

THE DEVIL'S PAYMASTER

Maxwell Grant

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THE DEVIL'S PAYMASTER

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I. VOICE IN THE NIGHT

POLICE COMMISSIONER RALPH WESTON was a man who did not, as a rule, awaken easily once he had fallen soundly asleep. He had trained his body to relax completely for eight hours every night. He had to, or he could never have endured the daily grind of directing the tremendous activities of the New York police department.

From 11 p.m. until 7 the following morning, Weston's valet had orders not to disturb the commissioner.

But, like all rules of personal conduct, Weston's sleep habits had one important exception. When the telephone bell in his bedroom rang, he always awakened instantly. Many a big crime had broken without warning in the black hours between midnight and dawn. Whenever it did, the news was flashed from headquarters to Weston's home.

His phone was ringing tonight. Or rather, it had just stopped ringing.

The final echo of the bell buzzed in Weston's ears as he sat up sleepily on the edge of his bed. A vivid stab of lightning cut the blackness of the room like a sword flash. It was followed by a rolling crash of thunder.

Weston, blinked. Instinctively, he turned toward the partly-opened window. The rug was damp. He could feel the wet drive of rain on his pajamas. Except for the sudden ring of the telephone bell, Weston would have slept calmly through the lightning and thunder.

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But once awake, he didn't want his wallpaper stained or a priceless Oriental rug soaked. He sprang across the room and shut the window. Then he darted to the phone.

"Commissioner Weston speaking."

There was no answer.

Weston spoke again impatiently, but no reply came. He growled with annoyance. His detour to shut the rain-drenched window had not taken much time. The phone bell must have barely stopped ringing before he had become fully awake. Not more than thirty seconds could have elapsed. And yet the operator at police headquarters had hung up already.

Weston's finger jabbed at the dial, to ring back the uniformed switch-board cop. He was sore enough to want to give that cop a good tongue-lashing.

But he was not angry enough to overlook an important fact. Something queer had happened to his private phone. There was no wire hum in his ear. The phone was dead.

Weston proved the correctness of his hearing by trying to establish contact with police headquarters. Nothing happened.

It puzzled him. How in the name of common sense could a phone bell ring, if the line was dead? Weston began to wonder if he could have imagined that bell-sound that had stopped ringing an instant before his sleepy eyes had opened to the flashing of lightning and the pelting of rain.

He snapped on the bedroom light and looked at the clock. Then he chuckled at his own foolishness.

The hands of the clock pointed to one minute after midnight. The chimes of the striking clock had telegraphed a wrong message to Weston's sleeping brain. The echo of the last chime had been in his ears when he had sat up with a jerk on the edge of his bed. There had been no phone call at all.

But why was the instrument dead? Another flash of lightning filled the room with daylight brilliance. To Weston, the flash provided a plausible answer. Lightning had struck a feed cable somewhere. It had put a whole section of phone lines temporarily out of commission, his own included.

He went back to bed and closed his eyes. He felt better, knowing his window was now shut against the wet lash of the storm. He was drifting back into slumber, when he heard the bell again!

THIS time, Weston was out of bed with a leap. It was a curiously muffled ring. It sounded more like a ghost bell than the normal ring of a telephone. He ran to the instrument and clapped it to his ear.

The phone was still dead!

Commissioner Weston felt a queer chill. The hair prickled on his scalp. He listened intently. Then he heard the faint bell again.

The sound came from the closed door of his wardrobe closet. A closet was a place where no normal person kept a telephone – certainly not Commissioner Weston.

And yet, he found one there.

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It was on the floor at the back of the closet, almost hidden by the trailing garments on the hangers above it. It was the latest type handset phone. Instead of being connected with a bell box screwed onto the wall, the signal apparatus was contained within the base of the telephone itself.

Weston had no idea how this mystery phone could have gotten into his bedroom closet. He picked it up. The wire was alive and throbbing.

"Hello! Who the devil are you?" Weston barked.

"Is this Ralph Weston, police commissioner of the city of New York?"

The voice was a curious one. It was high-pitched and tinny in quality. It could easily have been a woman's. And just as easily, it could have been the voice of a man speaking in a careful falsetto.

"Commissioner Weston speaking. Who are you? What do you –"

"My name doesn't really matter," the voice interrupted, coolly. "If you like, you can call me Mr. Remorse. Naturally, you want to know what my business is. I have none, at the present time. I retired some years ago. I'm a reformed criminal."

"A criminal!"

Weston choked with anger at the man's colossal gall. But he hid his rage. He had backed out of the closet, still holding the phone. His finger pressed a button on the wall, to summon his valet. In the meantime, he tried to temporize.

"I'm waiting to learn why you called me, Mr. Remorse," he said quietly into the instrument.

"All right. Listen!"

The voice was still too shrill to be natural, but the words were crystal clear.

"I won't waste your time or mine. I'm a criminal. A reformed criminal, believe it or not! I call myself Mr. Remorse because my real name, my fingerprints, and my record are on file down at police headquarters. The cops have enough on me to put me in jail for the rest of my life.

"But I don't want to go to jail! I want to undo some of the harm I caused before I decided to retire from crime. That's where you come in, commissioner."

"How?"

"I can't restore stolen money directly to my former victims. I need a go-between; somebody to do the contact work. I've got to use some public-spirited citizen – or someone whose own life is above reproach – to do my dirty work – or rather, my clean work – of restitution!"

There was a brief chuckle. It didn't sound sincere. There was nastiness in it.

"Who would you suggest, commissioner? Who, in New York City, is the intermediary I need? He must have leisure, plenty of money of his own, a reputation for charity and philanthropy. Tell me the name of a man like that, and I'll stop annoying, you and bid you good night."

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"Just a minute. I'll have to think."

Weston's valet had hurried noiselessly into the room in response to the summons. One glance at the commissioner's face and he knew that something deadly was going on.

He bent his ear close to Weston's faintly-moving lips. The commissioner ordered his valet to race downstairs and try to trace the mystery call on another phone. The man vanished swiftly

"Well?" snarled the high-pitched womanish voice on the wire. "I haven't got all night to wait! Have you thought of someone?"

"I would suggest that you get in touch with Mr. Lamont Cranston. He's a gentleman with every quality you have mentioned."

"Thank you. Good night."

"Wait! How are you going to restore this stolen money you spoke of? How are you going to contact Mr. Cranston?"

"That's my business, commissioner."

"How did you plant your damned telephone in my closet?"

There was more laughter on the wire.

"I fly through the air with the greatest of ease. Good night!"

The connection was suddenly broken. Commissioner Weston dialed furiously. But it did no good. The wire itself, as well as the connection, was broken.

AS Weston stood staring at the instrument, his valet raced back into the bedroom. The servant looked as flabbergasted as his employer.

"Something very queer going on tonight, sir. I put through a tracer call from downstairs. I couldn't trace the call, because there wasn't any!"

"What! You heard me, didn't you? You saw me! Do you think I was putting on a ventriloquist act just to amuse myself in the middle of the night?"

"I can't help it, sir. I spoke to the exchange manager. He said that no call came to this house."

Weston frowned. He began to realize the full extent of the cleverness of this invisible Mr. Remorse. The mystery man had evidently tapped in on Weston's phone at some point between the exchange and the commissioner's home. The tap had given him a private wire from some spot in the rainy darkness outside.

"Do you have any idea how this extra phone got into my bedroom closet?" Weston demanded. "Or where the wire leads?"

"No, sir."

"Then get busy and find out!"

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Weston dressed hurriedly, while his valet investigated. The valet soon found where the wire left the closet. A hole had been bored through the baseboard at the rear.

The wire ran along the baseboard of the sitting room beyond, concealed beneath a narrow strip of ornamental wood beading. It must have been a slow, careful job, one that had taken plenty of time. More than one secret intrusion of Weston's home must have taken place. Careful timing and an exact knowledge of the daily movements of Weston and his valet were indicated.

The contraband wire led out a rear window.

Weston and his valet traced it to a spot at the rear of the back yard. Rain lashed at them. Neither of them were fully dressed. Their hastily-donned clothes were soaked. Water from their dripping hair ran into their eyes.

But they discovered where the wire ended.

It ended in a dangling strand that led nowhere. The strand had been freshly cut with a pair of sharp clippers.

A small white card was hanging to the loose end of the wire. A hole had been punched in a corner of the card. Through the hole was a bit of white string. The string tied the card to the soaked wire.

Weston stared at the message with helpless rage. Rain had made the ink run, but the mockery of the single word was clear enough:

Sorry!

MR. REMORSE.

That was the end of that!

Later on, many cops arrived with plenty of flashlights and plenty of technical experts. But they might as well not have come. They found out no more concerning the whereabouts of Mr. Remorse than had Weston or his valet.

Back in his bedroom, Commissioner Weston changed his soaked clothing. He pulled on a slicker before venturing outdoors again. Automatically, his gaze traveled toward the clock.

The time was now thirty-two minutes after midnight.

At exactly 1 a.m., a duplication of Commissioner Weston's amazing experience was occurring at a point north of New York City. Mr. Remorse had used his hour's leeway to do some efficient traveling.

He was talking in his womanish, high-pitched falsetto to the warden of Sing Sing Prison!

The warden found himself awakened from sleep by the sound of a ghostly telephone bell. It didn't come from his own instrument, the private one in his bedroom that connected him with the head keeper of the prison.

This phone was a planted one, an instrument which the dazed warden had never seen before. It was a new-type handset model, with the bell apparatus concealed in the base of the instrument itself.

Mr. Remorse repeated his cool announcement that he was a reformed criminal. Mockingly, he asked the name of a prominent New York citizen who could help him to restore stolen money.

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The warden hesitated. Then he mentioned the first name that came to his mind. It was the name of Lamont Cranston.

There was nothing remarkable about this. Cranston fitted exactly the specifications mentioned by the mysterious Mr. Remorse. He was independently wealthy. He had plenty of leisure. His interest in charity and reform projects was well known. If anyone could reassure frightened victims that his motives in acting as a go-between for a criminal were honest, it was Lamont Cranston.

The warden at Sing Sing, however, couldn't understand how the sneering crook at the other end of a planted telephone wire expected to avoid capture if he tried to go through with his nery plan.

"That's my business, warden!" Mr. Remorse replied.

He hung up. The line went dead. An effort to trace the call met with the same result that had baffled Police Commissioner Weston. A grim searching party in the drenched flowerbeds back of the warden's cottage, found themselves staring at a freshly-cut wire, to which a small, white card was attached, stating:

Sorry!

MR. REMORSE.

By this time, the news of the strange happenings was beginning to seep into newspaper offices. Reporters came buzzing like bees around the home of Commissioner Weston. Another batch of them raced up to Sing Sing.

The rain had stopped. But the mystery grew more baffling by the hour.

That was how Mr. Remorse operated. On the hour!

There was no way to predict who would be called next. Nobody knew where to look, until the next alarm came through. The telephone company was going insane. Crews of linemen were racing through the darkness in a mad needle-in-the-haystack quest.

Commissioner Weston's call had come through at midnight. The warden of Sing Sing had heard the ghostly bell at 1 a.m. At 2 a.m., the third call was made.

This time, it came to a prominent newspaper owner. The publisher of the Daily Classic was roused from his bed.

At 3 a.m., a clergyman was drawn into the tangled web of Mr. Remorse's grim questionnaire. He was the Rev. Andrew Dingle, one of the best known preachers of New York.

He tried to reason with the unknown criminal. He pleaded with him, in the name of decency and religion, to come into the open like a man, if he were really the reformed criminal he claimed to be.

All that the Rev. Dingle received was a burst of shrill laughter. He also found a cut wire and a mocking card.

The final telephone call was made at 4 a.m. The last man was Benedict Stark, a prominent industrialist and banker. Stark was well known for his vast financial holdings, his modern, well-built factories, his interest in opera!

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Stark was asked the same question as the others. His answer was immediate. He mentioned Lamont Cranston as being a perfect intermediary for a criminal who wanted to do good through the aid of a reputable private citizen.

Was the whole thing a clever gag on the part of some practical joker? Or was it in deadly earnest?

The five men who had been called could scarcely be more unlike. A police commissioner, a prison warden, a publisher, a preacher, and a banker! Why had Mr. Remorse gone to such extraordinary trouble to contact them in the dead of night? Was he after some strange sort of publicity?

Whom had he victimized? And who was he?

There was only one definite in this whole whirlpool of conjecture and mystery. It looked as if Lamont Cranston's reputation as a public-spirited millionaire was getting him into a strange situation.

Perhaps a dangerous situation!

CHAPTER II. A STATUE WITH A HAT

ON the following morning, Lamont Cranston was seated at a desk near the window of his room at the Cobalt Club.

Whenever Cranston was in town, he usually stayed at this exclusive midtown club. His room was a rear one. It afforded an unexpectedly pleasant view in the heart of a metropolis like New York.

The rear courtyard had been transformed into a private garden, in which members of the club could stroll or sit whenever they chose. Right now, it was not in use. The grass had been taken up for resodding. But the rose bushes hadn't been disturbed.

Cranston loved roses. He glanced downward at them through his sunlit window.

But his mind wasn't on roses this morning. He was thinking of the strange and sensational mystery that had come to the attention of police at the stroke of twelve on the previous night.

The desk at Cranston's elbow was heaped high with morning newspapers. Their front pages were black with headlines concerning the unknown Mr. Remorse. Was he a criminal or a jokester? Did he really intend to restore loot to the victims from whom he had previously stolen it? Why had he made such a public announcement of his plans?

It was the biggest news story in a long time!

Lamont Cranston looked like an inoffensive gentleman, to act as a go-between for a criminal. The five men who had suggested his name the night before shared the general public opinion of Lamont Cranston. They knew him as a millionaire sportsman and a globe-trotter. They were aware of his many charities.

But there was a grim flame in Cranston's eyes as he scanned the newspapers on his desk. His jaw tightened, his face seemed thinner, harder. An entirely different personality was disclosed. The personality of The Shadow!

Lamont Cranston was The Shadow!

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Millions of persons had heard of The Shadow, but few had ever come in contact with him. Those few were criminals. All of them were now either dead or serving long terms in prison. The Shadow was a creature of darkness who fought on the side of the law.

In his sunlit room at the Cobalt Club, The Shadow considered the names of the five men whom the unknown Mr. Remorse had questioned by telephone. Four of those names he dismissed from his mind. The fifth remained.

That final name was Benedict Stark.

It wasn't the first time that Lamont Cranston had been mixed up in a case that involved Benedict Stark. Three times, The Shadow had encountered the elusive traces of Stark in his battle against the forces of crime. The Shadow had won those three battles. (Note: See "Prince of Evil." Vol. XXXIII, No. 4, "Murder Genius," Vol. XXXIV, No. 3, "The Man Who Died Twice," Vol. XXXV, No. 2.) But each time, the master criminal against whom he fought had managed to escape.

The name of that master of murder was Benedict Stark, the Prince of Evil!

The Shadow had knowledge of this, but no legal proof. To have accused Stark of crime would have made Lamont Cranston a laughing-stock. Stark was one of the richest men in America. He moved in the best society, was a friend of most of the influential leaders of the nation.

Lamont Cranston was still sitting silently, when there came a knock at his door. Reporters from every paper in New York were downstairs. He had given them permission to interview him. They were here now.

As soon as they were admitted to the room, they fired a barrage of questions. Cranston didn't answer those questions. Smilingly, he produced a brief typewritten statement and read it aloud.

It expressed mystification at the peculiar events of the previous night. Cranston had no idea who Mr. Remorse might be. He was gratified that five prominent men should have named him as a public-spirited citizen. He couldn't say whether he would act in the role of intermediary or not. He had been invited to a conference at police headquarters. He was going there soon. He thanked the newspapers for their courtesy.

And that was all.

Cranston handed out copies of his statement, and the newsmen scattered to phone it in for the late editions. None of them bothered to trail Cranston to police headquarters when, later, he left the Cobalt Club.

The conference at police head-quarters was to be a private one. No reporters were allowed to enter. Commissioner Weston had made that clear.

WESTON himself greeted Lamont Cranston when he entered the commissioner's private room in the old building on Centre Street. Weston and Lamont Cranston were old friends.

Inspector Joe Cardona was there, too. Cardona was the ace sleuth of the police department. Between him and Weston there was mutual confidence. When the police moved against the unknown Mr. Remorse, Cardona would be the spearhead of the attack. Cardona was also an old friend of Cranston's. He shook hands and murmured a pleasant greeting.

But Cranston's interest centered on Benedict Stark. Stark was one of the men who sat in the room, with self-conscious importance.

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Each time Cranston met Stark he was impressed anew by the man's incredible physical ugliness. Some men are so ugly they become impressive. Stark was one of these.

His torso was powerful, broad-chested like a gorilla's. A malformation at birth had made one of his arms shorter than the other. His head was enormously large on a short neck. He had a jutting lower lip and eyes like bright marbles. Behind those small eyes was a magnificently trained brain. It was his brain that made Benedict Stark so dangerous.

Stark said nothing, preferring to let the others speak. But when a direct question was asked of him, he was affable and courteous.

Weston took charge of the discussion.

"As you all know, we five men suggested the name of Lamont Cranston as a go-between to assist an unknown criminal in restoring stolen money to his victims. Is Cranston to accept this role, or not? Before I ask him, I'm going to ask each of you gentlemen your opinion – and your reason for it. I'll start with myself, because I was the first man telephoned by Mr. Remorse."

Weston took a deep breath.

"I say yes! It's the only way in which the police can get any kind of a start, or a clue, in a case that at present is shrouded in the deepest kind of mystery. What is your opinion, warden?"

The warden of Sing Sing nodded.

"My answer is yes, too. For the same reason you have given. I'd like to see that criminal caught. I'd like to have him as one of my permanent boarders up the river!"

"What about you?" Weston asked the publisher of the Daily Classic.

"Yes, by all means! First, as a duty to society. Second, because this is the biggest news story of a decade. I want it kept alive and solved. I promise that my paper will co-operate with the police one hundred percent."

Weston's gaze moved to the clergyman. The Rev. Andrew Dingle's face was red. He spoke hesitantly.

"Ordinarily, I would not like to ask a man to risk his life. But if Mr. Cranston is willing, my answer is yes. The criminal may be entirely sincere in his... ah... unusual offer of restitution. And it will certainly help the cause of charity, if Mr. Remorse keeps his promise."

"Promise?" Weston growled. "What promise?"

"Why, he told me over the telephone last night that for every stolen dollar he returns, he will match it with another dollar to be paid to any charity Mr. Cranston may select. It's his way of repaying Mr. Cranston for any annoyance he may be put to in acting as go-between."

"It's the first I've heard of this," Weston said with annoyance. "He made no such offer to me. What about the rest of you?"

There was a quick chorus of denials. The Rev. Andrew Dingle's face got redder.

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"Perhaps he thought that, as a clergyman, such an offer would appeal to my interest in charity. And it does, gentlemen. I don't know why I didn't mention it before. I thought I had. But Mr. Remorse did offer to match every dollar he returns with one for charity. And so, if Mr. Cranston is willing, I say yes."

"Mr. Stark?"

"No!"

Stark spoke quietly, with a slight smile of derision. He was well aware that he was the only man in the room to veto the plan. He was also aware of Lamont Cranston's mild gaze.

"Why not, Mr. Stark?" Cranston asked.

"Because I don't think you ought to risk your life. You never can tell who this Mr. Remorse may be. He might be a criminal of considerable mental power. He might be a lot more intelligent than Mr. Cranston. He might even kill you, Mr. Cranston!"

There was a sneer in the depths of Stark's eyes. So faint was it, that Cranston was barely aware of it. But he knew a challenge had been offered to him.

He didn't accept the challenge. He didn't even disclose that he was aware of it. None of the other men in the room sensed the situation.

"What is your own decision, Mr. Cranston?" Stark asked suavely.

Cranston met his smile, and matched it.

"At the present moment, I haven't the faintest idea. Naturally, I'd like to think things over at considerable length before I agree to so dangerous an assignment. It may be several days before I can let you know, commissioner. I wish you'd notify the newspapers to that effect. In the meantime, may I be excused?"

He arose and shook hands. In a few moments he was downstairs and in his trim little car, driving northward toward the Cobalt Club.

He was halfway there before he noticed the man in the gray coupe.

THE man was driving his car nimbly in and out of the whirlpools of traffic. He was doing a good tailing job of Cranston's machine. His face was bent low over the wheel. Cranston couldn't get much of a glimpse of him in the rear-vision mirror.

Cranston's smile deepened. He bided his time.

When he threw on his brakes, finally, he was traveling at a good rate of speed. The quick stop made his brakes squeal. The gray coupe almost ran into him.

It swerved just in time and sped past his stalled car, moving at a rapid pace. Cranston got a quick look at the man as the car shot past. He recognized the long nose, the bumpy forehead and the pale blue eyes of the driver.

The man in the gray coupe was a well-known crook named Mike Largo.

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Largo knew that Cranston was wise to him. He fled in his speedy little car like a scared rabbit. Cranston made no effort to pursue him. Even if he could have overtaken Largo and forced the gray coupe to the curb, it would have done him no good. He couldn't bring a charge against a man for following him – except, possibly, disorderly conduct.

Cranston had no desire to force events at this time. For the present, he was content to file away in his mind Largo's name and appearance for future reference.

He drove at a more sedate pace to the Cobalt Club. He nodded smilingly to the man at the desk and went up to his room. But his smile tightened as he inserted his key in the door and entered.

Someone had been in the room during his absence!

The shade was drawn on the rear window. Cranston had not done that. He liked the sunlight that came in from the rear garden behind the club.

Nor had Lamont Cranston placed his favorite silk hat on the marble bust of Cicero that stood on a pedestal in the corner.

The silk hat was perched rakishly on the statue's head. It looked like a ridiculous prank. But Cranston sensed something more sinister than a mere joke in the drawn shade and the misplaced hat.

He examined the silk hat, and could find no explanation. Nor was there any clue in the statue. It hadn't been touched, or moved an inch. Somebody with gloves had merely taken a silk topper from Cranston's closet and placed it on the statue.

Cranston made the only possible deduction. The silk hat had been deliberately placed where it was now, not to draw attention to the statue, but to draw attention to the fact that the hat had been removed from its usual place in the closet.

Opening the closet door, Cranston took down the hat box from the shelf. The circular lid of the box was open.

A grim look covered Cranston's face when he glanced inside. Then he walked with a quick step toward his bed, emptied the box on the coverlet.

Bank notes fluttered out like a green snowstorm. They made quite a pile on the bed. With them fluttered a white sheet of paper and a sealed envelope.

Cranston read the paper before he did anything else. It was just a penciled list of figures, with a total amount recorded at the bottom. The paper was a tally sheet recording the amount of cash the hat box contained.

The sum was twenty thousand dollars!

This amount had been checked and marked as being O.K. Under the check-mark was a familiar name: "Mr. Remorse."

The sealed envelope was still lying where it had fallen on the pile of loose cash. Cranston didn't pause to count the money, or to open the sealed envelope.

He stepped quickly to the window end raised the shade. The mystery of the unknown burglar's entry was explained.

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There was no glass in the window. The pane had been removed by a glass cutter. It was hidden on the floor behind an armchair.

CRANSTON stared down into the garden in the courtyard behind the club. He could see the bare earth from which the grass had been removed for resodding. He could also see the elm tree.

The elm tree was obviously how the burglar he'd climbed to Cranston's window. A branch swept close to the rear of the building. Members of the club were not supposed to enter the garden during repairs. But someone had. And that someone had made good use of his time.

Cranston placed the sealed envelope in an inner pocket. He started for the door. His purpose was to interview the club employee whose post was nearest the rear door that led to the garden.

He was grimly anxious to find out who had gone outside in spite of the garden's temporary lack of lawn. The employee ought to be able to describe the man. It would be impossible to enter the garden without passing him.

The sudden ring of the telephone bell changed Cranston's purpose. He answered the call. It was from Inspector Cardona. Cardona was excited.

