes to spy the man who slid out from the side of the road, to join persons in the waiting car.

The fellow was Tony. He'd cut across from the side road. He thought that the dusk was thick enough to hide him. So it was, where all eyes were concerned except those of The Shadow!

Margo suddenly found Cranston whisking her back to the cab. On the way, Cranston wrenched the cab driver from the group that was viewing Brock's remains.

Once in the cab, Cranston was ordering the driver to wheel up the concrete highway and stop beside the car that was parked there. The firm note in Cranston's tone thrilled Margo. He was going to snap from his indolent pose and become The Shadow!

Already, he was opening a suitcase, and Margo was expecting him to whip out black cloak and hat, along with a brace of automatics, when, suddenly, his manner changed. All that he produced was a small flashlight, which he juggled slightly as he settled back into the seat, to say quite calmly:

"It's going to be a long chase, Margo.

Staring ahead, Margo saw that the other car had started, quickening its speed as its driver saw the cab behind him. It was taking a road to the right, and the cab driver, following Cranston's order, was turning after it proof to the fugitives that they were being trailed.

A long chase, during which Cranston could afford to maintain his ordinary guise. But Margo was quite sure that when the chase closed in, the black garb would be out of the bag and her companion's transformation complete.

The laugh that came from Cranston's lips carried traces of a strange whisper that backed Margo's belief. An audible echo of the past, a pronouncement of the future, the mirth symbolized its author.

It was the laugh of The Shadow!

CHAPTER IV. TRAIL TO CRIME

THE car ahead was gaining despite the cabby's effort to overtake it. Both cars were whining along a road of brick that echoed louder than the motors, under the zimmering tread of the tires. The very roadway had a hollow sound, an obligatio to the whispered laugh that Margo heard again.

Rather than risk a halt amid the traffic of Lakedale, the fugitive car was heading for the reaches of Palm Park. Maybe its occupants thought they could shake off the pursuit amid the tricky byways. If so, they were wrong. The Shadow had visited Palm Park before. He could even tell the cabby a few things about its short cuts.

The fleeing car veered again, bounced over a railway grade crossing and tore through a forgotten sub-division, where the wheels howled louder than ever on the brick paving. Long weeds were sprouting up between the bricks, and the other car mowed right through them. It tried some turns, but the cab gained by them, so the fugitives cut into Palm Park.

Reaching a fork, they took to the left. In Cranston's calm tone, The Shadow told his driver to bear right.

Margo didn't understand it, until she saw that they were whizzing along the shore of a palm-flanked lake. Away across, she saw other speeding lights. While she was staring at them, Cranston reached in his bag and brought out an automatic. Margo didn't realize that he had the gun in hand until they reached what she thought was the end of the lake.

It turned out to be a jutting point that made a narrows of the lake. Straight across was the other driveway, with the fugitive car speeding past less than a hundred yards distant.

The Shadow's .45 began to talk. Unable to overtake the other automobile, he was flaying it with a broadside fire!

But for the cabby, The Shadow would have stopped that flight. His first two shots found the range; the next were due to clip tires and gasoline tank. His cab was halted on the point, giving him a real chance at excellent marksmanship; but it didn't last long enough.

With the second shot, the frightened cabby slammed the cab in reverse, ruining The Shadow's aim with the next shot; then, yanking the car forward, he spoiled the remainder of the fire.

The real result of The Shadow's shooting was that it brought return shots from the other car. Fired on the run, the aim of the answering revolvers was wide, high, and horrible. All the fugitives did was establish the fact that they were exactly what The Shadow believed them to be: crooks.

Margo again heard traces of The Shadow's laugh, in Cranston's tone, as he replaced his smoking gun in the bag.

By then, the cab was cutting through the nearest route that it could find, other than the lake. It was following a driveway opening among the palms, that led up to a pretentious mansion, where the cabby became bewildered, particularly when he saw servants on the lighted porch. He stopped the cab and sank back behind the wheel, as though trapped.

Cranston was quite equal to the situation. He stepped from the cab, helped Margo out, and beckoned for the servants to remove the luggage. As calmly as though nothing had happened, he paid the driver and sent him on his way.

DEATH DIAMONDS

AS Cranston and Margo turned toward the house steps, a bulky, gray-haired man met them.

"Hello, Haudlin," spoke Cranston. "I thought this was your house, when I saw it. We lost our way to Belmar's, so I told the cabby to drop us here." He turned to Margo. "Miss Lane, I should like to present Mr. Haudlin, the founder of Palm Park."

Haudlin gave a pleased smile. "Belmar is already here," he said. "We thought that Brock, his chauffeur, would be bringing you over. My servants thought they just heard some shooting down by the lake. Did you hear any, Cranston?"

"Yes. I heard some from the other side."

Haudlin looked quite relieved. He ushered the arrivals into the mansion. There, Margo experienced a real surprise at finding Arlene Hamil, whom she had met often in New York. Receiving a warm greeting from Belmar, Cranston next shook hands with Medrith. They, too, had met in the past.

"We were discussing diamonds, Cranston," declared Medrith in an important tone. "I claim that the stones found in Brazil are quite the equal of the famous Kimberley diamonds of South Africa. Haudlin disputes me."

"Nothing of the sort," objected Haudlin. "I merely said that you were cheapening the diamond market, Medrith, by importing stones from Brazil. If they are better diamonds, why do you and your associates persist in selling them at lower prices?"

"To beat the diamond trust," chuckled Medrith. "They've maintained an artificial valuation too long. With world conditions favoring the importation of diamonds from Brazil, we're going to fix prices for a change."

"And ruin things entirely," warned Haudlin. "The influx of Brazilian stones will cause people to unload their diamonds when the market begins to fall. They will buy other gems, instead. Diamonds will lose their status."

Medrith gave another laugh.

"What other gems?" he queried. "Rubies or emeralds? Why, they're making those synthetically! How could such stones dominate the market when there is no telling the real from the manufactured?"

"You're entirely wrong," returned Haudlin. "There are excellent synthetic rubies, and sapphires, too, but they do not stand minute inspection. They show a variance of structure lines not found in the real; they contain minute gas bubbles, easily detected.

"As for synthetic emeralds, they have too many flaws. To make them perfect would prove more expensive than the mining of the actual gems. They've even coined a name for them; they call them 'igmeralds.' They're afraid to sell them as emeralds."

Medrith still stood up for diamonds. He did it in a rather ironical manner.

"Whenever you use those arguments, Haudlin," he said, "just remember that diamonds are out of it. You don't have to compare real diamonds to synthetic ones. No one has ever made a synthetic diamond worthy of account. A diamond is always a diamond; nothing else."

"If that's the case," put in Arlene, her own tone pointed, "why did the Countess del Rondo lose all her gems except diamonds, last night?"

DEATH DIAMONDS

"Because she hung on to the bracelet with a death grip," snapped Medrith. "Which proves that she valued diamonds more than any other jewels, even that traffic light she called a pendant."

"You mean the emerald?" returned Arlene. "You do like traffic lights, don't you, Wayne? Especially when they're green!"

"If you mean I'm gaga about the countess –"

Haudlin's gestures interrupted Medrith, ending the spat that Arlene's jealousy had begun. Belmar understood the gestures and ended Haudlin's worriment.

"We can trust Cranston fully," Belmar assured. "He may as well know about the robberies here in Palm Park. He'll find out soon enough, because here comes our friend the police chief. I presume he didn't learn anything about the shooting."

Margo threw a look toward Cranston, who smiled. His prediction that she would find Palm Park lively was already being fulfilled.

Arlene was asking Margo if she would like to stay at her house for a visit. The Shadow saw Margo's dark hair shake, as the brunette nodded an acceptance of the redhead's invitation.

INTRODUCED to Cranston, the police chief learned that he rated as a Palm Park resident, and therewith talked about the matters of the moment.

"If those masked men did that shooting we've just heard," declared the chief, "they've disappeared just like they did before. So, now –" He stopped suddenly, as he heard a distant sound resembling a muffled cannon. "What was that?"

"Blasting in the limestone quarry," replied Haudlin. "They've been working nights, chief, and you can occasionally hear the blasts from here."

The chief remembered. He nodded.

"So now" he turned to Belmar "bring in your servant. We'll hear his version of last night's robbery."

As Belmar turned to the door, Haudlin stopped him.

"Brock isn't here," he said. "Cranston and Miss Lane came from your house by cab."

"Not from Belmar's," put in Cranston. "From the airport."

Both Belmar and Haudlin looked surprised. When Cranston happened to mention that they had been delayed by an accident at Dead Man's Crossing, surprise turned to alarm.

It was Belmar who hurried to the telephone and called the Lakedale hospital. He returned with a very solemn face.

"It was Brock," said Belmar. "Only, he's not at the hospital. He's at the morgue! I'm to go there and identify the body. Poor Brock! He won't be here to help us identify those criminals, when we catch them. However, I'm sure he already told us all he could."

The others apparently agreed, even the police chief. Oddly, there was a doubter present, who held his suspicion, though he had heard no more than mention of last night's crime. That doubter was Lamont Cranston. As The Shadow, he knew the ways of crooks.

Tonight, as The Shadow, he had gained a trail to crooks unknown; one that they had managed to shake off. Instead of that trail, The Shadow now had a path to crime itself.

Brock's death was the answer.

The Shadow knew!

CHAPTER V. CROOKS PREFER DIAMONDS

IT was afternoon; Margo Lane had dropped in at Belmar's for a short call. Arlene was coming back to get her, and Margo had much to tell in the meantime. The trouble was, she couldn't get a word in, because of Belmar.

At Cranston's suggestion, Belmar was recounting his experiences against crime.

Cranston had heard the story a dozen times, each description starting farther back and carrying more details. That was why he wanted Margo to hear it, though she didn't appreciate the favor. She didn't know, just yet, that Cranston had analyzed the tale with the keen insight that characterized The Shadow.

He was toying with a cardboard box when Belmar finished. The box contained Brock's belongings, that Belmar had brought from the morgue. Cranston most admired a watch charm that was studded with a fair-sized diamond. Belmar mentioned that Brock had purchased it, on a time basis, when given a raise in salary.

"Getting back to the beginning, Belmar," The Shadow remarked. "You say that you had two dozen flash bulbs, but you only used four."

"I took four, Cranston, but I only used three."

"Three that worked," reminded Cranston. "The fourth was a dud."

"That's right. I said so, didn't I?"

Cranston nodded. Margo decided they were getting nowhere fast. Cranston's meticulous ways were annoying her as much as Belmar's. However, The Shadow promptly pushed the subject several notches forward.

"The way those masked men disappeared," he said, "may mean they did not disappear at all. I understand that masks were found around the premises. Perhaps they were worn by some of the Wilkinham servants, who later discarded them. There might be three bad eggs in a dozen, Belmar."

"Quite true," agreed Belmar, "particularly as half of the servants left the next day; the Wilkinhams were only keeping them until after the reception. But you forget, Cranston" Belmar smiled indulgently "that the servants were searched, and so was the house."

"Perhaps they passed the Del Rondo gems to an accomplice," The Shadow suggested. "Let us say to some other person's servant."

"That's what the police thought," returned Belmar. "They suspected Brock. But he was searched, too, and so

DEATH DIAMONDS

was this house. I assure you, Cranston, that Brock could not have taken the gems."

For answer, Cranston picked up Belmar's camera and removed the dud bulb. Examining it carefully, he found what he suspected. Deftly, he unscrewed the glass part of the bulb from the metal. Then, to Belmar's horror, he set his cigarette tip against the silvery paper that the peculiar bulb contained.

"Don't Cranston!" exclaimed Belmar. "That contains magnesium. It will go off in a flash!"

It didn't go off, and The Shadow showed why when he spread the silvery stuff. It was nothing but tin foil in a dummy flash bulb. Though Margo knew it was The Shadow speaking, Belmar didn't, when his friend Cranston calmly suggested:

"Now show me the box of extra flash bulbs that you didn't use, Belmar."

Looking to the mantel, Belmar saw that the box wasn't there.

"Why, the detectives looked through that box night before last," he said. "I remember watching them. But the box is gone today. Of course! Brock took it back to the camera shop."

"Call them, and make sure."

Belmar followed Cranston's suggestion, only to learn that Brock had neither bought nor returned the extra box of bulbs.

MEANWHILE, Cranston was showing Margo what those bulbs really meant. He was using Brock's diamond-studded watch charm for demonstration purposes. He wrapped it in the tin foil and put the silvery material back in the trick bulb.

"It can't rattle in that stuff," said Cranston. "So we know what Brock did with the Del Rondo gems. He packed them all in phony flash bulbs, the last place anyone would look for them. He delivered the box somewhere yesterday."

"But what about this odd bulb?" queried Margo. "The one that Belmar tried to use?"

Belmar, himself, explained it. He had taken a bulb from the extra box and, later, put one back; but it hadn't been the same bulb. Inadvertently, he had acquired one of the false bulbs.

"You've solved the riddle, Cranston," he said. "But why didn't Brock learn what happened?"

"Because he only needed half of the fake bulbs to plant the stolen gems," replied The Shadow. "He didn't come across the real one. But we can be sure the gentlemen who received the gems did find the real bulb in the lot. That's why they murdered Brock."

Belmar stared aghast. His words came, disjointed:

"Murdered... Brock!"

"Exactly! Because they feared he wouldn't stand the strain of questioning, if you found the evidence against him. Brock was probably dead, Belmar, before your car began its coast across the through highway."

Belmar gave another exclamation. The Shadow's ability at noting trivial details was producing dividends.

DEATH DIAMONDS

"I wondered why Block stopped in the garage!" he ejaculated. "That's where they seized him, Cranston. But that watch charm" he pointed to the diamond as The Shadow brought it from the tin foil "how did Brock get it?"

"As an advance payment for joining up with crime," The Shadow explained. "Crooks prefer diamonds in return for their services. At least, the lesser crooks do, particularly when the big loot happens to be other gems. We must find the man higher up, who is willing to hold stolen jewels as a future asset."

Like Belmar, Margo thought back to the argument of the night before, when Medrith had denied Haudlin's claim that the diamond market would soon take a fall, to the benefit of other gems. If Medrith actually believed the fact that he disputed, he would be the logical man to unload diamonds, of which he had plenty, in return for other jewels.

Margo snapped from her reflection ahead of Belmar. The trend of conversation had come to the very subject that was on her mind. Eagerly, she turned to Cranston.

"Arlene let something out today," said Margo. "It started when she was talking to Wayne Medrith on the telephone. I happened to be there, so she told me more of it, later."

"Let's hear it, Margo."

"Medrith didn't stop for her the other night," declared Margo. "He intended to take the countess to the reception, and Arlene knew it. That's why she wasn't going."

"But Arlene said that Medrith stopped for her!" exclaimed Belmar. "I heard her!"

"That's what she's mad about," returned Margo. "Medrith put her on the spot."

THE SHADOW could already picture the whole angle, but Margo had to explain it for Belmar's benefit. It appeared that Medrith hadn't brought the countess, because Haudlin had reached her hotel ahead of him.

Rather than admit he'd come out second best, Medrith had persuaded Arlene to support his false story that he had been late because he stopped for her, instead.

"I know his real reason," put in Belmar. "The police chief blamed him for the robbery because Medrith's car lights helped the crooks. What's more, if he'd managed to bring the countess, the robbery would have been even easier, because crooks could have stopped them earlier. Medrith is the man behind this!"

"Medrith told Arlene that people would think just that," declared Margo sweetly. "That's why she helped him out."

"Even though he dropped her for the countess," was Cranston's observation, "Arlene must be quite crazy about Medrith."

"She is," agreed Margo, "but not that crazy. He sold her another bill of goods, besides. He told her he wanted to bring the countess to the reception just to boost his prestige in Palm Park. It means a lot to Medrith."

The Shadow looked toward Belmar, who nodded.

"Quite right," said Belmar. "Palm Park is really a one-man proposition. Haudlin has had his fun running it, and will soon yield the crown. The people here just love it whenever a celebrity pays a visit."

DEATH DIAMONDS

"Bringing the Countess del Rondo to the reception would have added greatly to Medrith's chances of succeeding Haudlin. I understand why Arlene finally believed his reason."

Margo was going to say that Arlene only half believed it, when she suddenly realized that Belmar did the same, but that his balance swayed in Medrith's favor. She saw Cranston smile as he brought an end to the discussion.

"Here's Arlene," he said, glancing from the window. "We'll see you later, Margo. Belmar and I have to go to the inquest. They're holding the man who went to the hospital. What was the chap's name, Belmar?"

"James Garver," replied Belmar, who was still thinking about other matters. "They will release him. He wasn't at all to blame. My lawyer saw him today, and made out very well. Garver signed a release, in return for hospital expenses."

They rode to the inquest in Belmar's old sedan. Having lost his short-lived grief upon learning that Brock was crooked, Belmar began to moan over the loss of his fine new coupe.

It didn't occur to him that he was getting off very lightly; that Garver, the driver of the other car, had a claim for much more compensation than he had demanded.

The Shadow understood why Garver hadn't pressed that claim. It would have meant a prolonged stay in Lakedale while dickering with lawyers and insurance companies. Garver didn't want to stay, and with good reason. The highway smash was definitely an aftermath to Brock's death in Belmar's garage. Therefore, Garver must have had a planned hand in it.

Arrived at the county courthouse, Cranston and Belmar heard the prompt exoneration that the coroner's jury gave Garver. At the finish, Garver walked stiffly from the courtroom. Most people noticed his limp, but The Shadow's keen eyes were upon the man's much-banded face.

The man's name wasn't Garver. The Shadow had a recollection of those flattish features, what he saw of them. Perhaps "Garver" felt the gaze, for he lifted a hand to hide his squarish chin. The Shadow saw a brilliant sparkle from the man's finger. The fellow was wearing a diamond ring, too flashy to have escaped notice when he was hauled from the car, the night before, had he worn it then.

Suddenly conscious of the diamond's sparkle, the man thrust his hand into his coat pocket. Outside the courthouse, he forgot his limp in his anxiety to leave the vicinity.

By then, Belmar had decided to take a look at some new cars in a showroom nearby, to replace his lost coupe. He was surprised when Cranston didn't care to come along.

"There's something on your mind, Cranston?"

"Only one thing," replied The Shadow calmly. "Crooks prefer diamonds."

Belmar stood puzzled. Then: "I'll see you later," he said. "Don't forget: the chess club meets at eight o'clock over at Townsley's house."

WITH that, Belmar was gone on foot, and Cranston was stopping at the parking lot, where he opened the door of the sedan that had brought them to the courthouse.

Keeping "Garver" in sight, Cranston reached for garments of black that he had stowed in the rear seat, earlier.

DEATH DIAMONDS

Unrolling his cloak, he took its contents in the shape of two automatics, which he stowed in holsters under his coat. Sliding his arms into the cloak, he added a slouch hat to his head.

Lamont Cranston had merged into The Shadow.

Thickened dusk shrouded the cloaked form as it glided toward the street. The man who called himself "Garver" was turning a corner to avoid the brighter section of Lakedale. What suited "Garver," suited The Shadow. A soft laugh came from hidden lips.

Two men who preferred diamonds. One, Brock, was dead. The other, whose name wasn't Garver, was still alive. Crooks by any name were the same to The Shadow. They would talk when properly persuaded, so long as they were still alive.

The Shadow was a master of persuasion!

CHAPTER VI. THE CHASE REVERSED

THE Lakedale railway station was on the outskirts of the town. It had been built there during the Florida boom, in the expectation that the town would soon grow out to it.

So far, the town hadn't; hence the station's location was inconvenient to everyone except The Shadow.

He liked it because he had no trouble trailing the so-called Garver along the sparsely built streets to the station. Having made sure that the fellow intended to take the seven o'clock train, The Shadow left that vicinity on an errand, which meant a brief return to his guise of Cranston.

Back again before train time, The Shadow arrived in a rattly car that he had bought from a used-car lot. It was quite suitable for his present purpose; and "Garver," pacing the platform, didn't notice the car when it parked close by. Other people were also arriving at the station.

The blare of a distant whistle announced the seven-o'clock express. The shifty Mr. Garver moved farther down the platform and stepped back between some pillars, so he wouldn't be too conspicuous.

He saw two men down the platform and waved his arm in their direction; but he didn't spot the mass of human blackness that moved up behind him, lost in the gloom of a pillar.

The fellow was suddenly frozen by the chill of a gun muzzle that pressed his neck. Even more spine-chilling was the whisper, in his very ear:

"You're coming along with me, Chance!"

Despite the fellow's efforts to the contrary, The Shadow had recognized him as Chance Lebrue, veteran automobile wrecker, who dealt in such thrills as crashing through brick walls and flaming wooden buildings.

Those feats had gone out of style; hence Chance's barnstorming days were over. It wasn't surprising that he'd taken on any job that came his way.

The train was pounding into the station, its mammoth searchlight burnishing the tracks and lighting the whole platform. But the blaze didn't reveal Chance Lebrue. He had moved back into darkness with The Shadow.

While cars were clattering past, The Shadow pushed Chance into the second-hand car and told him to take

DEATH DIAMONDS

the wheel. They started away at a moderate speed, The Shadow's gun controlling the pace and forcing Chance to take the roads, as indicated. A short drive out into the country was likely to do Chance a world of good.

