

Mansion Of Crime

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I. THE HOUSE ON THE SOUND.

OLD Theodore Prendle stood at his study window and glared off into the dusk. His view took in a sweep of lawn and shrubbery, well-kept woods and driveways, all part and parcel of his extensive Long Island estate. Beyond that landscape gleamed the broad blue waters of Long Island Sound, some portions clearly visible, others peeking through the trees that lined the shore.

Though increasing darkness lessened the beauty of the scene, Theodore Prendle was not disappointed. In fact, his eyes were not noting the graceful features of the landscape at all. All that he saw, or could ever see, when he gazed from that window was a double wall of high, dark hedges that flanked one edge of the estate.

Beyond that double hedge, the distant tops of castlelike towers were outlined against the glooming sky, indicating another mansion quite as large as Prendle's own residence.

That other house belonged to Victor Thorndon, for years Prendle's archrival in business. Even in retirement, the two had continued their bloodless feud. The hedges had been built for spite; one by Prendle, the other by Thorndon.

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Usually, such hedges were clipped to a reasonable height; these had been allowed to flourish until they had become as large as fair-sized trees, forming an almost impassable thicket. Only by dint of careful search, could anyone have found a route to crawl through that twofold wall.

When Prendle glared at the hedges and Thorndon's domain beyond, his heavy face took on a squarish look, which was increased by the straight, set lines of his lips. The expression gave Prendle's features a hardness, which was not a true index to his nature. For Prendle was actually a friendly man, firm of way, but not harsh.

Those who knew him well recognized that his bitterness toward Thorndon was the result of accumulated experience. Prendle realized it, too, and usually curbed his emotion, except in the presence of trusted friends who understood.

One such friend was Albert Carthwright, at present a visitor in Prendle's study. Also a resident of this exclusive area, Carthwright was likewise a retired businessman. Though not so wealthy as either Prendle or Thorndon, Carthwright had done quite well for himself, and furthermore, had withdrawn from active work much earlier.

Hence, in contrast to Prendle, whose age was visible in lined face and white hair, Carthwright showed no traces beyond those of middle age. He was a brisk man, Carthwright, with a lean, well-chiseled face and hair which showed no more than streaks of gray.

"Thorndon! Bah!" Prendle always prefaced his criticisms of his rival with such words. "He's copied everything I ever did, even to settling out here and growing a hedge. He'd still do anything he could to spite me. That is why"—Prendle lowered his booming tone—"I want to talk with you, Carthwright."

Before sitting down at his desk, Prendle stepped to a side door of his study and opened it. He peered cautiously into a fair-sized room that served as a library. It wasn't the only book room in the house, but it was the one where Prendle kept his own private volumes.

Its main door, leading in from the large front hall, was permanently bolted, hence it could only be reached from Prendle's study. There were windows, of course, but they were tightly latched. Nevertheless, Prendle liked to look into that library on occasion, to make sure that it was empty.

Satisfied that such was the case at present, Prendle returned to his desk.

There, he rang the buzzer for Blair, who arrived promptly at the main door of the study, which led in from the hall. Blair was Prendle's butler, an old and competent retainer, whose manner and tone were as dry as his withered face.

"Tell me, Blair," requested Prendle casually, "has anyone come home yet?"

"No, sir," replied the butler. "I believe that Mr. Jack is still at the Beach Club, while Miss Helene is some where with Mr. Exeter."

"Very well, Blair."

PRENDLE dismissed the butler with an approving nod. He waited until footfalls had died beyond the door; then he turned to Carthwright. Though Prendle's tone was restrained, it still had traces of its booming note, as he said:

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"There are my two troubles, Carthwright: Jack and Helene. Having heard what Blair just said, you should agree with me."

"I do, regarding Jack," conceded Carthwright, in his brisk way. "He does spend too much time at the Beach Club—"

"And other places," inserted Prendle, "where stakes are higher than in bridge games, drinks more frequent, and time more thoroughly wasted."

I suppose so," returned Carthwright. "Yes, it will take Jack a long time to settle down, if he ever does. But I can't understand your criticism of Helene. Your daughter is a very lovely girl."

Prendle jarred the desk with his fist.

"That is not the issue!" he stormed. "Good or bad, bad or good, persons must show judgment. Jack can hang around the Beach Club, or go the rounds in New York, if only he will get down to business first. Similarly, all of Helene's good qualities are wasted, while she prefers the company of ne'er-do-wells like Reggie Exeter.

"Sometimes, I think that there is only one person in this house who has any sense, besides myself. I'll tell you who that person is: Blair!"

Prendle's voice had been booming higher and higher. It ended in a blaze that made the windows rattle. Then, after the brief pause that followed, there came a cautious rap at the door. Prendle boomed for the person to enter. Blair appeared, to question:

"Did you call me, sir?"

Carthwright held back a smile, realizing that Blair must have heard Prendle's final shout. Bluntly, Prendle waved the butler away; but as soon as the servant had gone, Prendle began a deep laugh, in which Carthwright joined. Prendle rather relished jokes at his own expense; this one rendered him quite convulsive.

Contrarily, Blair lacked such a sense of humor. Out in the hall, he could hear Prendle's booming laugh and Carthwright's accompanying chuckle. Stiffly, the butler strode off to the kitchen, too annoyed to glance about the hall, as he usually did.

As soon as Blair was gone, a young man eased in from the front door and gave a chuckle of his own.

The newcomer was Jack Prendle. The son had enough of his father's appearance to prove the relationship. He was of slighter build, however, and his lips had a way of turning down when they smiled. Jack was pleased by Blair's departure and the stiff way in which the butler had gone. Pleased, too, because he knew that his father was talking with Carthwright in the study.

From his shrewd look, his sneaky manner as he stole through the large hall to the study door, Jack was following a preconceived design: namely, to listen in on the conference.

Close to the study door, in the shelter of its deep entrance, Jack could overhear the words that followed. Old Prendle had taken it for granted that neither Jack nor Helene had yet returned, otherwise the fact would have been mentioned by Blair. Hence, Prendle was talking a bit loudly, and Carthwright, somewhat influenced, was doing the same.