"I just found out something very queer, Mr. Cranston! I thought you'd like to know, on account of your being mixed up in this thing. The chief clerk in charge of headquarters records has just informed me that all our files concerning a certain criminal have vanished. His complete docket, his photograph, fingerprints – everything! Swiped and taken away! And nobody knows how the thing was done."

"Was it the records of a crook named Mike Largo?" Cranston asked quickly.

"Largo? No! Largo's just a small-time gunman. What made you think of him?"

Cranston's voice became sleepy.

"I don't know why. Perhaps I saw Largo's name in the papers one time. I really don't know much about crime, as you know."

He took a quick breath, said:

"Who was it?"

"A crook named Flasher Brown. A big-timer in the underworld. Flasher served time for a few minor jobs years ago. Then he got smart. He went after big swindle dough and made plenty of it. We never laid a finger on him after that, because he was too smart to give us a chance to nail him with a rap."

"What happened to him?"

"I don't know, Mr. Cranston. Flasher dropped out of sight several months ago. Wherever he is, he must be rotten with jack. You know what I think?"

"What?"

"I got a hunch that Flasher Brown is Mr. Remorse!"

Cranston didn't reply directly to that. It was impossible to tell whether he agreed with Joe Cardona or not. He turned the conversation to himself. He was so trite in his remarks, that Cardona brought the conversation to a close and hung up.

Lamont Cranston unlocked his door. He descended to the rear foyer of the Cobalt Club, to ask a few idle questions. Mr. Remorse's sealed envelope was tucked away in his inner pocket.

CHAPTER III. A FRIEND AND A FOE

LAMONT CRANSTON was a popular figure with the employees of the Cobalt Club. He was courteous and considerate. He always paid generously for special favors. And his bonus at Christmas skipped no one. The employee on duty in the rear foyer greeted Cranston with a respectful salute.

"I was expecting a friend of mine today," Cranston stated. "I haven't seen him around. Perhaps he called during my absence."

"Oh, yes, sir! He was here. He went out into the rear garden to wait. But you were a long time returning, so he left about ten minutes ago. He said he had another appointment."

Cranston's eyebrows lifted.

"You let him into the rear garden, I thought no one is permitted out there until the turf is replaced."

The man smiled.

"That's true, sir, but not for a friend of yours. He had a guest card signed by you. And he said he was interested in roses. To tell the truth, sir, I forgot all about him, until he came back into the foyer ten minutes ago, and said he could wait no longer."

Cranston assumed an expression of mild disappointment, but not enough to make the episode seem too important.

"I wish he had stayed. Nobody else asked for me, did they?"

"No, sir."

"I was expecting a couple of friends. I wonder which of the two this man was. I don't suppose he gave you his name?"

"No, sir. He didn't."

Cranston's mind jumped swiftly backward in time, to the figure of the man who had trailed him in the gray coupe. By fast driving, Mike Largo might have had time to cut out the pane of Cranston's courtyard window.

"Did my friend have a fairly long nose, a bumpy forehead and pale, blue eyes? Not very good-looking?"

"No, sir. This man was rather handsome. His clothing was expensive, though, if I may say so, sir, not in as quiet a taste as your own. He seemed like a sporting gentleman. At least, that was my guess, sir, when I saw his jewelry."

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"Sounds a lot like Phil Herkimer," Cranston said idly, using the first name that popped into his mind. "He wore plenty of jewelry, eh?"

"Yes sir. He had two big diamonds on his left hand. The stones must have been at least three or four carats apiece. He had jeweled cuff links and a large stickpin."

Cranston chuckled.

"It was Phil Herkimer! Your guess about his occupation is a good one. Mr. Herkimer is a sporting gentleman, as you deduced. He breeds horses, and has had several big winners at the racetrack."

He waved his hand idly, to dismissed the whole affair.

"I'll telephone him at his hotel and make another appointment. Thank you for letting Mr. Herkimer into the garden to admire the roses."

"I was glad to do it for a friend of yours, Mr. Cranston."

Cranston went back to his room. His mind was at fever heat with the information he had just received. Mike Largo was, for the moment, eliminated. Largo's purpose in attempting to trail Cranston in the gray coupe, still remained a mystery. But Mike had definitely not planted the money in Cranston's hat box.

This was the work of Flasher Brown!

CRANSTON was certain of the burglar's identity. The description of his flashy clothing and his fondness for jewels fitted the invisible Flasher Brown perfectly. That was how he had earned his nickname.

Was Flasher the bold criminal who called himself Mr. Remorse?

Flasher Brown's enormous earning as a big-time swindler had given him plenty of money, enough to make twenty thousand dollars a mere flea bite, if he chose to give it away.

The name of Benedict Stark began to fade from Cranston's mind. It was possible that Stark had nothing to do with this whole remarkable chain of events. Stark's reluctance to have Cranston assume the part of a go-between because he might be killed, might be a true statement. If Cranston was to be killed, Stark would want to do that himself in a web of his own making.

Cranston gave up theorizing. He still had in his inner pocket the sealed envelope left by a clever burglar. He opened the envelope, read the note it contained:

Enclosed find twenty thousand dollars. Half of it represents my first payment of conscience money to a victim I once defrauded. The other half is a gift to yourself, to repay you for your trouble in acting as my agent. You may either keep it or give it to any charity you select. There will be ten payments in all.

The name of the victim I wish to reimburse is Daniel Judson. He

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has an estate on the outskirts of a small town named Munford, in northern New Jersey. Please excuse my methods of getting the money to you. You will find my methods both varied and amusing. As soon as you have delivered Judson's first ten thousand dollars, you will hear from me again.

MR. REMORSE.

The cool nerve of the message made Cranston smile.

For each ten thousand dollars that Daniel Judson was to be paid, an additional ten thousand was to go as a free gift to Lamont Cranston. And there was to be, according to the note, ten payments in all. That meant a grand total of two hundred thousand dollars.

It was a sum large enough to make Cranston blink. He had fought many a crook who had tried to steal two hundred thousand dollars. But this was the first criminal in the history of The Shadow's career who wanted to give away two hundred thousand dollars!

There was something tigerish about Cranston's stride as he stepped to his telephone. He lifted the receiver and called a number. It was a number not listed in any telephone directory. A crisp voice replied almost instantly:

"Burbank speaking."

Burbank was The Shadow's contact man. He was always available, day or night, for the receipt and the transmission of orders to the various agents of The Shadow.

The Shadow gave Burbank orders concerning Rutledge Mann. Mann was a member of The Shadow's organization. He was an investment broker, and as such was The Shadow's business and financial agent.

Through Burbank, The Shadow transmitted to Mann the serial numbers of every bank note in that amazing hoard left by Mr. Remorse. He also gave him the name of Daniel Judson and the town called Munford in northern New Jersey.

Definite orders went with this information.

While he waited for a return call, The Shadow appeared to go to sleep. His closed eyes and his slumped figure suggested complete relaxation. But behind those closed eyelids, a keen brain was at work. Occasionally, a sibilant laugh came softly from The Shadow's lips. It was the only clue to his thoughts.

It was an hour and twenty minutes before the telephone bell rang.

The calm voice of Burbank reported fully on the subject of the "conscience money." The twenty thousand dollars was not "hot" money. It was neither counterfeit nor stolen. Rutledge Mann's discreet investigation of the serial numbers on the bills had established definitely that the cash was legal tender, perfectly normal and perfectly safe to spend.

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Its origin, however, remained a mystery. Mann had tried his level best to locate the bank from which the cash had been drawn, but he had been unsuccessful. None of the banks had paid out so unusual a sum in cash. Evidently, the foxy Mr. Remorse had accumulated it in dribs and drabs from a number of banks, using dummies to collect it for him.

But Rutledge Mann had found out plenty concerning Daniel Judson.

JUDSON was quite a character. He lived inside a walled estate on the outskirts of Munford, New Jersey. He had, apparently, no friends, no visitors, no servants. Electricity was Daniel Judson's servant.

He was an eccentric inventor. He had made and lost vast sums of money. Right now, he was reported to be almost broke. Apparently Judson, like most inventors, had no head for business. Some of his inventions had been stolen from him. Others were in hopeless litigation in the courts.

Also Judson had had considerable trouble in his personal life. His wife had left him for another man. His son, too, was a no-good. The son, according to Rutledge Mann's discreet investigation at various New York sources, had skipped one night with all the money he could lay his hands on.

Judson lived alone these days, embittered and suspicious of everyone. According to rumor, it was not healthy for strangers to enter the estate against the wishes of the eccentric inventor.

It was a set-up to make anyone hesitate. But there was flame in the eyes of The Shadow. He was not worried by Judson's wrath. He was determined to unmask Mr. Remorse and find out what unusual crime was being screened by all this seeming generosity.

The only way to start the ball rolling was for Lamont Cranston to act as a harmless go-between.

He didn't reveal this determination to the police. He called up Police Commissioner Weston and was very hesitant. He asked for two or three days more to think over Mr. Remorse's dangerous proposition.

But when Lamont Cranston finally left the Cobalt Club, the payment destined for Daniel Judson was in a small leather bag, along with some other interesting objects. The ten thousand dollars bonus for Cranston was already on its way to Rutledge Mann, to be credited to a charity for crippled children.

Cranston used his own personal car for the drive to Munford, New Jersey. It was a popular make, an inconspicuous car in town or country. But the engine under the hood was a special job. It could make a hundred miles an hour – and more, if necessary. The chassis was weighted far more than normal, to keep it on the road at high speed.

The drive was a pleasant one. Munford was off the beaten track. The route led through hilly, winding country that was almost devoid of motor traffic. Occasionally, a car flashed by, loaded with golf clubs and fishing equipment. But for the most part, The Shadow had the road to himself.

He was almost to Munford when he saw the boulder.

He didn't see it until he had rounded a sharp curve. The boulder belonged on the top of a railroad embankment that flanked the road beyond the curve. But the boulder was not where it belonged.

It was rolling down the embankment in gigantic leaps, headed straight for Cranston's car!

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The brakes were in good order. If they hadn't been, the car would have been smashed. The Shadow's foot jammed the brakes tight. The wheels screamed. The car skidded. But the brakes held for the desperate instant Cranston needed.

The boulder whizzed across the road like a granite football, directly in front of the sliding car. It crashed into the underbrush opposite, uprooting, saplings and flattening bushes.

The man who had started the boulder came down the railroad embankment with the speed of a merry-maker on a Coney Island slide.

But there was nothing merry about him or his gun. In an instant, he was down in the road, the snout of his automatic pistol menacing Cranston.

The Shadow had no time to draw a weapon. Both hands were busy with his skidding car. He lifted both arms above his head in a tremulous gesture. Not for an instant did he forget his assumed role of a timid clubman.

"That's better!" the gunman grunted. "Nobody's gonna hurt you, if you obey orders and hand over that dough!"

The gunman had made no effort to disguise himself. The Shadow was not too surprised at his identity. He stared at the long nose, the bumpy forehead, the pale, blue eyes.

It was the crook who had tailed Cranston earlier in Manhattan. Mike Largo!

"HAND over the dough!" Largo growled.

Cranston reached slowly for his wallet.

"The hell with that! I said dough, not chicken feed! I want the stuff in that leather bag under your feet. And if you try anything funny, mister, I'll dig a subway through your skull with a bullet!"

Largo wasn't fooling. His eyes were piggish with greed. He didn't allow Cranston to reach for the leather bag. Under Largo's orders, The Shadow opened the door and kicked the bag out into the road. Largo snatched it up with a brief downward gesture. His eyes and his gun stayed on Cranston.

He backed toward the railroad embankment.

"You can't do this!" Cranston pleaded, with the shrill terror of a law-abiding citizen faced for the first time in his life by crime. "That money isn't mine! It belongs to a man named Daniel Judson."

"Yeah? I need it a lot more than Judson does!"

"You mean you need a slug in the belly!" a harsh voice interrupted suddenly. "Drop that bag!"

The voice came from the opposite side of the road. Another figure had appeared from the underbrush. He emerged at a point well to the left of where the boulder had crashed.

He was masked. Black cloth covered his head and face like a loose fitting helmet. He held his gun like a man who knew how to shoot. He fired a moment after he spoke.

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But that warning of his had been a mistake. Mike Largo had ears like a cat and muscles like a startled deer. He dropped the bag and whirled. The bullet that the masked man fired drilled through empty air.

Largo made no attempt to return that gunfire. All he wanted was to get away. And he did that, fast!

The masked man leaped close to the car, his gun aimed toward Cranston.

"Freeze, damn you!"

Cranston froze. Largo had reached the top of the earth embankment and dropped out of sight. A quick, sputtering sound became audible. It deepened in an instant to the staccato roar of a gasoline engine.

Mike Largo hadn't left anything to chance. He escaped down the track on the gasoline railroad car he had so thoughtfully arrived on.

The masked man cursed. Then a shrill chuckle came from behind the black cloth of the mask. Eyes bored into Cranston through the narrow slits of the hood.

"Don't get excited – and don't try to follow me! I just wanted to make sure that the dough in that leather bag goes to its rightful owner. If you want to stay healthy, forget about me. Drive to where you were going when that louse pulled his highjack stunt. Give the ten thousand bucks to Daniel Judson with the compliments of Mr. Remorse. So long, sap! And remember, it's all in a good cause!"

He backed swiftly to the spot in the underbrush from which he had emerged, and vanished with little noise. Evidently, he knew his way through those woods. The Shadow didn't attempt to pursue him. Not because of the danger, but because of The Shadow's own calmly considered purpose.

The Shadow intended to hand that ten thousand dollars over to Daniel Judson. He wanted a reasonable excuse to penetrate within the walls of Judson's estate. It was there that the heart of this mystery was located.

For the present, he was content to let Flasher Brown make his getaway.

THE SHADOW knew it was Flasher. There had been two diamond rings on the crook's left hand. His suit was expensive and vulgar in pattern and cut. It was Flasher, all right!

It was the queerest situation in the entire career of The Shadow. He had been saved from one crook by another! Criminals were fighting to help him! For the first time in his life, The Shadow was an innocent bystander, battled over by contending forces whose leadership and purpose were still utterly unknown.

The Shadow placed the leather bag back in the car. He drove onward to Munford. He turned left when he came to the Green Tree Inn, just at the edge of the village. The left fork was not a very good road. It was poorly paved and bumpy. But it had one grim virtue. It led to the walled estate of Mr. Daniel Judson.

CHAPTER IV. THE BAG THAT FLEW

THE stone wall that guarded Daniel Judson's estate was ten feet high and a foot thick at the top. The top was protected by chunks of jagged glass, set edgewise in concrete. In addition to that, two strands of bare copper wire were attached to short metal posts that ran the entire length of the wall top.

Wires were too close together for a man to slip through without touching them. Any attempt to step over the top wire without brushing against it was also impossible. The thickness of the copper strands and their lack of

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insulation convinced Lamont Cranston that a high-tension current of terrific amperage and voltage was coursing with deadly invisibility through those wires.

It looked as if a visit to Daniel Judson was going to be difficult, if not impossible. But when The Shadow drove to the entrance gate, he found that his first guess was completely wrong.

The gate was wide open.

Usually, a small stone cottage for a gatekeeper was built just within the entrance of an estate of this kind. But Judson had none.

A driveway of crushed stone led peacefully enough into thickly-wooded grounds. Shrubbery formed a blank wall of green at the road's first turn. If there was a house at the end of this winding road, it was impossible to see it.

The Shadow frowned thoughtfully. The hospitality of the open gate didn't fit the grimmer picture of the electrified stone wall. Judson was apparently able to distinguish between friendly visitors and persons who might be enemies. The latter would think twice before driving through that deceptively open gateway.

The harmless guise of Lamont Cranston was The Shadow's passport of safety. He was confident that Judson had read the newspapers. The news of Mr. Remorse's strange offer of restitution and the selection of Lamont Cranston as an ideal go-between, was probably already known to the inventor.

The Shadow drove his car calmly through the open gateway and along the winding drive. The grounds of the estate were larger than he had expected. Large enough, in fact, to contain a fair sized lake. The edge of the lake was where the twisting driveway finally ended.

From his parked car, The Shadow could see a small wooden wharf. The wharf was bare except for a few prosaic objects. There was a mailbox on a post – the usual rural-free-delivery box, with its tin flag lowered flat to indicate the box was empty of mail. Beyond it was a taller post, with an electric light and a reflector at its top.

Below the light was a netting of what looked like wire mesh. Cranston was not sure of its purpose. He assumed that the electric bulb was to light the wharf at night for anyone crossing the lake from the island.

The island was in the center of the lake. It seemed to be as densely wooded as the mainland. A duplicate wharf was opposite the one near which The Shadow had parked his car.

If there was a house on the island, it was invisible.

Cranston walked out on the wharf with his leather bag that contained ten thousand dollars in cash. He read a small placard that was tacked on the light post behind the mail box:

NOTICE TO VISITORS

Please announce your presence by lifting tin flag on mail box.

Thank you.

D. JUDSON.

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Cranston lifted the flag.

Instantly, he was bathed in a vivid white light of tremendous candle power. The reflector atop the tall pole focused the beam directly on Cranston's face. Even in broad daylight, it was like standing in front of a photographer's light.

A voice came out of the wire mesh. It was metallic, but not at all unfriendly.

"How do you do? Did you wish to see me?"

"Yes."

"Will you please state your name and your business?"

"My name is Lamont Cranston. My business is to present you with ten thousand dollars in cash, which I believe is part of a larger sum stolen from you by some unknown criminal. The criminal wants to make restitution. He selected me as his intermediary."

"Excuse me a moment."

There was brief silence. Then the voice spoke again from the loudspeaker.

"I merely wanted to verify your photograph in this morning's newspaper. I hope you'll pardon my suspicion, Mr. Cranston I've had some bitter experience during my life. I've been forced to learn caution. Please step into the boat which you will find at the end of the wharf. It will carry you across the lake to my home."

THE voice from the loud-speaker ceased. The blinding light went out. The Shadow hadn't seen any boat. But when he stepped to the edge of the wharf, there it was!

Evidently, the craft had been concealed beneath the wharf. It had moved silently into view in response to some sort of remote control. There were no oars in it. No engine, either gasoline or electric.

All The Shadow could see as he stepped aboard were two sealed boxes about the size of the big cameras used for aerial photography. One was at the bow, the other at the stern. Atop each box was a metal rod surmounted by a ball that looked like dull silver.

The Shadow guessed that the strange craft was radio-controlled.

The boat moved swiftly across the lake in a straight line toward the wooded isle. It halted an instant before its bow touched the edge of the opposite wharf. Then it swung gently alongside.

Cranston got out and walked down a winding path.

He saw evidence of taste and beauty on the part of the eccentric inventor. Flowerbeds lined the path. The plants grew in liquid, however, not earth. Chemicals fed and nurtured these brilliantly colored flowers, some of which were varieties The Shadow had never seen before.

He enjoyed himself, until he came to the cobras.

The cobras were in a glass tank similar to the others. But this tank was larger, and raised above the ground. Its glass top was open. The inner walls were greased to prevent the coiled and slithering snakes from crawling

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out and dropping to the path. They were vicious-looking devils, with their lidless eyes and flat, repellent hoods.

A jointed rod was connected with the lower side of the cobra tank. Cranston shuddered, as he realized the import of that rod. If it straightened, the tank would tilt forward, spilling the writhing mass of snakes to the path!

But nothing happened. Cranston continued peacefully along the winding path to the edge of a clearing. A wolfhound guarded the clearing. He was a huge beast, capable of tearing a man to pieces. A stout chain tethered him to a kennel. The dog blocked the path. He snarled viciously and tried to leap at Cranston with bared fangs. The taut chain threw him sprawling.

Suddenly, the growling beast was drawn backward. The shortening chain pulled him out of sight into the steel kennel. A door clanged shut over the opening.

A moment later, Cranston saw the house. It was set in the middle of the terraced clearing. Around it was a formal garden spaced like the spokes of a wheel. There were lily pools and fountains. The largest pool was fully twenty feet across. Water foamed from the uplifted hand of a nude stone goddess. The basin was solid granite.

The house appeared to be a fortress. Steel shutters covered every window. The front door looked airtight. Cranston divined that this sealed dwelling of Daniel Judson was air-conditioned. There was no bell to ring, no knob to turn. But when The Shadow stepped to the entry, the door opened quietly of itself!

Emptiness greeted The Shadow – and a voice.

"Will you please join me in the living room? You'll find it straight down the hallway to your left. Thank you."

Cranston obeyed. He found Daniel Judson to be an inoffensive-looking old gentleman.

JUDSON was a little man, with gray hair, stooped shoulders and tired eyes. His natural voice was not as harsh as it had sounded through the loud-speaker.

"Have a cigar?"

Cranston took one from the extended box. As it left the box, its tip glowed red, ready for smoking. Judson laughed.

"A harmless gadget. It amuses me. Some of my other gadgets are not so harmless."

"Are you afraid of someone?"

"I'm afraid of everyone! Most human beings are rotten. I've been gyped and swindled all my life. Crooks have even tried to kill me." Judson's mild eyes kindled. He suddenly looked half mad. But he calmed down as he realized Cranston's thought.

"No, I'm not a crank. I'm perfectly sane. But I happen to be an inventor of ability and originality. You've seen some of my brainwork. I could show you more valuable things. Synthetic rubber, for instance. Not the poor substitute used in Germany, but actual rubber made artificially.

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"I've discovered glass that can stop a rifle bullet – and so soft and pliable, you could rumple a sheet of it in your pocket like a silk handkerchief. Invented it for my own amusement. Never patented."

"Why not?"

"Because I've had my belly full of patents. Thieves, Mr. Cranston! That's what most of the world is made up of. And spies – who would like to steal my brainwork and turn it into engines of destruction to slaughter millions of soldiers and win a world war! No! They'll stay unused in this house until I die. Then – and only then – can the government have my inventions."

Not a single word had been yet spoken about Mr. Remorse, or the ten thousand dollars in Cranston's leather bag. The Shadow didn't hurry the inventor. He let Judson ramble on bitterly about his personal troubles.

Judson had found even his own family treacherous. His wife had left him for another man shortly after the birth of their only child. Judson had brought up the boy and showered on him every advantage. Then had come reverses.

Lawyers had taken plenty of Judson's money in patent suits. Swindlers had taken more. The final blow came when Judson's own son decamped with every dollar he could lay his hands on. He had never been heard of since.

"Could your son be Mr. Remorse?" Cranston asked gently.

"My son return stolen money to undo a wrong? Not him! He's a worthless scamp, if he's still alive. He always will be!"

The subject of Mr. Remorse had now been broached. Cranston opened his leather bag. He showed the inventor the cash he had brought.

Judson scarcely listened to what Cranston said. He took a sample bank note from the hoard and tested it with a variety of bewildering experiments. An open panel in the living-room wall had disclosed a compact little laboratory, like a kitchenette. The Shadow watched in silence while the old man worked.

"Negative reaction," Judson said finally.

"What were you testing for?"

"For flame or explosive possibilities. You've already told me that these bills are neither stolen money nor counterfeit. I can now tell you that they won't cause a fire in my home from spontaneous combustion. Nor will they blow me to pieces so that thieves or spies can get into my laboratory and rifle it. I can't understand what Mr. Remorse's game is."

"You have no idea who he might be?"

"If he's anybody, I'd say he's Flasher Brown. Brown was the cleverest swindler I ever came in contact with. Your talk about payments of ten thousand dollars each convinces me that Brown must be the man.

"One hundred thousand dollars is the exact sum of which he defrauded me, when he came to me several years ago posing as a capitalist and promoter. You should have seen his business references. Forged, every one of them!"

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Again, Cranston changed the subject.

"Do you know Benedict Stark?"

"I know of him. His immense wealth. Who doesn't?"

"Did you ever meet Stark or have any dealings with him?"

"None. He's out of my class. Are you trying to tell me that you suspect Benedict Stark of being Mr. Remorse? If you are, you're crazier than most people think I am!"

JUDSON was getting excited again. The Shadow laughed his remark away. He had seen and heard all he wanted to, for the present. He brought the interview to a close.