It proved so, before they'd gone a mile. Chance had heard of The Shadow's prowess. He didn't mind artificial hazards, but this human one worried him. He talked as soon as he could find his tongue.

"I didn't know what I was getting in for," protested Chance. "Honest! I got a letter with a hundred bucks, saying it would be doubled if I came to Lakedale on a job."

"The man who sent the letter –"

"I wish I knew," declared Chance ruefully. "He talked to me over the telephone at the hotel. I know what I'm going to tell you sounds whacky, but it's the truth, so help me! He said he represented the chamber of commerce; that they wanted me to wreck an empty car out at Dead Man's Crossing."

Chance heard a whispered laugh. It registered neither belief nor doubt. Chance took it that The Shadow was reserving his decision. A gun prod meant for Chance to keep on driving, somewhat faster.

"He said they'd been trying to get that road closed," insisted Chance. "Ordinary accidents wouldn't do it, so they figured a mystery smash would help. I was to park way up the road and wait until a car came the other way, blinking its lights. Then I was to come down the road like blazes."

"That's just what I did. I saw what I'd been told I'd see a car that came coasting out from behind the old filling station. If I'd had on my lights, I'd have seen it was a new buggy, with a guy in it.

"But I wasn't supposed to be using lights. That was part of the lesson for the public. So I smacked into it and believe me, it wasn't easy!"

Again, The Shadow laughed, with a slightly reminiscent tone. He'd noted how the oncoming car had swerved to find its victim. Last night's "accident" had shown more than the earmarks of design.

CHANCE took the whispered mirth as an order to talk more. The rest of his story sounded straight. He'd gone to the hospital, faking worse hurts than he had, for the simple reason that he'd heard people mention that the man in the other car was killed.

Until that moment, so Chance declared, he hadn't an idea of the real game. His only hope was to play dumb until the coroner released him.

"As if I didn't know it!" added Chance. "They came to see me at the hospital, two guys tougher than railroad spikes. Neither of them was the one that called me at the hotel. They couldn't have faked his smooth voice between them."

"They gave their names –"

"Nicknames, that was all. One called himself Dannemora; the other Joliet. Those were the pens they busted out of last."

"And they told you –"

"They told me not to sing, or else," Chance asserted. "They said I'd stand for the murder rap, if I did. They gave me a hundred bucks and I took it. They handed me this ring as a bonus, and told me to wear it for luck."

DEATH DIAMONDS

Said I could hock it anywhere for a few hundred more."

Chance lifted his hand to display the diamond that The Shadow had already seen. As an afterthought, he added:

"They told me to hop out of town by train. I saw them on the platform, so I gave them a wave to let them know I was there. Flashed this sparkler at them –"

The Shadow wasn't listening to Chance, nor watching the gesture of the wrecker's hand. Catching the hum of another motor, The Shadow was peering through the rear window. A car was coming around the bend, making rapid time.

"They were the guys that gave the blinks at Dead Man's Crossing," Chance was saying. "Dannemora and Joliet; that's all I know them by. I'd know them, or their car, I think –"

"No need to think," interposed The Shadow. "They're right behind us. Show some speed, Chance."

The burden of crime he hadn't committed slipped instantly from Chance's shoulders. He began to show The Shadow speed, as much as the old car could supply.

Tonight's chase was in reverse. The Shadow was hounded by men of crime. They didn't happen to know, however, that such a superfighter was in the car ahead. They thought they were after Chance alone.

It was good business to make them show their hand first. Policy, too, to let Chance redeem himself. He was hitting seventy, a terrific speed for the bargain car, and he was cutting corners in a fashion that fitted his reputation as a thrill driver. But the pursuers, equipped with a better vehicle, were managing to gain.

The heap took a huge leap across a branch line railway crossing. It gobbled an upward slope and swung into a long straightaway that formed an undulating path before the wavery headlights. An old road, but a good one, that stretched across ground of choppy hills much like a roller coaster.

It surprised Chance, who evidently thought that all of Florida was flat. He took the downgrades with the accelerator against the floor board, hitting the bottoms with a rush that made the wheeled junk pile quiver.

Tough though they were, the men in the pursuing car couldn't stand that gaff; but they made up lost ground on the upgrades.

Off to the left, the rising moon showed a constant slope. This road was following an irregular hill crest that occasionally cut downward like a cliff. Chance was darting quick looks at the irregular terrain, while The Shadow, leaning from the other window, was watching back.

There was a steep rise just ahead; the other car was sure to make a gain. Chance knew what would come with it.

So did The Shadow.

As the second car crept closer, it opened fire. Not with the barks of revolvers; such men as Dannemora and Joliet merely reserved those guns for town use. The thing that came from the pursuing car was the chatter of a Tommy-gun, searing its blistery flames through the darkness.

The Shadow answered with an automatic. The recoils of his gun seemed to give the ratty car an urge. Chance

DEATH DIAMONDS

was actually bending the floor board with the accelerator pedal. He was watching the brow of the rise, to see what lay beyond.

ACTUALLY, this was an even duel. Puny revolver shots couldn't have matched The Shadow's automatic. Crooks needed their submachine gun to equal things. Getting the range at this high speed would be luck on their part. Whereas The Shadow, at any time, might insert a sure bullet into a front tire of the pursuing car.

He was firing steadily, calmly, ready to employ a second .45 when he exhausted the first. Chance didn't know The Shadow had two guns. He only remembered one. Chance was counting The Shadow's shots.

The last came as they topped the rise. Ahead, the road was almost level. None of those undulating valleys, where downgrades gave Chance his opportunity to gain. Here was where the pursuing car would gain, in plenty; but not if Chance found a way to avoid it.

He saw the way.

An old road curved sharply from the highway, off to the left among the scrubby trees. It wasn't much of a road, not more than a few sandy ruts, but it suited Chance Lebrue. He hit the brake pedal for the first time as he swerved the car into the ruts.

The Shadow's first shot from the fresh gun, perfectly aimed at the car in back, was spoiled. Bounced by the swerve, The Shadow rolled inward from the window. Hooking the side of the door, he came up again for a look through the back. Chance was still doing forty, and the other car was bettering it as it whirled in along the curving ruts. The Shadow started to twist toward the window; Chance caught him by the arm.

"Take a tight grip around my neck." Chance was leaning toward The Shadow. "Grab under the dash with your other mitt. I've got a wheel; you haven't."

The Shadow was dropping his automatic as Chance spoke. He took the holds that his companion advised, and he was just about in time. Chance was adding the admonition:

"Hang tight, and double like a ball –"

The curving ruts had ended, chopped off short. Straight ahead and a hundred feet below, the whole of Florida seemed stretched out, awaiting two foolhardy men who could only be bent on suicide.

With the roar of the pursuing car almost upon them, mingled with the rattle of a machine gun resuming its volleys through the trees, the crux came.

A bird without wings, the old car took off in midair, launching itself out into space from the edge of a cliff, into the engulfing darkness of awaiting death!

CHAPTER VII. DEATH FOR TWO

IT was amazing, the twist that the car took in space. Though hurling itself downward, it seemed guided as, in a sense, it was. Chance had given the wheel a jerk at the moment of the take-off an expert touch that altered the wild course.

True, the car was dropping at full force, but it was rolling as it went, and Chance was playing for what lay below. He and The Shadow were locked in what seemed a death grapple, but which happened to be the exact reverse. Both were doubled tight together when the first smash came.

DEATH DIAMONDS

It was more of a thump than a crash. Steep though it was, the rocky slope had an outward angle that fitted Chance's hope. Hitting on its side, the car took a rolling bound. A quarter spin and it was striking on its top. Another half roll, and the wheels hit with a terrific jolt that nearly ruined them.

Chance even played that shot. He jerked the steering wheel, bringing The Shadow half across it; then gave a lunge the other way, doubling himself over on The Shadow's side. The bounces had threatened to spoil the car's roll, but Chance had it right back where he wanted it again with that deft maneuver. The bounces were longer; the smashes harder, but the sideward roll prevailed until the bottom.

Then came the smash that broke the car apart. On their backs amid the wreckage, The Shadow and Chance Lebrue were staring upward toward a menace greater than their plunge; one that they could not possibly halt.

The other car had roared across the cliff edge, but it wasn't taking rolls. It was traveling end over end, each blow against the rocks a telling one. One smash jammed the radiator clear back to the windshield, amid the rip of flying fenders.

Somersaulting, the car hit hard enough to cave in its turret top. It was bulging straight down on the wreck below, a mass of flying junk, when it hit a last projecting ledge across which The Shadow's car had rolled.

That final bound sent the metal tangle on its longest leap. It cleared The Shadow's car by twenty feet, and actually shattered the limestone that it struck. The impact echoed with a jangle that persisted while The Shadow and his companion were climbing numbly from their own wreckage.

Both were more dazed than hurt. For once, The Shadow had found a man who could recuperate more readily than himself. Under these conditions it held true, for stunts like this were Chance's line of business. Reaching out a hand to steady his black-cloaked companion, Chance indicated the remains of The Shadow's recent purchase.

"You know," said Chance, "these old-time wheelers kind of help you, when you treat 'em right. They fall apart all around you and leave you sitting pretty, the way we were. The only thing that worried me was the safety glass. When it cracked up, you knew it wasn't what it was cracked up to be."

The double-talk was unintentional. Chance was really very serious. By way of proving his point, he gestured toward the other car.

"Of course," said Chance, "those new babies are safer. Its fun rolling them over the edge. I'd try it on anything short of the Grand Canyon. You can dent 'em, but you'll never split 'em. Only, you've got to heave 'em into a roll and hold it. Maybe you'll wrench an arm yanking the wheel, but that's better than breaking every bone you've got."

"Maybe those fellows didn't know what was coming, or else they didn't use their heads. You can't handle a car the way they did and come out, alive. They didn't just dent it; they caved it. All we can do is look at what's left of them."

The occupants of the other car were very, very dead. Their faces didn't look as bad as Brock's, however, because Chance had no trouble identifying them. He recognized one as the man who called himself Dannemora; the other as Joliet.

The Shadow studied the dead faces for future reference, so he could check them in his private rogues' gallery.

LEAVING the battered submachine gun with its murder-minded owners, The Shadow and Chance went their

DEATH DIAMONDS

way. They followed the bottom of the slope, which showed evidence of quarrying activity.

During the walk, while both were limping honestly, The Shadow told Chance some facts concerning Brock. Learning that the fellow was a crook, and a dead one, at that, before Chance's car hit him, the stunt driver was more than relieved.

Chance was voicing full allegiance to The Shadow, begging for the opportunity to help his cloaked friend hunt down the men responsible for crime. Chance didn't have to be told that Dannemora and Joliet were but a pair of many underlings, serving the higher-ups. He'd know the voice of the man who talked by telephone; of that, Chance was sure.

All of Chance's talk was really useless. He didn't have to prove his worth to The Shadow. The request was as good as granted, but The Shadow didn't announce it until Chance had finished his ardent verbal outpour.

Then, with Chance sworn in as a worker, The Shadow indicated a sharp clearage in the limestone hill. It was a straight cliff, roughly hewn, with a building nestling in front of it.

"Lucky we didn't find that one!" voiced Chance. "I'd have had trouble with the old roll."

"It's lucky we've found it now," returned The Shadow. "I've heard about this quarry. Stay here, while I approach it. Men may be working there."

It was the quarry that Haudlin had mentioned, but the night shift wasn't operating this evening. The only man around was a watchman, and The Shadow should have had an easy chance to enter his shack and see if it had a telephone. The trouble was, the quarry had no shack.

The building The Shadow saw was constructed of quarried rock, with a heavy steel door that had a combination lock. To attack the door would be ridiculous, with the watchman present; and the building had no windows at all. The Shadow rejoined Chance.

"We can walk the rest of the way," The Shadow decided. "I know the direction, and a road is very near. It may take us half of the evening, but that won't matter. I have an engagement, but it isn't very important."

The Shadow had reference to the meeting of the chess club, where Belmar expected his friend Cranston. Considering how occupied chess fiends could become at their favorite sport, it wasn't likely that Belmar would worry greatly over Cranston's absence.

IN fact, at that moment, Belmar was worrying whether he should sacrifice a bishop for a knight. The chess fans, a dozen of them, were immersed in their play on the huge, screened veranda belonging to the host of the evening, Thomas Townsley.

Belmar was playing with a difficult opponent named Quelby. Chess was a game that knew no caste; hence, Quelby, though not of the elect in Palm Park, was always invited to the chess-club meetings.

By day, Quelby ran a bookstore; or, rather, he let someone run it for him. Judging from the man's careful play, Belmar inferred that Quelby spent most of his waking hours browsing over chess problems.

Quelby was the sort who took his chess very seriously. Bowed above the board, he was watching Belmar's moves as though he, himself, were playing them. His wizened face had a happy gleam when Belmar elected to ignore the exchange of pieces. Running his hand through shaggy hair that streamed his forehead, Quelby was starting to make his move when he was interrupted.

DEATH DIAMONDS

Looking up, annoyed, he saw Townsley. Since Townsley was the host, Quelby had to nod agreeably. It turned out that the interruption was a reasonable one. Some new players had arrived, and needed chessmen to begin their game. Regulars like Quelby always brought their own sets, and had them in reserve. Townsley wanted to borrow Quelby's set.

"I think it's already being used," said Quelby, taking off his glasses to peer around the extensive veranda. "But there should be some sets available."

"I brought an extra set," stated Belmar. "You will find it on the table in the corner."

Townsley found the chessmen. A servant had laid them aside to use the table as a serving stand. The night was warm and drinks were being served; even Quelby forgot his game long enough to take a few sips in between.

But Belmar was forgetting his game, right along, while wondering why Cranston had not arrived. Quelby opened a powerful campaign with his knights, reduced Belmar's men, and soon gained a checkmate.

Players changed about, with short waits in between. In the course of an hour, Belmar's play improved, as he convinced himself that Cranston's absence was simply a polite way of refusing the invitation to the chess party. Why anyone should want to miss a wonderful evening like this, was something that Belmar couldn't really understand.

Still, people like Haudlin and Medrith did not care for chess; Belmar had to admit the fact. It didn't occur to him that chess, with all its intensity, represented slow motion to the absolute degree. Some people simply couldn't slow down amid the turmoil of this streamlined age.

Belmar liked slow motion. Townsley's big veranda flocked with chess players, was his idea of perfection. Even Pellew, the serving man, understood the mood of the guests.

Cat-footed, he moved in and out among the tables, taking up empty glasses and replacing them with full ones without even a tinkle of the ice. It was thoughtful of Townsley to allow only Pellew to serve the chess players.

At other houses, Belmar had noted that two servants always blundered things. They blocked each other at doorways, held low-voiced disputes among themselves. Even quiet talking bothered chess players.

There was none of it from Pellew; moving in and out of the house, he was as silent as the Sphinx, and sometimes his return to the veranda was observable only when a full glass surprisingly replaced an empty one beside a chess player's elbow.

Finding that Quelby had finished a game with someone else, Belmar invited him to a return bout. Quelby glanced at his watch and said he would have to be leaving shortly, as he always opened the bookshop early, thus needed a good night's sleep.

Since Belmar was persistent; Quelby finally agreed to play another game, so they sat down at an available board.

Belmar had the whites, and began with the Ruy Lopez opening. Quelby used the conventional defense, and the moves went like clockwork. Then Belmar was approaching the revenge he wanted, luring Quelby into a groove that would mean eventual disaster for black.

DEATH DIAMONDS

Usually, Quelby broke away from routines that did not suit his style of play; this time, he stayed cramped too long. Belmar's zeal was at its highest pitch when Quelby suddenly sat back, removed his glasses and gave a dour smile, to announce that he was resigning the game.

A chap named Andrews was leaving and he obligingly agreed to drop Quelby off at the bookshop, saving him the price of a cab. Quelby peered at the tables, to discover that no one was using his chessmen. He finally found them on a window sill beside the serving table; the box that contained them lay beneath his hat.

Poking the box under his arm, along with his chessboard, Quelby put on the hat and shook hands with Belmar, promising to hold a playoff with him at the next chess session.

BELMAR turned to see Pellew, who politely handed him a drink. Belmar felt that he deserved it, considering his quick conquest of the expert Quelby at the latter's favorite sport of chess. Cranston not being present to hear of the triumph, Belmar smiled to himself and raised the glass to his lips.

There, his action halted. Chairs began to topple, chessmen scattered on their boards, as excited men sprang to their feet, changing the slow-motion setting to one of sudden alarm. The thing that caused the transformation was a woman's shriek from within the house.

The scream was loud and agonized, its high pitch carrying far. Something most startling had happened within the house. To Belmar, jolted from his lethargy, it could mean but one thing a thought that the others promptly shared.

Crime's curse was again upon Palm Park, striking from the dark as suddenly as it had before. Crime that could transform a placid setting into one of complete commotion.

Crime without The Shadow present to offset. Tonight, The Shadow had met with rapid events, culminating in death for two men of crime. Perhaps a vigil at a chessboard would have proven boring to The Shadow after his mad, catapulting ride with Chance Lebrue.

But the climax of the peaceful chess session had all the elements that suited The Shadow; all except the immediate presence of the black-clad fighter who could so ably handle crime!

CHAPTER VIII. FIGHT BRINGS FLIGHT

THE first man to reach the house door was Thomas Townsley; he recognized the scream as his wife's. Pellew was starting to the door, too, but Townsley pushed the servant aside.

Sure that his wife's shrieks meant that murder threatened her, Townsley was determined that not even friends should slow him in his effort to reach his spouse.

Townsley was stopped, however, before he could reach a doorway on the far side of his living room. He was stopped by Mrs. Townsley, herself, as she came dashing from the other direction, clad in a streaming negligee. Mrs. Townsley didn't favor diets. Her avoirdupois flattened her startled husband as he encountered her.

The woman's voice turned to a high-pitched babble, which Townsley understood. Staring into the other room, he looked where his wife pointed, toward a gaping section of the wall. A heavy mirror stood on the floor beside the spot; the opening was due to a hinged panel, swung wide.

This was the first time that Belmar and the rest had seen Townsley's wall safe. The guests knew that the

DEATH DIAMONDS

family owned valuable gems, worn by Mrs. Townsley on special occasions, but they supposed that the jewels had been sent to a safe–deposit box long ago. The fact that Townsley had a wall safe was quite a surprise to Belmar.

Certainly, the safe had been rifled. There was no trace of the two huge necklaces, one of topaz, the other turquoise, that Mrs. Townsley wore on alternate occasions. Nor could anyone spy the milky–white opals which the lady had also favored as adornments. All were gone, along with the green–hued collection of rare jade that Townsley himself prized.

It didn't take a lightning calculator to realize that crooks had acquired new loot that rivaled, or perhaps exceeded, the loss sustained by the Countess del Rondo.

Townsley's big voice was drowning out his wife's babble. He was shouting at his friends, as though accusing them and asking their aid in one breath.

"Stop everyone!" he bawled. "No one leaves this house, you understand? Go after any who have gone! We'll find those thieves, wherever they went!"

Nobody moved for the moment, all fearing that it would mean self–accusation. Out front, Andrews was starting his car to take Quelby home. Evidently the noise of the motor had prevented him from hearing the cries within the house.

Two men decided to go after Andrews and call him back. They stepped out to the veranda and turned toward its front door.

It was then that Pellew, the servant, paved the way to action. He was near the rear of the veranda, and he gave a quick call that brought men in his direction. Pellew was pointing out through the screen; his eyes must have had the power of a ferret's, to discern the things he claimed were in the darkness.

"There they are!" Pellew shouted. "Look, they are getting into a car out back! Two of them, both masked! They must have robbed the wall safe and gone out the other way!"

Other men, Belmar included, were at the screen, trying to spot the scene that Pellew mentioned. Valiantly, the servant flung himself upon the guests, shoving them deeper in the veranda as he screeched:

"They've got guns! Look out, they're going to shoot!"

Shoot, they did, in a style that supported the charges made by Pellew, the man who had spied them. Two guns blazed from behind the house; bullets chopped the veranda screen above the heads of the scrambling guests.

Hard upon the zing of their bullets, the crooks scrambled for the car that Pellew had mentioned. No one saw them, for the veranda occupants were on hands and knees; but everyone could hear the clatter of the car doors.

Townsley had reached the porch. He was shouting, waving his arms.

"After them!" he ordered. "You all have cars! Come through my gun room, and I'll give you weapons."

Men scrambled to the chase. This was a better game than chess. Some were dashing to their cars, others going to get weapons.

DEATH DIAMONDS

Meanwhile, a roaring was going on out back, where crooks, boxed in by the narrow space they had entered from the rear drive, were trying to turn their car around.

They were a tough pair, those. They worked for Tony, the man who handled crime on the outside. In fact, they were the two who had helped Tony dispose of Brock. They were the two who called themselves Raiford and Reidsville.

Like Dannemora and Joliet, they chose their nicknames from the institutions where they had served time. Since they had broken out of Southern penitentiaries, they might be recognized in Lakedale.

Neither Raiford nor Reidsville had any intention of going back to the places where they belonged. Hence their anxiety to get their car away. They were sure they could outdistance any of Townsley's guests, but they weren't counting upon trouble from new arrivals.

