

THE HOUSE THAT VANISHED

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I. HOUSE OF DOOM

SHEETS of rain were sweeping with blinding downpour as the small coupe slogged through the midnight blackness. The glare of headlights was drowned amid the deluge. Two men, the driver and the passenger beside him, were straining as they watched the road ahead.

"Ten yards is as far as I can see," remarked the driver, in a tense tone. "But I'm keeping up to twenty miles an hour. The sooner we're through with this, the better. How about it, Fred?"

"You're the driver, Jay," replied the passenger. "You pick the speed you want. You're lucky that you can see ten yards. I can't even spot the road through this side of the windshield."

"The wiper's a big help," stated Jay. "I'm watching the macadam of the road. That's what counts when –"

"Hold it!" broke in Fred. "Look out ahead!"

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Staring into further blackness, the passenger had seen what the driver had not. A red lantern was waving in the darkness, its holder completely lost amid the storm. Jay looked up as he heard Fred's warning. He jammed on the brakes. The car skidded halfway across the road before it came to a stop.

Fred lowered the window as the red lantern came swinging forward. He turned on the dome light. As rain drizzled into the coupe, a man thrust his head and shoulders through the window. A rough but friendly face showed below the dripping brim of an oilskin hat.

"Didn't want to jolt you off the road, friend," announced the man with the lantern, "but I had to flag you before you got past. The bridge is out down the road."

"Have you reported it?" queried Jay, from the driver's wheel.

"That's what I'm doing now," laughed the informant, gruffly. "We were coming over from Westbury in a truck when we saw that the bridge was gone. Pete, he started back; but I waded through the creek to get over on this side. I'm heading into Sheffield, I am."

"You should have telephoned word," declared Jay.

"Ain't no houses along this stretch of road," retorted the man in oilskins. "Say – who do you reckon you are to be telling me what I ought to have been doing?"

"My name is Goodling," replied the man at the wheel of the coupe. "Jay Goodling. I –"

"That's different," growled the man in oilskins, his rough tone apologetic. "I hadn't no idea who you were. Jay Goodling, eh? The new county prosecutor. I kind of reckoned Jay Goodling was an older man than you. My name's Turner, Mr. Goodling."

TURNER thrust a beefy, rain-soaked paw through the window. Goodling smiled as he received the fellow's shake. The dome light showed Goodling's features as those of a man in his early thirties; but his face, though youthful, bore the firmness that befitted his legal position.

"This is Fred Lanford," introduced Goodling, indicating the passenger. Lanford was younger and less challenging than the prosecutor. "We're on our way to Westbury. Our best plan is to leave you here to stop other cars while we go ahead and find some house from which we can telephone."

"Suits me, Mr. Goodling," acknowledged Turner. "Being a night like this and after midnight, I don't reckon there'll be any more cars along. But I'll watch for them. Only thing is, where are you going to find the house to call from?"

"What about that old dirt road that cuts off to the right?" questioned Goodling. "The one that was the old route into Westbury?"

"Nobody uses it any longer," informed Turner. "Leastwise, nobody except those folks that live on it. It's like all those other dirt roads leading off. There's a raft of them that don't go anywhere."

"But there are houses on the old Westbury road. Some of them ought to have telephones."

"Like as not, Mr. Goodling. Well, I'm staying here, like you said to."

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Turner drew away with his lantern. Goodling straightened the car and started off through the storm while Lanford raised the window and turned out the dome light.

"The old Westbury road," mused Goodling, as he drove along. "Well, Fred, we won't have very much trouble finding it. That old sign will tell us when we get there. It still has its pointer marked Westbury."

"Maybe we'll see the sign," returned Lanford, peering at the sweeping downpour, "but it's a cinch we won't see the road. Look over there on the right, Fred. You can't even see the edge. We're liable to be passing a road right now, without knowing it."

"Look for the sign," ordered Goodling. "It's painted white and it's right at the turn. You'll see it."

Lanford lowered the window while the car rolled along. Despite the insweep of the rain, he kept peering at an angle ahead, watching the extreme right corner of the restricted glare that the headlights offered.

MINUTES passed, Goodling watched the road while Lanford kept a lookout. Suddenly the passenger uttered an exclamation. Goodling applied the brakes. Lanford pointed.

"There's the sign, Jay," he indicated. "You can even read it. Westbury. But you'll have to fish for the road. I can't make it out, even though I know it's here."

Goodling backed the car a dozen feet; then turned the wheel to the right. As he started forward, the headlights, swinging to the right, revealed the beginning of a curved dirt road. As the coupe rolled from the macadam, the winding course of the old highway showed its rocks and ruts.

In second gear, traveling at fifteen miles an hour, Goodling fumed as he tried to control the coupe. The road was upgrade; down it poured a sweeping torrent. At every dozen yards, the car went into a temporary skid.

"Like driving through a creek," asserted Goodling, grimly. "Keep that window open, Fred. Look for a house – the first one you see."

"That's a tough assignment, Jay," returned Lanford. "These farmers turn in early. If their lights are out, how are we going to see their houses?"

"Watch for entrances. Maybe you'll see a driveway."

"Not much chance. I couldn't even see this road when we came to it."

"Well, there's always a possibility. If you keep watching, you'll –"

Goodling ended abruptly. The coupe had gone into a skid. This was a bad one; water sloshed high as the car jabbed toward the left of the road. Front wheels hit an embankment; the car careened. Goodling held tight to the wheel, releasing the brakes momentarily while Lanford gripped the door.

Instead of toppling, the coupe slipped sidewise. The right side jounced; then the wheels struck a level space. Goodling applied the brakes as the car rolled from the road, headed directly to the left of the highway. The coupe came to a slithering stop.

THE two men blinked as they stared straight ahead. They had gained the luckiest of breaks. Directly in front of the headlights was the surface of a muddy driveway. Beyond it, at the edge of glow, the outline of porch steps.

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"How was that for hitting it?" chuckled Goodling. "Right into the front yard. We wanted a house and we found one. Say – that was a lucky skid."

"Turn out the lights," suggested Lanford. "Maybe we'll be able to see if anyone is home."

Goodling complied. His pressure of the light switch brought thick blackness up ahead. But as the men stared through the rain-swished windshield, they saw the sign that they wanted.

A tiny crack of light gave dim indication of a window. It came from the side of a lowered blind. It was further than the distance to the steps. This glimmer was from a front window that opened on the porch. It was proof that the house was occupied.

"Come on," suggested Goodling. "I'll leave the lights off. We won't need them. Get out on your side, Fred, and I'll meet you at the front of the car."

The two men disembarked. Splashing through mud, they groped their way to the front of the coupe. From there they stumbled forward until they struck the house steps. The sweeping beat of the rain ended as they gained the shelter beneath a porch roof.

Goodling struck a match. The flame showed a front door. The youthful prosecutor approached and hammered against the barrier. While he waited for an answer, he spoke to his companion.

"Do you know, Fred," remarked Goodling, "I would wager that neither of us would recognize this place if we saw it in daylight. Steps – a porch – a window – that's all. We don't know if the house is a big one or a small one."

"Or whether it's stone or wood," laughed Lanford. "We do know that it's somewhere on the old road to Westbury. We saw the sign. But outside of that –"

He broke off. A sound was coming from beyond the door. Listening, the young men heard the grate of rusty bolts. Above the sweep and beat of the rain the sound was strangely ominous.

Then the door swung inward. A burst of light glared from the hall within. It showed the strained faces of the two arrivals. It also revealed the figure of the person who had answered their knock.

A HUGE, stoop-shouldered fellow was standing just within the doorway, his big fists clenched. Glowering eyes peered from a scarred face. Bloated lips showed a fierce scowl of challenge. The man spoke harshly:

"Come in."

Almost mechanically, the two obeyed. Hardly were they across the threshold before the huge man thrust the door shut and pressed the bolts. Swinging about, he faced the two who were watching them. He uttered a gruff laugh.

"Go in there" – the man pointed to the door of a dimly lighted room – "while I go and tell that you are here. Stay in that room."

The eyes retained their glower. The big fists tightened. Fred Lanford turned about instinctively and entered the door that the huge fellow had indicated. Jay Goodling, almost ready to meet the man's challenge, decided better. He turned about and followed Lanford.

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The room was a parlor, sparse of furnishing; but its few chairs were expensive ones. Goodling sat down; Lanford followed suit. Both watched the door through which they had come. The big man was still standing there; his attitude that of a huge hound ready to make an attack.

Neither Goodling nor Lanford made a move. Satisfied at last, the big man stepped away. His figure passed from view, while the visitors still stared, like statues in their chairs.

The big man's heavy footsteps faded in the uncarpeted hall. The listeners heard a sound that resembled the creaking of a stairway. Then came silence, tempered only by the unceasing patter of the heavy rain upon the outside porch.

The glimmer of two floor lamps showed the room in somber outline. A deep depression had fallen upon those two men who had stepped into this outlandish setting.

The parlor seemed unreal, like a fanciful room plucked from a terrifying dream. The hush that filled it was a portion of the silence that seemed to pervade the whole building.

Neither Goodling nor Lanford spoke during those first minutes of ghastly silence. Yet the thoughts that they held were identical, forced by the pall of these strange surroundings.

Stupefied by the atmosphere that gripped them, these chance arrivals felt themselves within a house of doom.

CHAPTER II. LIVING AND DEAD

"WHAT do you make of it, Jay?"

Fred Lanford whispered the question huskily. Tense and nervous, he had managed to find his voice. He was looking at Jay Goodling as he spoke.

Goodling held up his hand for silence. The youthful prosecutor had become stolid. He was listening for sounds that might indicate the return of the huge servant who had introduced them to this room.

Hearing nothing, Goodling arose from his chair. He stared toward the open door that led to the hallway. Then he looked about the room and spied two heavy curtains that indicated a wide doorway at the rear.

Directly opposite the front window, these draperies showed that there was another apartment adjoining the parlor. Softly, Goodling trod in that direction. He drew back the curtains to disclose a pair of sliding doors. These barriers were shut.

"I wonder what's in back of these," he remarked quietly. "Suppose I take a look, Fred, while we're waiting."

"It might mean trouble, Jay," rejoined Lanford. "We've barged into something by accident. The best thing we can do is to sit tight."

"And wait for trouble? I don't see it that way, Fred. We did not come here as intruders. We made one mistake by not asserting ourselves before we entered."

"If you start prying, Jay, you'll be making a new mistake."

"You forget my status, Fred. This house is certainly within the limits of Sheffield County. My position as

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prosecutor entitles me to –"

He broke off, swinging from the sliding doors. The curtains dropped as Goodling released them. The prosecutor had heard a sound from the hallway. Lanford joined him in staring toward the door through which they had entered this parlor.

STANDING in the doorway was a dark-haired girl of twenty. The beauty of her face was apparent despite her paleness. She was attired in a black traveling dress; like her hair, the darkness of this costume accentuated her pallor.

Goodling bowed and smiled. Lanford came to his feet. He was smiling also; but the girl's face remained troubled. The girl darted a quick look back into the hall; then stepped into the parlor.

"You must go!" she said, tensely. "It is not safe here. Go. At once. Before Croy returns."

"Croy?" quizzed Goodling. "You mean the big fellow who opened the door for us?"

The brunette nodded.

"I think that we'll stay," decided Goodling. "We came here as strangers; but we were told that our arrival would be announced. I think that we are entitled to something of an explanation."

The girl shook her head.

"You don't agree with me?" questioned Goodling. "Well, perhaps if I explain who we are and how we happened to come here, you will understand the circumstances. May I do so, Miss –"

Goodling paused quizzically, hoping that the girl would announce her name, just as she had stated the name of the servant. Instead, the brunette continued to shake her head.

"I can not tell you who I am," she declared emphatically. "I can only say that you would be wise to leave. If you go, I can explain your departure. You must leave at once."

This time it was Goodling who shook his head. The girl sighed, hopelessly, and looked appealingly toward Lanford. For a moment, Fred was on the point of arguing with Goodling; but he saw the determined look on the prosecutor's face and knew that persuasion would be useless.

"Very well," said the girl, wearily. "I have advised you to go. Your own stubbornness will be to blame if your stay here becomes unpleasant."

She turned about and started toward the door. Goodling moved forward, about to speak. He saw the girl stop short; he did the same. A man had stepped into view from the hallway.

THIS chap was the antithesis of Croy. He was of no more than medium height; he was light in build, almost frail. His face was a sensitive one, but exceedingly pale. His left arm was in a sling. Freshly wrapped bandages ran from his wrist to his elbow.

Yet there was sternness in the pale man's gaze as he looked to the girl. His eyes, brilliant in their pallid setting, were half accusing, half inquiring.

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"Why did you come in here?" the man asked calmly. "You knew that these visitors were to be announced. You should not have talked to them."

"I saw Croy admit them," returned the girl. "I came to warn them, Daggart. I told them it would be best for them to leave."

The pale man winced at mention of his name. Then his stern expression returned.

"I shall talk with them," he announced. "It would be best for you to return upstairs."

"Very well," challenged the girl. "I shall talk with Mr. Kermal, since you have come from him, Daggart."

Croy – Daggart – Kermal – the three names were buzzing through the minds of both Goodling and Lanford as the girl departed into the hall. Goodling no longer felt tense. He drew a cigarette from his pocket and lighted it as he faced Daggart.

The pale man shifted his arm in his sling; then spoke quietly to Goodling and Lanford. Daggart's tone was reserved, yet friendly.

"You are strangers here," he told the two men. "Your unexpected arrival, at so late an hour, was a bit disconcerting to our servant. That is why he ushered you in here so abruptly."

"I am the secretary of the gentleman who is the master of this house. I have come to inform you that he will be here shortly. Kindly be seated and forget the odd incidents which followed your arrival. The master of the house will interview you presently."

Goodling nodded as he sat down. Lanford took a chair; Daggart bowed and walked out into the hallway. They heard the secretary's footsteps fade toward the distant stairway.

"Fred!" Goodling's whisper was tense. "That fellow didn't intend to come in here. He was sent down to look us over."

"Why did he enter then?" queried Lanford, in a low tone.

"Because the girl was talking to us," explained Goodling. "Daggart has gone up to report. That big fellow, Croy, is still upstairs. We'll hear this man Kermal when he comes down. We've a few minutes yet."

"For what?"

"To take a look around. Come."

RISING, Goodling made for the curtains at the rear of the room. Spreading them, he tried the sliding doors. There was a catch on the other side of the barriers; but the doors were old and shaky. Goodling juggled them; the curtains muffled the sound.

"Go easy, Jay," warned Lanford. "Somebody's liable to hear you –"

A click ended Lanford's statement. The catch had juggled loose. Goodling slid one door open, slowly and carefully. The two men peered into a dimly lighted living room.

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The new apartment afforded a beautiful setting. Contrasted with the stuffy front parlor, it was luxurious. Tapestries adorned the walls. Antique Oriental rugs were spread about the floor. The furniture, though of light construction, was exquisite in its workmanship.

Goodling noted chairs and a large couch, the back of which was toward the parlor. He saw a writing desk in the corner. By the farther wall, near a door beyond, was a Russian wolf-hound, reposing on a large mat.

The dog, apparently, had been trained to accept strangers, for it merely raised its head to survey the intruders; then placed its nose between its paws. Goodling shrugged his shoulders as he stepped a few paces into the room. He was about to turn and go back into the parlor when Lanford uttered a hoarse whisper:

"Look!"

Goodling stared as Lanford pointed. From their new angle, they could see just past the end of the couch. There, on the floor, they spied a man's feet. The tips of the shoes were pointed upward.

Goodling sprang forward, Lanford close behind him. Reaching the end of the couch, they stared in horror. The feet were those of a dead body. A man almost as huge as the servant, Croy, was lying on his back, his unseeing eyes staring upward.

"Who – who is he?" gasped Lanford. "Another – another servant? Or – or someone who came here – like ourselves –"

Goodling held up a hand, warning for silence. He approached and kneeled beside the dead body. Lanford joined him. They surveyed a face that had once been handsome, despite the over-largeness of its features. Death, however, had given a ghastly ugliness to the countenance.

The man had black hair, tanned skin, large nose and square jaw. He had eyes that seemed dark, despite the conspicuous whiteness that their bulge produced, and heavy black eyebrows. These were points that Goodling checked mentally.

The prosecutor raised the dead man's right arm. It swung stiffly; then thumped as if on a spring, when Goodling released it. Goodling noticed that the blue-serge coat was buttoned. He opened it; then grunted as he saw the man's vest. A gaping, ugly wound showed upon the dead man's breast.

"Shot through the heart," whispered Goodling. "Look at those rings, Fred. Close range – probably a revolver of large caliber –"

"Shh!" gasped Lanford, faintly. "Someone is coming – down the staircase –"

Goodling threw the coat front over the wound. He popped up from beside the corpse. Lanford was pale, shaking, unable to respond. Goodling caught his arm and dragged him toward the parlor.

Footsteps were already in the hall as the two reached the front room. There was no time to close the sliding doors. Goodling thrust Lanford into a chair; then pulled a curtain over the adjoining door. He was lighting a cigarette when the footsteps reached the hallway door.

THE man who entered was a newcomer. Though almost six feet tall, he looked shorter because of his thick-set build. He was well dressed, but his hair was shaggy and unkempt. His face was sallow; his tousled hair an iron-gray.

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"Mr. Kermal?" inquired Goodling, casually.

"Yes." The bulky man's voice was a harsh rasp. His features, though well formed, looked ugly as he scowled. "So you know my name, eh? The girl told you?"

"She did," replied Goodling, with a nod. He was stalling, so that Kermal would not notice Lanford, who was staring, pale faced, from his chair. "Allow me, sir, to introduce myself. Also to tell you why I came here."

"That is not necessary!" Kermal's tone was fierce. "I do not care why you came! Your actions here are what concerns me!"

"Our actions?" queried Goodling, feigning surprise.

"Yes," sneered Kermal. "My servant heard you from the stairs. He realized that you had managed to pry into the next room. He has entered there already."

Kermal looked toward the curtains. Goodling wheeled about. He saw Croy, coming through. The servant's face looked even uglier than before. Croy nodded to Kermal.

"You are sure they saw?" quizzed Kermal.

"Coat unbuttoned," responded Croy, gruffly.

Kermal smiled. He was looking at Lanford. Fred's paleness was a giveaway that he had seen the corpse in the next room.

"Well, gentlemen," decided Kermal, "who you are and why you came here does not matter, now. Circumstances compel me to keep you in temporary custody until –"

He did not finish the sentence. Goodling was bounding forward uttering a sharp cry to Lanford to aid him. From his pocket, the prosecutor was whipping a stub-nosed revolver, a weapon that he always carried.

CROY hurtled in from the curtains. Before Lanford could intervene, the servant was upon Goodling. Seizing the prosecutor as one would pounce upon a trouble-making child, Croy twisted Goodling's gun away. Then, as the prosecutor still struggled, Croy hurled him across the room. Goodling's head thumped the wall. He rolled half stunned, upon the floor.

Goodling's gun had struck thin carpeting. Lanford bounced from his chair and seized it. He came up, aiming at Croy. Again, the big servant was quick in action.

Lunging furiously, he hoisted Lanford upward and backward. Fred hit the chair back and sprawled to the floor, the chair rolling upon him. Like Goodling, Lanford lost hold of the revolver and lay half senseless from the force of the blow.

"Turn out the lights," ordered Kermal. Arms folded, the shaggy-haired man was standing at the door. "Watch these fellows, Croy, until I return."

Croy extinguished the lamps. Standing by the door, he blocked most of the dim hallway light. Jay Goodling, slowly recovering, heard footsteps as they returned. Trying to rise, Goodling saw Croy enter. Then he felt himself in the big servant's clutch.

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Something was happening to Lanford. Figures had entered; Goodling saw the flicker of a flashlight and caught the tones of whispered voices. He struggled against Croy; the big man's grasp tightened.

His head thrust back, Goodling could see nothing but the ceiling. He felt hands tugging at his coat sleeve; then came the rip of the shirt sleeve beneath it. Again, he fought with Croy. It was useless.

The flashlight blinked on Jay Goodling's bare arm. Croy's grip tightened. A hand appeared in the light, bearing a hypodermic syringe. The needle jabbed deep into Goodling's flesh.

Croy still gripped the victim as others stole from the darkened room. Then the servant's hold relaxed. Jay Goodling had subsided. Croy arose and went to the hall. He nodded to Kermal, who was standing there alone. Kermal pointed to the front door.

The servant returned to the parlor and reappeared with Lanford's limp form over his shoulder. Kermal unbolted the front door. Croy carried Lanford out into the driving rain. A few minutes later, he returned, entered the parlor and picked up Goodling.

Croy carried the prosecutor out into the darkness. Kermal chuckled as he bolted the front door. Listening, the shaggy-haired man heard the roar of a motor. Croy had started Goodling's coupe. The car was backing out into the din road.

However Kermal had hoped to deal with these intruders, the fight had definitely forced him to one plan. Goodling and Lanford had been overpowered in the fray. Both were doped. Croy had removed them at his master's order.

Whatever Kermal's plans might be, the bulky man seemed satisfied with his procedure. His chuckle sounded in the gloomy hall as he crossed the uncarpeted floor toward the stairway beyond that living room in which a man lay dead.

CHAPTER III. THE SHADOW ARRIVES

IT was morning in Manhattan. A quiet, round-faced man was seated at an office desk. From beyond his window loomed the sky line of the city; but the view did not concern this worker. The round-faced man was studying a map which showed the terrain about the town of Sheffield.

A rap sounded at the door. The man at the desk folded the map then gave an order to enter. A stenographer appeared.

"Mr. Vincent is calling," said the girl. "Shall I tell him to come in, Mr. Mann?"

"Certainly," responded Mann. "At once."

A few minutes later, a clean-cut young man was facing Mann in the inner office. Vincent's appearance was one that denoted an active temperament quite a contrast to the lethargic expression of Mann's chubby visage.

Yet both were workers in the same service. Rutledge Mann and Harry Vincent were agents of The Shadow. Mann, an investment broker, was a contact who relayed orders to the active aids such as Harry.

"You have seen this clipping?" inquired Mann. "It appeared in this morning's newspaper."

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"I saw it," smiled Harry, as he viewed the item that Mann passed him, "but I passed it up as something of a hoax. Two men reporting a murder in an isolated house, only to find that the building had vanished."

"Read more closely," suggested Mann. "You will note that one of the two men was the county prosecutor."

"That's right," acknowledged Harry, studying the clipping. "Say – that puts a new light on the case, doesn't it? This ought to have been front page stuff, Mann."

"It will be soon," stated the broker. "The New York newspapers are sending men to Sheffield. Clyde Burke is going for the Classic."

"Burke has already supplied further details," stated Mann, unfolding the map on his desk. "So I suggest, Vincent, that you listen to my full account. I can amplify facts that the newspapers merely skimmed over in the first story. Like yourself, they took it as a hoax at the start."

"Here" – Mann pointed to the map – "is the town of Sheffield. A paved road runs southward from Sheffield, then curves west and reaches Westbury, some dozen miles distant. You will notice that there are dirt roads going to the right from the main highway. One of them – this one – is important. It is the old road to Westbury."

Harry nodded.

"Saturday night, after midnight," resumed Mann, "Jay Goodling, county prosecutor and his friend, Fred Lanford, were riding along the paved road. They were going southward, from Sheffield to Westbury, when a man named Turner flagged them with a lantern. Somewhere in this neighborhood."

Mann tapped the map with his pencil. Harry watched while the investment broker made a mark, then moved the pencil to a point about three miles south.

"This is Roaring Creek," he explained. "The bridge had gone out during the heavy storm. Turner had hiked up to the road to stop other cars. He was heading into Sheffield. Goodling and Lanford decided to take the old Westbury road, which turns off before the bridge."

HARRY noted four roads going to the right between Mann's pencil mark and the creek. Only one, the third, was a through dirt highway. It was the old road to Westbury.

"Goodling and Lanford found the old Westbury road," explained Mann. "They identified it by the conspicuous sign that marks it. Driving up the road, they discovered a house. They entered, in the hope of finding a telephone."

"The servant who admitted them was named Croy. They also encountered a man named Daggart, ostensibly a secretary, whose arm was in a sling, indicating a recent wound. The supposed owner of the house, whom they likewise met, was named Kermal."

"What about the girl?" questioned Harry, holding up the clipping. "This story deals chiefly with the mysterious brunette, who vanished along with the house. Talks about the whole affair as if it had been a pipe dream."

"The girl," replied Mann, "was the person who mentioned the names of the others. Her name, however, was not learned. She advised Goodling and Lanford to leave."

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"But instead, they snooped around and found the body?"

"Yes. The report is correct. They found a dead man, who had been shot through the heart. Goodling and Lanford started a fight. They were overpowered. Goodling recalls that he was jabbed with a hypodermic needle. Lanford was too groggy to remember.

"That happened after midnight, Saturday. Shortly before noon, Sunday, Goodling and Lanford were found, half asleep, in the coupe. The car was about fifty yards from the washed-out bridge.

"As county prosecutor, Goodling has extraordinary powers. As soon as he was sufficiently roused to remember his story coherently, he ordered a search for the house. A dozen men scoured the old Westbury road. They failed to find the building at all."

"There are no houses along that road?"

"There are a dozen. But all are occupied by persons who are well known in the vicinity. Goodling and Lanford spoke of an extravagantly furnished living room. None of the houses can match that description. The report, Vincent, is not exaggerated. The mystery house vanished over night."

"But suppose that —"

Mann smiled as he held up his hand. He drew a watch from his pocket and nodded as he consulted the time.

"You can catch the one o'clock train for Sheffield," he stated. "You will find Burke there, representing the Classic. He will introduce you as a representative of the National Press Association. He will supply you with credentials."

WHILE Harry Vincent was on his way from Rutledge Mann's office, a singular event was taking place in another portion of Manhattan. A bluish light was gleaming in the corner of a black-walled room. Long white hands were unfolding a map that resembled Mann's.

The Shadow was in his sanctum. He, too, was marking points in the neighborhood of Sheffield and Westbury. The Shadow, like Harry Vincent, had questions that needed answering. His whispered laugh betokened that fact.

A pointing finger touched the town marked Westbury. It traced a northeast course toward Sheffield, following the line of the old road. The Shadow's finger stopped.

Although Goodling and Lanford had started their journey from Sheffield, the spot of their strange adventure had been nearer the town of Westbury. Furthermore, Westbury was larger than Sheffield, despite the fact that the latter town was the county seat.

