

GARDEN OF DEATH

Maxwell Grant

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GARDEN OF DEATH

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CHAPTER I. THE SILENT MANSION

SERENELY, the Bendleton mansion basked amid the shelter of shade trees that skirted its broad, well-kept lawns. In the thinning light of the setting sun, the house absorbed the laziness of the Indian Summer afternoon, giving the outward impression that all was well within.

Only one pair of eyes in a thousand would have detected menace beneath that tranquil setting. It happened that the thousandth pair were present, to view the deceptive scene.

They were the eyes of The Shadow.

His eyes alone betrayed the identity of the singular visitor who had come to Long Island to visit Richard Bendleton. Burning eyes, whose glow seemed the reflection of the sinking sun that was screened by the high hedge behind the mansion. Except for those eyes, The Shadow's features were calm, composed, even maskish in expression.

Like the mansion itself, The Shadow gave an outward appearance that would have deceived the average

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observer. Outwardly, The Shadow was Lamont Cranston, leisurely New York clubman, human symbol of wealth and indolence. He had come to Long Island in his new limousine, which was piloted by his regular chauffeur.

The limousine, of the convertible type, had its top thrown back so that its passenger could better enjoy the favorable weather. That lowered top also enabled the complacent Mr. Cranston to gain a very complete view of the Bendleton homestead.

To The Shadow, all was sinister.

Singular, that The Shadow, whose adventures had taken him to ghoulish, ruined manors at the dead of stormy nights, should view the serene Bendleton mansion with a sentiment akin to horror; yet, the consideration of one simple fact rendered the entire situation plain.

The Shadow had been in Bendleton's mansion. He knew that the proximity of shading elms and maples produced an early darkness within the house. Always, lights were needed an hour before sunset; not only in the gloomy halls and the deep living room, but in Bendleton's second-floor study, which had a single window fronting toward the east.

There were no lights glimmering from the house, though Bendleton had promised to be at home. Considering the urgency of Cranston's visit, which concerned important financial transactions that Bendleton had not detailed by telephone, the silent house, sunlit without but darkish within, had all the semblance of a morgue.

Cranston was alighting at the front walk which led to the house. Over his arm were black garments that the chauffeur did not see. Quietly, Cranston spoke:

"There may be other visitors, Stanley. It would be better not to block the entrance. Take the car around to the rear lane, and wait there until I summon you."

Stanley glanced back as he drove away. Not seeing Cranston, he supposed that his employer had strolled directly to the front door of the great house. Stanley's guess was wrong. Actually, Lamont Cranston had vanished.

Close to the house, he was sliding into the garments that he carried: a slouch hat and a black cloak. Under the shelter of tree-fringed walls, Cranston obliterated one personality to become another: The Shadow.

There was a side entrance to Bendleton's. It led through a so-called sun porch, which was only sunny in the morning. At present, the inclosed porch was streaked with gloom, through which The Shadow moved like a filtering stretch of blackness.

There were eyes present, sharp enough to discern the motion in the gloom, and their owner cocked his head, to deliver a screechy "Hello!"

The sharp-eyed viewer was a red-and-blue macaw, perched in a large cage above a porch table which bore two potted geraniums, side by side. Like the macaw's plumage, the red flowers caught the trickly sunlight that came diluted through the tree branches outside; but The Shadow remained only a mass of smoky blackness, drifting toward a door that led into the house itself.

Reaching the door, The Shadow found it unlocked. He opened it, stood in the block of gloom that made the doorway.

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IT was wise to pause before crossing that threshold. The whole house, horrendous in its silence, was like a vast infernal machine.

The air was musty, but warm. The Shadow could scent a faint odor resembling almonds, which other persons might have attributed to their imaginations, for its traces faded with the air that whispered in from the screened porch.

Another whisper accompanied the fitful breeze – a grim tone of low, restrained laughter that lacked all mirth. The tone was from The Shadow's hidden lips.

A slight swish of the gloom–shrouded cloak evidenced that he had crossed the fatal threshold. Through the great, somber living room, the master of darkness was picking his way to the hallway beyond.

The thing that lay on the hallway floor looked like a crumpled rug bunched into an awkward pile; but no rug belonged at that spot. There was a twinkle of The Shadow's tiny flashlight as he stooped to inspect the object. It was the dead form of Harvey, Bendleton's butler.

Instead of examining the body further, The Shadow looked elsewhere for the cause of death. Stepping to the rear of the hall, he turned on a table lamp and looked above it, to a gilded cage, much smaller than the one belonging to the macaw on the porch.

The little cage contained a canary, which was lying wilted, on its back, its upraised claws even more pitiful than Harvey's outstretched hands.

Dead butler and dead canary – both indicated the same touch of doom.

Before extinguishing the lamp, The Shadow noted a package that lay on the table. It measured about six inches square, and it was addressed to Bendleton's sister, who lived in Philadelphia. The writing was in a feminine hand, obviously that of Bendleton's daughter, Fay, whose name was in the upper corner. On the package lay twelve cents: two nickels and two pennies, which were to cover postage.

Moving to the stairway, The Shadow paused there. Stabs of sunlight, from a small westerly window, revealed the flat top of the newel post, which had circular streaks upon its oak–stained surface, indicating that this had been the accustomed spot for one of the geranium pots that The Shadow had noticed on the sun porch.

Going up the stairs, The Shadow entered a hallway even gloomier than the one below. His guarded flashlight gleamed again, disclosing a shape that even his keen eyes could not have discerned in the thick darkness of the floor. Another shape that looked like a crumpled rug, but wasn't.

The motionless form was the body of Bendleton's secretary, Jennings.

One hand of this victim was extended and half–closed, as though it had tried to claw the door against which it rested. The door belonged to Bendleton's study.

Either of two actions might have been the secretary's last effort. Jennings could have tried to knock, or he might have sought to grip the doorknob and turn it. Either case was an indication that Bendleton was in the study.

Slowly, The Shadow turned the knob and opened the door inward. A warning sound stirred from the room – a fierce, low hiss amid the darkness. Strained imagination could have identified it as anything from a snake's challenge to the snarl of a trapped assassin; but The Shadow remained unperturbed.

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He knew the hiss for what it was: the sizzle of a radiator. Under thermostatic control, the heat had come up automatically when afternoon brought coolness throughout the stone-walled house.

Turning to blocky darkness that represented Bendleton's desk, The Shadow found another lamp and pressed its switch. He saw what he expected: Bendleton's body, crumpled in its chair, tilted forward partly across the desk.

SLEWED sideways, the third victim's face was uptilted in the lamplight.

Rugged, yet kindly; crowned by a wealth of gray hair, the countenance of Richard Bendleton looked the same in death as it had in life.

Doom had come swiftly, suddenly, for Bendleton was in the midst of work. Stacks of financial reports and correspondence rested on the desk; all relating to the Alliance Drug Corp., the extensive business which Bendleton controlled.

The dead man's arm had bushed a few letters aside and they had fallen to the floor. The reason: Bendleton had been reaching for the telephone when death struck. In fact, the phone was lying off its stand, just away from Bendleton's half-opened hand. His face was resting on that same arm, but turned away from the phone, indicating a sudden fading of his strength.

Whether Bendleton was talking to someone, or just beginning a call, was a question, though The Shadow inclined to the latter theory. For the moment, however, the matter was quite unimportant. The Shadow's attention was riveted by an object on the desk – the first evidence that in any way gave direct trace to the cause of triple doom.

It was a little doll, about five inches high, fixed on a plywood pedestal. To be exact, it was a weather-telling doll, for the pedestal so stated. Moreover, the doll had a skirt, which indicated the weather by its changes of color from blue to pink.

A novelty of the Nineties, such weather dolls had recently been revived; The Shadow had seen them on display in shop windows.

Perhaps the chemically-treated cloth was none too accurate as a weather indicator; but as a barometer of death, it had startling merit on this occasion. The Shadow had seen such dolls in blue and pink, but this one violated all the rules.

The doll's skirt was jet-black!

Carefully lifting the doll, The Shadow examined it closer to the light; then, with a low, cryptic laugh, he carried it from the study, downstairs to where the package lay.

Opening the package, he found what he expected: another weather doll. Fay Bendleton had given one to her father, and was sending the other to her aunt.

But the doll in the package was quite normal. Its skirt was a conventional blue. Tightly boxed, the second doll had escaped the peculiar result which came to the one on Bendleton's desk.

For a few minutes, The Shadow pondered; then he placed the black skirted doll in the package and wrapped it. Sliding the package and its curious evidence beneath his cloak, he carried the normal doll upstairs and stood it on Bendleton's desk.

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Outside, the sun had completely set. Save for that lamp in the study, the house was filled with darkness. Under the lamplight, The Shadow watched a full five minutes. There was no change in the color scheme of the doll that he had substituted. Its skirt remained blue.

Turning out the lamp, The Shadow left the unimpaired doll on the desk. Retaining the package, with its black-skirted evidence, he returned downstairs. He opened the front door, tested it, to find that its automatic latch was set.

Dusk was thick across the front lawn, but birds were chirping busily from high tree branches. Those sounds drowned voices that came from the curb beyond the front walk.

Just as The Shadow caught the human murmurs, someone turned on a searchlight from a car. The brilliant glow raked the walk and found the front door as its target.

In that instant, The Shadow was swinging the door shut as he wheeled back into the gloom of the front hall. He was quick enough to hide himself, but arrivals saw the door slam. There were shouts, echoed from about the house.

New arrivals had snared The Shadow within the silent house of doom!

CHAPTER II. THE VANISHED PROWLER

WITH his slam of the front door, The Shadow blocked the invaders coming from the walk, but from their yells, he knew they'd come smashing through windows to reach him. Whoever the arrivals were, The Shadow couldn't afford to let them grab him, or even get a real impression as to his identity.

His only course was to play the fugitive, so swiftly and effectively that his trappers would be mystified as well as unsuccessful. With that aim in mind, The Shadow cut through darkness for the nearest and most logical outlet: the route through the sun porch.

It was blocked before he reached it. The door came smashing inward, and The Shadow, wheeling back across the living room, was almost spotted by the glare of flashlights. He caught glimpses of uniforms and knew immediately what must have happened.

Two factors, quite unrelated, were responsible for The Shadow's present predicament.

First: the telephone off the hook in Bendleton's study. The central operator must have worried about it and called the police. Second, The Shadow's inspection of the study wasn't quite over when the police arrived. They'd seen the light go off and had promptly surrounded the house, sure that something was amiss.

At this hour, with dusk actually at hand, the gloom of the mansion's interior was noticeable on sight. One light, going off, with none to replace it, smacked of a prowler. Though the police expected to find a burglar, rather than a murderer, they'd class a fugitive as both – should they capture him.

Such wouldn't help The Shadow's own investigation of Bendleton's strange death. But he wasn't planning to be captured. The invading police would have to see him first, and he didn't intend to let them manage even that.

A pair of officers, springing into the living room, saw curtains swishing from the farther doorway, marking the course that The Shadow had taken. Dashing across, they heard the smash of a window and darted in that direction, only to tangle with other officers, coming through the front.

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The Shadow, meanwhile, was hurrying up the front stairs, intending to find a back route down again. Unfortunately, the police recovered from their mix-up in time to turn toward the stairs, themselves. As flashlights swept the steps in an upward bath of light, they threatened to expose The Shadow at the landing, where the stairway turned.

Still desirous of escaping unsighted, The Shadow vaulted the banister and landed squarely in the rear hall, near the table there. It was a clever ruse, a reversal of his course in vertical fashion, rather than in the usual horizontal style.

Of four police heading for the stairway, not one saw The Shadow's sideward leap and the drop that followed it. The clatter of their own feet drowned the light sound with which the cloaked fugitive ended his drop.

Another turn, a short dash, and The Shadow would have either of two routes – through the front door, or the side. Again, luck went against him.

A fifth flashlight gleamed from a door that slashed wide near the rear of the hallway. The Shadow had scarcely time to whisk away before the glow was full upon him. At that, the flashlight's owner, a cop who had entered from the kitchen door, managed to spy a diving, though undistinguishable, shape.

This time, The Shadow's strategy was even more remarkable. Headlong, he gauged the exact position of Harvey's body, which his first pursuers had so far missed. Clearing the butler's dead form, The Shadow continued toward the front door. The cop from the kitchen sped his flashlight in pursuit, but stopped it on Harvey.

THE officer had every reason to suppose that Harvey represented the man who had dived from the glare. With a shout, the lone pursuer reached the dead butler and stooped beside him, yelling that he had made a capture.

Police on the stairway came about, to join him; but there was one who hadn't quite reached the stairs. That fellow turned, his flashlight swinging with him. He caught a passing glimpse of The Shadow, opening the front door.

The Shadow changed his course instantly, for he heard the shout that accompanied the sweep of light. He saw that his discoverer was springing toward him, and he had to settle the flashlight before its blinding eye focused full upon him. The thing that The Shadow used was an old umbrella stand by the front door.

Circular in shape, the umbrella stand formed a solid and fairly heavy cylinder, some four feet high. Dumping the umbrellas and canes from within it, The Shadow sent the cylinder rolling on its side with the sincere urge that a bowler puts behind an anticipated ten-strike.

It took two pins, the cop's legs. Floundering to the floor, the bluecoat lost his flashlight. On hands and knees, he scrambled after it; but by the time he regained his feet, The Shadow was gone.

His route was toward the curtained living room, and The Shadow had a weapon, which he would certainly need, for police revolvers had begun to talk. The Shadow's weapon wasn't a gun; it was one of Bendleton's canes, which he scooped up from the floor.

Meeting an officer shoulder on, in the middle of the hallway, The Shadow side-stepped and caught his adversary's ankle with the cane handle.

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A revolver bullet punched the ceiling as the cop hit the hardwood. The Shadow was gone again, through the curtains, as flashlights burned his way. He yanked a curtain loose and flung it, with a spreading sweep, from the living-room side.

Police blazed shots into the room beyond; then, their flashlights showing no one in sight, they took it that the fugitive must have reached the porch.

Some went across and around the crumpled curtain; others cut out by the front door and reached the screened porch by a route so short and quick that there was no chance for any fugitive to be gone before they arrived. Yet when those two quotas of police met each other with their glaring flashlights, there was blank space in between.

The fugitive, whoever he was, had seemingly vanished in their midst. As if in proof of his invisibility, they heard a sarcastic voice speak a sharp "Hello!"

The sound was at their very shoulders, and they wheeled with guns and flashlights, to see a ruffled macaw that squawked indignantly at receiving the glare of all the flashlights.

Meanwhile, The Shadow was performing the sequel to his remarkable disappearance.

Back in the doorway between living room and hallway, he was rising from beneath the curtain that he had flung. He'd needed a quick hiding place, so he had provided one. That wide fling of the curtain was more than a gesture. With it, The Shadow had made a forward fall to the floor in acrobatic style, landing ahead of the fluttering, spreading curtain.

Under the descending folds, The Shadow had gained absolute concealment. None of the excited police noticed that the rumples of the curtain were a foot or more in height.

Sounds from the porch told The Shadow that his pursuers were engaged in argument, with the macaw acting as referee, judging from the squawks that accompanied the disputing voices.

Picking up Bendleton's cane, The Shadow went out through the kitchen and paused to look toward the porch. The police were coming out with their flashlights, determined to scour the grounds. Slipping them would be easy enough, but their search would soon bring them to the limousine parked in the rear lane.

Stanley wouldn't be gone; in fact, the commotion that occurred was all the more reason why the well-trained chauffeur would wait for Cranston's return. Explanations, however, would be embarrassing for Stanley, should the police find him. Even more so for The Shadow, should he be questioned as Cranston, regarding the prowler at Bendleton's.

The only way for The Shadow to detach himself from all erroneous connection with the deaths of Bendleton and others, was to carry the misguided police on a final false trail.

PICKING out the sweep of a flashlight, The Shadow approached it, then made a quick turn as the beam neared him.

As before, an officer sighted a fleeting figure and shouted for the others to join the chase. The Shadow was gone, with a quick dart behind a clump of shrubbery near the rear of the lawn, but the flashlights showed the bushes waving.

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From the other side, The Shadow was weaving a course to a rear corner of the grounds, shaking the shrubbery as he passed.

Hurrying to cut him off, the pursuers didn't spot the point where he reversed his dash, for The Shadow was completely out of sight. Picking an opening in the hedge, The Shadow eased through, without a trace, and located his pursuers by their voices. They had reached the inner corner of the grounds, near a large apple tree.

On the high branches, The Shadow could see the ruddy fruit against the afterglow of the sky. The apples were ripe, and there were plenty on the lower branches, too.

Taking Bendleton's cane by the ferrule, The Shadow gave it a long, hard fling across the hedge, landing it a dozen feet up in the apple tree.

The police heard the cane clatter in the branches. Apples were still pelting them as they arrived beneath the tree. The cane didn't fall, its hooked handle had caught a branch, where they couldn't see it in the darkness.

They jumped to the logical theory that the fugitive had climbed the tree, only to slip among the branches. They were shouting for him to come down, threatening to shoot him if he didn't.

Heading the other way along the lane, The Shadow reached the limousine, which was barely discernible in the dusk. He was removing his cloak and hat as he silently opened the rear door. Timing his next action to the shouts that he still could distinguish, The Shadow spoke in Cranston's calm-voiced tone:

"Very well, Stanley. You may return to town."

As Stanley pressed the starter, guns began to spout back by the apple tree. The police were carrying out their threat against an imaginary fugitive. Shooting up into the branches, they didn't hear the limousine's starter, nor the smooth purr of the big car's motor.

Headlights, faced the opposite direction, were hidden by the hedge as the limousine rolled away. Finished with their useless fusillade, the searchers came plunging through the hedge a little later; but, by then, the limousine's taillights had vanished in the distance.

There was no mirth, however, in the laugh that throbbed from The Shadow's lips as he rode back to Manhattan in the guise of Cranston. His escape from the police was not an exploit; it was merely a correction of a mistake.

A mistake which had threatened even the meager evidence from which The Shadow, otherwise Lamont Cranston, hoped to solve the murder of his friend, Richard Bendleton!

CHAPTER III. A MATTER OF MURDER

IN the well-equipped laboratory that adjoined his sanctum – a place hidden away in the heart of Manhattan, and known only to The Shadow – The Shadow was making tests with the weather doll that he had brought from Bendleton's. He was working with sooty scrapings from the chemically treated skirt; sooty particles that, so far, hadn't yielded their full secret.

Of one thing, however, The Shadow was certain. Some deadly gas was responsible for the blackness that surfaced the color-changing dye.

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It wasn't The Shadow's usual policy to appropriate evidence which might serve the law. In this case, the situation had been thrust upon him. Planning a quick trip to his lab and back, The Shadow had hoped to replace the weather doll himself, and had left the unchanged substitute to fill in temporarily.

There was a chance – as always – that a murderer might return. If the killer came across a blackened weather doll, he would certainly remove it; hence, it was better, at the time, that The Shadow should have taken it.

All that was changed, of course, by the sudden manner in which arriving police had given The Shadow a surprise work-out. If they'd come a little sooner, The Shadow would have left the weather doll for them.

Still, having taken the evidence, The Shadow didn't exactly regret it. For one thing, he was wondering what verdict would be found in Bendleton's death, without the incriminating evidence of the weather doll.

Quite possibly, the murderer hadn't known that the doll was in Bendleton's study. If so, the deaths of the three men and a canary might have the elements of a so-called "perfect" crime. On that chance, The Shadow decided that the death gas must be of an untraceable type, possibly akin to phosgene.

On the black-tiled laboratory bench stood a glass bell containing the figure of a weather doll, one of several that The Shadow had purchased after reaching town. A hose ran from the bell top, branching to various tanks. The Shadow was experimenting with carbonyl chloride, in combination with hydrogen cyanide, plus gaseous mixtures of differing effects.

He was seeking a combination that would have a deadly effect, along with the faint, almost flowery odor that he had noticed in Bendleton's house. Also, the gas would have to produce a blackness on the weather doll. At last, the reaction came. Dark streaks appeared on the doll's skirt, proving the experiment a success.

The Shadow was detaching the hose, when a buzz came from the sanctum. Entering the curtained room that adjoined his laboratory, The Shadow picked earphones from the wall and spoke to his contact agent, Burbank, who reported that Ralph Weston, the New York police commissioner, was on his way to the Cobalt Club.

Leaving the sanctum, The Shadow entered his limousine, which was waiting on a darkened street. Placing his cloak and hat beneath the rear seat, he told Stanley to take him to the Cobalt Club. Riding as Cranston, The Shadow considered his recent findings.

Bendleton's death was murder, accomplished by a gas that had a remarkable penetrating effect, yet which was unlikely to leave proof of its use. Whether Harvey and Jennings had been intentional victims was another question.

It might be that they were merely unfortunate enough to be on hand when murder enveloped them, along with their employer; just as Bendleton's daughter, Fay, had chanced to be out of the house at the time death struck. As for the motive behind the murder, that was something The Shadow intended to discuss with his friend the police commissioner.

ARRIVING at the Cobalt Club, The Shadow took on Cranston's strolling gait. He ran into Commissioner Weston in the foyer. Weston was a brisk chap, usually the first to open a conversation, but on this occasion, Cranston slipped in a few words first:

"Sorry I can't dine with you, commissioner –"

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"You'll have time later," interrupted Weston. "Right now, I'm starting to investigate a most important case. A serious tragedy, Cranston. I'd like you to come along."

"But I can't," returned Cranston. "I'm trying to tell you that I have a dinner engagement –"

Cranston paused, as Weston showed annoyance at the thought that a trivial dinner engagement could interfere with something really important. Then, in Cranston's easiest style, The Shadow added the words that electrified the commissioner.

"A dinner engagement," he repeated, "with Richard Bendleton, at his home on Long Island."

Grabbing Cranston's arm, the commissioner piloted his friend out to the official car, explaining that their engagement was one and the same. Cranston wouldn't dine with Bendleton, but he was going to the house, just the same, because it was there that the tragedy had happened.

Bendleton was dead, two others with him, under mysterious circumstances. If he had told Cranston anything that might solve the puzzle, the commissioner wanted to hear it.

Since Weston put it that way, The Shadow confined himself to matters that had preceded Bendleton's death.

"Bendleton intended to organize a new company," he told the commissioner. "Not a subsidiary of Alliance Drug Corp., but an independent corporation, to be capitalized at a million dollars."

"Why?" queried Weston. "To compete with himself?"

"Not at all," was Cranston's response. "Bendleton talked of new drugs, that would benefit humanity. Discoveries as remarkable as quinine. He specified one in particular, a preparation to be called Somnotone, entirely harmless, but with sleep-inducing effects that would render it equal to an anesthetic."

Weston gave his friend a sideward look.

"Bendleton expected to make millions out of the drug, I suppose?"

"On the contrary," returned Cranston, "he planned a nonprofit corporation. Otherwise, he would not have expected me to help finance it."

Coming from anyone but Cranston, the commissioner would have considered the statement preposterous. It happened that he knew the altruistic tendencies of his friend. It wouldn't be like Cranston to seek profits from a discovery that would prove a needed boon to the human race.

Evidently, Bendleton was a man with similar ideas, who had found it difficult to interest investors in his humane proposition, until he had contacted Cranston. It seemed that the human race, in general, stood to lose much through Bendleton's death. In his turn, Weston had lost something: namely, the theory that Bendleton had been murdered.

"If no one was going to make anything," began Weston, "there wouldn't have been much point in anyone murdering Bendleton –"

Weston ended his statement abruptly, under Cranston's steady gaze. Perhaps Cranston's eyes caused the commissioner to catch the other side of the picture; if so, Weston didn't realize it. He actually thought he had gleaned an independent idea.

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"All the more reason for murder!" exclaimed Weston. "That's it! Bendleton could have been holding out on people who wanted to clean up with the new discovery. Tell me, Cranston: who invented the Somnotone preparation?"

"I expected to learn that this evening," was the answer. "Bendleton promised to introduce me to the inventor of the compound."

"Probably someone connected with the Alliance Drug Corp."

"I doubt it, commissioner. The company would claim the discovery, if such were the case."

"Then, who –"

"We may find the answer at Bendleton's."

THERE was a double meaning to The Shadow's statement. They might find one answer to Somnotone; another to Bendleton's death.