Two such arrivals were at hand. They were dashing in from the roadway in front of Townsley's, two figures in the moonlight. Or, rather, one figure; that of Chance Lebrue. For the shape that accompanied the daredevil driver was solid, yet scarcely visible.

It was like a shadow cast by Chance himself; a streak of darkness in the patchy moonlight. Even its swift motion was a glide, that helped the strange illusion. But Chance's companion was extremely real. He was The Shadow. Chance knew it, for he could feel the grip of a strong hand on his arm.

"Somebody is getting away from the other side of the house," The Shadow told Chance. "Cut over to the garage. You ought to find one of Townsley's extra cars. Meet me out back. I'll be there as soon as that crowd from the front."

Chance sped for the garage, forgetting the limp that was his souvenir from the roll over the cliff. He wondered how The Shadow was going to reach the other side of the house so quickly. The only way, in Chance's estimate, would be for The Shadow to jump it; something that didn't seem impossible to Chance, now that he was acquainted with The Shadow.

It happened that The Shadow had a simpler, easier way. He went right through the house.

Yanking open the veranda door, he dashed through the living room and then to the room beyond it, which looked like a reception room. The receiving line consisted of one person only: Mrs. Townsley.

She was by the rifled wall safe, moaning over the few jewels that it still contained. They consisted of a brooch, a pair of earrings, and a finger ring, all studded with diamonds only.

Though crooks wanted diamonds for themselves, those weren't the sort of gems they stole at Tony's bidding. Whoever backed this game wanted everything but diamonds. He let victims keep theirs; and used diamonds of his own to pay off the crooks who served him.

The Shadow didn't waste time considering facts that he already knew. He sped through the reception room so swiftly, that Mrs. Townsley saw him only as a streak of blackness. She stopped her moans to gape at the blackness that swallowed the cloaked figure as he reached a hall beyond.

Then she saw the swing of the door that led to the pantry. Only the backswing of that door remained as evidence that The Shadow had gone through.

Reaching the kitchen, The Shadow didn't bother with the back door. He went out through an open window,

DEATH DIAMONDS

carrying its screen with him, making a three–point landing in the darkness. Two feet and one hand stopped him; the other hand was whipping an automatic from its holster.

All that The Shadow wanted was a few shots at two men who were tearing away along the back drive. He didn't get them.

THE rear drive curved beyond the corner of the oversized garage, and the fleeing car had swung the angle when The Shadow aimed. Other cars were getting started from out in front of the house, Belmar's among them.

By the light of appearing headlights, The Shadow saw a high brick fence at the rear of Townsley's grounds. Cutting through a gate, the fugitive robbers had turned along a lane in the rear, but the wall was so high that only the top of the getaway car was visible. There was no way of stopping it.

That wasn't all The Shadow saw. Two men on foot were nearing the garage corner: Townsley and his servant, Pellew. Both had shotguns, and Pellew was bounding ahead of his master.

Suddenly, a great glare hit Pellew. It came from a car that was passing along the lane. The driver had turned a searchlight into the Townsley grounds.

The sharp crackles of a revolver accompanied the glare. Pellew sprawled, riddled by the passing salvo. A cover–up car was on the job. From it, a sharpshooter was disposing of Pellew, the man who had started the hue and cry that put crooks to flight. Then that car, like the first, was slithering beyond the brick wall.

The Shadow hadn't gotten a shot at it. The open gate was blocked by the garage angle, and even The Shadow's famous .45 couldn't shoot around corners.

Into the onrush of pursuing cars whipped another, that swerved as if on a pivot. Chance Lebrue was handling it; he'd brought the car from Townsley's garage. Men in other cars blinked, like their headlights seemed to do, when a smear of living blackness cut across the path. It was The Shadow, springing to join Chance and head the chase.

Out through the gate, hard to the right, Chance was showing what he could do at the wheel of a smooth–running machine. They fairly zipped along the curving lanes, chopping down the distance to those fugitive cars ahead. If Chance had been handling the cab the other night, crooks would never have made their getaway. Tonight, their cause looked very slim.

Two cars ahead. One, the cover–up car, was gaining on the other. Though The Shadow hadn't heard of a crook named Tony, he knew that the man in the cover–up vehicle was the leader of the fleeing band. Tony's car was swifter; he was getting ahead to point the way.

Side by side, the fleeing cars took to a road that was just their combined width. They were taking risks, for if they met a car coming the other way, the wreck would be total. Maybe Tony had guessed that only The Shadow could be on the trail; hence the urge for speed despite the hazard. However, crooks were lucky.

At a crossing, Tony whipped left and the companion car copied the swerve. The Shadow had begun to shoot, but the cars jerked from sight in time to elude his fire.

As Chance made the corner, The Shadow saw the two machines in single file. They were spurting across a little bridge, and just beyond it they twisted left again into what could only be a short sand road, for The Shadow saw their halting lights.

DEATH DIAMONDS

Almost at the bridge, The Shadow nudged Chance and thumbed to the left. His whisper was a command: "Take it here!"

Chance "took" it. He threw the borrowed car into a mass of jungle-like growth, where it came to a crackling stop. The door was open as the car finished its careen; The Shadow was out and plunging through thick brush that bordered a narrow canal. He hoped to spot the crooks from his side of the watery ditch and give them a barrage before they expected it.

The jungle shrubs slowed The Shadow's strides. Across the canal, the looming wall of a boathouse blocked his aim, for the crooks had fled beyond it, abandoning both their cars. A new motor roared, whirling off in the opposite direction. The Shadow fired at a little light that twinkled its reflection on the canal's surface. The range was long, the target poor; like the roadways, the canal had a curve.

Racing ahead of The Shadow's fire, the crooks were off in a speedboat, thus ending the chase by land. Off to a start that promised safety, for the canal led to a broad lake, where they might head anywhere they chose.

Finger halted on its trigger, The Shadow hurled them a defiance that was better than wasted bullets. Forceful, challenging, his laugh rose weirdly through the night, so crooks could hear it above their motor's roar. The mirth carried a sinister note that they would understand.

It was The Shadow's declaration that he was in the game; a prediction that crooks could well remember. It told them that The Shadow would relax no effort until he gained another meeting with these men of crime, on terms of his own choice!

CHAPTER IX. FRIENDS MEET AGAIN

THE SHADOW'S laugh was fading when other cars flashed into sight. Belmar's sedan was in the fore and, like the others, he passed the spot where Chance had driven the car into the jungle growth at The Shadow's bidding.

Tropical foliage surrounded the spot. In halting, Chance had flicked off the lights. The car was perfectly hidden from the road. So was The Shadow; in fact, he was quite hidden from Chance's sight, thanks to the dense darkness cast by huge drapes of Spanish moss that hung from the tree branches just above.

Still in his whispered tone, The Shadow spoke to Chance, who extended his hands and received a bundled cloak and hat. Then, after a brief use of a tiny flashlight that gave no sight of The Shadow's face, Chance received a folded sheet of paper. Again, The Shadow spoke:

"Take this car back to Townsley's. Go to the lake and follow it to the first road. Half a mile will bring you to a side lane leading into a Spanish house. Wait there until the owner, Glenn Belmar, returns. Give him this note."

Other cars had crossed the bridge and were turning in beside the boathouse, for some had heard the departure of the speedboat. While Chance was carefully backing the borrowed car out to the road, The Shadow reached it on foot. Crossing the bridge, he strolled up to join the group of men who were congregated near the abandoned cars.

They were thinking in terms of one car; not two. They were looking at an old, but serviceable sedan; the car that had pulled out from Townsley's grounds bearing Raiford and Reidsville. The other car was farther ahead, almost past the boathouse. It looked as though it had been parked there a long time.

DEATH DIAMONDS

Men started to challenge The Shadow as he stepped into the glow of headlights. They saw him plainly enough, for he was no longer clad in black. Nor was he The Shadow. He had resumed the guise of Lamont Cranston. Recognizing his friend, Belmar sprang forward to introduce Cranston to the others.

Then, from several lips, Cranston was hearing all that had happened. All, at least, that these men knew about, though Cranston himself could have given them some pointers. They had seen two cars, but were sure that one must have kept along the road as a decoy; in fact, some of their number had kept on chasing it.

Odd, in a way, that with the murder car standing in full view, they should ignore it; but it happened that they knew who owned the car. It was a very sporty roadster belonging to Wayne Medrith, and this happened to be his boathouse.

Having chosen to dock their boat at this convenient spot, there was a chance that the crooks had encountered Medrith. If so, he might have met with harm. Men resolved to search the boathouse to see if they could find him there.

The brief hunt was fruitless. It had hardly ended, when a motorboat came chugging slowly through the canal. Men turned about, ready with weapons. It was Belmar who cautioned them not to fire.

"That can't be the boat the crooks used," he said. "It's coming under the bridge, so it's from the other lake."

"Maybe they're just trying to fool us," voiced another man. "One of them could have doubled back along the canal and gotten into another boat."

The argument was settled as the boat arrived. From it, into the glare of lights, stepped Wayne Medrith. His youthful face was highly quizzical, especially when he saw the bristle of guns. He wanted an explanation, and received it in detail, just as Cranston had.

"I guess I was lucky to be away," decided Medrith. "I left here nearly an hour ago and went across the other lake. I was calling on Miss Hamil –"

Medrith paused as he noted the entering headlights of another car. His sideward glance enabled him to recognize it before the others did.

"That is, I went to see Arlene," added Medrith suavely, "but she happened to be out, so I came back here."

The arriving car had stopped, and The Shadow saw why Medrith had so smoothly changed his tune. The car was Arlene's, and the redhead was alighting from it, accompanied by Margo Lane. Medrith hadn't forgotten the tiff that had followed when he used Arlene to support a doubtful story, once before. He evidently decided not to make the same mistake again.

WHILE the girls were learning what had happened, Medrith turned to Belmar. His face anxious, Medrith fumbled in his pockets, and finally smiled in relief.

"Thought I'd forgotten to lock my car," he said, "but it's all right. I have the keys here in my pocket. I'm glad I locked it; otherwise, those crooks might have used it."

He stepped to his car, drawing his hand from his pocket. Belmar thought that Medrith was taking out his keys, but Cranston, watching from another angle, saw fakery in the maneuver.

His hand still doubled tight, Medrith slipped behind the wheel and reached his hand to the dash. After about

DEATH DIAMONDS

the time it would take to insert a key, he turned on the ignition and pressed the starter.

"They didn't even touch it," said Medrith, from the car window. "I guess they knew it couldn't chase them, when they left by boat. I'm really lucky, because this is a new car. By the way" he looked at Belmar "I'm really sorry about that servant of yours, Belmar. He was an honest fellow, Brock."

Backing the car out, Medrith paused as Arlene stepped up to the window. Her eyes held a challenging sparkle.

"I hear you were over visiting me," snapped Arlene. "We had a good time, didn't we, Wayne? Or did we?"

"I said I took the speedboat over to your house, but that you weren't there. Ask Belmar, if you don't believe me."

Arlene turned to Belmar, who nodded.

"Who told you I wasn't there?" she questioned, speaking to Medrith again. "Which one of the servants?"

Medrith must have remembered it was Thursday night, when most of the servants in Palm Park took the evening off.

"The house looked dark," he declared, "so I decided you weren't at home. Sorry I can't take you home right now."

"And why can't you?"

"Because you have your own car."

"Margo can drive it," Arlene decided. "I'll go with you, Wayne."

Seeing that Arlene had gotten over her ppeeve at Medrith, Margo smiled.

"Thanks a lot, Arlene," she said. "I'll take Lamont in your car. I can drop him off at Belmar's."

Since Cranston was getting a lift, Belmar returned to his car. He was among the first to drive out; Margo came later with Arlene's car, Cranston riding beside her. They both saw a police car arrive, to inspect the abandoned automobile the crooks had left.

Then, driving slowly along moonlit byways, Margo was listening, thrilled, to The Shadow's account of his earlier ride with Chance Lebrue. Giving the whole story in the easy tone of Cranston, The Shadow added the points that the episode had made clear.

Outside crooks were operating with the inside crowd, as represented by Brock and the missing Wilkinham servants. But those inside workers, dead and missing, were but part of the set-up. Palm Park, it seemed, was honeycombed with such persons, as witness crime's recent stroke at Townsley's. Margo was just about to question Cranston regarding the latest jewelry robbery, when they arrived at Belmar's.

Something was happening inside the house, for they could hear Belmar's excited voice. Springing from the car, Cranston dashed into the house, with Margo close behind him. They found Belmar shakily gripping a revolver, which he was using to cover a blunt-faced man who was patiently holding his hands raised.

DEATH DIAMONDS

"I found this chap prowling the premises," declared Belmar. "Search him, Cranston. I was holding him until you came along."

Frisking the fellow's pockets, Cranston shrugged and turned to Belmar.

"He hasn't a gun. Let him put his arms down. Then we can question him."

As Belmar was giving the order, Cranston undertoned to Margo: "It's Chance Lebrue. Watch what happens next."

RELIEVED of the gun threat, Chance produced the folded note and handed it to Belmar. With Cranston looking over his shoulder, Belmar scanned the lines and saw their ink fade, one by one.

"From The Shadow!" exclaimed Belmar. "He says this man is to be trusted. Can we believe him, Cranston?"

"Suppose we hear his story, Belmar, and then decide."

Invited to sit down, Chance did so, and began his story, relating it exactly as The Shadow had heard it before. Prompted by occasional glances from Cranston, Belmar became fully sympathetic. When Chance had finished, Belmar queried:

"What can this chap do now, Cranston? We need him here to help identify the criminals. But he must stay somewhere."

"Why not here?" was Cranston's questioning reply. "You need a man to replace Brock. This time, Belmar, you should choose an honest one. I would say that Lebrue is a proper candidate."

It was done. Belmar hired Chance on the spot, confident that he was getting a competent chauffeur, whatever other qualifications Lebrue lacked. Then, taking it for granted that Chance was to be included in future conferences, Belmar turned to Cranston and asked simply:

"What about the robbery at Townsley's? Have you any theories, Cranston as with the Del Rondo case?"

"I think I shall have," returned Cranston, with a slight smile, "once you give me all the details, right from the start. Let's hear about the chess party. It must have been really intriguing."

Belmar swelled, while Margo sat back hopelessly. Chance steeled his face for a long ordeal. Only Cranston retained interest when Belmar began to talk of the problems that the chessboard had presented. It seemed so foolish to talk of chess when crime was the real issue. To all, perhaps, except The Shadow.

Out of Belmar's meticulous details The Shadow expected to glean crime's real answer. No detail could be small enough to overlook. From one of Belmar's hobbies, photography, The Shadow had obtained the proper clue to previous crime.

From this other hobby, chess, The Shadow might trace the riddle of the robbery at Townsley's, a crime so recent, that there was still a chance of finding its participants before this night was ended!

CHAPTER X. CREDIT TO RUY LOPEZ

GLENN BELMAR was a man who admitted his own mistakes. He'd made some serious ones this evening; so serious, that he could not forget them. They had happened during that first game he played with the chess

DEATH DIAMONDS

wizard, Quelby.

It wasn't easy to explain them, so Belmar brought out a chessboard, set up the men, and went through the game as he remembered it.

Margo found some interest in the demonstration, but it was all a blank to Chance, who began to look at magazines, instead.

To The Shadow, it was another instance of Belmar's remarkable memory for detail, something upon which The Shadow heavily depended. It meant time, letting Belmar go into such lengthy description, but the greater the detail, the more likelihood of a clue.

"Quelby beat me with his knights," insisted Belmar at the end of twenty minutes. "See, Cranston, the way he handled them? This move, for instance" he shifted pieces on the board "was a cruel one. Umph!" Belmar's tone was disgruntled. "If I'd only forced him to exchange that knight for a bishop early in the game!"

Cranston inserted a quiet comment while Belmar was rearranging the chessmen.

"Maybe your mind wasn't on the game, Belmar."

"Frankly, it wasn't," declared Belmar, "and you were to blame, Cranston. I kept wondering why you hadn't come."

"Why blame me?" queried Cranston. "Townesley was serving drinks, wasn't he?"

"Very mild drinks," insisted Belmar, "and remember, this was only the first game."

"Tell me more about it. Anything you remember, outside of the actual play."

Belmar remembered Townesley's interruption when he asked Quelby if he had brought his chessmen. The mention of drinks also reminded him how capably Pellew had served them throughout the evening.

"Poor Pellew," said Belmar. "Townesley will find it difficult to replace him. Such an unobtrusive servant! He'd go to and come from the kitchen before you realized it. He spied the crooks, too, and started the pursuit. Too bad he was so close behind them. That marksman in the cover-up car couldn't have had an easier target."

Cranston suggested that they return to the subject of chess. Belmar nodded, gave brief details of the other games he had played, until the final one. Then, his tone ringing happily, he declared:

"How I revenged myself on Quelby! I will show you, Cranston. I had the whites, Quelby the blacks –"

He began to move the pieces rather rapidly, and Margo was really amazed at Belmar's memory, until she saw Cranston nod and say:

"The Ruy Lopez opening. I see why you chose it, Belmar."

"Perhaps you do," chuckled Belmar, "but Quelby didn't. Here, on the seventh move, I exchanged a bishop for a knight."

"Quite the conventional thing, of course. The two pieces are valued equally."

DEATH DIAMONDS

"Yes!" enthused Belmar. "But not with a player like Quelby, who is deadly with his knights. He fell into the trap, Cranston, giving me a knight for a bishop!"

Continuing the moves, Belmar came to the twelfth. He pushed a white bishop into black territory. Then, representing Quelby, he took the white bishop with a black knight.

"Quelby took my second bishop," he declared. "And, now" triumphantly, he supplied the next move "I take his second knight in return! Another fair exchange, Cranston, according to the book. But you see what happened to Quelby? Both his knights were gone. The game was in my favor, for Quelby's style depends upon his knights!"

Piece by piece, Belmar showed how he had completely devastated Quelby after that. Happily, he added:

"And was Quelby peeved! He found his hat and his box of chessmen under it. They were on the window sill by the serving table. He shook hands when he left, but he didn't mean it. Yet, why should Quelby be so irked?" Belmar added another chuckle. "I gave him a fair exchange twice over, and a fair exchange is no robbery."

Cranston shook his head. His eyes had a distant gaze. They were the eyes of The Shadow.

"In this case, Belmar," said Cranston, "a fair exchange had much to do with robbery."

Belmar couldn't understand. Rising, Cranston clapped a hand upon his shoulder.

"Sorry to spoil your triumph," he declared, "but Quelby strikes me as too clever, not to guess what you were after when you started the Ruy Lopez opening. He could have broken away from it. Instead, he played right into your hands in order to wind up the game as soon as possible."

GREATER puzzlement showed on Belmar's face. Then, with Margo and Chance also attentive, he was listening to Cranston's reconstruction of the Townsley robbery. Cranston began with the "how" of it.

How was the crime accomplished? Obviously by an insider. Only someone who knew the house could have opened the wall safe and removed the gems. The inside angle fitted with previous robberies in Palm Park.

Who was the inside man?

There was only one answer: Pellew. The taciturn servant had been going back and forth between the kitchen and the veranda with no one watching him. He could even have worked the combination of the small safe a twist at a time, with each passing.

What did the servant do with the gems?

The question was easily answered. Just as servants had passed the Del Rondo jewels to Brock, so had Pellew sent the Townsley treasures on their way. He hadn't handed them to anyone; he had planted them where they would be sure to be taken away.

Busy at the serving table, unobserved by the concentrated chess players, Pellew had stowed the gems with Quelby's chessmen!

The whole case was cracking itself wide open. Even Belmar had to admit it. Honest with himself, he realized that Quelby must have thrown that last game, as Cranston claimed. For Quelby, like Brock, was playing the

DEATH DIAMONDS

go-between on this occasion. Once the gems were ready for removal, Quelby didn't want to wait around.

"You've solved it, Cranston," affirmed Belmar soberly. "You deserve a world of credit!"

"Give the credit to Ruy Lopez," suggested The Shadow, with one of Cranston's smiles. "If you hadn't used that opening, Belmar, the case wouldn't have made itself so plain."

There was a pause while other thoughts were coming to the minds of listeners. Cranston summed them when he spoke again. He had covered the matters of how, who, and what. There was still a "why" to be discussed.

Why had outside crooks been present?

The answer fell in line. Pellew had to cover his crime. The only way was to fake it as a later event. With Quelby gone, Pellew was probably supposed to signal lurking men, who could then come in, plant a charge in the wall safe, close it, and go their way.

A blast, like the muffled thumps from the limestone quarry, would have announced the robbery long after it had really happened. Cars would have roared away, to be lost in the night.

Something had ruined the scheme. The something was Mrs. Townsley's chance visit to the wall safe. She had found the jewels missing, the wall safe open. Her screams had definitely put Pellew on the spot, even though Quelby was on the way out with the stolen gems.

Then Townsley had shouted to halt everyone, which meant that Quelby might be brought back. Remembering the outside crew, Pellew had pointed to them, even though he couldn't see them. These facts were plain, from Belmar's meticulous description of every incident that happened.

Naturally, the crooks had fled. Pellew, hoping to bolster his own cause, had been most ardent in the chase. In fact, it was possible that he had hoped to ride away with them, rather than face a questioning later. Evidently Pellew hadn't known about the cover-up car.