Long hands folded the map. The bluish light clicked off. The Shadow's laugh sounded in the darkness. Shivering tones betokened his urge for new adventure. When silence reigned within the black-walled room, The Shadow had departed.

Like his agents, he was faring forth to the mysterious terrain from which a house had vanished. But he had chosen to make his starting point the town of Westbury, in preference to Sheffield. Burke and Vincent could cover that town for the present.

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IT was late in the afternoon when Harry Vincent strolled into the lobby of the Weatherby Hotel, the old-fashioned inn that constituted Sheffield's sole hotel. He learned that Clyde Burke was in a room on the third floor. Harry went up and rapped on the door. Hearing a call to enter, he stepped in to find Clyde seated at a typewriter.

"Stuff for the Classic," chuckled Clyde. "Close the door, Harry. I've got your credentials. I thought you'd be in on the train I just heard chugging in."

"Anything new on the house?" questioned Harry.

"Not a thing," replied Clyde, seriously. "I've talked with Goodling. He won't go into further details until this evening. He's holding a conference in his office."

"Do you think he has learned something?"

"Yes. But not about the house. He's still mystified on that point. The place has vanished."

"Have you talked with Lanford?"

"I'm going to. Before he comes into the conference. He lives out in the country and he's still sleeping off his doopy jag. They must have given him a bigger dose than they did Goodling."

"Have they searched for the house today?"

"Sure. They started at Sunday noon. Here it is, Monday afternoon, and they've just finished."

Harry considered. Clyde watched him rub his chin. The reporter laughed.

"I know what you're thinking," declared Clyde. "They ought to have looked along the other roads. Well, they did; but they had no luck."

"No houses?"

"A few. But occupied by persons whom they knew, except for some empties. They knew who the owners of the empty houses were, and they've checked on them. All pass muster."

Clyde produced a road map. He had dotted it at various points. The marks indicated houses.

"Here's the old Gallivan house," he stated. "Been empty for two years; but it's three miles up the Westbury road. Goodling is sure that he and Lanford couldn't have traveled that far. One mile was about the limit."

"This house is empty. An artist named Brooks left it a month ago, to make a trip to California. But it's not on the old Westbury road. It's on one of those other roads. See? The first one past the Westbury road."

"Same thing with this house. It was owned by a farmer named Buckley. It's on the first road before you reach the old Westbury road; and it was burned out last fall. The big point, Harry, is that Goodling and Lanford both saw the old sign that points to Westbury. It's there, big as life. I went down to look at it this afternoon."

"But what about tire marks?" questioned Harry. "Those ought to tell something. Those dirt roads must have been mighty muddy."

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"Too muddy," replied Clyde. "They all led down into the paved road. They were raging torrents on Saturday night. Completely washed out by morning. Nothing left to go by."

"You can take it or leave it, Harry. The cold truth is that a house is missing. It's a bigger problem than a stolen bass drum. It has me guessing, just like everyone else."

HARRY was about to speak when the telephone bell rang. Clyde picked up the telephone from beside his typewriter. As he answered, Harry saw a steady expression appear upon the reporter's face.

Briefly, in short sentences, Clyde reported the same facts that he had given Harry. His words were prompted by questions that he heard across the wire. When the call was ended, Clyde hung up and nodded as he looked toward Harry

"It will pass as a long-distance call from the Classic," explained Clyde. "I talked like I was giving dope for a story. But that call was from a place nearer than New York."

"Westbury?" guessed Harry

Again Clyde nodded. Those quiet tones that he had heard could have come from only one person: The Shadow.

"I'm to see Lanford," stated Clyde. "I'll introduce you to Goodling after dinner; then I'll cut out and meet Lanford before he comes in to the conference. You can stick with Goodling."

Clyde dug into a suitcase to obtain Harry's credentials. Harry stood looking from the window, studying the town of Sheffield, beneath the darkening, clouded afternoon sky. A smile showed upon Harry's lips.

For Harry could guess what The Shadow's work would be while his agents were engaged in checking on developments here. Harry's hunch was that The Shadow was planning a prompt search for the vanished house wherein Jay Goodling and Fred Lanford had encountered strange adventure.

Would The Shadow succeed in that strange quest that had baffled scores of searchers? Harry Vincent believed it probable; yet he could not fathom what The Shadow's course could be. For in all his service as an agent of The Shadow, Harry Vincent had never encountered a case with so strange a beginning as this.

Men who knew the ground could offer no answer to the disappearance of a house with all its furnishings. The Shadow, here for the first time, following only the reports of others, was apparently faced by an impossible task.

So Harry Vincent reasoned; but his own arguments failed. Greater even than reason was Harry's confidence in The Shadow's amazing power of deduction.

CHAPTER IV. THE VANISHED HOUSE

ALL lay quiet along the old Westbury road. Sultry afternoon had brought a pall to the countryside where searchers had given up their vain hunt for a vanished house. Though an hour still remained until sunset, the features of the landscape appeared hazy and obscure.

There was motion at the side of the dirt road. Steadily, yet almost unnoticeably, a figure was moving along the highway. It was that of a tall individual who wore a dark suit. His chiseled features were scarcely

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discernible in that modulated light.

The stroller was hatless. He was carrying a flexible briefcase. He might have been some chance wayfarer taking this route between Westbury and Sheffield. Actually, he was here with a more definite purpose. The Shadow was going over the vainly searched terrain.

Walking along the old road from Westbury, The Shadow had spied various houses. All were ones which had already been investigated by the local authorities. Casual surveys had satisfied The Shadow that none were of interest.

The Shadow's goal was the spot where the old road met the paved one. He wanted to see the point at which Jay Goodling and Fred Lanford had turned into the path of weird adventure. The Shadow's pace had quickened; it slowed as he passed a slight bend. Directly ahead was the main highway.

Conspicuous at the junction point was the sign that pointed to Westbury. The white post and large-lettered placard stood straight upward. As The Shadow surveyed the sign he was impressed by its total absence of tilt.

Odd, for a sign like this one. The old Westbury road had gone into disuse; yet its sign had acquired none of the leaning so common with the old-fashioned markers seen on country highways.

Though the sign was obviously top-heavy; though the heavy rain had softened the ground, the post still maintained its vertical position. The Shadow stepped forward to examine it more closely

HE made a prompt discovery. The post hole was enlarged at the surface of the ground. This indicated that the sign must once have tilted slightly. Placing his briefcase aside, The Shadow gripped the post and tugged it upward.

At first the wooden upright refused to yield. Then it came loose. The Shadow hoisted the post up into the light. Again his eyes noted something; slowly he let the post slide down into the hole.

The pointed lower portion of the post was stained with dirt; that was natural, since it had been imbedded in the ground for some years. But the margin of the dirt stain was not at the ground level. When the post dropped back into place, a full five inches of white paint sank with the dirt-stained portion.

Thumping the post, The Shadow forced it farther down. It stuck and remained upright. The Shadow stepped back; his straight lips delivered a soft, whispered laugh. He had made the discovery that was to serve him as a vital clue.

Someone had recently removed that post. Afterward, the sign had been replaced. Before its removal, the sign had been slightly tilted. The man who had replaced it had not taken any chances on trying to duplicate the lean.

Instead, he had driven the post further into the rain-softened ground. He had left it upright, hard in place, so that no one would suspect that the post had been loose. That person had lowered the height of the signboard by his action. Yet none of the searchers, viewing the marker, had realized its new condition.

A good job. One that had been a perfect deception. Only The Shadow, delving into the possibilities of this strange case, had given thought to the signpost as a likely element in the mystery.

The Shadow had concluded that it would have been easier to move a signpost than a house. Since both had figured in the episode of Saturday, midnight, he had started with the post as his first objective.

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The sign, at present, was standing at the beginning of the old Westbury road, exactly where it belonged. Yet chances were that Goodling and Lanford had seen it elsewhere. The Shadow drew a map from his pocket and studied it in the fading light.

Following south from the old Westbury road, there were two more dirt roads that led off to the right before the paved highway crossed the creek. Those were logically the ones to be investigated. Picking up his briefcase, The Shadow started southward at a brisk pace.

The paved highway was deserted. The bridge had not yet been repaired. Travelers were using an entirely different route between Sheffield and Westbury. There had been searchers hereabouts, but The Shadow had learned from Clyde Burke that the hunt was ended. Hence he ran no risk of encountering searchers.

HALF a mile down the paved highway, The Shadow found the next dirt road. It looked very much like the old Westbury road; but the map showed that it merely ran into an old abandoned farm, a few miles from the main highway. It was called Dobson's Road on the map.

The Shadow stopped at the edge of Dobson's Road. He picked the spot where a sign would naturally stand, if this road were marked like the old highway to Westbury. Stooping beside the underbrush, The Shadow pressed back a matted mass of soggy turf. Again his soft laugh sounded.

The Shadow had found a large posthole. This second clue told him where the Westbury sign had been during its absence from the road where it belonged. The Shadow pushed the turf back into place. He started along Dobson's Road.

The week-end rain had completely obliterated any tire traces along this road. But The Shadow needed no such indications. He was watching to the left. Three quarters of a mile brought him to his objective.

Just past a slight embankment, The Shadow discovered an old driveway. Following it, he made a slight turn; then, swinging to the opposite angle, he faced a large house that loomed among trees.

At one corner was a porch, which had a roof but no steps. Approaching closely, The Shadow noticed a dry fringe of grass along the porch edge. This was a token that steps had been here until recently.

This was one of the empty houses that Clyde Burke had spoken about to Harry Vincent. It was the house that had been occupied by Brooks, the artist. The Shadow knew that it must be the house that Goodling and Lanford had visited.

The prosecutor and his friend had skidded through the driveway. They thought they had stopped facing the front of the building. Instead, they had been headed directly toward the side.

Realizing that, the occupants of the house had removed the steps after they had disposed of Goodling and Lanford. Small wonder that searchers had passed up this house entirely. It was not on the Westbury road. It was empty. It did not answer the vague description that Goodling and Lanford had given.

STEPPING UP to the porch, The Shadow tried the door. He found it locked. He opened it easily with a skeleton key. The inside of the door showed no bolts whatever. But as The Shadow used a flashlight for close examination, he discovered spots that had been dabbed with paint.

Another touch. The removal of the bolts aided the deception. As The Shadow looked through the gloomy hall, he understood fully how difficult it would be for anyone to recognize the place after one visit.

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The main portion of the house was to The Shadow's left. This was nothing more than a long rear hall. People coming in from the actual front would reach this hall from other passages. It would not answer the description given by Goodling and Lanford.

There was a doorway to The Shadow's right. Having the proper perspective, The Shadow decided that this must lead to the room which Goodling and Lanford had mistaken for a front parlor. The Shadow entered and found the room empty. He saw a wide opening into another room. He went through.

Clyde Burke had given The Shadow full details of the house as Goodling and Lanford had remembered it. Their description had been received at the Classic office before Clyde had started to Sheffield.

The Shadow knew, therefore, that he was in the living room where the two men had seen the dead body. But nothing remained to indicate that this had once been an apartment of luxury.

Old books, newspapers and magazines were scattered upon the bare floor. Cracked walls showed where tapestries had been. Empty boxes occupied the corners. Everything had been done to make this look like a rear storeroom in an empty house.

Half shrouded in dusk, The Shadow reviewed his discoveries. He saw the game, even though he could not supply the full details. A man had been killed in this house. The occupants had decided to make a get-away.

This house was on Dobson's Road, the first dirt road past the old route to Westbury. Someone in the house had gone out in the storm to remove the Westbury sign and place it on Dobson's Road. After they had departed with all their luggage, the sign had been put back in its original place.

Had this been to deceive such chance wayfarers as Goodling and Lanford? Perhaps. It had certainly succeeded in their case. But The Shadow could see chances for a deeper purpose. He decided, however, that such considerations could wait until later.

Opening a window in the big room, he dropped out to the rear of the house. Striding across sodden ground, he stopped to examine traces that interested him. Here, off at the rear, was an old abandoned path that was wide enough to accommodate an automobile. It wound off through the trees toward the next dirt road.

THE SHADOW followed the path. Flattened turf showed that a car might have traveled here; but the rain had obliterated tire marks. A quarter of a mile brought The Shadow to the last of the parallel dirt roads. Here, in a deep rut, he found another clue.

It was the broad mark of a tire with an old-fashioned, dotted tread. Large enough to have been made by a light truck. Using a bit of string, The Shadow measured this mark. He made an estimate of the tire's width.

Stepping up to an embankment, The Shadow looked forward and saw the hazy course of Roaring Creek. He gained a distant view of the broken bridge on the main highway.

Even at such long range, he could discern the muddy turbulence of the torrent that still raged through the gap. Near that spot where disaster threatened was the place where Goodling and Lanford had been found on Sunday morning.

Something in the view must have impressed The Shadow, for his laugh came as a spontaneous utterance. Turning, he made his way back to the abandoned house. Climbing through the window, he began an inspection of the ground floor.

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In the front of the building, The Shadow discovered a stairway. There was an obscure closet beneath it. The Shadow blinked his flashlight and tugged at the closed door. It opened. The rays of the light revealed an object in the closet's depths.

It was a small steamer trunk. Locked, but easily opened. Entering the closet, The Shadow blinked his flashlight on the trunk. There he discerned the remnants of steamship labels and stickers that bore the names of European hotels.

Another turn of the flashlight showed the end of the trunk. The Shadow saw the initials M. L. D. Using a pick, he unlocked the trunk and opened it. The trunk had a tray which contained various odd papers.

Steamship menus, theater programs in various languages, clippings from foreign newspapers. The Shadow raised the tray to find the main portion of the trunk empty. Replacing the tray, he rummaged among the papers and discovered a small stack of hotel bills.

There were all made out to Miss Myra Dolthan, of New York. With them, The Shadow found an envelope which had once contained a letter. It bore an American postage stamp. It was addressed to Miss Myra Dolthan, Hotel de Ville, Paris. It was postmarked Boston, but bore no return address.

THE SHADOW closed the trunk and locked it. He stepped from the closet. He picked up his briefcase and brought out a blackened fold of cloth. A cloak slipped over his shoulders. A slouch hat settled on his head.

Automatics went beneath the cloak; The Shadow's hands encased themselves in gloves. Beside the dusty stairs, The Shadow had become a living shroud. This spot was to be his headquarters until after dark.

For The Shadow had learned the one name that others had not gained: that of the mystery girl whom Goodling and Lanford had seen in this very house. The occupants, in leaving, had forgotten the single trunk.

Searchers had been about until this afternoon. The scouring of the district had ended. It would be possible for someone to return to this house. The odds were that the vanished occupants had learned that they had forgotten the steamer trunk.

The Shadow was waiting in the hope that he would later meet some member of the band that had departed so suddenly from this house of doom. That forgotten trunk was the factor that would bring a secret emissary hither.

To The Shadow, certain possibilities could rise to a point where they were sureties. He had discovered such an instance at present. He needed no further trail until this development had completed itself. His process of logic had brought him to a definite conclusion regarding the ways and means of the persons who had left this house.

Only the unforeseen could balk The Shadow for the present. Only developments that offered no clue could hold The Shadow to one duty while another pressing task was close at hand.

Oddly, both such obstacles were already in the making. The fortune which had resulted in the finding of the trunk was keeping The Shadow from other spots where strange events were due.

CHAPTER V. THE MAN IN THE SEDAN

WHILE The Shadow was lingering in the empty, almost forgotten house on Dobson's Road, one of his agents

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was approaching a farm building on the other side of Sheffield. This was Clyde Burke, riding in a coupe that he had hired. The reporter was on his way to pick up Fred Lanford.

Clyde applied the brakes as he saw a man step into the road. The fellow had come from a house gate. Clyde knew that this must be Lanford's farm. He turned on the dome light as the man stepped forward.

"You're Fred Lanford?" queried Clyde, surveying the pale, serious-looking man who peered through the coupe window.

A nod was the response.

"I'm Burke," explained Clyde. "Hop in; we'll ride downtown."

Lanford complied. He shook hands with Clyde, then turned out the dome light at the reporter's suggestion. Clyde headed back toward Sheffield.

"Nice of you to come out here and get me," said Lanford, as they rode along. "There's only one thing about it, Burke. I don't think I ought to talk much until after I've seen Goodling."

"I understand," acknowledged Clyde. "I'm not trying to work you for an interview. I told you that over the telephone. All I want to do is check up on the story as it already stands. This business about the house seems too fantastic to be real."

"I don't blame you for thinking that, Burke," chuckled Lanford. "Actually, I thought I'd had a pipe dream when I woke up. But when I told my story, it fitted Jay Goodling's account right to every detail. We couldn't both have had the same delusion."

"That's logical," agreed Clyde.

"Jay and I have always been pals," went on Lanford. "We went to college together; then I came back to help dad run the farm while he took up law. I can vouch for Jay's word and he can vouch for mine."

"We went through a real experience Saturday night. We both remembered names that we heard mentioned. The names of people whom we saw. Kernal – Daggart – Croy. Say – that fellow Croy was a tough fighter."

"He caught Jay unawares; but I had a chance to nab him. I would have made good on it, too; but I was woozy after looking at that corpse in the other room. Say" – Clyde could see Lanford's fists clench – "I'd like a crack at that big bird once again. I'd show him this time."

"About the girl," remarked Clyde, as Lanford paused. "Her name was not mentioned?"

"No. She was the one who told us the names of the others. That pale fellow, Daggart, seemed upset about it. I wonder what had happened to him. His left arm was bandaged and in a sling."

"Do you think that his wound was recent?"

"Yes. The bandages were fresh. Of course they could have been new ones; but he was so pale, it looked as though he'd gone through something not long before we arrived."

LANFORD paused and sat silent, staring through the windshield. Clyde had turned into a road that led directly into Sheffield. Far ahead, a traffic light showed a crossing on the outskirts of the town. An arc light

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also illuminated the corner.

"I was rather groggy when I came to my senses," resumed Lanford. "First thing I heard on Sunday morning was the roar of the creek. They'd parked Jay and myself mighty close to the broken bridge.

"It's a deep chasm there; and it was filled to the brim. Sure death for anybody who might have coasted into that mess. But I stopped worrying about the creek when I began to think about the night before. My arm's still a bit stiff from that jab they gave me with the hypo."

A sedan had cut in from a side street. It was rolling ahead of Clyde's coupe. Both cars were approaching the traffic light. The gleam turned red. The sedan stopped and Clyde swung up beside it.

Clyde went to the left of the sedan, which was apparently waiting to make a right turn into the secluded cross street.

Clyde muttered jokingly about the uselessness of a light at this point. He stopped suddenly as he heard a sound beside him. Lanford was opening the door.

"What's up?" queried Clyde.

Lanford was halfway out of the car. He caught Clyde's forearm in a warning grip. He whispered as he pointed to the sedan; the driver of the other car was looking up at the traffic light.

"See him?" queried Lanford, hoarsely. "Do you know who he is? That's Croy! I'm going to get him!"

Clyde shot a look as Lanford scrambled to the street. The reporter saw the scarred face of the man in the sedan. He noted puffy lips; he realized that the driver of the other car must be a huge hulk of a fellow.

It was too late to stop Lanford. Clyde would have recommended a chase, not an attack against so powerful a fighter. But Lanford, angered by his previous defeat, had already grabbed the opportunity that he wanted. He was pouncing straight toward the sedan.

Croy heard him coming. As Lanford reached the front door of the sedan, the big man shot a wild, hurried look at his unexpected antagonist. He recognized Lanford as the young man from the previous night. Lanford sprang upon the running board and thrust his hands through the opened window, aiming for Croy's throat.

Clyde saw a big fist flash. Lanford thumped back, staggering halfway to the coupe. Croy hurled the front door open and leaped from the sedan. Lanford piled forward to meet him.

CRYING encouragement to Lanford, Clyde leaped to the street and surged forward to aid. Had Lanford put up a real struggle, the reporter could have aided him. But Croy was too much for Lanford.

The huge man had delivered a second punch. Lanford was crumpling. He dropped away as Clyde arrived. Croy swung another powerful blow against Clyde's chest. The reporter catapulted back against the coupe.

With a fierce snarl, Croy yanked open the rear door of the sedan. He scooped up Lanford's form and hurled the groggy man within.

Slamming the rear door, he leaped to the wheel and pulled his own door shut. He swung the car about, to drive back along the street down which he had come.

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Clyde Burke had regained his wind. Croy's move gave the reporter opportunity. Running to the rear of the coupe, Clyde cut across in back and reached the sedan as it passed. He leaped to the running board beside the driver's seat. He shot a quick fist to Croy's jaw.

The scarred face took the punch unflinching. Croy's left arm swung out and encased Clyde. Driving with his right, the big man gripped and battled with his left while he sped the sedan along the silent street, heading out of town.

Clyde was wiry; that fact made up for the lack of weight behind his punches. He proved tougher than Croy had expected. Though he needed his left hand to hold on to the door of the sedan, Clyde found opportunity to use his right. He pummeled Croy as thoroughly as he could.

Yet Clyde's punches only glanced from the scarred face. Croy's head was bobbing back and forth; his left arm ward off most of the reporter's blows. Whirling along a serpentine course, the sedan was leaving the town behind.

Anything to stop the car. That was Clyde's frenzied thought. He was willing to risk a wreck to end this mad course. At intervals he almost succeeded.

They were roaring along an outlying road. At one point, Croy jammed the brakes as the sedan swung to the right. The big car skidded; then found its course along a dirt road.

Clyde lost his grip as the sedan swung. Croy's hamlike hand caught the back of the reporter's neck. The big man guffawed; his puffy lips showed a grin as he swung his opponent back and forth.

Clyde's light body wavered like a dummy figure; his feet clicked the running board while his hands made wild, unsuccessful grasps for the door.

The car slowed at another turn. Croy swung right. As he did, he flung his huge left arm outward. The heave precipitated Clyde a full dozen feet. The Shadow's agent landed at the edge of the road and hurtled headforemost upon a grassy bank.

CLYDE rolled over and came up gasping. He rose unsteadily and looked around for the car. It was gone, past the turn in the road. To follow by foot would be useless.

Clyde thought of his coupe, three miles away, on the outskirts of Sheffield. He realized now that he should have followed in his car. He had made the same mistake as Lanford.

As on a previous night, Croy had conquered two combatants. He had overpowered Lanford and carried the man away as prisoner. He had pitched Clyde Burke from the side of his speeding car. Evidently he had considered the reporter unimportant.

Croy, despite his great strength, must be stupid. So Clyde decided as he started back along the road. For although the big man had carried off Lanford, he had left Clyde free to bear witness of the affray that had ended in the abduction of Fred Lanford.

Under the circumstances, Clyde had but one choice. He knew that he must go into Sheffield and report to Jay Goodling. The conference in the prosecutor's office was already under way; for Clyde and Lanford would have arrived just at the time that Goodling had set.

Clyde Burke grunted huskily as he limped townward, still shaky from his battle with Croy. He was on his way to drop a bombshell into the conference at Goodling's, so he thought.

But Clyde's conjecture was wrong on that point. Already developments were taking place in Sheffield. Occurrences were due there that would prove more startling than Clyde's experience with Croy.

CHAPTER VI. DEATH BEARS WITNESS

THE county prosecutor's office was situated at the rear of the old Sheffield courthouse, a gloomy building that stood across the street from the Weatherby Hotel. It was there that Jay Goodling had arranged to hold an early evening discussion regarding the case in which he had figured so prominently.

Harry Vincent had met the prosecutor shortly after dinner. Clyde Burke had made the introduction. Immediately afterward, Goodling had headed for his office. The prosecutor's actions had indicated that something was in the air.

Harry sensed new tension when he entered the courthouse to await Clyde's arrival. There were three reporters present; with them, two men who looked like deputy sheriffs. In addition, Harry noted a lanky, white-haired man who wore a friendly smile as he chatted with the deputies. Harry heard one man address this worthy as Doctor Claig.

A closed door indicated the prosecutor's office. The transom above it was tightly shut. Harry fancied that he could hear the buzz of voices from within. Evidently, Goodling was holding preliminary conferences with someone.

At last there came the click of a key. The door swung open. Goodling, his face inscrutable, waved for those waiting to enter. Harry walked in with the others. Goodling motioned them to chairs.

Harry, like the others, was quick to observe another man within the room. The stranger was a square-set individual, with dark hair and a wise face. He was seated beside Goodling's desk.

"GENTLEMEN," began Goodling as he took his chair at the desk, "this is Roy Parrell, a private detective from New York. He has come up from New York to present a theory regarding the mysterious house wherein Lanford and I had our strange adventure.

"Mr. Parrell arrived this afternoon. He has finally agreed to make his theory public, now that the search for the house has failed. He feels that such a statement would be to the interest of the client who sent him here."

Goodling looked toward Parrell, who nodded; then glanced about the group.

"Which man," he asked, "is your friend Fred Lanford? I think that he should be present to hear my statement, prosecutor."

"That's right," rejoined Goodling. "Lanford should be here. Didn't I hear that reporter, Burke, say that he was going out to get him?"

Goodling looked toward Harry, who nodded.

"Well, Fred should be in any minute," declared Goodling. "Suppose you start, Parrell. Lanford will probably arrive by the time you have finished with the preliminaries."

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"Just one other question," insisted Parrell. "Is this gentleman Doctor Leo Claig?"

The detective was looking toward the white-haired man. It was Claig himself who nodded. Harry noticed a sharp gleam of the physician's eyes.

"Doctor Claig," continued Parrell, "you were the physician who examined Mr. Goodling and Mr. Lanford, were you not?"

"I was," replied the physician.

"And you stated," said Parrell, "that they had been under the influence of a powerful opiate, administered by a hypodermic syringe?"

"Precisely," agreed Claig. "Both showed influence of the drug. Both bore marks of the needle."

"Would that experience," questioned Parrell, "have caused them to hold a delusion regarding the things they saw and heard during their stay at the unknown house?"

"Not at all," interjected Claig. "Their impressions were gained prior to the injection of the narcotics. Moreover, their stories were identical."

"Doctor Claig is experienced in such matters," explained Goodling. "Prior to his retirement from active practice, he used his home for a private sanitarium."

"Here in Sheffield?" questioned Parrell.

"Outside of town," replied Claig. "Three miles north of here. I still live in the old place; but I have closed off the upper stories, since I no longer have patients there."

"You see, Mr. Parrell, opiates and narcotics are frequently required in mental cases. I am thoroughly acquainted with the actions of drugs. When I state, with full conviction, that Goodling and Lanford were not the victims of drugged impressions, my opinion is one that should carry weight."

"They, apparently, acquired a condition of complete catalepsy. Awakening, their minds reverted to the point where their recollections had left off. All their original impressions were clarified. Fully acceptable as testimony."