"Getting back to Jack and Helene"—inside the study, Prendle folded his arms as he sat erect behind the desk—"I am worried about their futures. Should I divide my fortune between them, they would become babes in the woods, to be devoured by the wolf."

"You mean that Victor Thorndon is the wolf?"

"Precisely, Carthwright," returned Prendle. "If he lives longer than I do—and he may—he will assuredly try to gratify his one ambition, of tearing down whatever I have built up."

"If you put your entire estate in trust—"

"I shall have to do that, Carthwright; in fact, I have already made such provisions. But I do not like it. Living on trust funds, Jack and Helene will be jellyfish for the rest of their lives. No, I would prefer, if I could, to start them off with fortunes of their own while I am still alive."

OUTSIDE the door, Jack's face, glum at first, had taken on an increasing gleam. Whatever his lack along some lines of judgment, he was an opportunist, and his shrewdness was coming to the fore. He was particularly attentive as he listened to the next words.

"Take Jack's case," boomed Prendle. "He wants money. I should like to give it to him and set him up in business."

"You can't mean," exclaimed Carthwright, "that Jack wants money to start a business?"

"Of course not," snorted Prendle. "He wants cash to make up for all that he has spent. He is welcome to it—a hundred thousand to start, and more as needed—if he will show the proper interest in things that count."

"Will he ever?"

There was a pause after Carthwright's question; then Prendle spoke, slowly and speculatively.

"Jack might," he declared. "Perhaps what he needs is the proper example. That brings us to Helene's case. If she would only meet the right man and marry him! I could set up my son-in-law in business, and offer Jack the same opportunity."

"But would Jack profit by it?"

"I think he would. He might see the value of Helene's marriage and find the right girl for himself. Marriage is what Jack needs, even more than Helene, in order to become stabilized."

Carthwright sat back in his chair and smiled. He looked at Prendle, as though trying to picture him as Cupid in disguise. Prendle saw the reason for the smile.

"No, Carthwright," he said. "I can't force either of my children into marriage. I can only hope that they will think of it themselves, and choose wisely. It may be that Jack will set the example in that respect."

"He seems to have no preferences at present, whereas Helene likes scatterbrains such as Reggie Exeter. But when they are both married, and properly so, they shall have fortunes in their own right. But until then—"

Prendle broke off, as a roar came from the drive, outside. A car with wide headlights wheeled past the house and screeched to a sharp stop.

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"Reggie Exeter," snorted Prendle, "bringing Helene home. Sometime, he'll bring her right into the living room, car, wall and all! Bah! I'll speak to that young fellow."

Prendle strode from the study. By then, Jack had stolen to the front of the hall, where he stopped abruptly at a telephone table. Picking up the telephone, he was half turned away when his father reached a door that led out to the driveway. Prendle did not notice Jack, but the latter heard the door chatter open. Still, Jack remained at the telephone.

It was Blair, coming from the kitchen, who noted Jack and stopped short. Catching the mutter of a voice, the butler mistook it for Prendle's and supposed that his employer was still in the study, making a call from his own telephone. Then, in the same glance that showed him that the study door was closed, Blair observed Jack.

Discreetly, the butler stepped back into the kitchen, for he made it a point never to eavesdrop. That virtue on Blair's part was, on this occasion, a failing.

If Blair had crossed the hallway and stopped in the shelter of the study door, which was not far from where Jack stood, the butler would have heard some startling things and grasped facts which had an important bearing on the future.

Facts which old Theodore Prendle would have thanked Blair for telling him. A scheme was in the making; a scheme that was deep, though quickly formed, and one that threatened crime and violence.

It hinged upon the call that Blair did not overhear. The servant, by his very fidelity, was allowing a threat of doom to grow upon his master, Theodore Prendle!

CHAPTER II. WORD TO MANHATTAN.

LOUNGING in an easy-chair in a fancy apartment, Roger Frack was dangling a cigarette in one hand and holding a hand-set telephone in the other. He was wearing a dressing gown that suited his garish surroundings, and his face, handsome in its dark way, was showing a very wise smile.

Frack's wisdom was more than superficial. He happened to be the smartest confidence man at present operating in New York City. Whenever Frack was in Manhattan, he always fixed up his place in lavish style. It went well with his business.

The telephone, in the opinion of Roger Frack, was the greatest of modern inventions. At present, it was bringing him important news from Long Island, acquainting him with the plans of Theodore Prendle very soon after the millionaire had propounded them.

Much was being said from the other end, though it came both rapidly and cautiously. Frack, in his turn, was saying very little, except to acknowledge the things he heard. For Frack happened to have a visitor who was concerned in the matter under discussion, though the visitor did not yet know it.

The visitor's name was Stanley Wilford. He was younger than Frack, and better-looking. In fact, Stanley Wilford, with his serious face and frank gaze, seemed quite out of place in a confidence man's apartment.

Frack settled the telephone on its stand, took a puff from his cigarette, and faced his visitor.

"A break for you, Stan," he informed. "I've just talked to the big-shot. He mentioned you, and said he'll give

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you the chance he promised."

"Whatever the chance is," retorted Stan, "I don't want it. I've told you, Frack—"

"So why repeat it?" interrupted Frack. "Its out of our hands. The big-shot holds those phony checks of yours, to the tune of two thousand dollars, and what he says goes."

Stan didn't agree.

"You know all about those checks," he insisted. "I thought I had five thousand dollars coming to me, on a legitimate business deal. I gave the checks out, and then found I was framed; that the money wasn't coming through. I was tricked and you know it!"

"But the judge won't," Frack mocked. "If that ever gets to court, Stan, you'll do five years work in a big house up a big river. So why not play ball and clear yourself a lot easier."

"By putting myself in deeper," Stan brooded. "No, Frack, I don't like your racket. I'm all set to leave town. If you want to go to the trouble of chasing the law after me, it's your privilege."

His jaw set, Stan Wilford stepped toward the door. With quick strides, Frack blocked him off.

"Why be a fool?" Frack snapped. "You'd never make a good con man. We want you for a front, that's all. One job, and the boss will hand you back those bum checks. That is—Frack corrected himself—"I'll hand them back for him.

"Pass up this chance and you're a dope. We've got others on the list, we always have. Somebody else will take over if you don't. As for clearing out, it won't help. We can't afford to let guys like you clear out. If you try, you may finish in the river, instead of up it!"