The full significance was dawning on Weston when the official car pulled up to Bendleton's Long Island mansion, situated within the city limits. Police were on guard outside, and the mansion was well lighted, a striking contrast to The Shadow's earlier visit. However, Weston's hopes went glimmering as soon as he and Cranston entered.

This wasn't to be a murder case, it seemed.

A medical examiner was present, and he already had the answer to triple death. Bendleton's own physician, a Dr. Williams, was also present, and concurred with the official medico. Everything pointed to one of those rare, yet actual, cases wherein the steam radiators had consumed the oxygen supply in an overheated house.

As both physicians pointed out, Bendleton had kept the place as tightly closed as a drum. There had been a week of rather chilly weather, and Bendleton hadn't aired the house because of one mild day. The constant consumption of oxygen could be responsible for the deadly work.

Of course, there would be autopsies on the bodies, but both doctors were convinced that such would support their findings.

When Weston remarked that the house wasn't stuffy, the police surgeon pointed to the windows that invading officers had smashed, claiming that the action had admitted the much-needed air too late. These were regrettable deaths, that had occurred through misadventure. It was Dr. Williams who softened the disaster, when he remarked:

"At least one life was spared. It is fortunate that Bendleton's daughter, Fay, was not here when the tragedy occurred."

"Where is Fay Bendleton?" came Cranston's query. "Odd that she hasn't returned."

"She probably went to get Theophilus Malbray," stated the physician. "He was expected for dinner, also, Mr. Cranston."

The name caught Weston's ear.

"You mean Professor Malbray?" he quizzed. "The famous horticulturist, who lives on the heights above the Hudson?"

Dr. Williams nodded.

"The same," he said. "Since Richard Bendleton is dead, I am no longer breaking a confidence when I tell you that Professor Malbray is the creator of the remarkable new drug that Bendleton hoped to give to the world. Malbray will be grieved, when he arrives and learns of Bendleton's death, but the shock will be much greater to Fay.

"I must insist, commissioner, that the news be broken to her with the utmost care. Her health has been none too good, of late."

Weston was nodding his agreement, when they heard the arrival of a car out front. It could only be Fay Bendleton, with Professor Malbray. The group started toward the door to meet the newcomers, and a silence clung over all.

Amid that silence, The Shadow was considering the coming moments in terms of a more distant future. He was confident that the testimony of Fay Bendleton, as well as that of Professor Malbray, would have an important bearing on this matter which The Shadow's own experiments had proven to be murder!

CHAPTER IV. THE SHADOW'S RETURN

FAY BENDLETON was steeled to the worst, from the moment she entered the house. Commissioner Weston's promise to break the news gently was emptier than he realized.

Sight of police outside the house had alarmed Fay before she stepped from the car. She would have arrived on the run, had not her companion, Professor Malbray, managed to restrain her.

Anxiety only increased the loveliness of Fay Bendleton. She was a frail girl, inclined to paleness, and excitement gave her face a needed color. Her blue eyes were earnest, as she looked from person to person, seeking a word of hope. When Dr. Williams stepped forward, she understood the worst, and took it bravely.

"Yes, Fay," said the physician soberly, "it is your father. He is dead."

Simple and direct, the words were the best way of telling the girl the news that she expected. Fay's eyes went shut; her blond hair tumbled as her head tilted forward. She swayed as Williams and Malbray supported her; then, rallying, she whispered:

"Tell me... all."

Looking at Cranston, Weston caught a slight negative headshake; then, tactfully, the commissioner suggested:

"Later, Miss Bendleton. It would be better if you rested first."

Dr. Williams nodded his appreciation. He helped the girl to a couch, insisting that she lie down. He sent for a glass of water, and gave Fay two pills to swallow. Within a few minutes, the girl was resting comfortably. The doctor approached the others.

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"We must thank Professor Malbray," he undertoned. "Those pills are a moderate dose of Somnotone. You can observe the quieting effect on Miss Bendleton." He turned to Commissioner Weston. "Suppose you take Professor Malbray to the study. I shall remain with the girl."

On the way upstairs, The Shadow had a good chance to observe Professor Theophilus Malbray, a man of whom he had heard much, but had seen nothing. Malbray was known as a habitual recluse, and he looked the part.

He was elderly, with wrinkled features, but his stride was spry and his eyes clear. White hair added to his benign appearance, and his face took on an expression of deep sorrow when he saw the body of his dead friend, Richard Bendleton.

Some persons would have classed Malbray as eccentric; others would have termed his actions to be the marks of genius. From the moment that he finished viewing the body, Malbray seemed to enter an absent-minded world of his own.

Stoop-shouldered, his clothes hanging baggily, he paced across the room, his chin deep in his hand. His lips moved, as though he were talking to himself. When he sat down near the desk, he looked from face to face with a curious, quizzical expression.

Commissioner Weston was explaining all that happened. At moments, Malbray nodded; at other intervals, he seemed not to hear. Though he had been at Bendleton's previously, he viewed the room as though he had never seen it. At times, he glanced at papers lying on the desk; once, he reached for the telephone, only to withdraw his hand, a dour smile on his face.

He saw the weather doll, the one that The Shadow had substituted for the blackened one; picking up the object, Malbray glanced at it curiously and laid it aside.

By then, Weston had finished his harangue without a verbal response from Malbray. A bit irked, the commissioner suddenly demanded:

"Have you been listening, Professor Malbray?"

"Oh, yes," returned Malbray, in a dry tone. "Very intently, commissioner. So you believe that Bendleton's death was accidental?"

"The evidence points that way."

"Evidence! Bah!" A gleam came to Malbray's eyes. "Nothing is accidental, commissioner; this case, least of all. Richard Bendleton was murdered!"

"Murdered? What makes you think so, professor?"

RISING, Malbray gave a wrinkly smile, which showed a bitter shrewdness at the corners of his lips.

"The untimely manner of his death proves it," Malbray asserted. "Bendleton was ready to buy my new drug, Somnotone, because Dr. Williams and others have tested it to their satisfaction. Mind you, he wanted the discovery to benefit mankind. Therefore, he died by the hand of man. It is nature's law, that one should die through the benefits he bestows."

Weston felt that this sort of conversation was carrying them far from the proper track.

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"Be specific, professor," he insisted. "Did Bendleton have any enemies?"

"I have said as much," returned Malbray. "Here!" He picked up a handful of letters from the desk and thrust them in Weston's direction. "Read these. Uncover Bendleton's enemies."

"But we have gone through that correspondence, professor. It contains names, of course, but only in a business way."

"And why else should Bendleton have died?" demanded Malbray. "Except in a business way? He wanted to benefit the world, without profit. In certain circles" – Malbray bobbed his head wisely as he turned to other listeners – "such policy is considered akin to crime."

This might be the kernel of something. Weston tried to pin Malbray down to fact.

"Did other persons seek to buy your new drug, professor?"

"Of course," answered Malbray. "Every large drug company in the country would want it."

"Can you recall any individuals?"

Malbray rubbed his chin; then shook his head. Weston began reading off names mentioned in Bendleton's letters. He came to one: Kirby Eldwald. Malbray brightened suddenly, and nodded.

"I remember Mr. Eldwald," he declared. "He came to my house, like Mr. Bendleton. How long ago" – the keen eyes went shut – "I can't recall. I pay no attention to time, commissioner. What few appointments I make, I forget. As for such instruments as these" – he gestured to the telephone – "I cannot tolerate them. I have none in my own home –"

Weston gestured an impatient interruption; Malbray was off the track again. He had supplied one important point: the fact that Kirby Eldwald wanted to purchase Somnotone. Head of the Apex Drug chain, a huge retailing organization, Eldwald was a business rival of Bendleton.

Making a note of Eldwald's name, Weston was about to question Malbray further, when Dr. Williams arrived to state that Fay Bendleton would like to join them.

The girl's expression was quite composed when she entered the study. Fay, herself, was proof that Malbray's new drug, Somnotone, had merit. She was quite herself, an indication that the medicine had no harmful effects; at the same time, she was able to contain the emotion that had previously seized her. When she viewed her father's body, Fay remained unswayed.

"Poor dad," she said, in a sorrowful tone. Then, turning to Weston, she added: "Dr. Williams tells me that his death was accidental."

The commissioner hesitated; then nodded. Before Weston could speak, Cranston intervened.

"You could help in establishing the fact," he said. "The commissioner would appreciate it, Fay; and I know that it would be as your father would have wanted it."

The girl nodded, her eyes meeting Cranston's in a steady manner. She understood that even the most trivial points might prove of value. With a slight monotone in her voice, she recounted her own experiences during the day.

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SHE had gone in town in the morning and made a few purchases, among them the weather doll, which she mentioned specifically, because it happened to be in sight on Bendleton's desk. She added that she had bought two of them, and left one in a package, addressing it to her aunt in Philadelphia.

Arriving home, Fay had lunched with her father. Later, she recalled, a man had arrived from the electric company, to read the meter. Harvey, the butler, had shown him to the cellar.

At that point, Weston was about to blurt something, when Cranston intervened again.

"By that time, Fay," he queried, "did it impress you that the house was stuffy?"

"Yes, it was," the girl answered. "But dad always kept the place so tightly closed. Really" – she shook her head – "I wouldn't be a good person to judge."

"Why not find the man from the electric company?" Cranston's suggestion was to Weston. "He might be able to give an opinion on the matter. Fay can tell you his name, commissioner."

"But I can't," exclaimed Fay. "He didn't state his name. Electric men never do. He was a new man, and I remember what he looked like. He was rather short and stocky and wore a sweater. His face – well, I'd recognize it if I saw it."

"We'll find the electric man," promised Weston. "Proceed, Miss Bendleton."

"Much later in the afternoon," Fay declared, "dad suggested that I drive over and get Professor Malbray. He's so forgetful, you know" – she gave a slight smile toward Malbray – "that dad was afraid the appointment would slip his mind. So I drove across to Manhattan by way of the Triboro Bridge, to the professor's house."

"To remind me of my engagement," acknowledged Malbray. "One that I would actually have forgotten, if you hadn't come for me."

Fay nodded; then said:

"That's about all, commissioner."

Weston suggested a trip downstairs. When they arrived at the lower hall, Fay glanced toward the table beneath the canary's cage. She turned to the commissioner.

"The package I mentioned," said the girl. "Harvey must have mailed it. I left it on that table, along with the postage money. Harvey always looked there when he took out any mail that dad gave him. Occasionally, Jennings took the mail."

They went out to the screened porch, where the macaw piped its "Hello." Looking toward the cage, Fay saw two flowerpots beneath it.

"I wonder why Harvey brought the geraniums here," she expressed. "One belongs at the bottom of the stairs, and the other in my room." She pondered momentarily, then: "I suppose he decided to water them and thought the porch table was the best place. But he never did it before."

Weston wasn't in a mood to discuss geraniums. He'd learned about all that he considered valuable, what little it was. When Professor Malbray suggested that Fay return to his house, Weston agreed upon it. Fay, herself, brightened at the invitation.

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"It's so pleasant there!" she exclaimed. "So far away – like another world! I can be calm there even though I will be thinking of poor dad."

Fay left with Malbray. They took along the macaw and the geraniums. Commissioner Weston remained to make a routine inspection; after ordering two policemen to stay outside the house, Weston suggested that he and Cranston return to the club.

During the journey, Weston talked in terms of Eldwald, and electric men, but did not mention geraniums.

"JUST one point, Cranston," mused the commissioner. "The matter of the prowler. I'd say he was an ordinary burglar, who was watching the house, hoping for a time when it would be empty. When no lights appeared at dusk, he thought his opportunity had come, so he entered.

"The fellow couldn't have been a murderer, for by that time, Bendleton and the others were dead. In fact, the prowler had no connection with the case, for he touched nothing important, such as Bendleton's papers.

"Finding dead men was enough to scare him away. He might return, though, as soon as the bodies are removed. If he does, my men will snare him."

Cranston had no comment on the matter. It was after he had dined with the commissioner that he gave it his own consideration.

Leaving the Cobalt Club, Cranston entered his limousine and drew out black garments from beneath the rear seat. Still Cranston, he ordered Stanley to take him to Long Island. During that ride, Cranston merged into the shape of The Shadow.

He ordered Stanley to stop some distance from the Bendleton mansion. A gliding figure, The Shadow became a part of darkness itself. With one pause only – and a brief one – he continued on to Bendleton's.

The brief pause was at a mailbox, where The Shadow posted a package that he brought along. It was the one that Fay had addressed to her aunt, but instead of a black-skirted weather doll, it contained one of the new duplicates that The Shadow had purchased after his first trip to Bendleton's.

A soft, whispery laugh stirred the thick darkness. The Shadow was returning to a scene of crime to learn more details that he needed. True, he was also the unknown prowler whose return Weston somewhat anticipated; but that was purely incidental.

The Shadow expected no foolish tangle with blundering police. He intended to accomplish a single mission; that of discovering the actual source of the death that had reached three men in one simultaneous stroke.

CHAPTER V. CREATURES OF NIGHT

IT was very dark in Bendleton's cellar, a fact which pleased The Shadow. There was moonlight outdoors, and since none of the glow filtered indoors, it was safe to assume that a light, inside, would not be noticed by the patrolling police.

The Shadow turned on the light in question. It was close to a large furnace, which occupied a compartment of its own.

Though an oil burner, the furnace was flanked by ancient coalbins, their windows heavily boarded, since they were no longer used. This explained why no light could escape the compartment. But it wasn't wholly

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soundproof. The Shadow could hear the approach of a car out front.

He turned out the light and stole back to the rear of the cellar, stopping at a window that he had used for entry.

Men paced past outside; then halted. The Shadow heard a gruff voice that he recognized. It belonged to Inspector Joe Cardona, a very able police official. Cardona had been out of town that afternoon; otherwise, he would have handled the Bendleton case from the start. Apparently, Joe was on it now, but didn't feel much flattered.

"Never mind about showing me inside," Cardona gruffed to the cops. "In one breath, the commissioner orders me out here; in the next, he tells me he's learned everything he needs. Looks like he only meant me to check up on you fellows.

"I'll stay around a half hour, until you two are relieved. We'll take a look inside, then, because there'll be four of us, instead of two. It will mean a quicker check-up inside. Routine stuff, but the commissioner likes it."

Deciding to profit by the half hour, The Shadow returned to the furnace and again turned on the light. The furnace was a large one, with its main pipe leading backward at an angle. The space was low beneath the pipe, and so dark that The Shadow had to use his flashlight when he crouched within it.

His probe brought immediate results. Against the tinny surface of the pipe, The Shadow found two blobs that looked like solder, spaced six inches apart. Turning the flashlight downward, he discovered tiny dabs of silvery metal on the floor. Removing a glove, The Shadow tested the warmth of the furnace pipe. His laugh was whispered.

These were clues that would ordinarily pass unnoticed. Apparently someone had done a small solder job on the pipe, which was slightly dented. But the dent was recent, otherwise, rust would have shown through the marred paint. The dent, like the solder, could have been applied today. The warmth of the pipe fitted with The Shadow's theory.

Someone – probably the electric man mentioned by Fay – had attached a cylinder made of some low-melting substance directly to the furnace pipe. The thermostat that controlled the heat had done the rest.

As the afternoon cooled, the furnace heat increased, and the pipe did the same. Having reached a required temperature, the heat fused the special gas container and released its deadly load.

Turning the flashlight upward, The Shadow saw the final clue he needed. There was packing around the pipe, where it went up through the cellar ceiling, but some of that packing had been removed so that the gas would filter up through into a space beneath the stairway, where the heater pipe passed.

Once started, the gas must have rapidly permeated the house, which explained why a special combination of gases had been employed. The gas had to be lighter than air, of penetrating quality, and a sort that would not vaporize too swiftly.

The electric man had come around one o'clock, but the exact time of his visit didn't matter. The deadly work would have begun at shortly after four, in any event, because that was when the furnace heat had increased. A half hour more and Bendleton was dead, along with his servants; while The Shadow, arriving some time after five, was fortunately too late to experience ill effects from the dissipating gas.

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Similarly, Fay Bendleton, who left about four o'clock, had gone too soon to become a victim. Her father had suggested the early start, so she could drive to Malbray's before darkness settled, and through that thoughtfulness, Bendleton had saved his daughter's life.

FINISHING his inspection, The Shadow eased out from beneath the pipe on the other side. As he did his shoulder brushed one of the empty coalbins. He paused suddenly, only half in the light, listening intently.

He was sure that he heard a slight stir past the whitewashed boards that marked the side of the bin. Dropping the flashlight beneath his cloak, The Shadow drew an automatic instead.

It would have been easy to deliver a sinister whisper through the cracks of the whitewashed boards and follow with shots through the flimsy barrier, should his challenge be ignored. But The Shadow hadn't forgotten that police were outside and that their number would soon be increased.

Shots were something to be reserved for an emergency that hadn't yet arrived. Apparently, someone was in the coalbin stalking The Shadow, a very foolish policy, considering that stalking was The Shadow's own art.

Reaching out with his free hand, The Shadow tapped the furnace pipe and produced a clinky sound, which indicated that he had moved in that direction. Immediately, he crept noiselessly forward, to the entrance of the bin itself.

His ear close to the boards, The Shadow heard a slight accompanying sound, indicating that his stalker was also on the move. The next thing was to reach the entrance of the bin, round it, and fling a surprise attack while the rival prowler was off guard.

The Shadow did just that, with a gusto calculated to bring swift victory.

He was around the corner of the bin door, swinging his gun hand ahead of him, when a crouched figure lunged upward to meet him. Great brawny hands were lunging for the black-cloaked attacker, coming more swiftly than The Shadow expected, yet definitely too late.

Instead of trying to clamp the thrusting hands, The Shadow slashed his gun between them with a hard, downward stroke. He expected his adversary to dodge, which would have enabled The Shadow to pull the sledging blow and merely stun his foe.

Instead, the lunger thrust his head right into it, taking all the poundage of The Shadow's terrific swing. It was probably as hard a blow as The Shadow had ever delivered, and it violated the cloaked fighter's policy of dealing lightly with an unidentified enemy.

A most unfortunate occurrence, unless this attacker proved to be an actual murderer who deserved the death that such a stroke could give. The Shadow couldn't understand why his opponent hadn't dodged; but that proved only a trivial puzzle. Far more amazing was the fact that the mighty smash didn't stop The Shadow's adversary at all!

Talking the skull-cracking stroke like a mere mosquito bite, the huge lunger clamped a mighty hand on The Shadow's gun, plucked it from the gloved fist that held it and slugged back with a force that made The Shadow's slug resemble a wrist-slap!

Only by a headlong dive did The Shadow escape the smash of death. The gun butt grazed his head, and even that force, less than a glancing blow, sent the cloaked fighter sprawling, groggy.

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As he rolled to the inner corner of the coalbin, bringing up against a stone wall, The Shadow heard the finish of his opponent's stroke. The sledged gun struck the partition of the bin and split the wooden wall apart.

Light flooded in from the cellar. In the midst of the splintered partition, The Shadow saw his snarly opponent. Though half dazed, The Shadow no longer wondered why the gun butt had rated second best when it met with the creature's skull.

The Shadow's adversary wasn't a man; it was an ape, as huge an orangutan as The Shadow had ever seen, in captivity or out!

THE orangutan liked the game of skull slugging. He was trying to detach himself from the wreckage of the partition, so that he could come back and really mash the black-cloaked human who had sagged in the depth of the coalbin.

Groggily, The Shadow was trying to draw another gun with one hand, while he used his other hand to get to his feet. He'd have to be out of the way before the huge ape charged. A few bullets wouldn't stop such an opponent.

Half to his feet, The Shadow slipped. His hand clutched the thing that accounted for his sprawl. It was a large lump of coal, one of a scattered few remaining in the old bin. Ill luck, his hand encountering that lump, while he was trying to shunt himself up from the floor. But The Shadow had a way of changing bad luck to good.

Half slumping against the wall, The Shadow flung the coal lump at the ape. The black rock bounced from the creature's shoulder, bringing a response that amounted to a monkey's guffaw. The big fellow liked this new game of throwing things. He forgot the slugging business and flung the handiest of missiles; the gun that he had borrowed from The Shadow.

It missed The Shadow's shoulder as he rolled to his feet. Scooping up the gun with one hand, The Shadow grabbed coal lumps with the other and flung them, to keep the orangutan busy. In turn, the ape snatched chunks of the broken partition and hurled them back.

From far outdoors came a peculiar sound, the hoot of a great owl. The Shadow heard it, and so did his ape foe. To The Shadow, it could have been an imitation hoot, delivered by a human throat; to the orangutan, it meant a signal that the creature was trained to obey.

The prolonged "Hooooo" was repeated, and before The Shadow could bring his gun to aim, the orangutan turned and bounded off through the cellar.

Rapidly, The Shadow followed. He could hear the hoot repeated; steadily, from the far corner of the grounds. There were shouts outside, several of them indicating that the new detail of two patrolmen had arrived, joining with Cardona and the others. They'd heard the terrific smashes from the cellar and were coming to learn the trouble.

It would be more than trouble if they met the orangutan. Firing after the creature, The Shadow tried to wound it before it could escape but his aim was badly off. Unscathed, the ape went out through the cellar window, and The Shadow followed, still shooting. His daze cleared as he reached the night air.

The owl hoots were coming from the direction of the apple tree, and the ape was making toward the spot. Steadying, The Shadow pulled his trigger, this time with better aim. His shot was spoiled when a blue-clad foeman sprang upon him. With a quick grapple, The Shadow managed to fling the cop aside.

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Cardona and the others didn't hear that scuffle. They were shooting from around the house, their target the orangutan, which they mistook for a human figure, as The Shadow had. The ape was traveling too fast for them, so they ran after him, losing their quarry in the shrubbery near the apple tree.

The Shadow was sure he heard the crackle of the hedge, but Cardona and his men stopped beneath the tree. The cop that The Shadow had tossed was coming up to join them, thinking they were after the fighter who had grappled him. Hoots were still coming from the tree, and Cardona fired two shots into the air as a warning to the accomplice in the branches.

Amid those shots, The Shadow heard the whine of a departing car and knew that men had met the orangutan beyond the hedge, to take the creature away. The situation was almost the duplicate of the one that The Shadow had provided that afternoon. Marauders were gone, with no chance to overtake them, except for the one in the tree.

"COME down, you!" Cardona was addressing the accomplice in the tree. "If you don't, we'll let you have it!"

A derisive hoot was the only answer. Cardona repeated his command, and received another hoot in return.

"All right!" announced the inspector grimly. "We'll bring you down!"

Aiming upward, Cardona and his men aimed for the next hoot they heard. Poor business for the accomplice in the tree, to keep up his fakery after a final warning.

Cardona was right; the shots did bring him down. The hooter descended, along with falling apples, and struck Cardona squarely in the shoulder. Starting back, the inspector stopped short and stared at the bullet-riddled creature.

The victim was the one and only thing that Cardona hadn't expected from the tree. It was a big hoot owl, that had been voicing a genuine call. The fact left Cardona baffled. A human fugitive answering a real owl's call was a puzzle. He might have understood, had he realized that the fugitive was an ape, not a man.

There was one who understood: The Shadow. His laugh, low-whispered, told that he, the master of darkness, was departing from this scene where creatures of the night had played strange parts in an aftermath of crime.

CHAPTER VI. CRIME'S CANDIDATES

KIRBY ELDWALD was a middle-sized man whose shoulders had the shape of a coat hanger, with a squarish face above them. An odd face, Eldwald's, with eyes that were always quizzical, even when his lips were furnishing a pointed statement. Nor did his lips lessen the enigma; instead, they increased it. They had the habit of continually starting a smile that they never finished.

Even Eldwald's one outstanding merit seemed phony. His merit was his frankness, and it didn't seem to fit him. As he sat chatting in Weston's office, Eldwald spoiled the police commissioner's whole morning. Weston had brought him here to be quizzed, and Eldwald was answering questions before they were even asked.

Not for a moment did Eldwald deny that he sought the new drug, Somnotone, and had hoped to outbid Bendleton for it.

"Of course I've been up to Malbray's," Eldwald declared, in a clipped tone that matched the darty maneuvers of his eyes. "He supplied me with some Somnotone pills for physicians to test. I had mine analyzed."

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"Then you know what Somnotone is?"