DOCTOR CLAIG nodded wisely as he completed his statement. The physician's opinion brought a gleaming smile from Parrell. It roused the detective into prompt activity.

"Good!" exclaimed Parrell. "Then we know that we are dealing with a man named Kermal; that he has a secretary named Daggart and a servant named Croy. That there was a girl there with them."

Again Claig nodded. Goodling looked pleased.

"Daggart and Croy," stated Parrell, "are names with which I am unfamiliar. But obviously, those men were merely servants of Kermal. I know who Kermal is. His full name is Taussig Kermal; he is a lawyer who once practiced in Boston."

Reporters began to make notes. Harry Vincent followed suit.

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"I can also name the young lady who was present," resumed Parrell. "She is Myra Dolthan, of Boston. She is the niece of my client, Rufus Dolthan, who lives in New York."

Parrell waited for the pencils to pause. He leaned on the side of the desk and resumed his statement.

"Rufus Dolthan is wealthy," he explained. "So was his brother, Wade Dolthan, Myra's father. A few months ago, Wade Dolthan died. He left his entire estate to his daughter, Myra, who was then in Europe.

"There was a second beneficiary. I refer to George Garling, stepson of Wade Dolthan. George Garling is somewhere in the West. He received a small inheritance; he would have come into the whole estate only if Myra had not been living."

Parrell made another pause. Then, emphatically, he came to the next point of his account.

"Myra Dolthan is not yet twenty-one," stated the detective. "Hence the estate is not yet hers. It still lies in the control of the executor. That man, gentlemen, is none other than Taussig Kermal, the Boston lawyer.

"Rufus Dolthan tried to communicate with his niece after her father died. He failed to reach her in Europe. He sought Kermal; the lawyer had left Boston. It was then that the truth dawned upon Rufus Dolthan.

"Taussig Kermal has decided to keep the girl away from everyone until her twenty-first birthday, which will be this very week. Upon that date, Myra Dolthan becomes sole heir to ten million dollars. Once she is twenty-one, any papers that she may sign will be legal documents.

"Kermal's game is to hold her, away from all contact, until after her birthday. Then he can have her sign away the bulk of her estate into his hands. Once that is done, Myra Dolthan will be free; and also penniless. She will have a chance to see her Uncle Rufus, after it is too late for him to aid her."

PARRELL was leaning forward as he spoke. The detective was in front of an open window, where trees and ground behind the courthouse formed pitch blackness. But Parrell was not concerned with matters outside. He was intent as he addressed his audience. He wagged an emphatic finger as he completed his statement.

"Most remarkable," commented Doctor Claig, nodding his white-locked head. "I presume, Mr. Parrell, that you read the brief accounts of the mysterious girl in the vanished house?"

"Rufus Dolthan did," returned Parrell. "That is why he sent me here. I run an investigating agency of my own" – he thrust a card across the desk to the physician – "and Rufus Dolthan told me to look into the case.

"After I talked with Mr. Goodling this afternoon, I wired Mr. Dolthan to come up on the evening train. He should be here within a few hours. All I needed to know" – again Parrell wagged his finger – "was that one name. Kermal. Taussig Kermal. That put us on the right track."

"What about these others?" questioned Claig. The physician was taking a sudden interest in the case. "Daggart and Croy? You say they are unimportant?"

"Probably," returned Roy Parrell. "Merely servants. Tools of Kermal's. He has probably duped the girl into believing that her enforced hiding is in keeping with some term in her father's will."

"But the dead man at the house?" quizzed Claig. "Have you any idea who he might be? Has Rufus Dolthan any theory?"

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"None at all." Parrell shook his head. "Taussig Kermal is the only one we know about. The lawyer has proven himself to be a scoundrel. He is capable of any crime; the fact that murder was committed in his house testifies to that point."

"We shall learn the name of the dead man," assured Goodling, quietly. "Do not worry upon that score. Our chief problem is to find that house. We must pick up some trail; gain some proof of crime –"

The prosecutor paused. Someone was rapping at the door. Goodling gave the command to enter. The door opened. A gawky, red-faced yokel stepped into the room. The newcomer was attired in khaki trousers, a gray-flannel shirt and heavy hunting boots. He was unshaven and his face showed an ugly grin.

"Hello, prosecutor," greeted the arrival, stepping up to the desk and dropping a battered felt hat into a chair. "Guess maybe you've heard of me. My name's Yager" – he rumbled a laugh as he spoke – "Hector Yager. I live up Dobson's Road, in by the old farm."

"A squatter, aren't you?" queried Goodling, sternly.

"Well," grumbled Yager, "I ain't got no deed for that property where I built that log cabin of mine. But I ain't exactly no squatter, neither."

"Certain people seem to think so. They've put in a protest to have you evicted."

"Yeah? What've they got against me?"

"Chicken stealing. You've been seen a few places where you shouldn't have been, Yager."

THE squatter's ugly grin faded. His eyes glowered angrily as he faced the youthful prosecutor. Then Yager's lips formed a sneer.

"Bringing that up, eh?" he snorted. "If I was as big a swell-head as them folks, I'd walk out of here right now."

"You're welcome to it, Yager. Your confession to thefts of hen roosts can wait until later. We have more important business here tonight."

"Smart guy, eh? Well, that comes of 'em, putting in a kid for county prosecutor. I ought to be leaving; but just because you think you know so much, I'm going to stay. And talk."

"There's the door, Yager," snapped Goodling, coming to his feet. "Use it in a hurry before I have you pitched out of here. Do you understand?"

"Sure," chuckled Yager, holding his ground. "You want me to clear out – without telling you what I know. About that house you're looking for – and the people who were living in it."

Goodling stood staring, rigid. Yager snorted a laugh. He pulled a wad of bank notes from his pocket and flung them on the desk beside his hat.

"See that there money?" demanded the squatter. "Well, that was given to me to keep my trap shut. It was given to me by a fellow named Blissop. He was living there in that house."

"Blissop?" queried Goodling. "You mean –"

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"I mean the guy they did away with," broke in Yager. "You're looking for a dead man, ain't you? Well, I'm telling you who he was. Blissop – that was his name."

"And the others?"

"I don't know them. But they got rid of Blissop because he was pulling a double-cross."

Doctor Claig had drawn close to the desk. Harry Vincent could see the sharp gleam of the physician's eyes. He fancied that he could hear Claig's breath coming in short, tense wheezes.

It was Parrell, however, who spoke to Yager. The detective had come to his feet. His expression was eager. He wanted to know more. He pointed as Yager turned toward him.

"You saw the murder of this man Blissop?" questioned Parrell. "You were a witness to the crime?"

"Me?" snorted Yager. "Say – I wouldn't have gone near that place. Not after Blissop talked to me. He spilled everything, he did, to keep me quiet. He thought I'd stay quiet because he gave me the dough."

"Say – I'm going to tell you folks who's who and what's what. I'm going to give away a mighty slick game so you'll all be straight. You won't have much trouble finding the man you want after I'm through."

YAGER paused. His grin returned. Claig was at his side, hands half raised. Parrell, still beside the desk, was wagging his finger; the detective was seeking to attract Yager's attention. But the squatter was facing Goodling, gloating in his triumph over the new prosecutor who had accused him of chicken stealing.

"Blissop come to me," began Yager, "and he says to listen. He gives me money. He says there's going to be more. He says to me on Saturday night that when –"

A staccato gun bark ended Yager's sentence. The burst came from outside the window. Harry Vincent leaped to his feet as he saw the flash in the darkness. A gulp came from Hector Yager as the big squatter straightened in front of the desk.

Then, like the echoes of that first bark, came two new bursts from beyond the window. With those flashes, Yager crumpled; he sprawled headforemost across the desk. Assassins from the trees behind the courthouse had drilled the squatter with their bullets.

As Goodling stood rigid, Claig stepped forward and bent above the body. The physician seemed fearless of new shots. He was acting to aid the stricken man. Roy Parrell, however, was quick to see new danger.

Leaping away from the desk, the private detective dived for the wall beside the door. He blinked out the light. The darkened room afforded no new targets for hidden killers in the night.

Goodling sprang to the window as he heard the roar of a motor. A car was shooting away from the curb of an isolated street beyond the trees that formed a cluster in the grounds behind the courthouse.

"Get them!" barked the prosecutor. "Through the window! Through the door! Outside, you fools!"

Goodling was yanking open a desk drawer. He grabbed a revolver in the darkness and sprang through the window to the ground a few feet below. Parrell scrambled after him; the detective had a gun of his own.

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The deputies yanked open the door and dashed through the corridor to spread the alarm, then circled the courthouse. The reporters followed. Harry Vincent was about to leave when he heard someone by the light switch. The light clicked on. It revealed Doctor Leo Claig.

The physician gazed sharply at Harry; then turned on his heel and went to the desk to examine Yager's body. Harry watched Claig. He saw a slow solemn nod of the physician's head; an indication that the squatter was dead.

Claig was still beside the body when Goodling and the others returned. The prosecutor's face was grim. The brief chase had proven futile. Killers had made a quick get-away in a waiting car. Half a dozen new deputies had arrived; they were men who had searched for the missing house that very afternoon.

JAY GOODLING studied the squad before him. He looked at Yager's body; then gave a prompt decision. His words brought comment of approval from the crowd.

"We're going out to Yager's cabin," declared the prosecutor. "We'll see what we can find there. Come along; we're starting for Dobson's Road."

Men tramped from the office. This time, Harry Vincent followed. Hector Yager's body remained, watched only by Doctor Leo Claig.

Death had claimed a witness about to testify regarding the location of the vanished house. The law was moving to follow the one lead that it had gained. Such a course was likely to prove barren; but it was the only one to take.

Harry Vincent realized that the trip to Yager's would probably prove futile. He would have preferred to stay at the courthouse until Clyde Burke arrived, for he was already puzzled by his fellow agent's absence.

But Harry had a part to play. He and Clyde were supposed to be mere acquaintances, both newspapermen, but not companions in a hidden surface. It was up to Harry to continue the bluff that The Shadow had ordered. He must not jeopardize his usefulness by failing to join the other reporters who were anxious to see the squatter's cabin.

With these thoughts in mind, Harry Vincent entered a waiting automobile that was about to start for the shack where Hector Yager would no longer dwell.

CHAPTER VII. KILLERS IN THE DARK

ONLY a few hours had elapsed since The Shadow's return to the lonely house on Dobson's Road. Those hours had brought no change to this silent terrain. This evening's episodes had so far been confined to the town of Sheffield.

All was still within the house on Dobson's Road. Complete blackness had enveloped the building. The Shadow lay hidden within that thickened gloom. He was listening as he had been since dusk; waiting for some betraying sound of a prowler's approach.

Click! The Shadow heard the noise from the darkness of the stairs. A key, scraping in a lock. The sound ended; then it repeated. Someone was trying to open the front door. The Shadow waited while the sound continued at brief intervals.

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Squeaking hinges told that the door had yielded. A faint puff of air breezed through the darkened hall beside the stairs. Then came footsteps, cautious, creaking tokens of advance. Dull reflections told of blinking flashlights.

Prowlers had entered. Two men; not one. They were sneaking through the rooms on the ground floor, making a close inspection of the secluded house. The blinks appeared from the rear. The men had cut through to the long hall.

Parlor – living room – hall again. The blinks were by the side door that The Shadow had entered. Light gleamed toward the stairs, then ran along the wall. Someone grunted; a hand clicked a light switch.

A single bulb gleamed from a high ceiling. That lamp was one that had not been removed from its unreachable socket. The light showed a telephone on the floor, near the closet to the stairs

PEERING from the steps, The Shadow saw two roughly dressed men. They were whispering, apparently discussing the next step in their snatch. One pointed to the closet door. The other nodded. The first man tugged the door open; he grunted to his pal. Both entered the long sloping closet.

The Shadow glided from the stairway.

In that dim light, he seemed a ghostly shape, some creature harbored by a house of gloom, a living shade that had remained from banished darkness.

Swiftly, silently, he gained the turn on the closet door. He stooped; his gloved hands appeared bearing automatics. His burning eyes stared toward the closet. The two men were sliding the trunk from its hiding place.

"Better open it, Jake," growled one. "Let's see what's inside. No use in lugging it out if its empty!"

"Yeah?" Jake's question was a snort. "Take a look at them labels, Dink. "An' the initials on the end. Ain't they reason enough?"

"Guess you're right, Jake; But you'd better –"

"Dink" broke off. Jake had stepped out into the light to fumble for keys somewhere in his pocket. He had chanced to look up. He found himself staring into the eyes of The Shadow.

Dink, looking up at Jake, had seen a sudden change in his pal's expression. Ugly lips had spread; but the snarl which they tried to give had faded in Jack's throat. Dink followed the direction of his companion's gaze. Like Jake, Dink saw The Shadow.

Two rigid men. Revolvers bulging from their pockets; yet they dared not reach for those ready weapons. The fiery gaze of The Shadow held them motionless.

They knew the identity of this weird being. That, in itself, told facts to The Shadow. He knew that these men, despite their rural garb, were ruffians from the city. They were crooks who feared The Shadow's might

Those who had occupied this house had gone to stay. These men were members of some crew that had come here in their stead. But their object was the same: to pick up anything that had been left behind, such as that telltale trunk beneath the stairs.

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THE SHADOW spoke. His tone was cold; his words a throbbing whisper, backed by the weapons that he wielded. He had no quarrel with these men, despite their uncouth appearance. He was ready to let them talk.

"Speak" hissed The Shadow. "State why you are here. Give the name of the person who sent you."

It was Jake who found words. His answer came in a husky gasp that followed the sibilant echoes of The Shadow's eerie tones.

"We was just lookin' around," explained the ruffian. "But here – wonderin' if there was anythin' – anythin' we could use. We're just a couple of bums. Nothin' else –"

The Shadow's whispered laugh interrupted. It was a sneering, mirthless tone that stopped Jake in his lie. That fierce taunt called for the truth. Dink quivered as he heard The Shadow's gibe.

"We'll talk," whined Dink. "On the level. Jake didn't mean no harm. We picked this house because we was told to come here. We ain't hicks; that's all a fake story. We've been looking for –"

The Shadow whirled suddenly. His move was timely. He was standing at the very corner of the long rear passage, his figure revealed by the light.

Dink's words had drowned a sound that The Shadow would ordinarily have heard. Some new prowler had been unlocking the door through which Goodling and Lanford had made their entry two nights before.

It was a puff of air that had warned The Shadow. His whirl came just as the door was fully opened. Crimson flashed from the lining of his black-surfaced cloak. Barely discernible in the doorway were the figures of two men.

"It's Slasher!" cried Jake to Dink. "Slasher, with Louie. They seen the glimmer. Get The Shadow!"

REVOLVERS barked from the doorway. "Slasher" and Louie had spotted The Shadow's twisting figure. Crooks, like Jake and Dink, they had blazed quick shots at their arch-foe. As flames stabbed in from the night, bullets sizzled past The Shadow's shoulder.

The cloaked fighter had made himself a moving target. The long range, the full length of the hall, was also to his advantage. Moreover, he had dived in the direction opposite that which the new arrivals had expected. He was heading for the living room; not to the stairs.

In his swift sweep, The Shadow swung straight toward those stabbing flares of guns. His fingers clicked triggers. Automatics answered with their booms. The Shadow's thrusts were gauged, despite their speed.

A figure thudded in the hall; another staggered back with a cry. One invader had dropped; the other was diving for the porch. The Shadow wheeled again; this time toward Jake and Dink. Once again, his move was his salvation.

Cornered rats were whimpering no longer. With venomous snarls, this pair had snatched their guns from their pockets. The Shadow had given them a chance to live. It was not in their evil hearts to return the favor.

Dink aimed too swiftly. He fired as The Shadow suddenly wheeled clear of the living room door. Dink's shot went wide. Jake, however, was more deliberate than his excited pal. He pressed his trigger finger, holding his shot half a second longer than Dink.

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One half second! Such an interval was a long space to The Shadow. His actions came in tenths of seconds. Between Dink's futile shot and Jake's coming attempt, The Shadow's automatics spat their jabs of flame.

Dink sprawled before he could fire a new bullet. Jake slumped, his first shot undischarged. The Shadow had dealt rightly with these skulkers who had shown no thanks for his mercy.

A gleam of headlights shot through the opened door. A cry from outside; it came from the man who had staggered into the clear. An automobile had arrived, bearing new thugs. Shouts told that they were piling toward the house.

THE SHADOW swept toward the wall near the stairway closet. Guns barked from the porch; exultant cries told that new crooks thought their enemy was on the run. The Shadow snapped the wall switch, plunging the hallway into darkness.

Crooks came on; they believed that The Shadow had fled into the interior of the house. They were wrong. Automatics burst anew. The Shadow had held his ground; he was meeting these invaders with a leaden hail.

Men went diving back to the porch, scrambling for safety, anxious to regain their car. The Shadow followed. His guns still barked as he kept up the pursuit. Crooks were in flight, firing wild shots from the sides of a rakish touring car.

One man had remained at the wheel; that accounted for the rapid escape. But as the touring car swung into the dirt road at the front, it came squarely into the glare of other headlights. Crooks fired wildly at approaching cars.

Guns barked in answer. The touring car veered wide and shot by an arriving caravan. Skidding from an embankment, it roared toward the lower road, jouncing its way to the clear before the other cars could stop and turn about.

The three cars swung into the driveway. The Shadow moved swiftly from the porch. He faded into the shelter of enshrouding trees. He saw the three cars draw up beside the house. Men alighted; Harry Vincent was among them.

Jay Goodling's procession, on its way to Yager's cabin, had been attracted by the finish of The Shadow's fray. Flashlights glimmered; one showed the open side door. A call for Goodling; then came the prosecutor's startled exclamation.

Entering by the side, Goodling had recognized the same hall that he and Lanford had seen two nights before. As men of the law poured into the house, The Shadow faded toward the dirt road. He saw no need to linger.

As aftermath to this strange chain of episodes, the law had discovered the spot that The Shadow had found hours before – the house that searchers thought had vanished. Within that house lay evidence.

Men of crime had failed to remove the steamer trunk that bore the initials of Myra Dolthan and which contained an envelope addressed to the girl herself.

The search for the missing heiress would gain new impetus, thanks to the consequences that had followed The Shadow's fight.

CHAPTER VIII. THE LAW PREPARES

THE big clock in the Sheffield courthouse was striking ten when three cars rolled up in front of the gloomy, old-fashioned building. Jay Goodling was returning with his squad from the house on Dobson's Road.

A lone deputy came forward from the courthouse steps. He started to speak to the prosecutor. Goodling waved him aside in order to superintend the unloading of the steamer trunk from one of the cars. The deputy managed, however, to get a statement off his chest.

"It's important, prosecutor," he insisted. "It's about your friend Lanford –"

"Where is Lanford?" questioned Goodling, suddenly turning about. "I want to see him. Is he here yet?"

"No," returned the deputy. "He's missing. Don't know where he is. This reporter fellow is in your office."

"Burke?"

"Yeah. Waiting to see you, prosecutor."

Goodling bounded up the steps. Roy Parrell followed, and Harry Vincent did the same. Two deputies were hoisting the trunk; they decided to carry it to the prosecutor's office.

When Harry and Parrell reached the rear office, they found Goodling already there. The prosecutor was staring at Clyde Burke, who was resting wearily in a chair beside the desk. Doctor Claig was standing beside the reporter.

"Where's Lanford?" Goodling was demanding. "What's happened to him, Burke? What's happened to you?"

Clyde's clothes showed that he had been in a scuffle. The reporter's sleeves were ripped; his suit was mud-stained. His face showed bruises.

"Lanford has been abducted," interposed Claig, quietly, before Clyde could explain. "He and Burke had a battle with some fellow whom they met outside of town. Lanford was carried off."

"By whom?" questioned Goodling, savagely.

"By Croy," replied Clyde. "The big fellow that you and Lanford saw at the missing house."

"Let me have the details, Burke."

CLYDE gave them. He told of the fight; his subsequent fall from Croy's sedan. He stated that he had walked into town; that he had arrived at half past nine to find the prosecutor absent.

"Half past nine?" questioned Goodling. "That was half an hour ago. Why wasn't I informed sooner?"

"You were up at Yager's," said Claig. "There was no way to reach you, prosecutor. I advised Burke to rest here until you returned."

"And you started no search for Lanford?"

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"There was no use. You had taken all your men except one; and I supposed that you wanted him to stay here."

"You seem to have an exaggerated idea of your authority, doctor."

Claig smiled at Goodling's outburst. With eyes gleaming shrewdly, the physician replied to the prosecutor's harsh statement.

"On the contrary, Goodling," declared Claig, "I did not usurp any privileges. I am merely a physician; not an officer of the law. The only advice that I could give was for Burke to rest until you returned. It was beyond my province to order a hunt for Lanford."

Goodling could think of no retort. He was angry; but realized that Claig's mild reproof allowed no criticism. Turning about, Goodling addressed the two deputies who had brought in the trunk.

"Everyone out to hunt for Lanford," snapped the prosecutor. "Start from the traffic light on Elm Street. Follow out to the old Northwest Road. Look for a suspicious sedan; hunt a big man with a scarred face. By the way, where are the reporters?"

"Coming in," replied a deputy. "They're in the last car. Take 'em along, shall we?"

"Yes," decided Goodling. "Burke and Vincent both represent the press. They're enough to be here."

Momentary silence followed the departure of the deputies. A train was chugging from somewhere beyond the courthouse; its clanging bell told that it was pulling out of town. Goodling spied the trunk. He opened it and began to examine the papers in the tray.

"Look at this," he said suddenly. He had found the envelope. "Addressed to Myra Dolthan, in Paris. This is her trunk, all right."

"I knew that from the initials," returned Parrell, indicating the end of the trunk. "The L stands for Lucille – the girl's middle name."

There were footsteps in the hall. Goodling looked up to see a tall, dignified man, whose thin gray hair topped a straight forehead. The arrival's face was a kindly one; yet trouble showed upon its drooping lips.

Behind the newcomer were two others. One was a solemn, long-faced individual of slight build; the other was a cabby from the station. The cabby was burdened with two heavy suitcases.

"Rufus Dolthan!" exclaimed Parrell, springing forward to greet the gray-haired man. "I am sorry, sir. I should have met you at the station. But there has been trouble here."

DOLTHAN'S kindly eyes had narrowed as they spied the trunk. The gray-haired man noticed the foreign papers in the opened tray.

"Myra's?" he questioned, in a worried tone. "You have traced her, Parrell?"

"Yes," nodded the private detective. "This is Mr. Goodling, sir. He can explain better than I."

Rufus Dolthan bowed. He turned to the long-faced man behind him and gave an order.

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"Pay the cabby, Souder," said Dolthan. "Have him take our luggage to the hotel. After that, you may join me here."

Souder nodded and went out with the cabby. Dolthan sat down in a chair. Goodling took his seat behind the desk; then introduced Claig, Harry and Clyde.

"Matters are still unsettled," explained Goodling, to Dolthan. "Nevertheless, I was about to summarize what we have learned. Therefore, Mr. Dolthan, your arrival enables you to hear of certain unfortunate developments."

"Concerning my niece?" questioned Dolthan, anxiously.

"Only indirectly," replied Goodling. "First of all, Mr. Dolthan, we had evidence of strangers in this vicinity. Two nights ago, a man named Lanford and myself entered an unknown house and there met a man named Kermal."

"Taussig Kermal?"

"Yes. He could hardly have been any other person. We also met a young woman who answers the description of your niece, Myra. She warned us to leave."

"She seemed well?"

"Yes. Her concern was for us; not for herself."

"Of course. Of course. Kermal would be according her the best possible treatment. The scoundrel will have to maintain her confidence until after she is of age."

"SO I understand from Parrell. But to resume, Mr. Dolthan, we had not, until tonight, gained any trace of the house or its occupants. Then events commenced.

"First, regarding Lanford. He was driving into town with Burke" – Goodling indicated the reporter – "and they encountered a man in a sedan. Lanford recognized the fellow as Croy, a servant of Taussig Kermal.

"Croy was a powerful fighter, as I can testify. He carried Lanford away; he dropped Burke on a road outside of town. Hence we were not immediately acquainted with what had happened.

"I was holding conference here. A squatter named Hector Yager entered and told of dealing with a man called Blissop, a servant of Kermal's who was murdered. Before Yager could complete his testimony, shots were fired through this window. Yager was slain under our very eyes."

"Incredible!" exclaimed Dolthan. He shifted, his chair away from the window. "A murder – here in your own office! Did the assassins escape?"

"They did," returned Goodling. "We started out to Yager's. We heard gunfire; we encountered a fleeing car. That led us to investigate a house that had not been properly searched before, since it was not on the old Westbury road.

"We discovered it to be the mystery house. We found dead men there; and we located this trunk that belonged to your niece. But the house was deserted; its lavish furnishings removed. Kermal, Daggart, Croy – all were gone; and Myra also."

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Goodling arose and paced the office. He stared through the blackened window. He shrugged his shoulders; he was sure that no lurkers had returned. They had dealt with Yager; another visit here would have been folly on the part of the assassins.

"I have come to certain conclusions," stated Goodling, "despite the fact that some details are vague. It is obvious that Kermal and his underlings fled that house after they had dealt with Lanford and myself.

"Apparently Blissop, knowing Kermal's game, had planned to blackmail his master. He must have arranged for pals of his to come to the house tonight. Probably he chose Yager's shack for the rendezvous. That is why he gave Yager money."

Goodling paused to look toward Parrell. The private detective nodded his accord. Goodling resumed.

"Kermal ordered Blissop's murder. He removed everything to some new hide-out. The trunk was forgotten. He sent men of his own to get it. On the way, they stopped here. Croy, scouting about, must have reported that a conference was due.

"Kermal's ruffians saw Yager through the window. They fired three shots, killing Yager; then they dashed away for a quick trip to the old house. Blissop's pals, meanwhile, had arrived at Yager's. Finding the squatter gone, they went to the old house.

"The two groups met. They battled; we arrived at the finish. We gained the trunk as evidence. But dead men cannot speak; and living rascals have escaped."

JAY GOODLING stopped, dejectedly. Rufus Dolthan, however, was quick to interject a hopeful comment.

"Perhaps," he exclaimed, "those fugitives have gone to join Kermal. Their trail would lead you to his new hiding place."

"No." It was Parrell who spoke. "Those fellows were covering up. They wouldn't hop back to Kermal's. They weren't hicks; they came from New York. Kermal must have called them in on the deal."