Judson thanked him for assuming the risk of acting as go-between for a dangerous criminal. He took the money which Cranston piled on the living-room table.

Cranston picked up his bag and made his polite adieu.

"You'll find that my boat will take you back across the lake as easily as it brought you here," Judson said. "Just step into it and do nothing."

"Thank you. I hope that in another week or so, Mr. Remorse will give me the pleasure of calling on you again, by furnishing me with the second payment of ten thousand dollars."

Judson smiled. Temporarily, he seemed to have lost his suspicion of human beings.

"You might as well have a look at my garden before you leave the island. Gardening is a lot like inventing – if it's done by an expert. You'll find varieties and colors that you can't buy in a florist shop. Black roses! Have you ever seen one? Look it over."

Cranston promised to do so. He walked quietly down the hall to the front door. Daniel Judson did not accompany him. The Shadow was glad of that. It gave him an opportunity to fake a piece of absentmindedness.

He left his bag on a console table in the foyer. It gave him a plausible excuse to return very soon. The Shadow had no desire to wait a week. He wanted to find out what Daniel Judson did when he was not aware he had a visitor. The lake could be easily swum. Cranston's excuse about a forgotten leather bag would smooth things over, if he happened to be discovered by the inventor.

He examined the flower beds on his way back to the island wharf. He couldn't find any sign of a black rose. Was the black rose like the silk-handkerchief glass and the artificial rubber – a figment of a cracked old inventor's imagination?

The Shadow was more puzzled than he cared to admit.

He stepped into the boat at the wharf. It moved swiftly across the lake to the opposite wharf with the tin mailbox.

The Shadow had parked his car farther back, at a bend in the road. The bushes screened it from the island. He walked toward it with the air of a man glad to get away from so queer a place.

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But he changed his mind about a stealthy return to the island, when he saw the small sheet of paper. The paper was tucked in the steering wheel. The four words of the message made The Shadow's jaw tighten:

You forgot your luggage.

D. JUDSON.

The empty leather bag which Lamont Cranston had left in Daniel Judson's sealed home on the island was now on the rear seat of Cranston's car!

It was miraculous, a feat that bordered on the supernatural. Even an inventor couldn't make a bag fly across a lake and enter a parked car by itself, wireless or no wireless!

Cranston got into his car, but his mind had already abandoned the problem of the bag.

How did the man who was now watching him get across?

The man was hidden nearby in a tangled covert of green underbrush. The Shadow had caught a single swift glimpse of his face before it vanished deeper into the underbrush. It was Daniel Judson!

THE SHADOW drove his car slowly along the stone drive. He followed the winding trail back to the gate in the wall of the estate. The gate was still open. A grocery truck was driving in.

The driver nodded cheerily to Cranston. He seemed undisturbed and happy. Just an ordinary delivery man with a basket of groceries for a customer.

To The Shadow, it was further proof of the remarkable possibilities of this strange estate. Honest visitors ran no risk in entering that open gateway – as Judson had himself stated. Only crooks and criminals need beware!

The grocery man would undoubtedly leave his basket of goods on the mainland wharf and drive out again, unaware of the snakes, the wolfhound, and the other grim perils on the island in the lake.

The whole situation added up to the queerest mystery in which The Shadow had ever found himself involved.

Three names glowed in his mind: Mike Largo, Flasher Brown, and Mr. Remorse. Mr. Remorse was still unknown. Flasher Brown was an X quantity, too. There remained Mike Largo.

The Shadow decided to begin by locating and investigating Mike Largo. Cliff Marsland, a secret agent of The Shadow, would do for that job very nicely.

CHAPTER V. A BLONDE WITH A LINE

A YOUNG man got out of a sleek-looking car in front of an expensive apartment house.

He was rather sleek himself. The hackneyed phrase, "tall, dark, and handsome," would have been an excellent description of him. He hurried into the foyer of the apartment house with an easy stride. The doorman touched his cap.

"Good evening, Mr. Forman."

"Good evening, Peter. What do you know?"

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"Not a thing, sir."

Forman chuckled. The look that passed between him and the doorman showed that the harmless pleasantries had grim meaning. The doorman never "knew" anything, because Forman paid him well to keep his mouth shut.

An elevator took Forman up to one of the choice upper floors. He let himself in with his latch-key and stared impatiently around the empty living room.

"Hey, Betty! Where are you?"

"You know very well where I am, and what I'm doing!" a woman's voice answered petulantly from an adjoining room. "Believe me, Bob, I'm getting sick of toasting myself like a hunk of bread!"

Bob Forman laughed. He walked into the next room. It was a sitting room. But his wife wasn't doing any sitting. Betty was on the floor, lying at full length on her stomach.

Under her was a thin beach mattress. Above her was a sun lamp that bathed her tanned back with ultraviolet light. Her costume consisted of bathing trunks with a brassiere top. She was wearing dark glasses.

Forman blinked. He turned off the sun lamp. His wife got to her feet with a sullen grumble.

"Whenever you think up a smart scheme, I'm always the goat!"

Betty Forman's voice was unpleasant. But her appearance made up for that. She was a glamorously beautiful girl. Her hair was the color of ripe corn. The color was natural; so was the wave. She had baby-blue eyes, with dark lashes. Her figure was curved in the right places.

"What's new?" she pouted.

"We're all set! Ready to go!"

"Have you got Mike Largo lined up?"

"Yeah. It took a little time, but I know where he's going to be tonight. Largo is in a second-rate night club off the main stem. Put on the phony gown you bought, and let's see how you look in the role of a hungry moll looking for a pickup."

Betty giggled. She went to her own room. She was gone quite awhile. But when she returned, Forman grinned with satisfaction.

Betty's evening gown looked as if it might have been bought from an installment joint. She had added brilliantine to her hair and too much make-up to her tanned face. She was wearing cheap fish-net stockings. She looked like a chorus girl down on her luck.

"I ought to take Mike Largo without any trouble," Betty said.

"A cinch, darling! With that dress and the sun tan, and my story to go with it, you'll take that punk easy!"

Forman gave his wife a lidded glance.

THE DEVIL'S PAYMASTER

"What are you going to tell Largo after he gets an eyeful of you?"

"I just got back from Florida," Betty said. "I'm a gal who likes easy living and plenty of dough. I don't care where the dough comes from, so long as my boyfriend is smart enough to keep cops out of my life. Jail makes me sick. That's why I blew out on my last boyfriend."

Forman nodded approvingly.

"Swell! Tell me some more."

"Well, I went down to Florida with a sap who said he was smart. The sap was so smart, he got himself pinched. The last I heard of him he was living in a cell on top of that skyscraper jail they got in Miami. Me, I took a powder just in time. But it was tough hitchhiking back to Broadway. All I got left are a few lousy bucks and this evening gown that I bought secondhand."

Betty's smile glinted wickedly.

"But what I'm most sick of right now, is men! Ugh! How tired I am of men!"

Forman roared with laughter.

"That's the ticket, honey! That's the line that will hook Largo right through the gills! Put on a decent dress, so you won't look queer walking out of a swell dump like this. Then let's go."

BETTY packed the cheap evening gown in a small valise. The dress she wore past the doorman downstairs came from Fifth Avenue. So did the wrap. Betty tucked the wrap's hood rather high on her blond head. It helped to hide the extra make-up.

Forman took the wheel of his car, but Betty didn't sit beside him long. After they had driven a block or two, she changed to the rear seat. Forman took the car on a leisurely circuit of Central Park. The dimly lit drive gave Betty plenty of opportunity to squirm out of her expensive gown and put on the cheap one.

Her voice sounded strained.

"Bob, is this going to be a real finger job? Is Largo going to be bumped?"

"Don't worry. I'm not going to do the bumping, if that's what you're scared of."

"Who is?"

"I don't know. It's all arranged."

"Arranged by the boss? Bob, this set-up scares me. I like to make big money – but I'd like to know who we're working for."

"That's something even I don't know. And I don't care a damn! Whoever he is, the boss is giving us a hundred percent protection. We have money in a half dozen banks, and more piling up every week. We've never seen the guy we work for. Forget it, Betty! Your job is to finger Mike Largo. Mine is to make sure that Mike doesn't run out on you before the bump specialist puts the bee on him."

Forman's tone was confident. Betty got over her jitters.

THE DEVIL'S PAYMASTER

"O.K.! Let's head for the night club."

Forman didn't go all the way. He dropped the blonde a few blocks distant. Betty took a taxi for the rest of the distance. But when she entered the Blue Canary, she was aware that Forman had already parked nearby, where he could keep an eye on the front door of the club. It stiffened Betty's nerve. She walked in with a sinuous sway of her shapely hips.

An unescorted woman didn't raise any moral eyebrows at the Blue Canary. It was Betty's figure, her blond hair, and baby-blue eyes that caused the eyebrow lifting.

She slipped the head waiter a five-dollar bill. It got her a table near the one where Mike Largo was sitting. Largo was alone, drinking moodily. He lost his grouch when he saw Betty. Betty took care that he saw her to good advantage.

Their eyes met, and she frowned. She ordered a drink, and their eyes met again. This time, Betty smiled. After a while, Largo came over.

The pick-up was witnessed by a man who didn't seem to notice anything. He sat at a wall table, apparently half asleep. He looked plenty tough.

His name was Cliff Marsland.

Marsland rated pretty high in the underworld. He had served time in his younger days, but he was smarter now. The police couldn't get a thing on him. That's what other mobsmen thought. They figured that Marsland was back in the racket, playing a careful lone-wolf game after having had his fingers burned once.

The truth was that Marsland, having squared his debt to society, was no longer a crook. His thuggish role was camouflage to enable him to keep in touch with the underworld. He was fighting now on the side of the law.

Cliff Marsland was an agent of The Shadow!

Cliff had witnessed the arrival of Betty Forman at the Blue Canary and her smooth pick-up of Mike Largo. The grinning patrons at nearby tables thought that Largo had taken the initiative. But Marsland knew that the blonde had hooked Largo with her smile and her baby stare.

Marsland had never seen her before and didn't know who she was. The Shadow had sent Marsland to keep tabs on Mike Largo. Now he had two to watch.

THEY were talking with their heads close together. Marsland would have given a lot to have overheard that conversation, but he was afraid to change his spot to a closer table. He did not want to disclose his interest in this flashy pair.

He missed hearing the Florida yarn in which Betty had been so ably coached by Forman. When she finished, Largo patted her hand.

"A swell looker like you should never have teamed up with a two-bit crook."

Betty didn't object to the hand-patting.

"What you ought to do is tie up with a big-timer," Largo said.

THE DEVIL'S PAYMASTER

"For instance?"

"Me! I got stuff on the fire that's due to cook up important dough."

Betty shrugged. Her gown slipped partly away from a creamy shoulder. Largo's eyes kindled.

"Don't compare me with the sap who got himself pinched in Florida," Mike said. "I got a proposition that ought to appeal to a gal who likes luxury."

"What's the take?"

"Ten grand."

Betty pouted.

"Chicken feed! You're a nice guy and I like you – but no soap on a yearly income like ten grand."

"Who said anything about a year?" Largo growled under his breath.

He leaned closer. He was well hooked, and Betty knew it with a cool inward satisfaction.

"The ten grand is only the first rake-off," Mike said. "Before I get done there'll be ten rake-offs at ten grand apiece."

"Now you're talking my language," Betty smiled.

"I could talk a lot more," Largo said pointedly, "if you're interested in a partnership."

She finished her drink and glanced briefly around the Blue Canary.

"I don't like to talk partnership in a night club."

"How about my place?"

"I'd rather go to my own apartment. It's a cheap dump, but it has plenty of privacy. O.K.?"

Largo nodded. He called the waiter and paid for their drinks. There were plenty of taxis outside, but Largo had his own car.

Before Betty got in, she glanced down the dark street. She saw a big car move away from the curb and vanish around the corner. The car headed north in the same direction Betty intended to go. The man in the car was Bob Forman.

Cliff Marsland didn't notice this incident. Cliff had left the Blue Canary too late to see the other car. But he had plenty of time to follow Largo's automobile.

The tailing job led uptown to the West Side. It was a region of furnished rooms and theatrical boarding houses. Cops usually got a headache in this neighborhood. It was not quite respectable, yet not quite underworld. Plenty of decent people lived here who were down on their luck.

THE DEVIL'S PAYMASTER

Forman had picked a cheap apartment in a dingy brick building for that very reason. He was parked nearby when Betty and Largo drove up.

As soon as they disappeared inside the building, Forman got out of his car. Marsland, who had himself arrived quietly after a neat trailing job, watched the sleek young man. He knew at once that Betty and Forman were working together. He had seen a swift signal pass between them.

Marsland figured that Forman was going to follow the pair into the apartment house. But things didn't happen that way. Forman crossed the street. He strolled quietly along the opposite sidewalk. Then he faded into a dark doorway.

It was a spot that gave him an excellent view of the house entrance opposite. He stayed there, out of sight.

MEANWHILE, Betty had led the way to an apartment on the second floor. Unlocking the door, she admitted Mike Largo to her shabby furnished suite. She faked an embarrassed laugh about her present poverty. That was Largo's cue.

"Stick with me, babe, and you'll be tops! Ten highjacks at ten grand a clip!"

"Is it risky?"

"Not when I tell you the set-up."

"Tell me after we've had a drink." Giggling, Betty went into an adjoining room for the liquor, closing the door behind her. There was no liquor in this room. It was a bedroom.

She didn't turn on the lights, but tiptoed swiftly toward an opened window. The window was directly above a narrow alley that ran between the apartment house and the building next door.

A knotted rope was fastened to the radiator. Betty dropped one end of it out the second-floor window. She went down the knotted rope with noiseless skill. She darted down the alley to its sidewalk entrance. Slowing down, she walked calmly to the street.

Cliff Marsland watched her from an invisible post nearby. He also kept an eye on the slick guy in the dark doorway opposite.

Betty hurried to Forman's car. Evidently Forman had left his ignition key for her. In a moment, the car was around the corner and gone.

Forman emerged from his doorway. To Marsland, the whole thing looked like a familiar criminal set-up. He expected to see Forman sneak upstairs to the apartment where the sucker waited. It looked like a simple kill.

But Forman didn't go into the house.

He walked right past it. Trailed discreetly by Cliff Marsland, he hurried to the next corner and turned into a side street. Another car was parked at the curb. Forman hopped into it and drove swiftly away.

Marsland couldn't comprehend this move. Were there three crooks in this sinister pick-up of Mike Largo? That's how it appeared now. Betty and Forman had arranged the finger. A hired killer would wind up the job, giving the other two a chance for a getaway and an alibi.

THE DEVIL'S PAYMASTER

Cliff Marsland hurried back to the alley from which Betty had emerged. The first thing he saw in the darkness was the dim shape of a knotted rope dangling from an opened window on the second floor.

There was a pile of empty ash cans nearby. Cliff ducked behind them. He waited.

His vigil was rewarded in less than two minutes. A man entered the alley with stealthy speed. His face was muffled by an upturned collar and a snap-brim hat pulled low on his forehead.

He climbed the knotted rope.

Marsland saw the glint of a huge diamond on the man's hand. An emerald stickpin glowed like soft-green flame. Forewarned by the instructions of The Shadow, Marsland made an instant identification of the killer.

It was Flasher Brown!

Cliff waited until Flasher vanished into Betty's bedroom. His plan was to follow Flasher up the rope to the murder apartment. But there was suddenly no rope!

Flasher Brown wasn't taking a chance on anyone noticing that dangling clue. He yanked the rope upward into the room which he had so quietly entered.

With a soundless oath of dismay, Cliff rose from behind his ash-can ambush. He began to retreat swiftly toward the head of the alley.

Mike Largo's life was trembling in the balance.

But Largo didn't realize that, as he waited in the shabby living room. There was a silly grin on his thick lips. All he could think of were Betty's baby-blue eyes and her shapely figure. His grin widened as he thought he heard Betty returning with the drinks.

"Scotch and soda for me," Largo said, as the bedroom door opened.

Then his breath hissed in his throat.

Betty had changed magically to a man with a knife!

The man was masked. The knife in his hand was not gripped dagger-wise. It lay flat on his palm, ready for a murderous throw.

As Largo recoiled in terror, the killer's arm swept backward to hurl the knife!

CHAPTER VI. ROUTE NO. 8

MIKE LARGO'S warning of death was only the matter of a split second. The opening door, the vision of the masked man with a poised knife, Mike's gasp of terror – all took no more time than a flash of lightning.

Largo flung himself backward toward the wall. So fast did his gun leap into his hand, that he seemed to seize it out of nothingness. He tilted the muzzle upward to fire a snap shot from the hip.

But Flasher Brown's knife throw was faster than Largo's trigger. The shot was never fired.

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The whizzing blade ripped through the flesh of Largo's wrist and pinned it to the wall. Largo felt a twinge of white-hot agony. Blood poured from a severed vein. The gun dropped from his grasp.

Largo sagged, held upright only by the bloodstained blade that nailed his wrist to the wall.

Flasher sprang forward. A second knife came from beneath his unbuttoned coat. Flasher was wearing two narrow straps across his vest. They supported duplicate scabbards, one under the hollow of each shoulder.

However, Flasher didn't throw his second knife. He had an easy victim before him. He took his time and stabbed ruthlessly.

The blade pierced Largo's heart.

For a moment, there was dreadful quiet in the apartment. Flasher stood above Mike Largo, breathing harshly behind his masked covering. Then he regained his breath and his wits.

He made a quick search of the living room. His purpose was to make sure that Betty Forman had left no trace of her presence in the murder apartment. His scrutiny convinced him that Betty had been as careful as she was smart.

Then he turned his attention to the dead gunman. Mike Largo would commit no more hijack jobs. His wide-open eyes were glazed and horrible. But to Flasher, he was still an object of hate. The killer cursed. His open palm slapped the dead man's face with a stinging impact.

The blow seemed to calm Flasher. With a steady pull, he drew the knife out of the dead man's heart. He cleaned the blade by wiping it on Largo's trousers. Fingerprints didn't worry him. He was wearing gloves.

He regained the knife that had pinned Largo's wrist to the wall. He was cleaning that, too, when he heard a faint click from the front door of the apartment.

To Flasher Brown, the sound was unmistakable. Someone out in the hall was trying to release the lock with a skeleton key.

Flasher didn't finish cleaning his second knife. The reddened blade went into its shoulder scabbard. The murderer tiptoed into the bedroom. The door closed.

Silence followed, except for that faint scrape of a key outside the front door. The sound ceased presently. The door opened.

Cliff Marsland, a gun in his hand, stepped into the apartment foyer. From where Cliff stood, he couldn't see the blood-smeared corpse of Mike Largo.

He saw that only after a slow, cautious advance.

His faint gasp was quickly repressed. He knew that the murder of Largo must have just taken place. Marsland's dash through the alley and up the front stairs of the building had wasted little time. Not more than a couple of minutes had elapsed.

Was Flasher Brown still in the apartment?

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Marsland stood well to the side of the closed bedroom door. He turned the knob gently. Then with a sudden motion, he flung the door wide.

The room was empty.

A glance toward the radiator at the open window showed Marsland that Flasher Brown had already escaped. The rope that Flasher had drawn up after him was no longer coiled inside the room. It hung into the black alley outside.

Staring downward, Marsland debated mentally whether he ought to investigate the apartment further, or pursue the vanished Flasher.

A slight creak behind him was Cliff's only warning of death.

He whirled from the window sill. The door of the bedroom closet had opened. A man was charging silently across the room with a bloodstained knife.

It was Flasher Brown!

THE startled Marsland had no time to shoot. Flasher was upon his victim before Cliff had barely time to whirl. The knife stabbed viciously at Cliff's gun hand.

Cliff threw himself sideways. The knife missed his arm. The blade bit into the soft wood of the window sill and quivered there.

It was almost a repetition of the attack of Largo – except that Marsland was not helplessly impaled. But, for an instant, he lay sprawled on the door at Flasher mercy.

Mercy was not one of Flasher's qualities. A second knife leaped from its scabbard. Marsland rolled desperately. The blade missed his heart and ripped across his arm, slitting the cloth and cutting a bloody furrow in his skin.

The force of the blow threw Flasher off balance. As he staggered, Marsland grabbed him by the leg. The killer fell. Both men rolled together in a writhing heap on the floor.

Between them lay the gun that Marsland had dropped. Both grabbed for it. But Flasher's fingers closed over the barrel before Cliff could tighten his grip on the butt.

The weapon swung upward, and descended like a glittering club. The butt crashed against Marsland's skull, dazing him badly. He lay quivering on the floor for an instant, with closed eyes.

An instant was all Flasher needed. The knife that had slashed Marsland's sleeve was now back in the killer's grip. He drove the reddened point toward Cliff's heart.

"Stop!"

The word was like the sharp crack of a whip. It came from behind Flasher's back. The Shadow was standing in the bedroom doorway! He was too far away from the killer to halt the knife blow. But his trumpet-like challenge accomplished the same purpose.

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Startled, Flasher twisted his head. The unguided knife stabbed wide of its target. Instead of the helpless flesh of the dazed Marsland, it found a sheath in the bedroom carpet alongside Cliff's ribs.

Flasher Brown uttered a yell of terror as he saw the black-robed figure that confronted him from a distance of perhaps a dozen feet.

"The Shadow!" Flasher screamed.

He was on his feet like a cat. As he rose, he scooped up the limp body of Marsland and tumbled him toward The Shadow. The Shadow had raised his gun. But the toppling body of Marsland came between the muzzle of the weapon and the fleeing killer.

Flasher went over the window sill like a scuttling roach. He slid down the rope to the alley.

Two things aided Flasher Brown's flight. The Shadow didn't want to fire into the alley for fear of attracting police. The roar of shots would raise sinister, crashing echoes. The presence of The Shadow and Marsland would be disclosed in the murder apartment. Awkward questions would be asked by the police. Lamont Cranston would have to explain the dead Mike Largo. And Lamont Cranston would be revealed as The Shadow!

The second reason why The Shadow left his trigger unsqueezed, was the limp figure of Cliff Marsland. To The Shadow, the safety of his agents was paramount. He knelt beside Cliff, to make sure that he wasn't badly wounded and in need of immediate surgical treatment.

A glance showed that Marsland's chief injury was the smash he had received from the butt of his own gun.

The Shadow raced to the open window, slid down the rope to the alley.

Flasher Brown had vanished. But he had left a telltale clue that told The Shadow which way he had fled. The killer had not raced out of the alley. He had fled toward its inner end.

The proof of this was the cloth mask Flasher had ripped from his head and thrown away.

The trail led to a fence at the alley's rear. Beyond the fence was a concrete courtyard behind a towering warehouse. Before The Shadow scaled the fence, he employed the same tactics as Flasher. He removed his black robe. He stowed it in an ash can, under a layer of tin cans and rubbish.

It was Lamont Cranston who went over the back fence.

HURRYING through another alley that flanked the warehouse, Cranston emerged in a street in the rear.

There were plenty of pedestrians in view – but not Flasher. Flasher had pulled a neat vanishing act in the few seconds that had been at his disposal.

The very briefness of time gave The Shadow a clue to the crook's probable whereabouts. Diagonally across the street was the electric sign of a bus terminal. Unless Flasher had been lucky enough to grab a rolling taxi, he must have headed straight for the bus terminal's waiting room.

Lamont Cranston entered the place with the air of a well-dressed gentleman who had all the time in the world. But his sharp eyes missed nothing, for all of their apparent laziness. He saw at once that Flasher was not in sight. A quick survey of the men's room eliminated that possibility.

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There remained the platform in the rear, where the lumbering busses halted to take on passengers. A bell began to ring in the waiting room. A loud-speaker bawled out, a warning:

"Bus for Jones Beach! All aboard for Jones Beach!"

Nearly all the people in the waiting room streamed toward the platform. Cranston knew that Flasher Brown had departed before the Jones Beach bus had rolled up. But he followed the crowd.

He blocked the bus step in the role of a bewildered passenger. The starter fumed and tried to get him out of the way.