"Not exactly," returned Eldwald. "You see, Malbray's discovery is really a process that he begins from the ground up. He grafts rare plants from all over the world, gets a combination that no one else can duplicate. He blends the results of such hybrid herbs, and winds up with something you can analyze but can't fully define or produce."

Weston looked across the desk to his friend Cranston, who had been invited specially to hear the quiz. Cranston's thoughts seemed far away, so Weston saw fit to jog him back to the present.

"Listen to this, Cranston!" snapped the commissioner. Then, to Eldwald: "What did the analysis of Somnotone show?"

"It's akin to datura," explained Eldwald. "The jimson weed is a species of datura; both narcotic and poisonous. It has a dash of Indian hemp, too. You know, the plant that produces marijuana. Only, it isn't either of them. It's neither poisonous nor habit-forming.

"Let's put it this way. You're familiar with coffee from which the caffeine has been extracted to render it harmless. Well, Malbray has done the same thing with Somnotone. The stuff ought to knock you out, but it doesn't. My experts can't figure it out. Extracting the harmful elements from datura or marijuana doesn't make sense to them."

Eldwald paused, giving Weston the long-awaited chance to put a question. At that, Eldwald still held the edge, for his statements had built up to a logical query, the very one that Weston therewith made.

"Does it make sense to you, Eldwald?"

"Of course," nodded the square-faced man. "I've been to Malbray's. His whole place is a gigantic greenhouse, filled with rare plants from all over the world. He grows all kinds of flowers, in and out of season, including tropical shrubs you never even read about.

"You've heard of famous plant-grafters like Luther Burbank. Well, you'd think they ended their education in kindergarten, after you've had a look at Malbray's place!"

Eldwald's enthusiasm was contagious. He was certainly giving Malbray a wonderful build-up. Then, in characteristic fashion, Eldwald bluntly and boldly switched the subject.

"So Malbray thinks that someone murdered Bendleton," declared Eldwald tartly. "I suppose he refers to me."

"Malbray mentioned no names –"

"None were necessary," interrupted Eldwald. "However, I wouldn't have murdered Bendleton. Not even to save my own life."

Weston threw a quick glance at Cranston; then turned again to Eldwald, to question briskly:

"Your life was in danger? From whom?"

"From Bendleton," responded Eldwald. "He was a fanatic, with those humane ideas of his. He wanted to ease human suffering; I hoped to profit from it. Don't forget that both Bendleton and myself rate as successful businessmen. He'd suddenly sailed off on a tangent, while I was staying to my orbit."

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WESTON tried to construe the full meaning of Eldwald's remarks. Slowly, the commissioner stated:

"You were both successful businessmen, you and Bendleton. You could both make money without going in for murder."

"Exactly," agreed Eldwald. "But when Bendleton's mind soared beyond the profit motive, he repudiated his entire past. From then on, his actions were unpredictable."

The commissioner gave a short laugh. Turning in his chair, he spoke to The Shadow.

"You heard what I heard, Cranston," declared Weston. "Eldwald is advancing the preposterous notion that Bendleton might have planned to murder him, rather than see Malbray's new drug devoted to profit instead of humanity. You are a man of ideals, Cranston. I shall let you refute Eldwald's claim."

"Tell him what you would do under similar circumstances. Could you, as a humanitarian, possibly consider disposing of a man's life purely because he blocked your plans for easing the sufferings of persons you had never met?"

"Consider yourself in Bendleton's position; assume that Eldwald had beaten you at every turn. Tell Eldwald what you would do about it; whether you would forget him, or murder him."

Cranston's eyes fixed steadily on Eldwald, surveying the covetous eyes and false, smiling lips.

"Had I been Bendleton," Cranston's tone was even, cold in its steadiness, "I could never have forgotten Eldwald. Not unless I murdered him – if you would call it murder, commissioner."

While Weston gaped, Eldwald arose, gave a long, pleased laugh and clapped his hand on Cranston's shoulder. Eldwald's whole manner evidenced appreciation.

"You see, commissioner?" he queried. "Your friend Cranston agrees with me. So have others, when I've put the case the way you two just heard it. Well, commissioner, I must be leaving. Don't worry about murders. With Bendleton gone, there won't be any."

They could hear his laugh from the corridor, as he left. When Eldwald's merriment finally died, Weston turned stormily to Cranston and began a bitter criticism.

"You spoiled everything, Cranston. I was just getting somewhere with Eldwald –"

"You mean he was getting somewhere with you, commissioner," interposed Cranston. "It was time you tried another tack. If you want to build a case against Eldwald, do it indirectly."

"But this was my opportunity to quiz him –"

"You will have another, any time you want. Eldwald is too busy running the Apex Drug chain to leave town in a hurry. Probably too busy, also, to have taken time to murder Bendleton, personally."

The final words brought results: they brought Weston back to the matter of Bendleton's death. First, the commissioner stated that accidental death was still regarded as the cause, though the bodies of all three victims – Bendleton, Harvey and Jennings – had shown a slight lung congestion, under autopsy.

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This was sufficient to delay temporarily the medical examiner's verdict, which explained why Weston had been so anxious to question Eldwald.

There was another phase of the Bendleton case that Weston felt was trivial. It concerned the visitor who had posed as a man from the electric company. The police had learned that the company had not sent anyone to read the meter at Bendleton's. But Weston did not regard the early impostor as a possible hand in murder.

He classed the man as an intended burglar, taking a preliminary look at the premises. At dusk, Weston claimed, the same man had returned, to be driven off by the police.

The commissioner happened to be confusing the earlier visitor with The Shadow, but Cranston did not enlighten him on the mistake. Cranston was more interested in something else the commissioner had to say.

"INSPECTOR CARDONA reported another marauder at midnight," declared Weston, letting his lips form a smile beneath his short-clipped mustache. "He bases his findings on vague sounds in the cellar, and a figure dashing across the lawn.

"We might credit those things, if the inspector had not also supposed that the fugitive had a friend up in the same old apple tree. The accomplice was hooting like an owl, which was quite sensible, because he turned out to be one."

Therewith dismissing matters more important that he recognized, Weston remembered a subject that had gathered in importance since Eldwald's visit.

"Regarding Professor Malbray," declared the commissioner. "He still may furnish a few shreds of information concerning Bendleton. It is also possible that Bendleton's daughter might give us more facts. Certainly, it would be wise to talk to both of them before shelving the case.

"Therefore, I must go to Malbray's, and it would be helpful if you accompanied me, Cranston. The visit would seem less official, and, as a friend of Bendleton's, you could encourage both Malbray and the girl to talk. We can lunch at the club, and go to Malbray's afterward.

"We can stay there until four o'clock, and then go to the Central Park Zoo. We shall meet Inspector Cardona there, after he returns from the Bronx. He's covering the Bronx Zoo first" – Weston's smile broadened – "trying to learn whatever is known about hoot owls."

Weston noticed that Cranston smiled, too, but the commissioner did not catch the significance of the expression. It was actually The Shadow's commendation of Cardona's thoroughness, which Weston regarded as a triviality. Cardona, at least, was still hoping to uncover a murderer's trail.

Anyone, anything, even a hoot owl, was a candidate for crime, in Cardona's estimation. The fact pleased The Shadow, for it paved the way to an inquiry of his own. Commissioner Weston would be doubly irked before this afternoon ended.

Weston would learn that Cardona's interest in owls could be outmatched by Cranston's zest for gathering facts relating to orangutans.

CHAPTER VII. THE HOUSE OF FLOWERS

THE trip to Malbray's was made in Cranston's flashy new limousine, instead of Weston's official car. Near the northwest extremity of Manhattan Island, Stanley squeezed the big car through a narrow gateway and

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drove it up a steep, rocky slope, where trees grew in abundance.

This was one of those inaccessible sectors of Manhattan that still retained its primitive appearance: ground which Weston had never seen, and which Cranston remembered only from a visit several years before.

Both received a surprise, when the car swung out from the trees and stopped at Malbray's mansion.

Weston hadn't expected to see so large a house, while Cranston was intrigued by its altered condition. He remembered an old mansion, with a small greenhouse attached, which he had viewed at a time when Malbray was absent on a tropical tour.

Today, the mansion itself was dwarfed by the great greeneries surrounding it. The place looked like a fair-sized edition of London's once-famous Crystal Palace.

Met by a stolid, short-built servant, the visitors were conducted through the ground floor of the mansion. They could see various doors opening out to the adjoining hothouses.

Some of the greeneries were low-built, containing shrubs and plants; others were quite high, for they held tropical trees: palms, bamboo, and even banyan.

At the rear of the house, the arrivals reached a small conservatory, where Professor Malbray received them.

Shaped like a cubicle, the conservatory was something of a workshop, which was not surprising, since Malbray, a horticulturist, needed surroundings that provided both light and air. The rear windows of the conservatory were open, as was a door, which had steps below.

Those steps led down into the most magnificent flower garden that the visitors had ever seen. The garden, rather than Malbray, captured their full attention.

In a sense, the garden was a patio. Fronted by the conservatory, it had side walls which began as short extensions of the house itself; then became great walls of glass, cut into many panes, in typical greenhouse style.

The rear of the patio was also of glass, and its roof, nearly thirty feet above the ground, was made up of countless panes.

Upright posts and steel cross girders supported the structure. The patio, itself, was about fifty feet in width, and considerably deeper. There was only one way to enter it – by those steps that led down from the conservatory.

True, there was a doorway in the far wall, but it was blocked off by a pool at the rear of the garden. The pool was quite deep, and floating on its surface were many lily pads, with colorful water flowers.

Other species of aquatic plants, such as water hyacinths, were visible, but the beauty of the flowered pool seemed slight, compared to the major portion of the garden that occupied the foreground.

There, in beds and banks, grew flowers of every color, size, and species. The whole setting was a luxuriant, exotic riot wherein growing things outmatched the magnificence of a rainbow. The air was heavy with the scent of mingled fragrance, which came not only from the flowerbeds, but from trees among them. Every tree was of a beautiful flowering variety.

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Vying with cherry blossoms and dogwood were such flowering shrubs as forsythia and mock orange. But the beds of flowers, numbering their varieties by the hundred, rather than in mere dozens, were definitely Malbray's pride.

Seeing the interest of his visitors, he pointed out clusters of roses, which included the climbing variety, stretching over an arched trellis. He indicated groups of lilies, splashed with unusual colors.

"If you are botanically inclined," declared Malbray, "I should be glad to take you on a thorough tour of this garden. But it would require more than a day; it would mean a week, at least."

THERE was something soothing about Malbray's tone. It fitted the lulling fragrance of the garden, and the visitors caught the spell. Commissioner Weston, however, had other matters on his mind, and broached them.

"We'd like to talk to you, professor," said Weston, "and to Miss Bendleton, too."

Malbray nodded.

"She is in the garden," he said. "I shall call her." He stepped to the door of the conservatory, then paused and turned to the short-built servant who had brought the visitors: "You may go, Verber."

As Verber went back into the house, Malbray called for Fay and she appeared through the trellised arch. Sight of Weston rather jarred her, so Cranston stepped forward as the girl arrived.

"Merely a social call, Fay," he said quietly. "Commissioner Weston merely came along because the professor had invited him to see the garden. The commissioner loves flowers, you know."

Weston smirked, to indicate that he loved flowers. Fay settled gratefully into a chair, and sighed as she breathed the fragrance from the garden.

"I've been here for days," she declared. "No – for weeks! Time seems to float by perfectly in this lovely place. Away from the world... so very far away –"

Her blue eyes were dreamy, her pale cheeks showed a flush. It was as if she had imbibed strength from the flowers, to improve her own beauty from its usual waxen state. Then, with a sudden eye sparkle, Fay came from her reverie and spoke to Weston.

"Don't take me too literally, commissioner," she said. "But if you stayed here a while, you would understand that there is much in what I say. In this house, time actually ceases to exist."

"Fay is right," nodded Malbray. "She is one person who sympathizes with my inability to keep appointments."

"The professor mentioned his dislike of telephones," reminded Fay. "He detests clocks just as much. There isn't one in the house; nor a watch, either."

"And no sundials in my garden," added Malbray emphatically. His face denoted pain. "Why people should use the sun, the great giver of life, to mark the passage of precious moments, is something beyond my comprehension."

Fearing that the professor was off on one of his philosophical rambles, Weston intervened with the natural question:

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"Then, how do you tell time, professor?"

"We don't," returned Malbray. "We ignore it. As Fay says, we deny its existence. We recognize day and night, because they are apparent. We never count the weeks, the months, nor even the seasons. I have solved the problem of the seasons" – he gestured toward the garden – "by growing flowers exactly as I choose."

"There is one season here," reminded Fay dreamily. "Springtime! It is always springtime, professor."

Malbray was about to warm up to that theme, when a new interruption came. Someone knocked at the hallway door; recognizing the rap, Malbray arose. They heard him speak to Verber. Returning, Malbray brought a yellow envelope with him and started to open it.

Fay spoke, anxiously:

"A telegram?"

"Nothing of consequence, Fay," said Malbray, as he read the message. "It concerns tulip bulbs. They are still having trouble importing them from Holland."

He crumpled the telegram, thrusting it into a pocket of his rumpled coat. Then:

"Dunwood is trimming the bamboo," said Malbray. "Why don't you go watch him, Fay?"

"I'm more interested in the flowers."

"You can return to them. When you do, don't forget to notice the *Silene noctiflora*. It is a very fragrant species of the Catchfly. Its flowers will interest you. They are the white ones, at the left of the lily pond."

FAY left, to join Dunwood in the tropical bamboo department, which was in one of the larger greenhouses. Musingly, Professor Malbray spoke:

"A very useful plant, the Catchfly. A small flower that attracts insects and traps them. If you would like to see some of the varieties, commissioner –"

"Sorry, professor," Weston interrupted. "We must discuss something else. I've talked to Kirby Eldwald regarding that drug of yours. Somnotone. From what he says, he was actually trying to outbid Bendleton for it."

"He was," admitted Malbray. "With poor Bendleton dead, he is after it again. Read this telegram. I disguised its purport because Fay was present."

He produced the crumpled telegram and handed it to Weston, who read it aloud. The message was from Eldwald, declaring that he was meeting friends at eight o'clock and wanted Malbray to be present. Eldwald specified that they would meet in Suite 1105 at the Hotel Clairwood.

"You will go there, professor?" inquired Weston.

"Of course not," replied Malbray, with a weary headshake. "I sometimes manage to arrive at a given place, but never at a given time, unless someone calls for me – as Fay did, yesterday."

"What will Eldwald do about it?"

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"He will probably come here, as he has before, hoping to buy the exclusive rights to Somnotone."

"Has he talked precise terms?"

Malbray nodded. Rising, the professor strolled to the door that led out to the garden.

"Eldwald offered the same price as Bendleton," said Malbray. "One hundred thousand dollars, to cover costs of experiments, maintenance of greeneries, and all else."

"But you favored Bendleton –"

"I would have, had he lived. I suppose that humanity will gain, even while Eldwald profits, should I sell him my precious drug. Nevertheless, I prefer to wait a while. Another sincere man, like Bendleton, might come along."

"You've talked with others?"

Professor Malbray shook his head.

"Only with Bendleton and Eldwald," he replied. Then, pointing out into the garden: "Observe that tree, commissioner. It is very rare, and beautiful."

Weston looked, and acknowledged that it was. He was staring toward a high-branched tree, that bore funnel-shaped flowers of blue. It was Cranston who diverted the commissioner's attention to a smaller tree that had yellow blossoms.

"Not the jacaranda," remarked Cranston. "Professor Malbray refers to the hursinghar, commissioner."

Professor Malbray brightened as he turned to Cranston.

"Ah, you recognize the tree!"

"I've seen it in India, professor."

"That is where this one came from," acknowledged Malbray. "The hursinghar is the only known species of the genus *Nyctanthes*. I meant to point it out to Fay. She would appreciate it, especially when its yellow flowers are fully open. I shall remind her to watch it and inform me when they do."

HE turned and gave a grieved glance at Weston, who had drawn a watch from his pocket, to note the time. Remembering Malbray's pet aversion, the commissioner pocketed the watch apologetically, and remarked that he and Cranston must be leaving.

Malbray signaled with a buzzer that brought Verber. He told the servant to show the visitors out by way of the large greenhouses.

Weston wasn't at all pleased by the detour, though he noted that his friend Cranston was taking interest in the various tropical trees that they passed, pausing particularly to study a many-limbed banyan that was fenced off in a little plot of its own.

There were other similar trees that could be seen through screens of bamboo and spreading palms, but Weston's hurry prevented Verber from showing them other banyans at close range.

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During the rapid excursion, they failed to see Fay Bendleton, though they caught her voice amid the clips of shears with which Dunwood, also out of sight, was trimming the bamboos.

"So I love flowers!" stormed Weston, as soon as he and Cranston were in the limousine. "I hope I never see flowers again! Show me anything but flowers!"

With a slight smile, Cranston leaned forward and spoke through the speaking tube:

"To the zoo, Stanley."

CHAPTER VIII. THE SHADOW'S LINK

DURING the ride to the Central Park Zoo, Commissioner Weston discussed the only development that interested him: the new attempt, by Kirby Eldwald, to purchase the remarkable drug that Professor Malbray still possessed.

Weston insisted that it might have a new bearing on the death of Richard Bendleton. Yet, as he talked, the commissioner gradually out-argued himself.

After all, Eldwald had openly admitted that he wanted to buy the drug, so his telegram to Malbray was something to be expected. Indeed, if anything, Malbray's mention that both Bendleton and Eldwald had offered an equal sum for Somnotone rather bolstered Eldwald's argument that he – not Bendleton – was the man who should have feared death.

However, Bendleton was dead, while Eldwald wasn't. If the medical examiner's verdict could only be delayed a short while longer, Weston might conceivably gain evidence pinning murder on Eldwald.

Meanwhile, The Shadow, impassive in his guise of Cranston, was mentally debating just how soon he should release the very evidence that the commissioner required.

The limousine halted near the zoo. Alighting, Weston snorted:

"I hope Cardona has found another hoot owl!"

Cardona hadn't found a hoot owl, but he had uncovered something close to one in the person of the zoo's assistant director, James Truban.

Cardona was in Truban's office when the new arrivals entered. Seated behind his desk, Truban had all the appearance of an owl, as he blinked his eyes and shook his head.

"No owls missing, inspector."

"You said something about an Annex," reminded Cardona. "The Loftus Annex, didn't you call it?"

"Yes. But –"

"I'd like to see the place."

Truban took the party to the Annex. It was some distance from the zoo proper, along a path that led under an arched bridge, beyond a pond, and up to a building that nestled, almost out of sight, in a wooded patch of park. Truban was explaining about the Loftus collection animals.

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"The endowment was provided by Engledon Loftus," stated Truban. "Mr. Loftus spent large sums acquiring specimens throughout the world. He gave some to the zoo outright, on condition that the remainder would be separately housed, under the care of Karl Stuggert, their keeper."

The Shadow remembered Engledon Loftus, a millionaire who liked wild animals, even though he hunted them. Loftus had been killed in an African elephant hunt, several years before. The Shadow also knew that Loftus had kept a sizable menagerie on his estate in the Catskills, but its transfer to Central Park was a recent development that had not been publicized.

When they met Karl Stuggert and had a look at the collection, The Shadow understood why.

STUGGERT was a big-jawed, scar-faced man, who had a stoop and walked with a limp, which Truban informed, in a whisper, was a souvenir of a tiger hunt. Privately, the listeners agreed that Stuggert would look better in a cage than on the loose as keeper of the Annex.

He certainly had a tougher appearance than any of the animals. In one cage a tawny puma raised its head and gave a half-hearted snarl, only to sink back like a tabby cat when Stuggert flourished a stick at its nose.

The dingoes, wild dogs from Australia, looked more like a batch of coyotes and yipped in suitable style. There were curious beasts like armadillos; while the prize of the collection was a unau, or two-toed sloth, which Stuggert claimed was less common than the ai, or three-toed variety.

The Annex, itself, was quite small, and at the end of the abbreviated line of cages Stuggert stopped to introduce a Borneo ape, which bore the name of Oswald. He didn't specify that this particular ape was an orangutan. Instead, he made light of Oswald.

"You've heard of the Borneo wild men?" gruffed Stuggert. "There's one of them. They sit up in trees and make faces at you. Harmless as kittens, they are. Look!"

He grimaced at Oswald, who grimaced back. Through the bars of the cage, Stuggert jostled the ape's arm, and received a jounce in return. Walking his hands along from bar to bar, Stuggert had Oswald doing the same. Stuggert lowered his head and butted, goat-style, against the last bar, and Oswald copied the action from his side of the cage.

It happened to be one stunt too many. The orangutan leaped back with a sudden snarl and displayed unusual ferocity, flinging its great arms forward as though to clutch through the bars and grab Stuggert's throat. This time, the keeper copied the animal.

Leaping back, Stuggert flung his arms high, just escaping Oswald's grab. Then, safely distant, the keeper clawed at the air and snarled.

There was a sponge lying on a bench; Stuggert snatched it up and tossed it through the bars to Oswald, who grabbed it and began to worry it. While the ape's ferocity dwindled, Stuggert remarked:

"That's the way they snatch coconuts. They get angry with them, throw them down, and smash them. They like the milk. Funny thing, the way people are scared of these Borneo apes that don't hurt anything outside of coconuts."

Considering Stuggert's slangy style of speech, the term "coconut" was significant, since it could apply to Oswald's own head. It happened, however, that Stuggert hadn't been on hand to see the orangutan take the full weight of The Shadow's hard-swung automatic, squarely on the skull.

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If he'd known that Oswald's head was slightly tender, Stuggert would have omitted the bar-butting stunt that tossed the ape into a real rage. However, the keeper had managed to quiet the orangutan and preserve the impression that the creature was gentle.

Looking about the group, Stuggert scarcely noticed the observant Mr. Cranston, whose expression remained impassive. Stuggert was afraid that Cardona knew something about the owl-and-ape combination, but the inspector showed no suspicion. The group turned to leave, and Cranston, the last to go, tried a simple experiment.

Just away from Oswald's cage, The Shadow voiced a low, repressed hoot, an excellent imitation of an owl's. The orangutan promptly bounded to the front of the cage and rattled the bars.

Departing men turned. Stuggert hadn't heard the false hoot, because he was busy talking; but Cardona fancied that he had caught such a sound.

BRUSHING right past Cranston, Cardona reached the dead end of the passage and stopped at a narrow, boarded space just beyond the ape's cage. Cardona noticed that the boards had a little door in them. He opened it, saying:

"What's this? An owl's roost?"

Obligingly, Stuggert used a flashlight within the boxlike space, and Cardona, peering through saw only blackness. Stuggert made a crooked lip motion that he meant for a smile.

"No owls here, inspector."

"But there could have been," Cardona wheeled to Truban. "What about it?"

"There are only mammals in the collection," assured Truban seriously. "I assure you, inspector, that I have checked on every specimen brought here. If you wish, I can show you the dally reports. Mr. Stuggert has charge of this Annex, but it is under our jurisdiction."

Cardona gave a satisfied grumble that Stuggert could take for an apology, if he chose. When they came outside the Annex the inspector looked around, but saw nothing except some empty boxes, with wire-screened ends, near a light truck that belonged to the Annex.

It was The Shadow who profited by the visit.

He had satisfied himself that Oswald was the antagonist of Bendleton's cellar, and that Stuggert had trained the nowise gentle ape to answer an owl's call, whether real or imitation. The owl that Cardona bagged didn't have to belong in the Loftus Annex, at all. Stuggert could have captured plenty of them in the Catskills and kept them elsewhere.

A real owl in Bendleton's apple tree had been an excellent way to bluff the police, and aid the escape of Oswald, the orangutan. The question was: why had Stuggert, keeper of the Loftus animals, involved himself in matters out at Bendleton's?

That question had an answer; one that was indicated by the inhabitants of the Annex. A puma, a few dingoes, an armadillo, a sloth, and a Borneo ape, weren't much to show for the private menagerie that had once belonged to Engledon Loftus.

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Someone had certainly taken the late Mr. Loftus for a first-class sucker. Any such gyp game would necessarily have included Stuggert as one of the participating swindlers.

Someone, intent upon covering up murder at Bendleton's, had drawn Stuggert in on the deal. Therefore, that someone knew that Stuggert was crooked, too, and thereby had forced him to play along.