"We have one lead," decided Goodling, thoughtfully. "I refer to Croy. He must have gone to join Kermal. What is more, I believe that the new headquarters is close by."

"What makes you think that?" questioned Dolthan.

"Croy being close at hand," replied Goodling. "That is one point. Another fact: they moved a whole lot of furnishings. They would not have wanted to travel after daybreak; hence they could not have gone a great distance.

"Moreover, the move was an emergency one. They were taking chances being in that empty house and they probably were wise enough to have another hide-out picked for a pinch. What is more, Daggart was wounded. Kermal would have to think about him.

"Our search will continue. I intend to scour the entire county for traces of Kermal and his subordinates. No time will be lost."

"No time can be lost!" exclaimed Dolthan, rising. "Myra must be found within the next few days. As soon as she becomes of age, Kermal's plot will be completed. Myra is his dupe, just as her father was. The grasping scoundrel will trick her into signing away her wealth."

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"Do you think that the girl's life is in jeopardy?" queried Goodling.

"Yes and no," replied Dolthan, his tone troubled. "So long as Kernal thinks he's within the law, he will prefer to have her live. But if he is trapped; if crime is pinned upon him, he is rogue enough to resort to murder. As he had done already."

"Then our search may bring trouble," declared Goodling, seriously. "Yet it is our only course."

"It must be carefully conducted," warned Dolthan. "Search thoroughly for Kernal; but when he is found, make no immediate attack against him."

"A good plan," agreed Goodling. "Naturally, Kernal would not murder Myra unless he knew his game was finished. Only an open attack would drive him to such a deed. I believe, Mr. Dolthan, that it would be best for you to stay in town, so that we can discuss matters when the emergency arrives."

"I shall do so." Dolthan turned to Souder, who had quietly returned during the discussion. "Souder, call my home in New York. Have Wurling drive here at once with the limousine. Tell him to bring Hazzler, also."

"ONE moment, Mr. Dolthan," asserted Parrell. "Maybe you need your chauffeur and your valet since you intend to stay a while; but I need helpers, too; and they are more important. If I'm to work on this case with Mr. Goodling, I ought to have a few of my investigators on the job."

"Perhaps, Parrell," reproved Dolthan, "Mr. Goodling does not want your assistance. My intentions were to send you back to New York. The search for Myra is now in the hands of the law."

"But I was trailing Kernal," insisted Parrell, in an indignant tone. "I came here to look for him. It's rather tough to be let down just when the game begins to open."

"Your search was for Myra," declared Dolthan. "We suspected that she was being influenced by Kernal. But Kernal, then, was known to us only as a rogue. At present, we know him for a criminal. A murderer. It is a matter for the authorities."

"I should welcome cooperation," put in Goodling, as he saw Parrell's dejection. "Parrell is a good man, Mr. Dolthan. If you care to retain him, I can certainly use him and his experienced investigators. They can be sworn in as deputies."

"Very well," agreed Dolthan. "Give Souder the names of the men whom you want, Parrell. When you call New York, Souder, arrange for Wurling to bring Parrell's operatives with him."

Comment ended. Goodling arose. He decided that there was no need of further conference. He stated that he would push the search that had already begun.

Rufus Dolthan left for the hotel, accompanied by Souder and Parrell. Doctor Claig suavely decided that he was going home. Harry and Clyde went from the office while the physician was still holding a brief chat with the prosecutor.

Both agents were anxious to hear from The Shadow; to make their reports regarding the evening's episodes. For they knew that in the search for Myra Dolthan, The Shadow, alone, could accomplish more than a host of others.

CHAPTER IX. THE SHADOW'S FINDING

"THAT'S finished."

Clyde Burke made the remark as he sealed a well-packed envelope. He placed it on the writing desk, where Harry Vincent was still engaged with fountain pen. A few minutes later, Harry ceased writing and folded his final paper. He tucked this sheet into a partly filled envelope. Like Clyde, Harry sealed the wrapper.

Harry had decided to room with Clyde. Uninstructed by The Shadow, the two agents had gone immediately to the hotel. There they had compiled individual reports.

"Of all places," mused Clyde Burke, staring from the window, "this town of Sheffield is the last where I'd expect excitement. The only place that's lighted is the courthouse; and that's simply because of all this crime."

"Quite a few street lamps," observed Harry, strolling to the window. "That's one help, Clyde."

"Yes," returned the reporter, "but what use are they? Ordinarily, nobody would be up after nine o'clock in this burg."

"There's someone now, coming from the courthouse."

"Sure. From the courthouse. Probably some deputy. No – it's Doctor Claig."

"I thought he had started home."

"Probably he got talking with Goodling. Claig likes to talk. He chatted with me for half an hour while we were waiting for you to come back."

"What was his topic?"

"A lot of bunk about the swell sanitarium he used to run. It's off on a hillside, about three miles north of town. I mentioned the place in my report."

"He's retired now, isn't he?"

"Yes. Living alone amid the ruins of his former glory. Wants to sell the old place. But he can't find a buyer."

Claig had come across the street while the two men were talking. The physician had entered a coupe that was parked in a space beneath the side of the hotel. Clyde and Harry heard the starter; they saw the gleam of lights. The coupe pulled out and started northward.

Clyde had regained his hired coupe on the way into town. He had found it undisturbed in front of the traffic light. At present, it was parked at the rear of the hotel.

Claig's car was the last that had been at the side of the hotel. To Harry and Clyde, the space seemed empty as they stared downward into the darkness.

THEY were wrong. There was a figure in that blackened space beside the old hotel. A shrouded form had arrived shortly before Doctor Claig. Silently, unseen, the shape was entering a side door of the hotel

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Looking up from below, The Shadow had seen his agents at the window. He was coming to gain their reports. Yet neither Clyde nor Harry suspected the proximity of their invisible master.

"I hope we receive a call from Westbury," remarked Clyde, in an undertone. "Of course, there's a lot of dope we can't give over the wire, even though we're supposed to be working for the press."

"That's true," agreed Harry, "but I've a hunch that we'll gain different contact, Clyde. A closer interview. I've been thinking about it ever since I was out at the house on Dobson's Road."

"You mean you saw someone there?"

"No. But I'm sure Goodling was wrong on one point of his theory. His idea was sound about Kermal's men being there to cover up; but –"

"That was Parrell's idea."

"One and the same. Goodling agreed with it. The fellows went from here after they shot down Yager. But it wasn't Blissop's pals who gave them trouble."

"Then who were the men there?"

"Some more of the same bunch. Some came to cover the courthouse. Others went to search the old house. And then –"

Clyde nodded as Harry paused. The reporter understood. Harry had viewed the scene of the fray and had recognized that The Shadow must have battled alone against two groups of crooks. Those who had slain Yager had come to warn their fellows.

Both agents were thinking, picturing the lone fighter and his odds. Clyde's face was serious. He was wondering if The Shadow had come unscathed from the fray. Harry's face was troubled also. Both agents stared musingly from the window.

The door behind them opened. Without noise, almost imperceptibly at first. Then, into the dull light of the room came the living figure of their chief. Beneath the table lamp lay the sealed envelopes; near by were the keys of Clyde's coupe

The Shadow approached. He picked up the envelopes and thrust them beneath his cloak. He detached one of the keys from the ring. His eyes viewed his agents by the window. Stealthily, The Shadow withdrew.

Unseen, unheard, the master sleuth had come and gone. But as token of his departure, he did not close the door as silently as he had opened it. From the hallway, The Shadow drew the door shut with a slight thump.

Harry and Clyde swung about, electrified by the sound. They saw the closed door. They stared at the table. They observed that the envelopes were gone. For a moment, Clyde showed alarm; then Harry's chuckle made the reporter smile.

Someone had entered unnoticed to gain those envelopes. That same person could have departed just as silently. The click of the door had been a deliberate signal on the part of The Shadow. An act that told his agents that it was he who had removed their messages.

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SHORTLY afterward, a light gleamed in a room on the same floor of the hotel. The Shadow had chosen an unoccupied room as a temporary sanctum. Blinds were drawn over windows. The glare came from a shaded table lamps, its rays centered downward upon the woodwork.

The Shadow was reading the reports of his agents. They were inked in code. Writing faded as The Shadow perused separately folded pages. But with pencil in an ungloved hand, The Shadow made notations as he continued his perusal. The reports finished, his hands brought a large sheet of paper into the light.

The Shadow compiled a column of notations, that read as follows:

Empty house as hideout.

Death of Blissop.

Disposal of Goodling and Lanford.

Removal to new hide-out.

Encounter with Croy.

Capture of Lanford.

The Shadow paused. Instead of continuing the column, he started a new sequence at the other side of the paper. This second column stated:

Arrival of Yager.

Murder of Yager.

Prowlers at house.

Arrival of murderers.

What Harry Vincent had guessed, The Shadow knew. The band that had come to the abandoned house were on their way to contact those already there. Both groups had joined in battle with The Shadow.

But Harry had not even guessed at one fact which The Shadow had definitely noted. That was the sudden break which had come in the sequence of events. That break explained the reason why The Shadow had formed two columns instead of only one.

Events that concerned Taussig Kernal had begun with craft and strategy. Blissop had been slain; but the death of that servant had not been an open one. Only the chance arrival of Goodling and Lanford had made Blissop's death a fact known to the law.

Goodling and Lanford could easily have been murdered in the old house. Instead, they had been doped and removed. That showed that Kernal still preferred craft; that he was confident that his trail would not be followed.

Upon that point, The Shadow made side notations; this time in ink, that dried, then faded. Thoughts that The Shadow gave in brief consideration; then dropped in order to return to his main theme.

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Murder not needed.

Accidental death.

The creek.

His references were to Goodling and Lanford. Kernal could not have known that the pair had met Turner on the road from Sheffield. Goodling and Lanford had been found in the prosecutor's coupe, on the very edge of Roaring Creek.

Had Kernal seen necessity for their death, he could have seen to it that the coupe was rolled into the creek, with the motor running. The doped men would have perished. Their deaths would have been classed as accidental – without Turner's testimony, which Kernal could not have anticipated.

Kernal had been confident that his new hide-out would not be discovered. He had deliberately allowed Goodling and Lanford to live, despite the testimony that they would later give concerning the body of Blissop.

Moreover, Kernal had allowed Croy to travel from the hide-out on this very night. Encountering Lanford and Clyde Burke, Croy had captured the former and shaken off the latter. Up to that point, Kernal and his aids had persisted in their policy of avoiding unnecessary killings.

Then came the break. Yager, murdered under the very nose of half a dozen witnesses. Why had the policy been changed? Yager could have been seized as readily as Lanford. Unless Yager's contact with Blissop had been unknown to Kernal. In that case, there would have been no use in watching the courthouse at all.

The prowlers at the house showed the next step in this new and perplexing policy. Since Croy had ventured from the new hide-out, why had Kernal not sent him alone to the old house?

Last of all, the arrival of the murderers there. Since the mystery of the house stood as Kernal's strongest protection; since its supposed evanishment left no beginning from which to pick up the lawyer's trail, why had he not warned Yager's murderers to stay clear of it after delivering death?

Obviously, they had gone to warn the men who were already there. Why, again, had that been a necessary move? Yager had not named the location of the house.

Goodling and the others were heading for Yager's cabin, two miles beyond the house. The prowlers who had come in place of Croy could easily have finished their search and departed with the trunk.

Confusion on the part of Yager's murderers was no explanation. Men who fired point-blank through the window of a prosecutor's office were too hardened to become stampeded after a simple get-away.

THE SHADOW'S finding was definite. The capture of Lanford, by Croy, constituted the final step in a policy of craft and strategy. The murder of Yager, very shortly after Lanford's capture, began a policy of open defiance; a series of bold moves that nullified all the cunning measures that had preceded it.

Taussig Kernal had become a hunted man. The murder of Yager had aroused the law to a high pitch of action. The trail to the house that he had left had cleared all mystery. The law had not even stopped to analyze the sudden change of action.

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Only The Shadow was making such analysis. He could see the reason behind the bold murder of Yager and the flight of killers to the mystery house. His answer was a whispered laugh that spoke of hidden knowledge. His long fist crumpled the paper that bore the written columns.

A NEW matter concerned The Shadow. That of Kermal's present hide-out. Quick comments appeared upon new paper; these were inscribed in vivid blue ink.

Croy close by... Daggart wounded... Bandages... Hypodermic...

Informant needed... Security in new hide-out... Quick seizure of

Lanford.

A pause. The last word faded. Then, in vivid letters, The Shadow wrote a name upon the paper:

Doctor Leo Claig.

A whispered laugh sounded as the name faded, letter by letter. Again, The Shadow had pieced important points. Daggart had been wounded. Clyde's report stated that Lanford had spoken of his paleness; the freshness of the bandages.

All pointed to skilled medical attention. Someone at the mystery house had tended the wounded secretary in capable fashion. Goodling and Lanford had been treated with a hypodermic needle. A likely item in the kit of a medical practitioner, on hand because of a wounded patient.

Claig had thrust himself straight into the investigation. It was he who had examined Goodling and Lanford after their experience. As an informant for Kermal, none could be better than Claig.

The doctor's old sanitarium could fill the bill as the new hide-out in this emergency. Croy's quick seizure of Fred Lanford at the traffic light proved that the servant did not have far to go.

Searchers were already on the job. They would scour the countryside for abandoned houses. They would pass up Claig's house as a matter of course. The physician had worked himself into the affairs of the law.

The Shadow, however, remained undeceived. The light clicked out; a cloak swished in darkness. A few minutes later, Clyde Burke's coupe rolled from its parking space behind the Weatherby Hotel.

The Shadow was on his way to pay an unseen visit to the country residence of Doctor Leo Claig.

CHAPTER X. KERMAL DECIDES

"WELL, doctor, we'll probably be seeing you tomorrow."

"Good. I'm glad you stopped off to say hello."

"We saw you pulling into your garage. Though we'd better find out if you'd spotted anybody suspicious."

"I wish I had, Carter. But I didn't pass a single car coming up from town."

"Well, I guess we've been chinning long enough. Good night, doctor."

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Three men stamped down the steps of Doctor Claig's front porch. They were deputies, headed by a man named Carter. Claig had encountered them just outside his drive. They had strolled up to the porch for a chat.

Doctor Leo Claig was both well known and well liked in Sheffield. In the days when his big house had served as a private sanitarium, his wealthy patients had spent large sums of money in the town.

Always ready to chat with those whom he met, Claig had given greeting to the deputies. They were returning from the search that Goodling had ordered; they were wearied with their tramp about the hills and were glad to rest a while at the physician's invitation.

Claig had gone into reminiscences. He had recalled many places in the neighborhood of Sheffield that he thought would be worthwhile investigating. Carter had thanked him for the tips.

Claig chuckled as he unlocked his front door. He planned to stay at home tomorrow. There would be more deputies prowling about. He would greet them as he had greeted Carter.

Closing the front door, Claig turned on the light. He walked from the hall into a comfortable, old-fashioned sitting room. He turned on a light there; then went back through the hall and into a parlor that served as waiting room for the few patients whom he occasionally received.

Claig went through and turned on the light in his office. Beyond was a door that opened into his bedroom. But instead of going in that direction, Claig used another door to enter a long passage that ran to the dining room and kitchen.

The physician turned on a light in a small alcove. Directly in front of him was a heavy door, with a large lock. The bottom of the barrier was above the level of the floor. This was the entrance to the stairway that led to the second and third floors.

Presumably, these upper stories were no longer in use. Claig had abandoned them when he had given up his sanitarium. They had formerly been the quarters occupied by the doctor's patients.

Tonight, however, Claig had reason to go upstairs. He unlocked the big door, stepped through to the darkened stairway and closed the door behind him. The lock clicked automatically.

Viewed from outside, Claig's house was a somber structure. The lights which the doctor had turned on modified the gloominess of the ground floor; but the upper stories looked barren and forbidding.

Faint moonlight showed blackened windows, most of them fronted by steel bars. One large window at the side of the house was unbarred; but its darkness made it as forbidding as the others. This window was on the second floor, just above the roof of a small side porch.

Off to the rear of the large house was a darkened garage. It was a large structure also, of sufficient size to accommodate four or five automobiles. The garage had a low second story, which possessed half a dozen windows. It had once been used as quarters for servants.

Off beyond the garage was a line of thick trees that marked the path of an old dirt road. It was from that streak of blackness that a vague figure appeared in the moonlight, only to fade in ghostlike fashion as it neared the garage.

THE SHADOW had come by a back route to Claig's. He had studied maps of the district. He had read Clyde Burke's details of the reporter's chat with the physician. Clyde had gained a good idea of where Claig's house

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was located.

From the garage, The Shadow studied the dimly lighted windows of the lower door. In their appearance, he detected the physician's bluff.

Claig had definitely made an effort to indicate that he was at home, yet might be anywhere on the ground floor. To the average late visitor, those scattered lights would serve as explanation if Claig should prove slow in answering a ring at the doorbell.

To The Shadow, the lights meant that the first floor needed no investigation. He looked upward and spied the unbarred window that was conspicuous above the roof of the little side porch. The Shadow moved toward the house.

That objective gained, his course was upward. Gripping fingers pressed roughened stone. The Shadow's figure reached the porch roof. His hands arrived upon a glass pane. A wedge of thin steel slid between the portions of the sash. A clamp yielded, noiselessly.

Stretching a hand into darkness, The Shadow felt a broad window ledge. Beyond were thick curtains; this accounted for the deep gloom within the window. The Shadow edged in until he reached the curtains. Silently, he closed the window.

The Shadow could hear voices; yet the thickness of the draperies muffled them almost to a point of obscurity. It was not until The Shadow carefully divided the curtains to a scant half inch that he could make out the words that were being spoken.

The separation of the curtains enabled him to see as well as hear. The view of the room beyond the curtains was immediate proof that The Shadow had reached his objective.

Chairs, couch, rugs and tapestries; even the wolfhound in the corner – all matched the description of the living room in the house on Dobson's Road.

The furnishings had been carried here to Claig's and put in place about this room. Apparently, this had once been the physician's upstairs office; that was why it had no bars upon the window. For the present, it was the new headquarters of Taussig Kermal. The man, himself, was seated in the center of the room.

A SOUR glower showed on Kermal's thick features. As The Shadow watched, the heavy man gave a growl and shook his shaggy head. Opposite Kermal sat Claig. It was apparent that the physician had completed a report. The details had not been to Kermal's liking.

"That's about all," declared Claig, suavely, as Kermal began to chew at the end of a cigar. "I was later than I expected; and I ran into some deputies outside the house. I stopped to chat with them a while. It seemed good policy."

"It was," snorted Kermal, "and it won't be all the talking you'll have to do, Claig. Well, let's hope we can hold out for the next few days."

"There should be no trouble, Kermal," assured Claig. "Leave that part of it to me."

"We may be able to fool Goodling," stated Kermal, "but Rufus Dolthan is a different matter. He and this smart detective, Parrell, are liable to make a lot of trouble for us."

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"No more than Goodling," objected Claig. "He's hot because of Yager's death. He's found the missing house besides."

"He blundered into it," sneered Kermal. "Something odd must have happened down there tonight. He never should have found the place. I'd have sent after that trunk sooner, if I'd known all that was coming."

"Lay it on Yager," suggested Claig. "How were we to know that Blissop talked to the fellow. I didn't know it until he blew into the courthouse tonight. I was expecting some trouble from Goodling or Lanford – not from a person like Yager."

"Croy took care of Lanford?"

"Yes. But there, again, I can see trouble. Goodling will be as anxious to rescue Lanford as Dolthan is to find Myra."

"Not quite. But we've a chance to spike the Lanford business."

Kermal settled back into his chair and puffed at his cigar. After a few moments of meditation, he spoke in a slow growl.

"Lanford recognized Croy," he explained. "The only thing Croy could do was grab him. Croy didn't think Burke knew who he was. That's why he chucked Burke from the car, instead of bringing him along, too."

"But Burke knew it was Croy," put in Claig, in a sarcastic tone, "and right after that, Yager was murdered. That made a perfect tie-up between the abduction and the killing."

"Forget Yager," growled Kermal.

"They'll never find the fellow who shot him; and if they can't trace it that far, how are they ever going to bring us into it?"

"Through Blissop's death," returned Claig. "When they find his body, they'll accuse us of his murder. They won't need any more than circumstantial evidence to pin Yager's death on us."

"We can explain matters about Blissop," insisted Kermal. "We decided that the other night, Claig. Our story will sound straight enough."

"It would have sounded straight," agreed Claig, "but it won't pass muster after what's happened to Yager. The two men were linked. Anybody who had cause to kill one would apparently have cause to kill the other."

"We'll have to sit tight; and all the while, we're in a worse mess because of Lanford. I'll tell you, Kermal, you've gone too strong. Of course, it was Croy's fault. He had good reason to be on his way through town; but he made a mistake in grabbing Lanford."

"DID he?" Kermal bounded to his feet. "Did he? Listen, Claig – we're lucky to have Lanford here. They're looking for us anyway. We couldn't use Lanford while he was loose."

"Can we use him now?"

"Certainly. There's going to be a show-down some day. The more friends we have in court, the better. I'm going to talk to Lanford and see how he reacts."

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"You're going to tell him about Yager?"

"Of course not. We'll give him the facts as they stood at the time Croy grabbed him. We'll see if he is impressed. If it goes over, we'll know that we can take a chance with the others later."

"Not now. Not since Yager's death. That complicates everything."

"Perhaps. Nevertheless, if Lanford listens, we'll have gained something."

Kermal strode to the door and called for Daggart. The Shadow caught a glimpse of the pale-faced secretary in a hallway beyond the door. Daggart nodded and departed when Kermal ordered him to bring Lanford.

Doctor Leo Claig was smiling wisely as Kermal returned. Watching the physician's face, The Shadow could see that Claig possessed craft as keen as Kermal's.

Fred Lanford was due for an interview with two shrewd men. However they might choose to bluff their prisoner, the chances were that they would be successful.

But in the coming game, these two planners were dealing with one whose presence they did not suspect. Unwittingly, they were about to reveal themselves and their schemes to the hidden watcher who had come to learn their ways.

CHAPTER XI. LANFORD AGREES

"COME in, Daggart."

Kermal rasped the command in response to taps at the doorway from the hall. The door opened; Daggart appeared, with Fred Lanford. The Shadow, peering from the slitted curtain, observed another figure also.

Croy was standing out in the hallway. The big servant had backed up Daggart. The Shadow knew that Lanford, until now, must have been kept prisoner in one of the barred rooms.

In fact, Lanford's face showed defiance as the prisoner met Kermal's gaze. Then, as Daggart closed the door, Lanford began to look about in bewildered fashion. The room had turned his recollection back to that old house that he had visited with Goodling.

Lanford stared toward the curtains at the window, thinking that they led into an adjoining room. Seeing that they were raised to the level of a window sill, he realized that this could not be the apartment wherein he had viewed a dead form by the couch.

A chuckle ended Lanford's musing. The prisoner turned as he heard the sound. He recognized Doctor Claig. An expression of complete mystification showed upon Lanford's features; then the young man smiled in relief.

Like others who lived in Sheffield, Lanford knew Claig by sight and reputation. The doctor's presence gave assurance that danger was absent. But as he viewed Claig's steady eyes, Lanford appeared to wonder.

"Good evening," greeted Kermal, his harsh voice toned. "Have a seat, Mr. Lanford. Help yourself to a cigar. You are with friends."

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LANFORD considered Kermal with doubt; then he caught a nod from Claig. He started to sit down on the couch; then shied away and took a chair instead. He managed a weak smile as he accepted a cigar from a box that Kermal passed him.

"Mr. Lanford," stated Kermal, "I greatly regret the circumstances that surrounded our first meeting. I must also apologize for the emergency which caused my servant to bring you here tonight.

"Therefore, I am ready to make explanation. Not only that: I am willing to answer any questions that may trouble you. Suppose, however, that I begin by giving an account of myself. That will automatically answer most of the questions that you have in mind."

"Very well," agreed Lanford, huskily. "Go ahead, Mr. Kermal."

"You remember my name." Kermal smiled. "Good. In full form, it is Taussig Kermal. I am a Boston attorney. I represent a man named Wade Dolthan, who died a few months ago. Before his death, he appointed me as executor of his estate.

"Wade Dolthan had a daughter named Myra. She is the young lady whom you met at our former headquarters. Myra was abroad at the time of her father's death. Since she would not inherit the estate until she became of age, I feared for her safety during the short time that remained before she would be twenty-one."

Kermal paused. He was seated back in his chair, looking steadily at Lanford. The Shadow could detect the closeness with which the lawyer was watching his listener.

"Let me be specific," resumed Kermal. "Should Myra Dolthan die before the age of twenty-one, the full estate would go to her stepbrother, George Garling. He is older than Myra, and he is a man of doubtful character.

"Do not misunderstand my statement" – Kermal raised his hand as Lanford was about to ask a question – "I would not accuse Garling of plotting his stepsister's death. Far from it. Garling is a weakling. But therein lies the possibility that he might listen to the threats of others.

"Wade Dolthan warned me that his stepson was a man with a bad past. He refused to give me details; but he intimated that there might be people who held information sufficient to send Garling to prison.

"Such persons would naturally like to see Wade Dolthan's estate go into the hands of George Garling. They could blackmail that young man for several millions. There is one way in which they could assure themselves that Garling would receive the money. That would be by murdering Myra Dolthan prior to her twenty-first birthday."

Kermal paused to survey his listener, Lanford was staring in amazement. He looked toward Doctor Claig, who nodded shrewdly.

"Am I clear?" questioned Kermal. "Do you see, Lanford, what great opportunity exists for those of criminal tendency? Realize one point" – he wagged an impressive finger – "namely that murderers could strike before they revealed themselves. They would not have to start pressure on Garling until after he actually held the millions.

"They could approach him by proxy, if necessary. He would not dare accuse anyone of murder; for on the face of it, he would appear to be the one who had most to gain. Had I realized those complications prior to

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Wade Dolthan's death, I would have insisted that he change his will. But I did not see the danger until after he had died."

KERMAL arose impressively. Chewing at a fresh cigar, he paced back and forth. He finally seated himself on the couch, nearer to Lanford than he had been before.

"There are remedies for most ills," stated Kermal, steadily. "I saw the cure in this case. To keep Myra Dolthan hidden until she is of age. Then to have her make out a will herself, cutting George Garling off entirely. When that has been accomplished, plotters will be checkmated.

"I happened to be a friend of Doctor Leo Claig. He came to Boston while Myra was on her way from Europe. I wanted to use his house as our hiding place. He suggested that it would be better to occupy a house on Dobson's Road, a building recently vacated by an artist named Brooks.