From that car, a hidden marksman had made a hero out of Pellew for the same reason that applied to Brock. A man who knew too much, but who had slipped in the performance of a crooked duty, wasn't the sort to leave alive for the law to quiz. Instead of receiving diamonds as a reward, Pellew had taken bullets.

The Shadow's summary was solid. But he still was Cranston, the man who didn't care to exert himself too much. He was resting back in his chair, reaching for a cigarette, when Margo put a question, drowning one on Belmar's lips.

"That other car was Medrith's," declared Margo. "If he wasn't shooting, he was certainly driving. What will you do about Medrith, Lamont?"

Cranston spoke to Belmar.

"You know him quite well, Glenn," stated Cranston. "I want you to go and see him. Take Margo with you."

"We'll call that bluff of his!" put in Margo. "He sent the crooks away in one boat, and went back along the canal to get the other –"

Cranston inserted a polite interruption.

DEATH DIAMONDS

"I am not referring to Medrith," he told Margo. "Belmar was asking me about Quelby. Medrith can adhere to an alibi, whether it is true or false. Quelby is the man for you to see."

BELMAR needed no further persuasion. He started downstairs, and Margo followed him. Cranston looked at Chance, indicating that the newly hired servant should see his master to the front door. So Chance hurried down to perform the duty.

Hardly had he left the room, before Cranston started swiftly to the back stairs.

Chance Lebrue was standing at the front door, watching the departing car, when a firm hand clutched his arm. He turned, to see The Shadow standing beside him. The Shadow beckoned into darkness, and Chance followed. In whispered tone, The Shadow asked where the others had gone. Chance told him.

The others had gone in Arlene's car, so The Shadow started Belmar's car toward Quelby's bookstore, which was on the fringe of Palm Park, listening to further details as they rode along. Chance had the crime angle well defined, but was weak on the subject of chess.

"Cranston figured it out perfect!" declared Chance admiringly. "But there's one guy I can't place. A fellow named Ruy Lopez."

The Shadow's whispered laugh merely added to the puzzle that was bothering Chance Lebrue.

CHAPTER XI. FOUR CASTLES

QUELBY, the man who liked his chess, had not been spending a very happy hour since leaving Townsley's. Quelby's trouble was his friend Andrews, the man who had taken him home. Though they were gone before excitement reached its pitch, sounds of commotion reached them and had Andrews worried.

Naturally, such worry was transferred to Quelby. Complaining that his heart was bothering him, he induced Andrews to keep driving. At the bookshop, Andrews had to help Quelby to his upstairs apartment.

There, after swallowing a few special pills, Quelby had felt better and persuaded Andrews to play a game of chess.

They were still at it, using Quelby's chessmen, an ornate wooden set with clumsy oversized pieces. At most chess parties they passed up Quelby's chess set, for the men were heavy as well as cumbersome. Usually, Quelby was glad when no one played with them, for the chessmen were his special pride.

Now, these men were on the chessboard, and the box that normally held them was resting close by. The game was nearly over, with Quelby on the losing end. While he waited for Andrews to move, Quelby became fidgety.

He picked up chessmen that had been taken in the play and laid them in the box. Though the box was lined with thin tissue paper, Andrews heard the clatter and became annoyed.

Quelby arose, went into another room and took a few pills from a bottle. Pouring a glass of water, he swallowed the pills with it, then came back to look at the move Andrews had made. It was the next thing to a checkmate, so Quelby simply went through the formalities of completing the game.

"Very nice chessmen," observed Andrews, as he helped put them in the box. "You wouldn't think of selling them, would you, Quelby?"

DEATH DIAMONDS

"Most people think they're too clumsy."

"I don't," insisted Andrews. "I'd like to keep them in a corner of my den, all arranged for a game. So if you're selling them –"

"But I'm not, Andrews." Immediately, Quelby regretted the statement. He modified it while he was showing Andrews to the door. Taking off his heavy-rimmed glasses, Quelby gave the other man a darting look.

"It's this way, Andrews," he said. "There's a man comes into the bookshop who really wants this set. If I sell it, I ought to give him first say. He'll be in tomorrow, and if he offers the right price, I'll let him have the chessmen. Otherwise, I'll talk terms with you, later."

Andrews left, quite pleased. Standing at the top of the stairway that led down to a side street, Quelby was pleased when he heard the man's car drive away. Then, turning about, Quelby spoke, half aloud:

"I think I shall sell those chessmen to Andrews –"

"A good idea, Quelby," interrupted a tone that was smooth, emphatic. "I approve it!"

Quelby's face popped upward. He was looking at a man who had come up through the bookshop, a man whose face was sallow despite its traces of tan; whose dark eyes were shrewd, in contrast to the friendly smile that was visible on his lips. In one breath, Quelby voiced the name:

"Tony Breckett!"

"SURPRISED to see me, Quelby?" Tony's voice was oily. "You shouldn't be, you know."

"But coming in through the store while it's closed. It's dangerous, isn't it, Tony?"

"Just why?"

"Suppose someone had seen you from the street!"

"I'm your landlord, Quelby," Tony laughed. "At least, I rented you this place. I could say that I came to collect the month's rent."

Slowly, Quelby nodded. Tony was right.

"Of course," added Tony, his voice lowered to a sharp, edge, "we both know that I came to collect the night's take."

Quelby gestured to the chess box. Then, anxiously:

"Why tonight, Tony? I thought you were coming tomorrow to buy the chess set."

"Tonight is better."

Leaving Quelby to wonder why, Tony Breckett fished among the chessmen and brought out four pieces that were all alike, except that two were white, the other pair black. The chessmen were heavy; shaped like miniature turrets.

DEATH DIAMONDS

"You call these castles, don't you, Quelby?"

"Yes," replied Quelby, "though they are sometimes termed rooks. Next to the queen, the castle is the most valuable piece on the board."

"Not these castles," declared Breckett. "Quit thinking about chess, Quelby, and be sensible."

Working with one castle, Breckett unscrewed the base. The chessman was hollow, its interior space quite large. Breckett removed a small wad of tissue paper, inverting the castle, to let other contents clatter down into his hand.

His palm shone with the milky beauty of heaped opals, pebbles that meant a small fortune in themselves.

From the second castle, Breckett brought specimens of jade that varied in size. None was large, but all were exquisite, both in carving and in color. Some were wedged fairly tight, and Breckett had to pick them out like the contents of a Brazil nut.

Meanwhile, Quelby's face showed anxiety, his voice carried a tremolo:

"Something went wrong, Tony? Something with Pellew?"

"Everything is fine with Pellew," countered Breckett. "He's dead."

"Dead! But how –"

"We saw to it!" Breckett's tone was boastful, though he wasn't taking personal credit for the kill. "You see, Quelby, it had to be that way. Pellew muffed things. How, we don't know yet; but he muffed. It was better for him to die a hero, than go to jail in disgrace. Besides, he might have talked –"

Breckett paused, eyeing Quelby until the latter nodded; it was then that the smooth-talking Tony added:

"– like Brock would have."

Those words knifed home. Pellew's death worried Quelby enough, but not too much, for the crooked servant was an inside man, who had to take long risks. Brock, however, belonged to the same category as Quelby; both had joined the crooked tribe as go-betweens. What had happened to Brock might happen to Quelby. Such was Breckett's direct intimation.

INVERTING the other castles, Breckett unscrewed them and drew out the necklaces, turquoise and topaz. As the topaz string uncoiled, its motion reminded Quelby of a snake; its glitter, too, had the semblance of a reptile's eyes. Sunk in a chair, Quelby began a hoarse-voiced plea.

"Nobody can make me talk, Tony. I even bluffed Andrews. I had him playing chess with the set, and he didn't know the difference. He even wanted to buy these chessmen."

"Good!" returned Breckett. "Sell them to him. But don't give him the phony castles." As he spoke, Breckett was dropping the hollow pieces in his pocket. "He can have these with the set."

Producing four solid castles from his other pocket, Breckett put them in the box. He was sweeping the jewels into a chamois bag. As he finished, he held a few of the opals into the light, noting their oval shape and translucent whiteness. He gave a glance at Quelby.

DEATH DIAMONDS

"These remind me of those pills you take," said Breckett. "For your heart, aren't they?"

Quelby nodded.

"Better take some," advised Breckett. "You need bucking up."

"I've already taken two," began Quelby. Then, horrified because Breckett had observed his weak-kneed manner: "Yes, Tony, another dose will do me good. The doctor said to take four on occasion. It's just my heart that worries me, that's all."

He was getting from the chair, but Tony pushed him back. He didn't want Quelby to exert himself.

"I'll get the pills," said Breckett. "Four, you say?"

Considering the pills he'd taken earlier, Quelby felt that four would be a heavy dose, but he felt it policy not to refuse. Breckett returned bringing the pill bottle and a glass of water.

While Quelby was swallowing four of the medicinal pellets, Breckett produced another type of pill, one that attracted Quelby's eyes more than the opals had.

It was a diamond, sizable and brilliant, mounted in a stickpin. Breckett gave Quelby a brief sight of it, then placed the pin in the chess player's necktie.

"Kind of old-fashioned," remarked Breckett, "but you're old-fashioned, too, Quelby. So I thought you'd like the sparkler mounted this way. Wear it for luck, and sit tight. You'll be surprised, when you hock that baby, how much you'll get for it. Only, don't unload it around Lakedale."

Up from his chair, Quelby began to admire the diamond in a mirror. He didn't notice that Breckett was keeping the pill bottle. Slapping Quelby on the back, Breckett went down through the bookshop, pocketing the bottle on the way.

Locking the door behind him with a key of his own, Breckett took a look along the short building block. Seeing the way clear, he skirted around to the other side.

Upstairs, Quelby had finished admiring the diamond. He suddenly clutched it with his hand and darted a look away from the mirror. He was thinking of his chessmen, noting them in their box, and a sudden idea struck him.

He hurried down to the bookshop, found a telephone in the dark. He needed a light to consult the directory, so he turned on a small one.

His breath was coming hard, as though the exertion had been too much. His finger was so shaky, he could scarcely dial. As a voice responded, finally, Quelby wheezed:

"I... I must talk to Mr. Haudlin... quickly! It's important. I need his advice... his help –"

Outside, Breckett had joined Raiford and Reidsville in an old car that was parked well out of sight among some trees behind the bookshop. Their hard, thuggish faces showed ugly pleasure as Breckett, said:

"I've fixed that fellow, the way I said I would. He's yellow, clear through, the sort that would blab sure –"

DEATH DIAMONDS

BRECKETT cut off suddenly. He noticed a faint glow from a small downstairs window: the light that Quelby had turned on. With snarls, Raiford and Reidsville drew guns. They were for getting out and settling Quelby promptly. Breckett told them to stay where they were.

"He can't last," assured Breckett. "Those pills I gave him from my bottle were enough to kill a horse! I ought to know. I got them from a horse doctor. Same stuff as in Quelby's pills; I saw both formulas. The kind of dope that makes an old plug stretch its legs, and then cave after it wins the race. Quelby can't last."

To back his claim, Breckett decided to wait and watch for a few minutes. Those minutes passed, and Tony was about to put his foot on the starter, when a car pulled up beside the bookshop.

Two persons stepped from it: Belmar and Margo Lane. Breckett couldn't recognize them at that distance.

Then, before Breckett could decide what to do about it, he heard another car stop somewhere nearby. It contained The Shadow and Chance Lebrue. They were stopping where Belmar and Margo couldn't hear them. Breckett started to mutter oaths.

"Quelby couldn't have brought them here!" he told his companions. "He may have made a phone call, but it wouldn't bring results so soon. Maybe Andrews suspected something and sent these people over!"

His companions muttered something about "getting started," but Breckett said that they would wait. So, crouched in their car, they waited, watching for developments on Quelby's premises. They were confident, Tony Breckett and his thuggish companions, that should anyone come their way, they would know it.

It didn't occur to them that their hidden car, if discovered, would be found by a shrouded searcher whose cloaked figure moved so stealthily that they could never notice his approach until he was upon them.

Their arch-foe, The Shadow!

CHAPTER XII. ROUTES REVERSED

MOVING through the darkness, The Shadow did not immediately approach Breckett's car. He hadn't yet learned of its presence, and he was more interested in noting how Belmar and Margo fared, before beginning what might prove to be a useless survey of the surrounding area.

Belmar was ringing the bell at the side door that led up to Quelby's apartment, where lights indicated that the chess fiend was still awake. Since Belmar was getting no results, Margo went around to the front and saw the light in the bookshop. Belmar joined her.

At that moment, The Shadow was quite close at hand. Sensing that matters weren't right, he chose the short route to the apartment, up by a darkened roof. Finding an obscure window, he opened it and slid inside.

Even when he crossed Quelby's living room, The Shadow wasn't observed by watchers outside. He kept away from the lights, avoiding positions where they would cast a shade against the wall when he passed them.

The Shadow reached the door leading to the side stairs and found it bolted on the inside. Obviously, no one could have gone out by that way without Quelby's knowledge and co-operation. Thus, the bookshop was the logical route; the place where Quelby probably was, at present. The Shadow started down the stairs to the shop.

Belmar was pounding intermittently at the front door. Despite the knocks, The Shadow detected other sounds

DEATH DIAMONDS

outside, and paused. The sounds were car motors, but they were approaching, not leaping, so The Shadow waited.

Belmar's banging stopped; evidently he was meeting people who had just arrived. So The Shadow glided quickly toward the light in the bookshop.

There, he saw Quelby for the first time.

The man fitted the descriptions of him. His face had a shrewd look. The Shadow recalled a quotation regarding the "scheming minds" of chess players.

Yes, Quelby could have been a schemer, the sort who would line up with crooks, as Brock had. He also looked the type who would talk under pressure. If Brock's lips had needed sealing, so had Quelby's.

That was probably why they had been sealed.

Sprawled by a table, the receiver in his clutch, Quelby was stone-dead. Death had struck him in the midst of the call. He had talked to someone, though, for the furious pounding that began at the front door indicated that summoned help had arrived. The pounding ended in a crash as the door came through.

It wasn't sensible for The Shadow to be found in company with the dead body. Nevertheless, he turned directly toward the men who entered. His purpose was to reach the stairs again, and he gained them in the darkness, though he nearly elbowed the arrivals as he made the turn.

On the stairs, The Shadow paused.

People were heading toward the light where Belmar lay. The Shadow recognized their voices when they found the body. Belmar's, of course, and Haudlin's, along with some others.

Startled at first, the tones changed. The Shadow heard Haudlin question:

"Did he call you, too, Belmar?"

Belmar hesitated, only momentarily. Then he replied:

"Why, no. You see, he and I had another match to play. Quelby said to drop around any time. When Miss Lane and I were driving by, a few minutes ago, I saw the lights upstairs so I rang the bell. But Quelby didn't answer."

"He couldn't have," decided Haudlin grimly. "He was dead! I feared it when his phone call ended so abruptly."

"Quelby called you, Haudlin?"

"Yes. He started to tell me that he needed my help. What for; I couldn't understand, until he gasped something about his heart. Evidently, he wasn't able to reach his physician, so he phoned me, instead. We came over."

By "we," Haudlin referred to friends who had accompanied him. There was a doctor among them, and The Shadow heard him declare Quelby to be dead. Another voice suggested that it would be wise to go upstairs.

DEATH DIAMONDS

The Shadow liked the idea. He went first. He was gone, out through the window, when the crowd arrived.

REACHING the ground, The Shadow actually veered in the direction of Breckett's car. He paused again, as another car arrived in front of Quelby's. He recognized the car; it was Medrith's roadster.

Postponing a search around the place, The Shadow moved close to the fancy car and saw Medrith step out with Arlene Hamil. Margo appeared from the bookshop and met Arlene.

"We heard that everyone was coming over here," said Arlene. "Tell us what happened, Margo."

Margo explained about Quelby's call to Haudlin, and added that Quelby was dead. Then:

"It may have been a heart attack," said Margo, "but they're not quite sure. They found a bottle of pills and think that Quelby may have taken an overdose. It might be suicide. Here comes Mr. Haudlin. He can tell us more."

As Margo turned away, The Shadow caught the words that Medrith spoke to Arlene.

"Too bad if it proves suicide," said Medrith. "It ought to be murder."

"Murder?" echoed Arlene. "Why so?"

"In that case," returned Medrith, in a chiding tone, "it would be one crime in which my alibi would suit you, Arlene. I happened to be with you at the time of Quelby's death."

Evidently, Arlene had been quizzing Medrith regarding his boat ride, just as she had questioned his trip to the hotel where the Countess del Rondo had stopped. A retort was on her lips, but she restrained it as the others arrived. Among them were Haudlin and Belmar.

"I have phoned the police chief," declared Haudlin. "We can leave the matter in his hands. Quelby may have taken an overdose of medicine without realizing it, until he felt the effects. That would account for his frantic call, as much as an ordinary heart attack would have."

The group was moving into a light near the corner of the bookshop. The Shadow would have had to do the same to hear further comments. It wasn't necessary, since Belmar and Margo were present to hear all that was said. Besides, The Shadow had other work. He knew that Quelby's death was neither accident nor suicide.

Some skilled hand was responsible, and the perpetrator of the crime still might be close by. Hence, The Shadow glided away to have a look around. He was bound in the right direction, but he wasn't close enough to hear the voices in Breckett's car.

There, men were watching the group by the bookshop. Breckett saw Medrith give a nod and turn away from Haudlin. Medrith was returning to his car with Arlene. Others, too, were leaving.

"That settles it," chuckled Breckett. "Quelby didn't squawk. We'll get the whole low-down later. Now is our time to ease out."

Other cars were starting, and amid the hubbub Breckett pressed his own starter. Easing the car into gear, he nosed it out from hiding, intending to use his lights later. One car, more or less, wouldn't be noted in the general departure.

DEATH DIAMONDS

So Breckett thought. He was reckoning without The Shadow. Locating the sound of Breckett's car, The Shadow turned toward it; then paused. Reversing his course, he reached Belmar's car, which was also parked obscurely, with Chance at the wheel. The Shadow told Lebrue to start the car and pick his way without lights.

Chance obliged, in deft fashion, while The Shadow, tracing the strange car by its sounds, kept telling him the way to go.

When Breckett's lights blinked on, The Shadow was right behind him. Guided by the lights of the other car, Chance didn't have to use his own, at all.

It was a strange trail in the darkness, The Shadow on the very heels of the crooks he wanted to meet, while they were in blissful ignorance of the fact.

Then came the wrong break.

IT happened at a corner only a few blocks away. Breckett was beginning a spurt; he ended it with a dab of the brakes. Another car swerved from the next street and skewed about to avoid a collision. The car was Medrith's.

The two autos began to back away, to resume their courses, and Breckett was keeping his mouth shut while Medrith was telling him off from the other car, perhaps to impress Arlene. In the midst of it, Raiford inserted a hoarse shout:

"Get going, Tony!"

Thanks to a swing of Medrith's lights, Raiford had spotted a third car near the scene; one entirely without lights. More than that, he glimpsed the figure that was stepping from the darkened car. A cloaked shape that could only be The Shadow!

Breckett roared his car away. The Shadow's big gun spoke, but its shots were wide. He had to divert his aim because of Medrith's car, as it made a sudden swing. Springing back with Chance, The Shadow ordered an immediate chase. Medrith had the same idea, and shoved his car in first.

The pace was mad, but not enough so to suit Chance Lebrue. Maybe Medrith was trying to overtake the crooks, but in Chance's estimate, Medrith was running interference for them.

Every time Medrith closed in, Breckett either zigzagged or his companions jabbed a few shots back. Always, Medrith was swinging wide, so that Chance was unable to pass him.

Meanwhile, The Shadow was inserting shots as best he could; but Medrith's roadster was an obstacle. He was counting upon Medrith finding the chase too hot for anyone in between. Whether Medrith favored the crooks, or was against them, the situation was the same. If their shots didn't worry him, The Shadow's would.

Medrith's chance came. There was a road to the left that led to a lake. Going to the left side, he prepared to take it.

Suddenly, Medrith's car shrieked as its brakes took full hold. By the lights that Chance had turned on, The Shadow saw both Medrith and Arlene bouncing about inside the roadster as it gyrated.

The sudden stop was necessary. Just ahead, Breckett had swerved left. He was taking that same road; in doing so, he was chopping right across Medrith's path.

DEATH DIAMONDS

Maybe Medrith didn't want to dent his nice roadster; possibly he didn't want to injure Arlene. Whatever the case, he managed to cut his speed in time for Breckett to swerve across. But Medrith's car was dented anyway.

Trying to make the turn, he missed and banged up against a tree. The crash wasn't serious, but it put his car right across the narrow side road.

The Shadow was out before Chance stopped. His strides were rapid, but not swift enough to get the crooks in range before they reached the lake, where the roar of a motorboat told that they were taking to the water route again.

Playing a hunch, The Shadow sped back to his car, told Chance where and how to go.

It was a long way around to the canal that ran by Medrith's boathouse. Mobsters could make it faster in their speedboat, and they did. Lebrue still had a quarter mile to go when The Shadow saw a car whip out from beside the boathouse. Revolver shots were popping from in back of it, but they didn't halt the car.

Tony Breckett and his hardened pals had reversed their former route. They had abandoned their second car for the first. A pair of local police had been assigned to watch the original car, but evidently they were lounging in the boathouse when the crooks arrived by canal. If the cops had taken the keys to the abandoned car, Tony must have had another key. Anyway, the thugs had daringly snatched their prize back from the hands of the law, and were on their way again.