The Shadow was quite ready to furnish Weston with the evidence, in the shape of a weather doll, that proved murder at Bendleton's. It would keep the case wide open, while The Shadow conducted further investigations concerning crime's perpetrators, along with their methods.

It would be easy enough, checking on the affairs of the late Engledon Loftus; something that the police would completely fail to consider, in the meantime. The Shadow would have an open track, and Stuggert would be just a way station on the trip that would produce a hidden murderer at the final destination.

SUCH were the thoughts behind the immobile features of Lamont Cranston while he and the police commissioner journeyed from the zoo to their club, along the avenues of Manhattan where brilliant lights were fighting off the settling dusk.

The limousine reached the Cobalt Club and Weston was leading the way indoors, when Cranston remembered instructions that he should have given Stanley.

Returning to the car, Cranston dipped his hand into the cushions of the rear seat and brought out a package that was addressed and stamped. He handed it to Stanley, who couldn't read the address in the dusk.

It was a package that Cranston could easily have delivered in person, for it was addressed to Police Commissioner Ralph Weston.

"Put the car in a garage, Stanley, while you dine," ordered Cranston. "We don't want its new fenders to be dented. You can then go out to dinner, and mail this package on the way. Bring the car back here after you eat, for I may need it later."

A soft laugh whispered from Cranston's lips, as he turned away. It was the mirth of The Shadow, carrying the confidence he always gave it when sure that he was whittling deep to the core of some notorious crime.

Had The Shadow foreseen the new trend that crime was to take, he would have reserved his mirth.

This was once when The Shadow laughed too soon.

CHAPTER IX. MURDER RETURNED

DURING dinner at the club, Commissioner Weston harped on the subject of Kirby Eldwald, repeating all that he, Weston, had said during the ride from Malbray's to the zoo. Cranston tried to divert him with comments concerning Cardona and owls, but such digression annoyed the commissioner.

"I know what that meeting is tonight," insisted Weston. "Eldwald is bringing in big investors from out of town. He's going to sell them on the Malbray proposition. They'll clean up millions, Eldwald and his compact group of friends, by merchandising Somnotone through the Apex Drug chain."

"Quite in keeping with Eldwald's methods," agreed Cranston, seeing that he couldn't pull Weston from the subject. "Provided that Malbray will let him have the drug."

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"What other choice has Malbray?" Weston demanded. "The professor has gone overboard on the subject of plants and flowers. He can't run all those greenhouses without cash. I'll wager they cost more to heat than Madison Square Garden!"

"Malbray hoped for another investor, like Bendleton. He might find one, commissioner."

"Where?"

With the question, Weston stared directly at Cranston, and met the response of steady eyes. It suddenly struck him what his friend meant.

"You, of course!" exclaimed Weston. "That's it! Malbray wanted you to make bid. Why don't you, Cranston?"

"We'll see how Malbray fares, first. I purposely ignored Malbray's hint."

From then, Weston was intrigued with a new plan. He wanted to move in on Eldwald's conference, at the Hotel Clairwood, and find out what happened there. But he couldn't find a good-enough pretext. Not having been informed of the meeting, it would be bad policy for Weston show up.

He suggested that Cranston go, instead – only to strike another snag. Like Weston, Cranston would have to state that he'd been at Malbray's when Eldwald's message came there. That, in turn, would make it look as though Cranston had begun secret bids to cut out Eldwald; an erroneous impression which Cranston had no desire to convey.

While Weston chafed and fumed, with eight o'clock almost at hand, the break came in the form of a telephone call for Cranston. Answering it, The Shadow rejoined the commissioner, purposely wearing a Cranston smile.

"It was Eldwald on the wire," he informed. "He wants me to drop over to the Clairwood. He thought I might still be interested in investing in Somnotone."

"What nerve!" exclaimed Weston. "Eldwald must doubt your integrity, Cranston. He thinks that you're a man of his type, rather than a human benefactor, like Bendleton."

"I believe it goes deeper than that," returned Cranston dryly. "Eldwald wouldn't be big-hearted enough to let me in on a sure thing. He wants to use me as a way of reaching Malbray."

"You mean Eldwald will probably pretend that he has gone humanitarian, too?"

"Yes. I think I know how he will try it, too. That is where you come in, commissioner."

"Where I come in?"

"Certainly! I'll say that I left word for you here. I'd suggest that you leave in about fifteen minutes. You'll arrive soon after Eldwald has sprung his bluff."

IN Suite 1105 at the Hotel Clairwood, Kirby Eldwald was hatching out the very scheme that The Shadow anticipated.

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There were three attentive listeners, shrewd investors who had entered into many schemes with Eldwald, chiefly as straw men, who had gained the jackal's share of spoils while he was carrying off the lion's profits.

"I tell you," declared Eldwald, raising a clenched fist, "I've got the proposition just as tight as that! The only danger" – he surveyed his tight hand ruefully – "is that it may trickle out. Bendleton's death" – he shook his head – "was most unfortunate."

The straw men exchanged glances, which Eldwald did not fail to notice. Eldwald became emphatic.

"I had nothing to do with Bendleton's death!" His eyes were quick, shrewd in their darts. "Malbray hadn't closed the deal with Bendleton. We both had a chance, Bendleton and I. If anything, I might have won out, and I'll tell you why.

"Malbray needs money to cover his heavy expenses. If he didn't, he'd be just silly enough to give his invention to humanity, himself.

"When a man needs money, he'll always listen to a higher bid. I've worked on Malbray along that line. Then Bendleton had to go and die by accident. Only a fool would claim that I'd played a hand in it; but Malbray belongs in that category.

"What's more, Bendleton's daughter is a factor. She knows I was her father's business rival. She'd be quite put out if Malbray made a deal with me."

The listeners began to understand their parts quite well. Convinced that Eldwald couldn't have had a hand in Bendleton's death, they regained their confidence.

"You fellows are to stage the great-heart stuff," Eldwald told them. "You all feel sorry about Bendleton, understand?" He waited until nods came; then he continued. "When Cranston arrives, talk along that line. I'll be hard to convince, but I'll finally fall.

"I'll resign in your favor. For the good of humanity and all that rot. We'll get Cranston to swing the deal for us. Afterward, you can turn over your stock to me, and I'll hold majority control. You'll all get your cut –"

A knock at the door gave interruption. Eldwald stepped to answer it, stating in an undertone:

"It may be Cranston, so get ready. If it's Malbray, so much the better. We can do the act for him, too. But there's hardly a chance that Malbray will get here. He never keeps appointments."

It was neither Cranston nor Malbray. When Eldwald opened the door, he was confronted by a solid-faced messenger, who handed him a square-shaped package.

"From your office, Mr. Eldwald," the messenger said. "They sent me up with it. They said you'd be here at eight."

"The office is still open?"

"It was when I stopped there," replied the messenger. "They thought maybe the package was important."

Eldwald tipped the messenger and stepped back into the room. He closed the door behind him, but it didn't latch.

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Eldwald was too intrigued with the package to notice the door. In fact, he was frozen in the center of the room, staring with fixed eyes from an ashen face. Suddenly, he recovered.

"From Bendleton," he said, showing the package around. "His name is on it, and I know his handwriting. Funny, getting a package from a dead man."

The others didn't regard it as funny. They shifted, very uneasily. With his usual bravado, Eldwald laid the package on a table and drew a knife from his pocket, to cut the cord.

"We were good-enough friends, Bendleton and I," he bragged. "This proves it! He'd gone rather foolish on the humanity stuff, but I don't think he'd turned fanatic. I know what's in this package: some of those fancy cigars he used to hand to his friends.

"We'll smoke some in his honor. Good old Bendleton." Eldwald was pleased with the package, for it helped him warm up to the phony part he was to play for Cranston's benefit. "Yes, this shows that Bendleton held no grievances. He must have mailed this package yesterday, not long before he died."

THOSE final words, delivered in a rising tone, carried out through the hallway, where an elevator had just stopped. An alighting passenger heard them and recognized Eldwald's voice.

The arrival was Lamont Cranston. He saw Eldwald's door ajar, and obtained a view of the long corridor beyond it.

Clear at the other end of the corridor a door was closing, and Cranston caught a last glimpse of a short, stocky man in a messenger's uniform. The closing door bore the words: FIRE EXIT. It represented an unusual route for a messenger to be taking when leaving the eleventh floor of a hotel.

Connecting the messenger with the package that Eldwald's voice was mentioning, Cranston suddenly became The Shadow, in action, if not appearance.

He sped across the space to Eldwald's suite and slashed the door open with his shoulder, not pausing for an instant. Driving his hands ahead of him, he spread them with a wide sweep that cleared away two startled men who turned to block his path.

They were Eldwald's friends, drawn closer to watch their ringleader undo Bendleton's package.

There was a third man, even closer to Eldwald. Cranston's swift-shoving hand bowled him to the corner. Thrusting his other hand toward the package that was in Eldwald's grasp, The Shadow voiced a warning in a tone much sharper than Cranston's:

"Hold it, Eldwald!"

Eldwald didn't hold it. His was a nature that couldn't understand a friendly act. He didn't realize that Cranston had no choice but to spring it upon him. His thoughts, governed only by suspicion and mistrust, made him want to keep the package, for Eldwald, planning a crooked game, suddenly believed that Cranston's surprise entry might be a trick in reverse.

Hooking the package under one arm, Eldwald flung the table with the other and dived for the next room. He heard the clatter as Cranston tripped across the table while making a dive to overtake him.

GARDEN OF DEATH

Half through the doorway, Eldwald grabbed the last wrapping of the package and ripped at it as if his life depended upon it.

His life did depend upon it!

The package came apart under that final tug. It came apart all at once, in a most voluminous style. It blasted with a gorge of flame that fairly swallowed Eldwald. The package was gone to atoms and Eldwald a flying, mangled figure, torn by the power of the explosion.

Shattered by the blast, chunks of the doorway showered The Shadow as he lost the footing that he had just regained. Others in the room sprawled, too, as the floor rocked beneath them. A terrific shatter announced the departure of the windows, which were smashed to bits by the volcanic outrush of the air.

Volcanic, too, was the thick, whitish fumes that filled the doorway from which Eldwald had disappeared. That cloud didn't represent cigar smoke. It was a vapor of death, the remnants of a bomb explosion that drove one thought through the half-stunned minds of Eldwald's three associates.

They could only think of Kirby Eldwald as the murderer of Richard Bendleton. Through their numbed brains drummed the maddening impression that Bendleton, though dead, had returned the favor of murder to Eldwald, with compliments.

CHAPTER X. THE TRAIL DELAYED

WITH or without his garb of black, The Shadow had ways of making rapid disappearances.

On this occasion, he vanished so thoroughly and suddenly, that Eldwald's staring friends thought he had gone with the blast. Blinking at the clearing smoke, they couldn't understand why they saw Eldwald's shattered hulk, yet viewed no trace of Cranston.

The answer was that Cranston had again displayed The Shadow's speed. He was out of the hotel suite while Eldwald's blinking companions were still dazzled by the explosion's flash.

An elevator was stopping at the eleventh floor; entering it, Cranston told the operator to hurry him to the lobby, that they might summon aid.

When they reached the lobby, Cranston sped from the car before the operator could stop him. There were shouts from persons who had heard the explosion and supposed that Cranston's dash marked him as the man responsible. But when pursuers reached the street door, Cranston was gone from sight.

He'd entered one side of his parked limousine and come out the other, no longer Cranston, but The Shadow. As the avenger in black, it was now his purpose to head off the messenger who had been party to Eldwald's death.

Finding the exit from the fire tower, The Shadow entered, expecting to meet the man from above.

Eleven stories was a long trip down, and the fugitive couldn't have reached the bottom. The trouble was that he took a short cut, which The Shadow found a floor above the street.

He saw the fugitive clambering across a low roof that jutted from the fire tower. Following, The Shadow fired two shots as the man dropped from the edge beyond.

GARDEN OF DEATH

Not only did the fugitive get clear; luck served him in the moments to come. Hurrying to the roof edge, The Shadow was aiming point-blank at the fleeing man, when bullets began to drum the roof.

Rolling to cover, The Shadow saw the marksmen; they were police, firing at the gun stabs that came from the roof. Inciting the officers to such measures was none other than The Shadow's good friend, Commissioner Weston.

Instead of waiting at the club, Weston had come to the hotel, intending to stay around the lobby during the fifteen minutes that Cranston had suggested.

By so doing, Weston had managed to get in on something that The Shadow hadn't anticipated: the pursuit of a man who had participated in fresh and unexpected murder. Instead of aiding the pursuit, Weston was blocking it.

Up the street, the fugitive messenger was entering a waiting car, which drove off beyond the range of The Shadow's guns. Thanks to Weston's interference, The Shadow hadn't gotten even a good look at his quarry. There was nothing to do except resume the role of Cranston. That, at least, was easy.

Rolling across the roof at another angle, The Shadow remained unseen and below the level of the shots that the police were sizzling up over the roof edge. Reaching the farthest corner, The Shadow rolled right off it and landed, with a catlike plop, in the back seat of his own limousine.

He'd remembered just where Stanley had parked the big car, and the lower top had simplified the rest. Crouched low, The Shadow stowed away his cloak and hat, slid from the car and found a way into the lobby, where he contacted Weston, arriving from the street.

SEVERAL hotel employees grabbed Cranston, recognizing him as the man who had dashed out awhile before. Finding that he knew the commissioner, they released him. In Cranston's style, The Shadow explained about the fugitive. Weston gave a sour smile.

"You're imagining things, Cranston," he said, "like my men are. They were outside and they saw no fugitive. They thought they heard some shots, though, and they wasted a lot of bullets firing at a roof, where they eventually found no one. Come, let us go upstairs."

In Eldwald's suite, they heard the testimony of the drug magnate's friends. They considered the messenger to be quite bona fide. They hadn't seen the fellow, but Eldwald had taken the package from him without question, and had recognized Bendleton's writing on the wrapper.

All three were very shaky. They regarded themselves as witnesses to a retribution that Eldwald had deserved. They credited Cranston with a valiant effort at saving Eldwald's life; the fact that it had failed made it seem all the more that fate had played a hand in the outcome.

Inspector Cardona arrived, and Weston turned the case over to him. Then, drawing Cranston aside, the commissioner said, quite soberly:

"Eldwald was right: Bendleton did turn fanatic. I wish, though, that we had more than Eldwald's statements to go on, Cranston."

"Why not drop uptown and see Malbray again?" suggested The Shadow. "He won't have heard of this tragedy, the way he is cut off from the world. We might get a better opinion, under the circumstances."

GARDEN OF DEATH

WITHIN half an hour, Cranston's limousine stopped again in front of Malbray's isolated mansion. It was approximately nine o'clock, for there had been some delay in leaving the hotel.

Verber admitted the arrivals, and was quite surprised to see them back. However, he was prompt in conducting them to the conservatory, where he stopped and knocked at the door.

Professor Malbray was in the conservatory. He opened the door from his side and spoke through the crack.

"If it's Mr. Eldwald, Verber, have him wait a few minutes. Miss Bendleton is still in the garden; I wouldn't want her to meet him."

Pushing Verber aside, Weston drew the door open and entered the conservatory with Cranston. Malbray greeted them with such surprise that he finally concluded by digging his fingers through his white hair.

"Why... why, I can't understand!" he exclaimed. "I thought that you had left long ago, commissioner. I was expecting Eldwald, but now I find you haven't left. I certainly have no sense of time whatever. This seems incredible!"

He glanced out toward the garden, which was aglow with soft light; then, noting the thick darkness beyond the massed glass panes, Malbray managed to stir his recollections.

"You must have left!" he ejaculated. "It was daylight when you were here. I remember that much! Yes, now I know why I was expecting Eldwald. He was coming some time after dark."

"Quite right, professor," spoke Weston in a humoring tone. "We've come back to see your lovely garden. It's even more beautiful at night, with those indirect lights. I really must look at the flowers."

The garden was beautiful indeed. Along with the soft, varicolored lights, Malbray had turned on a fountain, which gushed from the edge of the lily pond, catching the glow and changing it to rainbow hues that rivaled the flowers.

Some of the water plants had closed their blossoms, but others had opened; the same was true of flowers in the beds. Fay was in the garden, admiring the hursinghar, which was really the center of the scene, for its yellow blooms were wide and shone clearly in the light.

The girl was surprised, however, to see the visitors. Weston gave a quick look at Cranston, hoping he would help out. Cranston did.

"Sorry to trouble you, Fay," he said quietly, "but the commissioner had some questions he wanted to ask you earlier. Merely a few routine queries, to help straighten some of your father's business affairs."

Fay nodded, willing enough to help.

"About Kirby Eldwald, for example," continued Cranston casually. "He and your father differed on most matters, but I understand that Eldwald's chain stores occasionally retailed some of the Alliance products which your father controlled."

Again, Fay nodded.

"Dad was very fair about that," she declared. "He saw no reason why Eldwald's associates should be penalized just because Eldwald was dishonest. But dad would never have dealt with Eldwald as an

individual."

"Do you think that Eldwald ever tried to trick him?"

"I don't believe that Eldwald would have dared. Dad said often that if Eldwald made a single move to injure him, in business, or otherwise, he would retaliate. He insisted, though, that he would first make sure of Eldwald's intent."

Cranston's eyes held Fay's, so that the girl would not notice the change of expression that Weston must certainly have given. Fay was becoming quite intense, and Malbray promptly noticed it.

"You mustn't excite yourself, Fay," said the professor. "I must remind you, too, that you need rest. It may be getting very late."

Gently, he conducted Fay in from the garden, through the conservatory and into the house, while the others followed. Fay stopped in an alcoved library just beyond the conservatory door. She picked up a book from the table.

"I think I shall read a while," she began. "It can't be very late, professor."

"It must be late," insisted Malbray. "You began reading soon after we looked at the Catchflies, while I remained in the conservatory."

Fay looked at the book.

"That's so," she admitted. "Dunwood finished trimming the bamboo. I saw the Catchflies" – she was counting the incidents on her fingers – "and then I read half through this book, until finally you interrupted me, professor, so that I could look at the hursinghar. It really must be late. I think I shall say good night."

CARRYING the book, Fay went up a broad stairway and turned to the right at a landing near the top. After the girl's footsteps faded, Malbray turned to his visitors and shook his head.

"I never heard Bendleton speak that way regarding Eldwald," he said. "All my impressions were the other way about."

Weston put a quick question:

"You mean that Eldwald was actually antagonistic toward Bendleton?"

"Very much so," assured Malbray. "Of course, Eldwald wanted me to deal with him, instead of Bendleton, so I couldn't take his statements at face value."

"What sort of statements?"

"I recall one that was quite ridiculous," returned Malbray. "Of course, Eldwald was in a heated mood at the time, but he seemed to mean it. He said that Bendleton's talk of aiding humanity was rot; that if Bendleton did obtain the rights to Somnotone, he would never introduce it to the public."

"I really feel" – Malbray's tone was very solemn – "that such a statement was a slur against Bendleton's integrity."

GARDEN OF DEATH

"Indeed it was, professor," agreed Weston. "Well, we must be going again. Some day soon, I shall stop back to look at more flowers."

They were hardly in the limousine before Weston was expressing his full opinions to Cranston.

"Two people totally away from the world," said Weston, referring to Malbray and Fay. "Yet they provided the very facts I required. Behind the remarks they quoted lay a seething animosity between Bendleton and Eldwald.

"If I can only find proof that Bendleton was murdered, I'd know that Eldwald was the culprit, making good his boast that Bendleton would never market Malbray's drug. Such proof, in turn, would fit with Bendleton's willingness to retaliate, no matter what move Eldwald made.

"Fearing murder, Bendleton would have felt justified in sending a bomb to Eldwald. But I still need proof, Cranston. Proof of the thing that's hankered me all along. I still must have evidence that Bendleton's death was murder!"

The Shadow made no response. It wasn't necessary to inform Weston that such evidence existed. It was already in the mail, and would reach the commissioner in the morning. Furthermore, The Shadow wasn't listening to what Weston said.

Gazing back through the trees, the complacent Mr. Cranston was taking a long, steady look at the home of Professor Theophilus Malbray – the house where time stood still.

CHAPTER XI. MURDER MUST OUT

ON reaching his office the next morning, Commissioner Weston pushed aside a small package that was lying on his desk. He was more interested in looking at the morning newspapers and admiring Cranston's photograph, which appeared on every front page. Quite a hero, Cranston, because of his earnest effort to save Kirby Eldwald from destruction.

Eldwald's former associates had given honest testimony on that point, and their word stood, regarding the address that they saw on the death package, with Bendleton's name in the return corner.

Noting his own package again, Weston started to open it. He removed the paper and was lifting the lid of a cardboard box, when he suddenly remembered what could happen to people who opened packages unwarily.

Flinging the package one way, Weston hurled himself the other, actually climbing over his desk to get away.

When nothing happened, the commissioner poked his head in sight across the desk top. He stared at the figure lying on the floor, as though it were full sized and human, instead of imitation.

The object from the package was a little weather-telling doll, like the one that Weston had seen at Bendleton's. Its skirt was black.

There was an envelope lying with the doll, and the commissioner opened it. When he finished reading the blue-inked message, it faded.

Weston had seen such messages go blank before. This was from The Shadow, and the commissioner had time to digest its contents before the writing vanished.

GARDEN OF DEATH

Just the evidence that the police needed to prove the murder of Richard Bendleton was as big a bang as the one that had marked the violent death of Kirby Eldwald!

Seizing the telephone, Weston started things moving. He put Cardona on the go, and others besides. Within an hour, the commissioner had all the data needed, and was phoning the newspapers to give them a new sensation.

By noon, New Yorkers were buying extra editions that exposed the Bendleton–Eldwald case in all its harrowing details.

Give and take, with death as the trophy – such was the law's opinion, backed by proof. Richard Bendleton and his two unfortunate servants were victims of murder, which, from the facts at hand, could only have been inspired by Kirby Eldwald.

The man who could profit by Bendleton's death, Eldwald also could summon the services of various chemists, keeping all in ignorance of his intent.

Eldwald was marked as the man responsible for placing a deadly container of poison gas on Bendleton's furnace pipe, thus smoothly disposing of his greatest business rival.

Perhaps the law of self–preservation influenced Eldwald's scheme, for at the very time he managed the planting of the death device, Bendleton's package was on its way to serve Eldwald in like turn.

Or, that same law, self–preservation, could have ruled Bendleton's actions, on the logical assumption that Bendleton feared a death thrust from Eldwald.

BUSY in his office until after one o'clock, Weston did not lunch with the morning's hero, Cranston, until two, at the club.

By then, Cranston's photographs were in the discard. Eldwald's tragic finish was old stuff, interesting only in connection with Bendleton's death. If anyone could be called a hero, Commissioner Weston had usurped the title.

When an attendant approached the table, bringing a telephone, Weston reached for it. He was a bit annoyed to find that the call was for Cranston, because Weston had been expecting another newspaper interview.

The attendant plugged the telephone into a wall socket, and when Cranston spoke, Weston turned away, disinterested.

The call, however, was highly interesting to Cranston. The voice across the wire was quick, very eager. A man's voice, that couldn't quite cover its strain.

"I want to talk to you, Mr. Cranston," said the voice. "Personally; in private. When your friend, the police commissioner, isn't around."

"Very well," was Cranston's casual response. "Any time you say."

"I can't make it until after four o'clock," the voice continued. "That's when I'll be free. How would close to five o'clock do? I can get to your club by then."

"I shall be here all afternoon."

GARDEN OF DEATH

"I'd like you to meet me out front, Mr. Cranston. I'll come in a cab, along about quarter of five. Just to show I'm on the level, I'll give you my name. It's Felkin. Howard Felkin. Got it?"

"Howard Felkin."

Cranston's repetition of the name brought a slight uneasiness from the other end of the wire.

"Don't mention my name to anyone," Felkin insisted. "I'll explain why when I see you. I'm depending on you, Mr. Cranston."

The call ended abruptly. Hanging up, The Shadow found himself in a new conversation, this one with Commissioner Weston.

"Did I hear right, Cranston?" quizzed Weston. "Were you talking to a man named Howard Felkin?"

The Shadow nodded.