"Jones Beach bus! Don't block the doorway, please. Get on or get off, mister."

"Where's the other bus? There was supposed to be one here a couple of minutes ago. I'm afraid I got here a little late. Has it gone?"

"You mean Route No. 8? Yeah, that one's gone."

Cranston put on a good act.

"Why, this is an outrage! They told me at the hotel I had plenty of time! They —"

The starter eased him efficiently out of the way of the passengers who wanted to go to Jones Beach. The starter was used to boobs like this.

"Don't blame me, mister. This line runs busses on a schedule. If you show up late, it's your own fault."

"When does the next bus leave for Route No. 8?"

"Ask the girl at the information desk. All aboard!"

The bus door slammed, the heavy vehicle rolled away. Cranston went over to the desk and got a copy of the schedule for Route 8.

His eyes ran down the printed list of towns. A grim smile came into his eyes, which was quickly repressed. The girl behind the desk thought that Cranston was still angry.

"There'll be another bus in three quarters of an hour, sir. I'm sorry."

"That's all right," Cranston said. "It was my own fault, I guess. Now I'll have plenty of time for a cup of coffee."

He disappeared into the lunchroom that adjoined the terminal. But he didn't stop there. He emerged quietly on the street and signaled a taxicab.

MEANWHILE, Cliff Marsland was regaining consciousness in the shabby furnished apartment where he had been struck down. His head ached horribly. There was a smear of dried blood on the hair at the back of his scalp. His sleeve was slashed where Flasher Brown had cut at him.

Marsland was about to leave the bedroom, when he saw the match pad.

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It was on the floor where he had been lying. Cliff uttered a quick exclamation. He realized instantly what must have happened. In the fierce struggle, Marsland must have ripped loose one of Flasher's pockets.

The match pad had dropped to the floor. Marsland's limp body had rolled on top of it.

The pad was red, with bright-green lettering. A picture of a tall pine tree accompanied the advertising. Marsland read the ad with interest:

GREEN TREE INN

A homelike hotel in the heart of vacation land.

Golf – Tennis – Fishing. Munford, New Jersey.

Cliff put the match folder in his pocket. He left the apartment house without being seen, and took a taxi to the hotel which was his present headquarters.

Marsland congratulated himself that he had made the best of a bad series of breaks. Flasher Brown was wise to him. But Flasher had no idea of Marsland's real identity.

The blonde who had put the finger on Mike Largo was unaware that Marsland had trailed her from the Blue Canary. Her slick boyfriend was also in the dark.

Such was Marsland's thought. But he was wrong!

As he entered the lobby of his hotel, a pair of baby-blue eyes watched him intently. Betty Forman had ducked out of sight into a telephone booth as Marsland entered the lobby.

Betty attracted no attention from the other guests who sat lounging about in the lobby. She had discarded her cheap costume, had toned down her bold make-up.

Betty heard Marsland ask the clerk if there was any mail for him. The clerk, after a moment, said:

"No mail today, Mr. Marsland."

Cliff walked to the elevator and went up to his room. The moment he was gone, Betty Forman made a quiet telephone call.

She consulted a small notebook before she dialed the number. Betty had to do this because the phone number of the man to whom she was now reporting was changed every week. She had no idea of the man's name, his appearance, or his occupation.

He was the unknown boss for whom Betty and Bob Forman worked.

The blonde reported Marsland's name. She gave a minutely accurate description of his appearance. Then she added a single sentence that spelled doom for the unsuspecting man who had just ascended in the hotel elevator.

"Marsland is an agent of The Shadow!"

CHAPTER VII. A DEAL IN BOOKS

THE SHADOW was in his sanctum – a secret hide-away in the heart of New York City. It was a place of utter blackness. There was no sound.

Suddenly, the silence was broken by a sibilant laugh.

At the same instant, a hanging light glowed from overhead. It cast a blue light on the polished surface of a desk. The hands of The Shadow were visible in the oval of light. His face and the rest of his body remained invisible.

On one of the tapering fingers of The Shadow a brilliant gem gleamed. It was The Shadow's girasol, a magnificent fire opal. As his hand moved slowly under the light, crimson changed to deep orange. The orange faded to green, then blue. With bewildering rapidity, the gem became again crimson.

This girasol was the symbol of The Shadow's personality.

The Shadow's moving hand returned to the oval of light on the surface of his desk. Three small packets of paper became evident. They were reports from his agents.

Before reading these reports, The Shadow examined another document. It was a printed bus schedule, marked "Route 8." The Shadow, in his role of Lamont Cranston, had obtained it at the bus terminal from which Flasher Brown had made his slick fade-out from New York.

One of the towns on the schedule was a place in northern New Jersey called Munford. It was the only town on the list in which The Shadow was interested.

He picked up the first of his agent's reports. It was the one submitted by Cliff Marsland. Cliff described everything that had happened on his dangerous trailing assignment that had culminated in the death of Mike Largo.

To The Shadow, most of this was already familiar. But laughter welled from his lips when he looked at the match pad which Marsland had included with his report.

This was the clue Marsland had picked up in the furnished apartment where Largo had been murdered. It advertised the Green Tree Inn at Munford, New Jersey. It was additional proof of where Flasher Brown had fled.

The Shadow examined a second agent's report.

This one was submitted by Moe Shrevnitz, a taxi driver in The Shadow's employ. It, too, supplied interesting information. Moe's taxicab had been parked inconspicuously in the neighborhood of the murder apartment.

When the blonde who had lured Mike Largo to his death emerged from the place, Moe followed her without revealing his presence. It was not too difficult a task for the shrewd little taxi driver. Moe was one of the cleverest hackies in Manhattan on a job of that sort.

He had trailed the shapely blonde with the baby-blue eyes to an exclusive apartment house. When she stepped from her car, she was no longer the toughly-dressed little babe who had entered it. From head to foot she looked very smartly gowned. A uniformed doorman addressed her very respectfully as Mrs. Forman.

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Moe Shrevnitz did a little snooping around. He found that the blonde occupied an expensive suite with her good-looking husband, a tall, dark-complexioned man named Bob Forman.

Shortly after the blonde arrived, her husband apparently left town. At any rate, the observant Moe noticed him depart with a suitcase. Moe waited to see what the blonde would do. As far as he could tell, she remained in the apartment.

The last of the agent's reports was from Clyde Burke.

The Shadow had already planted the Daily Classic reporter at the Green Tree Inn, in Munford. Clyde was ostensibly there on a vacation, to do a little golfing and catch some of the fish for which the neighboring lakes were famous.

Clyde reported that Flasher Brown was living at the inn. He was posing as an invalid, using the name of Richard Woodstock. Clyde had had little luck tracing the crook's movements. Flasher went nowhere. He remained most of the time in his room at the inn. If he had made a secret trip to New York, Clyde was unable to prove it.

But The Shadow wasn't dismayed by this negative report. He knew that Munford was barely five miles from the walled estate where Daniel Judson lived in fear of his life. The eccentric inventor was obviously the prospective victim of an organized gang.

Forman and his blond wife, Flasher Brown and the unknown Mr. Remorse – all were interested in some scheme against Judson, which had started with the queer offer of restitution on the part of the elusive Mr. Remorse.

THE SHADOW was now ready to make a move. Not in Munford, however. The Shadow would start his personal investigation through the medium of Betty Forman. His knowledge of her appearance and character suggested the best method of approach.

Moving from his desk, The Shadow caused a light to glow in another part of his sanctum. A glass-fronted bookcase was disclosed. Its doors were locked. Behind the glass were rows of expensively bound volumes. They were expensively priced, too. But their possession in his private crime laboratory had cost The Shadow nothing.

Every one of these books was contraband. They were samples seized in a police raid on a notorious "private edition" bookseller. Millionaires with perverted tastes paid fancy sums for stuff like this. Most of it was smuggled to New York from abroad.

The Shadow selected a volume. It would make ideal bait for an interview with Betty Forman. He also selected an appropriate disguise to go with the book. He packed a small leather bag.

Then the light in the sanctum went out. Darkness blotted this unknown retreat of a master detective. There was no sound of footsteps, no evidence that a panel had been moved or a secret doorway opened.

And yet The Shadow was already gone.

When The Shadow again appeared, it was in the guise of Lamont Cranston. No one gave him a second glance. He walked to his car and drove sedately uptown.

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He didn't halt his car in front of the exclusive apartment building where Betty Forman lived. He got out a couple blocks away and approached the canopied entrance on foot.

He slowed up, until he saw the doorman busy himself getting a taxi for a departing tenant. While the man was out in the street blowing his whistle, The Shadow located the service entrance to the building and faded from the sidewalk unobserved. He went through a dimly lit basement to the rear.

There was a service elevator there for the use of tradesmen making deliveries. There was also a steel-enclosed flight of stairs, as required by law.

It was a long climb to the floor where Betty Forman lived. The Shadow went up one floor higher than necessary.

There was no one in sight when he peered into the corridor on the floor directly above the apartment of Betty Forman. He noticed that there were four apartments. His smile deepened. Now came the most ticklish part of his precautions.

Leaving his leather bag in the service hallway, The Shadow moved with extraordinary swiftness. He paused for an instant in front of each of the four locked apartment doors. At each, he rang the bell.

Almost before the buzzing of the last bell had ceased, he was back at his hidden post in the stair well. He left the fire door open a tiny crack. It allowed him to watch the results of his curious bell-ringing campaign.

A man opened a door, saw nobody, and cursed. After he withdrew, a second door opened. This time, it was a woman, with her hair in curlers and a layer of beauty cream all over her pudgy face. She, too, seemed annoyed by the vanished bell-ringer. She slammed the door viciously.

The other two apartment doors remained shut.

The Shadow wanted to find an empty apartment, in order to make a quick change of costume. He tried the nearest of the two closed doors. He didn't turn the knob or fiddle with the lock – and it was just as well that he was cautious. For when he peered through the keyhole, he saw the muzzle of a gun!

THE gun was pointed at the inside of the door. A man was standing there, listening intently. He looked like a paunchy, well-dressed broker, but his face was muddy with fear. Evidently, he had something on his conscience.

The Shadow retreated noiselessly to the last door.

This time, his keyhole luck was better. The living room was empty. A drawn shade on a window convinced The Shadow that the owner was away. He had skeleton keys and used them skillfully.

Once in the apartment, The Shadow opened his leather bag in the bathroom and made a complete change. When he was finished, Lamont Cranston had vanished.

In his place stood a rakish-looking individual dressed in a sporty suit. His hair was slickly parted. Some sort of grease made it lie smoothly flat. There was a sneer on the man's lips and a wise, knowing look in his eyes.

The Shadow chuckled at his reflection in the bathroom mirror. It was a role that matched the contraband book in his hand.

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He hid the leather bag and left the apartment. He fixed the inner lock on the door, so that it could be opened readily from the outside. Then he descended the stairs and rang Betty Forman's bell.

"Who is it?" came through the door.

"No vacuum cleaners!" Cranston chuckled. He put just the right note of unconcern in his voice. "I'm not selling a thing. It's a buying proposition. You'll want to buy when you see the sample. But I might as well warn you in advance, it's going to cost you a thousand dollars."

"What's the gag?"

"No gag at all. I'm doing you a favor, and making myself a neat commission."

The door opened. Betty's blue eyes were hard. But they softened as she saw the sporty appearance of her caller. She also noted the expensive binding of the volume in his hand.

Without a word, The Shadow handed her the book. Betty skimmed through the pages and glanced at a couple of the illustrations.

"Hm—m—m," she murmured. "Some book! How many are there in the complete set?"

"A dozen volumes. I don't need to tell you that you can't buy these in the open market. The sample I'm showing you is the dullest one in the set."

The Shadow stepped boldly into the apartment. Betty didn't object. She walked to a lounge chair and sat down, examining the contraband book in greater detail.

"What's your real price for the complete set?"

"I wasn't kidding, lady. One thousand dollars. Only ten sets ever got to this country from abroad."

Cranston rattled off the names of several famous book collectors.

"They liked it at that price. How about you?"

Betty Forman smiled. "I'll take it."

"Fine! I'll leave the sample here. Write me a check for a hundred dollars, as a deposit. The rest when I deliver the set."

Betty shook her head.

"I'll pay when I get the set. And no check! I'll pay the money in cash."

The Shadow had hoped to lure a check out of her. It would show where Betty banked. It might uncover an important lead to the mysterious Mr. Remorse. But he didn't allow disappointment to appear in his face.

"Cash is O.K. It's a deal. That is, if you'll do me a little favor."

He grinned as he noted Betty's frown.

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"Could you spare a thirsty lad a highball? One with plenty of ice in it? Book-selling is a thirsty business."

Betty Forman nodded.

"I could do with one myself," she admitted. "My maid is off today, but I think I can scare up some whiskey and soda."

She vanished from the living room, with a sinuous sway of her hips. The Shadow pretended to look over the volume with which he had just clinched a sale. But the moment he was satisfied that the blonde was out of sight, he leaped noiselessly to his feet and crossed the room.

There was a table against the wall. On the table was a document which had attracted The Shadow's attention the moment he had entered the apartment. It was a bus timetable.

A quick glance showed him that it was Route 8. One of the towns in the list of bus stops was underlined with pencil. The name of the town was Munford, New Jersey.

THE SHADOW retreated swiftly to the chair where he had left the book. But his self-congratulation was ill-timed.

Betty had seen him examine that bus folder. She had not departed to the kitchen as innocently as she had pretended. Sneaking back in stockinged feet to the living-room entrance, she had watched The Shadow's behavior through a tiny fold in the velvet drapes across the doorway.

Having verified her suspicions, she tiptoed warily to the kitchen and prepared the highballs.

She was coy and flirtatious as she sipped her drink with The Shadow. A less resourceful crook would have drugged the drink The Shadow took. But Betty didn't want to tip her hand by any rough stuff.

She was confident that Bob Forman could take care of this fake book salesman when the time came. She figured he was an agent of The Shadow. Not for an instant did she dream that she was actually face to face with The Shadow himself!

She got rid of him presently. The Shadow promised to return in three days to collect the cash payment for the set of books. He walked smilingly to the elevator and pretended to punch the button.

As soon as Betty Forman closed her apartment door, he hurried to the fire stairs at the end of the hall and went up to the floor above.

In ten minutes, the figure of the snappy-looking book salesman vanished in the bathroom of the empty apartment. Lamont Cranston replaced him. Cranston used the fire stairs to get to the basement of the building unseen. He left by the tradesman's entrance, the same way he had entered.

He had no idea that Betty was aware of the deception.

The blonde was already talking in a low voice over her private telephone. She had consulted a small book and had dialed a phone number. The number changed every week. None of them were listed in any phone directory.

Betty was reporting to the unknown super-criminal who called himself Mr. Remorse!

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She described the appearance of her slick-haired visitor. She reported everything that had happened, and declared her suspicion that her visitor was an agent of The Shadow.

There was cold laughter over the wire. Mr. Remorse issued orders in a voice that sounded oddly like a woman's.

"Pack up and scram! Your present apartment is no longer safe. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"Leave a signal to warn Bob Forman when he returns," Mr. Remorse continued in his high-pitched voice. "You know the signal we agreed upon in case of trouble. Use it! Handle the trunk in the usual manner. Is all that clear?"

"Yes," Betty murmured.

"The emergency hide-out is all prepared. I'll guarantee no agent of The Shadow will ever locate it. Phone me when the transfer is complete."

The wire went suddenly dead, as Mr. Remorse hung up. Betty hung up, too, her pretty hand tremulous. She was still trembling when she draped a scarlet scarf over the back of an easy-chair, where Forman couldn't fail to see it when he returned to the apartment from his out-of-town trip.

An expressman took Betty's trunk to the baggage room of a railroad terminal. Later, she would remove it by a private truck to the new apartment. It would make tracing of the trunk impossible.

The smiling Betty Forman walked out of the apartment house forever. Without realizing it, the doorman tipped his hat to her for the last time.

The Shadow knew nothing of these developments!

CHAPTER VIII. GREEN TREE INN

THE country road was well paved, and had two lanes for cars. But The Shadow drove slowly. His slowness wasn't caused by heavy traffic. He had seen few cars.

He was deep in northern New Jersey. Soon, he expected to reach the town of Munford.

As he drove slowly along, The Shadow kept watching the side of the road. Presently, he saw what he was looking for. It was a sign advertising the Green Tree Inn. The sign stated that the inn was twelve miles farther on.

The Shadow got out of his car and examined the sign. He paid no attention to the neatly-painted lettering which described the fishing, bathing and boating advantages that the inn afforded to vacationists. The bare white background of the sign was what interested The Shadow.

His keen eyes soon found what he was looking for. It was written in pencil in the lower left-hand corner. A casual observer would scarcely have noticed it. But The Shadow's quiet laughter showed that he considered the four scrawled words important:

Five minutes, forty miles.

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It seemed like a meaningless bit of nonsense. How could even a reckless motorist drive forty miles in five minutes?

The Shadow got back into his car. He was parked directly opposite the sign. He set his mileage indicator at zero. A quick glance at the clock on the dash showed him the time.

He accelerated swiftly, until his car was hitting forty miles an hour. The Shadow kept the needle of his speedometer squarely on that mark. He drove for exactly five minutes. Then he braked to a stop.

He found himself at a deserted crossroads. The Munford road was bisected by another highway. Bushes and scrub oak lined both sides.

A man came out of one of those leafy coverts. As he parted the branches, his parked car was briefly disclosed, well screened from view.

The man was Clyde Burke, the Daily Classic reporter.

The Shadow moved over on the front seat, and Clyde climbed in and slid behind the wheel. Not a word was spoken. Clyde swung the car in a left turn and drove swiftly along the road that crossed the main highway.

Presently, the road dipped. A golf course became visible. One of the greens was close to the road. It was a blistering hot day. There were no golfers playing.

Clyde parked the car under an enormous oak. It was an ideal spot to talk without being seen or heard. The Shadow intended presently to drive to the Green Tree Inn, at Munford. He didn't care to have anyone suspect that he and Clyde Burke had conferred secretly beforehand.

"Report!" The Shadow intoned.

Clyde confirmed his earlier information. Flasher Brown was living at the inn, he declared, posing as an invalid named Richard Woodstock. Clyde, however, had no news of Bob Forman. He had neither seen nor heard anything about Betty's tall, handsome husband. But he exploded a bombshell when he discussed Flasher Brown.

"Flasher couldn't have killed Mike Largo!" Clyde declared.

A look of grim interest crossed The Shadow's face. He knew that Flasher had been in the murder apartment where Largo had been killed. The Shadow hadn't seen Flasher actually commit the crime. But he had intervened a few seconds later, to save the life of Cliff Marsland. He had witnessed the flight of Flasher down the alley and across the street to the bus station.

And yet Clyde Burke was calmly stating that Flasher could not have killed Largo.

"Explain!" The Shadow said.

CLYDE'S report was a plausible one. From the moment he had arrived at the Green Tree Inn, he had kept a close watch on "Woodstock." Woodstock claimed to be suffering from arthritis. He used a cane and walked with difficulty. This illness was probably a fake, but Clyde's insistence on Flasher's innocence of murder rested on entirely different evidence.

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Woodstock stayed mostly in his room on the second floor. He had not left the inn during the day that preceded Largo's murder in New York. If The Shadow's theory was correct, Woodstock should have returned to Munford on the night bus after a sly murder trip to Manhattan.

But he hadn't. Clyde was positive.

"Night?" The Shadow suggested tersely. "Window?"

Clyde shook his head. Woodstock couldn't have slipped out his bedroom window and returned secretly under cover of darkness. Directly above his window was a huge neon sign, advertising the Green Tree Inn. It shone all night and bathed the front of the building in a bright green glow.

The office where the night clerk sat at his desk was directly below the sign. If Woodstock had tried to sneak out of his window, the clerk would surely have seen him.

The Shadow inquired about the clerk's honesty. Clyde vouched for it. He had made a careful study of the man and his habits. Clyde was convinced that the clerk was not a stooge for a criminal gang.

It blew the murder charge against Flasher Brown wide open. Either Flasher was innocent – or he had worked out an extremely cunning alibi!

A crisp order crossed The Shadow's lips. Clyde drove the car back to the crossroads. He brought his own automobile out of concealment. After listening carefully to The Shadow's instructions, he sped down the road to Munford.

Fifteen minutes later, The Shadow followed.

He arrived at the inn as Lamont Cranston. His car was piled with fishing equipment. Ostensibly, he had come to the inn for a brief vacation. When he walked in, Clyde Burke leaped up from a lobby chair and greeted Cranston warmly. They spoke as if they had not seen each other for weeks.

Clyde had made reservations for his millionaire friend. His story to the clerk was that he had enjoyed the fishing so much, he had sent a wire to Cranston to join him.

Presently, Cranston went upstairs to his room. Clyde had reserved for him the room next to Richard Woodstock's.

The Shadow made a great stir in unpacking his luggage. He noted that there was a connecting door between his room and Woodstock's. It was locked, of course, but there was no key in the keyhole.

Tiptoeing to the barrier, The Shadow knelt noiselessly and applied his eye to the small opening.

He found himself staring at the frightened face of Flasher Brown!

He was well disguised as Woodstock, but The Shadow had no difficulty in identifying him. The crook was so fond of his jewelry, that he had continued wearing it in spite of his new role as a quiet invalid. He was wearing his big stickpin and the ring with the huge diamond.

He seemed suspicious of the sudden silence in Cranston's room. A gun slid suddenly from his pocket. Gripping it nervously, Flasher tried to peer through the keyhole of the connecting door.

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He saw nothing. The Shadow had dropped his hat over the knob.

There was a faint oath, then silence. The Shadow guessed what would happen next. He prepared for it. Presently, there came a knock at the hall door.

When Cranston opened it, Woodstock was outside. He introduced himself, and Cranston invited him in.

"I'm sorry to interrupt you in your unpacking," Woodstock declared, "but I'm an invalid. I come here every year for rest. Noise bothers me. I just wanted to ask you to be as quiet as possible."

Cranston's reply was apologetic and polite.

"Thank you," Woodstock murmured.

His glance veered toward the connecting door. The Shadow knew why. Woodstock was trying to find out why he had been unable to see through the keyhole. A shrewd crook, he suspected what had actually happened – that Cranston had hung a hat over the knob.

But there was no hat there now. A wad of paper was stuffed in the keyhole. Woodstock didn't know how long the plug had been there. He had never had occasion before to peer into the adjoining room. He assumed what The Shadow intended him to think – that the keyhole had been plugged by some guest a long time ago.

WOODSTOCK withdrew after inviting Cranston to accompany him downstairs to the taproom.

"I drink three glasses of stout daily," he said in his feeble tones. "My doctor advises it. It's wonderful stuff. Are you sure you wouldn't care to join me?"

Cranston declined. He said he was tired after his automobile trip from New York.

Woodstock went slowly down the stairs, leaning heavily on his cane. He disappeared into the taproom. A moment later, Clyde Burke vanished in the same direction.

The Shadow completed his unpacking. He had barely finished, when the telephone in his room rang.

The clerk was phoning from down stairs. His voice sounded bored. But to The Shadow, his message was an electrifying one.

"A gentleman is here to see you, sir. His name is Daniel Judson. Shall I tell him to come up?"

Daniel Judson! The eccentric inventor against whom The Shadow was convinced the whole strange intrigue of Mr. Remorse was aimed! How did Judson know that Cranston was here? And why was he calling?

"Show him up," The Shadow murmured.

Judson had a queer expression on his face when he entered. He was very affable, but he seemed to be waiting for Cranston to say something. They talked aimlessly for a while about the weather. Then Judson frowned, said:

"Well? Have you brought the money?"

"What money?"

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"The ten thousand dollars. The second payment of conscience money from Mr. Remorse."

Cranston looked puzzled. "I brought you no money. What makes you think I did?"

"Didn't you telephone me from this inn, a short while ago?"

"Of course not. I have only arrived."

"That's queer!"

Judson's face paled. Under Cranston's prompting, he explained in a choked voice.