This time, there was no overtaking them. The quarter-mile start enabled them to dig through twisty byways before The Shadow was close enough to observe the turns they made.

Ten minutes proved the hunt to be useless. Chance Lebrue was so convinced and was about to state his opinion, when he heard The Shadow's whispered laugh.

If crooks had reversed their route, so could The Shadow, but in a different style. Clues could serve to uncover the men who had disappeared. The Shadow knew where such clues might be found.

"Back to Quelby's," ordered The Shadow. "Park where no one will see us, Chance, while I look into the matter of Quelby's death."

Lebrue gave a nod. One evening in company with The Shadow had convinced him that wherever clues were to be found, the cloaked investigator would find them!

CHAPTER XIII. THE TRAIL AHEAD

THE police chief had come and gone from Quelby's. He would have stayed there longer, but he couldn't be in three places at once. He was needed at Medrith's boathouse to investigate the case of living crooks who had returned and gone again.

Also, the sheriff wanted him out near Haudlin's quarry, to look at a couple of dead crooks who had dived to doom from a sloping cliff. The police chief was too busy to bother about Quelby's case any longer. The coroner could handle it.

At least, the chief took the precaution of shipping Quelby's body to the morgue. The way crooks were picking up cars and laying them down, they wouldn't think twice about showing up and running away with Quelby's body, just for the fun of it.

DEATH DIAMONDS

The only thing that Quelby had worth taking was a valuable diamond stickpin, but if thugs wanted it, they'd probably take the corpse, too, just to cloud the issue.

Consequently, Quelby's apartment was deserted when The Shadow entered for the second time. In most towns, the police would have taken along a great many exhibits, thus muddling worth-while clues; but the Lakedale force didn't operate in that fashion. The Shadow's tiny flashlight showed everything as he had previously seen it.

Looking for the pill bottle first, The Shadow found it. Enough pills were gone to account for Quelby's death. Just enough; that was the interesting part. The bottle was dated; Quelby had purchased it three days ago. If he had taken pills previously, he couldn't have swallowed a death dosage tonight without emptying the bottle.

The point pleased The Shadow, since he was already sure that Quelby's death was murder.

Returning to the living room, The Shadow looked at once for Quelby's chess set. He examined the men, one by one, and found them all quite ordinary. The castles, though, impressed him by their polish. They looked newer than the other men, which wasn't at all surprising, because they were not the castles that Quelby had been using regularly.

Balancing the castles one by one, studying their size, The Shadow could picture four castles with hollow interiors, large enough to contain the stolen Townsley gems.

Yet those other castles had necessarily been used in chess play, so The Shadow looked for further clues. He found wadded tissue paper in the box, and under the tissue sheet that served as lining he discovered objects even more important. The objects were small fishing-line sinkers, four in number.

Chess players could be fishermen, too, and might absent-mindedly leave sinkers in with chessmen. But, in terms of hollow castles and paper wadding, the weights explained themselves.

Quelby had kept them wadded in the hollow pieces so players would not notice the lightness. Even if somebody had used the chessmen at Townsley's, the trick would not have been discovered.

Quelby had laid the box beneath his hat for another reason. Those men needed to be where Pellew could sneak the castles from the box, load them with the jewels from the wall safe, and replace them. A very easy task for the servant, going in and out, always stopping at the serving table near which the box of chessmen lay.

Having packed the castles with gems, Pellew had replaced the sinkers in the box, expecting Quelby to dispose of them later.

The Shadow considered something else.

He had heard the name "Tony" shouted in the darkness. Whoever Tony was, The Shadow conjectured him as Quelby's murderer.

He doubted that Tony had left by the little window; certainly, the man had not departed by the bolted door, if his visit had been a surprise one. He could have used the bookshop for both entrance and exit, particularly if he had a duplicate key.

Such speculations were too doubtful to be classified as a clue, but they at least produced as a clue other research. The Shadow looked through Quelby's belongings to see what else he could discover. Finding

DEATH DIAMONDS

nothing of consequence, he descended to the bookshop and investigated a desk near the telephone.

In a drawer, The Shadow found receipted bills. Quelby, it seemed, was tardy in paying debts, judging from the dates on the bills when compared to the receipt stamps. One group of bills, however, were receipted before the due dates. They were the rent bills. Quelby had paid his rent through a Lakedale real-estate agent named A. J. Breckett.

If the initial "A" stood for Anthony, Breckett could be "Tony." As real-estate agent, he would be the logical man to have another key to the bookshop. There were other evidences of Breckett in the desk drawer folders listing the real-estate properties Breckett had for sale. Studying them carefully, The Shadow concluded his investigation by deciding upon a future course.

LEAVING by his favorite upstairs window, The Shadow rejoined Lebrue and had him drive back to Belmar's. The others had not returned; evidently Belmar had taken Margo to Arlene's. Belmar would naturally have stayed there awhile to hear all about Arlene's adventurous ride with Medrith.

So The Shadow suggested that Chance go to the Hamil residence and get Belmar. Chance had only one objection; he voiced it while The Shadow was stepping out into darkness.

"I might stop in the house," said Chance, "and ask Mr. Cranston if Mr. Belmar called up."

"No use, Chance," returned The Shadow. "I've heard that Cranston is even lazier than Belmar. He's probably asleep by this time, and wouldn't thank you for disturbing him."

The Shadow faded into the darkness. Deciding that The Shadow was right on everything, Chance drove to Hamil's and found Belmar there. When they returned to Belmar's, Chance found that The Shadow was still right.

Cranston was asleep in the armchair where they had left him. He appeared annoyed when Belmar awakened him, and merely shrugged when he heard about Quelby's death and the brief reappearance of the crooks who had been at Townsley's.

"Why spoil my vacation, Belmar?" Cranston's tone was irritable. "I've been dreaming about lakes. Lovely lakes, with palm trees all around them.

"Wouldn't it be nice if I could buy a little lake, all my own, right here in Florida? I don't suppose it could be done."

"It can, quite readily," assured Belmar. "Florida tracts are sold with water as well as land. If you buy an acreage with a lake in the middle of it, you naturally acquire the lake, too."

"Are they all bought up?"

"No, indeed! There are thousands of such lakes in this State. There is a real-estate agent here in Lakedale who specializes in selling lake tracts. His name is Breckett."

"You have dealt with Breckett?"

"No," replied Belmar, "but Medrith has. He wanted Breckett to get him some ranch land. They were still negotiating, the last I heard. I believe, too, that Haudlin had to arrange the purchase of his quarry partly through Breckett. Either of them could introduce you to him."

DEATH DIAMONDS

"Remind me about it tomorrow," suggested Cranston. "I should like to meet Breckett."

The Shadow could have met Breckett before the morrow, had he chosen to go into Lakedale. Breckett's real-estate office was located on the main street. It showed no lights, but there was one turned on in the back room.

There, by an open safe, his actions hidden by tight-drawn window shades, Breckett was opening a safe to put away the stolen gems.

Raiford and Reidsville were present. Their eyes gleamed greedily; not at the Townsley jewels, for they cared little for the topaz necklace, the glimmering opals, and the rest. They were pleased by other gems that Breckett produced to pay them for their services. Payment was to be made in the usual currency: diamonds.

Breckett gave Raiford an antique brooch set with three stones. He handed Reidsville two larger diamonds, both loose.

"Those are honeys," assured Breckett. "Worth a grand to each of you, wherever you hock them. Hold out for what they're worth. None of those sparklers are hot. We had the three mounted in the brooch just so they'd look right.

"Those singles, Reidsville, are a matched pair. You can say they belonged in old cuff links."

Both thugs nodded. They'd had previous experience in cashing the diamonds that Breckett gave them in lieu of currency. They knew how salable the gems were.

"ONLY one thing bothers me, Tony," said Raiford. "I suppose it ain't my business, but when Medrith brings these rocks in from Brazil, why don't he unload them himself, instead of going after other stuff?"

"Yeah," agreed Reidsville. "I can see why he lays off grabbing diamonds, on those jobs we pull for him, because he's got to stay clean in that line. But it's going to be a long while before he cashes in on emeralds and such. Diamonds will always be good."

Breckett chuckled.

"Not always," he said. "When Medrith hits the regular market with his South American goods, he will knock the bottom right out of it, if he isn't careful. He knows it, but won't say so. These jobs are his insurance.

"If diamonds go down and other gems up, a couple of years from now, Medrith will have the hot stuff ready to unload. It will be cool by then." The listening thugs nodded.

"Smart guy, Medrith," approved Raiford. "I get the idea, now."

"Yeah," added Reidsville. "He knows how to cover up."

"He takes chances, though," reminded Breckett. "He was driving his car tonight when I gave the works to Pellew. Handling it later, too, when he blocked off The Shadow from chasing us. So, remember" Breckett's tone was hard "keep your lips buttoned. Neither of you have ever heard of Medrith."

The pair nodded.

"The going may be getting tough," added Breckett, as he started his companions toward the door. "Medrith

DEATH DIAMONDS

and I have been stalling on our ranch deal, so he can come here whenever he wants and hand me diamonds when he takes the hot stuff. People have begun to notice it, particularly Haudlin. He comes here too much."

"A couple of times, I've thought of giving Haudlin the extra quarry property at the price he wants to pay. But if I did, he'd smell a rat. I talked to Medrith about it, and he agrees. So it's still a case of bluffing Haudlin."

Breckett showed the others out, and they sneaked off into the darkness their regular policy in Lakedale, where their faces might be recognized.

Breckett gave a relieved grunt, after they had gone. Raiford and Reidsville worried him. He didn't worry about Dannemora and Joliet. They hadn't come back as he expected, but he would hear from them tomorrow, probably.

Quite satisfied on that point, Breckett closed his safe and turned out the light.

What worries he had, he was saving for tomorrow, not realizing that they would be real worries, then. For Tony Breckett wasn't going to hear from Dannemora and Joliet tomorrow.

That would be bad enough when Breckett found out why. Even worse, was something else that he wouldn't find out. Tony Breckett was going to hear from The Shadow!

CHAPTER XIV. CRIME TO COME

EARLY the next afternoon, a limousine stopped in front of Breckett's real-estate office and Richard Haudlin stepped out with Lamont Cranston. Haudlin gave his chauffeur a twenty-dollar bill and told him to get it changed, so he would have a nickel for the parking meter.

Entering the real-estate office, Haudlin introduced Cranston to Breckett and told him his friend wanted to buy a lake.

Breckett produced a huge album filled with photographs of suitable properties. While Cranston was studying it, Haudlin brought up the matter of the quarry land.

"I still need the corner of that triangle," insisted Haudlin. "Only the corner; the rest is worthless. Some day, a big blast will bring down rock from the adjoining property, so I feel that I should own it. It's merely a protection, Breckett. You should take that into consequence and meet my price."

"I'd like to do something about it," began Breckett. "But the owner won't listen –"

"Let's go over the chart again," interrupted Haudlin, "and see exactly how the matter stands."

He turned toward the rear room, and Breckett gave a nervous glance that The Shadow observed across the top of the album. From the door toward which Haudlin turned stepped Wayne Medrith, wearing a suave smile.

"Hello, Haudlin!" greeted Medrith. "Don't let me disturb you. My business can wait."

"Still after that ranch land, are you?" queried Haudlin. "Well, I hope Breckett will give you a bargain."

"He hasn't yet, Haudlin. So we dropped the ranch business. We've been talking baseball. The training season is under way. How about going out with us to see the Blue Sox play, this afternoon?"

DEATH DIAMONDS

Haudlin's answer was a contemptuous stare. Baseball wasn't one of his passions. He had protested when the Lakedale city fathers invited a big-league ball club to train in their town, claiming that it would attract the cheaper type of tourists. But Haudlin, though supreme in Palm Park, could not control the affairs of Lakedale; hence had lost his point.

Seeing Cranston, Medrith sat down to chat with him, while Haudlin was busy with Breckett. Medrith was in a jolly mood, and described his adventures of the previous evening as though they had been passing sport. He was finishing his account when Haudlin came from the rear office and joined them.

"I'm going to the ball game, Medrith," decided Haudlin, in a superior manner. "I think it is advisable to learn, first hand, regarding all activities that interest the general public."

"Putting it another way," smiled Medrith, "you have found that Breckett is crazy about baseball and you might use it as a wedge to talk him into a better deal on the quarry property."

For a moment, Haudlin's dignity was ruffled; then he relaxed and laughed.

"Since you are doing it to help your ranch buy," he told Medrith, "you can hardly criticize my use of the same policy."

From the picture that Haudlin and Medrith produced, The Shadow could well have visualized Breckett, in the inner office, deep in a newspaper, reading the sporting section.

In fact, Breckett was reading a newspaper, but he was concerned with something else. He was reading about the finding of two men, reputedly known criminals, below a cliff in the quarry district.

In letting that news out, the police had at the same time suppressed the facts of robbery at Townsley's. The newspaper, of course, had been in full accord. It didn't help the tourist trade to mention crime, until the culprits were dead or captured.

Breckett was folding the newspaper when he heard a tap from the alley door. He opened it to face Raiford and Reidsville. From their faces, he understood what they wanted to know.

"YOU guessed it," snapped Breckett. "Those two dead guys are Dannemora and Joliet! But don't let it throw you. I've figured it all out. They bumped off Chance Lebrue –"

"Yeah?" interrupted Raiford. "Looks to me like he rubbed them out, instead."

"He couldn't have," argued Breckett. "He'd have been killed, too. They bumped him and took his car, that's the size of it. Chance's body is in a cypress swamp, probably. Anyway, they were poking his bum car off the cliff, when the bumpers must have locked and hooked them along, too."

Raiford looked at Reidsville, who nodded. The theory sounded so simple, that both were willing to believe it, along with Breckett.

"I've been talking to Medrith," resumed Breckett. "The job is set for tonight. Get the stuff and slip it to me, because I'll be right there. We aren't using any inside guys or any go-between. But remember this: don't go after anything but pearls."

Breckett's listeners were puzzled, and said so. He merely repeated the admonition regarding the pearls, then decided to add another warning.

DEATH DIAMONDS

"Wait until I flash the high-sign," he said. "I've still got to think of a way to get along without a go-between. I can't risk being found with any pearls on me, after you two grab them. I'll find a way, probably. Meanwhile, keep low until this evening."

The pair departed, and Breckett went out to join better company. Pleased to learn that Haudlin was a baseball fan, like Medrith, Breckett was still further enthused when Cranston said he would go to the ball game, too.

They rode to the park in Haudlin's car, and found seats in the ramshackle grandstand of the playing field.

It was a poor ball game. This being the training season, none of the players particularly cared, except the rookies, who were trying to make good. Nor was it much of a ball park.

Instead of a right-field fence, it had a line of shrubs, and when a ball landed in them, it was lost. Ground rules held the batter to two bases on such hits.

During the game, Haudlin and Medrith chatted about a big event scheduled for that evening. It was known as the Palm Park Parade and was a combination dance and reception, to be held at the Dilworthy residence, one of the suburb's showplaces.

This was the one social event to which outsiders were invited, though the privilege was granted to comparatively few.

Breckett was the lucky holder of a ticket to the affair. He couldn't well be left out, considering that he rented and sold property in Palm Park.

Though Haudlin and Medrith talked of the event as though it were unimportant in their lives, Breckett seemed to be counting upon having a good time at the party.

When the ball game ended, the group walked across the field, the short way to Haudlin's car. They passed the shrubbery, where boys were crawling around hunting for the two-base-hit balls. Finding baseballs in the bushes was quite difficult, as the passers noticed.

Reaching Haudlin's car, the four men had some trouble of their own. The chauffeur had moved it under an oak tree so the sun wouldn't blister the paint, and when he opened the door, it tangled with the Spanish moss that draped from a tree bough.

The moss was thicker than seaweed and just as tough. Medrith tangled with a batch of it and wound up laughing, with a huge drape hooked to his neck, hanging like a beard. Haudlin pulled some from the car door, and when they were inside, he gave his opinion of Spanish moss.

"The stuff is more than a nuisance," he declared. "It is a parasite that smothers the trees. I've seen men toss rakes to haul it down, and the rakes stay up in the trees, the moss is so thick. I am going to recommend a campaign in Palm Park to rid the trees of Spanish moss. I shall mention it in my speech at the Parade, this evening."

THEY dropped Breckett at his office in Lakedale, and continued on to Palm Park. Neither Haudlin nor Medrith regarded the afternoon as profitable. The Shadow's opinion differed, though he did not mention the fact.

As Cranston, he had studied Breckett quite closely, and was no longer doubtful as to the meaning of the first initial in the man's name.

DEATH DIAMONDS

Breckett was unquestionably the Tony of the night before. His whole manner betrayed him, under The Shadow's unwatched scrutiny.

Through a small side window at the real-estate office, The Shadow had seen the car that pulled from the rear alley, bearing Tony's companions of the night before. This evening would produce the crux The Shadow wanted. Breckett and his comrades wouldn't pass up the opportunity for further crime. The Shadow would be on watch for it. He wanted them to make the try. They weren't the only men he sought. There were still inside men, located in Palm Park. Moreover, there was someone higher up, the real brain of the ring, a man whose name The Shadow could very nearly declare, having had a chance to study him, this afternoon, along with Breckett.

Medrith was stopping off to see Arlene, so Cranston decided to do the same, in order to see Margo. Haudlin dropped them at the Hamil residence, where they found the girls on the veranda.

Medrith's mention of the baseball game brought a puzzled look from Arlene, who thought his only sport was polo. Then, hearing Margo mention the Parade to Cranston, Arlene launched into the subject of the evening's party.

"You've heard already, Wayne," said Arlene, "but perhaps Lamont hasn't. Everyone will be wearing jewels tonight, but most of us will have imitations. Of course, nobody will know which is which. Those who wish can wear real gems, if they choose.

"However, it will fool the robbers to perfection, if they try their game again. Paste gems are so realistic, you can't tell them from the real, except by close inspection."

"Fancy it" Arlene laughed merrily "crooks taking thousands of dollars in gems, to find they aren't worth hundreds of cents! I actually hope that they will try robbery again tonight!"

The Shadow hoped likewise, though he didn't doubt that Breckett had already heard that imitation jewelry would prevail in Palm Park, this evening. He glanced at Medrith, as the latter spoke.

"If people didn't put their money into jewels," said Medrith, "these robberies wouldn't happen. That's between ourselves, however, since my business is selling diamonds. I prefer to put my own money into real estate, which is something no one can steal."

Mention of real estate reawakened The Shadow's thoughts of Tony Breckett. Confident that Breckett dealt in crime, The Shadow would have had further evidence, could he have seen Breckett at that moment; though, superficially, the man's actions seemed very trivial.

Across the street from his real-estate office, Breckett was glancing in the window of a candy store, noting a display of imitation baseballs. They were hollow, and opened at the center, to serve as candy boxes.

Close by was a sporting-goods shop, where real baseballs were sold. People were coming out and hurrying to the hotel, not far away, where baseball players, returning from the ball park, were obligingly autographing baseballs.

Crime was still on Breckett's mind, and he had an answer to the problems that would be his this evening. His sallow lips framed a smile that served instead of words.

Tony Breckett was no longer worrying about being caught with the goods. He wouldn't be caught not even by The Shadow!

CHAPTER XV. VANISHED PEARLS

THE Dilworthy mansion was indeed a showplace. It was so large it seemed to bulge from the property that held it. The hedges that flanked the sides of the mansion were so close that people had to lean out of windows to see them.

For years, old Dilworthy had been trying to acquire more ground on each side. One neighbor was willing to sell some, but the other wasn't. The other neighbor was Miss Genevieve Ebling, an elderly spinster who had more money than she could count, more land than she could measure.

Miss Genevieve could readily have obliged old Dilworthy by selling him a few adjoining acres, but she wouldn't. Dilworthy had tried every persuasion, even hiring Breckett, at intervals, to use his glib talk. But Miss Genevieve was obdurate, for a specific reason.

Her estate was called Nine Oaks, because of its nine huge oak trees. One of those oaks grew very close to Dilworthy's hedge, and if Genevieve sold that piece of property, she would only have eight oak trees on her land.

Almost daily, old Dilworthy would step to his upstairs veranda and glare angrily at the ninth oak, hoping it would die. Some tree experts told him that it would, because of the Spanish moss which covered it like ornaments on an overly decorated Christmas tree.

Those streaming masses cut off air from the leaves and could turn a live oak into a dead one. So far, however, the ninth oak still survived, and even threatened to outlive old Dilworthy.

There were more than a hundred guests at the Palm Park Parade. They filled reception rooms downstairs and upstairs. Dilworthy had hired a lot of extra help for the occasion, and among the many waiters who were moving everywhere, serving the refreshments, were two who didn't really belong.

They were Breckett's special helpers: Reidsville and Raiford. The outside crew composed the inside men tonight. It wasn't so very risky, for Raiford and Reidsville were shirking their duty as waiters. When they saw Breckett, they looked for his high-sign and he gave it. Crime was on the move again.

All that postponed it was Haudlin's speech, which he delivered in the downstairs reception room. Seeing Cranston and Medrith, Breckett joined them and listened to Haudlin's edicts on the welfare of Palm Park, which included mention of the Spanish moss and the way it menaced the beautiful old trees.