FRACK meant what he said. Never in his experience with this tool who was working for someone higher up, had Stan seen Frack exhibit such determination. He let Frack shove him back to a chair; there, Stan accepted the cigarette that his persecutor offered him.

"It's a cinch," declared Frack. "All you've got to do is go out to Long Island, to a place called Longwood, and put on a good show. You'll draw money whenever you need it, so you can get in with the right people, particularly a family named Prendle."

"And then?"

"You'll learn the rest later," Frack replied, studying Stan's sober face with careful approval. "And I promise you this: you won't have to steal anything, slug anybody, or do anything that can incriminate you in any way."

Stan was thinking it over. His bluish eyes had a sudden flash. He felt that he could rely upon Frack's terms, though there would certainly be a catch later. But the catch, as Stan foresaw it, would apply to Frack and the master crook that the con man represented. Perhaps, once when he had slipped the mesh, Stan could use the net himself and trap the bigger fish.

"All right," said Stan firmly. "It's a deal. "When do I start?"

"Tonight," returned Frack. Then, cagily: "But you'll have company on the way out. I'm sending Skeet along."

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Stan merely shrugged. He knew Skeet by sight. The fellow was a small-fry member of the confidence ring; he posed as a racetrack tout. But Skeet, with others of his ilk, formed a compact mob. They were the sort that would be sent along to see that Stan "played ball," as Frack had termed it.

"Where do I go with Skeet?" inquired Stan, a trifle tartly. "Is he going to stay with me?"

"You stop at the Beach Club," informed Frack, "and Skeet comes back to town. Your job will be to meet old Theodore Prendle, who has a son named Jack and a daughter named Helene. Jack is probably the best bet, for a starter. He plays cards at the club. Lose to him, and he'll like you. We'll pay the freight."

Stan reached for his hat again, and Frack did not stop him. With a smile of grim pleasure, as though the coming adventure intrigued him, Stan strode from the apartment and gave a farewell wave, remarking that he would stop off at his own apartment.

With Stan's departure, Frack picked up the telephone and dialed a number. Soon he was talking cautiously with Skeet, smiling as he heard the things that his tool had to tell him.

"Wilford is going through with it," informed Frack. "Packed his stuff, you say?... You've been casing his place, I take it. He left the luggage at Grand Central? Good enough. You can pick it up for him—"

"Sure, you're going with him, but on the train.... Yes, take him in your car, out to Long Island... No, don't dump him... Just let him off at the Beach Club, in Longwood... he's going through with it, I tell you... Yes, meet him over at the apartment—"

Frack heard the thud of Skeet's receiver and could picture the fellow's disappointment. Skeet was always hoping for a chance to dispose of persons like Stan Wilford, instead of conveying them to a safe destination.

In fact, Frack could picture more. He could visualize Skeet, in the back room of the joint where he hung out, mouthing that same disappointment to a group of surrounding thugs.

THE picture was correct. Skeet was at the back-room table where he always sat, and he had three men with him. Like Skeet, they were undersized but tough, not the sort who looked like regular mobbies. Their appearance, like their size, helped them a great deal, because the police regarded them as somewhat harmless.

Judging by the bulges on their hips, however, they made a specialty of carrying lethal weapons. They were careful to suppress those bulges, as they arose at Skeet's beckon.

"Frack says Wilford is coming along," undertoned Skeet, in the voice he used for giving racetrack tips. "But you never can tell. The guy may pull a run-out. So when I go up to talk to him, you birds close in. His joint is easy to reach; it's Apartment B6, over at the Marbleton."

Lounging at the next table, under the wary eye of an aproned waiter, was a long-limbed, ill-dressed customer who evidently patronized this place because of its cheap prices. He was stretched half across his table, apparently the victim of too many drinks, and the waiter was wondering whether the small change that he fumbled was meant for another drink, or a tip.

Skeet and his pals didn't give that customer a further thought as they sidled out through the rear door. Skeet, in particular, was quite sure that his voice hadn't reached the stranger's ears.

But as soon as the undersized mobbies had left, the wayward customer came to life. Pushing the change in the waiter's direction, he reached his feet and shambled out through the front.

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There, he practically stumbled against a cab that was parked in darkness. Its door swung wide as he approached, released by the driver. It was the stumbling man, however, who pulled it shut as he gave the whispered order:

"Marbleton Apartments."

The stumble-bum was The Shadow; this cab was his own. The driver, Moe Shrevnitz, knew that the order called for speed. He whisked his chief the few blocks to the Marbleton at such a pace that The Shadow had to use rapid action to match it. The Shadow's action concerned a special drawer set beneath the rear seat of the cab.

From that drawer, The Shadow was whipping garments of black—a slouch hat, a cloak, and thin gloves. With them, he usually brought automatics, but on this occasion none were in the drawer. They were already parked in holsters beneath the shabby coat that The Shadow had worn when in the dive that Skeet Co. patronized.

The law hadn't spotted Skeet and his crew for what they were, but The Shadow had, and therefore had been ready for them.

The only thing that The Shadow had missed was the telephone call that Skeet received from Frack, because Skeet had taken it in a booth. But The Shadow, hearing the name of Frack, had identified the con man, and therefore had something of a line on Stanley Wilford.

This, however, was the first evidence that The Shadow had gotten regarding mob connections in the racket with which Roger Frack was associated.

Cloaked in black as the cab slid up beside the old and squatty Marbleton Apartments, The Shadow eased out into darkness and whispered a low laugh. His course was plain: by reaching Stan first, he could wrench that young man from the racket and take proper measures against Roger Frack, who, for some time, had been on The Shadow's future list.

Skeet and his crew could report that their bird had flown. Any efforts to retrieve Stan would simply bring them up against The Shadow. Surprises would be due for men of crime, according to The Shadow's coming schedule.

But it happened that The Shadow had not yet met Stan Wilford, whose own ways happened to be distinctly individual.

The surprise that was coming shortly, was different from the sort that The Shadow would normally expect. It was to be a surprise for The Shadow, himself!

CHAPTER III. STRANGE ADVENTURE.