A man whose voice sounded remarkably like Lamont Cranston had phoned Judson at his walled estate. He announced that Mr. Remorse had handed him the second payment of ten thousand dollars to be turned over to Judson. He asked the inventor to come at once to the Green Tree Inn and receive the money.

"Are you sure the call came from this inn?" Cranston asked.

"Positive! I had the call traced. The operator told me it came from here."

Cranston's face was suddenly grim. He stepped to the telephone, called the desk.

"This is Mr. Cranston. Mr. Judson was called on the phone a short time ago by one of your guests. He forgot to get the man's name. Do you remember from which room the call was made?"

"Just a moment," the clerk said. "I'll ask the switchboard man."

There was a brief silence. Then the clerk returned to the wire. He sounded puzzled.

"There must be some mistake. No outside call was made. The only calls were requests for room service. Is Mr. Judson sure the message came from the inn?"

Cranston pretended to confer with the frightened-looking inventor. Then he spoke apologetically into the mouthpiece.

"I beg your pardon. I misunderstood Mr. Judson. The call was from New York. I'm sorry to have troubled you."

He hung up.

"That clerk was lying!" Judson said nervously.

"I don't think so. I noticed a public telephone booth in the tap-room downstairs. A call from there could reach you without going through the switchboard."

"Who did it?"

Flasher Brown was the name that occurred instantly to The Shadow. In his role of Woodstock, Flasher had ample opportunity to lure Judson to the inn by a fake message. But Cranston didn't disclose his suspicions to the jittery inventor.

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"It was a trick to get me away from the protection of my walled estate," Judson whispered. "It must be Mr. Remorse!"

CRANSTON questioned Judson about possible suspects. But the inventor was of no help. He knew no more about Mr. Remorse than Cranston did.

In his laboratory, Judson reminded Cranston, were the unpatented formulas for synthetic glass, synthetic rubber, and many other discoveries that would mean millions to a warlike nation. Europe was in a mighty conflict. If Judson could be kidnapped and tortured into revealing some of his scientific secrets, spies could reap a handsome profit from warring powers across the Atlantic.

In a quiet voice, Cranston advised Daniel Judson exactly what to do.

Judson agreed. There was something reassuring in the calm voice of this millionaire from New York.

Acting on the advice he received, Daniel Judson went downstairs to the taproom. A glance through the open door showed him that Richard Woodstock and Clyde Burke were still there. Woodstock had finished his glass of stout and Clyde his beer, but the two men had got into a discussion on trout fishing.

Judson joined them.

He entered the fishing argument, and got quite hot in his opinions about the type of flies to use in New Jersey waters. He kept his eye on the taproom clock. Lamont Cranston had told him to keep Woodstock in the taproom for at least fifteen minutes

The hands on the clock seemed to crawl.

Meanwhile, Lamont Cranston had put in another phone call from his room to the desk clerk downstairs.

"I'm very tired," he said. "I'm going to try to sleep awhile. I don't wish to be disturbed during the next hour."

The clerk agreed.

All The Shadow wanted to do was to establish in the mind of the clerk that for the next hour, he would be asleep inside a locked room. Sinister events were in the making. An alibi might be extremely valuable later on!

Cranston left his room with cautious stealth. There was a leather bag in his hand. He carried it with him down the dim upper hall, to a room at the rear.

The door was locked. But Cranston got in easily enough. It was Clyde Burke's room. Clyde had given the key to Cranston under cover of their handshake when Cranston had arrived.

Locked inside that rear room and protected from surveillance by a drawn shade, Lamont Cranston made a quick change. He changed not only his garments, but his entire personality.

The burning eyes of The Shadow gleamed in the semi-darkness. A broad-brimmed slouch hat shaded those eyes. A black cloak with a scarlet lining covered The Shadow's gaunt frame. Black gloves covered his tapering fingers.

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He lifted the shade on Clyde's window and peered cautiously down at the rear of the inn. There was no one in sight.

Like most country establishments of its kind, the inn was far from attractive at the rear. There was a narrow drive where trucks with supplies drove around to the kitchen door. Clyde's room was in a sort of an "L," invisible from the kitchen.

The Shadow moved like a patch of darkness across Clyde's window sill. He seized a drainpipe that ran downward between the windows. Sliding swiftly down it, The Shadow avoided any chance of being seen by other guests of the inn. He passed no windows on that quick descent.

A noiseless leap carried him across the narrow driveway. He vaulted a garden of wilted-looking flowers, leaving no footprints in the soft earth.

The Shadow vanished into a dense clump of bushes.

CHAPTER IX. THE SHADOW OUTWITTED

DANIEL JUDSON was scared.

He leaned against the bar in the taproom of the Green Tree Inn, talking idly about trout fishing to Clyde Burke and to Richard Woodstock. From time to time, his gaze drifted toward the taproom clock.

When fifteen minutes had passed, Judson glanced suddenly at his watch.

"Good gracious! I had no idea it was getting so late. I've got to run along."

He watched Woodstock narrowly. He knew that Burke was a friend of Lamont Cranston's. But Woodstock seemed no more anxious to detain Judson than the yawning Daily Classic reporter.

When Judson left the taproom, he heard Woodstock ask Clyde if he'd care to kill some time with a game of checkers. Clyde agreed.

Judson departed from the inn by the front door, as Cranston had told him to do.

His car was in the parking circle. Except where the driveway entered the parking circle from the road, the spot was heavily screened by trees. It would have been a simple matter for someone to have tampered with the car without being seen.

But Judson found everything in order. His tires were untouched, his gas tank intact. When he unlocked the car and stepped on the starter, the motor hummed efficiently.

Judson drove toward his estate.

He had about a seven-mile stretch to cover. He drove fast, because he knew the road would be a poor one after he reached the fork.

The fork was three miles from the Green Tree Inn. To the left it wound through valley swamp land in a meandering course that brought it back to a main highway. This swamp road was no more than a muddy wheel track, a short cut that only a motorist in a hurry would be apt to use.

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The road to the right climbed steeply over a chain of hills. Judson's estate was in a valley beyond.

As it happened, Judson was able to take neither fork of the narrow road.

A car blocked his progress. It was halted several feet in front of where the road branched. It was parked broadside, so that Judson was unable to pass it.

He braked to a quick stop, blew his horn for the careless driver ahead to move out of the way. Then he realized that the car was empty.

At any rate, it looked empty. There was no one behind the wheel.

Judson got out and walked hesitantly to the stalled car. There was no one hiding inside. The car was unlocked. The ignition key was still in the dashboard. Judson decided to move the abandoned car himself.

"Up!" a voice snarled suddenly.

The voice came from behind the inventor. When he turned, he found, himself confronted by a masked man with a gun.

The masked man had stepped out of the shrubbery close to the two cars. He wasn't wearing Richard Woodstock's clothing. And yet Woodstock was the name that Daniel Judson gasped.

A diamond ring, on the masked man's finger, the huge stickpin in his tie, suggested that in some miraculous way Woodstock had managed to elude Clyde Burke at the Green Tree Inn.

Under the menace of the aimed gun, Judson elevated his hands.

The masked man chuckled.

"Finish what you started, sucker! Get into my car!"

The reason for the highjacker's delayed appearance was now explained. He intended to kidnap Judson. He had counted on his victim's curiosity to make the pick-up easier. Judson had reacted perfectly to the riddle of the empty car. He had opened the door. He had practically kidnapped himself.

"Get in!" the masked man repeated. "Clasp both hands on the top of your head and keep them there."

Terrified, Judson started to obey.

"Stop!"

The sudden command startled the masked man, as well as Judson. It came from an unlooked for direction.

A man was standing in the road, close to the opened rumble of Judson's car. He had used the kidnapper's preoccupation with a frightened victim to lift the rumble cautiously and step without sound to the road.

He was garbed in black from head to foot. Flame gleamed from steady, deep-set eyes.

"The Shadow!" gasped the masked man.

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THE SHADOW didn't command the criminal to drop his weapon. He allowed his gun to speak for him. The masked man's pistol fell from nerveless fingers. Empty hands lifted stiffly above his head.

He stared through the slitted holes in his mask at The Shadow's steady gun. He knew that the slightest wrong move meant death.

"Approach!" The Shadow ordered. "Move slowly!"

The masked man obeyed. The Shadow believed that this kidnaper was Woodstock. He was positive that Woodstock and Flasher Brown were the same. And yet, how had the trick been done? How had the wily "invalid" at the Green Tree Inn been able to get away from Clyde Burke and race to the fork in the road ahead of Judson?

It was The Shadow's intention to solve one part of this intricate web of mystery. His left hand lifted to rip the mask from the face of the slowly approaching thug.

The Shadow's confidence was not justified. Woodstock had expected danger and was prepared for it. He was not to be unmasked as easily as this.

Prompt dropping of his gun at The Shadow's order was not a craven surrender. It was an offensive move by a wily criminal.

In order to drop the gun, Woodstock had to lower his right arm. His curled fingers had pressed the cuff of his sleeve. Into his palm dropped a small glass pellet. The gesture was done so swiftly, that it escaped the vigilant gaze of The Shadow.

The pellet was in Woodstock's upraised right hand, as he walked slowly toward The Shadow in apparent terror.

He hurled it when he was barely four feet away. Thin glass smashed into The Shadow's face. His nose and chin were splashed with a brownish liquid. From the liquid arose a thick vapor. It was more like smoke than vapor. It hung in the air like a cloud of muddy-colored soot.

Fumes paralyzed The Shadow's throat. He was unable to breathe. He reeled backward, clawing at his collar. He was scarcely able to see. He fell writhing to the ground.

With a quick whirl, Woodstock dived and recovered his lost gun. He paid no attention to The Shadow. He darted toward Daniel Judson, to finish his interrupted kidnap job.

But Judson wasn't waiting to be caught. Tremulous with terror, he raced back toward his own car when he saw The Shadow fall.

He leaped inside the vehicle. A quick movement locked the doors. The windows were already shut.

Woodstock found it impossible to get at the pale-faced inventor inside the car.

"Come out – or I'll blow you apart!"

Judson's pale smile infuriated the criminal. He fired. A powdery dent appeared in the glass. Ugly cracks radiated from the spot of impact. But the glass remained intact. The bullet didn't pierce it.

THE DEVIL'S PAYMASTER

Nor did any of the other slugs that roared, as Woodstock furiously emptied his pistol. Judson's inventive genius stood him in good stead. The glass was bulletproof at practically point-blank range!

The Shadow was on his hands and knees in the road, shaking his head to clear his brain of the vapor fumes. The breeze was already dissipating the deadly brownish gas. The Shadow was recovering his breath and his wits.

Woodstock fled. He raced to his own car and put it swiftly into motion. Backing hurriedly, he turned it straight and roared toward the fork in the road.

He took the road to the left. His fleeing car vanished along the muddy wheel tracks that crossed the swampland.

The Shadow was up on his feet now. He flung a loud cry over his shoulder toward the petrified little inventor who sat terrified inside his bulletproof car. The Shadow ordered Daniel Judson to drive over the hill to his walled estate. He told him to remain there until he received further instructions.

Then The Shadow raced on foot after Woodstock's car.

It was not as ridiculous a pursuit as it appeared. The swamp road was narrow and muddy. A skid sideways could mire the car and bring it to a quick halt. The nature of the road made fast driving impossible.

In a few moments, The Shadow could see the back of Woodstock's car. It was rumbling across the loose planks of a wooden bridge. The bridge crossed a deep swamp gully through which a mere trickle of water flowed. It was more quicksand than water.

Woodstock slowed beyond the bridge.

The Shadow's gun lifted. He aimed at a rear tire. But Woodstock's hand had lifted, too. He was leaning far out. In his clenched fist was something that looked like a misshapen egg.

The thing was a grenade!

It struck the wooden bridge before The Shadow could fire. Flame mushroomed upward. Through the flame rose a whirling tornado of smashed planks, chunks of wooden railing and fragments of timber. The noise of the explosion was like a roar of thunder.

The Shadow had flung himself flat when he saw the grenade bounce on the bridge. Bits of debris whined over his lowered head like shrapnel. He felt a stinging pain in his shoulder. But in a moment, he had staggered to his feet.

He faced an impassable gulf. The bridge was completely gone. Quicksand stretched like an open gash between The Shadow and his fleeing enemy.

Woodstock's car raced out of sight around a turn in the muddy, reed-lined road. He had resumed speed almost at the moment the grenade had left his hand.

A quick glance to left and right convinced The Shadow that an attempt to find a place to cross the quicksand gully would take a long time. Turning, he ran back to the crossroad.

Daniel Judson had already driven over the hill, to get to the protection of his walled estate.

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Woodstock was probably racing back to the inn across the swamp short cut. This was necessary, if he wanted to protect his alibi as an "invalid" who never left the inn.

Balked by the ruined bridge, The Shadow had to take the long way. Wrath flamed in his eyes. He had been outwitted by a clever foe. Clyde Burke, too, had apparently slipped up. Clyde had been given strict orders not to let Woodstock out of his sight.

As The Shadow raced on foot toward the inn by the long route, a car occasionally passed him. Each time it happened, The Shadow melted from sight in the underbrush.

He, too, had an alibi to protect. Not for an instant did he allow himself to forget that Lamont Cranston was supposed to be fast asleep inside a locked bedroom at the Green Tree Inn.

CLYDE BURKE had not disobeyed the orders of The Shadow. He had kept close to Woodstock's side ever since Judson had left the inn. The two men played a quick game of checkers. Then Woodstock yawned. Pleading a headache, he left the tap-room. He declared he was going to take a nap.

Clyde said that he'd do the same thing. The country air, he said smilingly, made him drowsy.

But there was nothing drowsy about his movements after Woodstock vanished. Clyde waited only a few moments. Then he tiptoed down the semi-darkness of the upper hall to Lamont Cranston's room.

Cranston had left his key on Clyde's bureau. Clyde unlocked Cranston's door. He was in his stockinged feet. He had promised The Shadow that he would keep a continuous watch on Woodstock. He didn't intend to break that promise.

Gently, he took out the wad of paper with which The Shadow had stopped up the keyhole of the connecting door. He could see Woodstock quite clearly. There was no indication that the crook was planning a furtive sneak from his room as soon as the coast was clear.

Woodstock had calmly removed his shoes and socks and was stretched out on his bed. He picked up a copy of a picture magazine and began to scan it.

Clyde settled down for a long, boring wait.

He waited less than five minutes. Then he suddenly froze to attention at the keyhole. He could see something that was unnoticed by Woodstock.

A closet door was slowly opening!

Woodstock was lying on his side in order to hold his magazine closer to the light. His position on the bed turned his face away from the closet.

By the time Clyde realized the horrible thing that was happening, it was too late.

A man stepped suddenly into view. Clyde, who was acquainted with Cliff Marsland's confidential report to The Shadow, recognized him instantly. It was Bob Forman!

There was a knife in Forman's hand. He leaped toward the man on the bed. Woodstock heard him and whirled. His hand dived toward an inside pocket. But Woodstock's fingers tangled with the bed clothes.

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His gun was only partially drawn when Forman stabbed.

The blade of the knife was driven with such fury into Woodstock's body, that the killer grunted.

Forman jerked the knife out of the gaping wound and sprang backward. He darted noiselessly for the door of Woodstock's room.

Clyde almost tumbled, in his eagerness to rise from his post behind the keyhole. His bent legs were cramped. He reeled against a chair and knocked it scraping across the floor. Then, with a bound, he unlocked the hallway door and sprang out to intercept the fleeing killer.

Forman was waiting for him! He had heard the noise of the dislodged chair and the thump of Clyde's stockinged feet. As Clyde's head peered into the dim hallway, the butt of a gun crashed against his skull.

Forman caught Clyde's falling body and lowered it noiselessly to the floor. The treacherous attack had been completed in absolute silence.

Leaving his slumped victim unconscious in the upper hall, Forman tiptoed to a back flight of stairs. He vanished downward.

It was quite awhile before Clyde recovered his senses. No one downstairs realized as yet what had happened.

Clyde retreated to his room at the rear of the hall. His head was throbbing like a drum. There was a gash in his scalp. He washed it with warm water. He was still quivering from the sting of iodine, when The Shadow returned.

The Shadow entered through the window that had afforded him an unseen exit earlier. He was startled at Clyde's pale face. But Clyde's breathless report of what had happened startled The Shadow still more.

Woodstock's death at the hands of Bob Forman meant that The Shadow had been following an entirely wrong scent. Woodstock and Flasher Brown were the same. If Woodstock was a victim, instead of a murderer – then so was Flasher Brown!

It proved Clyde Burke's earlier contention, that Flasher could not have murdered Mike Largo in New York. Nor could he have been the masked man who had attempted unsuccessfully to kidnap Daniel Judson.

Bob Forman had done that! Forman, using duplicate jewelry and a mask, had impersonated Flasher Brown. Escaping from The Shadow, he had returned to the inn by the short cut. He was hidden in Flasher's closet when the unfortunate crook had gone upstairs from the taproom.

THE SHADOW resumed his identity of Lamont Cranston. He went back to his room, undressed and pretended to sleep. He was still "asleep" when Richard Woodstock's murder was discovered.

In an hour, the quiet inn buzzed with police. The sheriff and a horde of county detectives came whizzing over in fast cars from the county seat. They asked innumerable questions, but they were extremely polite to Lamont Cranston.

His alibi was not a particularly good one, but his reputation placed him above suspicion. And Bob Forman had made a bad mistake. He had been careless enough to leave a bloody fingerprint.

Cranston didn't mention Forman to the police. Nor did Clyde Burke. A different method of parting his hair concealed the gash in Clyde's scalp. Like Cranston, he had been "asleep" in his room when the murder took place.

Like everyone else at the inn, Cranston and Clyde submitted a sample of their fingerprints. It absolved them of guilt.

Cranston asked for, and received, permission to return to New York until the inquest took place. Clyde, in his role of a newspaperman, remained at the inn to observe developments.

Lamont Cranston looked dazed as he drove off toward New York. But the moment he was on the open road, a change came over his face. His lips became taut. Between towns, he sent the powerful car ahead at a terrific pace.

The Shadow had missed one trick in an intricate game of crime. But he intended to take the next! He had a grim date at a certain exclusive apartment in Manhattan!

CHAPTER X. TRIPLE CROSS

GUISED as Lamont Cranston, The Shadow made a quiet entry into the apartment building where Bob and Betty Forman lived. He used the service entrance to the basement. Then he climbed the enclosed fire stairs, as he had done on a previous occasion.

He went straight to the floor on which Betty lived. He used a pick-like device to trip the lock. He didn't bother to draw a gun.

His lack of a weapon showed that The Shadow was confident of finding the apartment empty. That confidence was justified.

Betty and Bob had made a quick sneak.

A red scarf, that was draped across the back of a living-room chair, attracted The Shadow's attention. It was the only jarring note in the orderly furnishings of the room. It was obviously a signal. The Shadow had no trouble in divining its meaning.

Betty had undoubtedly remained in the apartment, as a lookout, while Bob had gone to Munford to slaughter Flasher Brown. Betty had learned that The Shadow was on the trail of herself and her husband. She had fled to another well prepared hide-out. The crimson scarf was to warn Forman to follow.

A quick search of closets and bureau confirmed The Shadow's shrewd deduction. Every article of personal apparel had vanished from the apartment. Nothing was left except the furnishings that went with the suite – and the red scarf draped across the chair.

It wouldn't be easy to locate this slippery pair again.

The Shadow made a more minute search of the place. His inspection was rewarded by a find in the bedroom. His eyes gleamed as he examined the contents of a frivolous-looking wastebasket. He uttered a curt laugh.

He was staring at several discarded objects that had a somewhat remarkable similarity. There were three or four swizzle sticks. Also, a couple of wooden applause hammers of the sort used in night clubs. The applause hammers and the swizzle sticks were marked with a night club's name. As if this weren't enough, there was a

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crumpled card advertising the club itself.

The Shadow's laugh was one of derision.

Crooks, overanxious to trap a powerful foe, were clumsily handing him a "clue." The object in the wastebasket had been left there purposely, to make The Shadow realize that Betty Forman was a regular visitor at a certain night club.

The club was the one in which Mike Largo had been picked up by Betty prior to his murder.

Forman obviously wanted The Shadow to attempt to pick up the trail of his blond wife at the night club. Danger threatened such a course. An ambush of some sort was in the making.

The Shadow accepted the challenge!

It wasn't the first time he had confounded crooks by stepping into a well-baited trap. Forewarned, he would know how to direct his agents.

The Shadow was determined to capture Flasher Brown's murderer and the murderer's blond wife. Once he forced them to talk, a way would be opened to reach the unknown Mr. Remorse.

He stepped calmly to Forman's telephone. The instrument was still in working order. The Shadow dialed a secret number. Presently, a dry, unemotional voice replied:

"Burbank speaking."

To his contact man, crisp orders were given by The Shadow. They were orders that involved the movements of Cliff Marsland and Moe Shrevnitz, a taxi driver in The Shadow's employ.

The challenge of wily crooks was being accepted by a man who was already one jump ahead of his enemies. The tables had been turned. It was the criminals themselves who were due for a surprise!

BOB FORMAN was on the telephone, too. He had reached the secret hide-out where Betty awaited him.

Betty sat lolling in an easy-chair, attired in a flimsy house robe that emphasized the glamorous beauty of her figure. There was a smile on her red lips as she listened to her husband.

Forman was talking to his unknown boss, Mr. Remorse.

"Flasher Brown is dead," he reported. "I let him have a knife where it would do the most good. The cops still think he's Richard Woodstock, an invalid with a bad case of arthritis."

The grin of Forman faded as he heard the shrill, womanish voice of Mr. Remorse. There was rage in that tone on the wire:

"Why the devil did you let Clyde Burke see you? Do you call that using your brains?"

"I couldn't help it," Forman protested uneasily. "There was no time to delay. The Shadow had witnessed the kidnap attempt against Daniel Judson. He was racing back to the inn to grab Woodstock. I had to kill the fool to protect the whole racket from discovery!"

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"You should have examined Cranston's room first," Mr. Remorse snarled. "It would have given you a perfect chance to bump Clyde Burke, too."

Forman said nothing. There was pallor on his handsome face. He knew that failure to please his unknown employer might mean a sentence of death for himself. When he spoke again, he turned the talk to a subject that reflected more credit on him.

"Lamont Cranston is The Shadow!" he said. "Events at the Green Tree Inn have proved that. I have also definitely established the identity of two of The Shadow's agents. Clyde Burke is one. Another is Cliff Marsland."

Mr. Remorse gave an unpleasant giggle.

"Two agents of The Shadow are known, did you say? You'll be more correct if you say that four agents of The Shadow are known to me."

His words rasped over the wire.

"The third agent is Rutledge Mann, a fake investment broker, who was unlucky enough to betray himself some time ago. The fourth is a dapper young gentleman named Harry Vincent, who lives at the Hotel Metrolite. Vincent was not smart enough to keep his service of The Shadow a secret from me."

Mr. Remorse continued grimly:

"Did you plant the clues that will lead The Shadow and his men to the night club where Betty is going to appear tonight?"

"I did."

"Good! If events work out as I intend them to, I may forget your blunder in not killing Clyde Burke at the inn. My plan is now a more comprehensive one. I intend to kill The Shadow and four of his agents at one blow! If luck is with us, the attempt of The Shadow to pick up Betty at the night club may even uncover the identity of a fifth agent!"

The voice on the wire chuckled.

"All you have to do is to obey orders. If you succeed, you'll continue to receive the large sum of money that I place at your disposal every month. If you fail – you and your wife will be killed! Do you understand?"

"I understand," Forman replied tremulously.

He found himself suddenly holding a dead wire. Mr. Remorse had hung up. Forman did the same. His wife had heard nothing of the conversation from the other end. Her red lips were still curved in a smile.

"What did he say?" Betty murmured.

Forman concealed his fright over the threat he had heard. Betty was to play an important role tonight.

He had to keep her courage up, or she might lose her nerve and doom them both.

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"He said you were doing a swell job," Forman lied. "He particularly praised you. Said you were twice as smart as you are beautiful."