Across the room, old Dilworthy glowered at such comment, while Miss Ebling, near the doorway, showed the utmost interest, since she was the chief tree fancier in Palm Park.

Haudlin came over to receive congratulations on his speech. A dance was about to start downstairs, bingo game upstairs. Breckett called a servant, told him to bring a box that he would find in the hall. The servant brought it, and Breckett began to remove new baseballs from the box, handing them to Haudlin, one by one.

"Why not raffle these, along with the bingo game?" queried Breckett. "They've all been autographed by Blue Sox players. Keep one for yourself, Haudlin, and you, too, Medrith" Breckett gave each a baseball "and I'll hold one for myself." He dropped it in his pocket. "Raffle the rest, and the money can go as a bonus in the bingo pot."

Breckett would have given a souvenir baseball to Cranston, too; but, at that moment, Cranston wasn't present. Margo Lane was standing by impatiently, for she had the first dance with Medrith. Arlene, in her turn, had

DEATH DIAMONDS

corralled Cranston and they were already on the floor.

From among the drifting dancers, The Shadow witnessed the baseball business and decided that he could ask Margo about its details, later.

Bulging with baseballs, Haudlin started upstairs. Medrith and Margo joined the dance. Breckett looked about; seeing no available dancing partner, he went upstairs, too. The Shadow observed that Belmar was going in the same direction, which was a help.

Few details could escape Belmar's photographic mind. At the end of this dance, The Shadow would be upstairs, too, for he had the next dance with Margo and she would be willing to forgo it and have a look at the bingo game instead.

THERE was a special reason why Breckett went upstairs. Miss Genevieve Ebbeling had headed for the bingo game. Next to trees, she loved bingo. In fact, she often threw fashionable bingo parties in the afternoons, always outdoors, under one of the nine oaks.

But that wasn't the main reason why Breckett followed Miss Genevieve. The real reason was that the lady was wearing pearls.

The party was resplendent with jewels, most of them imitation. The conspiring guests had overdone the thing; some were wearing jewelry that was manifestly junk. There were clever touches, however.

Breckett saw flashy bracelets that he thought were studded with zircons, instead of diamonds, but couldn't be sure. Garnets were passing as rubies; tourmalines as emeralds.

Amethysts and aquamarines looked genuine enough, but for all Breckett could tell, they might be colored glass. Many residents of Palm Park owned cheap replicas that matched their valuable gems, so the whole scene was a delusion to the eye and a snare for crooks.

In fact, for all the impositions present, Miss Genevieve's pearls appeared the most palpable.

The pearls formed a necklace of remarkable proportions. The largest beads were as huge as marbles, and they tapered gradually to tiny sizes at the clasp in back of Miss Genevieve's ample neck.

There were close to a hundred pearls in the string, and all had the same faint blue hue. That necklace, if real, couldn't be duplicated for less than a hundred thousand dollars.

People smiled, however, when they saw the pearls. They'd heard about cultured pearls, the kind the Japanese produced by annoying captive oysters in their shells. Cultured pearls were actually the real article; they simply came from tamed oysters rather than wild ones. So Miss Genevieve might be wearing a necklace of cultured pearls that matched a much more valuable one.

But Breckett thought differently, as he watched the bingo game from a vantage spot near the door to the upstairs veranda. He was conscious that men were moving about beneath the veranda, for he could hear them near the hedge. He knew who they were: local detectives, amplified by deputy police. Dilworthy's grounds were solidly surrounded.

Still, Breckett was not troubled. Smoking a cigarette, he listened to the dance music wafting up from the floor below. The music wasn't all that wafted up.

DEATH DIAMONDS

Some waiters arrived, carrying trays with glasses. Reidsville and Raiford were among them. Breckett didn't have to point out the Ebbling pearls. The two crooks spotted them at once.

Good men for the coming job, in Breckett's estimate. Together, they behaved like clockwork. Reidsville, stopping with his tray, took a glance over Miss Genevieve's shoulder, then elbowed in beside her, to point to her bingo card.

"You've got a bingo, lady!" Haughty Miss Genevieve couldn't ordinarily tolerate an upstart waiter, but one who offered her a tip that would add a few dollars to her millions was entitled to a hearing.

She couldn't see how her card made bingo, so she insisted that Reidsville point it out. To touch the card, Reidsville had to hold the tray in front of the pearl necklace.

Raiford, passing with an empty tray, stopped to look at the conference. His fingers plucked the clasp behind Miss Genevieve's neck; he snaked the necklace his direction while his pal, accidentally jostling the tray, bumped the lady with it.

The necklace was gone without Miss Genevieve's knowledge, and her bingo was gone, too. Reidsville found he'd made a mistake about the winning number.

ALL this took place under the eyes of the other bingo players, though not one caught a flash of the swiftly vanishing pearls. Miss Genevieve, however, was conscious of the gazes and let her hands rove for the necklace, as she always did under such circumstances.

When her fingers didn't find the pearls, Miss Genevieve came to her feet with a shriek. She didn't have to cry that the pearls were gone. Everyone realized it by that time.

Reidsville was still standing by, flourishing his tray. He purposely upset the glasses, to add to the excitement. It diverted attention from Raiford, who had neared the veranda door, gathering the necklace in his hand under cover of the empty tray.

Breckett's hand caught Raiford's elbow and turned him about. His other hand slid below Raiford's fist and received the necklace.

"Back to the table," ordered Breckett. "Bluff it through with Reidsville. Insist that they search you, too."

Then, with a quick turn, Breckett was gone to the veranda, while Raiford, heading toward the bingo table, mixed with a group of other servants, pretending to be as surprised as they were.

From the other end of the room, Haudlin was bawling orders, telling men to watch the doors and see that no one left. Prominent members of the Palm Park colony promptly responded.

Breckett, of course, was cut off from farther flight, for there was only one doorway to the veranda, while beyond its rail men were calling up from the hedges, wanting to know what the uproar meant.

For the moment, Breckett didn't tell them. In the darkness of the veranda, he was packing the huge necklace into a tight space, wadding it with some crinkly tissue paper. Then, sighting off into the darkness, he saw a monstrous object dead ahead, waiting like a massive, silent sentinel.

Drawing his arm back, Breckett took a quick, forward pace, hurling an object off into the night as hard and far as he could throw it.

DEATH DIAMONDS

His fling carried him to the veranda rail. Over the edge, Breckett shouted to the men below:

"Hurry up, all of you! There's been a robbery!"

Men came up by the trellis, and Breckett actually helped them over the rail. When they reached the guarded door, they halted. Looking across to another door, Breckett saw persons stopping there, too people who had come up from the dance to have a look at the bingo game. He saw Lamont Cranston, accompanied by Margo Lane.

Order was gathering from chaos. Haudlin was taking charge, and he was segregating all persons who might possibly have taken the pearls. Miss Genevieve was wailing that the pearls were real, her voice so anguished that the truth was certain. Assuring her that the missing necklace would be found, Haudlin ordered a search of the suspects.

They included two men who had been playing bingo on each side of Miss Genevieve; also, all servants, five in number, who were in the room at the time the necklace disappeared. Haudlin added that if others cared to be searched, they could volunteer.

A few men accepted the invitation; among them Breckett. He was stepping in from the veranda as he spoke, along with the men who had come up from the ground.

Haudlin remarked that Breckett could hardly be regarded as a suspect; nevertheless, he had the right to be searched if he wanted.

When Margo looked around for Cranston, he was gone. She wondered what clue he could have gained to a robbery he hadn't witnessed. Margo didn't know that The Shadow had already labeled Breckett as the man to be watched.

Leaving the house, Cranston became The Shadow. No men remained at the hedge below the veranda. Probing there with a tiny flashlight, The Shadow looked for pearls, but found none hanging from the hedge.

Using the trellis route, he reached the upper veranda and continued the search.

The bingo game was over; everyone had gone downstairs, except those who were being searched. They were coming, one by one, from a room across the way. Haudlin was checking them as they came, and The Shadow noted that Medrith had come up to join him.

Breckett appeared, and turned toward the stairs with Haudlin and Medrith. He was shaking his head, indicating that the search had failed. Through the door that Breckett left open, The Shadow saw the last two men of those who had been searched.

They were servants, hired for the evening, and their faces had a familiar look. Gliding across the deserted hall, The Shadow eased through the door and drew it shut.

THE click of the latch brought Raiford and Reidsville full about. In the fully lighted room, they saw their nemesis, The Shadow.

If ever two crooks showed scared faces, that pair did. Though The Shadow held only one automatic, each man thought the muzzle was meant for him.

"We didn't snag those pearls," protested Reidsville. "They just got through searching us."

DEATH DIAMONDS

"And they frisked us right," insisted Raiford. "Ask 'em, if you don't think they did."

The Shadow's low laugh responded as he approached. His whispered mirth, the bore of his burning eyes, made the thugs tremble. They realized that their use of the words "we" and "us" had betrayed the fact that they were in collusion. They had satisfied the men who searched them, but not The Shadow. He knew they could tell him where the pearls had gone. They would have told him, under the menace of that gun, but for the sudden opening of the door. In from the hallway lunged a man who drove straight for The Shadow.

It was Breckett, and, to all intents, he had every right to seize this cloaked stranger who had so singularly arrived in a mansion where crime was rife.

Wheeling, The Shadow caught Breckett in a swift hold and sent him reeling against two others who followed him: Haudlin and Medrith. The search had proved that Breckett wasn't carrying a gun, and the same applied to Raiford and Reidsville.

They were springing for The Shadow, but he met them when he came around, hurling one upon the other. In a trice, it seemed, The Shadow was capturing three mobsters in a single stroke.

Right then, the lights went off.

Instantly, The Shadow made a dive of his own, and just in time. A revolver spurted in the darkness and its shots were aimed for him. The Shadow couldn't afford return shots; they might clip the wrong man. Instead, he drove in from an angle, to grab the spurting gun. There, he encountered two men, instead of one. Another was after the same gun.

Next, everyone was tangled in the brawl, and The Shadow was the center of the thing, until a hand grabbed the door and yanked it wide. Two men broke and fled through the hall. Raiford and Reidsville weren't taking chances with The Shadow.

Twisting from the others, The Shadow followed. He fired after the phony servants, but they were diving down the back stairs. The Shadow saw Breckett at the door of the room he had left, yelling for Haudlin and Medrith to come along. They came; Haudlin first, then Medrith.

The latter had the gun, and he stabbed a shot The Shadow's way, far too late to wing the figure in black. By then, The Shadow was on his way downstairs in pursuit of Raiford and Reidsville.

As the phony servants tore through the kitchen, real servants sprang to their feet. Mistaking The Shadow for a foe, the loyal servants tried to stop him. He scattered them several directions, but the delay prevented him from overtaking the crooks. Raiford and Reidsville were speeding away in a car when The Shadow arrived outside.

People were rushing from the house, and lights were showing everywhere. No one spotted The Shadow as he crossed to the shelter of a hedge and followed it to a rear space where Belmar's car was parked.

There, he whisked off cloak and hat and stowed them under the rear seat. He was out through the other door when people arrived to search among the cars.

The hunters sprang into cars and turned on headlights. The whole parking space was promptly flooded for the benefit of the ardent searchers who were looking for an unknown man in black. Among the searchers was Glenn Belmar; between two cars, Belmar ran into Lamont Cranston, aiding in the search.

It didn't occur to Belmar, nor to anyone else, that the esteemed Mr. Cranston, in searching for The Shadow, was actually looking for himself!

CHAPTER XVI. CRIME'S CONSEQUENCE

IT was late afternoon and the day was brilliant, yet mystery enshrouded Palm Park. The mystery involved Miss Genevieve Ebbing's pearls, and talk of it was on every tongue. In fact, the news was so widespread, that the local newspapers were not able to suppress it any longer; which was very serious, indeed.

The problem was a deep one. Two crooks had fled, thus declaring that they had taken part in crime. The Shadow, unknown figure in the case, now stood revealed as a champion of right.

It hadn't been apparent, when people discovered him holding two servants trapped in the Dilworthy mansion. That pair, in declaring their own guilt by flight, had automatically put The Shadow in the proper light.

Yet those very men who betrayed their false colors, were members of the group that had been so thoroughly searched. They couldn't have carried the pearls away with them. So the question still remained: what had become of the Ebbing pearls?

All day, searchers scoured the Dilworthy mansion and the narrow grounds around it. They dug deep into the hedges, and even inspected the adjoining grounds for a short distance.

Meanwhile, Miss Genevieve Ebbing remained in a state of near collapse. The only way to humor her was to listen to her moans, so Miss Genevieve, seated beneath the most convenient oak tree, was constant host to sympathetic visitors who came and went.

Of course, Belmar felt it necessary to pay his proper respects, so he and Cranston drove over to see Miss Genevieve. They found Margo and Arlene chatting with her. For the fifteenth time, Miss Genevieve was explaining why she had worn her real pearls, instead of a false set.

"I've owned those pearls for forty years," she declared, "and their luster is as beautiful as ever. The reason is that I never failed to wear them whenever occasion offered. Pearls become dead and colorless if laid away and never worn. It mars their beauty forever."

Neither Margo nor Arlene had heard that fact before. The one listener who knew it was the silent Mr. Cranston. Without realizing it, Miss Genevieve was also stating the very reason why crooks had chosen pearls, last night, instead of other gems. Breckett must have learned the ways of pearls from someone, and acted accordingly.

"People who prize pearls always wear them," insisted Miss Genevieve. "Some people I, for one are specially gifted at preserving the luster of those wonderful gems. How I cherished those pearls!" Her voice became a wail. "Only to lose them!"

Two new visitors had just arrived: Haudlin and Medrith. After helping condole with Miss Genevieve on her loss, they drew to one side, requesting Cranston to join them.

"Another friendly dispute, Cranston," said Haudlin. "Perhaps you can settle it for us. I claim that the robbers made a valuable haul last night. Medrith thinks otherwise."

"They were fools!" put in Medrith. "Pearls are out of date. Cultured pearls are cheaper, and can be classed as genuine."

DEATH DIAMONDS

"Until you put them under the X ray," argued Haudlin. "A real pearl shows a circular structure. The cultured ones have straight lines in the center. That's because a cultured pearl has an artificial nucleus. Come, Medrith, you must know that much about pearls!"

Apparently, Medrith did, but had forgotten it. He recalled that in producing cultured pearls, bits of shell were forced into the captive oysters, so that they would build around it as a core. However, Medrith now shrugged as he queried:

"But where can anyone dispose of those real pearls?"

"In South America, I would say," retorted Haudlin archly. "Diamonds are so plentiful there, that wealthy persons would be eager to purchase other gems, specifically genuine pearls, perfectly matched. You are familiar with South America, Medrith. Am I right?"

As if in reply to the question came a muffled boom, carrying from far away. Blasting was going on in Haudlin's quarry. It gave Haudlin an idea for another question.

"Perhaps you have forgotten diamonds, Medrith," he said. "So you would naturally forget other gems, too. Isn't ranching your mainstay, at present?"

"It will be," returned Medrith, "if I can ever buy that land from Breckett. I hope to become a cattleman –"

"Of course," interposed Haudlin. "I hoped to develop a quarry business, too, and I have. There is a difference, Medrith, between having an idea and going through with it."

MISS GENEVIEVE was calling, so the testy remarks ended. As they approached the lady, they saw that she was smiling. Something had made her forget her pearls.

She pointed across the lawn, where a procession of workmen were passing with wheelbarrows laden with Spanish moss.

"You see, Mr. Haudlin?" she queried. "I'm getting rid of all that Spanish moss to save those wonderful oaks of mine. Best of all, it is not costing me a penny!"

Haudlin stared, a surprised expression on his face.

"They're taking the moss to a mattress factory," stated Miss Genevieve. "All day, the men have been raking it down in great clusters and carrying it away in trucks."

Arlene picked up a cluster of moss that had fallen from the oak above. The stuff looked like a mass of spinach, that would hardly do as stuffing for mattresses.

Taking the moss, Miss Genevieve scraped one of the long thin tendrils with her fingernail. The surface peeled away, revealing a core consisting of a long, threadlike hair.

"They dry the moss and put it through a scraper," she explained. "The hair is used in manufacturing the mattresses. If you want to see how lovely an oak looks when the Spanish moss is gone, look at the tree over next to Dilworthy's. The workmen cleared it first."

Margo and Arlene decided to look at the tree in question, so Cranston strolled along. He was taking a last cigarette from his pack, and as he passed a moss-laden tree, he wadded the empty pack and gave it a high

DEATH DIAMONDS

toss over his shoulder.

The paper had never reached the ground. Encountering a huge beard of Spanish moss, it went out of sight and stayed there.

Thick, pliant, the weedlike strands had the clutch of living tentacles. What went up did not come down, when Spanish moss took a grip upon it. The Shadow decided that a trip to the ninth oak would be unnecessary.

Instead, he went back and borrowed Belmar's car. When the last truckload of Spanish moss pulled out, Cranston followed it.

THE mattress factory was only a small building, flanked by a very large shed. There, the workers were piling the gathered moss in great heaps. Beyond were the drying racks, already hung with strands of moss, like clothes on a line.

Satisfied that the truckmen would be busy until dark, Cranston drove away. It was after dusk when he reached Belmar's house and gave the horn a slight tap.

Belmar hadn't returned. It was Lebrue who appeared, expecting to find Cranston in the car. Instead, he saw The Shadow, distinguishable only as a cloak-shrouded being who gave a whispered command.

Lebrue took the wheel and followed the directions The Shadow gave. They retraced the route to the mattress factory, where Chance stopped some distance away.

Watching after The Shadow had glided into the darkness, Chance was surprised to see the flicker of a flashlight near the shed. Previously, The Shadow had handled his light in such guarded fashion, that Chance had never spotted more than the tiniest ray. In fact, though Chance did not realize it, The Shadow was handling his light in typical style on this occasion.

The glow that Chance saw came from another flashlight. A man was holding it, to help two others search through the mound of Spanish moss that occupied the shed.

From darkness, The Shadow watched and waited. He saw the faces of Raiford and Reidsville, knew that the man with the light must be Breckett.

At last, it came.

Finding something in the moss, Raiford dug deep and twisted the object free. He brought it out and held it to the light. Superficially, it was a baseball. Breckett chuckled at Raiford's puzzlement. Then Breckett spoke:

"Open it!"

Raiford suddenly discovered that the baseball was an imitation made of cardboard; though stout and substantial, it really had a genuine feel. He cracked it apart, finding it to be nothing more than a hinged box. Pulling out a wad of tissue paper, Raiford saw something white and lifted it. Tony laughed anew.

Hanging from Raiford's fingers was the Ebling necklace, uncoiled to its full length.

"I told you there wouldn't be a go-between," gloated Breckett. "I knew old lady Ebling would be wearing real pearls, so the grab was easy enough. Getting rid of the necklace bothered me, until I went to the ball game. The way the two-base hits got lost in the bushes made me think of Spanish moss being even better.

DEATH DIAMONDS

"I saw this phony ball in a candy shop and bought it. You saw those real baseballs I brought to the party? I had them along for a blind. When you slipped me the necklace, Raiford, I stepped to the veranda, packed it in this candy ball and let wing.

"It was easier than hitting a barn door, that big oak tree over in old lady Ebbing's yard. I just couldn't miss. The ball couldn't help sticking in the Spanish moss, there was so much of it.

"Today, I called the mattress people and told them I was old man Dilworthy; that I wanted the moss cleared off Miss Ebbing's nearest oak tree because it was an eyesore.

"I told them to tell her they'd do the job for nothing. Then, I said: 'Send the bill to my real-estate agent, Mr. Breckett. I shall instruct him to pay it.' Faking Dilworthy's voice was a cinch, and there won't be any comeback, because when I get the bill, I'll take care of it and Dilworthy won't know a thing about it."

WHILE Breckett talked, a singular thing was happening; so strange, that it seemingly passed belief. Dangling from Raiford's fingers, the Ebbing necklace was disappearing, inch by inch, from the bottom up!

As if darkness itself possessed some acid strength that could devour pearls, the amazing phenomenon continued until almost complete. By then, the process was closer to the sphere of Breckett's flashlight, and the cause of it was vaguely visible.

It wasn't just darkness that was swallowing the pearls. A hand was responsible, a living hand that wore a thin black glove, the edge of which emerged with a projecting cloak sleeve.

The hand of The Shadow!

Nearing Raiford's fingers, The Shadow's digits performed more nimbly than the crooks had on the previous night. With a twist, the gloved fingers took the necklace from Raiford's grip without the man realizing it.

Operating alone, The Shadow outdid the system with which the pearls had been lifted from the neck of Miss Ebbing. The Shadow didn't even lift them; he just let them fall, and they were gone from sight.

It was mere coincidence that brought discovery. Having finished his spiel, Breckett happened to want the necklace at that particular moment.

"Give me those oyster eggs. Raiford –"

As he spoke, Breckett swung the flashlight. Instead of the opalescent pearls, he saw vacancy. He stared down at the Spanish moss, thinking that Raiford might have dropped the pearls into the heap.

He couldn't even see the moss. Receding blackness blotted it; but Breckett was quick enough to notice that the blackness faded. He swung the flashlight wide.