THE front of the Marbleton was gloomy, as it always was at night, when Stan Wilford arrived there. He had taken a cab from Frack's, but traffic had delayed him in the Times Square area. The time-lengthened trip had given Stan an opportunity to think things out, and he had gradually reconciled himself to the adventure that lay ahead.

The more hazards it might offer, the better Stan would like it. He had always looked for strange adventure and was willing to start from the wrong side of the fence, since nothing better offered.

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Things were quite to his liking, as he left the cab in front of the apartment house. Stan could see lurking figures in the offing and knew that Skeet and others were on hand. For their benefit, he paused outside the door, then strolled into the Marbleton, as though the choice were entirely his own.

In fact, Stan regarded himself as a free agent, despite the threats that Frack had broached. He intended to act the part, even while taking orders that Frack relayed from higher up. It was just a case of gaining leeway all along the line, until the time came to kick over the traces.

Meanwhile, he would play in with crime whenever necessary, not only to learn what it was all about, but to satisfy a whim of his own.

Stan was thinking in terms of Theodore Prendle. He had recalled the name while riding in the cab.

It went back to Oklahoma, where Stan had tried his hand at oil, only to be frozen out, along with some other small independents, by certain large corporations. True, the big ones had been wrangling among themselves, but that hadn't helped Stan's case. They had raised money when they needed it, and had finally fattened through their feud.

The money had come from New York, supplied by a banking house of which Theodore Prendle was a director. The bankers had received interest for their money, Prendle among them.

It was easy enough for Stan to argue, mentally, that others had a right to wrest such funds from Prendle. Remembering his own prospects in oil, and how they had been squashed, Stan conveniently decided that it was his money at stake, not Prendle's.

Prendle had a family: a son named Jack, and a daughter, Helene. But why should that change Stan's attitude? He pictured Jack as the typical rich man's son, who would either squander a fortune, or, worse, push himself into a high position through his father's backing and crowd out men of greater competence.

Toward Helene, Stan had even less sympathy. He had seen plenty of her sort, out West. They came to the oil fields in airplanes and private cars and looked at the derricks hungrily, regarding them as the producers of fur coats, imported limousines, French maids, and Sealyham terriers.

These daughters of the rich had no sympathy for the men who sweated in the fields; no regard for the ambitions of toilers. So Stan could see no reason why he should hold sympathy for them. His contempt for Helene Prendle, the girl that he had never met, was quite complete when he entered his apartment.

Except for the furniture, the little apartment was empty. Stan had packed everything that afternoon. His trunk and suitcases were at Grand Central Station, the checks in his pocket, along with a ticket for the West.

He had agreed to return to the apartment, simply so that Frack would not suspect how far he had gone with his plan for departure to an unstated destination. Taking the ticket from his wallet, Stan looked at it and laughed. He folded it away, intending to redeem it later.

Longwood, fashionable suburb on Long Island, would be just as golden a spot as somewhere in the West. There, if he could withstand his dislike for surrounding luxury, Stan would redeem himself in his own way. He'd worked himself into a mood where he detested persons like the Prendles as much as he hated Roger Frack and the unknown big-shot behind the confidence ring.

Stan's eyes had at least been wide open when Frack had tricked him. It had happened after Stan came East to invest his savings in a retail oil business. Through Frack, Stan had been promised five thousand dollars, to be

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supplied by a silent partner, cash on the line, provided all debts were clear. So Stan had paid off the debts of his newly acquired business by overdrawing his bank account.

Then the storm had struck. There weren't any debts, no silent partner. It had all been a frame-up, and Stan's checks were in the hands of the man behind the confidence ring. It was just a case of putting them into circulation and letting Stan take the rap.

Frack had put the case quite coolly, along with his promise that there would be a way out, if Stan chose to accept it. The way out was for Stan to serve as wedge in a bigger game involving Prendle.

So what?

STAN asked himself the question, as he nosed around the apartment to make sure that he hadn't left anything important. He opened a closet door, gave the interior a glance, without bothering to look deeper. Then, as he was closing the door, Stan did remember something.

He stepped to a small table, which had a slightly opened drawer. Pulling the drawer out, Stan tilted the table forward. There was a clatter, as a .32 revolver slid forward into his waiting hand.

Stan had brought the gun to New York with him, and had stowed it behind the table drawer as a good hiding place. At times, he'd regretted that he had kept it, since revolvers were taboo in New York.

But he was glad, now, that he had it; pleased, too, that it was fully loaded, a fact which he proved by cracking the gun open. Even if he did intend to play along with crooks, it wouldn't do to trust them too far.

Stan, at that moment, was thinking in terms of Skeet, the man who was to convoy him to Long Island. Closing the gun, he listened, and heard a creep from the hall. It was probably Skeet, and the idea struck Stan that the gun would make the right impression on that sneaky crook.

Yes, he'd show Skeet the revolver, muzzle foremost, then put the gun away. Skeet would then know, and report back to Frack, that Stan had gone to Long Island of his own volition.

Moving toward the door, his own steps stealthy, Stan unwittingly made a progressive picture of a hunted man, ready for a last stand against odds. He was practically deceiving himself, hence it wasn't surprising that he should deceive an observer whose presence Stan did not suspect.

The closet door swung wide noiselessly. From the depths that Stan had mistaken for mere darkness came a cloaked shape, advancing with swift, silent glide. First, to reach the apartment, The Shadow had witnessed Stan's arrival. Knowing that a real threat lay over the young man, The Shadow was taking steps to balk it.

First indication of The Shadow's presence became evident to Stan when the latter gained the door. One hand reaching for the knob, Stan was holding the gun in his other fist, when blackness intervened. The blackness wasn't solid; it was The Shadow's own shadow, thrust ahead of the cloaked figure. It produced the anticipated result.

Seeing the silhouette that spread against the whiteness of the door, Stan turned. He gave his gun hand a natural sweep, twisting slightly backward as he did. However quick he might have been with the trigger, the swing was needed first. It came right where The Shadow wanted it: into a clamping trap.

Stan, halting, startled, found his wrist in the grip of a gloved hand that had the power of a vise; a strength so numbing that it paralyzed Stan's fingers. He couldn't have pulled the gun trigger had he wished.

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Besides, a shot from Stan's gun would have been doubly useless. The Shadow had stopped the weapon far short; it wasn't even aimed at the cloaked intruder. But The Shadow's .45 was aimed straight between Stan's eyes.