"We moved in there one night. Myra, myself, Daggart and two servants: Croy and Blissop. Brooks had failed to order the telephone disconnected. That suited us, because it enabled us to communicate with Doctor Claig.

"However, the telephone caused trouble. Last Saturday night, Daggart heard someone making a call by the door of the hall closet. Daggart listened; he heard Blissop giving someone instructions how to reach our house.

"Blissop, like Croy, was in my confidence. The man had turned traitor. He was selling out to those who wished to murder Myra. Daggart rushed upon Blissop as soon as the fellow had completed the call.

"Blissop drew a gun. He fired two shots; one clipped Daggart's arm. When Daggart fell, Blissop was aiming deliberately to kill him when Croy arrived. He had a gun; he had heard the shots. He fired and his bullet lodged in Blissop's heart."

Lanford saw Daggart standing pale-faced near the couch. The secretary nodded as he caught Kermal's gaze. Daggart's face looked troubled; Lanford decided that the man was recalling that experience in which he had been wounded.

"I called Doctor Claig," declared Kermal. "He attended Daggart's wound. We placed Blissop's body in the living room. Then we discussed our next step. Less than one week remained before Myra would be twenty-one. It seemed best to avoid complications until that date.

"To inform the authorities would have caused an inquiry. Our whereabouts would be known. Myra would be held as a witness. We knew that we were dealing with hidden foes who would go to any measure to slay the girl whom we were protecting

"Blissop had told them where we were. Fortunately, his telephone conversation had been finished. They did not know what had happened. Yet there was a chance that they might come that very night. Blissop had directed them to take the first road after they passed the one marked Westbury.

"We sent Croy out into the storm. He removed the sign. He brought it to our road and planted it there. We knew that we would have time to move. We were packing upstairs when you and Goodling arrived. Naturally, Croy suspected that you might be enemies."

LANFORD smiled. The story sounded logical. Kermal smiled also; he saw that Lanford was beginning to believe.

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"Croy's description of you and Goodling impressed Doctor Claig and myself," said Kermal, to Lanford. "We sent Daggart downstairs, however, to make sure. Unfortunately, Myra, who was upset by Blissop's death, saw you before Daggart arrived.

"She took it upon herself to give you a vague warning. You became suspicious and discovered Blissop's body. Even then we would not have dealt roughly with you if Goodling had not started the attack.

"After we had overpowered the pair of you, I felt that there was no time to be lost. Doctor Claig agreed. He realized who you were. That was why we turned out the lights before he came in to administer the hypodermic.

"Croy took you both to the edge of the creek. He left you in the coupe. He came back and helped us complete packing. After that, he replaced the sign where it belonged. We came here and brought Blissop's body with us. Our intention was to make everything known the day that Myra becomes of age."

Kermal stopped. It was Doctor Claig who added the finishing touch to the story.

"There was a trunk at the old house," explained the physician, dryly. "Blissop had put it away somewhere. We overlooked it when we packed. When we checked up on everything here, we remembered the trunk.

"Myra thought it must be under the stairs. We decided to send Croy to find it, since I had learned, downtown, that the location of the house was still a mystery. But Croy could not go until after the search was ended."

"I sent him out this evening," added Kermal. "He met you while he was driving through the outskirts of the town. You recognized him; and Croy saw nothing else to do but bring you here."

"And now," put in Claig, "the house has been located. The trunk is in Goodling's office. The hunt is beginning for Myra Dolthan as well as for you, Lanford. But" – the physician chuckled – "they will never suspect this house as the new hiding place."

"Not until we reveal it," declared Kermal, seriously. "We intend to do that, Lanford, within the next few days. As soon as Myra is twenty-one and has made her new will. That is why we have decided to be frank with you."

KERMAL arose, stepped forward and clamped his hand on Lanford's shoulder. His entire action was friendly.

"You can help us, Lanford," declared the lawyer, in an emphatic tone. "You can help us by staying here, as a guest, rather than as a prisoner. You can act as witness to documents. You can aid us in protecting Myra."

"How?" questioned Lanford.

"By writing a letter," replied Kermal. "A letter to Goodling. I shall mail it to New York and have a friend there send it, in your envelope, to Goodling.

"You can explain that everything is all right. That you have met Myra Dolthan. That will carry the search away from here. We shall be unmolested until the all-important day when we can make our complete story public."

Lanford nodded momentarily. Then his fists clenched in challenge. Rising, the young man faced Kermal. He blurted out his doubt.

"Why should I accept your story?" he demanded. "Why should I even believe in Doctor Claig? You have tried to explain a murder. Perhaps your story is true. But how do I know that the girl is here? How do I know that she is still alive? She warned me once – where is she to warn me now?"

"She is here," smiled Kernal, "to advise you. Not to warn you. Daggart" – he beckoned to the secretary – "go and request Miss Dolthan to join our company."

The secretary bowed and went toward a door opposite the one by which Lanford had entered. Kernal's smile had become triumphant. Claig's face showed a gleam.

The Shadow, watching Fred Lanford, saw the young man stare fixedly toward the door by which Daggart had departed. The Shadow knew that if Myra Dolthan appeared in answer to the secretary's summons, Kernal's argument with Lanford would be won.

CHAPTER XII. FROM THE NIGHT

BEYOND the door that Daggart had left open was a further hall. It was the twin of the corridor by which Lanford had come to this meeting room. Daggart's footsteps had died; now, after a brief-lapse, foot-falls were returning.

All eyes were toward that door as Myra Dolthan appeared. Standing on the threshold, the girl gazed inquiringly toward Taussig Kernal. Then she spied Fred Lanford.

Her eyes showed involuntary surprise as she recognized him as one of the men to whom she had given a warning.

"Come in, Myra," requested Kernal, in a kindly tone. "I want you to meet Mr. Lanford. He was one of the strangers who came to the other house. Do you remember him?"

"I do," replied Myra, nodding slowly. The girl's face had paled; but its color was returning as she advanced into the room. "I – I am pleased to meet you, Mr. Lanford."

"I am pleased to meet you, Miss Dolthan," returned Lanford. He had risen and was bowing. "Very pleased."

"Your friend?" inquired Myra. "Where is he?"

"Jay Goodling?" laughed Lanford. "Back in town, where he belongs. Wondering where I am, I suppose."

"You see, Myra" – Kernal caught the girl's attention – "I told you the exact truth when I said that no harm had befallen those two strangers. We did not hold them as prisoners. They were released by Croy. Both of them returned to Sheffield.

"Mr. Lanford came here tonight, after a chance meeting with Croy. I must admit that there was a misunderstanding; but after Croy brought Lanford here, I explained matters. Lanford is our guest; not our prisoner."

Myra Dolthan appeared relieved. Fred Lanford smiled. This was certainly the girl whom he had met on Saturday night. He had remembered Myra's countenance from the vague light of the old house. Here, where he could see her face more plainly, he was absolutely sure of her identity.

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Myra Dolthan was attired in the same dark traveling costume that she had been wearing that other night. Her voice was the same; the darkness of her hair produced the same contrast against the whiteness of her face.

"I was worried about you, Mr. Lanford," explained Myra, as she seated herself in a chair. "Mr. Kernal and Doctor Claig assured me that you and your friend were uninjured. But I knew that there had been a scuffle after you had failed to heed my warning."

"Mr. Lanford was concerned about your safety, Myra," put in Claig, with his dry tone. "So Mr. Kernal decided that it would be best for you to meet."

"You see, Myra," stated Kernal, "I have made certain statements to Mr. Lanford. I feel convinced that he believes what I have told him; but your corroboration would be most welcome."

"May I ask Miss Dolthan some questions?" queried Lanford, facing Kernal boldly.

"Certainly," replied the lawyer. "Myra" – he stared toward the girl – "you may answer any questions that Mr. Lanford asks."

THE girl nodded. Her eyes were looking straight toward Kernal. The Shadow, watching from the curtains, could see the fixed, almost hypnotic stare that had come over Myra's expression. Not once did Kernal relax his gaze.

"Miss Dolthan," stated Lanford, "I have been told that you are here of your own free choice. Is that correct?"

"Certainly." The girl spoke in a low tone; then turned toward Lanford as Kernal's gaze relaxed. "Yes. I lived in the old house at Mr. Kernal's advice. I came here also because he advised it."

"Yet you warned Goodling and myself," insisted Lanford. "You told us to leave that house on Dobson's Road. Why?"

Myra did not look toward Kernal; yet it was plain, to The Shadow, that the girl knew the lawyer was watching her. Myra spoke; her voice trembled slightly.

"I was afraid," she said to Lanford. "Not for myself; but for you and your friend. I was afraid that you would be mistaken for enemies. We expected such persons to arrive."

"But you thought Goodling and I were all right?"

"Yes. That is why I warned you."

"You knew that a man was dead in the house?"

"Yes. I knew that Blissop had been killed."

"And you believe that his death was either accidental or justified by circumstances?"

"Yes. Croy told me that he shot Blissop in order to save Daggart. I believed Croy."

Lanford nodded. Despite the fact that Myra spoke as if under pressure, her statements were clear. Kernal smiled; then made a suggestion to Lanford.

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"Ask Miss Dolthan if she thinks you should cooperate with us," said the lawyer. Then, to Myra: "Remember, Myra, you may answer as you think best."

Again the girl's eyes met Kermal's. Myra nodded instinctively. The Shadow could see that Kermal was forcing her to a choice. Lanford, however, did not discern the subtle fact.

"Mr. Kermal wants me to write a letter," stated the young man. "One that can be posted from New York. A letter saying that everything is all right; that you are safe. That I am satisfied that all can be explained. Do you feel that I should comply with that request?"

"I do," responded Myra. "I advise you to do as Mr. Kermal suggests."

"And shall I remain here, and aid in keeping searchers from learning where you are?"

"Yes. If Mr. Kermal wishes you to do so."

Lanford paused. Again he was impressed by the girl's definite opinions. Kermal spoke.

"Are there any other questions, Mr. Lanford?" he inquired.

Fred started to shake his head; then stopped. One question had occurred to him. He turned to Myra.

"Who are these enemies of yours," he asked. "Is there anyone in particular whom you fear? Anyone whom you think —"

LANFORD stopped short. Myra was gripping the arms of her chair. Her face had turned pale; she was biting her lips. The girl glanced nervously toward Kermal.

The lawyer came to his feet. For a moment he glared at Lanford; then his wrath subsided before Fred noticed the suppressed outburst.

"Miss Dolthan is highly nervous," spoke Kermal. "Your question has disturbed her. We must not trouble her with a subject that arouses her fears. Am I right, Doctor Claig?"

"Quite right," responded the physician. "As you know, Lanford, I am a specialist on nerve conditions. I believe that it would be best for Miss Dolthan to rest."

Kermal nodded. The girl arose. She steadied and managed to say good night. Fred watched her walk from the room. Daggart closed the door immediately after the girl's departure.

"About the letter," declared Kermal, brusquely. "If you write it at once, Doctor Claig can drive downtown and post it so it will go out in the early morning mail."

"What shall I state in it?" asked Lanford.

"I shall leave that to you," replied Kermal. "Goodling is a friend of yours. Tell him that you are in New York; that you have met Myra Dolthan. State that you have promised her that you will not explain matters until later. Choose your own wording, so the letter will be natural."

Lanford nodded and turned about toward the door by which he had entered. Kermal nodded to Daggart. The secretary followed Goodling. The Shadow saw Croy in the hall when the door was opened by Lanford. Then

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Fred and Daggart went out; the door closed. "Not bad, Claig," chuckled Kermal. "Not bad at all. We sold Lanford on our story. Others will believe us also."

"It was Myra who convinced him," corrected Claig. "Don't forget that, Kermal."

"Myra will convince others later."

"Not if they question her while you are absent."

"Ridiculous, Claig. She knows what to say."

"Up to a certain point, yes. But after that – well, you saw how she acted when Lanford questioned her about who the enemies were."

Kermal grunted angrily; but he had no reply. He paced back and forth across the room. Claig looked dour.

"I guess you're right," admitted Kermal, stopping his pacing to face the physician. "Everything is explainable up to a certain point. After that, we need proofs."

"Which you do not have," reminded Claig, "and which you can never obtain. Remember, Kermal, how you first told the story to Myra. I was there. I saw her reaction."

"She listened just as Lanford did tonight. She believed me completely."

"At first, yes. You told her about threatening danger. That you were performing a duty for her dead father. She welcomed your protection; and then she asked whom it was you feared."

"And I told her Rufus Dolthan. Her uncle."

"Yes. You told her that. Like the fool you can sometimes be."

"I made her believe that her uncle wants to murder her."

"You made her make believe she believed it."

"She certainly mistrusts her uncle."

"And she mistrusts you as well. That girl is in a state of confusion, Kermal. As a witness, she would probably turn against you."

KERMAL paced again. At last he stopped and pounded his fist upon the table.

"There are millions of dollars hinged on this game of ours, Claig," declared the lawyer. "You and I are in it deep. You know as well as I do that we have to hold off everyone until after Myra Dolthan becomes of age."

"The girl believes sufficiently in me. As long as she encounters no other influence, she will sign anything that I ask. No one – not even Rufus Dolthan – can question the legality of a paper that bears her signature after she is twenty-one."

"Provided, of course, that it is witnessed. That part of it is easily handled. Croy and Daggart can sign; better still, you and Lanford. Four of you."

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"And suppose," suggested Claig, "that the lot of us are jailed on account of Blissop and Yager –"

"That does not matter," broke in Kermal. "There's only one document that Myra needs to sign. That is her will. In the absence of a later will, such an instrument would remain valid."

"You are forgetting Rufus Dolthan," reminded Claig. "Suppose all of us – Lanford, of course, excepted – should become fugitives from justice. Myra would be restored to her uncle. She would know us as thieves and murderers; she would see some game in everything that we have done. No matter how cleverly you word that will, Kermal, its purpose will appear suspicious."

"We can discuss that point later," decided Kermal. "I disagree with you on it, Claig. Myra may have doubted some of my statements; but she believes enough of them to make matters safe. As you yourself say, she is in a state of confusion. That is good."

"I made her trust me at the start. Then to clinch matters, I tried to shatter her belief in her uncle. My plan did not work as I expected it. But it did have a negative effect; it made the girl mistrust both her uncle and myself."

"Let her remain confused. Let her distrust everyone concerned. She will seek new friends; and because of her mistrust, she will find safe ones. She will go by the advice of some reputable lawyer; and I will defy any attorney to uncover a joker in the will that I intend to have Myra sign."

"She will be advised to let it stand. We will still hold the upper hand. But all this, Claig" – Kermal shook his shaggy head – "is useless speculation. We are smart enough to come into the clear."

CLAIG looked unconvinced. Kermal became savage in his argument.

"I've told you," he asserted, "that we can explain Blissop's death. They can never prove Yager's murder against us. The birds who finished him have flown."

"A bad combination," reminded Claig. "I was afraid that matters would get beyond us. But you were stubborn, Kermal. You insisted on acting as you have."

"We have Lanford as an ally," mused Kermal. "He will testify in our behalf."

"Not when he learns what happened at the courthouse tonight."

"But Croy and Daggart will stand by."

"Croy, yes. But not Daggart. He will stick to his story regarding Blissop's death, because he might be implicated. But when you are accused of Yager's murder, Daggart will have qualms."

"How can he bring any charges against me?"

"He can't. But he will doubt you. He will no longer be whole-heartedly for you. Whatever you do, Kermal, say nothing to Daggart about that crime downtown tonight."

"You mean that even if I assured him that I did not order Yager's death he would not believe me?"

"Daggart would not believe you. He knows your stubborn traits, Kermal. If he grasps the idea that crooks are teamed up with us, he will desert us."

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"And report Blissop's death in order to save his own hide?"

"Exactly. He would consider himself justified."

Claig paused. Kermal was about to speak when a light tap sounded at the door. Kermal growled; Daggart entered. The secretary was bringing Lanford's letter.

KERMAL read the epistle. He nodded in satisfaction, put the letter in its envelope and thrust the latter into a larger wrapper, upon which he wrote an address.

"The letter is all right, Claig," assured the lawyer. "Get it downtown right away. I have addressed it to a friend in New York. He will mail Lanford's letter back. Lanford addressed its envelope to Goodling."

Claig took the letter and departed. The Shadow saw Daggart watch the physician's departure. Daggart's face looked pale and troubled. Kermal noted the fact also.

"Good night, Daggart," said the lawyer. "It's time for sleep. If anything worries you, we can talk about it in the morning."

The secretary nodded and went out by the door which he had entered. Kermal glanced about the room; then went to the same door and turned out the lights. The Shadow saw the hallway light as the lawyer opened the door; then the glow was obscured as the barrier closed behind Kermal.

Curtains parted in darkness. Softly, The Shadow entered the living room. From outside, he could hear the buzz of a motor. Doctor Claig was driving his coupe from the garage.

Reaching the portal, The Shadow opened the door to find a darkened hall. One glimmer of light was present; it came from beneath a door at the end of the corridor. Softly, The Shadow stole in that direction.

He stopped when he reached the door itself. Shrouded amid darkness, The Shadow paused to listen. The sound outside had faded. Claig had departed townward. An absolute hush held sway throughout this entire house.

CHAPTER XIII. THE SHADOW'S PROMISE

Tap-tap – Tap-tap –

Myra Dolthan looked up, startled. The girl was seated in the corner of a plainly furnished room, the apartment to which she had been assigned since the arrival at Doctor Claig's.

Tap-tap – Tap-tap –

Myra smiled at her own fright. She laid aside the diary in which she was writing and arose from beside a little table. She had recognized Daggart's knock. This was probably another summons from Kermal. Myra supposed that the lawyer wanted her to hold a new interview with Lanford.

"All right, Daggart," said Myra. "I am ready. Does Mr. Kermal want to see me again?"

She was unlocking the door as she spoke. She thought she heard a response in the secretary's voice. Myra opened the door. Eyes wide with amazement, she stared across the threshold.

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Before her, Myra saw an incredible figure. The darkness of the hall enshrouded cloaked shoulders. That same gloom obscured the features of a face beneath a slouch hat. Yet the girl could discern eyes – orbs of fire that shone from beneath the hat brim.

A warning whisper stopped the startled exclamation that sprang to Myra's lips. Silent, the girl stared into those burning eyes. Yet fear passed instantly as Myra studied the glowing optics. Some mysterious flash of The Shadow's eyes told her that this visitant was a friend.

The Shadow's gaze brought further understanding. Like speaking lips, those eyes pronounced that their owner had come here secretly, that his presence in this house was unknown to other occupants. Stepping back from the door, Myra motioned for The Shadow to enter.

Blackness moved inward from the hall. The Shadow's outline formed a clear-cut figure in the light. Silently, The Shadow closed the door. He turned and spoke to Myra. The steadiness of his whisper gave the girl new confidence.

"I have seen," pronounced The Shadow. "I have heard. I am a friend. You may speak. Tell me your real thoughts concerning Taussig Kermal."

The girl walked to the table. She picked up her diary, closed the book and extended it to The Shadow. A gloved hand received the volume.

"I have kept this record," declared Myra. "You may have it. You must truly be a friend; otherwise you could not be here. Of if you were an enemy" – the girl managed a smile as she paused – "your purpose would be to kill me; not to talk of the dangers which surround me."

MYRA had seated herself at the table. Her confidence in The Shadow was amazing. Instinctively, the girl had recognized The Shadow as a protector. She was anxious to unburden her troubled mind to this weird visitant who had conquered obstacles to meet her.

"The book tells everything," declared Myra, her quiet eyes meeting The Shadow's gaze, "and yet – and yet I do not fully understand. About Taussig Kermal – about my uncle. I would have believed Mr. Kermal fully if he had not spoken as he did of Uncle Rufus."

"State what Kermal said," ordained The Shadow.

"He told me that father had died suddenly." The girl's tone was sober. "He said that the will placed my life in jeopardy. Should I die before I became twenty-one, father's money would go to my stepbrother, George. I have always liked George; but it is true that he is a weakling, as Mr. Kermal said.

"I do not doubt that George could be sent to prison by people who knew too much about him. I believed it best to do as Mr. Kermal said. The old house where we were seemed safe. I could see easily how my life would be sought by criminals if they intended to blackmail George Garling, should he gain my father's wealth.

"But I could not understand why Mr. Kermal would not let me write to my uncle. I asked him; he said, at first, that my uncle would disapprove of the plan to keep me hidden. I insisted that I could persuade Uncle Rufus to make no objection. Mr. Kermal said then that maybe our enemies were watching Uncle Rufus. I became more persistent and finally Mr. Kermal said that my uncle was the one enemy whom we must guard against."

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THE girl paused. Her face was pale and troubled; her eyes had a far-away stare as she recalled those discussions that she had held in the past.

"I told Mr. Kermal that I did not believe him," declared Myra, firmly. "He broke into a tirade against my uncle. He – he said that he believed my father feared my uncle. That – that my father's death looked like murder.

"He claimed that!" The girl's tone, though low, was indignant. "Mr. Kermal declared that Uncle Rufus first managed to poison my father. So cleverly was it done that no trace could be discovered; and that his next move would be to kill me.

"In my case, Mr. Kermal said, there would be no attempt at strategy. Any form of death would do, so long as I died before I came of age. Each day seemed more desperate; and yet I felt forced to trust in Mr. Kermal."

"Your reason," ordered The Shadow. "State why you still trusted Kermal."

"I knew that I was safe with him," explained Myra. "Events had proven that. Doctor Claig, too, seemed very kind. But when Blissop was killed, I – I began to wonder. That is why I warned the two men who came to the house."

"Give your recollection of Blissop's death," commanded The Shadow.

"It happened while I was upstairs," declared Myra. "At the other house. I heard the shots. I came down and saw Daggart wounded. Blissop was dead; Croy had killed him. Croy said that he had slain Blissop to save Daggart.

"Croy seemed honest. But Blissop had seemed honest, too. I think Croy did act to save Daggart. But Croy is stupid at times; Blissop was a much more intelligent man. I wondered if Blissop really was a traitor.

"Suppose that Mr. Kermal was the one who really plotted against my life; not Uncle Rufus, as he suggests. Croy would not have seen that Mr. Kermal was evil; but Blissop could have. He might have been acting to help me when Croy killed him."

Again the girl paused. The Shadow spoke:

"Tonight," he whispered, "you spoke as though you partly trusted Kermal. You managed well with it. You covered most of the doubts that you must feel."

Myra nodded her understanding. She realized that somehow The Shadow had been present at that interview. She gave her explanation.

"I have realized that I must cover my mistrust," she declared. "I am safe here for the present. But I fear Mr. Kermal. I know that the crisis may come soon. When he told me those lies about Uncle Rufus, I realized what his own game could be.

"Whether or not I do have enemies at present, I could certainly have one after I become of age. The one I mean is Mr. Kermal himself. He may be planning crime of his own, telling me these stories in order to cover his own plot.

"When I am twenty-one, my father's wealth will be mine. I am actually in the power of Mr. Kermal and Doctor Claig. If they should threaten me, I should be forced to sign away my wealth to them. Mr. Kermal

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says he merely wants me to sign a will, leaving my money to some charitable organization, instead of to George Garling.

"And yet – yet I can no longer believe him. His statements about Uncle Rufus; his policy of hiding; the fact that he has covered Blissop's death – all these things frighten me. Today is the fifteenth. My birthday is the eighteenth. Once midnight of the seventeenth has passed –"

THE girl stopped speaking. She shuddered; her lips trembled with suppressed fear. The Shadow spoke; his voice held a calmness that quieted Myra's alarm.

The Shadow raised his left hand and drew back the glove that covered it. Myra observed a glowing gem. It was a magnificent opal, its depths as mysterious as The Shadow's eyes.

"This girasol," affirmed The Shadow, "is my token. You will recognize me by it, no matter what my guise. Have no fear; you are safe for the present. Before danger strikes, I shall be here."

The Shadow stepped to the window. He unlatched folding shutters and drew one inward. Bars gleamed beyond. The girasol glittered as The Shadow pointed to the rods of steel.

"They have told you," he stated, "that those bars are to protect you. But to you – not fully trusting – those bars make this room a prison."

The girl nodded. She was amazed at The Shadow's statement. Kernal and Claig had spoken of the bars the night that Myra had occupied this room. The Shadow closed the shutter.

"Keep these shutters closed," he warned, "as you have been instructed. As for the bars, I shall deal with them tonight. Beyond this window you can see the upper story of the garage. My station will be there. You can signal me, should fear compel you.

"I shall know when danger threatens. I shall return at that hour. You will answer when you hear my summons" – slowly, The Shadow delivered four slow taps upon the table, with his gloved hand – "and you will know me by my token."

The Shadow raised his left hand. Myra stared once more at the girasol, fascinated by its changing hues. Then the glove moved over the gem, blotting out its hypnotic radiance.

Myra saw a flash of crimson as The Shadow moved toward the door. The weird visitor opened the barrier; his form merged with the blackness of the hall. The door closed, leaving Myra stilled with wonderment.

To the girl, the episode was like a dream. Yet her diary was gone; sure proof that this being from the night had been a reality. Moreover, The Shadow's presence had brought a calmness that remained. Myra Dolthan's fears were allayed.

OUTSIDE the house, The Shadow was descending by the window through which he had entered. He reached the ground; he faded toward the garage as he saw lights coming up the road. Doctor Claig's coupe rolled into the drive. A stooped figure appeared from the direction of the house. It was Croy.

The Shadow watched the big servant enter the garage. Peering through a window, he saw Croy and Claig jacking up an old sedan in the corner. This was the car that Croy had used earlier; they were fixing it so that it would appear to have been long since out of commission.

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The coupe's lights went out; Claig and Croy stumbled through darkness to the house. The Shadow let them pass, then entered the garage. He waited there a few minutes; then blinked his light along the floor. He found a third vehicle parked in the garage. It was an old station wagon that Claig had used in the past.

The Shadow's light showed the right rear tire. The Shadow recognized the tread that he had seen on the road from the rear of the old house. The station wagon was the vehicle in which the furnishings had been brought here.

The flashlight blackened. The Shadow stole from the garage, glided to the back road and coasted away in Clyde's coupe. Reaching Sheffield, he parked the car and entered the hotel.

He arrived at the room which his agents occupied. There he unlocked the door. Clyde and Harry were asleep in their beds.

From a large suitcase belonging to Harry Vincent, The Shadow brought out boxlike objects: items of special radio equipment. He produced wires and earphones; in their place he left a sealed envelope. Carrying his new burdens, he glided from the room and locked the door behind him.