"That ought to make me pretty smart, she said, with a complacent smile.

MOE SHREVNITZ'S eyelids were half closed. He seemed to be dozing. But his sleepiness was deceptive. Behind his wizened little forehead a shrewd brain was alert.

He was slumped behind the wheel of his battered taxicab, opposite the gaudy entrance of a night club. It was fairly dark where Moe's cab was parked. He had another reason for parking across the street from the more profitable stand outside the club's entrance.

Moe wanted no arguments from the hard-faced hackers who formed the club's usual cab line.

He was there to watch for the arrival of Betty Forman. He was also under orders to establish contact with Cliff Marsland as soon as he had uncovered a certain piece of information.

Betty Forman arrived at the club in a taxicab that came from somewhere uptown.

The thing Moe was hoping for happened. The hackers made it tough for a stranger to pull in close to the club's entrance. Betty's driver argued fiercely, until he saw a couple of tough-looking drivers sidle up with tire irons. Then he shut up.

Betty soothed her driver's feelings with a big tip. She looked dazzlingly beautiful. As she walked into the night club, she drew the admiring gaze of the taximen. They forgot about the guy who had brought her. But Moe didn't.

He drove toward the avenue behind the hacker from uptown. A red traffic light stopped the guy. Moe's cab slid alongside him.

The camaraderie between independent drivers gave Moe a chance to talk without seeming nosy. He sympathized with the guy about the tough treatment he had received when he had tried to park close to the club with his blond fare.

"A honey, wasn't she?" Moe grinned. "I wouldn't mind driving that dame for life! Where did you pick her up?"

"Riverside Drive – and Eighty-sixth."

"She must live in one of the big apartment buildings around there," Moe suggested.

The other driver chuckled.

"She didn't come out of no building. She was walking along the Drive when she hailed me. You're out of luck, pal."

"Guess I am," Moe grinned.

The traffic light changed and the two cabs forged ahead. But Moe drove around the block. He returned to his post near the night club.

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A man drifted past. He walked close to the curb. When he paused to light a cigarette, there was low-toned talk between him and Moe.

The man was Cliff Marsland. He vanished promptly from the neighborhood.

Moe continued to wait. There was worry in his eyes. He intended to pick up Betty Forman when she emerged from the club. To do that, Moe would have to run the gauntlet of the tough hackers. It might mean trouble. But it was a chance he had to take.

Moe was the first to see Betty appear. He shot his cab diagonally across the street. He was helping the blonde into his taxi before the other hackers realized he was on the spot.

Betty herself helped him. She leaped into the cab with a lithe spring. She seemed to be in a hurry.

"Riverside and Eighty-sixth," she said quickly. "Make it fast! I've got a date, and I'm late."

Moe made his getaway so swiftly, that he was racing down the street with his fare before the drivers in the cab line could swing into action and rough him up.

The presence of a cop on the corner helped, too.

Moe turned west before he got to Eighty-sixth Street. Deliberately, he drove through a street that he knew was a dead end. When it reached Riverside Drive, the street plunged beneath the Drive in a tunnel and ended on a dock at the edge of the Hudson River.

Moe faked dismay when he reached the tunnel. With an apology to Betty, he backed toward the gloomy curb under the Drive, pretending to turn around.

Cliff Marsland was waiting there in the darkness. He flung open the cab door and slammed himself inside.

A gun froze the blonde and kept her from screaming.

"O.K." Marsland grunted. "Let's go!"

"Nice," Moe Shrevnitz grinned over his shoulder.

BUT it wasn't as nice as Moe imagined. From the shadow of the stone embankment that supported the tunnel, a figure dropped to the sidewalk. He reached the taxi before Moe had a chance to meet this unexpected attack.

There was a gun in the man's hand. He clubbed Moe in the jaw and dropped him in a dazed huddle over the wheel.

Betty was ready for this hasty rescue. She leaped swiftly. Her teeth met Marsland's extended wrist. Cliff uttered an oath of pain. As he recoiled with a bleeding wrist, the gun was knocked out of his hand.

The blonde straightened, with her dress hauled above her knees. She, too, had drawn a gun. It was a garter weapon, of small caliber. But it looked as if it could do deadly damage at close range.

Marsland and Moe Shrevnitz were dazed by the swift manner in which the tables had been turned. The surprise was on the side of the crooks. They had expected Moe to pull a kidnap stunt. They were all prepared.

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Bob Forman was crouched on the front seat. His gun was pressed against Moe's ribs. On the back seat, Forman's wife held Cliff Marsland helpless.

The pick-up of Betty had turned into a double kidnapping of The Shadow's agents!

"Let's go!" Betty snarled.

"Wait!" Forman's gun menaced Moe, and he said, "Sit quiet until that truck passes. Then drive us up the hill back to Broadway. I'll tell you where to turn."

The truck had driven off the dock at the foot of the dead-end street. It rumbled through the tunnel under the Drive. The driver paid no attention to the stalled taxi. He seemed to be having trouble with his heavy truck. It skidded on the greasy pavement.

The skid sent it slewing across the street. It banged into the rear of the taxi.

There was a jouncing impact that sent the four taxi passengers into a huddled heap. Marsland and Betty plunged head over heels on the floor. The wheel braced Moe. But Bob Foreman couldn't stop himself from cracking his forehead on the windshield.

Marsland had little trouble getting the best of Betty. A quick grab, and he wrenched the garter gun from her.

Moe, however, had his hands full with Bob Forman. Moe was getting the worst of it, when the driver of the truck took a hand in the grimly silent battle under the gloom of the Riverside Drive tunnel.

He clubbed Forman on the skull with a wrench. One blow was all that was necessary.

The truck driver was dressed in greasy overalls. A cap was pulled low on his forehead. He looked like a typical driver for a big hauling company. But when he spoke, it was with the calm, incisive voice of The Shadow!

The Shadow issued a curt order.

Moe helped Marsland to transfer Forman and his wife to the interior of the truck. Marsland got inside with the prisoners, to ride with them as an armed guard.

The Shadow closed and locked the big doors in the rear of the truck.

In a moment, Moe was back in the taxicab. The collision hadn't hurt it much. Moe drove the taxi up the hill to Broadway. He turned the corner and headed south. His goal was a certain garage farther downtown. The Shadow had ordered him to get there in a hurry and wait for further instructions.

The Shadow drove the closed truck up the hill. He had accomplished his purpose.

Betty and Bob Forman were prisoners in the truck, closely guarded by Cliff Marsland. They were the only two persons on earth who knew the plans, or the possible identity, of a super-criminal who called himself Mr. Remorse.

The Shadow intended to force them to confess. His goal was a black-draped chamber where scientific devices took the place of the usual brutal torture methods. No crook who entered that secret examination chamber ever walked out without confessing everything he knew.

Sibilant laughter welled from the lips of the overall-clad driver of the truck.

CHAPTER XI. DEATH BY SOUND

AS the truck rumbled up the hill from the Riverside Drive tunnel to Broadway, it was under close observation.

The man who watched it was standing on the corner. He seemed to be giving all his attention to a racing edition of a tabloid newspaper. Actually, he was staring over the upper edge of his newspaper at the advancing truck.

A cigarette hung loosely from the corner of his lips. His eyes were narrow and watery. He had a thin, swarthy face. There was a red birthmark under his ear, about the size of a half dollar.

The moment he was certain that the truck was about to turn into Broadway, he lost all interest in his newspaper. Walking to the curb, he dropped the paper into the gutter and watched it float away on a stream of water that was racing along the curb toward a sewer opening.

The water came from a hose. A street cleaner was flushing the street. He saw the discarded tabloid float away. It was a signal from one crook to another. The street cleaner began to move farther out into the street, dragging the thick hose after him.

He hadn't been a street cleaner very long. His white uniform and the rubber boots were borrowed. The real street cleaner had been lured to the rear of a dark tenement hallway. He was lying doubled up under a flight of rear stairs, with a piece of old carpet thrown over him.

The Shadow knew nothing of these sinister preparations.

When the covered truck swung around the corner, the street cleaner had dragged his spouting hose well into the street. His back was toward the advancing truck. He pretended not to see it.

It was only when The Shadow slammed on the brakes and startled pedestrians yelled a warning, that the fake street cleaner registered surprise and fright. He leaped backward, almost falling on the wet, slippery pavement.

His stumble threw up his hands awkwardly. The gesture lifted the nozzle of the hose. Water splashed against the windshield of the truck.

The Shadow thought the mishap was an accident. So did the pedestrians. A few of them laughed. But The Shadow's face darkened with assumed rage. Not for an instant did he forget his role of a tough truck driver.

He began to curse at the clumsy street cleaner.

"Why the hell don't you watch traffic! Wanna get yourself killed?"

"Why don'tcha slow up?" the street clearer bawled. "You seen the pavement was wet! I got a good mind to climb up on that seat and pop you on the nose!"

The Shadow turned his attention to the windshield. The hose had deluged the glass and made vision difficult. He wiped it off with a rag. He paid no attention to the pugnacious street cleaner who was now daring him to get down and fight.

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Under cover of all this argument, the man with the birthmark sidled out into the street. He was an old hand at a stunt like this. There was a license plate under his coat. It was a plate that belonged to a truck which had been stolen a week earlier.

He paused briefly behind the rear of the covered truck. Then he continued across the street to the opposite sidewalk. No one noticed him. The closed rear door prevented Cliff Marsland from suspecting what was going on.

Besides, Cliff had his hands full trying to keep the captured Betty and Bob Forman from yelling and tipping off street spectators that something was wrong.

The street cleaner yelled a final insult, as The Shadow finished wiping off his windshield. Then he skipped nimbly back to the curb to avoid being hit by the suddenly starting truck.

The Shadow crowded on speed. Time was important. This brief, unpleasant incident had delayed him more than he liked.

He still had no inkling of trouble.

MEANWHILE, the crook with the birthmark was acting fast. Having crossed the street, he hurried to a nearby candy store. There were private booths at the rear. But he didn't use any of them. He asked for a bar of candy, and the proprietor of the store gave it to him.

With the candy bar was a key. The crook palmed it and hurried to a door at the back.

Inside was a small room with a phone. The wire that led from that phone was a tap from an underground cable. It would be impossible to trace any call made on this bootleg instrument. In case phone company employees made a search, the tap could be easily severed.

The crook called the local police precinct. Knowing its number was only part of his preparation. He also knew the name of the uniformed cop on the beat. When he spoke, he faked an imitation of the cop's voice.

He reported that he had just spotted a stolen truck. The truck had gone racing down upper Broadway at a fast clip. He had been unable to pursue, he declared, because the fleeing truck had veered and grazed him. His leg was sprained.

Having spoken his lying little piece, the man with the birthmark hung up with a sly grin. The proprietor of the candy shop entered the back room with another man. This fellow was a wire expert.

He lifted a trapdoor and went down into the cellar. His job was to get rid of the phone tap, until well-organized criminals needed it again.

By this time, The Shadow was a dozen blocks away, driving as fast as he dared without attracting attention.

He got attention, anyway. Behind him, he heard a blood-curdling shriek. It was a police siren. Turning his head, The Shadow saw the reflection of a radio car in the rear-mirror.

The car seemed to be racing after the truck. But even with the evidence of his own eyes to warn him, The Shadow found it difficult to believe that police were after him. A glance at his speedometer showed that his speed was within the legal limit.

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In the next moment, he knew he had trouble on his hands.

The police car sped alongside the truck. A cop glared at The Shadow. A grim voice roared for him to pull over to the curb. A gun in the hand of the cop emphasized the order.

The Shadow had only an instant to think. But thoughts crowded his brain with the speed of lightning. He knew that if he obeyed the law, his kidnapping of the Formans would be revealed. Cliff Marsland would be found inside the covered truck, guarding the kidnapped crooks with a gun. Worst of all, the driver of the truck would be revealed as The Shadow!

As The Shadow slowed in apparent obedience to the arrest, the police car sped ahead. It headed in for the curb with a squeal of brakes.

The Shadow swung his wheel. At the same instant, he stepped hard on the gas. The truck smashed into the police car with a tremendous crash.

It struck the small radio car in the middle, shoved it up on the sidewalk and pushed it headlong into a fruit and vegetable stand.

Frightened cops were deluged with a landslide of oranges, potatoes and onions. Their car was a dented wreck. But they were more scared than hurt.

The Shadow didn't wait to see all this. Only one of his broad-tired wheels had mounted the sidewalk. He bounced the truck back into the gutter. Then he crowded on speed. This time, he wasn't fooling. He streaked down Broadway with all the power he could cram into the motor.

He knew that the radio cops were stymied. But it wouldn't take them long to flash the alarm to headquarters. Cars from every neighborhood precinct would head for upper Broadway to stop the fugitive truck. Eyewitnesses would report the route The Shadow had taken.

But The Shadow still had a trick up his sleeve!

He watched the blurred street signs flash past. Presently, he turned west. He headed for a garage where the knew he could get instant cooperation. This garage was owned by The Shadow. It was one of several spots strategically placed around Manhattan, in case of an emergency like the present one.

It was the garage where Moe Shrevnitz had been ordered to wait for further instructions, after The Shadow had dismissed him.

THE garage doors were wide open when The Shadow drove in. A mechanic in a greasy jumper looked startled. So did the manager, who raced quickly out of his cubbyhole at the roar of the truck's arrival.

Quickly, The Shadow leaped down from the seat. No one recognized him. The mechanic picked up a tire iron and lifted it menacingly. But a quick glance at the extended hand of the truck driver made his jaw gape in amazement.

On a finger of the hand blazed a fire opal of rare and flashing beauty.

It was the girasol of The Shadow!

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No words were spoken. None were needed. In a thrice, the front door of the garage slammed shut. The Shadow saw Moe Shrevnitz's taxicab standing by. He gestured to Moe, and then raced around to the rear of the truck.

A single glance explained the mystery of the police pursuit. The Shadow saw the stolen license plate hanging over the legitimate license that belonged to the truck. Too late, The Shadow realized the purpose of the street cleaner incident.

But The Shadow laughed. There was defiance in that sibilant mirth. He unlocked the rear doors of the truck.

Moe Shrevnitz and Cliff Marsland forced the two prisoners to make a quick transfer. They were hustled to Moe's taxi and forced to lie flat on the floor in the rear.

The Shadow made a quick change. His greasy overalls were removed. He became the dapper figure of Lamont Cranston. He sat on the rear seat of the taxi. A well-shielded gun kept Bob Forman and his blond wife quiet in their cramped position on the floor. A lap robe was tossed over them.

Moe climbed behind the taxi's wheel.

Cliff Marsland was already on the truck. The stolen license plate had been removed. Cliff drove the heavy truck to the street end turned westward. He went a half block, then parked at the curb. He walked quietly back to the garage and disappeared through a rear exit.

Meanwhile, Moe's cab was heading toward Broadway. As it reached the corner, a siren-shrieking police car passed them, racing toward the river. There was nothing about the dapper figure of Lamont Cranston to change their purpose. He seemed to be alone on the rear seat of the cab.

The police car halted alongside the truck which Marsland had parked. Grim hands wrenched open the heavy rear doors. They found nothing. The truck was empty.

A glance at the license plate made police faces frown with disgust. It wasn't the stolen number which had been telephoned in. The truck looked like the fugitive vehicle. There was a dent near the front fender. But there were other dents, too.

The discomfited cops decided they had lost the stolen truck. Inquiries at the garage increased their suspicion that they had been tricked somewhere en route. The garage manager said that the empty truck had been parked for more than an hour. He didn't know where the driver was. Probably at a bar and grill somewhere in the neighborhood.

Cops headed the radio car back to Broadway. It made quite a noise. But Lamont Cranston was too far away by now to hear it.

BOB FORMAN still had his gun when he recovered consciousness. His blond wife lay beside him on a jet-black floor. The floor wasn't the only part of this strange chamber that was black.

Walls and ceiling were of the same hue. The walls were steel, as Forman discovered when he pushed heavy drapes aside and touched a hard, cold surface.

There was no sign of a door or a window. The only light came from what looked like a large silver ball suspended from the black ceiling on a silver chain. The light within the ball was pale and milky. But suddenly it glowed with a clearer hue.

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Betty screamed as she saw a face mirrored within the ball. Her husband uttered a terrified cry.

The face was that of the dead Richard Woodstock – the identity Flasher Brown had assumed.

"Why did you kill me?" Woodstock moaned.

Forman's gun swung upward. He fired convulsively at the crystal, until his gun was empty. The face of Flasher Brown vanished. But no apparent harm had come to the silver ball. Bullets had whizzed straight through it without leaving a sign.

The empty gun fell from Forman's shaking hand. His morale wasn't helped by the shrieking of the terrified Betty. She was cowering at her husband's side, her cheeks the color of paper.

Another face appeared suddenly in the translucent depths of the suspended crystal. Burning eyes stared without expression at the captured crooks. It was the face of The Shadow!

"Confess!" he intoned.

Betty was too frightened to talk. Her husband wouldn't.

"Why did you kill Flasher Brown?"

"Go to hell!"

"Who is Mr. Remorse?" The Shadow continued, relentlessly.

"You can't hurt me. Mr. Remorse will kill you if you try. I'm telling nothing, damn you!"

"No?"

Sibilant laughter echoed. The stern face in the crystal ball vanished suddenly. So did the light.

When light returned, it was a mere pin point of yellow. The yellow began to spread and to grow brighter. It was soon dazzling – and it got worse! It became like the sun at midday. It penetrated the tightly closed eyelids of Bob Forman and his wife. They grovelled on the floor.

The Shadow, hidden in a control chamber outside the sealed room, could hear hysterical sobs when he turned off the unbearable light.

"Confess!" came his inexorable voice.

But neither Forman nor his wife would open their trembling mouths. Their fear of Mr. Remorse was greater than their fear of The Shadow!

Again, the scientific torture of The Shadow began. This time, it was sound instead of light.

The sound began like the barely audible chirp of a cricket. It was pleasant to listen to. But it soon changed its pitch. It became louder, stronger. Bit by bit it climbed through the scale of sound. It was worse than any siren. Its noise was like a sharp fingernail tearing at the delicate membrane of the eardrum.

"Confess!"

THE DEVIL'S PAYMASTER

The shrill noise had reached a superhuman pitch that was almost silence. Soon, it became inaudible. The voice of The Shadow was the only sound.

Staring at the two prisoners inside the sealed room, he felt a twinge of uneasiness. He had used this scientific device many times. It had never before reached the pitch of absolute silence. The Shadow knew it was still working, because the control lever was under his hand.

Besides, he could tell from the frozen agony in the eyes of Bob and Betty Forman that noise too unbearable for human beings to withstand was still tearing silently at their brains through their bombarded eardrums.

The Shadow tried to move the lever to shut it off. He couldn't! To his stupefaction, the lever was jammed!

IN the torture chamber, Betty Forman pitched forward on her face. Rigid hands fell away from her ears. She made no effort to jam them back.

Her husband was tottering, his eyes glazed with madness.

The Shadow sprang away from the jammed mechanism of his electrical sound amplifier. He pushed a button. A steel door opened. The Shadow knew that he was risking his life, but he flung himself headlong through the opening.

He could hear nothing. But a queer agony seemed to run through him from head to heels. Sound that had atom-smashing power in its electrically shortened waves was tearing like a thunderbolt through the brain and heart of The Shadow!

He dragged Bob Forman out of the sealed chamber. It took steel nerve to go back and rescue the blonde; but The Shadow gritted his teeth and made a swift second entry. He rescued the woman, then he slammed the steel panel and collapsed for a moment.

It was like coming out of an air-pressure tunnel into the normal air of everyday life.

A quick glance at his prisoners showed that both were unconscious, but alive. Blood oozed from Forman's ears. The blonde's open mouth was crimson from internal bleeding. But The Shadow was certain they would live.

He put a hasty phone call through to Burbank, gave him rapid instructions. Soon, Dr. Rupert Sayre, a friend who had given medical aid to The Shadow on many occasions but who wasn't certain of his identity, would appear here.

Sayre would nurse Forman and his wife back to health. When they were well again, The Shadow would take them under his wing. Such was his personality, his will to overcome evil, that Forman and his wife would never again have tendencies toward wrong-doing.

The sound mechanism was still jammed. The Shadow examined it. It had been tampered with. A wire that had been cleverly concealed led to another piece of apparatus that was connected up with the sound device. The Shadow had no notion who had placed it there. But he knew its murderous purpose.

It had been put there to trick The Shadow into killing two criminal witnesses. Fortunately, The Shadow had saved them in time.

THE DEVIL'S PAYMASTER

The Shadow left the control room. He used a secret elevator that brought him down a narrow shaft to a private garage. From the garage, he used a wall passage that took him into a brownstone house.

Dust lay thick on the bare floor. Outside the house was a creaky "TO LET" sign. The sign had been there for a long time. Cranston's real estate agency had made the price of the house purposely high.

When Cranston emerged, after carefully locking the front door, he saw a janitor across the street. The man was sweeping the sidewalk.

Cranston went across and spoke to the man. He pretended to be disgusted. He said that he had made an appointment to meet a client who wanted to rent his house. The client had not shown up. Had the janitor seen anyone stop to look at the house across the way?

The janitor had. A man had arrived a couple hours ago. The janitor was sure he was the client, because he had a key. He had let himself into the brownstone house and was there a half hour or so. Then he drove away.

When the janitor described the visitor, The Shadow's body tensed.

The man who had entered the brownstone house was Benedict Stark, the Prince of Evil!

This furtive visit to the brownstone house was the first public appearance of Benedict Stark since Mr. Remorse had startled New York with this queer telephone offer of restitution. Was Stark actually Mr. Remorse?

The fact that Betty and Bob Forman could not be questioned for some time, left The Shadow again facing a blank wall.

With a grim, unsmiling face, Lamont Cranston got into his car. He had a queer feeling that invisible forces of evil were swirling around him.

He drove straight to the Cobalt Club.

CHAPTER XII. SIX MUST DIE

WHEN Cranston arrived at the Cobalt Club, his hunch that a master criminal had placed him on the defensive was verified. He knew it when the clerk glanced up from the desk with a respectful smile.

"Sorry to bother you, Mr. Cranston, but I have a letter and a package for you. They came while you were away."

The envelope was a plain one. The sender's name was not in the corner. The package was a paper-wrapped parcel that had come via express. It, too, bore no sender's name.

Cranston placed the letter in his pocket and signed for the parcel. He appeared bored.

He returned to the elevator and ascended to his room. Having locked the door and drawn the shade, he examined the parcel.

Inside it, wrapped in neat bundles of small-denomination bills, was a large sum of cash.

The sum amounted to twenty thousand dollars.

THE DEVIL'S PAYMASTER

A typewritten note was tucked in the bottom packet of bank notes. It read as follows:

Thank you for your courtesy in delivering the first payment of conscience money to Daniel Judson. Enclosed find second payment. Ten thousand is for Mr. Judson. The other ten thousand is to repay you for your trouble, as usual.

MR. REMORSE

Cranston put the money carefully aside. He examined the wrappings of the express package. He had been careful not to deface the label. The label bore no sender's name. But it identified the branch office of the express company where the package had been received.

Cranston called the express office and asked for the manager. A package, he declared, had been sent to him by an old friend whom he hadn't seen in years. He was anxious to get in touch with this friend. But, unfortunately, the gentleman had forgotten to mark the package with a return address.

"Just a moment," the manager replied. "I'll check with our receiving clerk."

The Shadow waited. He had small hope of success, but he could not neglect the smallest chance. After a while the manager returned to the wire. He sounded regretful and puzzled.

"I'm afraid there's some mistake. We have no record that any package for you was received here. Are you sure it was delivered through this branch?"

Cranston pretended to take time out to re-examine the label. Then he became very apologetic.

"I'm afraid I telephoned the wrong branch. I note that the label says the downtown depot. I'm sorry to have taken up your time."

Cranston hung up. The label did not specify the downtown depot. The package had ostensibly come from the office Cranston had just called. It was clear what had happened.