Sight of the big muzzle made Stan quail. The Shadow could feel the young man go limp. Coolly, The Shadow lowered his leveled weapon, though still keeping his restraining grip on Stan's gun hand.

Then came whispered words—The Shadow's promise of co-operation against crime. He was declaring himself a friend, and backing the statement with the glow of burning eyes. He was offering Stan a way out, while he, The Shadow remained to combat Skeet and the crew, should they offer trouble.

With sweeping gesture, The Shadow indicated a window which led to an outside roof, the proper route for Stan to take.

TEN minutes before, Stan Wilford would have snapped at the invitation. Even at this moment, his eyes showed interest. His lips were tightening, as though fighting to curb a fear. Actually, Stan was striving to suppress inclinations toward crime, the mood which The Shadow had not yet observed. In fact, the thing that decided Stan was almost trivial.

It was The Shadow's gesture. To indicate the window, The Shadow used his gun hand. The .45 was completely away from Stan at the crucial instant. As for Stan, though his own gun hand was powerless, his other hand had reached the doorknob.

Seized by a rebellious impulse, a sudden urge to go through with his own plan in a way that would prove his pretended desire for crime, Stan whipped the door open.

He intended the yank to carry him beyond the door, where he would be out of The Shadow's sight. He expected the door edge, coming in between, to free him from The Shadow's grip. It did, but not through Stan's own effort.

The Shadow was hauling Stan off balance as the door came inward, and normally, Stan would have bashed against the door, slamming it shut again. But there were other forces to contend with: Skeet and a pair of thugs. Though scrawny, their combined weight was considerable as they threw themselves against the door.

They saw The Shadow lose his grip on Stan. They heard Stan's hoarse yell as the door flung him to the corner. The cry was lost in the laugh that The Shadow gave, a mocking invitation for crooks to follow as he wheeled.

Then, as they took the invitation, lunging as they drew their guns, The Shadow proved his move to be a feint. He was no longer wheeling across the room; he was driving headlong into his attackers, meeting them just within the doorway.

In the turmoil, the charging forms struck hard against the door, slapping it wide against the wall. From the corner where he had landed on hands and knees, groping for his gun on the floor beside him, Stan Wilford was a witness to the sudden fray that his own impulse had produced.

More than a witness, he was to be a deciding factor in this battle between The Shadow and, men of crime!

CHAPTER IV. FLIGHT'S FINISH.

THE SHADOW was hurling crooks like chaff, meeting them with hard-sledged gun strokes, then plucking them, free-handed, to fling them one against the other. They were slashing, too, trying to ward off his blows and get an aim at him.

They were a rabbity tribe, unlike brawny thugs. They preferred to shoot while on the dodge, and The Shadow recognized it. He wasn't giving them the chance they needed.

As Stan was rising, one crook came spilling hard against him. It was Skeet, and the fellow bounded like a rubber ball. He hoped to get a shot at The Shadow, but the cloaked fighter was suddenly gone. Taking the two remaining thugs in one swoop, The Shadow had tossed them bodily through the doorway and across the outer hall, following them as part of his lunge.

Skeet made a spring for the doorway, stopping just short of the edge. He heard The Shadow's taunting laugh and did not welcome it. Stan heard the mockery, too, as he finally found his feet, with gun in hand. Caught by a new impulse, Stan hoarsed:

"Look out, Skeet! Duck back here!"

Stan's tone was something of a give-away, though he didn't realize it. He was trying to rectify the thing that he had done. His first surge of animosity toward The Shadow had been a brief one, much like the instinct felt by a trapped animal toward its trapper. He'd seen a way to elude The Shadow and make a hit with Skeet; but Stan hadn't expected the things that followed.

The smash of the door, the fray that it produced, was Skeet's idea, not Stan's. In witnessing the rapid strife, Stan had suddenly found himself in favor of The Shadow. The cloaked intruder's friendly offer was still clear in Stan's mind, and the fact that The Shadow had carried through the promise, though one against three, was something to admire.

Stan's own career had always been on the uphill side. He wanted to help The Shadow, and was doing it. Stan's yell to Skeet caused the fellow to hesitate, instead of taking a quick gun jab at The Shadow.

Then it was too late for Skeet. The Shadow had flattened the others and was wheeling toward the room, his laugh ringing with ominous challenge. The Shadow was out to settle scores, and to Stan, the laugh was meant for him as well as Skeet.

Stan couldn't realize that The Shadow had heard his yell and given it the correct translation, for Stan himself had not fully interpreted his own cry.

He saw Skeet whip forward again in desperation. Stan, too, was on the drive, hoping to reach Skeet before the fellow could fire; but it looked as though The Shadow would smother the crook first.

Then, as gunshots sounded from the hall, The Shadow wheeled, forgetting Skeet. He had a more pressing duel: Skeet's two reserves had arrived and were opening fire from the end of the hall. The Shadow had to settle those pint-sized marksmen before they found the range.

At that moment, Stan's brain was in a whirl. He was against the wall, his free hand gripping the edge of the opened door. The Shadow was gone, but Skeet was still a target. A shot at Skeet could count, but the echoes of The Shadow's taunt still produced confusion in Stan's mind.

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He couldn't discount his previous mistakes; if he fired now and clipped Skeet, The Shadow would probably consider it another error. Stan had tagged himself as a member of crime's faction, and logically should he shooting at The Shadow. At least, so Stan believed The Shadow would define it.

There was one other course at hand. It was literally at hand, because it involved the door, which Stan happened to be gripping. Otherwise, it might not have occurred to him. Indeed, it came so spontaneously, that Stan started his action while his thoughts still whirled.

He gave the door a huge slam, and as it was whizzing shut, Stan foresaw happy consequences. The door would cut off Skeet from The Shadow. Stan himself could then suppress Skeet, to prove which side he really favored.

THINGS didn't work that way.

Skeet, too, was spinning as Stan gave the door its fling. The door hooked the human pint behind the shoulder and catapulted him across the room, at an angle toward the window.

The door's momentum wasn't halted, for Stan had put plenty of beef behind the sweep. The door closed with a slam that drowned the bark of guns from the hallway.