LATER, he arrived on foot at Doctor Claig's. Entering the garage, The Shadow found the door to the unoccupied upper floor. He went up the stairs, left the articles that he was carrying and descended. His figure glided to the house, directly beneath Myra's room.

Scaling the wall in darkness, The Shadow gripped the outside bars. They were built into the masonry; The Shadow attacked them in the darkness with a sharp, glistening saw that cut its way steadily through the steel. He seemed untiring as he proceeded with this task, gripping the solid bars as he worked to weaken others.

At last, the central bars, though apparently untampered, were cut to a point where a single twist would break them. Loosening his hold, The Shadow dropped easily to the ground. The moonlight gave only a passing glimpse of his gliding figure as he returned to the garage.

Only Myra Dolthan had heard the sound of The Shadow's sawing. Half asleep, the girl had scarcely noticed the sound until just before The Shadow's task was completed. Rising, Myra went to the window and cautiously unlatched a shutter. She peered out into the moonlight.

A blink came from an upstairs window of the garage. It was repeated. Myra understood. The Shadow had discerned her face behind the barred window of her room. His glimmers were a signal that all was well. The Shadow had kept his promise. Myra knew that the bars of her window were formidable no longer.

She knew also that her mysterious protector had taken his new post. Day and night, The Shadow would be ready to aid her should danger strike. Myra smiled as she looked out into the moonlight. With a happy heart she closed the shutters and dropped the latch in place.

Whatever the answer to the complex problems that, confronted her, the girl felt confident that her security was assured. Somehow, she held the belief that The Shadow had delved deeply into the plots that up to now had threatened her.

The Shadow knew. Withholding action for the present, he was baiting men of crime. When the stage would be set for an exposure of evil schemes, The Shadow would be prepared.

CHAPTER XIV. THE LAW'S QUEST

IT was the next afternoon. A sultry haze clung to the slopes of the horizon about Sheffield. An ominous touch seemed present on the countryside. This was apparent to Doctor Leo Claig as he sat in an old rocker on the front porch of his prisonlike house.

The physician was puffing mildly at a briar pipe. A casual observer would have considered him complacent. But all the while, Claig's watchful eyes were shrewdly gazing toward roads and hillsides. He was studying the toylike figures of searching men. Jay Goodling had ordered a search throughout the county.

Deputies had passed during the day. Some had seen Doctor Claig standing in his doorway; others had noted him rocking in his porch chair. All had waved friendly greetings, which Claig had returned. None, however, had heard the mild chuckles that the physician uttered after they had passed.

Sunset was approaching. Claig's gaze turned westward. The watchful man saw wearied figures against the sky. Searchers were inward bound. Cutting across fields, they would pass by the house. They had evidently chosen Claig's as a landmark on which to take bearings.

A motor throbbed from the road. Claig looked in that direction to see a sedan roll in the driveway. An arm waved from the driver's seat. Jay Goodling alighted; then Clyde Burke. Following them came Roy Parrell and a stocky man who was evidently one of Parrell's investigators.

The group approached the porch. Doctor Claig arose, knocked the ashes from his pipe and leaned against a thin pillar. He waited until Goodling was almost to the porch; then drawled:

"Any luck, prosecutor?"

"No, doctor," returned Goodling. "We're ending the hunt for today. Driving around to bring in the searchers. There come some of them now."

He waved toward the stragglers who were coming across the field. The leader of the searchers waved in return. Claig recognized him as Carter.

"I'm posting men on all the roads," stated Goodling. "Even though that fellow Kernal is hiding out somewhere about, he won't be able to leave the county. Tomorrow, we'll have another big hunt."

"No clues?" queried Claig. "Nothing on the car that Croy was driving?"

"Not a thing. Burke says it was a sedan; but he's not sure of the make. It was an old bus, a dark color – that's all he knows."

"Too bad," mused Claig, studying Clyde. "It would have helped you, Goodling, had he noted it more closely."

PARRELL had strolled out from the porch. The private detective was studying Claig's house curiously, looking up toward barred and shuttered windows. The physician noted this from the corner of his eye. Methodically, Claig pulled a tobacco pouch from his pocket and began to stuff his pipe.

"Lucky I'm still living here," he chuckled. "Otherwise those rogues might have chosen this house instead of the one on Dobson's Road. That's the trouble with a place in the country. You can't leave it empty."

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The remarks, although addressed to Goodling, had been for Parrell's benefit. The detective ended his inspection and strolled up to the porch.

"This was your sanitarium?" questioned Parrell.

Claig nodded.

"You must have had a lot of customers once," added Parrell.

"I did," chuckled Claig. "Always at least a dozen patients. Do you know, yesterday, I was thinking I might go into business again. With everybody looking for a house that had vanished from the old Westbury road, I thought I would find a lot of nervous cases right in Sheffield."

"It had me guessing," put in Goodling. "It did seem like a pipe dream, Claig. But matters are serious right now. I'm mighty worried about Fred Lanford. He may be in greater danger than Myra Dolthan."

"He won't be after tomorrow night," stated Parrell. "Don't forget that, prosecutor. The girl's birthday comes on the eighteenth. We've got to find her before tomorrow at midnight."

Carter and his men arrived. The deputy clambered upon the porch and mopped his brow. He looked tired; his gaze wandered toward Goodling's sedan.

"Say, prosecutor," suggested Carter, "if you could send some cars up from Sheffield, we'd appreciate it plenty. The boys are pretty worn out, ploughing through some of that soggy ground. I can keep them here until the cars come, instead of tramping into town."

"Don't know that I can help you, Carter," returned Goodling. "Most of the available cars are off in other parts of the county."

"I have just what you want, Carter," announced Claig. He removed his pipe from his lips and used it to point toward the rear of the house. "My old station wagon's out there and I've no present use for it. If you can manage to start it, you can take the whole bunch along to town."

"That's great, doctor," returned Carter. "Who knows enough about cars to give me a hand?"

Clyde Burke volunteered. He went along with Carter to the garage. They opened the sliding door and found the station wagon. Clyde noted the old sedan jacked up in the corner, beyond Claig's coupe. He made no comment. Carter was testing the starter; he discovered that the battery in the station wagon was low. He decided to use the crank.

Another man entered while Carter was cranking. It was Roy Parrell. The detective noted the sedan; observing that it was jacked up, he decided that it had long been out of use. He climbed into the station wagon when Carter called for cooperation with the accelerator.

After a few crankings, the station wagon started. Parrell shifted over from the driver's seat, pulling the hand throttle to make the motor roar.

Carter took the wheel and backed the vehicle from the garage. He swung about in the drive and headed toward the house.

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CLYDE BURKE was closing the sliding door. Gloom had pervaded the old garage. The door almost closed. Clyde stopped as he heard a warning whisper. Turning about, the reporter saw a door that stood a trifle ajar.

"Report."

Clyde heard The Shadow's quiet order. He approached and spoke brief details regarding the fruitless search. The Shadow's whisper delivered brief instructions. A gloved hand emerged from the blackness beyond the stairway door.

Clyde received a small book: Myra Dolthan's diary. The reporter placed the volume in his inside pocket, nodded his understanding and stepped from the garage. He slid the big door tightly shut; then walked across the drive, past the house until he reached the porch in front.

The motor of the station wagon was still roaring. The deputies were aboard; Carter at the wheel. Doctor Claig, pipe in hand, was shouting above the tumult.

"Put a service battery in it, Carter," the physician was ordering. "Have mine recharged. Keep the old wagon as long as you want. If you pay for the recharging of the battery, we'll call it square."

Carter nodded; then drove away. The sun had set; long streaks of gloom presaged the coming darkness. Jay Goodling motioned to his companions. They walked to the prosecutor's car, Claig accompanying them.

"Well, Parrell," said Goodling, "I'm mighty sorry that you've gained no good news for Rufus Dolthan. My only hope is that some of the other searchers may have had some luck. Your other two men are out with them, aren't they?"

"Over toward Westbury," replied Parrell. "That's where they went; probably they're back by now, though. By the way, Doctor Claig, do you have a telephone here?"

The physician nodded.

"Rufus Dolthan is staying at the Weatherby Hotel," explained Parrell. "He has Souder with him; and, of course, Wurling and Hazzler came in this morning, bringing my three operatives. But they're not much help."

"You mean that Mr. Dolthan is subject to illness?" questioned Claig.

"Yes," replied the detective. "He is extremely nervous; and failure to find his niece may be too much of a strain for him. I wanted to be sure that you were available."

"Absolutely," assured Claig. "Call me at any time, Parrell. Or stop by, if you wish. I'm a regular owl – always awake half the night."

GOODLING'S car pulled away, carrying the last of the visitors. Doctor Claig stood alone, puffing at his pipe. As he smoked, the physician delivered a contemptuous snort that ended in a chuckle.

He had disposed of these unwanted guests in gilt-edged fashion. Claig's lips showed a hard smile as he walked back to the house.

The physician thought that eyes were no longer observing him. He was wrong in that supposition. From a darkened window upstairs in the garage, glittering optics were viewing Claig, noting his gestures and expressions from a distance of thirty feet.

A whispered laugh crept through a dusk-filled room as Claig passed from view. Well did The Shadow know the game that lay at stake. He could end Claig's bluff the moment that he chose to do so.

CHAPTER XV. THE LAST DAY

TWENTY-FOUR hours had elapsed. Again, darkness had settled over the town of Sheffield. Searchers had scoured the terrain in vain. This – by Roy Parrell's statement – marked the end of the law's last chance.

Clyde Burke was standing at the window of his hotel room. By the inner wall, Harry Vincent was tuning in with a small radio, the duplicate of the device that The Shadow had removed from his suitcase, two nights before.

"Here comes the station wagon," informed Clyde. "Carter and half a dozen deputies are in it. They're parking alongside of the hotel, in that empty space. They look mighty tired."

"Are they all going off duty?" questioned Harry.

"Not a chance," replied Clyde. "Goodling is not through by a long shot. He's posting all those fellows along the roads. He'll start another hunt tomorrow."

"Hoping that the girl will still be alive?"

"Yes. He says it's the only bet. He's sure that Kermal is still somewhere in the county. He doesn't think the lawyer will take a chance on murdering Myra Dolthan until he has a chance to get the girl away from here."

"What's Parrell's opinion?"

"He's doubtful. Says it might work either way. Blissop was murdered in this county; so was Yager. Why should Kermal worry about the law?"

"What does he recommend?"

"To keep on with the search tonight. But Goodling won't agree. He says that it's best to watch the roads. They might try a get-away from their new hide-out."

There was a pause. Clyde strolled in from the window. Harry had set the radio dial as he wanted it. Clyde opened the door, peered into the hall; then closed the door and locked it.

"Craig was too smart for Parrell," he stated in a low tone. "I watched Parrell when we were up there yesterday. He looked at the old sedan; but never guessed that it could have been the one Croy had used."

"It's good he didn't," said Harry. "He'd probably have asked you about it."

"Yes. That would have put me in the bluffer class, with Claig. Of course, I could have gotten away with it; but it was better I didn't have to. It had me shaky, for a minute."

"What about that letter Goodling received today?"

"The one from Lanford? Both Goodling and Parrell figured it for a bluff. Lanford could have written it under orders."

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"Didn't sound as though Lanford meant it?"

"Yes; but it was too vague. Goodling and Parrell agreed that Lanford might have listened to some hokum from Kermal. The lawyer is a smart bird, you know."

"Undoubtedly."

HARRY became thoughtful. Clyde watched him. The reporter knew what was passing in his friend's mind. Harry was thinking of The Shadow, speculating on what the chief intended.

It was seldom that the agents discussed their superior's methods; but on this occasion, Harry seemed inclined to forgo the usual custom.

"Our job is coming," said Harry, slowly. "It's for tonight, Clyde; we know that much. We'll do what we're told when we receive final orders. At the same time –"

"I know," interposed Clyde. "You're wondering just how the parties are going to react. It has me guessing, too."

"Kermal is powerless until after midnight," declared Harry. "Of course, it's possible that he might murder Myra before then. He could make her sign documents at any time; then have them witnessed afterward. But that would be a dangerous procedure."

"Absolutely," agreed Clyde. "Particularly if he had Lanford buffaloed. He can use Lanford as a witness, you know, and if Lanford swears later that he saw Myra alive after she became of age, it would be an important point."

"Myra is safe enough for the present," affirmed Harry. "We know that The" – he paused, catching himself before he mentioned The Shadow's name aloud – "well, we know she's under protection. There's only one answer to it, Clyde."

"What's that?"

"A show-down. At midnight. That's the time when Kermal will have reached his goal."

"That's right, Harry."

"And it's also the finish line for Rufus Dolthan's hopes. Rufus Dolthan will be desperate; Taussig Kermal will be triumphant."

"Kermal's wariness will be ended."

"Absolutely. And yet, when the break comes, Clyde –"

"Well?"

"It can't strike right at midnight. The time element would be too close."

Another pause. This time it was Clyde's quick brain that found an answer.

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"I've got it, Harry!" exclaimed the reporter. Then, lowering his voice: "Look here: Kermal must have some details to make ready. Preparing documents, smoothing Lanford, getting everything ready. Am I right?"

"Yes."

"When will he do all that? I'll tell you. Before midnight. He'll have everything set; he'll be waiting for the stroke of the gong."

"That's logical, Clyde."

"Allow him an hour – between eleven and twelve. That's the crucial time. That's when Kermal will be all set for triumph, but Dolthan and Parrell will still have a chance to stop him. If –"

Clyde cut it short. A faint buzz was coming from the radio. Harry was listening to the call. Quickly, he began to manipulate his own set. Like The Shadow, Harry could send. He and his chief were in short-wave communication.

Faint, barely audible, those coded sentences. Toned low so that chance listeners might not even hear them, Harry caught a question that The Shadow was sending from Claig's garage. He spoke to Clyde.

"What about Goodling's men?" he queried. "Are they using the station wagon tonight?"

"No," replied Clyde. "They didn't use it last night. The road-watching groups are too small. They need something faster than the wagon, anyway. It's only used for bringing in a big crowd during the day."

HARRY was already sending a reply. Clyde heard instructions follow from The Shadow; but he was not close enough to catch the code. Harry nodded; but did not speak. He sent his acknowledgment. Then came another query. Harry questioned Clyde this time.

"Goodling will be at the courthouse?"

"Either there or over here with Rufus Dolthan."

"Parrell and his men?"

"Here, with Dolthan."

"Deputies?"

"Maybe a few will be available. Not many."

Harry sent this information. He received another query and answered it. Then came a signal that Clyde recognized. The Shadow was signing off. Harry acknowledged.

He turned the dial, made some adjustments and strolled away from the radio. The soft melody of music came over the air. Harry had tuned in on a New York station. The set was giving normal reception.

"We're right," Harry told Clyde. "Eleven is the zero hour. That's when the move must start up to Claig's. You're to be in on it, while I'm up here; that is, you'll be with Rufus Dolthan, Roy Parrell and Jay Goodling when they plan their action."

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"And after that?"

"You're to hop up here. I'm supposed to be in bed. That is, I will be at eleven o'clock. I'm no nighthawk, like the Classic bunch. I represent the National Press Association."

Clyde chuckled.

"I'm glad the rest of the reporters went back to town," he remarked. "They're going to miss a story. Go ahead, Harry – after I get up here –"

"You'll know the plans. I'll send the details by the short-wave set. But we'll probably be heading out on our own. In your car. Unless, of course, there's some hitch that forces a change."

"But suppose I'm wanted by Goodling and the others?"

"Then I can go out alone, using your car. You won't need it if you're with them."

Clyde nodded his understanding. The Shadow always provided for emergencies. Whatever tonight's mission might be, one agent would be available for it if both were not.

"Get that diary of Myra Dolthan's," said Harry. "It's in the secret pocket of my suitcase. Here's one point, Clyde; you've got to start the fireworks. The question is, can you ring Parrell in on it? Can you get him out of the hotel? Just for a stroll – any pretext – just so you'll have a chance to steer him on a job of sleuthing that he'll think is his own?"

Clyde pondered.

"If you can't," said Harry, "you can do the job alone. But if you can bring in Parrell –"

"I've got it!" interrupted Clyde. "Yesterday, Parrell whiffed some smoke from Claig's pipe. The doctor was smoking when we were up there. The aroma suited Parrell and he dug out a swell briar of his own. He was smoking it today."

"Well?"

"He left it in Goodling's office. Parrell will be wondering where he dropped it. Let's go and see if it's still there."

"Fine. Bring the diary."

FIVE minutes later, The Shadow's agents strolled into Goodling's office. The prosecutor was out to dinner; but he never locked his door. The lights were on; and Clyde spied a pipe on the desk. The reporter recognized it as Parrell's.

"Pocket it," whispered Harry. Then, as they strolled out through the vacated corridor, he questioned: "Didn't I see Parrell in the station wagon about the middle of the afternoon?"

"Yes," replied Clyde. "He was in the front seat, talking with Carter. That was just after Carter came in to report no luck to Goodling."

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"That's great!" Harry chuckled as they reached the street. He looked across to the spot where the station wagon was parked near a big limousine that belonged to Rufus Dolthan. "We'll have some planting to do, Clyde. We'll have dinner first; then take in a movie. It will be after ten by then. I'll do the planting; you'll handle the rest."

"What's the stunt, Harry?"

They had reached the little restaurant where they usually ate. Harry motioned for silence. He whispered last words as they entered.

"I'll tell you after dinner, Clyde," said Harry. "When we're in the movie, you can slip me the pipe and the diary."

They sat down at a table. Clyde was still half mystified. But Harry wore a smile. He knew that The Shadow's orders could be carried through with ease. Clyde Burke would understand as well, as soon as Harry could give him three minutes of explanation.

The Shadow had planned a simple process which would bring confusion to those who schemed in crime. Yet Clyde Burke had not guessed what was due, even though Clyde was a keen thinker. That, to Harry, was merely new proof that facts, though simple, were not necessarily obvious.

Harry felt secret elation as he noticed Clyde's thoughtful perplexity. He felt, for the moment, that he had gained the edge in a bit of friendly rivalry. Soon, however, Clyde would know all that Harry knew.

That, oddly, would prove to be less than Harry Vincent supposed. For while his agents were studying the surfaces of crime development, The Shadow had delved into the depths. Where others guessed, The Shadow knew.

CHAPTER XVI. THE ZERO HOUR

IT was a quarter of eleven when Clyde Burke stopped in front of a door on the second floor of the Weatherby Hotel. The reporter rapped for admittance. A voice called for him to enter. Clyde stepped into the living room of the only suite that the hotel boasted.

Rufus Dolthan was seated in an easy-chair. His kindly face seemed haggard; yet his restlessness was a sign that he still possessed stamina. Clyde noticed that the gray-haired man was clutching the arms of his chair, as though to suppress a maddened desire for hopeless action.

Roy Parrell looked chunky as he stood beside Dolthan's chair. The detective's wise face possessed a glumness. There was a third man in the room: Jay Goodling. The prosecutor's youthful countenance seemed aged with worry.

"We are talking matters over, Mr. Burke," informed Dolthan, in a wearied tone. "It is terrible, this suspense. As you know, Myra's fate may be decided within a few hours. My word!" He turned appealingly to Parrell and Goodling. "Is there nothing we can do?"

"We can only wait, Mr. Dolthan," returned Goodling. "I'm positive that this county still harbors those criminals – Kermal and his fellows – and I believe that in spite of Lanford's letter. Remember, sir: Fred Lanford is my closest friend. This situation grieves me deeply."

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"But Kermal may murder Myra –"

"And Lanford also, if it suits him. They are both in grave danger, wherever they are."

"And you, Parrell" – Dolthan spoke sharply to the detective – "you have failed me in this crisis. I have paid you well, because millions are at stake. Have you no suggestions whatever?"

Parrell shook his head. He, too, was becoming restless. Clyde could see desperation in the detective's air. Idly, the reporter drew a new pipe and a package of fine smoking mixture from his pocket. He extended the package to Parrell.

"Fill up, old man," suggested Clyde. "A good pipe smoke clears the cobwebs. That briar of yours is a sweet one."

Parrell nodded and began to fumble in his pocket. His pipe was missing. Goodling made a remark.

"Your pipe is over in my office, Parrell," he said. "I believe that you left it on my desk."

"I'll walk over with you while you get it," put in Clyde. "How about it, Parrell?"

Clyde had filled his own pipe and was lighting it. The aroma of the tobacco brought a nod from Parrell. Clyde had chosen a mixture well filled with perique. The odor was effective.

TOGETHER, reporter and detective left the hotel and reached Goodling's office. Parrell was silent during the walk; he stared glumly after turning on the lights and noting no pipe on the prosecutor's desk.

"Goodling must have been seeing things," he grumbled. "I wonder where I could have dropped that briar. Let's see –"

"Didn't you have it this afternoon?" queried Clyde. "When you were in the station wagon with Carter?"

"That's right, Burke," recalled Parrell. "The old bus is parked alongside of Mr. Dolthan's limousine, isn't it? Let's take a look over there."

They left the courthouse and approached the station wagon. Parrell produced a flashlight and looked about the front seat. He saw no sign of the pipe; but he noticed a space between the seat and the side of the car. He drew the seat forward.

"Here's the pipe, all right," exclaimed the detective. "But say – what's this?"

The diary was lying below the pipe. Harry Vincent had planted them effectively. Parrell opened the book with his left hand while he held the flashlight with his right. A sudden cry came from his lips.

"This book is Myra Dolthan's!" blurted the detective. "In the girl's handwriting. Here, in Claig's station wagon. She must have dropped it. Say, Burke didn't Claig tell Carter he might have a tough time starting this old bus?"

"That's what he said," nodded Clyde. "I heard him."

"But Carter had no trouble," added Parrell. "Say, Burke – do you remember an old sedan up in Claig's garage?"

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"The one that was jacked up?"

"Yes. Did it look anything like the boat that Croy was in the night he snatched Lanford?"

"A whole lot, Parrell. But I didn't think anything about it at the time. Claig's sedan looked out of use. It could have been the car Croy was in though. Maybe it was the car."

"Come on." Parrell grabbed Clyde's arm. "We're hopping up to see Dolthan and the prosecutor! Pronto."

They hurried into the hotel and took the stairs on the run. Parrell barged into Dolthan's living room and thrust the diary into the hands of Myra's uncle.

Excitedly, the detective told how they had made the find. He added the comments that Clyde had given concerning the old sedan in Claig's garage.

"This is incredible!" exclaimed Goodling. "A man of Doctor Claig's reputation would not assist criminals. I cannot believe that he aided them in their departure from the old house on Dobson's Road."

"He has done more than aid them," retorted Parrell. "He is harboring them. Why do you think we haven't been able to locate Kermal? I'll tell you why – it's because he's hiding out in the one place we've never looked. In the upstairs part of Claig's house!"

"But – but –"

GOODLING stopped short as he spluttered. This suggestion of Parrell's was a powerful one. The prosecutor realized suddenly that those upper stories of Claig's old sanitarium afforded every advantage as a refuge for Kermal and his band. Nevertheless, the prosecutor finally shook his head.

"I have too much faith in Claig," he asserted. "He has lived hereabouts for years. Even supposing that he has listened to crooks, why should he commit the folly of using his own property as their lair?"

"He didn't," returned Parrell. "Not at first. Who do you suppose misled Kermal to that old house where you and Lanford first went? How did Kermal learn of it?"

"Someone hereabouts could have told him."

"That's just it. And who would be most likely? Doctor Claig. You're right, prosecutor; he didn't want to jeopardize himself by letting Kermal use his own place. He didn't at first. He steered Kermal to the house on Dobson's Road. But when the emergency landed, he brought the works to his own hang-out. It was the only way out in the pinch."

"Parrell is correct," declared Dolthan, with a dignified nod. "Men of repute will do much, prosecutor, when they see an opportunity for huge wealth. We can consider Doctor Claig more charitably than we can Taussig Kermal. Claig was tempted by a fiend's offer. He allowed himself to become a party to crime."

Dolthan's heatless words were convincing. The gray-haired man showed sorrow rather than anger. A thought came to Goodling; he himself expressed the next statement in the argument against Claig's integrity.

"Fred Lanford's letter," mused the prosecutor. "It seemed genuine; yet it indicated that he was trying to lead the trail away from here. Fred would not have allowed Kermal to influence him. Fred was encouraged by someone in whom he had confidence."

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"Doctor Claig could have influenced Fred Lanford. What is more, Claig could have sent that letter to New York, so someone would return it here. As I review this case, I realize that Claig has shown unusual interest in it. Too much interest for one who is merely a retired physician."

"He bluffed us yesterday," asserted Parrell. "Up there on his porch. Acting as a blind. Offering Carter his station wagon."

"And Myra a prisoner in his house," groaned Dolthan. "Her day of doom approaching."

"Craig is as crooked as Kermal," barked Parrell. "Why try to be easy with him? He's the fellow, right enough, who jabbed you and Lanford with the hypodermic, prosecutor. Being a doctor, he'd have had a needle with him. He's a crook –"

"Calm yourself, Parrell." It was Dolthan who interrupted. He had risen from his chair and was surveying the others with dignity. "Doctor Claig may not know the depths of Kermal's schemes. We can learn the physician's story later. Our present duty is to rescue my niece and this poor chap, Lanford."

"Right!" agreed Goodling. "We'll get to the bottom of this business. I'll gather thirty men; we'll smash into Claig's if necessary."

"ONE moment." Dolthan's raised hand stopped Goodling as the latter was about to pick up the telephone. "Tell me, prosecutor, where are these men whom you intend to summon?"

"Out guarding the roads," returned Goodling. "I'll have them all in here and on their way to Claig's within two hours."

"That will be too late." Dolthan's tone was solemn. "It is already eleven. At midnight, Myra becomes of age. Kermal will force her to sign away her wealth the moment that she is legally twenty-one. Her life will then be at stake."

"That's true," added Parrell. "What's more, prosecutor, Kermal will have to kill her in a pinch. He'll bump Lanford, too, if he knows his game is up. He'll know it, right enough, when a whole squadron comes banging in on him."

"We must use strategy," announced Dolthan. "Moreover, we cannot spare another precious minute. Tell me, prosecutor, have you no men available here?"

"There's a deputy named Derry downstairs," replied Parrell. "But I'll need him to round up the men on the roads. We certainly should arrange to cut off any flight by Kermal."

"Positively," nodded Dolthan. "That move will be essential, prosecutor. But in the meantime, we must arrange some immediate action. Come, come, Parrell" – Dolthan turned to the detective – "show your ability, man. How can we surmount this emergency?"