"Watch out for him," warned Weston. "He's listed as a dangerous swindler. Suspected in connection with crooked oil companies out West; only, they haven't managed to indict him yet."

It was The Shadow's turn to be irked, though he did not reveal the fact. His own crime files, though compact, were frequently more extensive than those kept by the police. The Shadow's rogues' gallery, as an example, showed thousands of faces, all on microscopic prints that could be enlarged when required.

Frequently, however, the police gained inklings regarding persons who hadn't reached The Shadow's lists. Howard Felkin happened to be one. Often The Shadow, as Cranston, tapped Commissioner Weston for facts concerning such people, but many were apt to slip by.

"If Felkin tries to sell you stock," persisted Weston, "let me know about it. I'd like to get something on him right here in New York."

"He didn't mention stock, commissioner."

"Of course not," asserted Weston. "He won't, until he meets you, Cranston. I'll tell you how those fellows operate. They look up people who are in the public eye. Felkin probably saw your picture in the newspapers, this morning.

"Felkin is practically hiding out, at present, but he probably can't resist the chance to flatter a stranger and sell him something. If he should show up here, hang on to him. I'll be back by five o'clock."

With that, Weston left for his office, while Cranston remained at the club.

DURING the few hours that followed, the impassive Mr. Cranston made some calls to Burbank, using the voice of The Shadow. Reports were coming in regarding the Loftus Annex at the Central Park Zoo, but that matter could wait. The Shadow's main interest concerned the coming visit of Howard Felkin.

Murder will out.

It was a rule that often worked; one that definitely applied to the combined deaths of Bendleton and Eldwald. The Shadow had assisted the law in satisfying itself on the exchange of murder, but The Shadow wasn't at all convinced that the thing was just a simple open-and-shut case.

GARDEN OF DEATH

There were loose ends in many cases, and this double tragedy promised them. The Shadow hadn't been disappointed. He was convinced that Felkin's information would apply to Bendleton or Eldwald, perhaps both. For The Shadow was working on a theory so far below the surface, that the law hadn't even scratched the veneer.

Potential swindlers like Felkin might pick victims from persons heralded in the newspapers, but they didn't choose the friends of police commissioners.

At half past four, Lamont Cranston was strolling outside the Cobalt Club. He was watching for a taxicab, and at the same time keeping a lookout for Weston's official car, which might arrive before five.

Minutes passed, and it was nearly quarter of five when a cab swung around the corner. As chance had it, Cranston spied Weston's big car just as the cab halted.

It would have been easy for The Shadow to whip open the cab door and whisk Felkin into the confines of the club ahead of the arriving commissioner. But when he took one glance at the cab, The Shadow preferred to retain the leisurely style of Cranston.

Deliberately, he turned and waved to Weston as the commissioner approached. They met, while the doorman was stepping to the cab that had stopped in front of the club.

"You wanted to meet Felkin," remarked The Shadow in Cranston's most casual tone, "so I asked him to come here, commissioner. I think he is in this cab."

Weston stared.

"But that cab is empty, Cranston!"

It wasn't empty. The Shadow had spied a telltale hat poked just above the window edge. Through his mind was running that earlier thought: "Murder will out."

The adage was to have dramatic proof. The doorman was at the cab; both The Shadow and commissioner were watching as he opened the door.

Out from the cab plunged a figure that struck the sidewalk, floundered on its shoulders and landed face upward, to show peaked features that had once been sallow, but were now as white as chalk.

It was the visage of a dead man, who could be none other than Howard Felkin.

Until the cab had actually arrived, The Shadow did not expect this dramatic result. He'd assumed that Felkin had arranged his plans to escape disaster. Apparently, Felkin had been lax on that essential point.

Howard Felkin was just another man who knew too much. An additional pawn in the game that had taken the lives of two more important men: Richard Bendleton and Kirby Eldwald.

CHAPTER XII. ENOUGH OF MYSTERY

THE dignified members of the Cobalt Club had lost all patience with Commissioner Weston. They had usually tolerated his practice of holding police investigations on the premises. But when he insisted on dragging in a corpse from the sidewalk and planting it in the middle of the foyer, things had gone too far.

GARDEN OF DEATH

The body, of course, was Felkin's, and Weston was so anxious to identify it that he waived the club rules as though they didn't exist. He made it worse by summoning other people – Inspector Cardona, for example, who didn't belong in the club, at all. He prolonged the matter, too, by sending for data that would fully identify the victim.

Then came the parley of the police surgeons, which added to the confusion. If the Cobalt Club hadn't included some noted physicians among its members, the governing board would probably have taken matters in hand and insisted that Weston transfer his base of operations to the morgue.

But Felkin's death was so unusual, that the doctor's couldn't help but show an interest.

The victim's death was due to strangulation, but no rope could have caused the marks on Felkin's neck. As one physician put it, they were due to widespread pressure, evenly applied."

Felkin's pallor was another case in point. During the process of strangulation, the blood supply had been cut off from his head, never to return.

There was a curious twist to the dead man's neck, indicating that vertebrae were badly dislodged because of the continued pressure. Forming themselves into a jury, the physicians conferred, and delivered a unanimous verdict.

Felkin's death could only have been produced by a powerful snake of the constrictor type, very possibly a man-killing python from the African jungle!

At least, the verdict cleared the foyer of the Cobalt Club, though it didn't clear the mystery. Weston ordered the body shipped to the morgue, and the physicians disbanded.

Retiring to a remote nook, Weston took three persons along: Cranston, Cardona, and the cab driver who had delivered Felkin on the club's front stoop.

The cab driver wasn't any help.

He was a "coolie," who hung around the ferry slips on a twenty-hour shift. He'd gone to sleep with a pinochle deck in his hands, to be aroused by someone telling him to hurry to the Cobalt Club. He hadn't even looked at his passenger until he reached the destination.

The cabby's story indicated that men responsible for Felkin's death had placed the body in the cab and given the order themselves. So Felkin was dead before he began his last ride, and the present problem was to find somebody who owned a python.

Weston dismissed the cab driver, after taking his name and address. Then the commissioner asked for opinions. Cardona had one.

"That guy is a cluck," said the inspector, referring to the cab driver. "You could get more out of a monkey than out of him –"

Cardona halted, his swarthy face displaying the glow of his own inspiration.

"A monkey!" exclaimed Cardona. "That's an idea! There was a gorilla, or something like one, in that Annex that Stuggert runs."

GARDEN OF DEATH

Cardona was referring to the orangutan that Weston still classed as a Borneo ape.

"We are looking for a python," informed the commissioner testily. "Apes can strangle, but not in constrictor fashion."

"I don't mean the monkey did it," argued Cardona. "My idea is, we ought to go to the zoo again and find out if any snakes are missing."

THEY went to the zoo in Central Park. There, Truban, the patient and reliable assistant director, assured them that all reptiles in his custody were still where they belonged. Cardona insisted on another trip to the annex, so Truban conducted them there.

Stuggert was on hand. He'd been busy teaching tricks to Oswald, all afternoon, with a small crowd watching. Stuggert had no snakes, and wanted none. He didn't like them. Truban reiterated that the Loftus Annex contained only mammals, and that reptiles were not in that category.

Since Cardona was still stubborn, both Truban and Stuggert insisted that he look around the place. Cardona did, poking into the same box beyond the monkey cage where he had looked for owls the day before. There wasn't any snake in the boxed space. Everything was quite black when Cardona used his flashlight.

Stuggert didn't take the search very gracefully. All the way back he pointed to the cages, asking if the occupants, sloths or armadillos, looked like snakes. He stopped at the puma's cage and gestured toward the tawny cat, saying that it needed exercise, which Cardona could give it if he'd like to enter the cage. Cardona declined the invitation.

Contrasted to Stuggert, Truban was more than pleasant. When they were leaving the assistant director's office, Cardona shook hands with him and put sincerity behind the grasp.

"If there's anything I can ever do for you, Mr. Truban," declared Cardona, "let me know. I appreciate the way you've helped us, and I'll return the favor."

Dropping Cardona off, Weston returned to the club, with Cranston. When the commissioner suggested that they dine, his friend declined, saying that he wasn't hungry.

"The other evening, commissioner," stated Cranston, "you took me out to Bendleton's to see some rather unpleasant sights. This afternoon, we spent some time viewing Felkin's body. Did it ever occur to you that such displays might spoil a person's appetite?"

Weston grunted.

"It's been an hour, Cranston, since we looked at Felkin."

"And we've spent that hour at the zoo," Cranston rejoined. "I still don't feel like eating dinner."

There wasn't any trouble getting away from Weston after that. Leaving by limousine, Cranston transferred to the garb of The Shadow and made a trip to his sanctum.

Once in the black-walled room, he studied report sheets received from agents. They concerned the Loftus Annex at the Central Park Zoo.

More than that, the reports covered facts concerning Engledon Loftus.

GARDEN OF DEATH

Years ago, Loftus had financed expeditions into jungle territory, to study and bring back rare flora and fauna. He'd spent large sums on those expeditions.

As a finish to such a career, Loftus had gone on an expedition himself; one from which he had never returned.

Such facts helped, because they formed a background to the present situation, involving the murder for murder game between Bendleton and Eldwald, The law had closed that twofold case, and was now concerned with a new mystery: the death of Howard Felkin.

But The Shadow did not regard Felkin's death as another beginning. Rather, he classed it as a carry-over from something that should have been finished. He connected it definitely with Bendleton and Eldwald.

BENEATH the bluish light that flooded a corner of the sanctum, a living hand – The Shadow's – began inscribing words upon a sheet of paper.

The words formed a column, like a sum in addition, a curious list of key thoughts for The Shadow's future reference. The column ran:

Electrician

Geraniums

Packages

Weather doll

Orangutan

Servants

Messenger

Time Factor

Informant

\$100,000.00

\$100,000.00

Very interesting, the way The Shadow placed actual figures at the bottom of the column, in the form of a monetary tabulation that stood repeated. He drew a line under the list and poised his pen, as though intending to write an answer that his verbal figures produced.

Then, laying the pen aside, The Shadow folded the paper in an odd fashion. He turned the top edge down a half inch; then folded it over again, and still again, continuing the pleating system, until the paper became a long thin strip, which he folded crosswise and tucked into a pocket beneath his cloak.

Reaching the earphones on the wall, The Shadow put in a call to Burbank, gave the contact man instructions to pass along to the other agents. That done, The Shadow took a small pad, wrote something on its top sheet,

and put the paper in an envelope. He repeated the action with another slip of paper and a second envelope.

A strange laugh throbbed through the black-walled sanctum. The sibilant tone denoted that the words which The Shadow had twice written, to inclose in separate envelopes, were the answer to his verbal sum.

Pocketing the envelopes, the master of the sanctum turned off the blue light. A swish from his cloak announced his departure from the curtained abode of blackness.

There had been enough of mystery. The police could continue to bolster their finding of mutual murder in the cases of Richard Bendleton and Kirby Eldwald. The Shadow would take another course, to develop a theory of his own.

Not only did The Shadow hold the secret to past crimes; he was determined to balk the menace of murder yet to come!

CHAPTER XIII. AGENTS OF THE SHADOW

PERHAPS his brief interlude as The Shadow restored Cranston's appetite. At any rate, he dined that evening, though not with Commissioner Weston. Instead, he had dinner in an isolated corner of a small and quiet restaurant, with two friends: Harry Vincent and Margo Lane.

Long in The Shadow's service Harry Vincent was a clean-cut chap who knew his way around. He'd served The Shadow in so many capacities, that any new assignment would be simple.

Honest, trustworthy, reliable, Harry was all for The Shadow at all times, basing his loyalty on the proposition that The Shadow was always right.

As for Margo Lane, her sphere was also important. She knew Manhattan inside out, particularly in the realm of cafe society, which dug its roots into the underworld and spread its branches through the upper crust.

An intelligent, attractive brunette, Margo knew just how and when to supplant wisdom with glamour, and vice versa. Withal, she had a constant charm that matched Harry's reliability.

Both Harry and Margo knew why Cranston had summoned them. Other persons might have considered The Shadow as Cranston in disguise, but Harry and Margo took the opposite view. They were agents of The Shadow, who chose, on occasion, to appear in the guise of Cranston.

Thus, when Cranston spoke in his quiet, even tone, they listened eagerly, for they were hearing the words of The Shadow.

Neither listener was surprised when The Shadow came directly to the Bendleton-Eldwald feud.

"Singular that each should have murdered the other," declared The Shadow. "I think we should look into this business of important men eliminating each other like Kilkenny cats. Let us consider Eldwald first.

"We know that he was a grasper; the sort who would deal in murder if he chose. He could have acquired the necessary poison gas. But we must admit that the evidence against Eldwald is purely circumstantial."

There were nods from Harry and Margo.

GARDEN OF DEATH

"Bendleton was just the opposite," continued The Shadow. "It would be impossible to conceive of him as a murderer, except for the package which Eldwald received. Suppose we eliminate Bendleton's connection with the package and merely consider it as a device that ended Eldwald's life. What then?"

"It would point to a hidden murderer," declared Harry promptly. "Someone who pinned the crime on Bendleton."

"Of course," added Margo, "and the same hidden hand could have killed Bendleton, too."

"A perfect cover-up," said Harry. "With both men dead, neither could help clear the mystery. But who would have the motive to murder both Bendleton and Eldwald?"

"And even granting that someone had the motive," put in Margo, "where is the evidence against him?"

Cranston produced two envelopes handing one to Harry, the other to Margo. He also showed them a folded sheet of paper, remarking that it contained a list of added facts. He suggested that they open their envelopes first and read the total. Eagerly, the agents did so.

Each read a name on a slip of paper; a name that faded, being written in The Shadow's vanishing ink. But when Harry and Margo faced each other, both were gripped by the same startling revelation. Simultaneously, their lips spoke that name in an amazed whisper:

"Professor Theophilus Malbray!"

IT couldn't be! Malbray, of all people, murdering the two men who were bidding for the much-prized drug that he had created.

It was possible that Malbray could have sided openly with Bendleton, and secretly with Eldwald, wavering the balance from one to the other. But to have equalized the scale by delivering double death, looked like a policy of self-defeat on Malbray's part.

The Shadow understood the puzzlement that gripped Harry and Margo.

"Malbray still has his precious drug," he reminded them, "and can sell it to a new bidder. If he had strong reason to murder either Bendleton or Eldwald, his disposal of the other was necessary to remove his own name from the suspect list. I am sure, however, that Malbray had a double motive.

"First, however, I shall itemize the points against him. Some that seem inconsequential in themselves, link with later points. Known facts build to conclusions which dovetail into one another. So I shall detail them."

The Shadow opened the top fold of his own paper. He read the word "Electrician," which faded while he spoke. He dealt quite briefly with that subject, stating that the phony electric man had probably planted the gas container in Bendleton's cellar.

He reminded his listeners, however, that two persons had seen the gadget planter. One, Harvey the butler, was dead; the other, Fay Bendleton, was still alive.

Next, the subject of geraniums.

"The man who set the gas device," declared The Shadow, "could also have removed the geraniums to the porch when he left Bendleton's house. Plants, of course, subsist on carbon dioxide; therefore, had Bendleton

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and his servants died of ordinary suffocation, the geraniums would not have suffered.

"Actually, a deadly gas was used; one good enough to pass detection in the case of human beings. But the man who devised it must have known that it would leave traces on certain plants, specifically flowers. Many a murderer would have overlooked the point, but this one did not. No man knows flowers better than Professor Malbray."

The evidence was beginning to point itself. Reaching the third fold of his paper, The Shadow discussed packages. He gave a brief description of his own activities at Bendleton's when he first arrived there.

The fact that Harvey hadn't mailed Fay's package was important. It indicated that the butler couldn't have mailed the other package which Bendleton presumably sent to Eldwald. From that, The Shadow drew direct conclusions.

"Malbray thought that Harvey had taken out the mail," he declared, "because Fay mentioned that the package to her aunt was gone. So Malbray sent the bomb to Eldwald, faking a wrapper with canceled stamps and imitating Bendleton's handwriting. The package was delivered by a messenger, who simply said he had been to Eldwald's office.

"We can assume, of course, that the messenger was the same man who planted the death device at Bendleton's. But let us consider another point: Malbray's forgery of Bendleton's handwriting. It shows us the full extent of Malbray's cunning.

"He knew that the forgery would pass muster when viewed by Eldwald and his friends, but that it would be detected if studied by experts. Hence, Malbray used an explosive, instead of a poison gas – not just to give variety to his murders, but to destroy the telltale wrapping of the package. When the bomb blasted, it consumed the torn wrapping with one puff of flame."

ANOTHER fold of The Shadow's list produced the words: "Weather doll." This was more than evidence of poison gas at Bendleton's. It drove home the spike that incriminated Malbray.

Oddly, however, The Shadow was more concerned with the ordinary weather doll that he had planted on Bendleton's desk in place of the one with the blackened skirt.

He explained that Malbray couldn't have known about the weather doll, Fay's gift to her father, on the very day of murder. Arriving at Bendleton's later, Malbray had seen an unimpaired doll on the victim's desk.

Pausing, to open another fold of his sheet, The Shadow then declared:

"Malbray knew that, because of the gas action, someone had substituted one doll for another. He heard talk of a prowler who had entered the house at dusk. He recognized that such a person was on the right track, and would probably return to resume his interrupted investigation.

"So he saw to it that a formidable opponent was waiting in the cellar: Oswald, the trained orangutan from Borneo."

Not only had The Shadow eliminated Eldwald as a murderer, since Eldwald, not having come to Bendleton's house, could not have known about the weather doll or the prowler, but The Shadow had also formed a link between Professor Malbray and Stuggert, the keeper of the Loftus Annex at the zoo. But he regarded Stuggert only as an ace in the hole, not as one of Malbray's regular workers.

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The next of The Shadow's items covered that point. He read the word "Servants" before it faded.

"Professor Malbray may have several servants," declared The Shadow, "but I know of two, specifically. One is the house man, Verber; the other, a gardener, Dunwood.

"Now, here is the odd point. Verber keeps constantly from sight whenever Fay Bendleton appears; whereas Dunwood is kept from the view of strangers."

The Shadow looked at the two ardent listeners, as though inviting comment. They gave it.

"Verber must have been the phony electrician," declared Harry. "Malbray is afraid Fay will recognize him."

"He could have been the messenger, too," added Margo. "The only man who really saw his face was Eldwald, who is dead."

Nodding, The Shadow passed over the next item on the list, the word "Messenger," because it was covered. Neither Harry nor Margo could figure Dunwood's case, so The Shadow postponed it. He dealt on the words: "Time Factor."

Malbray, who disclaimed all interest in time, had certainly used it in disposing of Eldwald. Therefore, the professor's pose was his weak point. To build a case against Malbray, which was now The Shadow's cause, would require study of the time factor. In a recollective tone, The Shadow remarked:

"Today, a man named Felkin called me, saying he would see me after four o'clock. He arrived in a taxicab, dead. I believe that Felkin was an informant" – The Shadow turned to the next word on the list – "who had facts against Malbray.

"I might add" – The Shadow gazed from Harry to Margo – "that Felkin had been keeping out of sight, to avoid the police."

"Then Felkin is Dunwood!" Harry jumped to the point at once. "That's why Malbray wouldn't let strangers see him!"

"And if Felkin could tell when it was four o'clock," exclaimed Margo, "so could Professor Malbray. That makes the time factor even more important!"

Both agents were simply voicing The Shadow's own conclusions. He dealt on Felkin's death, explaining that the system of strangulation, attributable to a python, led the trail away from Stuggert, who had no snakes in the Annex.

"Malbray knew that the police had been to the zoo," declared The Shadow, "so he decided to have them go again, on a quest that would be to Stuggert's advantage. We have added our facts; now we shall deal in figures, to include motive in the sum against Professor Malbray."

HE spread the paper flat. Both Harry and Margo saw the figures before they faded and observed that they amounted to two hundred thousand dollars, divided into halves.

"Bendleton and Eldwald each offered Malbray one hundred thousand dollars," announced The Shadow. "Both were very wealthy. Bendleton admired Malbray, while Eldwald regarded the professor with contempt.

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"Extreme opinions, but both could have produced the same result. I feel positive that Bendleton and Eldwald had each paid the professor the full sum he wanted, in order to clinch the deal."

Harry and Margo stared, amazed.

"One against the other, all along!" Harry ejaculated. "After Malbray had the money in the bag, he murdered them."

"But surely," questioned Margo, "Bendleton and Eldwald must have insisted upon some proof that they advanced suck sums?"

"I believed that both relied on witnesses," declared The Shadow. "In Bendleton's case, the witness was his secretary, Jennings, who died with him. Eldwald, a shrewder bargainer, planted an inside man at Malbray's. I refer to Felkin, alias Dunwood. Malbray must have learned that Felkin was checking on the Eldwald deal."

It fitted tightly. Malbray, man of murder, with two hundred thousand dollars in his craw, still owning full rights to his much-prized drug.

Tracing back to the past, The Shadow could picture how Malbray got his start – through swindling Engledon Loftus, with Stuggert as an accomplice. Probably Malbray had begun by interesting Loftus in expeditions to gather tropical plants. When Loftus had shown a preference toward collecting wild animals, Malbray had brought in Stuggert. The two were still in cahoots.

The problem, of course, was to uncover Malbray's crimes in full, and call him to account for them. That, and more.

"Don't forget Fay Bendleton," reminded The Shadow. "Her testimony, pieced with facts, could convict Malbray. He has therefore coaxed her out of circulation. How long she will remain safe, is another question. Therefore, we must make Malbray think that his crimes are undiscovered.

"We can then induce him to seek another dupe. I really believe –"

The Shadow was speaking definitely as Cranston – "that I would make an excellent one. But, while I play the dupe, I can hardly check on inside facts at Malbray's, too. There is also Fay's safety to consider."

With that, The Shadow turned to Margo.

"You know Fay Bendleton," he said. "Why not drop up to see her? She would appreciate company, and I think you could worm an invitation to remain there."

Margo gave a confident nod.

"In your case," spoke The Shadow to Harry, "you can prove one thing while you are accomplishing another. If Felkin and Dunwood were the same man, Malbray will need a new gardener. You are sufficiently qualified for such a position, Vincent. Find out if it is open."

The Shadow settled on the next day as the time for the separate ventures. That done, he discussed other phases, such as methods of communication, should his agents place themselves, as he felt confident they would. When The Shadow and his agents parted, Harry and Margo felt imbued with the same confidence.

Their chief, The Shadow, had marked Professor Malbray as a master of hidden murder. Theirs would be the task of placing guilt upon the supermind of crime!

CHAPTER XIV. WHEN FLOWERS TALKED

MATTERS were working as The Shadow hoped. Margo was a guest at Malbray's, and Harry held the gardener's job. They'd both been on the premises a few days, and were waiting for The Shadow to visit Malbray in the pose of Cranston.

But matters were working in reverse, for Margo wanted to talk to Fay, but couldn't because Malbray was always in his conservatory, close by, when the girls met in the garden. Margo had to agree with the nice things Fay said about the professor, knowing, all the while, that it would be more difficult, later, to convince Fay that Malbray was anything but benign.

Every evening, Fay went to bed soon after dark, because physicians had advised that she get all the rest she could. Margo stayed up until after midnight, reading books in the library, from which she could watch the door of the conservatory, where the professor was usually busy grafting plants or working out new combinations of medicinal herbs.

Thus, Margo was really looking out for Fay, instead of acquiring information; whereas Harry, who had taken over the missing Dunwood's job, was looking for facts, instead of handling secret guard duty.

Harry hoped to talk to Fay, but had found her rather taciturn whenever they met. Meanwhile, thanks to his rating as gardener, he was learning much about the premises. Professor Malbray personally conducted the new gardener through the tropical greeneries, and Harry learned one thing definitely: namely, that the place contained no snakes, small or large.

The banyan trees were interesting, particularly one curious variety which occupied its own glass-walled compartment because it required very special temperatures. It was squattier than the banyans, and its limbs were unusually thin and long, some spreading close to the ground. Malbray pointed it out to Harry through the glass-paned wall.

Professor Malbray pronounced the tree a hybrid, a cross between the *Ficus Bengalensis*, or banyan, and the *Ficus pumila*, or creeping fig. Odd, the banyan and the fig belonging to the same family, but they did.