Skeet was on his feet before Stan could reach him. The crook was at the window, beckoning with his gun.

"Come on!" he urged Stan. "Say, The Shadow must have hit me hard. But I'll bet he got his when you smeared him with the door!"

Engaged with The Shadow when the door swung, Skeet supposed that it was the cloaked fighter who had flung him. After all, Skeet was still inside the room and couldn't figure how the door, going the other direction, had put him there.

Shooting from the hall had ended, and Stan, grimly fearing that The Shadow had lost out, saw no other course than to flee along with Skeet. After all, it had been his original intention, and at present, Stan felt fully branded with crime. His only path to redemption was to go through with the thing, and settle scores later. Stan felt that he owed it to The Shadow.

From the roof, which he reached with Skeet, it was an easy drop to an alley below. Stan followed his scrawny guide to a waiting car, an old sedan that had brought the thugs.

They found a groggy thug already there. Skeet addressed the fellow as Terry, and shoved him into the rear seat. Skeet took the wheel, with Stan beside him.

"We didn't get The Shadow," croaked Terry glumly, from the rear seat. "He got us, that's what. Bowled me and Juke right down the stairs, and Juke lay where he landed. If The Shadow hadn't gone up again after you guys, he'd have got me, too. I thought Juke was playing possum, so I did the same. Only Juke wasn't faking. He's croaked!"

Skeet received the news with alarm. He threw a glance into the mirror that fronted the driver's seat, and sped ahead as he noticed a trailing cab. Skeet shook off the cab, apparently, but the way he went through traffic lights brought other pursuers.

Police cars were whining from the rear, when Skeet took to a dead-end street near the East River and nosed the sedan into an old garage which was deserted except for a few cars. Hopping out, Skeet rammed the door

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of the garage shut.

"That will fool them," he told Stan. "While I call Frack, to tell him that you rate one hundred percent. You can get that coupe in the corner started. We'll go out the other way and start for Long Island."

Stan took the wheel of the coupe, with Terry beside him, while Skeet was making the phone call. Then Skeet arrived and cautiously opened the rear door of the garage, which gave access to another street.

Doing a lot of thinking, meanwhile, Stan was more than ever decided to go through with the Long Island proposition. He felt that The Shadow's friendship was a thing he might regain at the right time and place. It was welcome news, the fact that The Shadow was still alive.

When Skeet hopped in the right side of the coupe, Stan followed instructions and drove for an East River bridge. They passed police cars on the way, but they paid no attention to the coupe.

Across the bridge, Stan picked a boulevard and made toward Longwood, occasionally noting that cabs were in sight behind him. But he didn't connect any of them with the cab that Skeet had suspected earlier.

They were well away from traffic, when Stan saw a uniformed policeman blocking the road ahead. The cop was waving his arms, and there was a patrol car standing by. Stan gave an anxious look toward Skeet, whose fist promptly showed a revolver. Terry, too, was pulling a gun from his pocket.

"Slow up," ordered Skeet. "Terry and I will give it. Step on the gas as soon as we let blast."

TENSELY, Stan obeyed the first instructions, swerving the coupe slightly to the left; but before either crook could thrust a gun from the window, Stan followed the later orders. His jab of the accelerator fairly lifted the coupe on its way. The shots that Skeet and Terry fired were hopelessly wide and belated.

In the mirror, Stan saw the cop jump back to the patrol car, which immediately got under way.

"You dope!" snarled Skeet angrily. "We'd have croaked that bull, if you'd given us the chance!"

"So what?" retorted Stan. "There were others in the car. We'd have them after us, anyway. I saw my way to a better start, that's all."

Skeet glared suspiciously across Terry, then decided that the question could be settled later. Stan was giving the coupe its best speed, which was all Skeet could expect for the present. Leaning from the window, Skeet jabbed a few shots back at the patrol car, which answered in kind. Terry had what seemed a better idea. He rolled down the rear window and opened fire through the back.

"Keep it going, Terry," approved Skeet. "I'll take care of the loading."

Stan was giving the coupe all it had, with the special purpose of keeping the car so far ahead that Terry's shots could not take effect on the pursuing police. He saw a sign marking Longwood as a mile ahead, and took a road that curved toward Long Island Sound.

By then, the police car had gained despite him, and was within revolver range. But police guns packed a wallop that Terry's weapon didn't have.

There was a ping, as something smacked the windshield and turned the center of it to a webbed mass of streaks. Another bullet, and Terry was slumping silently between Stan and Skeet. Almost savagely, Skeet

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eyed the face that had hit the cushion. Terry was dead.

"Hit for the shore," snarled Skeet. "We'll hop out of this buggy and grab a boat somewhere."

The road was converging with another. Jamming the brakes, Stan made a hairpin turn and zigzagged for a rough gravel drive that led down to an old pier.

He didn't realize what the delay might mean, until he saw Skeet poke from the window on the right and aim squarely at the police car, which had gone off the road in trying to make the first turn. Stan's grab at Skeet's arm was just in time to send the crook's shots high.

Stan's game was through, so far as Skeet was concerned, and the crook's snarl told it. But Skeet was through, too, his savage outburst ending in a gasp, as he swung about hoping to settle his companion.

Unheard in the volley of Skeet's wild shots, another gun had spoken, from back by the turn. Its bullet had clipped Skeet at the window of the coupe.

As sequel to the timely shot, Stan was sure that he heard a laugh much like The Shadow's, proof that the cloaked fighter had been on the trail all along. But the mirth, if real, was drowned by the roar of new guns that splattered the coupe and flayed Skeet's form, while Stan, ducking, sped the car down the gravel road to the Sound.

These were shots from the police, who had jumped from their stranded car, and it wouldn't do to halt and explain things to them. The police, quite as much as The Shadow, would have every reason to list Stan with the mob.

So Stan calculated, as he took the blind road, wondering what it would bring. He saw, within the next two hundred yards.

AHEAD, the gravel roadway ran directly onto the short, rickety pier, an abandoned stretch of weather-beaten planking. With dead companions bouncing against him, Stan did his best to brake the car; but the space was too short

The pier crackled as the front wheels bore upon it, and with that token of coming disaster, Stan yanked at the door handle on his side of the car. As the coupe careened, he plunged outward.