Upon the three mobsters lunged a living hurricane, an automatic shoving out ahead of it, clutched in The Shadow's other fist. The crooks grabbed for the arm, were lucky enough to hoist it as the big gun spoke.

A slug ripped a chunk from the shed roof. Then The Shadow's gun-weighted fist was sledging downward, and the thugs were dodging, trying to ward the blow.

The pearls didn't handicap The Shadow; they were hooked within his glove. He grabbed the flashlight from Breckett, scaled it through the air, clear over the squatty building that adjoined the shed.

DEATH DIAMONDS

His laugh was throbbing, taunting in the ears of the men who struggled with him. Resuming the struggle of the night before, The Shadow was sprawling them on long, hard spills.

All that saved them was the Spanish moss, for it made their landings soft. Strewn with the stuff, crooks went staggering from the shed, dashing for a car that was parked nearby. The Shadow heard the spurt of a motor before crooks reached their goal. He knew that Chance was shoving across, to block their getaway.

Starting into the darkness, The Shadow planned to trap Breckett and his thuggish companions right in their own car.

Suddenly, a brilliant path of light gleamed toward the shed, fully outlining The Shadow in its glow. It came from an approaching car, and the power of the searchlight could not be mistaken. The car was Medrith's roadster, again covering a crooked getaway.

Whirling about, The Shadow found the shelter of the shed as a revolver barked in his direction.

Those shots were wide, and The Shadow, past the shed edge, intended to blot the searchlight and the hidden gunner beyond it. The Shadow wasn't on the spot; his rival occupied that position, though the circumstances did seem the other way about.

Thinking The Shadow to be in jeopardy, Chance Lebrue swung his car toward the roadster, flashing on his lights to counteract the searchlight's glare.

Lebrue's act briefly eclipsed The Shadow's path of fire long enough for the roadster to wheel to flight, along with the car that Breckett drove.

With The Shadow back in the car with him, Chance did his best to make amends, but he had boxed himself in a corner and it took too long to pull about. Fugitive cars had taken separate courses and were too distant to overtake when Chance finally was under way. The Shadow told him to drive back to Belmar's.

At Belmar's, while Chance was putting the car away, Cranston strolled indoors to find Margo and Belmar playing cribbage. He learned that Arlene had a date with Medrith that evening. Casually, Cranston asked if they were going somewhere in Medrith's car.

"Why, no," said Margo. "I believe they're using Arlene's. I think that Wayne sent his roadster to the repair shop to have the searchlight fixed. A short circuit, I believe."

"And how did you leave Miss Ebling?"

"Silly as ever," replied Margo. "She and some friends are sitting around a table in a dim room, hoping the spirits will tip it and spell out some facts about the necklace."

Cranston decided that he would go out for a moonlight stroll. He was rising lazily from his chair as Chance entered, and from Cranston's manner, Chance thought that Belmar's guest must have been drowsing indoors all the evening.

Once outside, Cranston regained his cloak and hat from the rear of Belmar's car. He became The Shadow, but he left on foot. He didn't need a car for the short trip he planned.

In the gloom of her huge dining room, Genevieve Ebling was seated at a large table with a circle of a dozen friends around her. They were skeptical about the table tilting, and so far, it hadn't performed.

DEATH DIAMONDS

Miss Genevieve claimed that the table was too heavy; they had better try another. She called for lights, which pleased her guests, for some of them had felt a strange impression of motion in the darkness around them.

Light, when it came, produced a sensation more startling than darkness. Gasps and shrieks mingled about the table. A dozen pairs of eyes were riveted upon Miss Genevieve.

Puzzled, she performed her old habit of plucking for her necklace. Her hands stopped, numbed, her stare more profoundly awed than any of the rest.

The spirits, it seemed, had done more than speak. They had found the lost, and delivered it. The amazed Miss Genevieve was wearing her fabulous pearl necklace!

The stillness that followed was strangely stirred by the trail of a distant, parting laugh that crept in from the whispering oaks, as though some fleeting ghost had uttered it. Those who heard it were wrong when they attributed the macabre tone to their strained imaginations.

It was the laugh of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVII. EVERYBODY HAPPY

NEARLY everybody in Lakedale was very, very happy. The police chief was happy because the Ebling necklace had been recovered, and the local newspaper gave him full credit for restoring it to its owner, even though he hadn't.

One resident, Tony Breckett, shouldn't have been happy, but he was. Tony was living in new quarters, above one of the many juke joints on the outside of the city. In cramped but comfortable quarters, he was entertaining two visitors, while a juke organ ground out music from downstairs.

It was midnight, and the music had been going all evening. Tony's visitors had come into the joint as customers, then sneaked upstairs. They were the usual pair: Raiford and Reidsville.

Breckett explained why he was happy.

"Losing the pearls won't matter," he assured. "They were the worst bet of everything we grabbed. Some of the early jobs were better. The pearls were plenty valuable, but even a fellow like Medrith would have trouble unloading them. Anyway, losing them paves the way to another job, now that everybody thinks everything is quiet."

Breckett's companions gave uneasy looks. They didn't regard matters as quiet.

"Quiet in Palm Park, I mean," said Breckett. "Don't worry about the big job. Medrith will handle that himself, all alone. I've closed my office, and I'm supposed to be on a trip. I know where I can sell out, without anybody knowing until the fellow who buys it shows up in Lakedale, to take over.

"I'm sick of the real-estate business, anyway. It's too legitimate. So I'm going my way, and you can go yours. All you're worried about is the payoff due you for the pearl job. Well, you're getting it, in full."

From a small chamois bag, Breckett slid a single diamond, as magnificent a stone as the viewers had ever seen. To the eyes of Raiford and Reidsville, the gem rated at least a dozen carats, though their estimate was probably exaggerated. It was cut in lozenge shape, something of a diamond in itself.

DEATH DIAMONDS

"I could give you some smaller ones," declared Breckett, displaying some other stones, "but they wouldn't divide equally. Why not split that one?"

"Split it?" inquired Raiford. "You mean the sparkler or the dough?"

"Both," replied Breckett. "You know old Jolger, who lives down at that flop house where you've been staying?"

The two crooks nodded.

"He's a refugee from Holland," explained Breckett. "He used to be a diamond cutter. He has tools here with him. I brought him to Lakedale, in case we needed him. He owes me dough and wants to make it up. A conscientious guy, and you know what trouble they can be.

"Take him that rock and tell him you want it split right across the center. It will make two swell pieces, both triangle cuts. You can hock them separately, easier than you could the big one. Stick right with Jolger, until he gets it done."

Both men agreed that they would stay with Jolger. They even argued as to which should have custody of the diamond until they reached the cheap hotel where Jolger was. They finally matched for the privilege, and Raiford won.

Noting their faces as they left, Breckett was pleased. They were as happy as he was, which counted heavily with Tony Breckett. Satisfied henchmen never squealed.

PEOPLE were satisfied, too, in Palm Park. The Ebbing pearls had been returned and crime had apparently met its master, in the person of a cloaked fighter whose entry upon the scene had marked the end of robbery.

But there were certain people whose interests still had to be considered.

They were meeting at Haudlin's house, a group that included Countess del Rondo, returned from Miami, and other individuals who had suffered from earlier robberies. Townsley, of course, was present, with his wife, and Haudlin was computing the totals of their losses in round figures.

The figures approached half a million dollars, and Haudlin knew that something must be done about it. These people had rights equal to those of Genevieve Ebbing. Unless some effort was made to reclaim their lost jewels, they would break the story wide. The policy of suppressing news was over, since the Ebbing case had been made public through the press.

"If you give us time," assured Haudlin, "we can surely apprehend the criminals. I know that everyone agrees on that point."

He looked around, seeking nods. He received one from Belmar; thought that Cranston's calm expression was the equivalent of an affirmative. Medrith, however, did not agree at all.

"The birds have flown," declared Medrith. "Why not admit the fact, Haudlin? The only chance to get back the stolen gems would be to capture the crooks in an act of crime and make them confess where they have placed the stolen goods. In fact, a confession might not be necessary, if the men themselves were caught."

"What would you have us do?" demanded Haudlin surlily. "Bait them into a trap?"

DEATH DIAMONDS

Medrith shrugged; then queried stoutly:

"Why not?"

"Very well," decided Haudlin. "Suppose we make some announcement regarding important jewels that will be on display, now that crime has been halted. Perhaps you would be willing to supply the gems, Medrith."

"I specialize in diamonds, and so far, the robbers have ignored such gems. Of course, I'm willing to trade in a few diamonds for some other gems, if it will help."

The idea pleased Haudlin and the rest. Almost immediately, the group was discussing the matter of a pool toward the acquisition of the required gems. Haudlin began to use the telephone, calling up other residents of Palm Park. He had no trouble inducing contributors, once the plan was explained.

Finished with those calls, Haudlin turned to Medrith with gratitude in his eyes.

"Credit for the suggestion is yours, Medrith," declared Haudlin. "So far, a dozen persons have agreed to contribute two thousand dollars apiece. You and I can provide similar amounts. I believe by tomorrow we shall have doubled the number of contributors. This will enable us to provide at least fifty thousand dollars for the purchase of suitable gems. The one question is: what gems are suitable."

"Don't forget," added Medrith, "you must also have some sensible reason for the thing."

That led to new debate, with Haudlin approving the various motions, though always keeping a ready ear to Medrith's suggestions. It was finally decided that a single gem would be better than a group, since one famous jewel, on display in Palm Park; would be a marked sensation. As for the purpose, Cranston supplied a good one.

He suggested that the gem be advertised as a reward for the capture of the notorious jewel thieves. That, in itself, would attract the attention of the wanted men. The only objection was that such a capture would mean handing over the gem itself, as a reward; but such an objection had merit in itself.

The Countess del Rondo declared that she would stand a fifth of the reward money, should it be paid; Townsley and the others chimed in with similar offers. So it was left to Haudlin to call in some important jewelers and let them show their wares. He promptly wrote out telegrams and told his secretary to send them to New York.

Looking over the schedule of Palm Park events, Haudlin discovered that a fashion show was upon the calendar. It was purely a society affair; the models would be members of the colony.

All would be wearing jewelry, so one could be delegated to display the fifty-thousand-dollar gem that was to attract the missing men of crime. It was decided that the lucky girl would be chosen by lot.

WHILE the elite of Palm Park were thus arranging the coming trap, two men of crime had reached their destination. Raiford and Reidsville were at their old hotel; tapping at the door of Jolger's room.

The old diamond cutter was still awake; but he looked annoyed when he poked his head out from his door to see who was knocking.

The visitors entered without ceremony. Once inside, they showed Jolger their diamond. His eyes gleamed with immediate interest when he heard the men were from Breckett and learned the reason of their visit.

DEATH DIAMONDS

Setting a jeweler's glass to his eye, Jolger studied the diamond so long and ardently that Raiford became worried.

"What's the matter?" he queried. "Ain't it real?"

"Very real," replied Jolger, with a thick accent. "A very goot diamond. From South America, maybe."

The crooks exchanged worried glances that Jolger did not notice. Then Raiford demanded:

"What makes you think that, Jolger?"

"This one is from river diggings," assured Jolger. "Like in Brazil. It is a very hard diamond. Ah!" His eye was tight against the glass. "The grain is as we wish it. But the cleaving, it will be difficult."

"Is that good or bad?"

Jolger looked up and studied Raiford with a smile.

"It is very goot," he said, "when cleavage is difficult, because it means that the stone, it will not crack. But for the cutter" he tapped his chest with his hands "it is difficult. I must make a study of this diamond, so goot a study, before I can begin."

The thugs agreed that he could study the gem as long as he wished, since they had rented the adjoining room. Leaving the diamond with Jolger, they went to their quarters and matched to see which one would keep first vigil. They intended that one would always be awake as long as the diamond was in Jolger's hands.

AT about that time, The Shadow was leaving Haudlin's, with Belmar. Outside, Margo met them. She pointed to Arlene's car, where they saw Medrith joining the other girl.

Arlene yielded the wheel to Medrith, and they saw the girl's red hair rest against his shoulder as the car rode away.

"You can drop me off at Arlene's," laughed Margo. "I think those two love birds would rather be alone."

"Apparently the tiffs are really over," observed Belmar. "Arlene doesn't seem annoyed because Wayne saw the countess this evening."

"I think they settled all their problems last night," declared Margo. "Arlene says it was the most wonderful evening that she ever spent. Of course, she always thinks in the future when she talks of Wayne. That has a lot to do with it."

The Shadow caught the significance in Margo's tone. It meant that Medrith hadn't added new evidence to support his alibis at the times when certain robberies had been committed. Maybe Arlene had lost her doubts, but Margo certainly hadn't.

As for The Shadow, he had doubts of his own. He was thinking of the episode at the mattress factory, when crooks managed to slip his toils, thanks to sudden intervention in their behalf. The Shadow, too, was thinking of the future, but he was linking it with the past.

He liked the plan to come, the method which Haudlin had developed from Medrith's suggestion and which promised to prove a snare for criminals. But The Shadow was no longer thinking in terms of Tony Breckett

and the thugs who worked with him. They could be gathered into the fold at a future date.

Breckett was labeled, and The Shadow had identified the others from pictures in his microphoto rogues' gallery, which he had brought from New York with him. None of them, not even Breckett, was custodian of the stolen gems.

The Shadow shared the general satisfaction that was rife throughout Palm Park, for the future promised success to his cause the trapping of the real brain who managed ways of crime.

CHAPTER XVIII. THE FASHION SHOW

RICHARD HAUDLIN sat in his study and gestured at the row of gems upon his desk. A dozen girls, Margo and Arlene among them, were fascinated by the display.

Gems of similar size, all set in identical pendants and all very beautiful. Catching the rays of the afternoon sun, each stone sought to outdazzle its next companion.

Beckoning to a stolid jeweler who stood by, Haudlin requested him to name the various gems. The jeweler identified them with taps, as he reeled off the list: citrine, peridot, chrysoberyl, rubellite, almandine, jacinth. The very names were fascinating! The jeweler came to the last in line, and announced: "Alexandrite!"

Haudlin picked up the final gem and held it in his palm. It was green in hue, much like an emerald.

"This is the prize jewel," he declared. "A rare alexandrite from Ceylon. The jeweler tells me that they are seldom found so large and fine. This alexandrite represents our fifty thousand dollars. We shall place it in a box by itself."

He did so; then resumed:

"The others are merely semiprecious stones. Some worth several hundred dollars each, but no more. Let me see" he began to count then "we have more than enough, haven't we? Very well, I shall choose the rest myself.

"This evening, each will be in a separate box, and we shall give them out at random. One lucky person will receive the alexandrite, but in order to be fair to all, no one must mention the rare gem. At the finish of the fashion show, we shall announce its identity to the audience."

The idea intrigued the girls, as they left to make ready for the evening. Margo, in particular, could see the method in Haudlin's plan. The newspapers were mentioning the mystery gem that would be the feature of the fashion show, but they had not specified what sort of a jewel it would be.

Crooks would be kept guessing, and all the while, detectives in the audience would be on the lookout. Not just the local detectives, but private investigators hired specially for this occasion. By the time crooks eased around and scented out the gem they wanted, detectives would have a line on them.

That, at least, was the theory, but in practice Margo wondered how it would work. She felt that the crooks, if they appeared, would be clever enough to balk the detectives.

Margo, however, had no worry as to the final outcome. Lamont Cranston would be at the fashion show. The real issue would be settled by The Shadow.

DEATH DIAMONDS

It was dusk when the girls arrived at the little theater where the show was to be held. A buffet supper was held, and afterward, they went to the dressing rooms to put on the gowns they were to model. Margo was just finishing her make-up and was ready for her gown, when she heard a car stop below her window.

No one else was in the little dressing room, for Margo had tarried purposely. Drawing her kimono over her shoulders, she leaned from the window and spoke softly:

"Lamont!"

It was Chance Lebrue who answered. He had dropped Cranston and Belmar at the front, and was to join them. Quickly, Margo gave Chance the needed facts.

"The prize gem is an alexandrite," she said. "We don't know who will wear it, but it is a green stone. It will be the only green one in the lot. Tell Lamont –"

Margo had to close abruptly because a maid was arriving with her gown. But she saw Chance nod and start around the corner. Sure that word would reach Cranston, Margo was quite satisfied.

OUTSIDE the dressing room, Margo found the other girls all waiting for her. Haudlin was on hand, beaming, as he placed the dozen boxes on a table. The girls took their choice, and Haudlin remarked:

"The detectives saw the gems this afternoon. They will know which gem to watch. So the lucky girl will have no need to worry."

He bowed and left. The girls opened the boxes. Amid the tones of disappointment around her, Margo found herself fascinated by the gem that she had chanced to pick. There it lay; vivid in the glow of the border lights above the stage.

A gem of glimmering green!

Arlene was the first to offer congratulations. She had picked a red stone, and appeared to be quite pleased. She said it would go well with her hair.

That sally brought a smile from the rest, and the tension was broken. They all congratulated Margo on picking the alexandrite. The others only wished they could remember the names of their particular gems.

"I think this is the rubellite," said Arlene, referring to the red stone that she wore. "Anyway, we'll find out afterward and here's a secret, girls. Mr. Haudlin is going to let us keep the pendants. All except the alexandrite, but I'm sure he'll give Margo another instead."

The curtain arose and the show was on. As Margo promenaded along the runway, she was conscious that all eyes were fixed upon her. Certainly, the detectives were watching her, but it seemed that others were in the know, too.

She looked for Cranston, but did not see him. She saw Belmar, and Chance was with him, and she suddenly wondered if Lamont had come.

It might be that he had assumed the role of The Shadow too soon. For once, Margo was really worried.

Then she was back on the stage once more, away from the dazzle of the spotlights. The curtain was dropping, and there was to be a five-minute intermission before the tableau scene.

DEATH DIAMONDS

Margo looked for Arlene, saw her coming from a dressing room, crumpling a note.

"It's from Wayne," said Arlene. "A message that someone received over the telephone. He wants to see me. I'll be right outside, Margo. Call me in time for the curtain."

Margo nodded. She turned toward her own dressing room. She had hardly reached the door, before a hand clutched her arm. Its touch was firm, yet reassuring; Margo recognized it instantly. She turned, to see Cranston's eyes upon her. At least, she knew them for Lamont's eyes, though they looked so different when he wore the garb that so completely concealed his other features. The hand that pressed Margo's arm was gloved in black; the same color as the cloak and hat above. Well though she knew Cranston, he seemed a strangely different personage when he became The Shadow.

"Quickly," The Shadow undertoned. "Where is Arlene?"

"She went to see Wayne Medrith," began Margo. "But she's perfectly safe. I'm wearing the alexandrite –"

MARGO couldn't finish. She had gestured toward the stage door, and The Shadow understood where Arlene had gone. He was away with swift strides that carried him across the paths of two girls, who stopped short, blinking at the black-cloaked form that swept past them.

Then Margo was running, too, tripping over her trailing gown, until she had sense enough to bunch it. She had only reached the center of the stage when she heard a startled cry from outdoors: a voice that she knew was Arlene's.

Reaching the stage door, Margo saw across the parking space, where Arlene, distinguishable by her light-hued gown, was in the clutches of a man with upraised gun. Margo couldn't make out the attacker, but she saw the glimmer of his revolver, poised to deliver a stunning stroke into the reddish tresses that were Arlene's.

Margo gave a scream, herself, hoping to divert the man's attention. Margo's cry couldn't have helped; in fact, it wasn't heard.

The blast of a big gun drowned it. The weapon stabbed from darkness just below where Margo stood. Its thrust was aimed close to the man who held Arlene in his clutch. The gun stab was accompanied by a fierce laugh that threatened prompt disaster, should the would-be murderer complete his swing.

The Shadow's shot missed the upraised arm by inches only. Arlene's captor must have heard its whine and known that the next blast from The Shadow's gun would clip him. With a sideward sweep, he sent Arlene sprawling toward The Shadow; turning, the assailant bolted off among the parked cars.

Streaking after him, The Shadow had passed Arlene when Margo reached her. Arlene was all right; she came up gasping. Her words, too, were coherent.

"I... I don't know... who it was!" she told Margo. "I thought it was Wayne... but I didn't see his face. No, it couldn't have been Wayne!" Arlene's voice showed plainly that she was trying to deny something that she didn't want to believe. "Not Wayne!"

Her voice choked with a sob.

"Look, Margo!" Arlene raised her hands helplessly. "He took my red pendant. Why?"

DEATH DIAMONDS

Others were echoing "why," as they crowded about Arlene. Then, suddenly, they thought of Margo, who was wearing the all-important green gem, the one that the robber should actually have tried to steal. By the time they thought of Margo, it was too late. She had dashed off between the cars.

Margo heard frantic calls behind her, but she didn't listen. She heard the roar of motors up ahead, and thought that she was too late. Three cars, at least, were leaving, and only one could be The Shadow's.

Margo sprang for the nearest at hand, and found it was the right one. Belmar's, of course, but The Shadow's for the time being.

Chance Lebrue was at the wheel, The Shadow beside him, as Margo made a dive into the rear seat. She crouched there, peering between the two men in front, watching for signs of other cars ahead. A whole cavalcade was coming from behind, but Chance was outdistancing them. He was exhibiting the breakneck speed for which he was famous, and the wild ride thrilled Margo.