"We'll have to consider Doctor Claig first," responded Parrell promptly. "He's the blind. If we can get past him easily, we'll be where we want. Listen, prosecutor" – he swung to Goodling – "do you remember how Claig invited us to stop in any time?"

Goodling nodded.

"I told him, too," continued Parrell, "that we might need him as physician for Mr. Dolthan?"

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Again Goodling nodded.

"That's our bet then," decided Parrell. "You and I can drive up to Claig's. He'll let us in, all right. We'll tell him Mr. Dolthan is very ill."

"Won't Claig wonder?" queried Goodling. "He will want to know why we did not call him by telephone."

"We'll explain that, prosecutor. Tell him that Mr. Dolthan claims he doesn't want to see a doctor. Worriment over Myra. Claig will fall for it."

"And accompany us down here? That would give Kernal an opportunity to suspect a ruse on our part."

"We won't leave the place. We'll corner Claig and cover him. Then our way will be clear. We'll go upstairs and pounce on Kernal. He'll think it's Claig."

"But there are only two of us, Parrell. I cannot get deputies on such short order."

"I have three operatives here. Trained detectives. We'll take them along in your car. They can follow us in."

GOODLING'S expression showed prompt enthusiasm. He urged Parrell to the telephone. The detective began to call the rooms in which his men were staying. Goodling turned to Dolthan, who offered a further suggestion.

"Use strategy, prosecutor," urged Dolthan. "Lives are at stake. Would that I could accompany you. Indeed, I shall follow you and Parrell; but of course, I shall remain far enough away not to excite suspicion."

"Parrell has never seen either Kernal or Myra. Of course, you have – that night you were at the old house – so that will satisfy for immediate identification. But when I see them also, there can be no doubt."

"It's best to have you close by, Mr. Dolthan," assured Goodling. "After all, once we are actually upstairs in the house, there is no reason why you should not approach."

"Souder!" called Dolthan. The long-faced man appeared from the other room. "Summon Wurling and Hazzler at once. We are going out in the limousine."

Souder nodded and went to the telephone, which Parrell had relinquished. Clyde Burke, silent until now, found chance to speak to Jay Goodling.

"How about myself, prosecutor," asked the reporter. "All right if I tag along in my coupe. I'll keep far enough away from the house."

"All right," agreed Goodling. "What about this friend of yours, Vincent? Are you taking him with you?"

"I can. He's asleep in his room right now."

"Better wake him. Then he'll be accounted for. I don't want anyone coming up there unexpectedly to bungle our work."

Souder had finished his call for Wurling and Hazzler. Goodling took the telephone to speak with Derry, the deputy who he had left in the lobby. Clyde hurried from the room; in the hallway he ran into two of Parrell's husky subordinates, coming in response to the detective's call.

Passing the fellows, Clyde dashed up the steps to the third floor. The way was clear; but time was short. The Shadow's plan had worked; unexpected visitors would soon be at the home of Doctor Leo Claig. In the brief interval that remained, there would be important work for The Shadow's agents to perform.

CHAPTER XVII. MEN FROM THE NIGHT

HARRY VINCENT was already at the radio when Clyde Burke arrived in their third-floor room. Harry had watched from the window after planting Parrell's pipe and Myra's diary in the station wagon. He had seen Clyde and the detective make their find. Harry had allowed a short interval; then had begun to signal The Shadow.

An acknowledgment was sounding. As Clyde whispered details to Harry, the latter sent through a coded message. The Shadow's reply was brief. Events had shaped as he had anticipated them. Harry nodded as former instructions were corroborated. The Shadow's signal came to sign off. Harry responded; he twisted the dial and disconnected wiring. He nodded to Clyde.

Together, the agents headed downstairs. They had made the most of brief minutes. The clock in the lobby showed twelve minutes after eleven. Goodling, Parrell and the latter's three men were still upstairs. Clyde and Harry heard their tramp in the hallway above.

Derry was in a telephone booth, sending out calls to the various posts where deputies were watching roads. Clyde and Harry hurried out through the side door, dashed past the station wagon and reached the reporter's coupe.

Clyde started the motor; they rolled away just as Goodling and Parrell were coming out of the hotel with their party. The Shadow's agents took a rear street; between buildings they saw the five men heading for the courthouse, where Goodling's car was parked.

Clyde was taking the route that The Shadow had used when he had gone to Claig's. A circling course that would bring them to that obscure road fringed by trees, where not even the lights of the car could be seen from Claig's house.

The trip required less than one dozen minutes. As they curved into the old road, at a point above Claig's, Clyde shut off the motor and switched off the lights. Feeling his way by the ruts, the reporter coasted the car along the road. He finally applied the brakes.

Both agents alighted. They crept up the bank of the road and passed a cluster of bushes. The night was clouded; but they could discern the outline of Claig's garage; they could also see the house beyond it.

As they waited, they saw a momentary glimmer from the near side of the garage. It was The Shadow's signal; and meant that he would join them.

Watching tensely, Clyde saw a car approaching Claig's. Its lights were coming up the regular road. The machine was Goodling's; the prosecutor was using the strategy that he had planned with Parrell and Dolthan.

Then, as Goodling's car drew closer to the house, Harry pointed out other lights. These were down the road; they slowed, stopped and finally blinked off.

"Dolthan's limousine," whispered Harry. "The chauffeur must have followed pretty close after Goodling."

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"They'll wait there," added Clyde. "Then they'll come closer after they know that Goodling and Parrell are inside the house."

The comments ended. Both agents were silent, knowing that soon The Shadow would arrive where they were stationed. Harry held a flashlight close against the ground, ready to deliver a cautious answering glimmer the moment that The Shadow gave an arriving blink from close at hand.

MEANWHILE, Goodling's car was slowly climbing the up grade to Claig's. The prosecutor was making a cautious approach, despite the fact that there was reason for the visit. He was not anxious that the physician should know of their arrival until they rang the doorbell.

While he drove, Goodling exchanged comments with Parrell. In response to a suggestion from the detective, the prosecutor swung wide as they entered the drive and brought the car to a standstill at the very edge of the gravel.

This made the path easy for Parrell's three followers. The trio would be able to avoid crunching gravel when they approached the house.

Goodling and Parrell alighted. Apparently their arrival had not been heard. The lower floor of the house showed dim lights from various rooms. Doctor Claig had applied his usual method of deceiving visitors. The county prosecutor strolled slowly to the porch; the private detective followed at his heels. Reaching their goal, they stopped at the door. Goodling rang the bell.

An interval followed. Goodling rang again. Two minutes of waiting; then a light appeared suddenly upon the porch. The door opened; Doctor Claig appeared. The physician smiled as he recognized his visitors.

"Well, well, Goodling," he ejaculated. "This is a surprise. I did not hear your car arrive. You appear troubled. Have you come to report an illness in town?"

Goodling nodded; it was Parrell, however, who spoke.

"We've come on account of Rufus Dolthan," he explained. "He is just about beside himself, doctor. Pacing like a caged lion. Won't go to bed.

"We've got to get something to put him to sleep. Can't you fix up some opiate for him? Something that will look like ordinary medicine? So he'll take it?"

"I believe so," responded Claig. "Come in, gentlemen. We can go right into my office."

The door closed as the three men entered. Darkness stirred in the blackness beside the house. A cloak swished softly.

The Shadow had returned from his trip to the rear road. His business with his agents was ended; his return journey had been accomplished with swiftness. In fact, The Shadow had arrived just in time to catch the last of the conversation between Doctor Claig and the physician's two visitors.

Listening, The Shadow heard sounds from Goodling's car. A door was opening cautiously. Men were easing out into the darkness. The Shadow sensed that Parrell's three aids were creeping toward the porch. He waited no longer. Turning in the darkness, The Shadow skirted toward the rear of the building. His course was untraceable.

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INSIDE the house, Doctor Claig was holding consultation with Goodling and Parrell. Head cocked, the white-haired physician was listening to the detective's description of Rufus Dolthan's nervous symptoms. A ticking clock showed the time as twenty-five minutes before twelve.

"I see," declared Claig, wisely. "Mr. Dolthan has reached a high pitch of nervousness. Unquestionably, the strain has been too great for him. He must be soothed. Quieted. Suppose I write you a prescription, Goodling? You can wake Billings, the druggist, and he will prepare it for you. Let me see – where did I place those prescription blanks?"

Claig opened a drawer with his left hand. He reached in with his right; then stopped short as he heard a sharp remark from Parrell.

Looking over his shoulder, the doctor stared into the muzzle of a stub-nosed revolver that the detective had brought from his pocket. Even Goodling was momentarily surprised until he heard Parrell explain.

"You'll find a gun in that drawer," stated Parrell. "Take a look for it, prosecutor. I know when a man's reaching for a gat. Claig was going to cover us."

Goodling dived for the drawer. He uncovered an old-fashioned revolver. Removing the weapon, the prosecutor cracked it open and found bullets in the gun's five chambers. Pocketing the revolver, Goodling eyed Claig severely.

"I've had that gun for years," declared the physician, calmly. "Naturally, I have it in an available place. It is dangerous to live out in the country, Goodling. Everyone around here owns a gun."

"Hurry up, prosecutor," urged Parrell. "Don't let him pull a stall. He's holding out for twelve o'clock. Trying to help Kernal's game."

For the first time, Claig lost his self-control. The physician's face darkened; an instinctive gasp came from his lips. It was enough for Goodling. The prosecutor drew a .38 and covered the physician. He motioned Parrell to the door; the detective grinned and nodded.

Sneaking out through the front hall, Parrell opened the big door and let his three men enter. They followed him softly into the physician's office.

Goodling was questioning Claig; the doctor was preserving firm silence. As the others appeared, Goodling stepped forward, gripped Claig's wrist and pulled the physician to his feet. Searching Claig's pockets, Goodling found a large key. He thrust it into Claig's hand.

"Move ahead of us, doctor," growled Goodling. "Unlock that door and lead the way upstairs. I warn you – despite the fact that you were once my friend – I shall riddle you with bullets if you display a sign of treachery."

With that cold statement, Goodling rammed the muzzle of his .38 between Claig's shoulders. Parrell nodded to his men; they drew revolvers of their own. Goodling forced Claig through the doorway to the hall. Key in hand, the physician moved to the alcove and unlocked the door.

Covered by five men, Claig had no chance to resist. His role of blind had ended; no longer could he cover Taussig Kernal's hide-out. With twenty minutes still remaining before midnight, invaders were on the threshold of the crafty lawyer's lair.

CHAPTER XVIII. COUNSEL FOR DEFENSE

UPSTAIRS in the luxurious room, Taussig Kernal was seated at his desk, totally unaware of the coup that had been made downstairs. The lawyer had faith in Doctor Claig's ability. The arrival of late callers had not perturbed him.

Moreover, Kernal had a reason for covering the slight concern that he did feel. Fred Lanford was present in the room, watching him from a chair. Croy was present also; the big servant had brought Lanford here only a few minutes before.

"Miss Dolthan will soon be with us, Lanford," declared Kernal. He looked up from the desk, where his hand was resting upon a written document. "I just sent Daggart to summon her. There are matters which I should like you to hear when they are discussed."

"Concerning her estate?" inquired Fred.

"Yes," replied Kernal. "This document on my desk is a will. It stipulates that her entire wealth is to go to certain charities. I want her to read it before twelve o'clock; you will have opportunity to do the same. Then you can sign as a witness when she affixes her signature."

Kernal looked toward the door to the hallway on the left. Daggart had not reappeared; Kernal seemed perplexed. He turned his shaggy head and delivered a command to Croy.

"Possibly Daggart misunderstood my order," said the lawyer. "Go and summon Miss Dolthan, Croy. Then hunt up Daggart. He should be here also."

The ugly-faced servant nodded and made his departure. This time Kernal showed anger as he glared toward the door on the right.

"What is keeping Claig?" he questioned. "He should certainly not be dawdling at this late hour. If he has patients, why does he not hurry them from his office?"

"They might become suspicious," replied Lanford.

"What does it matter?" demanded Kernal. "In twenty minutes we shall be ready to call your friend Goodling and invite him here in person. Claig knows that as well as I."

"Maybe he has an emergency case to hold him up."

"Never mind, Lanford. Here is Claig now."

The door was opening as Kernal spoke. Claig's figure came into view; the doctor stared, pale faced, then stumbled into the room, impelled by a thrust. As Kernal came to his feet, Goodling bounded through the doorway. With leveled gun, the prosecutor covered the lawyer.

FOR a moment, Kernal appeared ready to spring forward in resistance; then Parrell and the detectives bobbed into view. Revolvers glimmered; Kernal sank back in his chair, glowering. Fred Lanford sprang to his feet, to give greeting to his friend.

"Fred!" cried Goodling, with enthusiasm. "You're safe. Tell me – what about the girl – is she all right?"

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"Myra Dolthan?" returned Lanford. "Certainly, Jay. How did you happen to get up here? Mr. Kermal wasn't going to call you until after midnight."

Goodling eyed Lanford in perplexity. Fred grinned as he thumped the prosecutor on the shoulder.

"It's all jake, Jay," assured Lanford. "You got my letter, didn't you?"

"Certainly," retorted Goodling. "It said you were in New York. Instead, you're here. That sounds bad for a start."

"Not when you know the facts," laughed Lanford. "Miss Dolthan is not a prisoner. She is staying here of her own volition. I have talked with her. That dead man, Blissop, was not murdered. He tried to kill Daggart. Croy had to shoot him."

"What about Yager?"

"Yager? Who is he?"

"A squatter living out on Dobson's Road. Shot dead in my office, the same night that you were abducted."

LANFORD stared. Parrell pressed forward and delivered a contemptuous laugh. He stared at Kermal; then at Claig, who was backed in a corner near the desk.

"Bluffed Lanford did you?" quizzed the detective. "I thought maybe that would be your game. But you didn't have nerve enough to let him know you'd rubbed out Yager."

"I had nothing to do with Yager's death," retorted Kermal, in a harsh tone. "It was unnecessary to mention it to Lanford. It would have confused him."

"Have your men cover these doors," said Goodling, to Parrell. "I'm going to have this out with Kermal. Those two rogues, Daggart and Croy, are somewhere about. We must be ready for them."

With that, the prosecutor swung toward the desk. In challenging tones he delivered an ultimatum to the shaggy-headed man who stood beyond.

"Your assassins slew Yager," accused Goodling. "You and your accomplices are guilty of two murders, Kermal. We have come to remove Myra Dolthan from your custody. Also to arrest your confederates. Tell me where they are."

"Speak up, Claig," rasped Kermal, turning to the lawyer. "This is your house. These persons have entered without warrant. Order them to leave. Prosecutor or no prosecutor, Goodling has no right here."

"I am investigating the deaths of Blissop and Yager," stormed Goodling. "I am here also to find Myra Dolthan. Unless –"

He paused as he saw the paper on the desk. Snatching it up, Goodling began to read the lines that Kermal had written. The lawyer chuckled.

"That," he explained, "is the will that Myra Dolthan will sign at midnight. As you see, Goodling, it leaves all of her property to recognized charities. It stands as proof of my sincerity. I am the girl's legal guardian and will be" – he chuckled as he glanced at a clock on the desk – "for fifteen minutes more. I refuse to have you

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interview her until after midnight. She will be here at any moment" – Kermal paused to glance toward the door – "and I shall advise her both as guardian and counsel."

GOODLING looked a trifle puzzled as he dropped the will back on the desk. He stared at Kermal; then swung to Lanford. That young man nodded.

"It's on the level, Jay," Lanford told Goodling. "Give Kermal a chance to explain. Doctor Claig will back up his statements. Kermal is working to protect Myra Dolthan. Her real enemy is her uncle, Rufus Dolthan –"

Roy Parrell leaped forward in angry interruption. In maddened loyalty to his employer, the private dick thrust his stubby revolver toward Lanford.

The gesture brought a sharp bark of challenge from Goodling. Apologetically, Parrell stepped back and lowered his revolver. Taussig Kermal was prompt to make the most of the detective's action.

"See that?" demanded the lawyer. "Parrell knows the truth. That's why he made his slip. Use your brains, Goodling. Tell those fellows to put up their guns; then I'll tell you something."

The lawyer was leaning with both palms on the table; his position rendered him helpless. Goodling glared at Parrell and motioned for the dicks to put away their guns. The detective, anxious to hold the prosecutor's favor, nodded to his men. Revolvers went into pockets.

"You have asked me about Yager's death, Goodling," announced Kermal, in his deep tone. "I swear that I had nothing to do with it. I ask you to hear my defense; I can promise you it will be brief. I admit that Blissop was slain by Croy, in the house on Dobson's Road. Blissop, however, tried to kill Daggart; the latter's wound is proof of that fact."

"To which I can testify," put in Doctor Claig. "Kermal is right, Goodling."

"I consider you a murderer." Goodling spoke steadily as he faced Kermal. The prosecutor was holding his .38 in readiness. "Nevertheless, I shall accept the supposition that Blissop's death was justifiable. But Yager's death was murder –"

"One moment," interposed Kermal. "Follow the story from the time of Blissop's death. Shortly after that, Goodling, you and Lanford came to my house. The two of you put up a fight. We overpowered you. Had I been a murderer, I would have slain you then."

"You feared to kill us," retorted Goodling. "We were well known in Sheffield."

"So was Yager," reminded Kermal, with a nod of his shaggy head. "Your logic does not hold. But here is the main point, Goodling. You and Lanford had seen Blissop's body; there was every reason why you could make trouble for us. We had a chance to dispose of both of you by the simple expedient of coasting your coupe into the swollen creek beside the broken bridge. Yet we spared your lives."

KERMAL had delivered a strong argument; it was one that coincided with the facts that The Shadow alone had considered, of all those who had investigated this case. An exclamation of agreement came from Lanford.

"That's straight, Jay," argued the prosecutor's friend. "Kermal's no murderer. If he was, he'd have gotten rid of us."

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"Your own friend understands, Goodling," asserted Kermal. "Moreover, when he encountered my servant Croy, a few nights ago, Croy made no effort to injure him. Croy brought Lanford here a prisoner; that is true. After that, however, I offered Lanford freedom. He preferred to stay here."

"Is that right, Fred?" questioned Goodling.

"Absolutely," returned Lanford.

"But Yager was murdered," asserted the prosecutor, swinging back to Kermal. "And if you ordered his death, you –"

"I would have been a fool," interposed Kermal, with a convincing nod. "I had an explanation for Blissop's death. I had proof that I meant you and Lanford no ill. Lanford himself was here with us, ready to favor our cause. My hands were clean."

"Then who –"

"Who murdered Yager? The facts should be obvious to anyone who has heard me speak. Thugs murdered Yager; they fled afterward. But they acted at the order of those who were seeking to defeat me in my protection of Myra Dolthan. They were ordered to kill Yager because he had talked with Blissop."

"Talked with Blissop?"

"Yes. Because Blissop had turned traitor against me. He knew whom I feared. He must have told Yager the facts. Had Yager talked, the real crooks would have been exposed. One name would have been revealed in its true light – the name of the man who seeks the life of Myra Dolthan – the name of the girl's own uncle, Rufus Dolthan!"

GOODLING stood transfixed. Roy Parrell was staring straight at the prosecutor, too tense to make a move while Goodling held that ready gun. Taussig Kermal clenched a massive fist and drove it fiercely against the surface of the desk.

"Rufus Dolthan!" he denounced. "But his crooked game is at its end. He came here hoping that the law would find his niece, so he could see that she was slain before she came of age. A dozen minutes more; his opportunity will be ended.

"Fool that he is! Instead of coming here himself, he sent an underling, Roy Parrell." Kermal turned and pointed squarely at the detective. "Roy Parrell, head of a fake investigation agency, a poor tool in the hands of a supercrook. Keep him covered, Goodling; he put his gun away too soon.

"Parrell is yellow. He won't call for help from those fake dicks of his. He's afraid that you will shoot him if he does. Hold them where they stand, Goodling. Call Croy and Daggart, Lanford. Bring Myra Dolthan here. It is almost midnight."

Lanford started toward the door at the left. Croy had left it ajar. But before he had taken four steps, Lanford halted. Like the others, Goodling included, he whirled about to face the door at the right of the room.

A fiendish chuckle had issued from that half-opened barrier. Into the room was stepping a gray-haired man, his face no longer one of dignity.

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Rufus Dolthan, revolver in hand, was covering Jay Goodling. Behind the leering fiend were others: Souder, Wurling and Hazzler; three servants as venomous as their master, all with guns.

As counsel in his own defense, Taussig Kernal had won his argument with the county prosecutor. But Jay Goodling could no longer act in Kernal's behalf. Rufus Dolthan and his servants had stepped in to gain the control that Roy Parrell and his aids had lost.

CHAPTER XIX. FACTS COME OUT

"TWELVE minutes more."

Rufus Dolthan delivered the words with an insidious sneer. His faked nervousness was gone. Revealed as a man of crime, he was taking pride in his role of supercreek. At his nod, Roy Parrell grinned. He and his pretended dicks were ready to double the strength of Dolthan's forces.

"Twelve minutes," repeated Dolthan, "ample time in which to accomplish my purpose here. In fact" – an evil chuckle escaped his curling lips – "there is no need for haste. As matters now stand, we can wait until after midnight.

"You have paved your own destruction, Kernal. You were crafty in your moves. You suspected that I murdered my brother Wade. You were right. I had him poisoned; Souder aided me and Parrell removed the evidence.

"It was Parrell, too, who gathered facts concerning George Garling. When Myra's stepbrother inherits her father's estate, he will not enjoy it long. When Parrell, as my agent, interviews him, Garling will be glad to rid himself of wealth. Some of his past indiscretions can be classed as crimes. Enough, if known, to send him to prison for twenty years. He will pay for silence."

Dolthan paused to survey Kernal in contemptuous fashion. The little clock was ticking on toward midnight; the fact did not seem to trouble the supercreek. Dolthan had already said that he had no need for haste.

"You moved ahead of us, Kernal," sneered the gray-haired murderer. "Your mistake, however, was in trusting those about you. Particularly Blissop. He knew that you feared me. He saw an opportunity for wealth. He called me by long distance, Saturday night. You uncovered his treachery; you traveled here. But your own softness was your undoing.

"Had you finished Goodling and Lanford – as I would have done – you would have been better off. I am forgetting though" – Dolthan's chuckle was filled with cackled malice – "that you are honest, not a plotter like myself. You see, Kernal, I did not intend to hurry to that house on Dobson's Road. I planned to wait; to let you spend a few more days of false security.

"But when I read of the strange adventures of Jay Goodling and Fred Lanford, I knew that Blissop had failed to keep his spying secret. I knew my informant to be the dead man mentioned in their story. I knew then that you must have sought some new hide-out; I knew also that technically you were a fugitive from justice.

"I sent Parrell here to Sheffield. His purpose: to discover Myra's whereabouts, to dispatch hidden killers to the spot where she might be. Their task was to slay my niece; but prior to that, they had other duties. They came in secretly on Monday evening. Some to be near the courthouse in case of an emergency; others to visit the old house of which Blissop had told us, there to find clues before the law could gain them."

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TAUSSIG KERMAL, leaning heavily on the desk, was nodding as Rufus Dolthan paused. These words were the lawyer's vindication. Jay Goodling realized it; the prosecutor stared helplessly. He still held his gun; but he had been forced to point the weapon to the floor when covered by Dolthan's revolver.

Roy Parrell was swaggering up beside Dolthan. The phony dick was trying to cover his display of yellowness. His face was hard; his lips wore a leer as he took credit for the next phase of Dolthan's criminal activity.

"When Yager blew in," jeered Parrell, "I heard him start to blab about Blissop. I guessed that he knew too much. Blissop had posted him that we'd be sending some killers out that way. He'd told us over the telephone that he had things fixed.

"So I marked Yager for the spot. Pointed him out, right in front of your eyes. I gave the finger wag like I'd been doing all along" – Parrell paused to indicate the gesture that he had used in the prosecutor's office – "and when I steadied it on Yager, there were fellows outside who knew what it meant.

"They finished Yager. Then they headed for Dobson's Road, to tip off the boys who were going through the house. Who started the trouble there is something that I don't know. It was a bad break for us, though."

"Hardly so, Parrell," croaked Dolthan, as his lieutenant paused. "The murder of Yager was easily blamed on Kermal. It placed him definitely outside the law. The discovery of the trunk merely enabled us to spur the authorities to their search for Myra.

"Moreover, the elimination of those hirelings was no handicap. Your phony detectives and my servants have proven themselves more capable than those cheap skulkers. What we needed, Parrell, was a break. Finding Myra's diary in the station wagon was a most timely clue. Particularly because it occurred when Goodling's deputies were not available."

The reference to the diary brought a puzzled look to Kermal's face. Doctor Claig also registered perplexity. Rufus Dolthan seemed to have gained a new chain of thought now that he had mentioned his niece's name. He looked across the room toward the door that stood ajar.

"It is time we thought of Myra," he remarked. "One fact is certain: she has no way of leaving here. Your barred windows, Claig, are excellently suited to our purpose. The girl is trapped; for that matter, Kermal, so are your two servants.

"I said that haste was not imperative. I meant it. So long as no one except myself and those with me see Myra alive after midnight, it will be deemed that she died before she came of age. Her father's will is due to stand. The wealth will come into the possession of George Garling. Only for a temporary period."

Stepping to the desk, Dolthan snatched up the will that Kermal had prepared. He crumpled it with his left hand and thrust the paper into his pocket. All the while he kept Goodling covered.

Stepping toward the door that led to Myra's hallway, Dolthan paused; then laughed as he eyed the revolver that Goodling was still holding.

"Keep your revolver, Goodling," ordered the master crook. "You will have use for it. Parrell, take a look in Kermal's desk. See what weapons he has available."

PARRELL stepped forward and opened the drawer, pushing Kermal away from the desk. He found two guns. One was a .32 automatic; another was a revolver of the same caliber, with inlaid handle bearing the letter K.

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Parrell exhibited them.

"Excellent," decided Dolthan. "Replace the automatic, Parrell, and bring me the revolver. Leave the drawer half open."

The phony detective complied. Dolthan juggled the initialed gun in his left hand.

"Quite considerate of you, Kermal," he chortled, "to have a revolver that will certainly be identified as your own. I shall keep this weapon and use it to slay Myra. Her death will be attributed to you, Kermal."

"It will do for Lanford also; but he will come afterward. By the way, Parrell, did Doctor Claig have a gun when you and Goodling captured him?"

The detective nodded and nudged his thumb toward Goodling's pocket.