The dive landed Stan on the pier, for the car was swerving to the right. From where he sprawled, Stan saw the death car take a topple from the outer corner of the pier. Its two occupants were already dead, as Stan knew; but had either been alive, the chance for survival would have been nil.

For in the coupe's final careen to the right, the door on the driver's side yanked shut, sealing the dead men in their bullet-riddled tomb.

There were bushes near the pier. Dizzily, Stan reached them. His clothes were torn, his body battered, but he kept stumbling ahead through darkness. Everything faded out behind him, but he still kept on.

Downgrade, he struck a little cove and waded through its water, which revived him somewhat; then, ashore again, he continued through woods and thickets, until he sank from sheer exhaustion.

The pier seemed very far behind him, and it was far, for by the time Stan's staggering flight was ended, much had happened at the water's edge. The police had sent for a wrecking truck, and a derrick was pulling the

coupe up from the shallow water off the pier end. As soon as the car was reclaimed, officers yanked open its doors.

Inside, they found the bodies of Skeet and Terry, both bearing signs of gun wounds. The police took it for granted that they were the car's only occupants. Though they hadn't seen the car plunge from the pier, some of the officers had heard its engine's roar end with a splash, and the closed doors indicated that no one could have escaped.

The wrecker pulled away, dragging the death car behind it. The police car followed, and again a peaceful quiet reigned along the Sound. Then, as if from nowhere, a probing light appeared. It was a tiny flashlight, maneuvered by a gloved hand.

Near the inner end of the pier, The Shadow detected broken bushes. Following between them, he found footprints trodden in the earth. Following such leads, The Shadow reached the cove where Stan had waded

By then, The Shadow had found out two things: first, that Stan's course had been staggering; second, that the distance which the fugitive had traveled was proof enough that he still had recuperative strength.

The Shadow followed the trail no longer. Returning to the upper road, he stepped into the waiting cab that was parked deep beneath the shelter of trees. A low laugh stirred the darkness, its sound mingling with the purr of the starting motor.

The police could count this case closed if they chose, but the part that Stanley Wilford had played was one that would still be remembered—by The Shadow!

CHAPTER V. NEW REFUGE.

WITH morning, Stan Wilford crawled from beneath a clump of bushes and surveyed the Long Island countryside. The sun was high, indicating that it must be as late as ten o'clock, which did not surprise Stan at all. He could recall a very uncomfortable night on the hard ground; so uncomfortable, that he hadn't really managed to sleep until dawn.

At present, Stan was very stiff and bruised; his appearance, too, was quite bedraggled. Groping back through vague dreams from the night, he recalled the events that had started it all, and his worryment became real.

True he had survived the running fight in which Skeet and Terry had perished, but that did not prove that he was in the clear. He could hope that the law had forgotten him, but certainly Roger Frack hadn't. Stan felt himself in the very middle of something he didn't like.

Even such middle ground could be uncertain, when Stan's reflections turned to The Shadow. Whoever The Shadow was, he seemed to have a faculty for moving in where least expected. In real alarm, Stan glanced about the landscape, almost expecting The Shadow to step from behind a tree and give that mocking laugh of his in broad daylight.

Then, finally deciding that he had temporarily eluded The Shadow, too, Stan looked for a path that would lead him somewhere else.

He found a path. It led to a dirt road, where Stan saw the marks of tire tracks. This wasn't the road that he had taken the night before. In fact, Stan was quite sure that it must be a mile or more from the pier where he had launched the coupe. Seating himself on a rock beside the road, Stan began to reason things out.

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First, he gradually assured himself that the law had overlooked him. The conclusion became quite sound. To begin with, Stan hadn't used his own name at the apartment where he stayed.

It was an apartment with a regular lease, used by Roger Frack to quarter newcomers who worked for the confidence ring. Stan was quite sure that only Frack, or someone higher up, would be able to release the name of the last occupant.

Memories of the diving car, with its shutting door, gave Stan a true clue to the police decision in the case. He was sure that the police regarded Skeet and Terry as the only occupants; otherwise, they would have beaten through these woods until they found another fugitive.

Since the police hadn't made a search, Stan felt that he could dismiss them from his mind; and after further contemplation, he decided to forget The Shadow, too, for the present.

Stan was right back where he had started. He was ready to go through with the plan that Frack had proposed, until he could see all consequences that his policy might produce. It wasn't wise to dally too long, however, because of Frack.

He remembered that Skeet had called Frack from the old garage, to certify that Stan was really working with the racket; but there were various ways in which Frack might interpret the subsequent events.

The sunken car, with Skeet and Terry as its only tenants, was a damaging matter, unless Stan could explain how it had happened. He was sure that he could sell the story to Frack, omitting, of course, the detail of how he had grabbed Skeet's gun hand at a vital moment.

But it was imperative to contact Frack without delay. How to do it puzzled Stan for a short while; then enlightenment struck him.

He would find the Prendle house and talk to some of the servants. He could claim that he had cracked up a speedboat on the shore—a story to which his bedraggled appearance would testify. It might already be that Frack had posted a man at Prendle's; if so, all the better. If not, Stan could certainly get permission to make a telephone call, and thereby reach Frack.

Therewith, he could tell Frack that he was actually at the Prendle mansion, the place where Frack wanted him to be.

The immediate problem was to find the mansion.

STAN took to the dirt road and limped along, hoping that it would come out somewhere. He hoped, too, that he would meet someone and inquire the way to Prendle's. He hadn't long to wait, for, as he turned a bend in the road, he came upon a sporty yellow roadster parked beside the road.

There was a girl with the car, but she wasn't in it. She was standing beside the roadster, gazing impatiently along the road as though expecting someone.

The car was handsome, but the girl was gorgeous. Indeed, she was dazzling, literally so. She was standing against the sun and the dazzle came from its rays, which turned her light-brown hair into a burnished copper. The face framed against that background was worthy of its setting; not only were the features of excellent mold, they had expression as well as beauty.

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From a distance, her dark eyes seemed firm in gaze, but as Stan approached, he saw that they carried a mild query, while the girl's lips, half opened, looked ready to give this stranger a friendly greeting.