Mr. Remorse had taken shrewd precautions to avoid being traced through the parcel. He, or one of his underlings, had stolen the label from the uptown branch of the express company. He knew that a truck from that office served the district in which the Cobalt Club was located.

All Mr. Remorse had to do was to prepare his package and then loiter the neighborhood of the Cobalt Club until the express truck that served the route appeared. When the driver left the truck to deliver a consignment of goods, Mr. Remorse had tossed his own contraband parcel into the truck.

The label was addressed clearly to Lamont Cranston at the Cobalt Club. The driver's only interest would be to get rid of it and be on his way. The package was untraceable.

The Shadow turned his attention to the letter he had received. He expected it to be another communication from the crafty Mr. Remorse. But he was wrong.

The note was from Benedict Stark!

THE DEVIL'S PAYMASTER

It was a very friendly message:

MY DEAR CRANSTON:

I haven't had the pleasure of seeing you since we met at police headquarters some time ago about that ridiculous business of Mr. Remorse. I assume from the silence in the newspapers that you very properly refused to be a party to a criminal's fake promise to restore stolen money to former victims.

If you are at leisure, I have a very pleasant surprise for you, and some news about butterflies that I know will please you. Will you call at my office as soon as convenient, so that I may explain in greater detail?

BENEDICT STARK

The Shadow had no notion what the reference to butterflies meant. Perhaps the explanation lay in the fact that, among other things, Cranston was a renowned amateur entomologist. The letter seemed to have no connection whatever with the package of twenty thousand dollars.

But The Shadow suspected a cunning link somewhere. He decided to visit Stark at once.

HE drove downtown to the huge skyscraper at the lower tip of Manhattan that housed the far-flung enterprises of this millionaire industrial magnate.

Stark owned railroads, mines and factories in every section of the country. To get into his private office was like getting into the United States mint.

But Cranston's card smoothed the way with remarkable speed. Almost before he knew it, he was conducted by a respectable underling to a magnificent room that overlooked the broad expanse of New York harbor.

Stark looked homely as ever. Every time Cranston met him, he thought of a well-tailored ape. But Stark was proud of his ugliness. He deliberately hired the most handsome men and women assistants he could find, in order to emphasize his what amounted to near physical deformity.

With Cranston, Stark was extremely friendly. He came to the point at once. He invited Cranston to sail with him on his palatial yacht for a pleasure cruise to the West Indies.

Cranston hesitated.

"Why not come?" Stark asked. "I'm inviting some exclusive guests that I'm sure you'll enjoy traveling with. I'm inviting you especially, because I know of your scientific interest in butterflies."

THE DEVIL'S PAYMASTER

He mentioned the name of a small and rarely-visited island in the West Indies.

"I don't need to remind you that the island is noted for rare types of butterflies. There are at least a dozen species that have never been captured and mounted. Wouldn't you like the thrill of snaring them with your own butterfly net?"

Cranston agreed that he would. But he declined the cruise invitation, nevertheless. He declared that certain private business made it necessary for him to remain in New York.

Benedict Stark expressed mild disappointment, but he didn't press his invitation. He turned away to light a cigar. Cranston caught a glimpse of triumph in those slitted eyes before Stark could avert his face.

It proved much. Stark was delighted that Cranston had refused. The yacht invitation had not been made in good faith. All Stark was interested in was a check-up on Cranston's plans for the next few days. His refusal to make a luxurious trip to the West Indies told Stark that Cranston was deep in the criminal riddle of Mr. Remorse!

The second payment of twenty thousand dollars had been received by Cranston. He obviously intended to make a second visit to the walled estate of Daniel Judson.

That was all that the wily Benedict Stark wanted to know.

Cranston went back to the Cobalt Club, with two names glowing like flame in his mind. Benedict Stark – and Mr. Remorse. Were they the same man? Events in the next few hours would decide the answer.

It was time for a blowoff. If Stark were checking up on Cranston's movements, it meant that he was aware at last that Lamont Cranston was The Shadow! More than that. Events had already disclosed the identities of one or two of The Shadow's agents.

Unless The Shadow moved with speed and intelligence, at least two of his loyal assistants might be destroyed!

THE SHADOW'S suspicion of disaster was not strong enough to be an accurate picture of the situation. He underestimated the peril which already faced himself and his organization.

Mr. Remorse was already pulling strings to trap and murder five agents of The Shadow!

Clyde Burke was the first victim in that five-linked chain of treachery. Clyde was still at the Green Tree Inn at Munford, New Jersey. He had remained there in his role as a reporter for the Daily Classic, after the mysterious death of Richard Woodstock.

Little news had developed since the murder. The county detectives were slow and inefficient. The inquest had not yet been held.

Clyde marked time and waited for fresh instructions.

Those instructions had come. The manner of their coming completely deceived Clyde. He took it for granted that The Shadow had decided on a fresh move.

Not for a single instant did he suspect Mr. Remorse.

THE DEVIL'S PAYMASTER

Clyde found a secluded telephone and dialed a secret number. A crisp voice replied:

"Burbank speaking."

To the contact man of The Shadow's organization, Clyde spoke exultantly. He was tired of inaction. The final drive was on – and he was part of it.

"Written instructions of The Shadow received," Clyde said quietly. "Am proceeding according to orders, to the estate of Daniel Judson. Notify Cliff Marsland that he is to join me there at once. Please repeat."

Burbank repeated the fake instructions in his unemotional voice. He hung up, as completely deceived as Clyde Burke.

The second victim was Harry Vincent. Vincent's instructions came to his room at the Hotel Metrolite, where he lived. As in the case of Clyde Burke, they were written. Harry found a note shoved under his door when he returned after a brief absence from the hotel.

The note ordered Vincent to proceed at once to the estate of Daniel Judson. There was no signature. A symbol replaced the name of The Shadow. But it was a powerful symbol. It caused Harry to make swift preparations for a hurried trip to New Jersey. It was an accurate drawing of The Shadow's girasol.

In a few minutes, Harry was in his fast little car, heading uptown for the George Washington Bridge crossing the Hudson.

The third agent of The Shadow to be tricked by the sly Mr. Remorse was Cliff Marsland. Cliff's case was even simpler than the others. Burbank merely carried out the orders that had been phoned to him by Clyde Burke.

Marsland was sitting idly at a table in an underworld dive, when a waiter sidled up close. He dropped a quick whisper in Cliff's ear.

"You're wanted on the phone."

"O.K."

Cliff went back to a telephone in a rear room. He received Burbank's message. Marsland agreed to leave at once and join Clyde Burke at the estate of Daniel Judson.

Marsland swaggered out of the dive. He took a taxi to a nearby garage and picked up his own car. He drove to Times Square and drifted in and out of a couple of midtown gambling joints, just in case anyone might have followed him. Then he headed across town and turned northward.

Cliff had been very neatly hooked by a cunning master criminal!

THE fourth victim was Rutledge Mann. The trickery took place at the office where he posed as an investment broker.

Rutledge Mann had not been there in a long time. He had been severely ill as a result of his kidnapping and torture at the hands of an unknown criminal months before.

THE DEVIL'S PAYMASTER

Mann found evidence that the lock of his office had been tampered with. For an instant, he suspected burglars. Then he saw a tiny "S" traced on the dusty panel of the door, under the lock.

To Mann it was proof that The Shadow himself had visited his office, for some unknown reason.

He entered eagerly. He looked vainly for further clues. He was about to give up, when he uttered a low cry of satisfaction. There was a dusty stock ticker in the corner. It had been disconnected weeks earlier, when Mann had closed his office due to his illness. On the glass top of the ticker was another "S," traced in a layer of dust.

A strip of paper tape still hung from the machine. There was nothing on the tape except printed stock quotations, that were now hopelessly out of date. But when Mann turned the tape over and glanced at its blank side, he found a message written in pencil.

Once more, the magnet of Daniel Judson's estate drew a deluded victim!

Moe Shrevnitz was the last of the five agents to be lured into the closing net. Moe was parked in his usual stand at a crowded curb, when he heard a faint, sibilant laugh.

He had been dozing behind the wheel of his taxi, but he raised his head quickly, scanned the passing crowd of pedestrians. Moe saw no one he knew.

But there was excitement in his blood. He had recognized that ghostly laugh – or he thought he had. Moe guessed that The Shadow had passed swiftly by. He had vanished after warning Moe that something was up!

Moe was wide awake now. He got out of his taxi, after making sure that no note had been dropped on the seat where he had been dozing over the wheel.

There must be some sort of communication for him, Moe reasoned. The Shadow never made an appearance without some purpose behind it. Moe was more puzzled than ever when he saw his left rear tire. It was getting flatter by the minute. Someone had jabbed it with a sharp instrument. Air was oozing out of it. Moe thought that it was a strange way to get him to co-operate. Then, with a shrewd grin, he divined the answer.

He opened his tool box. A note was lying neatly folded on top of a wrench. It ordered Moe Shrevnitz to proceed at once to the estate of Daniel Judson.

Before Moe obeyed, he phoned Burbank and acknowledged the order. Burbank, in turn, called The Shadow's number at the Cobalt Club.

He got no answer.

Had the call gone through, the whole plot would have been instantly laid bare. But Lamont Cranston had left the Cobalt Club two minutes earlier. In his hand was a leather bag that contained ten thousand dollars in cash.

The Shadow departed, secure in the belief that only Daniel Judson and himself were menaced.

The shrewd trickery of Mr. Remorse had been completely successful!

CHAPTER XIII. THE SHADOW'S TWIN

WHEN The Shadow reached the walled estate of Daniel Judson, the hour was quite late. But the gate in the wall was open.

The driveway of the estate was like a winding ribbon of black velvet. A brisk wind had piled the sky with clouds. Most of the stars were blotted out. There was no moon.

The Shadow examined the driveway. He had a small pocket flash, but he was too cautious to use it. He let his sensitive palms act as his eyes. His hands, moving lightly over the gravel of the driveway, detected the faint indentation of tire marks.

Whether the tracks had been made tonight, or earlier, was impossible to say. On his previous visit to the estate, The Shadow had discovered that delivery trucks came and went freely. The tire marks might have no evil significance.

The Shadow drove slowly down the winding road toward the lake. The faint murmur of his motor was covered by the sound of the wind among the trees.

He used one of these leafy coverts to hide his car. He kept close to the shrubbery as he advanced on foot.

He had almost reached the tiny wharf at the edge of the lake, when he heard the throb of a motor. Instantly, he melted backward, became part of the trees. He could see the headlights of a car.

It was a taxicab. A moment later, The Shadow recognized the driver. It was Moe Shrevnitz!

The Shadow had issued no orders for Moe to visit this lonely estate at midnight. Instantly, he suspected treachery. But he didn't show himself. He waited grimly to see what would happen.

When Moe Shrevnitz saw the tiny wharf and the black lake in the glow of his headlights, he stopped his taxi. He shut off the motor and calmly waited. Evidently Moe expected something to happen.

When it did, it was a sound that amazed the listening Shadow. Laughter issued from a dense clump of shrubbery almost directly opposite where Moe sat behind his wheel.

It was a perfect reproduction of the sibilant laughter of The Shadow! Moe's face turned. He stared at the dark bushes that quivered in the lash of the wind. Then he uttered a quick exclamation of satisfaction. He had seen an arm and a hand.

The sleeve of a black robe covered the extended arm. The hand was encased in a black glove. Something white projected from the fingers.

It was a sheet of paper.

Moe took it. Instantly, the hand and arm vanished. There was silence, except for the wind among the dark, interlaced leaves.

Moe struck a match, shielding its light prudently. He read the note. Then he began to move quietly toward the wharf at the lake's edge.

The Shadow saw nothing of this. He was already on the trail of the fake Shadow!

THE DEVIL'S PAYMASTER

Crossing the driveway with noiseless stealth, he entered the shrubbery near the point where the black-gloved hand had projected. He found a sort of arched tunnel under the leaves. There was room enough for a crouched man to move freely.

The path branched presently. The Shadow halted. He struck no light. Sensitive palms again served him as eyes in the darkness. He could feel the soft imprint of feet in the earth along the left fork of this queer tunnel through the underbrush.

Turning left, The Shadow came to an open glade at the edge of the lake. A man standing in this glade would be protected from observation except from across the lake itself.

A man was standing there!

It was a figure dressed in a cunning duplication of The Shadow's costume. The black robe was scarlet-lined. A broad slouch hat shaded forehead and eyes. Hands were still gloved, as Moe had seen them for a brief instant.

Suddenly, the unknown criminal stripped off his gloves. The black robe and hat followed. They were rolled into a neat bundle.

The Shadow's heart thudded as he caught a revealing glimpse of the man's ugly face.

It was Benedict Stark, the Prince of Evil!

STARK was bending close to the ground. Almost at his feet was the smooth outline of a large boulder. Part of the smooth surface of the stone was chipped. Stark manipulated this chipped section.

The boulder lifted without sound. It tipped backward as if on powerful hinges. A circular hole was disclosed underneath.

Stark descended at once. A moment after he vanished into the earth, the tilted boulder returned to its normal position.

There were several chipped places on the stone. The Shadow marked with a bit of chalk the spot Stark had touched. He didn't attempt to raise this camouflaged door to a secret pit in the earth alongside the shore of the lake. A premature pursuit would tip off Benedict Stark that his presence had been discovered.

Besides, it was necessary to protect Moe Shrevnitz. Stark had evidently seized and overpowered Daniel Judson on the island in the center of the lake. He was using the inventor's clever gadgets to trap an agent of The Shadow!

Such was The Shadow's instant deduction. He had no idea yet that a trap had been baited for five of his agents – and for himself, as well!

He intercepted Moe before the taxi driver reached the wharf at the edge of the lake. A light touch in the darkness halted Moe. A warning command was breathed in his ear.

"The note! Repeat contents!"

Moe obeyed. He assumed that The Shadow had returned to change or amplify instructions already handed him. The Shadow listened grimly, as Moe read:

THE DEVIL'S PAYMASTER

"Lift tin flag on wharf mailbox. Answer questions truthfully. Obey Judson's commands."

"Signed, 'The Shadow.'"

The Shadow quickly acquainted Moe with the truth. He ordered him to obey the lying instructions. Then The Shadow was gone.

Moe walked out on the wharf. He located the mailbox and lifted the flag.

Instantly, vivid white light shone down from an overhead pole. It bathed Moe's face and body in revealing brilliance. From the wire-mesh covering of a loud-speaker beneath the light came a stern question:

"Your name?"

"Moe Shrevnitz."

"Your occupation?"

"Taxicab driver."

"Thank you; I am Daniel Judson. I've been expecting you. The Shadow promised me that you would come tonight, to aid in my defense against Mr. Remorse. Kindly step into the boat which you will find at the front of the wharf. It will conduct you across the lake to the island."

Moe had seen no boat. He was amazed to find one floating quietly at the spot indicated. As he stepped into it, the bright light on the wharf went out. Darkness blotted out everything.

The darkness aided The Shadow. He had been floating quietly on the surface of the water beneath the wharf. He slid into the boat like a dripping eel.

The next instant, the wireless-controlled craft sped in a straight line across the lake.

Moe listened to the whisper at his ear. The whisper told him that the voice on the loud-speaker was not Daniel Judson's. It had sounded remarkably like the inventor's. But The Shadow had detected the fraud. The voice was that of Benedict Stark, cunningly disguised.

It was proof that Stark had some secret method of reaching the island from the pit beneath the boulder.

Moe shuddered as the whisper of The Shadow explained uglier things: that there were cobras on the island path to Judson's home. Moe began to sweat. The only cobras he had ever seen before were safely penned up in a zoo – and Moe hadn't liked them much!

He followed The Shadow along the blackness of the island path, after they left the boat. The Shadow walked ahead. He had come prepared; but the slightest mistake in his defense would mean horrible death.

It was The Shadow who heard the faint hissing. His palm pressed against Moe's chest and shoved him backward, as he commanded:

"Light!"

THE DEVIL'S PAYMASTER

The flash in Moe's trembling grasp sent a narrow, white beam along the dark path in front of them. Moe almost dropped the flash when he saw the writhing serpents.

They had been dumped from a tilted glass tank alongside the path. There were nearly a dozen cobras!

HORRIBLE hooded heads lifted from a nauseous tangle on the ground. Sleek coils disengaged themselves. The snakes began to glide with uncanny speed toward the two rigidly staring men.

The Shadow faced them with a queer contraption in his hand. It was a small barrel-shaped object, with a long piston handle. It looked like a larger version of the familiar device used by exterminators to get rid of vermin.

With an expression of loathing, The Shadow drove home the piston.

Greenish-colored spray shot outward in a funnel-like cloud. The spray dissolved instantly. It changed to a smoky substance the moment it was exposed to air. It rolled close to the ground like a green fog.

It enveloped the cobras. The effect it produced was startling. The snakes seemed to go mad with rage. They struck viciously, vainly trying to sink their fangs into the greenish smoke.

The Shadow stood his ground. He pumped the deadly poison as fast as he could shove the piston. He moved only when a sightless serpent struck dangerously close to his legs.

The poison seemed to kill the snakes through their lidless eyes. The eyes turned a strange milky hue. Some of the cobras were already dead. The rest tried to coil into a defensive huddle. It was useless.

Hooded heads drooped. The desperate lashing of the scaly bodies ceased. The Shadow kicked one of the dead ones. It was like kicking a crowbar. The snake rolled over rigidly.

Moe Shrevnitz leaned forward with a gasp of awe. The Shadow held him back out of the radius of the greenish smoke along the path.

It was thinning rapidly. Heavier than air, it clung close to the ground. But The Shadow didn't step forward until the vapor had dissolved. He wanted none of that deadly stuff in his throat or lungs.

He had discarded his poison pump. A single-shot gun replaced it in his hand. The gun had a long, snout-like protuberance at the muzzle: a silencer.

The Shadow advanced cautiously. He had already traversed this island path once before, by daylight, when he had made his first visit to Daniel Judson in the role of Lamont Cranston.

Judson had protected him on that occasion. But Judson was now in the power of Benedict Stark! The Shadow knew what to expect when he came to the end of the path. Just before he reached the clearing where Judson's home was located, a low growl became audible.

An enormous dog was standing at a steel chain. The chain tethered it to the inside of a huge kennel. The dog was trying to spring at the throat of The Shadow.

Its powerful haunches were flattened against the ground. Every time it threw itself forward, the tight chain broke its leap and knocked it sprawling to the path.

THE DEVIL'S PAYMASTER

When The Shadow had first beheld this beast that guarded the clearing, the chain had slowly drawn the dog back into the kennel.

But this time, the reverse happened. The chain suddenly came loose. The dog launched itself through the air at The Shadow!

The Shadow fired. The silenced gun spat a soundless bullet, hit the beast in a vital spot.

When the huge animal's body hit the ground, it was dead.

The Shadow had taken a desperate chance. But his marksmanship hadn't failed him. He gestured for Moe to follow him across the clearing toward the home of Daniel Judson.

The clearing seemed peaceful enough. It was dimly visible in the light of a feathery moon that had emerged from the dark, racing clouds overhead. Flower beds glimmered with a lovely and unearthly beauty. The marble statues of nymphs and mermaids seemed almost alive.

Into the broad basin of a central fountain, foaming water splattered with a sound like silvery music.

However, The Shadow had no time to admire beauty. He gave the fountain and basin scarcely a glance. With Moe Shrevnitz following him, he hurried quietly toward the front door of the Judson mansion.

Because of his haste, The Shadow failed to see something – a thing that watched him from the watery depths of the fountain's basin.

A head lifted for an instant. It was a strange bulbous sort of head, with neither nose nor mouth. It glimmered queerly in the snowy foam of the cascading water from above. It looked like a prehistoric monster from some antediluvian age of the earth.

It vanished downward into the water in the stone basin.

The Shadow, unconscious of this baleful scrutiny from the garden, was already trying the door of Judson's home. Knowing that Benedict Stark was waiting somewhere inside to lure Moe Shrevnitz to death, The Shadow anticipated an easy entrance.

His guess was correct. The front door was unlocked.

LIGHTS burned quietly in the entry and the long hallway beyond. None of the furniture was out of place or disturbed in any way. The house was as peaceful as it had been on the occasion when Lamont Cranston had turned over the first ten-thousand-dollar payment from Mr. Remorse to the puzzled Daniel Judson.

As before, the door to Judson's living room was open.

But the inventor was not seated smilingly in his favorite armchair, as he had been on Cranston's first visit. Judson was on the floor. He was lying in a tight huddle. His bulging eyes were glazed with terror!

Moe Shrevnitz, at a whispered command from The Shadow, sprang forward. He ripped off the gag, slashed away the bonds that had almost paralyzed the captive inventor.

Judson cringed when he beheld the black-robed figure staring at him with burning eyes. Moe calmed him. He explained that The Shadow had come to save Judson from death, not to harm him.

THE DEVIL'S PAYMASTER

Judson's faltering whisper, when he had recovered the ability to speak, explained why he had cringed at the sight of a black-robed intruder. A Shadow had been in his home earlier tonight! He had attacked Judson and tortured him. The Shadow had forced the terrified inventor to explain the protective devices that guarded his island home from criminals or spies.

The real Shadow laughed. He explained that the robed figure who had attacked Judson was a wily criminal. He asked a swift question: Had Judson been forced to confess where his electrical control chamber was hidden?

"Yes," the inventor gasped.

"Where?"

Judson pointed. His finger was directed toward a smooth panel of antique oak near the jut of a stone fireplace.

The fake Shadow had opened the panel after learning how it was operated. He had vanished through the passage that led to the control chamber. Judson described how the panel was manipulated to make it slide upward into a groove near the ceiling.

Tiptoeing forward, The Shadow followed Judson's directions. Nothing happened. The oaken panel remained immovable.

With a gasp, Judson himself tried to release the mechanism. He was no more successful than The Shadow. Benedict Stark had jammed the mechanism from the other side.

The Shadow spoke a quick word to Moe Shrevnitz. He ordered Moe to remain in the living room and guard Judson from further attack.

Then, noiselessly, The Shadow raced down the hallway of the house, to the front door. He had not forgotten the boulder that guarded the pit at the opposite side of the lake. Stark had used that pit to reach some passage that enabled him to cross the lake.

The Shadow had been balked in a frontal attack on Stark. He now intended to try a flank move!

He raced down the path to the island wharf, where the wireless-controlled boat was moored.

CHAPTER XIV. WATER PERIL

WHEN The Shadow reached the end of the path, he hurried to the edge of the tiny wharf, stared anxiously at the black water. To his relief, the strange boat that had carried him and Moe across the lake was still there.

The Shadow knew that this unusual craft was electrically controlled by short-wave radio impulses. But was that remote control automatic, or human? The Shadow suspected it was both.

He had seen the boat glide out into view from beneath the wharf on the other side, after Moe had identified himself to the voice in the loud-speaker. A human brain had done that. But The Shadow believed that the rest of the boat's performance was automatic.

The flooring of the craft was not joined to the sides. It was made of metal. When Moe and The Shadow had boarded the craft, their weight had caused the flooring to sink slightly. It was then that the boat had moved across the lake.

THE DEVIL'S PAYMASTER

The Shadow believed that his weight and Moe's had started the hidden machinery of the craft.

Much depended on the accuracy of The Shadow's reasoning. If Benedict Stark was able to disable the boat by wireless, The Shadow was marooned.

He lowered himself gingerly from the edge of the wharf. The moment his feet touched the boat, he felt the metal flooring give. Instantly, the boat quivered! It headed across the lake.

When he gained the opposite shore, The Shadow did a cunning thing. He searched the edge of the gravel driveway until he found a large-sized stone. He tossed it into the boat.

Acting automatically, the empty boat began a return trip to the island. There was satisfaction in The Shadow's soft laughter. For reasons of his own, he wanted that boat on the island side of the lake.

The Shadow melted into dark underbrush at the point where a gloved hand had handed the deluded Moe Shrevnitz a lying message. He followed the path under the bushes to the spot where Benedict Stark had manipulated the huge stone.

The boulder lifted slowly and tipped backward on camouflaged hinges. A square pit was disclosed. A ladder led downward to the floor of what seemed to be an empty underground room.