"Produce the weapon," ordered Dolthan. "Return it to Claig."

Parrell complied. Dolthan motioned his men to new positions. He arranged them so that Souder and the three false detectives were with Parrell, all covering Kermal, Goodling and Claig.

The lawyer's hand was just above the desk drawer wherein Parrell had replaced his automatic. The prosecutor was still holding his .38 downward. The physician had his five-chambered revolver limp in his hand, where Parrell had placed it.

"Wurling," said Dolthan to his chauffeur, "you and Hazzler keep Lanford covered. Simply hold him until I return. If he tries to make trouble, overpower him. Do not shoot him unless you are forced to do so."

"The stage is now set. We shall have the semblance of a battle. Start to shoot down the victims, Parrell, when I give the word. Let them try to fight; they have guns handy. I shall go find Myra and arrange her death. After that, I shall attend to Lanford."

Dolthan chuckled gloatingly as he brandished the gun that he had taken from Kermal. The inlaid handle glittered in the light. Dolthan exhibited his own revolver.

"This will do for others," he remarked. "Croy and Daggart, if I encounter them. You follow me, Parrell, after your first shots. The rest also; we will scour the place and corner our missing enemies."

THE depth of Dolthan's scheme was apparent. Deputies would soon arrive from town. They would hasten at the sound of distant gunfire. They would find Kermal, Claig and Goodling dead, with guns in hand. They would meet Dolthan, his servants and detectives triumphant.

The scene would show that a supposed crook – Kermal – had been slain, along with his accomplice, Doctor Claig. For it would be obvious that the physician had let Kermal use this house as hide-out.

Myra and Lanford also would be found slain by bullets from Kermal's gun. Belief would have it that Kermal had murdered them prior to the arrival of rescuers. Goodling would be found dead also. Witnesses would testify that the prosecutor had fallen fighting against Kermal and Claig.

As for Croy and Daggart, they would be trapped and slain afterward. Chances were that they would head for this room once the gunfire began. Dolthan and his underlings would have no trouble with the missing pair.

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The only flaw was Goodling. It must look as though he had fallen in fray with the occupants of the house; not from shots delivered by the pretended rescuers. Dolthan had not forgotten that point. He settled it as he surveyed the scene.

"You take out Goodling," he said to Souder. "Don't give him a chance; we don't want many of his bullets around here. After we finish that big fellow Croy, we'll plant your gun on him, Souder. It will look like he settled Goodling."

Souder's long face showed a grin, as the fellow nodded. Dolthan surveyed the intended victims. He saw determined looks upon their faces. He shook his head.

"You won't stand idle with those guns," jeered Dolthan. "When you hear me give the word to fire, you'll make a fight for your lives. At least you'll try to; but you won't get far."

THE crook's words bore significance. Kernal, Claig, Goodling – all had the same thought: to drop their guns to the floor, so the evidence would show that they had not fought. Yet it was impossible for them to do so. Human desire to live would force them to a fight for their lives, even though the odds were against them.

Already guns were trained upon the victims. Glowering fiends would let the doomed men start upward with their weapons; then those covering crooks would shoot down the victims, letting them do no more than fire scattered bullets while they sank dying to the floor.

As Dolthan said, time was not essential to his scheme. He had forgotten the little clock upon the desk. But from the floor below came the booming tones of an old grandfather's clock, an heirloom that Doctor Claig had always prized. It was intoning the hour of midnight.

Twelve strokes of doom; the change to a new day. The fateful hour that had meant so much to Myra Dolthan. It marked the day that Taussig Kernal had hoped would come with haste; that Rufus Dolthan had wished would wait until his evil schemes were fully fashioned.

Kernal's cause was lost; Dolthan's crimes were ready for their culmination. The fiend chuckled as he heard the clock's strokes. While the tones still boomed, he raised his hand, waiting only until the final echo to give the signal for slaughter. The time was suited to Rufus Dolthan's need for massacre.

Then came a sudden pause. Dolthan's lips, about to speak, froze with their twisted smile. From that door that stood ajar behind him came a sound that stopped the crook's command. Into the room of doom crept the ghoulish quiver of a mocking laugh, a sound that brought chilled rigidity to all who heard its eerie tones.

Another had waited for this crucial moment, hard on the stroke of twelve. An unseen visitant had listened to Rufus Dolthan's plans and was here to prevent their delivery.

That creepy taunt from the blackness of the hallway was the laugh of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XX. AFTER MIDNIGHT

RUFUS DOLTHAN wheeled. With their leader's turn, henchmen of crime swung also toward the doorway. Already the partly opened barrier was swinging inward. The Shadow's laugh rang loud.

Burning eyes from darkness. They were the only visible tokens of the master avenger. His cloaked form shrouded in the gloom, The Shadow was a creature of invisibility.

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Then, with amazing suddenness, a sweeping form moved inward. Automatics blazed an opening message into the ranks of crooks. The Shadow could afford no quarter to murderers who held helpless men at bay.

Wildly, crooks scattered, firing quick shots toward the shape that whirled inward from the door. As always, The Shadow had sprung the unexpected. He had deserted his post of safety. Forgetful of his own safety, he wanted to draw all shots in his direction.

The automatics blasted thunderously. That withering fire gave no choice. The Shadow was the only target to every would-be murderer who saw him. Dropping, crouching, diving, crooks stabbed wild shots toward the figure that was wheeling half across the room.

There were others who joined in the fray. Men to whom The Shadow had given opportunity; those upon whose aid he had counted to cover his bold stroke. Rufus Dolthan had good cause to regret the plans he had made to camouflage this scene of crime. Men whom he had branded helpless were far from being so.

Backed against the desk, Jay Goodling was jabbing shots at close range. Making every bullet tell, he was crippling Dolthan's henchmen as those rogues aimed for The Shadow.

Taussig Kermal had snatched his automatic from the desk drawer. With two quick shots, the lawyer dropped one of Dolthan's aces, the long-faced Souder.

Fred Lanford had sprung to fight with Wurling and Hazzler. That was the only reason why The Shadow had left Souder to someone else.

Wurling, desperate, had aimed to finish Lanford. The Shadow had fired two consecutive bullets to drop Dolthan's murderous chauffeur.

It was Hazzler, now, who threatened. He had left Lanford to Wurling and was aiming for The Shadow as the chauffeur fell. Fred Lanford, furious, made a dive for Hazzler and drove the fellow's gun arm upward. Then the pair grappled. Hazzler's well-aimed shot had been sent wide.

All the while, one man had devoted himself to a single task. Doctor Claig, dropping back into a corner, had fired diagonally across the room, hoping to drop one foe, Rufus Dolthan.

The supercrook had dived for cover as Claig's first bullets whined past his ears. Dolthan had chosen the refuge that The Shadow had scorned: that blackened hallway that led to Myra's room.

Frantically, Claig had emptied his gun. His shots were too hasty; all five of the bullets from his old-fashioned revolver had gone wide of their mark.

Claig was clicking his trigger before he realized that his opportunity was gone. He looked about; he saw Kermal and Goodling standing with smoking guns. All about were sprawled crooks.

Claig tried to shout; his voice failed him. Kermal and Goodling were transfixed as they watched the finish of a desperate fray. Lanford and Hazzler were locked like wrestlers. Hazzler was striving to twist his revolver muzzle toward Lanford's head.

ACROSS the room, The Shadow stood like a blackened statue. He saw Hazzler's hand come clear. Goodling sprang forward frantically, too late to be of aid to his threatened friend. But before Hazzler could press the trigger of his gun, The Shadow acted. One of his automatics boomed a timely shot.

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The Shadow was swinging as he fired; spinning to an angle that offered opportunity. His gun roared as he neared the door through which Dolthan had sped.

A swift shot clipped Hazzler's forearm. With a wild cry the man clawed the air, his revolver dropping from his grasp. Then Goodling was upon him; the prosecutor hurled the fellow hard against the wall, while Lanford staggered free.

It was then that Claig found his voice. Wildly, the physician appealed to Kermal. Frantically, he pointed toward the door on the left, gesturing with his emptied gun.

"Get Dolthan!" gasped Claig. "Stop him! He's gone to murder Myra!"

Before Kermal could turn about, a last antagonist came upward from the floor. It was Roy Parrell. The yellow lieutenant had dropped at the first shots from The Shadow's automatics.

Covered by a fallen body, Parrell had escaped injury. Lying there, he had believed that his pals had triumphed. Then, when he started to arise, he saw Kermal squarely in front of him.

Thinking he had but one man to finish, Parrell had sprung upon the lawyer. With vicious snarl, the coward was aiming to kill; his finger on revolver trigger. Doctor Claig, his own gun emptied, had no chance to save Kermal. He thought that the lawyer was doomed.

The Shadow fired a final shot. One automatic emptied, this was the last that the other gun contained. Straight from the front of the opened door, his cloaked form black against the background of the hallway, The Shadow dealt this stroke with absolute precision. As his automatic gave its message, Parrell's murderous drive was ended.

Kermal, staring into the detective's gun muzzle, saw Parrell spin about in air. The revolver clattered to the floor; mechanically, Kermal reached for it as Parrell sprawled, rolled over writhing and lay still.

The Shadow had spun about, out into the hall. Instead of following it, he drew back into a short alcove at the nearer end. He had given up pursuit of Rufus Dolthan. The master murderer had already reached the doorway of Myra's room.

There, dangling in the lock, Dolthan had found a key. He had turned it; gun in hand, he was opening the door at the moment of The Shadow's return to the hall.

Dull light revealed Dolthan's figure. The Shadow saw the crook bound inward. He listened. An instant later, his ears caught a hoarse cry of surprise; a sound that turned to the snarled tone of a cornered beast.

SURE that his henchmen would win their fray, Dolthan had headed through the hall with murderous intent. Within the lighted room, he had expected to find the niece whose life he sought. Instead, he had come upon two foemen whom he had forgotten.

At one side of the room was Daggart, pale-faced but determined as he held a leveled gun; at the other side, Croy, his huge face stonelike. Like Daggart, Croy was ready with a revolver. Rufus Dolthan was between them.

The arch-crook's face showed ratlike in the light. Slowly, Dolthan moved back a pace; then, taking advantage of the fact that his enemies were ready to give quarter, the crook sprang forward, choosing Croy as his first foe.

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With wild fury, Dolthan ducked past the big man's aiming arm to thrust his gun straight for Croy's heart.

Daggart fired. Teeth gritting, the pale-faced secretary showed determination as well as good aim. Croy had saved his life when Blissop had sought it. Daggart's chance for repayment had arrived. His grit served him in the pinch.

As Croy's revolver covered Dolthan, the gray-haired crook collapsed. He sank to the floor; he lost his hold on his gun. Mortally wounded, he began to cough out his evil life.

Footsteps pounded through the hallway. Taussig Kermal dashed into the room, carrying Parrell's revolver. Behind the lawyer followed Goodling and Lanford; after them, Doctor Claig. All stopped short as they joined Kermal.

Straight across the room yawned blackness. Shutters were opened; window was unbarred. Myra Dolthan had gone. Croy and Daggart had remained here in her stead.

A gleam of triumph showed on Croy's rugged features. Daggart was nodding as he viewed the dying form of Rufus Dolthan. Daggart's left arm was still in its sling; his right hand held the revolver with which he had delivered his timely shot.

Taussig Kermal spoke his commendation as Dolthan's last cough ended. The others crowded about Daggart. The babble of their praising tones could be heard in the long hall. The Shadow stepped from his alcove.

Again, his weird laugh sounded. Quivering echoes returned their mockery from the walls. Turning, The Shadow swept into the room where crooks lay sprawled.

Hazzler, crippled by the wall, looked up and tried to snarl as his bleary eyes saw the shape that moved swiftly toward the window.

Then, as the wounded minion's snarl failed him, The Shadow was gone. Blackness only where he had merged with those heavy draperies beyond Kermal's desk. Only the ticking of the desk clock sounded amid the hush that followed, until, from beyond the house, came the weird tones of a fading laugh.

The Shadow, triumphant, had departed. He had dealt with men of crime. He had made allowance for Rufus Dolthan's eagerness to kill, by preparing a trap wherein two determined men had been ready for the supercrook.

Croy's strength or Daggart's courage; The Shadow had known that he could rely on one or the other. To Daggart had come the opportunity to fire the shot that spelled the end of Rufus Dolthan. To The Shadow had come the real triumph.

CHAPTER XXI. WORD TO THE VICTORS

"BUT Myra? What has become of her?"

Taussig Kermal put the question as he stood beside his desk. Doctor Claig was tending Hazzler; the wounded man's testimony would be a record against Rufus Dolthan's past. But Kermal knew that Hazzler could tell nothing. It was to Croy and Daggart that he spoke.

"I don't know, sir," stated the secretary. "The mystery began when I went to summon Miss Dolthan. I rapped

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at her door, sir. I heard her unlock it; the door opened slowly."

"And then?"

"Something black enveloped me. I was powerless. I had no chance to cry out. Someone switched out the light; I found myself upon the floor. Yet there was no struggle; no sudden jolt. Just a momentary smothering that stifled me for the time."

"What next?"

"I heard a voice – a whispered voice – warning me to be quiet and to make no move. Metal pressed my neck. It was a gun muzzle. I had my own revolver, sir; but I dared not reach for it. Then, after a long time – at least so it seemed – I heard another rap upon the door."

"Was that when Croy arrived?"

"Yes. The gun was pressing me no longer; but the voice repeated a warning. It was uncanny, that voice. I could not bring myself to disobey it. Perhaps I was somewhat of a coward, Mr. Kermal –"

"You have proven your bravery, Daggart. Proceed."

"The door opened suddenly. There was a struggle in the darkness. A figure sprawled beside me, so suddenly that it seemed incredible. The door must have closed; for I heard the voice speaking a new warning as it had to me. I knew that Croy must be the man beside me."

"Enough for the moment, Daggart," said Kermal. "What happened to you, Croy?"

"Just what Daggart said," grumbled the big man. "It was the same with me, Mr. Kermal. I was smothered, I made a grab and found myself plopped on the floor. There was the voice, too. That gun muzzle Daggart talked about."

"Like a ghost, Mr. Kermal. It wasn't human, anyway. Look" – Croy stretched out his huge arms and doubled his big fists – "who's going to roll me over like I was nothing. Anybody human? No, sir."

Kermal paused, speculating. He was inclined to agree. He remembered The Shadow's laugh. He had a fleeting recollection of a sweeping figure in black. It was all uncanny; bullets had been real, yet even they had come in a deluge that seemed incredible.

"The whisper came again, Mr. Kermal," explained Daggart. "It was friendly – yet fearful. It told us to wait; that we must be ready to fight for you."

"The voice said that?" queried Kermal. "When?"

"Shortly after Croy arrived. There was something weirdly persuasive in the tone. There, in pitch darkness, it was ghostly. There was nothing to do but obey."

"What was your impression, Croy?" questioned Kermal.

"What Daggart has said, Mr. Kermal," nodded the big man. "I can't tell it the way he does; but it wasn't human, that voice wasn't. You had to do what it said."

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KERMAL looked toward Goodling and Lanford who were listening with interest. The lawyer shook his head, wondering.

"Do you realize what this means?" questioned Kermal. "This weird creature – whoever, whatever he was – had divined my purposes. He knew that I was right; that Rufus Dolthan was wrong."

"We waited in the room, sir," resumed Daggart. "The voice told us to remain where we were; to put on the light when we heard four raps against the door. Then to wait until someone came; to be ready."

"But to stay there," added Croy, "no matter what happened. Remember that, Daggart?"

The secretary nodded.

"A while went by," said Croy to Kermal. "Then came the four raps. They were like the voice. You'd have thought a ghost had tapped the door. We turned on the light. The room was empty."

"You had heard no one go out?" demanded Kermal.

"Absolutely not, sir," responded Daggart. "Croy tried the door. It must have been locked on the other side."

"The key was out of the inside," put in Croy.

"I opened the shutters," resumed Daggart. "The bars were no longer there. Before I could investigate further, we heard the shooting begin. Croy wanted to start out. I stopped him."

"Why?" asked Kermal.

"Because of what the voice had said," replied Daggart. "I reminded Croy; he agreed when I mentioned the voice. We waited there in the room, with our guns ready."

"There was some sort of sound we heard," completed Croy. "Like a laugh – before the shots. The same laugh that we heard when you and the others had come to join us."

"Did it remind you of the voice?" demanded Kermal.

Croy nodded.

"That tells the story, sir," completed Daggart. "We heard nothing more until someone unlocked the door. The voice had said some enemy was coming. We were ready; we knew Rufus Dolthan from your description of him."

"You finished him, Daggart," commended Kermal. "You deserve great credit."

"Frankly, sir," declared Daggart, "it – it was that voice that gave me the nerve I needed. Somehow, I – well, if I hadn't dropped Rufus Dolthan, I'd have had the voice to settle with. That was what was in my mind, sir, from the moment that I saw the villain."

Kermal's face was sober as he clapped his secretary on the right shoulder. The lawyer realized that some strange influence had predominated this house tonight.

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He was recalling facts that he could not explain; other facts than these that Daggart and Croy had related. Kermal began to speak again concerning Myra, when Goodling held up his hand for silence.

From outside came the throb of motors. Goodling sprang to the window and drew aside the heavy curtains. Half a dozen cars were rolling into the driveway. Goodling saw figures alighting; men dashing toward the porch. The summoned deputies had arrived.

GOODLING hurried out into the hallway on the right. He descended the stairs as he heard pounding on the door. He opened the barrier to admit a surge of deputies, Carter in the lead.

Goodling detailed briefly what had happened as he led the way upstairs. Carter and the others stared at sight of the crooks who lay in the living room.

Then the deputy remembered a message. He drew Goodling aside and spoke in confidential tone. The prosecutor's eyes opened.

"Those reporter fellows," informed Carter. "Burke and Vincent. They're in the lobby down at the hotel. Spoke to me when we pulled into town. Said to get down there as soon as possible, with everybody concerned."

Goodling nodded. Leaving Carter in charge, he ordered the others to join him in a quick trip to town. Lanford, Kermal and Croy accompanied the prosecutor in his car, while Daggart came along with Doctor Claig, in the physician's coupe. The two cars made the trip to Sheffield in a dozen minutes. Goodling was the first to reach the hotel lobby. There he found Clyde and Harry waiting.

"Carter says you have news for us," stated Goodling, anxiously. "What is it? Something important?"

"I'll say it is," replied Clyde. "Hurry up to Rufus Dolthan's living room. There's someone up there."

"Myra Dolthan?"

Clyde nodded.

CHAPTER XXII. THE SHADOW DEPARTS

THEY found Myra Dolthan in the big room of her dead uncle's suite. Garbed in her traveling attire, the girl was reading a book when the arrivals entered. Myra had heard nothing about the fray at Doctor Claig's. She looked up in surprise when she saw the anxious faces.

Spying Taussig Kermal, Myra arose with a smile. She extended her hand to the lawyer. Kermal received the girl's clasp. Relief showed on his heavy features. He wondered for a moment at the enthusiasm of the girl's greeting; then Myra explained.

"I did not fully trust you, Mr. Kermal," said the girl. "I am sorry. I was wrong. You are my truest friend. That is, unless —"

She paused soberly; then added:

"Unless I place one friend before you. One whose face I have never seen; one whose voice is weird and mysterious, whose words carry absolute conviction. One who must be believed and cannot be disobeyed."

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"The voice!" exclaimed Daggart, looking toward Croy. "The voice we heard tonight!"

"Tell us everything, Myra," urged Kermal. "We must learn all that we can about this amazing being who rescued us."

"Who rescued you as well as me?" queried Myra, in surprise.

"Yes," replied Kermal. "I shall explain that later. Go on, Myra."

"Two nights ago," stated the girl, "after you had let Mr. Lanford question me, I felt grave concern. I wondered about everything, Mr. Kermal. Particularly about your accusations of my uncle."

Doctor Claig nodded wisely.

"Later," continued Myra, "there was a knock at my door. I thought it was Daggart. Instead, it was a tall stranger in black. His eyes were like living fire; his voice an uncanny whisper."

Daggart and Croy looked at each other and nodded their corroboration of the voice.

"This visitor," resumed Myra, "seemed more than human. He was a most amazing being; his cloak, his hat, made him seem a solid shadow come to life. Yet his tones were calming. He was as gentle as he was fearful.

"He promised me protection. I gave him the diary that I had kept. When he left, he vanished so amazingly that I thought almost that he had been unreal. But later, he cut the bars outside of my window. After that, I saw a glimmering light from the second floor of the garage. His promised signal. From then on, I had no fear."

THERE was a calmness to the girl's story. Every word had the ring of fact. None who listened doubted. Clyde Burke and Harry Vincent were agents of The Shadow; the others had heard his laugh upon this very night.

"At about eleven o'clock tonight," declared Myra, "or a little later, perhaps, I heard four taps upon the shutters of my window. That was his signal. Strange taps – almost as though they were in the room."

Again Daggart and Croy were impressed with recollections. They, like Myra, recalled The Shadow's signal.

"I opened the shutters," declared the girl. "I saw those glowing, living eyes in blackness. That whispered voice spoke again. The figure moved downward; I followed, by a ladder that was resting against the wall.

"It was black about the house. The ladder was white. It seemed to move beside me as the voice gave instructions. Stretched level with the ground, that ladder; carried by a figure that I could not see beside me.

"We passed the garage; there my conductor placed the ladder against the wall. The voice still spoke, moving onward, commanding me to follow. It was like a dream, my eyes unseeing. A gloved hand held my arm, guiding me; the whispered tones gave truthful utterance.

"My invisible friend was telling me of danger. My uncle was coming to Doctor Claig's. Mr. Kermal had been right when he had told me of my uncle's plotting. I was to meet others who would take me to safety when I told them who I was. Then suddenly, I realized that I was walking alone.

"For the moment, I was terrified; I stumbled as I continued along the slope. A flashlight appeared in front of me; I was at the edge of a road. Two men were there; they questioned me. They were Mr. Burke and Mr.

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Vincent. They introduced themselves when I told them who I was. They brought me here in their car."

"Where did you find Miss Dolthan?" questioned Goodling, turning to Clyde and Harry.

"On the back road," replied Clyde. "We drove up there to watch the house while you went in with Parrell. While we were waiting around, we heard someone coming our way. It turned out to be Miss Dolthan. We knew town was the safest place for her."

"You were right," agreed Goodling, grimly. "We've a lot to thank you for, Burke. You too, Vincent."

"Rufus Dolthan turned phony?" questioned Clyde. "These chaps" – he indicated Kermal, Croy and Daggart – "look a lot like the ones you were looking for."

"They're the ones," stated Goodling. "Lanford told us they were all right; but we didn't believe him until Parrell started to act up and Dolthan broke in on the meeting."

CLYDE was looking at Lanford, who pointed toward Croy. Clyde stared at the big man; he saw Croy grin. Then Clyde smiled as he nodded. He was indicating that he had at last recognized the man with whom he had battled while on the running board of the old sedan.

"Rufus Dolthan is dead," declared Goodling, solemnly. "Roy Parrell also. They admitted their crimes, believing that we were helpless. Then a rescuer arrived; as nearly as I can judge, he must have been the same one who aided Miss Dolthan to safety."

"He came in by the window," put in Croy, with a nod. "That is it. By the window."

"After you were gone, Miss Dolthan," added Daggart, to Myra, "he held Croy and myself there, so that we would be ready when your uncle came to kill you."

The girl uttered a startled cry. Then, realizing that all danger was past, she reached to the table beside her and picked up a little book that lay there.

"My diary," she stated. "I cannot imagine how it came here."

"Parrell found it in the station wagon," explained Clyde, to Kermal and Claig. "While he was looking for his pipe. I was with him. That's how he guessed where you were."

Bit by bit, the story was being pieced. More comments followed; yet, as the talk continued, the part by The Shadow increased in its mysterious proportions. One suggestion followed another; it was Jay Goodling, finally, who summed the case.

"Whoever he was," declared the prosecutor, solemnly, as he referred to The Shadow, "he must have learned everything through sheer deduction. Not only a superfighter, he is a supermind. A superbeing.

"It was he who scattered those crooks at the house on Dobson's Road and brought us to the first goal in our hunt. He learned that Kermal was at your house, Claig. He went there and prepared to save Myra from danger that he foresaw.

"He must have analyzed the case to perfection; known that you were on the level, Kermal; that Dolthan was crooked. He must have analyzed it from Yager's murder, the way you outlined it tonight.

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"He was for you, Kermal. He wanted a show-down. He wanted to make Dolthan reveal himself as the villain. No one but this mysterious stranger could have placed that diary in the station wagon. But how he knew so many other things is what amazes me.

"Parrell's pipe in my office. Parrell found it in the station wagon instead. Burke and Vincent on that rear road; with their lights out. Yet this super-being found that out while he was rescuing Myra Dolthan and sent the girl to safety.

"He handled Daggart and Croy; then pitched in to start the fight against them. He had Rufus Dolthan figured to the dot. He knew that Dolthan would set out to kill Myra; and then he had Daggart and Croy waiting. The very men with whom he had battled less than a quarter of an hour before."

OTHERS nodded their heads in understanding. Each terse detail was new proof of The Shadow's might. Men who had fought for right felt like mere pygmies as they considered the craft, the strategy, the prowess of The Shadow.

"Well, Myra," announced Kermal, after Goodling had concluded. "Congratulations are in order. You are twenty-one; your father's estate is yours. Here is the will that I made out" – he produced the crumpled paper; he had taken it from Rufus Dolthan's pocket – "and I still advise you to sign it.

"There's no one now to influence your stepbrother should he be named as your heir; but I've seen enough of crooks to know we shouldn't trust one just because he hasn't gone to prison. As for witnesses" – Kermal chuckled as he looked about the group – "we have plenty of them now."

Kermal spread the crumpled will upon the table. Myra Dolthan took a pen that Fred Lanford brought from a desk. She dipped the pen in ink, wrote her signature below the will and passed the document to Taussig Kermal.

It was then that all were stilled by a weird sound that reached them. Though the timing of that distant call might have been mere coincidence, it impressed every listener with the startling thought that an unseen being had known all that passed within this room.

From somewhere outside the hotel, floating through silent night that blanketed the town of Sheffield came the burst of eerie mirth, that faded into shivering echoes, wafted by a dying breeze. As if he claimed the privilege of being the first witness to the will, The Shadow's tones had come from the invisible spaces that formed his habitat.

Justice had triumphed. Men of right had conquered insidious crime. All through the strength of The Shadow, that master being whose token of departure remained, unforgotten, in the minds of those who had heard.

THE END