Malbray proudly claimed credit for the hybrid, and told Harry that he intended to name it *Ficus Theophilus*, in tribute to himself.

Like the banyans, the *Ficus Theophilus* had aerial roots that grew down to the ground, so straight that they appeared to be tree trunks, making the plant a miniature forest in itself. Harry could look right between them and see the bare ground, so his inspection was satisfactory.

Unlike the banyans, the pet plant had no major trunk, because it was partly fig vine. Some of the propping roots actually entered the ground, thus supporting the shrublike tree, but the rest simply dangled. The *Ficus Theophilus* had a little fence around it, but Malbray was afraid he would have to enlarge the barrier, because the curious tree was spreading more rapidly than the average banyan.

On this particular afternoon, Harry had studied the odd tree and then gone to the garden. Margo was there, chatting with Fay, but their conversation was restricted because of Malbray's presence in the conservatory.

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Harry gave a slight nod to Margo, who decided to get a book; but when she reached the library, she couldn't find the one she wanted, so called to Malbray and he left the conservatory to help her.

The professor found the book without trouble, but Margo held him in conversation. She told him that she really thought that Fay should stay up later than she had been. Malbray agreed that Fay was probably finding life monotonous, rising and retiring with the birds. He promised to talk it over with Dr. Williams the next time he came.

Malbray was in a chatty mood, so he stayed in the library. He told Margo that a guest was coming in the evening, a friend of his named Cranston. Smartly, Margo nodded, and said that she knew Cranston rather well, having met him among the cafe set.

If Malbray thought he could catch Margo off guard, he was wrong. Not only was she ahead of him, through out their chat, she was also giving Harry a chance to talk with Fay.

ALWAYS, when in the garden, Fay took on a conversational mood, particularly over flowers. Harry was near a bed of funnel-shaped blooms that disported shades of red, white, and yellow, some with stripes of combining colors. Fay approached, and spoke dreamily:

"Lovely, aren't they? I believe those flowers were Dunwood's favorites. He looked at them every day."

"Very pretty," agreed Harry. Then, deciding it best to emphasize whatever he knew about flowers, he added: "They are a rather common species, though. Many people have Four O'Clocks in their gardens."

"Four O'Clocks?" The term puzzled Fay. "Why, Dunwood termed them Peruvian Marvels."

"Another name for them," said Harry. "Botanically, the flower is called *Mirabilis Jalapa*. The name Four O'Clock is popularly used –"

Harry cut himself off before adding the word "because." It was better to let Fay think of the flowers as Peruvian Marvels. The term "Four O'Clock" had a most significant meaning. It came from the hour at which the Peruvian Marvels habitually opened their blossoms, every afternoon!

Four o'clock.

It was the hour Felkin had mentioned in his call to Cranston; the time at which he would be able to "get away." In this house where he lived at Dunwood, Felkin hadn't needed a clock to recognize that hour. He'd simply watched the Four O'Clocks open their blossoms!

"Tell me about Dunwood," suggested Harry. "He must have liked it here."

"He did," assured Fay. "He went out one day without asking Professor Malbray's permission. He was only gone a short while, and the professor said nothing about it. But he discharged him, that very same day."

Without realizing it, Fay was accounting for Felkin's phone call, which must have been made outside the mansion. Malbray had been watching the Four O'Clocks, too, and had been ready to handle Felkin when the right hour came. Very probably, Verber had trailed "Dunwood" and overheard his phone call.

It was after four o'clock at present, for the Marvels were wide open. Harry began to walk around the garden as though looking for his own favorite flower, and Fay followed. Harry came upon a bed of yellow flowers, which had a four-petal arrangement. He struck them just at the right time.

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The flowers were popping open almost like silent firecrackers. They were Evening Primroses, otherwise known as *Oenothera*. They were telling an hour, too, which Harry estimated as five o'clock, because the sun was quite low.

When Fay pointed to another bed of Evening Primroses, containing white flowers that hadn't opened, Harry wasn't surprised when she remarked that they would be the next to watch.

By Harry's forming calculations, "next" signified six o'clock. A new thought struck him. He turned to Fay.

"You seem to know most of the flowers," he said. "Which variety is your favorite?"

"I like them all," replied Fay. "That is, all except the Catchflies." She stooped by a border of pink flowers, which were still closed. "See how sticky the stems are? That's why I don't like them. I haven't noticed them recently, because I've been going to bed so early, always before they open."

SINCE Harry knew that Fay retired soon after dusk, he set the time of the Catchflies at seven o'clock. Hoping to learn more from Fay's reminiscences, Harry queried casually:

"You stayed up later when you first came here?"

Fay nodded.

"It was the day Mr. Cranston came here," she began. "You've met Mr. Cranston?"

Harry stared, blankly.

"Of course you haven't," Fay recalled. "Dunwood was still here, then. I watched the Catchflies open after Mr. Cranston had gone. Then I went to the library, to read a book. Finally, Professor Malbray called to me from the conservatory. He wanted me to see the *Nyctanthes*."

She pointed to the hursinghar tree. Its closed yellow flowers looked very tiny.

"They're much prettier when they've opened," said Fay. "So are the Tropical Water Lilies, the blue ones" – the girl was pointing to the pool – "and they were open, too, that evening. But I didn't see them spread their long thin petals. They opened while I was still in the library."

From Fay's statements, Harry, still figuring on an hourly basis, set the Tropical Water Lily at eight o'clock, and the *Nyctanthes* at nine. Fay had seen the opening of the Catchfly and the *Nyctanthes*, but had missed the Water Lily. The point was very plain.

Fay had seen Professor Malbray at seven o'clock, and later at nine, but not between. He'd been in the conservatory, she thought, but Harry doubted it. On that evening, Kirby Eldwald had met death at eight o'clock.

Assuming that Verber had been the messenger with the murder package, someone must have driven the car that took him to and from the hotel.

Professor Malbray could be the man!

Those missing two hours were quite sufficient, and Harry, tracing back, decided that Malbray could also have taken Verber over to Long Island the day the fellow planted the death device in Bendleton's cellar.

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It had been done quite early, before Fay, herself, had driven over here to Malbray's. Thus, the professor could easily have arrived home ahead of Fay's visit.

Easy enough for Malbray, whose flowers talked to him in terms of time. They were speaking to Harry, too, as he looked around, telling their entire story. Flowers by the hundreds, all shapes, all sizes, all colors, but among them – if Harry's theory proved right – there would be exactly twenty-four, each signifying a different hour of the day, or night, by its mere act of opening!

Professor Malbray's private garden was his clock. The problem of the time factor, most important in building a case against the master murderer, was on its way to a solution.

One thing, alone, puzzled Harry Vincent. He wondered how Malbray could have left the conservatory, while Fay was in the library, that evening when Eldwald had been blasted out of existence.

He couldn't have come out through the garden, because the lily pond was too deep and wide to wade across. Harry had tested it, with a pole, and found it eight feet deep. Malbray certainly couldn't have taken time to change in and out of a bathing suit, twice.

Maybe he'd slipped past Fay while she was engrossed with her book. Such speculation, however, was scarcely worth while. Harry had found out the real secret of the garden: that it served as a flower clock.

After he passed that fact along, Harry could leave the rest to The Shadow.

CHAPTER XV. GAME FOR GAME

LAMONT CRANSTON arrived for dinner, and Fay Bendleton stayed up for the special occasion. From the moment that Cranston entered the house, facts evidenced themselves in accepted style.

It was Verber who admitted Cranston, and the short-built servant turned away through the library as Cranston entered the conservatory. As usual, Verber didn't want to be seen by Fay Bendleton. She was the one person he had to avoid, because she might recognize his face.

Fay had described Verber as rather thickset, which he wasn't. However, The Shadow understood Fay's mistake on that point. She'd also mentioned that the "electric man" had worn a heavy sweater under his coat; rather odd, because the afternoon had been fairly warm. But The Shadow didn't regard it as odd. He knew that Verber had worn the sweater to add stockiness to his middle-sized stature.

The "messenger" at the Clairwood Hotel had been a trifle toward the stocky side, too, and had managed to get away without showing his face. So Professor Malbray was keeping Verber on display, as usual, except when Fay was around.

There was another matter of interest. Malbray wasn't keeping his new gardener, Vincent, out of sight, as he had done with Dunswood. Fay, of course, had seen Dunswood, but neither Cranston nor Weston had. Tonight, The Shadow had a photograph of Felkin with him, intending to give it to Margo. It would come in useful, later.

During dinner, Margo chatted rather brightly, and managed, very casually, to inform Cranston on certain matters in Malbray's household. Even though Malbray heard everything that Margo said, he couldn't have suspected what she was about, for it passed as ordinary table chat.

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The Shadow learned that Malbray had three other servants in the house, beside Verber. A chef, a housekeeper, and a serving man made up the trio, and the last-named was on display, because he was serving the dinner, Verber being busy at something else. The serving man looked quite dull, and Margo gave The Shadow a look to infer that the chef and housekeeper were the same.

All loyal to Malbray, and therefore to be watched; but none were of Verber's caliber. From the way Margo mentioned the servants, The Shadow took it that they played no active part in any of Malbray's crimes.

It was Fay who helped by talking about the gardeners, who lived outside the mansion. Malbray kept only one man, Vincent, on the premises; the rest came to work from their homes, wherever those happened to be.

Some had only part-time jobs, but preferred the arrangement. Of course, Vincent was around all the time, living in the servants' quarters, as Dunwood had.

From this, The Shadow gained the impression that the garden help, like the servants, knew nothing of Malbray's murder game. He also decided that they constituted a reserve group that might prove exceedingly dangerous. It all depended upon what they did when not working on their part-time jobs.

It would be clever of Malbray, to have thugs available if needed, at the same time pretending that he knew nothing of their real caliber. He could draw them in, or cut them adrift, as he preferred, and it might be that he had hired them through Karl Stuggert, who ran the Loftus Annex at the zoo.

An interesting tie-up: Malbray and Stuggert. One that fitted more and more with the data that The Shadow was still acquiring in regard to the Loftus estate.

It could even be that Professor Malbray was responsible for the sudden death of Engledon Loftus during the game-hunting expedition in Africa. It would certainly account for the funds that had started Malbray in his large-scale horticulture ventures. A murderer of past experience, Malbray was well-fitted to perpetrate coolly his recent crimes.

BY the time dinner was over, Fay was very tired. She said good night and went upstairs to bed, turning to the right when she reached the landing. Professor Malbray gave a worried headshake as he turned to The Shadow.

"Fay's condition is more serious than she realizes," said Malbray. "She hasn't recovered from the shock of her father's death. The physicians have recommended absolute quiet."

"So Fay has that side of the house all to herself," put in Margo, in a tone of approval. "I sleep in the other wing, so as not to disturb her."

Again, Margo was putting special significance in her statement. Her words didn't carry the approval she expressed by tone. Margo was telling The Shadow that she'd been placed distant from Fay, and wouldn't be able to reach the other girl in an emergency.

Margo went on.

"Even the slightest shock might be fatal to Fay," she said. "All the physicians agree that her heart couldn't stand a sudden strain. So we're taking good care of her" – Margo turned from Cranston to Malbray – "aren't we, professor?"

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Malbray acknowledged that they were; then remarked that he had matters to discuss with Cranston, which was a hint for Margo to go into the library and burrow herself in a book. She complied, and Malbray conducted Cranston into the conservatory.

Matters were very delicately balanced with Malbray, though he didn't suppose that Cranston knew it. The Shadow, however, could picture every angle.

Cleverly, Malbray was using Fay's welfare as a pretext to keep her at his house, where she couldn't learn that her father's death was murder; or, even worse, that Bendleton had also been branded as Eldwald's killer in the imaginary game of mutual death.

Naturally, Malbray wasn't telling Fay, because such facts might give her the shock that the physicians feared. Should Fay find out about matters, she wouldn't necessarily lose her confidence in Malbray; but the way would be paved toward something more.

She might want to talk to the police, hoping to exonerate her father. If she learned that her own statements, made to Weston, had been taken to mean that Bendleton sought Eldwald's life, Fay's indignation would know no bounds.

Murder might out, with another murderer as the culprit at the throttle. So Malbray was seeing to it that murder didn't "out." Which meant, to The Shadow, that Fay's position was quite precarious. If Malbray found it necessary to forestall Fay's testimony, he'd provide some "shock" that would dispose of her before she could talk.

As usual, Malbray was covering one game with another. As soon as he and Cranston were seated in the conservatory, the professor assumed his most benign expression and began to talk in terms of humanity.

"I AM back where I started," declared Malbray. "No one could have suffered more from the deaths of Bendleton and Eldwald than did I. But my suffering will be small compared to that of human beings who must still await the boon of the priceless drug of my creation."

The Shadow nodded. There was no question that the deaths of two rival bidders prevented Somnotone from reaching the public. Regretfully, Malbray cupped his hand in his chin and eyed his visitor intently.

"If I had the funds, I could develop it myself, Cranston," declared Malbray. "Not for my own profit, though I feel that any investor should be entitled to a fair return."

"Did Bendleton want a return?"

"No," returned Malbray. "He wanted nothing, whereas Eldwald wanted everything. That is why I no longer care to treat with men of extreme ideas. I believe you are more practical, Cranston."

"Possibly, professor. Of course –"

"I understand," interrupted Malbray. "Being practical, you recognize that if you associate your name with Somnotone, it might lead to rumors. It would be bad business, considering that two men destroyed each other in their effort to obtain the precious drug."

The Shadow nodded.

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"But you are a humanitarian, too," insisted Malbray. "Therefore, you would like to furnish financial support. Ah, well" – he shrugged – "my name is already identified with Somnotone. I must go ahead with it, on my own. But if I had a silent partner –"

The pause brought the result Malbray wanted. Cranston became interested. Soon, the professor was tabulating figures, calculating that one hundred thousand dollars would be needed to market the drug on a nationwide scale.

All the while, he emphasized that Cranston's connection with it would not be mentioned, and he calculated that his silent partner would double his investment in due time.

The Shadow was being treated to the same sort of build-up that Bendleton and Eldwald had received, though he was quite sure that Malbray was playing a middle course this occasion.

In their cases, Malbray had gained funds sub rosa by playing one against the other; with Cranston, he was equally clever, using the avoidance of notoriety as a means to an end.

"Suppose you bring the funds tomorrow," suggested Malbray, when Cranston had approved the figures on Somnotone. "In cash, of course, so there will be no canceled check as evidence of a transaction on which you prefer absolute silence."

On which Malbray preferred silence, though he neatly dodged that point. Shrewd was the professor's gaze as he watched Cranston's slow nod. The approval satisfied Malbray. He questioned:

"When will the funds be available?"

"Tomorrow," was Cranston's reply. "I shall draw them from different banks. You may expect me some time after three o'clock, professor."

Malbray spread his hands apologetically, reminding his visitor that this house was on a timeless basis. As he spoke, Malbray gave a wary glance toward the garden, which Cranston happened to be facing. Malbray spied a certain flowerbed, a figure just beyond it. He frowned.

"I thought Vincent had left," remarked Malbray, "but he is still in the garden. I hope he didn't overhear us."

MALBRAY beckoned, and The Shadow followed. Fortunately, Harry was in a far corner of the garden and couldn't have overheard. He explained that he was checking over the flowerbeds to learn how many needed weeding. While Harry was speaking, The Shadow was looking at the nearest bed.

It contained purplish flowers that looked much like Morning-glories, and the wide, silken funnels were opening to the full. Turning, Malbray observed Cranston's interest in the flowers. In his turn, The Shadow parried:

"You have produced a remarkable species, professor. I never saw a Morning-glory open at night, before."

"The Morning-glory belongs to the family Convolvulacea," stated Malbray. "There are some yonder, reds and blues, which you will notice are closed. This flower is the Evening-glory, belonging to the family Ipomea. I developed it from the rather common purple bindweed."

Cranston gave a casual nod, but in that moment, Harry was sure that The Shadow had also gotten an inkling to Malbray's flower clock, even though the Evening-glory was a much less obvious clue than the Four

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O'Clocks had been.

On Malbray's floral time table, the Evening–glory stood for ten o'clock at night. Harry had already made a note of it.

Following the others to the conservatory, Harry gave the professor a sheet of penciled notes relative to weeds, thus satisfying Malbray that he'd really been busy in the garden.

Harry had some blank sheets, too; he was folding one, when it slipped from his fingers and fell beyond the desk. Cranston promptly stooped, picked it up and returned it to Harry.

Malbray noticed Harry unfold the sheet and glance at it. Sudden suspicion crossed Malbray's mind. Cranston could have switched the blank sheet for another. It was policy for Malbray to concentrate on Harry, so he did, with the inquiry:

"More notes, Vincent?"

"Only a blank paper," replied Harry. He crumpled the sheet and tossed it into a wastebasket. "Good evening, professor."

His eyes following the tossed wad, Malbray didn't see the other folded sheet that went into Cranston's pocket. The Shadow had actually made the switch that Malbray suspected.

After Harry had left, The Shadow chatted with Malbray a while; then decided to go. Malbray started to show him out; then he stepped back into the conservatory.

Rapidly, the wrinkle–faced botanist dug the crumpled paper from the wastebasket and opened it, only to find that it was actually blank. Malbray relaxed into a pleased smile, deciding that Cranston and Vincent weren't in collusion, after all.

Malbray didn't guess that Harry had actually read instructions from that sheet – writing inscribed in The Shadow's special blue ink, that faded rapidly after contact with the air.

Nor could the professor realize that by returning to the conservatory, he had given Cranston a chance to stop at the library and deliver instructions to Margo, too, along with a very important photograph.

Verber had arrived at the front door and was unbolting it when Malbray overtook Cranston. The professor personally bowed his affluent visitor out to the open–topped limousine.

Riding away, The Shadow brought Harry's sheet from his pocket and applied the flame of a cigarette lighter to its under surface. Writing appeared, and The Shadow read Harry's secret report, detailing what he had learned about Malbray's method of telling time by cowers.

It fitted with The Shadow's own inkling, but that wasn't why a soft laugh came from Cranston's lips. The Shadow was thinking how neatly the paper switch had worked.

He'd used his vanishing ink, while Harry had employed an appearing variety. Malbray had twice seen what he thought was the same sheet of paper, blank before and after!

Game for game, The Shadow was working to a showdown with Professor Malbray, a climax to crime that would be reached upon the morrow!

CHAPTER XVI. AROUND THE CLOCK

THOUGH Professor Malbray didn't know it, his new gardener, Harry Vincent, spent the rest of the night in the patio garden, dozing only at fitful intervals. Harry was out to complete his time chart as far as possible, and he managed much of it.

The opening of the Moonflower, a species of wild anemone, marked eleven in the evening. Midnight was told by a cactus plant, which Harry identified as the Night-blooming Cereus, distinguishable by its large pink petals.

Harry almost missed the Snow Thistle, that spread at one in the morning, and he had trouble classifying the wild Goatbeard, at two o'clock.

The rest were easy. The picris, a kind of chicory, opened its large yellow rays at three, while the four-o'clock flower proved to be a form of Camomile, quite similar to a daisy. The Poppy popped at five, one whole bed of flowers becoming a veritable poppy field.

At six, when the true Morning glory took over, it was time for Harry to leave and get some steady sleep.

Soon afterward, Margo took over. Fay always arose early, and this morning, Margo did the same. Of course, Professor Malbray, who never seemed to sleep, saw fit to arrive in the conservatory just after the girls met in the garden. But that didn't prevent Margo from noticing some aquatic plants that were opening in the little pool. They were Water Roses, and they stood for seven o'clock.

Just before lunch, Fay went indoors. Harry reappeared, and had a chance to speak to Margo in a corner of the garden, unnoticed by Malbray, who was thinking in terms of people talking to Fay.

Margo gave Harry the rest of the flower list: the Scarlet Pimpernel for eight o'clock; the Venus Mirror at nine; the Purslane for ten o'clock; and the star of Bethlehem, denoting the hour of eleven.

Harry had to identify the Venus Mirror, which Margo had mistaken for an ordinary violet, and he decided, after some debate, that the Purslane could better be termed the "Red Maid." A showy pink flower was opening as Professor Malbray called that lunch was ready. Margo paused to point it out to Harry, undertoning:

"It looks like a marigold –"

"The Fig Marigold," defined Harry. "I hadn't noticed it before. It's also called the Moon Flower, as much a giveaway as the Four O'Clock!"

During lunch, Malbray glanced at Fay and said that she looked over-tired, attributing it to the fact that she had stayed up the previous evening.

Admitting she was tired, Fay decided to take a nap after lunch. She went upstairs, while Malbray entered the conservatory, leaving Margo in the library.

Shortly, Harry appeared, coming from the conservatory. Making sure that Verber wasn't around, he confided new facts to Margo.

"I just spotted Malbray looking at the carnations," said Harry. "They're opening, at one o'clock. I've doped out the flowers for two and three: the Blue Cornflower and the Autumn Dandelion. I guess Malbray was afraid

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I'd weed them out, because he told me he wouldn't need me until later."

"Does he suspect anything?" inquired Margo.

"I don't think so." Harry noted Margo's serious mood. "Why?"

Margo told Harry about Fay's nap. She was sure that Malbray was making extra effort to keep her from talking to Fay; or, equally likely, he might be trying to trap Margo, if she went up to see the other girl. Margo was sure that the housekeeper was somewhere about, probably acting as Malbray's spy.

"I'd hoped for just a word or two with Fay," expressed Margo, "so I could tell her to speak with you, Harry. Fay would trust you on my say—so. You could show her that picture of Felkin. I'd have to talk to her, first —"

HARRY was taking a cautious look at Malbray's door. There were no sounds from beyond it. Beckoning Margo from the library, Harry led her toward the tropical greenery that housed the Ficus Theophilus; then turned a corner, to a steep stairway down into the cellar.

They were under the wing where Fay's room was located, and Harry showed Margo a hot-water pipe.

"If we tapped this," he began, "Fay would hear us. I don't suppose, though, that she understands code —"

He paused, hearing sounds from the pipe itself; Margo heard them, too, the rhythmic gurgles of running water.

"Fay must be taking a shower," exclaimed Margo. "I don't think she would hear the taps."

"I've a better idea," said Harry. "Wait here."

He returned with a wrench, and a hose with a spray funnel on the end of it. Removing the nozzle of the funnel, Harry transformed it into a megaphone. He used the wrench to loosen a joint in the hot-water pipe; then found the water valves and shut them off.

Working rapidly, Harry finished separating the pipe; he plugged in the rubber hose and handed the improvised megaphone to Margo, saying:

"Talk!"

Upstairs, Fay was wondering what had cut off the shower. When she heard a muffled contralto voice coming through the shower spray itself, Fay nearly jumped out of the shower stall. She never would have recognized the voice, but for its words:

"Fay! This is Margo. Listen! If you can hear me, tap the pipe."

Fay tapped the pipe with the heel of a slipper. Briefly, Margo told her to trust anything that Harry told her on their next meeting in the garden. Margo would see to it that Professor Malbray wasn't around at the time. Margo didn't give any details; she merely asked for three more taps, if Fay understood and would agree.

The three taps came.

Nothing of this reached Professor Malbray. Using the hot-water pipe for a speaking tube was a very cute system, particularly with the funnel attachment, as Margo had been able to muffle her speech so that only Fay

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could hear.

Even Harry, standing close by, couldn't catch Margo's tone, so Malbray certainly could not have heard anything in the conservatory.

However, Malbray wasn't in the conservatory waiting to see the Blue Cornflower open at two o'clock. He was a very long way off, clear downtown, in fact.

How he had gotten there was something of a mystery, since neither Harry nor Margo had seen him come from the conservatory during their preliminary stay in the library.

They'd have been surprised had they known that Malbray was gone from the house; even more amazed at his destination. Professor Malbray was calling on Commissioner Weston, in the latter's office.

THERE were others in the office: Inspector Cardona and an owlish man, who proved to be Assistant Director Truban of the Central Park Zoo.

Weston introduced Truban to Malbray, and each merely nodded. Truban was interested in animals, Malbray in plants. Naturally, they didn't coincide.

Truban was explaining about some ocelots, which had arrived at the zoo. He'd understood that four were coming, but the cage contained only three, and was in battered condition when taken from the truck. Truban was afraid that the fourth ocelot had escaped, and the appeal he therewith made was addressed chiefly to Inspector Cardona.