Cautiously, The Shadow descended. When he stepped from the ladder, the boulder over his head sank back into place. The Shadow was entombed under the earth! But his laughter indicated grim satisfaction.

The beam of his tiny flash showed a square crack in the wooden floor. Lifting a trapdoor, The Shadow beheld a lower compartment in the pit. This was a water compartment. A narrow scaffolding of planks afforded footing for a human being above the water.

On the wall were two racks. One was empty. But the other provided an answer to the mystery of Benedict Stark's disappearance. It contained a diving helmet, to which was attached a portable oxygen tank for breathing under water.

Underneath the helmet, on a stout hook, was a leather belt which was weighted by lumps of lead sewn into small packets. There was also a waterproof garment bag.

Stark had obviously descended into the water at the bottom of this pit, wearing the missing helmet from the empty rack.

The Shadow stripped. He placed all his garments in the waterproof bag. Then he donned the helmet and the belt with the leaden weights. Descending into the water, he found that he sank easily to the bottom. The portable oxygen tank made breathing simple.

A water-filled tunnel connected the pit with the bottom of the lake. The Shadow began to walk across the lake.

He found that he didn't need a light. A narrow strip of concrete led across the black mud at the bottom. The concrete glowed with a pale greenish light.

Phosphorous paint made this queer highway an easy path to follow. It also kept The Shadow from floundering and slipping on the slimy mud that covered the floor of the lake like sticky glue.

THE DEVIL'S PAYMASTER

PRESENTLY, The Shadow reached a roofed tunnel similar to the one he had left on the opposite shore. He knew he had reached Judson's island.

Judson's queer movements at the time of Cranston's first visit to the island were now explained. Benedict Stark had taken full advantage of the captive inventor's genius!

The Shadow's flash glowed. He needed it now. No human eye could pierce this underwater darkness. Suddenly, the tunnel widened. An iron ladder was disclosed. The Shadow believed that he had reached the end of the strange underwater route.

But he was mistaken.

Climbing the ladder, he found his helmeted head lifting into open air under a milky spray of falling foam. He had emerged in the basin of the fountain that jetted so beautifully into the clearing that surrounded Judson's house.

The Shadow had not seen the glassy, monstrous head that had observed him and Moe Shrevnitz when they had entered Judson's home a few minutes earlier. But he suspected what had happened.

He realized that Benedict Stark could easily have noted his earlier movements from this concealed turret of water. Stark obviously knew by now that The Shadow, as well as Moe Shrevnitz, had arrived at the estate of the captive inventor.

The knowledge of this added grim speed to The Shadow's progress. Descending from the basin of the fountain, he continued onward through the tunnel.

He came soon to a blank wall that barred any farther advance. His flash showed a barrier completely covered with water.

But The Shadow's weighted body did something to the floor. A vertical door lifted. The Shadow passed into an inner chamber. The door closed at once behind him.

This room was an inner lock. A notched wheel showed how the water was pumped out. The Shadow swung the wheel as far as it would turn.

Instantly he could hear a queer bubbling mutter. It was the sound of a hydraulic pump. The water receded. It was pumped back into the lake. A wet floor showed. So did something else.

The Shadow found himself staring at a small door. Original height of the water had concealed the door. The Shadow opened it after a brief struggle with a balky rubber gasket.

He had penetrated to a sub-cellar beneath Judson's house. He knew it when he saw a wet helmet and an empty garment bag. It was here that Benedict Stark had dressed after his sly crossing beneath the lake.

The Shadow donned his dry clothing from the rubber garment bag he had carried slung over his shoulder. He made sure that his twin automatics were in excellent working order. Then he left the chamber.

A murderous eye watched every move The Shadow made!

The eye was above the ceiling. The hole through which it peered downward was so well concealed, that The Shadow had no suspicion he was under the observation of a super-criminal.

THE DEVIL'S PAYMASTER

The man who peered down was Benedict Stark, the Prince of Evil!

Stark was lying flat on his stomach in what looked like a tiny air chamber. There was barely room for Stark in that cramped overhead space. But he didn't mind the discomfort. As soon as The Shadow moved out of sight beneath, Stark rose to his knees.

In front of him was the opening of a passage barely large enough to admit a man. Stark knew all about it. He had crawled through this passage from Judson's electrical control room. He had found out that The Shadow had returned to Judson's island home. A sly chuckle signified Stark's delight.

He wriggled like a snake into the narrow rat hole. An electrically controlled door closed behind him.

MEANWHILE, The Shadow had found himself in the basement game room of Daniel Judson's home.

There were billiard and table-tennis tables, an archery game, a miniature bowling alley set with tiny pins. The Shadow noted every detail. His attention centered on one of the chairs.

This chair was out of place. It had been moved against the wall. There was no apparent reason for that moving. The chair belonged normally with three others at a card table. Who had moved it – and why?

The Shadow discovered the answer when he mounted the chair and made a careful examination of wall and ceiling. He detected a panel that revolved after a spring in the molding was pressed. Beyond the panel was cramped air space. The Shadow crawled into the same spot from which Benedict Stark had watched him a few moments earlier!

There was no sign of Stark. But The Shadow saw the peephole in the floor. Glancing down through it, he could see his discarded helmet and the wet rubber bag. He also saw the closed door of the rat hole through which Stark had crawled out of sight.

A plan presented itself to The Shadow's mind. A flexible length of insulated wire was visible along-side the tight crack of the closed tunnel door. The Shadow divined that this wire was part of the electrical system that controlled the opening and closing of the door.

He cut the wire. By so doing, he effectively sealed up Stark's rear exit. The steel door was too heavy to be lifted by hand. With the wire severed, the lever that controlled the door's lifting would be useless.

The Shadow returned to the game room. He tiptoed through the basement and located a staircase. In a moment, he was on the ground floor of the inventor's island mansion.

He raced toward the living room to notify Judson and Moe Shrevnitz what had happened. But when he entered with noiseless stealth, he received an unpleasant surprise.

The room was empty; Moe and Daniel Judson had vanished!

As he stood alone in that empty room, The Shadow had a bitter moment. He had been too fast in his movements and too brief on instructions. He had neglected to warn Moe of the terrific danger he faced.

Moe had been so intent on protecting Judson, that he had neglected to protect himself. He had fallen an easy victim to Benedict Stark!

THE DEVIL'S PAYMASTER

The Shadow could guess what had happened. Stark must have made a stealthy foray from the passage that led to the control room. The panel had been jammed. Moe assumed that no one could attack from that direction. But Stark must have loosened it from the tunnel side.

Silently, The Shadow darted toward the living-room wall. Judson had already explained how the panel worked. The Shadow tried it despairingly.

To his amazement, the mechanism worked! The panel was no longer jammed. Stark, in his eagerness to carry off Moe and Judson, had neglected to block the pursuing Shadow!

The Shadow entered the wall passage. It was a large one, entirely unlike the cramped rat hole that formed Stark's rear exit. There was plenty of room to walk upright.

The passage was pitch-dark, but The Shadow did not light his flash. He preferred to take a chance on the darkness, rather than advertise his presence prematurely.

Inch by inch, The Shadow's feet slid cautiously forward over the unseen floor. He was afraid of a sudden opening, underfoot that might precipitate him headlong to death in some unknown pit.

Suddenly, his outstretched fingers touched something solid in the darkness. It was the smooth panel of a metal door. Was Stark behind that door?

The Shadow had no time to speculate. The moment his fingertips touched the unseen barrier in front of him, an amazing thing happened.

Light blazed with revealing brilliance! It was like the bluish-white glare of a photographer's studio. It bathed The Shadow from head to foot, blinding him with its intensity. At the same instant, a voice shouted a sardonic greeting:

"Welcome to The Shadow!"

Sightlessly, The Shadow flung up his gun. But no chance was given him to press the trigger.

A terrific blow descended on The Shadow's skull. He felt himself falling forward. Weakly, he tried to clutch at the smooth surface of the door. He encountered nothing but empty air.

There wasn't any door. It had opened.

The Shadow crashed at full length. He was badly dazed. He knew vaguely that he was helpless on the floor and that furious hands were dragging him upright. He couldn't resist. He was dragged to a chair. Tight straps were fastened quickly around his arms and legs and across his body.

THE flaming mist cleared slowly from The Shadow's eyes. He was able to see, although the effort to focus was still painful. The brilliance of the light had diminished, however. It was possible to make out the ugly figure of Benedict Stark.

Stark was standing, with a murderous grin, in front of the helpless Shadow.

"I thought you might be bored if you died alone," Stark said mockingly. "So I brought along a few of your friends to keep you company on your trip to hell!"

THE DEVIL'S PAYMASTER

There were five of them, The Shadow realized with horror. He could see the faces of Moe Shrevnitz and Cliff Marsland. Beyond them were Harry Vincent and Clyde Burke. Rutledge Mann, his financial agent, completed the captive group. All were gagged and bound.

In another chair was the fettered figure of Daniel Judson.

Judson was the only captive who was not gagged. The reason for this was obvious the moment Judson realized that The Shadow was staring at him. Judson's mouth opened. Jeering laughter taunted The Shadow.

"You fool!"

Judson's bonds were a fake. They fell away as he stretched his arms. Judson sprang to his feet with a crooked grin that matched Stark's.

"You've been worried about the identity of Mr. Remorse for a long time. You need worry no longer. Mr. Remorse is Benedict Stark!"

The Shadow said nothing.

"Stark suspected The Shadow was Lamont Cranston," Daniel Judson continued vindictively. "So he hired me to help him trap you and every agent we could lay our hands on! The ten thousand dollars "conscience payments" were a device to keep in touch with you and have you constantly in our net. It was a cheap price to pay for the privilege of killing you... Am I right, Mr. Stark?"

"Quite right," Stark growled.

His eyes glared at The Shadow with unholy glee.

"You defeated me on three previous occasions. I decided to go after you, with the aid of Judson. We used Flasher Brown as a lure. Brown was well paid to lie low at the Green Tree Inn and kidnap you along.

"Bob Forman impersonated him. Forman killed Mike Largo and Flasher Brown to shut their mouths. He also pretended to try to kidnap my friend Judson, in order to fool you into believing that Judson was an innocent victim."

The crooked inventor chimed in viciously.

"Forman is dead and can't squeal. So is his blond wife." The Shadow smiled slightly at the statement, for he knew it to be untrue. "All that remains is to finish The Shadow and his five agents! Shall I tell him how the trick is going to be done?"

Stark chuckled. "Do – by all means."

"Lift your head and look at the wall," Judson sneered at The Shadow. "You're a butterfly hunter, Mr. Cranston. You know all about mounting rare insect specimens. We're going to let you find out exactly how a butterfly feels when it's pinned to a specimen card! It's a pretty way to watch men die – because it takes so long!"

"Hoist them up!" Benedict Stark rasped.

CHAPTER XV. DEATH DUEL

JUDSON scuttled across the room like an evil little roach. His goal was a glass door set in the wall. The glass looked thick. Tiny threads of wire ran through it. One glance told The Shadow that it was shatterproof and bulletproof.

A microphone was set in the center of the pane, so that a man inside the control chamber could talk readily to those outside.

Daniel Judson, however, didn't utter a word. He busied himself with a bewildering array of instruments that could be seen through the glass door.

He was careful to leave the glass door slightly ajar. There was a strange looking lock on the door. The Shadow divined that the lock operated automatically when the door was slammed. Judson was cautious, because he didn't want to be sealed in this well-guarded control room.

The Shadow thought of the wire he had severed in the tiny air space above the basement game room. Flame glowed briefly in his eyes. Judson and Stark were unaware of what The Shadow had already done – and the grim reason for his action.

A faint whirring was heard as Judson left the glassed chamber.

"The show is ready to start," he grinned.

The five chairs to which the agents of The Shadow were tied began to creak. The backs of those chairs were lifting upward. The seats and the four legs of each chair remained riveted to the floor. The victims were tied only to the chair backs.

With arms helplessly fettered and legs dangling, The Shadow's five agents were lifted slowly upward along the surface of the wall. They hung there like bugs in a scientist's laboratory.

The Shadow's chair remained motionless. It was turned so that he faced his captive agents. He could see their bulging eyes. Despair made their faces gaunt under the bright light.

"Naturally, we'll kill you last," Stark told The Shadow softly. "It will take probably an hour before your agents die. You'll have the pleasure of watching each of them perish. Then, knowing what's in store for you, you will be better able to enjoy your own torture!"

As Stark spoke, there was a metallic click. Five heavy poles that were fastened horizontally to the ceiling began to hinge downward. They looked like billiard cues. But as The Shadow saw the tapering points, he felt a surge of fear for his agents.

The points were tipped with steel, and were razor-sharp. Each of the poles was a harpoon. The points were intended to press, inch by inch, into the flesh of the victims, until the steel was buried deep in their vitals.

Benedict Stark mounted a chair. He ripped open the shirts of the victims, baring their chests. The steel-tipped harpoons touched naked flesh. The electrically-controlled motion was maddeningly slow. It was like watching the hands of a clock. Yet the spears were moving!

A tiny dimple appeared in the skin of Moe Shrevnitz. The same thing was happening to the others. Sweat dripped from their strained faces.

THE DEVIL'S PAYMASTER

"Blood will not appear for a little while," Stark purred. "First, there will be just a tiny oozing. Later, the flow will increase as the points of the harpoons burrow deep into vital organs. A pretty method of torture, don't you think?"

The Shadow remained silent.

"It's even prettier, when you realize the completeness of our methods. There won't even be a flake of ash to identify any of you, after we finish the disposal of your dead bodies. Why not tell him about it, Judson?"

JUDSON nodded like a wrinkled little monkey. Like Stark, he was enjoying himself immensely. All the fake timidity that had marked his previous role as an innocent inventor had vanished. He uttered a cackling laugh as he saw a trickle of crimson run like a thin scarlet thread down the bared chest of Rutledge Mann.

Judson leered at The Shadow.

"Perhaps you noticed a clock among the other devices within my glass-enclosed control room. The clock is a timing trigger. It is connected with a type of incendiary bomb. The bomb is filled with liquid air, and some other chemicals that are none of your business. In short, a thermite bomb."

He continued with husky triumph.

"The moment the clock releases the trigger, a terrific explosion will occur. By that time, Benedict Stark and myself will have made our departure. The thermite explosion will release heat of terrific energy. In less than ten seconds, the ruins of this detonated house will be fiercely ablaze.

"Nothing on earth can put out that flame! The house will be reduced to ashes. So will your tortured bodies."

"The police will realize it was arson," The Shadow said quietly.

"Oh, no, they won't!" Judson retorted. "I've already prepared my alibi. I've taken the trouble to drop hints in Munford that I was experimenting with a new type of thermite. The police will merely assume that an experiment by an eccentric inventor went wrong... Who will ever bother about a crazy inventor, eh, Stark?"

Benedict Stark chuckled.

"I can assure you that Judson's as crazy as a fox," he said. "He's been my chief assistant for a long time. From now on, we should have an easier time. With The Shadow reduced to ashes and his agents destroyed, I expect Judson and I will be bored with the easiness of future crimes. A great pity!"

Stark laughed wheezingly. Judson kept his eyes on the victims who hung like pinned butterflies on the wall. They were groaning. Their bared torsos were dappled with blood, as the spears bit deeper.

The Shadow twisted in his chair with helpless horror. Actually, his despair was a mask to cover a counterattack. The Shadow's twisting arms were tied tightly to the back of his chair. His purpose was to try to loosen his left wrist sufficiently to gain a scant space for leverage.

He wanted his left sleeve to press with steady force against the hard back of the chair.

The Shadow had known before he entered the walled estate of Daniel Judson that he was dealing with, a super-criminal. He had expected peril, and had come prepared.

THE DEVIL'S PAYMASTER

In a slitted recess on the inside of his sleeve was a tiny glass ball about the size of a grape. It looked like a grape, too. But the purplish fluid that filled that glass ball was a lot more deadly than grape juice. To use it required courage of the highest order. But there was no alternative.

The Shadow had listened quietly to the boastings of Stark and Judson, because he wanted to lull their suspicion of danger.

His seemingly hopeless writhings brought the slitted pocket on the inside of his sleeve squarely against the sharp corner of the chair. The Shadow gritted his teeth. He pressed hard.

He didn't feel the gash from the broken glass when the vial burst. A more deadly pain began to gnaw at his flesh. The purplish fluid was a corrosive acid. Its wet stain was unnoticed on The Shadow's black sleeve. But it was disintegrating the cloth.

It was also rotting the leather straps that fettered, The Shadow's wrist. He could feel the bond giving!

His flesh was being burned to the bone! That was why he had gritted his teeth an instant before he smashed the hidden pellet. His clenched teeth transformed the cry into a faint gasp.

Stark thought it was a gasp of fear. Judson was too busy watching the pinned victims on the wall to think anything.

The strap that had fettered The Shadow's left wrist parted. The agony of the acid burn made his gesture faster than the human eye could follow. In an instant, he had snatched a knife from concealment. He slashed the other strap.

THE SHADOW sprang headlong out of his chair in a diving attack. He chose Judson, who was the nearer.

Judson had only a split second of warning. But he was a man of devilish cunning. A gun whipped from the crooked inventor's pocket. He tried to swing the muzzle upward and fire point-blank into The Shadow's face.

The Shadow's lowered head caught Judson squarely in the stomach. It drove the breath from his lungs. Judson was unable to maintain his balance. He crashed to the floor. The gun dropped from his fingers.

He made a mad clutch to recover the weapon; but The Shadow kicked Judson's hand away and seized the dropped gun.

All this took place so fast, that it seemed part of the instant that The Shadow had used to slash his bonds and rise from the chair.

Benedict Stark was petrified. But not Judson!

The inventor was up from the floor like a writhing snake. One hand grabbed at The Shadow's left wrist, the other clutched the gun. The grip of the inventor tightened on the acid burn. The Shadow's knees wobbled. Agony blurred his eyes.

It was The Shadow's life or Judson's. Stark had recovered from his temporary paralysis. He was plunging across the room to Judson's assistance.

The Shadow fired. The bullet caught Judson squarely in the chest. Pink froth bubbled from torn lungs, as the murderous inventor fell dying to the floor.

THE DEVIL'S PAYMASTER

With a scream, Stark whirled. Like most criminals of mental genius, he was a coward physically. The spectacle of the armed Shadow and the dying Judson turned Benedict Stark into a squeaking rat. And like a rat, he ran for his hole.

In two frenzied leaps, he reached the glass door of the control chamber. He slammed the door shut behind him. There was a small explosive sound, like the pop of a tiny firecracker. It came from the lock of the slammed door. The chamber was now hermetically sealed!

Stark explained this sardonically to The Shadow, a moment later. He had regained his nerve when he saw The Shadow's bullet recoil harmlessly from the thick glass. His voice shrilled through the microphone set in the center of the pane.

"Goodbye! A pleasant trip to hell for you and your friends!

"You can't get in here – and I have a way to get out. I have just set the thermite bomb to explode in three minutes! Three minutes – do you hear that?"

Stark's distorted face faded from behind the glass. He vanished into a small opening at the rear of the sealed control chamber.

The Shadow raced to where his five agents hung helplessly pinned to the wall. Three precious minutes was the margin between life and death. The Shadow forgot his acid-maimed flesh. All he could think of were his loyal agents.

He forced backward the bloody points of the harpoons. One by one, he released his men from their bonds and lowered them to the floor. Nearly two minutes had passed!

The Shadow's clarion shout roused Clyde Burke and the others from their stupor.

"Out! Follow me!"

He darted toward the steel door that barred the way to Daniel Judson's living room. He began to work desperately to force it open.

BENEDICT STARK was moving desperately, too. He was crawling with extraordinary haste down a mole-like passage that led in a slant toward the basement of Judson's house.

This was the narrow rat hole which Stark had used after he had crossed the bottom of the lake to reach the island.

Stark crawled swiftly to the end of the passage. Ahead of him was a small door. Beyond that door was the air space that led to Judson's basement game room. Once there, it would be only a matter of seconds to don the diving helmet and escape via the bottom of the lake.

Stark pulled the lever that operated the door. Nothing happened!

For an instant, he was stunned. He supposed that he had not jerked the control hard enough. But staring closer, he saw something that froze his blood. It was a dangling wire.

Stark pulled the loose end. It slid through the crack in the door and dangled uselessly in his hand. Madness came into Stark's bulging eyes, as he saw that the wire had been cut.

THE DEVIL'S PAYMASTER

He tried to lift the door. In vain! It was too heavy to be budged by hand. Like a maniac, Stark began to beat at the heavy barrier with his fist.

A glance at his watch made him whimper. Two minutes had elapsed. In another sixty seconds the thermite bomb would go off!

Stark was unable to turn around because of the narrowness of the exit tunnel. He backed up as fast as he could, his face horribly contorted. Terror hindered his crab-like progress. He slipped and fell in his mad backward haste.

Daniel Judson was lying dead beyond that tunnel. But Stark had long since forgotten his crooked accomplice. He thought only of himself.

He began to scream.

AT the moment that Benedict Stark found his rear exit blocked by a clipped wire, The Shadow was racing from the doomed house. He was the last to leave.

His five dazed agents stumbled ahead of him. They were faint from loss of blood, but they ran desperately. The Shadow had told them what to expect.

The automatic boat was floating quietly at its mooring alongside the island wharf. The Shadow's foresight in sending it across the lake by tossing a heavy stone on its movable floor plate, was now justified.

His stern voice commanded his agents to jump aboard. The Shadow joined them by a flying leap as the craft suddenly darted away.

It sped straight across the lake. Then, suddenly, the boat stopped dead!

Its stopping was like a signal for the opening of the gates of hell. A gigantic sheet of flame leaped upward from Judson's home on the island. The flame came on the heels of a terrific explosion.

The noise of that crashing roar seemed to wait for an eternity. It blasted the ears of the men in the boat. The concussion knocked them flat.

The boat rocked violently. Water poured over the gunwales. It was The Shadow who first struggled upright. He saved the craft from foundering.

It was still incapable of motion. The blast that had ruined Judson's house had also destroyed the boat's sensitive power apparatus.

Bending, The Shadow cupped his hands and began an awkward attempt to propel the boat. His agents saw his purpose. They flailed at the water, using their arms and hands like oars. The Shadow slipped over the stern and swam behind the sluggish craft, kicking vigorously with his legs.

The disabled craft finally nudged drunkenly against the opposite shore.

The burning mansion of the dead inventor was like an enormous torch in the sky. It lit the surrounding country like a crimson beacon. The Shadow realized that police and firemen from Munford would come racing to the scene in a few minutes. He didn't intend that his agents or himself should be seen.

THE DEVIL'S PAYMASTER

A grim order sent Moe Shrevnitz racing along the driveway to where he had left his taxicab. Moe sprang behind the wheel. The rest of The Shadow's agents leaped helter-skelter into the cab.

Moe's car drove furiously toward the open gates of the ruined estate. He turned left. It took him in a direction away from Munford. In a moment, the roar of Moe's car was a fading echo in the flame-reflecting darkness.

The Shadow remained. He had no wish to accompany his agents. He had saved them from death. Moe knew where to drive and what to do when he got there.

For The Shadow, the rest was silence and invisibility.

He was hidden by underbrush when fire apparatus from Munford raced past him with screaming sirens.

As soon as it faded from sight, The Shadow sprang back to the road. His acid-burned arm was like a torturing flame. But no taint of his agony appeared in the sibilant laugh he uttered.

The Shadow had triumphed over the millionaire genius of crime – Benedict Stark, the Prince of Evil – who called himself Mr. Remorse! He had unmasked and killed the sly Daniel Judson. These were the only two criminals on earth who had discovered the identity of The Shadow and five of his agents.

They had paid for their crimes with their lives. The secret organization of The Shadow, built up over a period of many years, was no longer in danger of exposure.

The black robe of The Shadow merged with the darkness. His work was done. He would remain as invisible as the night, until some fresh assault by criminal overlords brought The Shadow back from nothingness to battle for justice!

THE END