As they cut around the end of a lake, Margo glimpsed a car that was looping ahead of them. The moonlight struck it, and Margo gave a silent, disappointed gulp. The car was Medrith's roadster; he had driven it to the fashion show, alone, this evening.

Poor Arlene! Those alibis would certainly crash upon her head, even though the swinging gun hadn't.

But Margo was steeled to such things. Time and again, she had seen The Shadow prove crime against men who were likable on the surface. She had only hoped that with Wayne Medrith, the good qualities would prove deeper.

THEN came The Shadow's voice, in an easy whisper:

"Don't huddle, Margo. We know you are with us. You can see better if you lift your head a little higher. Since you chose to come, we are glad to have you."

"Even though I'm worth fifty thousand dollars?" queried Margo, not to be outdone. "I'm wearing the alexandrite. Remember?"

The Shadow's quiet laugh puzzled Margo.

"You are wearing a green stone," he declared, "which is probably a peridot."

Margo remembered that there had been a peridot among the cheaper gems that Haudlin showed, and that it was green. Perhaps The Shadow was right; but he was wrong on one thing.

"But Arlene's pendant had a red gem," argued Margo, "and the alexandrite was green."

Again, The Shadow laughed. "Very curious," he said, "that an alexandrite should be so specially valued. It should have occurred to you, Margo, that such a gem possesses a special quality –"

"A special quality?"

"Yes. The alexandrite is unique among gems. By day, it has the rich green of an emerald; under artificial light, it takes the deep red of the ruby. It was fortunate you remembered the name of the gem, as well as its color, at the time you saw it."

Margo sank back into the rear seat, totally bewildered. She clutched the pendant that was dangling from her neck, and thought of all the worry it had given her during the fashion parade. Then Margo's attention was riveted anew on what lay ahead.

Medrith's car had gone from sight. There wasn't a sound of a motor up ahead. Somewhere in the darkness, the trail had been lost; yet there was still a chance of finding it.

Through the palms, Margo could see the glimmer of a lake that curved in crescent fashion. At least, there was a chance that The Shadow had boxed in the man he wanted.

Like an answer to Margo's hope came the whispered laugh of The Shadow.

CHAPTER XIX. CROOKS MAKE CLAIM

IN the squalid hotel room where Jolger lived, a tense scene was in progress. The jewel cutter was seated at a table; in front of him was a small wooden pedestal, only a few inches in height. Mounted in the top of the pedestal, which was shaped like a bowl, lay the four-sided diamond that Raiford and Reidsville had brought him.

Straight across the middle of the diamond ran a thin groove, barely discernible amid the sparkle. The groove marked the division of the diamond into two equal triangles, as the mutual owners wanted it.

Those same two owners were peering across Jolger's shoulders. Annoyed, he pressed them back.

"This is delicate work," he told them. "Sometimes, with very important diamonds, I have studied carefully for days before attempting this. It is a time when the nerves are tight; the mind has great worry. You say it is simple, as you wish it. I tell you, it is difficult. We all should know our own work."

The argument convinced both crooks. Their own work, too, had proven much harder than might be supposed. They stepped back, to give Jolger the room he wanted. They watched him take a steel plate that he called a cleaving iron and place its sharp edge in the groove.

Jolger had done that a dozen times before; this time, he was ready. In his other hand he held a wooden hammer, not much larger than a potato masher.

Deliberately, Jolger poised the hammer, then struck a forcible blow against the upper edge of the steel plate. The watching men expected the diamond to split. It didn't, and Jolger struck again.

This time, faint traces of dust were apparent along the lower edge of the cleaving iron. Jolger supplied a third stroke, direct and hard.

The diamond split, and more. As it broke, it seemed to crumble. The dust that came from it was black, obliterating the glitter.

Jolger pulled the tools away and stared, transfixed. He poked a finger in the diamond dust, expecting to find the stone itself; but it was gone. The farther Jolger probed, the more dust he found, a grayish dust, with little dots of black.

Raiford shoved forward, yelled: "Say, what –"

"It is impossible!" exclaimed Jolger. "Impossible, yet no! It is like carbonado, that they find in Brazil. I have

DEATH DIAMONDS

seen it in bits that have no cleavage, but this is dust. And the black" he moistened his finger tips and raised some particles "is what you call graphite."

"Lay off!" snarled Raiford. "If you switched that diamond on us –" Jolger turned helplessly.

"How could I make one false diamond here?" he queried. "Never have I seen such as this. But I have heard of ways that false diamonds can be made. Always with carbon, they have tried it but in this case, with carbonado, which is different. Ah!" he bowed his head "to think that I should declare one diamond real, when it was false –"

Reidsville was stepping forward to clutch Jolger and shake him. Raiford stopped him.

"Come along," said Raiford. "This dope don't know what it's all about. There's another guy can tell us and will!"

TAKING their car, the pair sped to the juke joint and entered by a side door. They didn't even waste time dropping a nickel in the juke organ, as most customers did.

Stepping around the corner from the bar, they found the stairs and went up. They announced themselves outside of Breckett's door, and he opened it.

Then Breckett was backing away, his hands lifted, under the threat of two guns. On the bed, the others saw his half-packed suitcase. Raiford snarled:

"Taking a powder on us, huh?"

"You're crazy!" retorted Breckett. "If I'd wanted to run out, I'd have done it sooner. What's up?"

"This is up!" Raiford pocketed his gun, turned to his companion and gruffed: "Cover him, Reidy."

Then, producing a folded paper, he opened it and showed Breckett the grayish powder. Raiford had scooped it up before leaving Jolger's.

"That's what happened when Jolger tried to split the diamond!"

Breckett's eyes glared disbelief. Then, realizing that Raiford was in earnest, he gingerly brought the chamois bag from his vest pocket. Taking a small diamond, he laid it on the window sill; removing his shoe, he smashed it on the diamond.

When Breckett lifted the shoe, all that remained was grayish dust, with black flakes.

"Get it?" queried Raiford. "I guess you're with us, Tony. We want to see this Medrith guy and have a showdown... Park your gat, Reidy. You won't need it until later."

Slowly, Breckett stroked his chin.

"I'll take you to Medrith," he said. "Only, let me do the talking. I'll show you how to handle him."

IF crooks thought they would make trouble for Medrith, they were a bit belated. Already, Medrith was finding trouble for himself. He had parked his car where he had left it several nights before, near his boathouse on the canal.

DEATH DIAMONDS

A gun was pressed against him, a voice speaking in his ear. The voice was Haudlin's; the big man had reached this destination ahead of Medrith.

"Thought you could fool me, Medrith," said Haudlin. "Step in sight, where there is a light. I'm going to get to the bottom of these crimes!"

He moved Medrith into the boathouse and turned on the light. There, the two faced each other, Haudlin with the gun, Medrith with half-raised hands.

There was a telephone near at hand. Haudlin lifted the receiver and managed to dial the operator with a single sweep of his free hand. He asked for police headquarters. Then Haudlin was telling where he was and requesting the chief to send a detail.

All the while, Medrith retained his pose. His handsome face wore a slight smile.

"You took a long chance, Medrith," declared Haudlin. "Trying to stage a crime alone, when your followers failed to appear. I thought I'd find you here."

"Let me compliment you on your imagination," retorted Medrith. "If you think you can pin these crimes on me, you are a long way off!"

"You'll have a hard time proving otherwise."

"Not when I name the man responsible. Have you thought of Breckett as the real criminal?"

Haudlin stared at Medrith closely.

"You mean that Breckett worked with you before?"

"Only on his own," replied Medrith. "I had my clue that night at Dilworthy's, when I grabbed the gun away from him. I'm sure that Breckett turned off the lights and fired those shots at The Shadow."

"And tonight?"

"I didn't seize Arlene," declared Medrith. "I was too far away to help her. The Shadow handled that matter, instead. I reached my car and went after the one ahead. I boxed it near here, and decided that this was where Breckett came."

Both men were too intense to notice the blackness that infringed from the doorway. It seemed as though night itself, or at least a portion of it, was moving in to join the conference. A hawkish silhouette traced itself upon the floor, a creeping carpet of phantom blackness, coming closer by degrees.

Haudlin put a question, narrowly:

"Why should Breckett have come here?"

"He knew the place," replied Medrith coolly. "He used it as a base that night the thieves escaped by speedboat. I believe he used my car, too. The keys were really in the lock."

"Then, again, the night after the trouble at Dilworthy's, I left my car to have the wiring fixed. I noted the mileage, and it was higher, later. I'm sure that Breckett had the car out, that time."

DEATH DIAMONDS

Though Medrith's tone had the ring of assurance, Haudlin regarded the statements as feeble.

"Sorry, Medrith." There was a tinge of sarcasm in Haudlin's tone. "I'm holding you here until the police arrive. They can judge the merits of your story. Stand as you are; I hear them coming."

A CAR was coming in toward the boathouse. Blackness moved away from the door. Haudlin kept Medrith covered, as thoroughly as before, until footsteps banged upon the threshold.

Then, noting Medrith's sudden turn of gaze, the surprise that showed upon his face, Haudlin turned, too.

The police hadn't arrived. Instead, Tony Breckett was at hand, backed by two thuggish men with drawn guns. Medrith turned to Haudlin and queried:

"You see?"

"We've got something to settle," spoke Breckett, advancing between the two. He had a gun in one hand; his left was cupped, displaying a grayish powder. "These diamonds you've been using to pay us off they're phony! They fall apart into this stuff!"

Both Medrith and Haudlin were facing Breckett as he spoke. Haudlin swung about.

"So that's your game!" he stormed. "Fake diamonds, the kind you said no one could make –"

Haudlin had lowered his own gun, hence was no longer covering Medrith. Breckett, confident that his thugs were backing him, was careless with his revolver. In their turn, Raiford and Reidsville, remembering Breckett's admonition, were holding their weapons loosely. It was a chance for Medrith, and he took it.

Springing suddenly behind Haudlin, he hurled the big man about, shoving him toward Breckett. Medrith was pulling his own revolver at the moment.

Before Breckett could take aim, a gun spoke. It was Haudlin's. Coming straight at Breckett, Haudlin blasted. His bullet caught Breckett in the chest and staggered him.

Neither Raiford nor Reidsville noticed. They thought that Breckett could surely beat Haudlin to the shot. They were springing to get Medrith, and they might have, if another fighter had not overtaken them. He came with a surge, The Shadow!

Hurling himself upon the thugs from behind, The Shadow flattened them. His sprawl, along with theirs, carried him below the level of other guns. Wheeling up from between the men that he had floored, The Shadow took aim at the doorway.

Haudlin was already through, and Medrith was leaping after him. Raiford was trying to aim, too, as he shouted:

"We'll get you Medrith! Giving us diamonds that go to powder –"

He ended with a sideward sprawl that jarred him. For the first time, Raiford realized what had sprawled him. He saw The Shadow. He tried to aim, but The Shadow slugged the gun from his fist, then gave a kick that disarmed Reidsville, who was groggily rising on hands and knees.

The Shadow had no time to waste with these small-fry. He was leaving them to the police, whose cars were

whining in the distance, their sirens at full blast.

Nor had he time for Tony Breckett, for the man was dead. Springing across the outstretched body, The Shadow headed after bigger game. He pressed a gun into Lebrue's hand, told him to hold the two crooks where they were.

Then, at the wheel of Belmar's car, The Shadow was speeding away with Margo, taking the same route that Haudlin and Medrith had followed, in succession.

As he drove, The Shadow laughed. Whether his strident tone was meant for those ahead or the men he had left behind, Margo Lane could not guess!

CHAPTER XX. THE FINAL BLAST

SHOTS sounded from the region of the boathouse as The Shadow wheeled along the curving drive. Margo saw him tilt his head and listen. He seemed to understand them, for he laughed, though his tone was much like a knell.

Obviously, Raiford and Reidsville had tried to make a break for it. It wasn't Lebrue who stopped them; The Shadow had heard too many shots. The thugs had run right into the police and taken a full dose of bullets. As for Lebrue, The Shadow knew he could explain himself well enough. His story to the police would gain a backing later.

The ride, itself, was a wild one, and Margo decided that The Shadow must have been learning tricks of speed from his daredevil chauffeur. Where it was leading, she couldn't guess, for they were veering away from Palm Park.

At moments, The Shadow slackened speed to choose a road, and Margo soon realized that he wasn't following a definite route, but was picking his direction.

At last they came to a rolling road, and Margo realized where they were. This was the road that led to Haudlin's quarry, for she had passed it one day while driving with Arlene. Why the trail was leading there, Margo could only wait and learn.

The first car to reach the quarry was Haudlin's. Stepping from it, he turned it over to the watchman and gave him brisk orders which the fellow followed, even though he didn't understand them.

"I want you to go to Medrith's boathouse," stated Haudlin, "and bring the police here. You will find them at the boathouse. But take the lower road. I think it will be safer."

While the watchman was driving away, Haudlin produced a set of keys and unlocked the door of the heavy-built storehouse. He listened, heard the sound of an approaching car. As it came to a stop, he harkened for another, but did not hear a further noise.

Turning on a light, Haudlin stepped outside again and waited in the darkness. Soon, a man approached and stole close to the quarry house. The light from the doorway showed a tense, grim face: Medrith's.

Peering through the doorway, Medrith moved inside. His eyes stared at what he saw; his lips began to smile.

Then Medrith's smile was gone, his gun useless. Haudlin had stepped up in back of him and was prodding him through the doorway. He ordered Medrith to drop his gun, which Medrith did, sullenly. Haudlin forced

DEATH DIAMONDS

him to turn around, but kept him facing the center of the little building.

"Don't worry yet, Medrith," said Haudlin, with a heavy chuckle. "You still may be worth more to me alive, rather than dead. At least, I should like you to view the arrangements here."

In the center of the quarry house stood a great steel cylinder mounted upon concrete. It had a lid, gripped tight, by huge clamps, reinforced with an added cap of metal. The whole contrivance gave the impression of great strength.

Medrith gritted words, half aloud: "What a fool I was!"

"Not because of this," returned Haudlin. "You were right when you said that there was no way of making synthetic diamonds. You were thinking of the past, however, not the present."

Medrith still gazed at the giant cylinder.

"I'd heard of this way," he began. "It was used by Noble, years ago, but it failed."

"Exactly," declared Haudlin. "The method was to use a powerful explosive inside a huge steel cylinder, thus attaining a pressure of fifty tons per square inch and a temperature, exceeding five thousand degrees centigrade. The process liquefied a quantity of carbon included in the cylinder and turned it into diamond crystals."

"No one was ever sure that they were diamonds –"

"I was," interrupted Haudlin.

"What else could they have been? So I worked on the process, and improved it. Mine is a stronger cylinder. My explosive is more powerful than cordite, which was originally used, and a slower burning type. Instead of ordinary carbon, I used the mineral carbonado, an opaque variety of diamond.

"Yes, I tried bort, and ballas, but carbonado was the best, especially with graphite added. Unfortunately, my diamonds did not stand the absolute test."

So glum was Haudlin at that moment, that Medrith almost attempted another break. Halting him with a quick gun gesture, Haudlin resumed his theme.

"You and your diamonds from South America," he sneered. "I could make diamonds that would ruin the market entirely! But I needed to improve my process. While thus engaged, I saw a way to fortify myself when the market fell.

"I hired men to steal other gems, and I paid them off in diamonds. My diamonds! Diamonds perfect enough to fool the experts, for the present. Diamonds that I could turn out by the bushel. You see how nicely it led back to you, Medrith?"

Medrith saw. All of Haudlin's talk had been designed for that purpose. His methods, too, had been a perfect frame-up. He had put Medrith at a disadvantage, the night when the countess lost her jewels.

Breckett, alone, had driven Medrith's car, borrowed from the boathouse, on the night of the Townsley robbery. It was Haudlin who had pulled a gun at Dilworthy's, the gun that Medrith had later gotten in the dark.

DEATH DIAMONDS

"You fooled yourself there," sneered Haudlin. "Tony couldn't have had a gun; he had just been searched. But you forgot it, Medrith –"

The Shadow had not forgotten.

His whispered laugh crept through the quarry house with all its sinister mockery. It came at the perfect moment, when Haudlin, referring to a gun, had gestured his own. He wasn't covering Medrith any longer; nor could he, for The Shadow, just within the doorway, was holding a bulge on Haudlin.

It was Haudlin's turn to be amazed. He couldn't realize how The Shadow had arrived here so quickly, or at all. Then Haudlin remembered the rolling road, and scowled.

At the beginning of that hilly highway, The Shadow had simply cut off his motor and ridden the rough road right to the quarry, without a sound.

As for choosing the quarry, The Shadow calmly explained that point.

"I saw your game," he told Haudlin. "Like Medrith, you were a possible suspect throughout. Your giveaway came when you used Medrith's car to visit the mattress factory. I happen to have learned that Medrith's alibi was valid, that evening.

"Tonight, your game was far too strong. You were the man who actually put across the idea of a gem as a reward, and chose the color-changing alexandrite. As for seeing Breckett, you had as many opportunities as Medrith. His talk of Medrith, as the man higher up, was all for the benefit of the thugs he hired.

"Tonight, Breckett came to have a showdown with you, not Medrith. But he was playing his cards well, realizing that your crumbling diamonds might be the result of accident. You saw your chance and murdered Breckett, knowing the others would go after Medrith. In one stroke, you thought you could eliminate the man who knew the truth and the man you tried to frame!"

Haudlin had only half succeeded in that effort. His partial success was to the benefit of justice, rather than crime, since it had disposed of Tony Breckett, a murderer in his own right. His failure to pave the way for Medrith's death had been stopped by The Shadow, the master of justice who at this moment was placing all blame for crime exactly where it belonged.

Still, Haudlin had a scheme in mind. He'd come here for a purpose: to blast his synthetic diamond plant, now that it had failed him, and thus destroy all evidence.

Calculating that Medrith might follow, Haudlin hoped to blast him with it, provided he could not make the framed man agree to terms that might prove profitable to both, a thing which Medrith was too honest to ever do.

The Shadow, it seemed, had come on a clue gained long ago.

"I always wanted to see this quarry house," he told Haudlin. "That is, the inside of it. A quarry shack built like a bank vault is as odd as a quarry where blasts occur at times when no men are working there."

IT was the final touch. The Shadow was revealing why Haudlin had gone into the quarry business. Not just to have explosives handy for his diamond-making. He needed a cover-up for the huge blasts that occurred in his mighty steel cylinder, reverberations that shook the surrounding countryside.

DEATH DIAMONDS

Blasts were Haudlin's business. He remembered it in this frantic moment. He sprang toward the steel cylinder, shouting that he was going for explosives, a trick which failed to deceive The Shadow, who knew that Haudlin wouldn't keep such dangerous stuff so close.

As Haudlin reached the far side of the cylinder, he found The Shadow coming around to meet him.

Reversing his course, Haudlin fled for the doorway. Medrith's attempt to block him was like handling human dynamite. Haudlin threw his whole bulk into the drive and sent Medrith sprawling.

In the melee, The Shadow had no chance to aim. Haudlin was through the door, cutting across the quarry to where the explosive really was.

Cars were roaring along the rolling road when The Shadow spotted Haudlin close beside the cliff, where his figure showed against the limestone background. Haudlin's hand was up, with a stick of explosive in its clutch. His hand was beginning the throw, when The Shadow fired the necessary shot.

Haudlin wavered, while The Shadow was sweeping Medrith back into the quarry house. As Haudlin fell, the final blast responded. He fell close against the cliff, and the blast which obliterated him forever brought down chunks of rocks upon the very spot that marked his place of doom.

A bit shaken by the blast, his eyes blinded by the mighty burst of flame, Wayne Medrith finally managed to look for The Shadow. By then, his cloaked friend was gone. Instead, police were coming down to the quarry. They listened to his story readily, for Medrith had the proof at hand.

The proof was the strong-built quarry house; for the first time, its interior was open for public view, and the evidence, with Medrith's testimony amplified by facts he had heard The Shadow state, was indisputable.

While Medrith testified, a car rolled away from the spot where it had parked, secluded, off the side of the road. The Shadow was the driver, and Margo Lane was with him. Their first stop was at Arlene Hamil's home, where The Shadow let Margo off. While he was waiting outside, The Shadow heard a voice beside the car.

It was Chance Lebrue. Things had happened at the boathouse just as The Shadow pictured them. Raiford and Reidsville were dead, like their former pals. But Chance hadn't stayed around to congratulate the police. He'd eased out of the scene unnoticed, and had come to Arlene's, knowing that The Shadow would eventually drop Margo there.

With Chance in the car beside him, The Shadow heard the quick throb of a motor from the Hamil garage. Then a car spun by, whipping at a speed which even Lebrue conceded was remarkable. At its wheel was a red-haired girl, bound for a distant quarry. Margo had told Arlene where she would find Wayne Medrith.

From her own window, Margo watched the other car that moved away in the direction of Belmar's house. She listened, intently, for the parting sound that she knew would come. At first, she heard only the whisper of the palm trees; then came the tone that she expected.

A strange laugh, distant, yet vaguely close; trailing, yet lingering with its echoes, as though loath to dwindle from this setting where its author had conquered crime and won.

That mirth was music to Margo's ears, for she had witnessed the delivery of the justice that it represented.

The Shadow's triumph laugh!

THE END