"You told me you'd give me help if I needed it," insisted Truban. "I do need your help. If the ocelot is at large in Central Park, it may prove dangerous. I haven't enough men to hunt for it."

"I'll send some men out," promised Cardona. "Only, you'll have to tell me what an ocelot looks like."

Truban described the ocelot as a large American spotted cat, ranging from Texas to Patagonia, which didn't include Central Park. This specimen of the *Felis pardalis*, as Truban termed the ocelot, was yellow, with black markings, much like a leopard.

"Why don't you go along with Mr. Truban?" queried Weston, turning to Cardona. "He'll show you three ocelots, so you can identify the fourth. He'll tell you all about its habits, so you'll know where to look for it."

"The ocelot," stated Truban, "has nocturnal habits –"

"Like the owl," put in Weston, addressing Cardona sarcastically. "You bagged an owl once, inspector. This is your chance to tackle larger game."

Cardona grumbled that tonight was his evening off. Weston countered by suggesting that he spend it strolling through Central Park.

The commissioner was recalling how Cardona had dragged him to the zoo on two fruitless excursions. He felt that the ocelot hunt would be a good lesson. It might break Cardona of his worst habit, that of having too many hunches. The owl episode had about ended Weston's patience on the hunch question.

After Cardona left with Truban, Malbray chatted with Weston. His weather eye on the clock, Malbray watched the time, though the commissioner did not guess it.

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Three o'clock passed; with it, the opening of the Autumn Dandelions. But Malbray wasn't thinking in terms of flowers. Three o'clock was the hour when the banks closed.

Professor Malbray wanted to make sure that Lamont Cranston did not drop into see Commissioner Weston, or even call him by telephone, regarding a matter of one hundred thousand dollars.

Cannily, Malbray calculated that if Cranston happened to be working with the law, he'd surely tell the commissioner about the Somnotone purchase.

As four o'clock approached, there still was no word from the commissioner's friend.

By then, Weston was getting restless. For the tenth time, he agreed that Fay Bendleton shouldn't know about her father's crimes until her health was better. The commissioner was wishing that Malbray would leave. Weston said he was going out of town, which was true, and that he had a lot of matters to finish first, which wasn't true.

To back the latter claim, the commissioner picked up the telephone and began sending out some unnecessary orders. Among them, he ordered a radio broadcast to the effect that a dangerous ocelot was at large in Central Park. Remembering Malbray's aversion to telephones, Weston hoped that the professor would become annoyed, which Malbray soon did.

With a rather forced smile, Malbray made the most of an interval which Weston purposely allowed, and bowed his way out.

Commissioner Weston treated himself to a chuckle as soon as the unwanted visitor had left. He didn't know that Malbray was chuckling, too, with a much deeper appreciation.

Half past four and all was well with Professor Malbray. By the time his flower clock had completed its twenty-four-hour round, he hoped to be one hundred thousand dollars richer. Malbray's gain would be Weston's loss.

If all continued to go as well as Malbray planned it, Weston would be lacking a very good friend, in the person of Lamont Cranston. Malbray's mind of murder was again at work!

CHAPTER XVII. BAIT FOR MURDER

IT was nine o'clock and Fay Bendleton was still in the garden. She had slept all afternoon, she said, and was therefore staying up late – a decision which Malbray didn't disapprove.

He was in the conservatory, talking with Lamont Cranston, but Fay couldn't overhear them because the fountain was splashing in the soft light that tinted the deep lily pond.

Strange thoughts were gripping Fay. She had been swayed by a conflict of emotions for hours; since five o'clock, to be exact, when she had come downstairs, to see Professor Malbray coming from the conservatory.

Fortunately, she hadn't learned of his treachery at that time; hence, she had greeted him as pleasantly as usual.

Going into the garden, Fay had been watching the sun cups of the yellow Evening Primroses as they opened, when Harry had joined her. Tersely, he had told her of the accusation against her dead father, backing his story with newspaper clippings. In almost the same breath, Harry had relieved Fay's tension by placing the blame on Professor Malbray.

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Felkin's picture was a help. Fay recognized the man as Dunwood. Later, Harry maneuvered her into the conservatory and let her get a glimpse of Verber when he was answering the front door, to admit Cranston.

Keyed to the situation, Fay in a glance, had recognized the servant as the self-styled "electric man" who had come to her home the day of her father's death.

Cranston's presence at the dinner table had been fortunate. His eyes always ready when Fay looked for them, imbued the girl with strength; they flashed silently, and without Malbray's knowledge. Even now, Fay could feel their power, and felt confident for any ordeal as long as Cranston was around. Yet her own thoughts weighed heavily.

She was strolling near the hursinghar and sight of the tree's spreading yellow blossoms, symbols of nine o'clock, made her remember the depth of Malbray's craft. Shuddering slightly, the girl turned away and stooped to admire a bed of flowers that weren't part of the sinister clock.

They were pink things, like Camellias, clusters with exquisite waxy petals. As Fay's fingers neared them, the flowers snapped away angrily. Their pods flipped open, scattering seeds like miniature shrapnel. They were Touch-me-nots, a name that Fay had heard, but hadn't understood before.

Like the Catchflies, they were a serious omen. Though the showering seeds were harmless, Fay wondered what Touch-me-nots would be like on a larger scale. Her thoughts ran to the huge plants in Malbray's tropical greeneries. She pictured weird creatures of the plant world on parade, seeking prey.

In a way, the thought was laughable; still, plants and herbs could produce drugs and poisons. Unquestionably, the poison gas that killed Fay's father, as well as the explosives that did away with Eldwald, were made from things that Malbray used in experiments.

Harry had spoken of noxious garden sprays, employed quite legitimately, however, only on his own premises, for they had also served in murder. Here, however, his ways were even darker.

There was Dunwood's death, for instance, as yet unexplained. What was more, Malbray might, at any time, invoke some drug that would produce quite the opposite effect of his wonderful and beneficial Somnotone.

Recalling Malbray's prized invention, Fay looked toward the conservatory, wondering how Cranston was making out with the professor. There was nothing to do but wait; so wait, Fay did, hoping that Cranston would still be present when she was forced to face Malbray again.

LAMONT CRANSTON was making out all right.

Most persons wouldn't have felt pleased in handing over one hundred thousand dollars, in cash, but Cranston did. He was counting the money so readily, that Professor Malbray showed a certain uneasiness. Leaning across the desk, Malbray spoke earnestly to his latest dupe.

"This transaction should be witnessed, Cranston," insisted Malbray. "For your protection, you know."

"But why?" queried Cranston. "I trust you implicitly, professor!"

"Something might happen to me –"

"In this secluded house? Never, professor! You are cut off from the world; even time does not exist here."

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Malbray shook his head sadly.

"I have forgotten time," he declared, "but I doubt that time has forgotten me. We must have a witness. I shall provide one."

He stepped to the garden and called Fay. When she arrived, Malbray began to explain matters that she already understood, though he interpreted them quite differently than Harry had. Malbray's tone was unusually benign, which only made Fay recognize the tremendous depths of his hypocrisy.

Malbray spoke tenderly of Fay's father. Bendleton's last wish, so Malbray claimed, was to have Somnotone sponsored for the benefit of all humanity. Like Malbray, Cranston understood. Generously, Cranston was offering to finance the boon-giving drug without taking an iota of credit.

It was appropriate that Fay should witness the transaction. Malbray skipped the point that it was for Cranston's protection. It was a tribute to Bendleton, Malbray told Fay, and his tone should have thrilled her to tears.

Indeed, Fay's eyes did moisten when she thought of her father's betrayal by Malbray, the man he had so thoroughly trusted. So she put up a good pretext, after all.

Meanwhile, The Shadow was getting a first-hand glimpse of Malbray's method. Probably the professor had given Bendleton the same sort of talk, which resulted in the secretary, Jennings, becoming a witness.

Very likely, Malbray had called in Dunwood to witness the Eldwald deal, a thing satisfying enough to Eldwald, since Dunwood, otherwise Felkin, was already in his hire.

Those thoughts, however, emphasized the gravity of the present situation. When Bendleton died, so had Jennings. After Eldwald's death, Felkin's had followed. If anything was to happen to Cranston, Malbray was certainly scheduling a similar fate for Fay. Fortunately, The Shadow had foreseen that prospect.

"We might call in another witness," suggested Malbray. "I leave it to you, Mr. Cranston."

"Verber might do," returned The Shadow. "That is, if we need another."

Fay noticed that Malbray lost something of his poise at mention of Verber. He couldn't call in the servant, of course, because Fay might promptly recognize him.

Still believing that Fay had not glimpsed Verber during her stay at this house of flowers, Malbray resolved to take no chances. He decided what The Shadow wanted: namely, that no other witnesses would be needed.

Thus Harry and Margo, the persons that Malbray might call upon, were freed from impending death warrants, which was highly important, for The Shadow was depending heavily upon their coming services and did not want them hampered.

Solemnly, Malbray put the money in a desk drawer, locked it, and gave the key to Fay as a token of his trust. The girl trembled slightly, but not enough to rouse Malbray's suspicions. Cranston's eyes were the steadying influence that helped Fay past that tremor.

Then they were leaving the conservatory, going out through the hallway. There, as Cranston said good night to Fay, Malbray gave a worried look toward the girl.

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"It must be very late," said the professor. "I haven't an idea how long it has been since dark came, but you mustn't tire yourself again, Fay."

"I'm going right to bed," returned Fay. "Good night, professor."

At that moment, Margo arrived from the library in response to a cue that Cranston flashed her.

"I'm turning in, too," said Margo, with a yawn. "I was up with the birds this morning, along with Fay."

TOGETHER, the girls started upstairs. Malbray saw Cranston turning toward the door and remembered something, as The Shadow hoped he would.

"You're going to the club, of course?" queried Malbray. "To see your friend, the commissioner?"

"Hardly," was the reply. "I thought Weston was going out of town."

"No, no," rejoined Malbray. "I saw him this afternoon. He said he would be back; that he hoped he would see you."

"I might go to the club." Cranston's tone was very leisurely. "Yes, I suppose I should see Weston. I shall go to the club."

He held Malbray just long enough. When the professor turned, to look up at the landing, Margo and Fay had taken their separate ways. But they, too, were showing teamwork.

By hurrying their steps, they were almost out of sight, far enough so Malbray could merely glimpse their backs. Thanks to their co-operation, The Shadow had played a human shell game on that master of flimflam, Professor Malbray.

Not for an instant did Malbray guess that Fay was the girl going to the left, and Margo the one who had turned to the right. Margo was bound for Fay's room, to occupy the post of danger. In her turn, Fay was to substitute for Margo, so that no one would know the difference.

Malbray missed it, and so did Verber, who arrived just as the girls went out of sight. The Shadow had calculated that Verber would be tardy on account of Fay, and it worked exactly in accordance.

As on the previous night, Verber unbolted the front door, and Malbray bowed Cranston out to the open-topped limousine.

Not far from Malbray's, Cranston spoke to Stanley, suggesting that they stop for gasoline. Stanley couldn't understand it, because he always gassed up in the morning at Cranston's private tank. However, he stopped at a service station, and Cranston then told him to check the tires.

While Stanley was doing it, he heard Cranston's voice beside him. The chauffeur was even more puzzled when his employer beckoned him to one side, off behind a double stack of tires.

The service man was puzzled, too, when he found that the limousine's tank would only take a few gallons. However, when the chauffeur appeared and handed him a tip, along with payment for the gas, the fellow merely gave a shrug.

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Then, the big car was rolling away toward Central Park, the short route to the Cobalt Club. The radio was tuned low and a figure in the rear seat was leaning forward, as though to hear it clearly. No longer, however, was the passenger guised as Cranston. That figure in the rear seat wore the cloak and hat of The Shadow.

Not once did The Shadow look back; not even when other cars moved past and cut ahead of the limousine. He didn't seem to notice them, even when they were in advance. Cars that seemed to be speeding toward some destination, ahead of The Shadow.

Nor was it surprising that the limousine's chauffeur did not report to the rear seat. Stanley was trained so well that he never annoyed his master.

Yet, from the limousine, as it rolled steadily along, came the whispered laugh of The Shadow.

Death lay ahead. Strange death that lurked.

The Shadow knew!

CHAPTER XVIII. DEATH STRIKES

HUNTING the elusive ocelot was a new experience for Inspector Joe Cardona. It had reached the point where Joe had turned himself into quite as stealthy a slinker as the notorious spotted cat. Joe had to slink, or he might have been bagged, himself. Those broadcasts that Weston ordered were the reason.

Everybody and his brother was out to find the missing ocelot. Some were armed with canes, hoping to round up the creature, while others carried potato sacks in which to bag it. The amateur hunters were creating more than a traffic problem as they crossed the park drives. A little encouragement and they'd be battling one another; clubs first, sacks afterward.

So Cardona had to put most of his detail on the job of chasing the general public out of range, which left him free to move around with a few picked men. However, they were keeping to the bushes, not only to uncover the ocelot, but to avoid any chance sluggers who might not have heeded the police warning.

Every now and then, Joe saw a flash bulb flare up, and knew that cameramen had taken a shot. The newspapers would be full of pictures, tomorrow, all relating to Cardona's stalking of jungle prey in the wilds of Central Park.

It all summed up to something that the inspector didn't like: namely, that he'd have to find the ocelot. He'd never live it down, if he didn't.

At least, Cardona had a sensible idea.

He figured, on the theory of like seeking like, that the roaming ocelot would be in the neighborhood of the zoo. So Joe kept working in circles, with the zoo as the center, and he found the going better.

The amateurs were roaming far, getting out of Cardona's way. Which made it easy for Joe to move along the fringes of the driveways, then cut off through the trees, turning his circle into something of a zigzag.

Cardona wasn't far from the Loftus Annex when he witnessed an occurrence that made him temporarily forget the ocelot.

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Nearing an intersection of two drives, Cardona saw two cars coming side by side, one about to pass the other. Something was wrong with their lights, for they were blinking as they went beneath the extended branches of a thick, overhanging tree. Then came the screech of brakes, and Cardona saw the cars again, both jerking to a stop.

Another machine had cut in from the other drive. For a moment, it looked like a three-way smash-up; but the drivers were alert. Cardona heard the clash of locking bumpers, the sound of outraged shouts. He decided to hurry over and settle the traffic question as a mild relief from the monotonous ocelot hunt.

Still a few dozen yards from the intersection, Cardona had another car arrive. He turned to warn it, but its brakes operated smoothly under the control of a competent chauffeur. The car was a large one, a limousine, and it was forced to stop beneath the boughs of the overhanging tree.

By the headlights of a car that came the other way and stopped because of the blockade, Cardona gained a good view of the limousine.

He recognized it as Cranston's new car. Not only because of its make, which was uncommon, but by the lowered top, Cardona saw the chauffeur in front, but couldn't quite make out Stanley's face; so he looked toward the open rear seat, expecting to see Cranston.

Instead, Cardona saw The Shadow!

At least, he was sure he saw The Shadow. Most certainly, that cloaked shape was human, particularly in the way it shifted forward, as if to crouch from the glare that came its way.

Intrigued by the idea of The Shadow riding in Cranston's car, Cardona stated intently. Then, wildly, Joe was leaping forward, shouting a frenzied warning.

He'd seen something else – in the tree bough.

A spotted thing, of yellow and black, shoving from the branches. A beast that had the crouch of a killer, turned in the direction of the prey that chance had brought within its reach.

Before Cardona was able to draw his gun, the creature was springing. It was the missing ocelot, and it was lunging straight down into the open limousine.

IF only The Shadow had heard Joe's shout in time!

Instead, the cloaked occupant of the limousine was utterly unable to swing about. The best that could be done was a drop, flat to the floor of the limousine. That drop was weighted by the ocelot's arrival. Claws stretched, teeth jabbing, the spotted killer landed its full weight home.

How Cardona covered the yardage so quickly, he didn't know. He was halfway to the car when the ocelot landed. His gun was out as he reached the step. Not bothering with the door, Joe hurled himself for the spotted beast, which gave a bound in his direction, claws coming up to meet him.

It was a sequel more astounding than the thing that had occurred before. For, amid that splash of spots that came clawing at him, Cardona saw nothing but flatness on the floor of the car. He'd seen the ocelot reach The Shadow, digging its claws and teeth home, but there was no sign of the prey.

The Shadow had vanished!

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Cardona couldn't vanish. He wasn't even able to dive away, before the killer cat was at him. In his attempt to dodge, Cardona tripped; he was going backward, to the ground, his gun hand wide, and the ocelot, clearing the side of the car, seemed sure of a kill to replace the one that it had so mysteriously missed.

Even more mysterious, in that moment of his backward sprawl, Cardona heard the laugh of The Shadow!

It might have come from nowhere, but the gunshot that emphasized it blasted through from the front seat. It was the jab of an automatic, and it clipped the ocelot.

The beast seemed to jar in midair, and its snarl became a screech. It was half spinning as it reached the downward portion of its spring, and at that instant, the big gun spoke again.

Under the second impact of the .45, the ocelot took another midair twist, and missed Cardona completely as he squirmed closer to the car. Claws actually ripped Cardona's coat; he felt the brush of fur against his face. Literally, the shots had jarred the beast away from him – and more.

Instead of turning to pounce upon Cardona, the wounded cat sprang away with howls that seemed an appeal for shelter. Cardona heard new gun bursts, but they weren't in the direction of the fleeing animal. They were jabbing at the cars that made the blockade, and they were being answered in kind.

Yet the lone marksman was getting results, while his foemen weren't. Abandoning one car, they hopped into the other two and tore away along the curving driveways, the rocky contours of the park helping their escape.

Most amazing to Cardona was the man who did the shooting. Joe didn't see The Shadow; he didn't even see Cranston.

He saw Stanley, the chauffeur!

Then the mystery cleared in part as Cardona came to his feet, intending to yell for police to pursue the fugitive cars. The chauffeur turned around, taking off his cap. He was no longer Stanley; he was Cranston. Calmly, Cranston dissuaded Cardona from the futile chase.

"Hello, inspector," he said. "Surprised to see me? You shouldn't be. You know I like big-game hunting. My chauffeur didn't, so I dropped him off. Had to wear his uniform, of course, to drive a limousine."

Cardona stared; then asked:

"But who was in the back seat?"

"No one," Cranston replied. "You must have been mistaken, inspector."

Cardona was mistaken, but Cranston didn't specify the details. Cardona had seen the figure of The Shadow in the rear of the big car, but it was merely the cloak and hat, surmounted on cushions. Bait for murder, arranged by The Shadow, otherwise Cranston, and on this occasion, Stanley.

"But who were those fellows in the other cars?" queried Cardona. "They began shooting at you, after you fired at the ocelot."

"So I fired at them," rejoined Cranston. "I'd say they were crooks in disguise."

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"And you were in disguise," grunted Cardona. "Maybe I ought to have worn false whiskers, to make it unanimous. Only, then the ocelot would have needed a disguise, too."

Cranston's eyes met Cardona's steadily.

"Are you sure, inspector, that the ocelot wasn't disguised?"

There was no jest in the tone, as Cardona suddenly realized. Then, still in Cranston's style, The Shadow said:

"I heard the broadcasts. I was looking for an ocelot, but I am still not sure I saw one, though I know such game well. Whatever the creature was, I wounded it mortally. Ocelot or no ocelot, we shall find it very near here."

Still dumfounded, Cardona followed The Shadow off into the trees, never realizing that this trail was to carry him to things far more mysterious than an ocelot in disguise.

CHAPTER XIX. WINGED BLACKNESS

THEY found the spotted cat, quite dead, a little way beyond the tree where it had been lurking for its prey.

Cardona's flashlight showed plenty of black spots on the creature's yellow fur. Having seen other ocelots earlier, Cardona would have wagered that this was their twin, if Cranston hadn't probed the matter further.

Stooping in the light, Cranston rubbed the spots. They dwindled, then vanished, under the sweep of his hand. Black spots, dabbed with some quick-drying dye that clung only to the fur.

Yellowness faded somewhat, as Cranston continued the action. Gradually, the ocelot's hide was reduced to a duller tawny color. Only a sizable patch was needed to reveal what the animal really was.

"A puma," identified Cranston. "I believe that we saw one recently, inspector."

"At the Loftus Annex!" recalled Cardona. "That fellow Stuggert had a puma. Say" – Joe pointed his flashlight in the direction that the dead cat faced – "I'll bet this cat was heading that way!"

As if in answer to Cardona came a low, thin whistle, repeated twice in the night, the sort of signal to which a trained beast would respond. There was a pause; then a repetition of the call, given cautiously.

"Stuggert!" exclaimed Cardona. "He's trying to bring in the puma. I've got it! He painted up the puma to look like an ocelot, so it wouldn't be traced back to him. He wanted this critter to be mistaken for the missing ocelot."

"Are you sure there was a missing ocelot?"

Cranston's question brought a stare from Cardona. At last, Joe answered:

"Truban said there was one, and Truban is all right. Wait, though! Truban didn't see the ocelot before it escaped."

"Perhaps there were only three ocelots in the shipment. You can look into that matter later, inspector, after you've learned if Stuggert's puma is missing."

GARDEN OF DEATH

Cardona turned in the direction of the Annex. The Shadow was about to call him back, when Joe returned of his own accord.

"The owl business," Cardona reminded. "I've got an idea that Stuggert used an owl out at Bendleton's, to call off the puma. Only" – Joe shook his head – "the thing that went for the apple tree looked a lot like a man."

"So does Stuggert's orangutan," reminded Cranston. "Remember Oswald, inspector? Test him with a hoot when you reach the Annex."

"A good idea," decided Cardona. "One other thing, Mr. Cranston. You say you were hunting the phony ocelot. But it looks like the thing was after you, too. That's what the traffic mess was for: to stop your car where the puma could take a jump at you. What's the answer?"

Cardona saw Cranston shake his head.

"I really wouldn't know," said The Shadow. "You see, I've been rather out of matters, this evening. I was at a place where all was peaceful. I was calling on Professor Malbray."

"He knew you were taking this route?"

"Certainly," nodded The Shadow. "He insisted that I drive down to the club. He said that the commissioner would be expecting me. Malbray had quite a chat with the commissioner, today."

The Shadow was letting Cardona spring to his own conclusions, which was easy enough, since Joe knew that Weston had gone out of town and wouldn't be back. It was like pointing a finger straight at Malbray, and Cardona linked it with past facts.

He remembered that Malbray had been at Bendleton's only a few hours before the episode of the owl and the orangutan. Cardona's next question was a logical one:

"Was Malbray talking business, Mr. Cranston?"

"Yes," The Shadow replied. "He sold me the rights to Somnotone for one hundred thousand dollars, cash."

"And gave you a receipt?"

"No. Fay Bendleton served as witness, however."

THE whole story of murder was cracking apart and dropping right into Cardona's lap. Correctly, Joe saw Malbray as the heinous master of hidden death. Bendleton first, then Eldwald; now, an attempt on Cranston's life. One more mental hop and Cardona was thinking in terms of Fay Bendleton.

"We've got to get to Malbray's," asserted Cardona grimly. "That girl is in danger! We can use your car, Mr. Cranston."

"And forget Stuggert?" queried The Shadow. "I wouldn't, if I were you, inspector. Let me go up to Malbray's. My return will surprise him, and keep him cautious for a while."

"Not after he's learned that the puma missed."

GARDEN OF DEATH

"But he can't learn for a while. He has no telephone. You can arrest Stuggert and bring him up to Malbray's. Be careful, though, inspector. Take some men with you. Stuggert may prove wily."

With Cardona nodding his agreement, Cranston strolled away. Nearing the limousine, he took off the chauffeur's jacket and carried it with the cap. At the limousine, he found Stanley, who had arrived by cab. Stanley was in shirt sleeves, too, carrying Cranston's coat.

A group of curious onlookers saw chauffeur and master exchange coat and jacket. None, however, saw the other garments, cloak and hat of black, that were flattened in the bottom of the limousine.

Stanley took the wheel and Cranston became the passenger. The big car turned and swung the bend; it was scarcely out of sight before Cranston was putting on the garb of The Shadow.

The fake ocelot hadn't clawed the black attire too badly. The garb obliterated The Shadow from sight as he settled deep in the seat. In fact, the limousine looked quite empty when it paused at the stop sign marking a cross drive. The only token of The Shadow was his whispered laugh.

His keen eyes were noting a glimmer from below a cluster of trees. The light represented the Loftus Annex, where Inspector Cardona would soon be settling certain matters with Karl Stuggert.

More than eager to settle those matters, Cardona was almost at the Annex when The Shadow spied the lights. On the way, Joe looked around for some of his men, but saw none.

Figuring that he had wasted precious minutes, Cardona postponed the business of forming a squad. Not that he intended to ignore Cranston's admonition. It just struck Cardona that he could do a bit of preliminary investigation.

Off from the darkness came the low whistle that Joe had heard before. If Stuggert happened to be the whistler, he wouldn't be in the Annex. So Cardona approached the building and finding the door unlocked, he entered. The place was dimly lighted, and Cardona took a prompt look into the puma's cage.

It was empty.

One point for Cardona. He decided to score another. Moving along the passage, he reached the last cage and took a look at Oswald, the Borneo ape. An orangutan, Cranston had termed the beast, and Cranston was right. What was more, Oswald showed sudden savagery at viewing Cardona.

Springing to the bars of the cage, the ape banged at them and snarled, proving that he wasn't inclined to be pleasant, except when his keeper, Stuggert, was on hand. But Oswald's ugly manner ended when Cardona vocalized an owl's hoot.

Stiffening, Oswald ceased to grimace, and waited to hear the sound again. Cardona gave another hoot, a trifle louder.

The second hoot brought new results: a clatter from the door of the Annex. Cardona swung, drawing a revolver as he came about, in time to surprise Stuggert, flat-footed on the threshold.

THE keeper was back from his puma quest, armed with a stick in one hand, a lighted kerosene lantern in the other.

GARDEN OF DEATH

Cardona beckoned with his gun, and Stuggert approached slowly. Cardona told him to drop the club, and Stuggert let it clatter. He was only about ten feet away, and Cardona let him come a little closer, since the fellow no longer had his weapon. At least, Cardona thought that Stuggert had no weapon, but Joe was wrong. Stuggert still held the lantern.

With a spring that he must have learned from the animals he tamed, Stuggert was suddenly away from Cardona's gun muzzle. In the same move, the fellow gave a cross lash with his lantern that almost hooked Cardona's head.

Joe wheeled away, but before he could take new aim, Stuggert pressed the light switch on the passing wall, leaving only the light of the lantern.

It was flying Cardona's way again, that lantern, and Joe was shooting on the wrong side of it. Immediately, Cardona found himself grappling with Stuggert, who was after the gun, while the lantern bounced around between them, giving close-up flashes of Oswald, grimacing from his cage.

Cardona lost the gun as they shouldered against the cage. It didn't strike the floor; instead, it went through the bars. Oswald, fascinated by the lantern, didn't see the gun land near him, or he might have picked it up and thrown it.

Gunless, Cardona fought to get the lantern, and succeeded. Needing another weapon, Stuggert chose the handle of Oswald's cage.

The barred door yanked open and the orangutan gave a huge roar, flinging itself toward Cardona. Sweeping the lantern wide, Cardona made the killer ape recoil.

Then, before Stuggert could come in and thwack the lantern with his regained club, Cardona sprang into Oswald's cage and pulled the door shut. Sweeping the lantern toward the floor, Joe saw his gun and scooped it up.

Cardona had turned the tables neatly. In the cage or out, it didn't matter, so far, as Oswald was on the other side of the bars. As for Stuggert, he'd be easy to handle, for Cardona had regained his gun by the little trick of out and in.

Stuggert was shooing the orangutan along the passage, toward the outer door, probably to get his ally out of harm's way. Cardona's gruff voice sounded above Oswald's snarls.

"No monkey business, Stuggert!" Cardona didn't recognize the pun he made. "Stand right where you are! Drop the stick and raise your hands!"

Sullenly, Stuggert complied. He shifted deeper into the passage; past the cage, to the boarded partition where Cardona had looked for owls through a little wicket. Holding the lantern so he could watch Stuggert's face, Cardona listened for Oswald's snarls.

They came from outside the Annex. Sliding the lantern handle over his arm, Cardona reached through the cage door, pulled the handle, and stepped out.

"You're going ahead of me," Joe told Stuggert. "So you can make the ape behave when we catch up with him. Remember! My gun will be poking the middle of your back!"

GARDEN OF DEATH

Stuggert began a helpless shrug that became a sudden move. His hand grabbed the partition at his shoulder; he swung the whole thing open, wicket and all, like the top half of a door. The flipping barricade swept straight toward Cardona's face, but Joe made a quick half-drop, so that it only grazed his head.

Up from beneath the barrier, Cardona turned to fire after Stuggert, who was speeding out along the passage. Before Joe could pull his gun trigger, a whirring stir came from the compartment that Stuggert had opened wide.

Thinking of pythons, Cardona dropped away again, swinging the lantern to startle the new menace.

BLACKNESS zoomed – a huge, spreading shape, like arms in cloak sleeves. It swept the lantern from Cardona's grasp.

The light extinguished with a crash, and in the absolute gloom, Cardona heard winged blackness whiz along the passage, as if in pursuit of Stuggert and the orangutan.

How The Shadow had come into the Annex, Cardona could not guess. He heard the roar of a motor, which meant that Stuggert was escaping with the orangutan and hoped that The Shadow would overtake them. Whether The Shadow did or not, Cardona could guess where the trail would lead: to Malbray's.

Still clutching his gun, Cardona stumbled along the passage and reached the clear night air. Stuggert's car was gone, and so was the winged blackness that the animal trainer had released. It was odd, Cardona thought, that The Shadow should have waited until that moment to disclose himself.

Considering that he had recently mistaken Cranston for a chauffeur, and a painted puma for an ocelot, Cardona should have realized that living blackness, moving with the speed of wings, might represent a creature other than The Shadow!

CHAPTER XX. BATTLERS OF NIGHT

IT was very quiet in Fay's room, so quiet that it worried Margo. In Margo's own room, which faced the Hudson, occasional sounds of river traffic could be heard at night. This room however, was so secluded that it seemed hundreds of miles from New York.

Its windows were toward the flower patio, something that Margo hadn't known before, for her own room, in the other wing, was on the outside of the house.

Lights were off in the patio, and the fountain was no longer running. From the window, however, Margo could see a dim glow in the conservatory, indicating that Professor Malbray was still busy there.

Or was he?

At times, Margo had noted stealthy footfalls outside her door, which might have been Malbray's, rather than the housekeeper's. Apparently, someone was very anxious to see that Fay wasn't disturbed.

Naturally Margo, subbing for Fay, didn't want to be disturbed, either, so she had locked the door. She wasn't at all sure, however, that the door couldn't be opened by Malbray, if he so wanted.

Rather than risk discovery of her ruse, Margo had gone to bed as soon as she reached Fay's room. At present, she was wearing slippers and kimono, but she was ready to slip them off and slide quickly into bed, should anyone tap at the door.

GARDEN OF DEATH

Margo preferred the kimono because its pocket contained a small automatic, which might prove very useful. For there wasn't a doubt that danger threatened Fay Bendleton; hence Margo Lane, as Fay's substitute, was the person who would actually encounter it.

Down below, the garden looked very peaceful, but Margo could see dim banks of flowers, particularly nightblooming white ones. They worried her, for they spoke of Professor Malbray. His flower clock was going its steady rounds – a clock composed of living things that never slept.

Nor did Malbray seem to sleep. His benign mask hid an ever-present menace, as did the beauty of time-telling flowers that kept Malbray so well posted at any hour of the day or night.

Harry Vincent wasn't in the garden. He was somewhere in the house, probably in the servants' quarters, though Margo was sure that he would move about at any opportunity. All along, she was hoping for a tap at the door, a signal telling that Harry had managed to get to this part of the house and was standing by.

At least, this room seemed free of menace within. Looking about through the dimness, Margo saw two pots of flowers, but they were merely the geraniums that Fay had brought from her home. The macaw wasn't present, so Margo assumed that Fay was boarding the bird at some pet shop.

On a table just within the window stood a vase that contained a small tree branch, with oblong leaves, and oval fruit the size of a hen's egg. Red in color, the fruit was a species of guava.

Margo remembered Malbray plucking it from a tree in a tropical greenery and giving it to Fay, to keep in her room. Thoughts of Malbray caused Margo to glance toward the conservatory again.

As she did, the lights went off, deepening the darkness in the garden. Margo could see only the lily pool, which caught the starlight and reflected it; yet, even the star twinkles were spotty, because the pool was surfaced with so many lily pads, of varying sizes.

More ominous than before, the atmosphere was heavy-laden with the scent of flowers; increased, it seemed, now that the light was gone. Sounds were noticeable, too, and Margo thought she heard a rustle of the creeping ivy vine that crawled upward on the patio wall.

She shrank back from the window; as she did, she saw that the room's darkness had also increased. Only the red ovals of the guavas were visible in the gloom, for they were close enough to the window to catch the trifling outside glow.

The aroma and the darkness gave Margo a sleepy feeling. She reached the bed and sat there, trying to keep awake. Only the gun seemed real when she clutched it; otherwise, she could have believed that she had really gone to sleep, and that her surroundings were the fabric of a dream.

Then, too plainly to be unreal, Margo heard creeping sounds beyond the door.

She waited, tense. It should be Harry, hoping for a chance to speak with her; but it could be Malbray, who had left the conservatory. Margo felt balanced on the edge of a precipice, as she waited for the taps which would probably tell her which it was.

The rustle of the ivy forced its sound upon Margo's ears, its increase too great to be caused by a mere breeze.

Margo gave a quick glance toward the window, and managed to stifle the glad cry which started to her lips.

GARDEN OF DEATH

The Shadow!

HE had arrived in an amazing manner, for he must have come through the patio, which had no normal way of entrance except through the conservatory. Malbray hadn't been gone long enough from the conservatory for even The Shadow to steal through and scale the garden trellis.

But The Shadow always did amazing things, so his appearance in accustomed style was all the more reassuring to Margo.

Persons who hadn't met The Shadow in his guise of black – Fay, for instance – might have been frightened by the figure at the window, with its stooped head and black-shrouded shoulders. Apparently, The Shadow was gripping the sides of the window, about to push himself through.

Margo decided to let him know that she had seen him. Undertoning a greeting, she was stepping toward the window, when a strange thing happened. So strange, that it changed Margo's awakened thoughts into a nightmarish medley.

Of a sudden, The Shadow dwindled, shrinking to a pygmy form, though he was actually entering the window. Instead of answering Margo's greeting, the shrunken shape, now only half its size, was turning toward the guava branch.

Stopping short, Margo blinked, for the shape was enlarging again. She couldn't hold back her startled cry, and it produced a baleful result. The creature turned and flipping its spreading shoulders, revealing them as wings, instead of arms. Wings centered by a grayish face; small, but terribly vicious, like the visage of a gargoyle.

In one instant, the nocturnal visitant was altered from a friend into a living horror.

The creature was a gigantic bat, with a wingspread of fully thirty inches. A bat that could only be of the vampire species, for its ugly teeth were long and sharp, its claws veritable talons.

Petrified, Margo couldn't shrink away from the ghoulish terror. She could hardly collect the disjointed thoughts that flashed through her swimming brain.

She'd heard of such bats; how they possessed the instinct of finding food, though miles away. They fed on tropical fruits like the guava. On the table by the window rested the only available guava that this hungry, long-winged monster could have found anywhere in Manhattan. The bat had come here like a thing attracted by a magnet.

No longer did the night-thing want the pitiful supply of red guava. Its glittering eyes, wicked like a snake's, were on a choicer morsel. It saw Margo's whitened throat, and with a great heft of its wings, the bat swooped for its new prey.

The noise of the monster's flip stirred Margo into frantic action. She shrieked as she dived away, stumbling across a chair that spilled her toward the door. Her gun came from her kimono pocket, and she was firing stabbing tongues of flame that couldn't seem to touch the enveloping darkness which closed down upon her.

How many shots she fired, Margo couldn't tell, but they seemed to combine into one vast echo at the finish – at the very moment, in fact, when long claws reached her breast and the great-winged bat drove its terrible teeth toward her throat.

GARDEN OF DEATH

Some one was hammering at the door as Margo beat frantically at the fearful thing which clutched her. How she managed to ward off the teeth and shake free from the claws, was something unexplainable. At the very peak of its attack, the bat had suddenly become vulnerable, for Margo found herself on her feet, stumbling in circular fashion, with the gun in her hand.

She wanted to reach the door; instead, she neared the window, and there she saw the bat again, swooping in to new attack. Desperately, Margo tried to draw away and fire; this time, neither teeth nor claw thwarted her.

Instead, a gloved hand came swooping from the mass of living blackness and gripped her gun before she could use it. The voice that whispered close to Margo's ears belonged to The Shadow!

Then the door came flinging open, bringing light from the hall. Shaking, wavering, Margo felt herself steadied by The Shadow, who was really at her side. In one hand he held a smoking automatic, and the direction of its point indicated another blackened shape upon the floor.

There lay the great vampire bat, dead, blasted by the mighty burst of The Shadow's .45 which Margo had mistaken for the accumulated echo of her own puny gunfire.

The Shadow had overtaken the winged menace that Cardona had seen Stuggert release. The bat had reached Malbray's ahead of its cloaked rival, but only by a matter of minutes.

Again, the professor and his accomplice, Stuggert, had worked in team, loosing a killing creature upon an established prey.

As he had dealt with the false puma in the park, so had The Shadow treated the murderous vampire bat, and in so doing, the cloaked master of the night had saved the life of Margo Lane.

CHAPTER XXI. ASSISTED DOOM

EVEN as his hidden lips phrased a laugh of triumph, The Shadow changed his tone to one of challenge. Turning toward the door, he saw the man who had opened it: Professor Theophilus Malbray. A key in one hand, a gun in the other, the master of murder had arrived at a well-calculated moment.

Malbray had planned to appear just too late to save the life of Fay Bendleton. Instead, he missed the rescue of Margo Lane. That was bad enough, from Malbray's viewpoint; but there were other things that he regarded even worse.

He had hoped that the vampire bat would fly away, leaving only its victim; but it didn't. The bat's flying days, or nights, were ended, and it lay on view as evidence of frustrated crime.

As for the fighter who had nullified the bat's endeavor, he was still present, and quite as ready to deal with Malbray as he had with the blood-minded creature on the floor. The Shadow's challenge was accompanied by a swing of his deadly gun, straight toward Malbray.

Spryly, the professor sprang for the hall, and The Shadow wheeled in the opposite direction, carrying Margo with him. Malbray was shooting wildly as he went; while The Shadow, pivoting around his gun point, was holding his fire until the proper moment, which would be when he had flung Margo safely to one side.

As the moment came, The Shadow's trigger finger squeezed; then halted.

GARDEN OF DEATH

Another fighter was in the fray, flinging himself upon Malbray. The arrival was Harry Vincent, and he spoiled The Shadow's aim. It wouldn't have mattered, had Harry come alone, for he bowled Malbray to the floor in competent fashion.

However, Harry, in his turn, was seized by Malbray's servants, arriving right behind his back. Verber was the man who led two others – the chef and the serving man. Verber, of course, knew what lay at stake; the others were aiding through sheer dumbness.

Before The Shadow could spring into the fray, they were clutching Harry and drawing him away from Malbray. Using the flinging forms as cover, the professor ducked off toward the stairs.

Lunging in, The Shadow slashed a hard stroke to Verber's head, and the fellow didn't take it like Oswald, the orangutan. Verber flattened, giving Harry all the chance he needed to slug at the two halfhearted foemen who had lost their leader.

The doorway was clear and Margo was through it, dashing after Malbray. She knew that the professor must have headed to the other wing of the house. Seeing Margo alive, Malbray knew that Fay must be in the distant room. Fay's death was imperative to Malbray's plans. He hoped to kill her, and meet The Shadow later.

It was a long way around by the hallways with the connecting stairs. Margo's slippers tripped her, and she hoped, at every other pace, that The Shadow would loom up and overtake her; but he didn't.

Something must have delayed The Shadow. It was up to Margo to put the quietus on Malbray. If she could only overtake him, she would try; but those tripping slippers were a troublesome handicap.

Spying Malbray at Fay's door, Margo aimed too late. He went through before she could pull her trigger. Valiantly, Margo covered the last stretch and flung herself through the doorway.

She saw Fay sitting up in bed, staring almost calmly at Malbray and his gun. Wildly, Margo made a grab for the professor; as she did, she realized why Fay sat unperturbed.

Inside the window stood The Shadow, his automatic aimed for Malbray. Too late, Margo understood why the professor had halted, frozen. He had reason to be amazed, to meet The Shadow in the other wing of the house. It didn't occur to him that the black-cloaked fighter had chosen a shorter path than the skirting hallways.

Down by one trellis, across the garden, and up by the other vines, The Shadow, as agile as he was swift, was on hand to head off Malbray's new attempt at murder well before the professor had completed his roundabout trip.

Like Harry's mistake, Margo's blunder aided Malbray. Grabbing the girl, he used her as a shield against The Shadow. Margo's gun merely clicked when she tried to use it; she'd wasted the entire load upon the vampire bat.

She slashed at Malbray as he darted for the hall, but he broke free, and Margo, stumbling, fell across The Shadow's path as he sprang forward to break up the struggle.

So Malbray was gone again, and Margo, once more in the chase, thought The Shadow would be close behind her. At the stairway she met Harry, coming from the other direction. He stared blankly at Margo, surprised that The Shadow wasn't with her. From below, they heard the slam of a door, deep in the house.

GARDEN OF DEATH

"The conservatory!" exclaimed Harry. "Malbray has gone there to grab the money! Come on! We can block him off until the chief arrives!"

THEY reached the conservatory and Harry slapped its door wide open, pushing his gun in ahead. Malbray was at the desk; he'd forgotten that Fay had the key to the drawer.

Seeing Harry, he stopped yanking at the locked drawer and dived for the garden. On the steps, Malbray faltered; overtaking him, Harry and Margo gripped him. They thought, for the moment, that Malbray had given up because the garden had no outlet. They were wrong.

The laugh of The Shadow told them.

Straight ahead, they saw The Shadow, waiting with a leveled automatic, but the cloaked fighter wasn't near a flowerbed. He was standing upon the surface of the lily pond, barring the glass wall beyond it!

The Shadow was weaving back and forth, lifting each foot before the water could immerse it. At that, the sight was incredible, until Harry and Margo obtained a clearer view.

They saw, then, that The Shadow was stepping from one broad lily pad to another, depending upon their temporary support to keep him on the water's surface. The oversized pads, of the tropical variety, were large enough to make it possible.

Not only did this explain that The Shadow had originally reached the garden by coming through the rear door, and then across the pool; it told how Professor Malbray had managed to roam at large while persons supposed him to be in the conservatory.

The Shadow had wondered about that trick of Malbray's, until he noticed the broadness of the lily pads. They were the logical answer, and The Shadow had proven it by depending upon their broad support when he returned to Margo's rescue.

Under the aim of The Shadow's gun, Malbray shrank back into the conservatory, where Harry and Margo grabbed him. They saw The Shadow coming toward them, striding along the surface of the pond by deft steps from pad to pad.

He was on the solid ground of the garden, when he hissed a sudden warning that made his agents turn about. They, the trappers, had become the trapped, and only The Shadow's prompt signal could have saved them.

Into the conservatory, from the outer door, had stepped two new challengers of The Shadow's might: Karl Stuggert and the mighty orangutan, Oswald!

The Shadow had left their settlement to Joe Cardona. The arrival of the great ape and his keeper was therefore something that The Shadow had not foreseen. He was springing forward, at the same time ordering Harry and Margo to forget Malbray and take to shelter.

Quickly, Harry thrust Margo down the steps, at an angle away from The Shadow's rapid drive. But Harry was right at his chief's heels when The Shadow sprang for the new invaders.

Stuggert intervened with a gun, but before he could use it, The Shadow clubbed him with an automatic, and Harry pounced upon the reeling animal trainer.

GARDEN OF DEATH

The orangutan was pouncing, too, in The Shadow's direction, but matters were quite different than at Brendleton's. The Shadow dodged the ape; went neatly and swiftly around Malbray's desk, past workbenches and into corners.

On his own, The Shadow could have battered the ape with bullets, but he knew that such beasts, when wounded, went berserk, which would make it risky for Harry and Margo.

Flinging his automatic at Oswald, The Shadow sent the ape bounding after it. Instead of the weapon, The Shadow seized a spray gun from one of Malbray's shelves. As the orangutan swung up to throw the automatic back at its owner, The Shadow sprayed him full in the face.

Tiny flowers could stomach that spray, but Oswald was no shrinking violet. As The Shadow suspected, Malbray's spray was noxious to all animal life. The snarling ape wilted under the white cloud from the spray gun and struck the floor, as helpless as Stuggert.

Leaving both to Harry, The Shadow drew a fresh automatic and went after Malbray, who was darting into the front of the house.

SOUNDS of combat greeted both the professor and his pursuer. Malbray's so-called gardeners were coming in from the rear of the house to report that their blockade of Cranston's car had failed.

At the same time, Joe Cardona was arriving at the front door; this time, with a squad at his heels. The two factions were coming face to face, when they heard The Shadow's laugh.

Spurting a few shots at the wheeling crooks, The Shadow drove them back. His diverting tactics also gave Cardona's men the advantage that they needed. They were shooting, too, as they poured across the hall to overwhelm Malbray's reserve crew.

Leaving the mopping-up to Cardona, The Shadow followed Malbray. He cornered the murderous professor in the little greenery that contained the spreading *Ficus Theophilus*.

Malbray looked ridiculous as he cowered in a corner near the banyan fig, clutching a large flowerpot that he had picked up somewhere along the way. Nevertheless, Malbray, when trapped, could be more shrewd than ever. His eyes lighted and his face took on a surprised expression.

"You are a friend!" exclaimed Malbray to The Shadow. "Like myself, you were trying to protect Fay from harm. I was so excited, that I mistook your purpose. But if we are friends" – the professor's stare narrowed – "why should you still hold a gun, while I am weaponless?"

Obligingly, The Shadow placed the automatic beneath his cloak. He wanted to see the effect that the action had on Malbray, and he observed it very soon. With all the frenzy that characterized Stuggert's pets – ape, puma, and bat – Malbray hurled himself upon The Shadow, flinging the weight of the flowerpot ahead of him.

Instead of stepping backward into the foliage of the *Ficus Theophilus*, The Shadow twisted sideward. The effort of Malbray's lunge carried the professor across the low fence and into the branches of the low tree.

Malbray gave a howl as he went, for he knew what his fate would be. He'd planned that fate for The Shadow, and had failed with it.

GARDEN OF DEATH

It wasn't a mere creeping fig that Malbray had crossed with a banyan. He had used a different variety – the strangling fig, a common plant of the subtropics. The *Ficus Theophilus* promptly proved its prowess. Its vinelike branches rose and caught their namesake in the folds.

Shrieking shrilly, Malbray writhed in the clutches of what was veritably a python plant. It was too late for The Shadow to save him from his own misstep. The limb that coiled about Malbray's neck could not be hacked away in time to save the arch-murderer from the doom of his own creation.

Malbray was personally re-enacting Dunwood's death, so far unexplained. As the limbs of the python plant relaxed, Malbray rolled limp and very dead, from the untwining branches.

Joe Cardona witnessed it, along with Harry Vincent, who arrived with him. When Cardona turned to congratulate The Shadow, the black-cloaked fighter was gone. Harry suggested a trip to the conservatory; on the way, he told Joe about the vampire bat.

Cardona realized that bats were mammals, not birds; hence Turban hadn't intended to mislead him by not mentioning the winged monstrosity that Stuggert kept with the other creatures in the Annex.

In the conservatory they found Margo Lane and Fay Bendleton. In her hand, Fay held the key to the desk drawer, ready to unlock it and disclose the cash that Cranston had mentioned to Cardona.

The hundred thousand dollars would be returned to its rightful owner, and therewith stand as evidence that Malbray had collected similar sums from Bendleton and Eldwald before murdering them.

From beyond the garden came the trailing tone of a departing laugh. Gazing, the listeners saw a path of broad lily pads drifting on the pool. Again, The Shadow had glided into night's own darkness, using floating steppingstones.

THE END