Of medium height, the girl was shapely, a fact which could not be doubted, considering her attire. She was wearing a riding habit, its trimness a sure index to her own. Stan didn't ordinarily fancy riding habits, for he regarded them as too masculine to go with feminine charm; but this instance was causing him to reverse all previous opinions. The brown-haired girl with the deep-hued eyes would be herself in any costume; of that, Stan was certain.

Then, realizing that it wasn't polite to stare, Stan spoke, quite pleasantly, but with a note of weariness which was genuine.

"I'm a stranger," said Stan, "and I've lost my way. Perhaps you can help me."

The girl's gaze was a further credit to her. She wasn't the sort to judge persons by mere appearance, or lack of it. She was taking stock of Stan's bedraggled attire and unshaven face, discounting them completely in favor of his frank eyes and sincere smile. Graciously, she gestured toward the car.

"I can do more than that," she declared, in a tone as clear and lovely as Stan expected. "Tell me where you would like to go, and I can take you there. I am expecting someone here"—she paused, to smile—"but since he has kept me waiting, I can let him wait, in turn."

Stan stepped to the car; then paused, hesitant. As a complete stranger in the vicinity, he really wouldn't know where he wanted to go. The thought struck him that he could modify the statement, by claiming a destination without knowing how to reach it. But there, he was meeting with another snag.

He couldn't mention the Prendles, because he had never met them. If the girl knew the Prendle family, as was probable, it would be a bad beginning for Stan to ask her to leave him at the servants quarters.

As for the Beach Club, Stan didn't care to make his entrance at the place in his present disreputable garb. As a result, he found himself stammering excuses, which, for the first time, caused the girl to view him with doubt.

"If you'll give me a lift—" he began. "Well, say anywhere... that is, wherever you prefer... or if you'd just direct me, I'd appreciate it. You see, I'm a stranger—"

"You said that before," the girl interrupted. "Perhaps we should postpone the trip until you become more specific—or coherent."

There was no anger in her tone; not even doubt of her previous impression regarding Stan. The girl was simply showing the firmness that really lay behind her friendly manner.

To emphasize it, she reached for the door which Stan had half opened and started to draw it shut. Tightening his grip on the door, Stan decided to give her the boat story.

"You see, I just cracked up," he said. "Not in a car"—Stan was hasty to insert that point—"but in a speedboat down in the cove—"

The girl's eyes were already shifting to Stan's clothes, noting that though torn and bedraggled, they were dry. She was drawing the door more firmly, her hand clenched tightly upon it, and Stan, in his turn, was holding back, determined to complete his tale.

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"—quite a while ago," he was adding. "Just about dawn. I started over from Connecticut along about midnight. Foggy on the Sound, you know. It crept in on me, and, without a compass, I was lost. Thought this was the Connecticut shore—"

"At dawn, with the sun rising?"

"It was just before dawn," put in Stan, glibly. Then, seeing that the girl didn't believe him, he added:

"Of course, the drinks had something to do with it. I took too many of them. Nothing else to do, and with a bottle on the boat—"

"I'm sorry," interposed the girl, "but I can't believe you. I think you had better go your own way."

SHE reached to press Stan away, and he raised his hand in protest. The girl didn't misunderstand; in a way, she seemed sorry to find that this frank-looking stranger had proven himself so unreliable.

The person who did misunderstand was a vapid young man who arrived that moment, to overlook the situation. He had an excellent vantage point, for he was mounted on a horse.

"Get away, you bounder!" he began harshly. "Why are you disturbing this young lady? Who are you, anyway? What right have you to be here?"

Stan stepped back, annoyed by the fellow's poppycock attitude. He was quite prepared to answer; ready, this time, to cut down his story to the simple statement that he had lost his way and that how he had come here was his own business. But before Stan could speak, the girl had intervened.

"It's all right, Reggie—"

There was almost a plea in her tone, an insistence that the disheveled stranger had in no way sought to harm her. But Reggie, probably considering himself a knight without armor, was intent upon dealing with the interloper as he thought suitable.

"So you won't speak up?" he sneered. "Very well, you can have the consequences!"

He wheeled his horse toward Stan, at the same time yanking his riding whip into action. He had the whip reversed, and swung at Stan with the crop. It was a hard blow, that wouldn't have been healthy for Stan's skull, had it landed.

But it didn't get that far. Stan warded Reggie's arm with his own; in the same motion, he caught the fellow's wrist. Then, swinging his other hand into play, he took a double hold and hauled Reggie from the saddle in a long, hard, somersault.

With Reggie sprawled, Stan picked up the whip and handed it to the girl. For the first time, Stan's tone had sarcasm, as he told the brunette:

"Better take the boy friend where he wants to go, and tell him he's lucky that it isn't the hospital."

Turning, Stan was about to walk away, when he heard a clatter from beside the car. He swung to meet Reggie. The horseless hero was coming in fists first, his foremost hand carrying a fair-sized stone, for weight.

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Stan ducked the clumsy blow and let it slide across his shoulder. With the same motion, he roundhoused his own fist against Reggie's jaw. As Reggie flattened, Stan turned to wave a farewell to the girl.

Something lashed his face from chin to ear. It was the riding whip, handled by the girl, whose face was flushed with real anger. The sting was sharp, and Stan could almost feel the welt grow on his cheek. He stood stock-still, and the girl did the same. Their eyes met as they had not done before, mingling all the emotions that only two impulsive natures could produce.

Then Reggie, rising groggily, let out a howl, and Stan heard the thuds of horses' hoofs. Two grooms were riding up, bringing an extra horse in tow, and both were huskies who might welcome a fight.

Not that Stan wasn't willing to take them on; he would have, ordinarily. But the present time was certainly not right for a brawl that might require explanation in a police station.

Suddenly remembering why he was at Longwood, and how he had actually arrived there, Stan made a dive for the nearest bushes.

He heard the grooms come after him, with Reggie spurring them on with shouts. Crashing through thickets in broad daylight wasn't the easiest way to shake followers from the trail.

Stan could hear shouting from other directions and knew that more people had been summoned to the chase. He saw a clear expanse of lawn, with men who looked like gardeners dashing in his direction. Reversing his course, Stan took to the woods again.

THE scrambles of followers dwindled, as Stan reached another space, to find it deserted. He saw a large gray house; beyond it, a high hedge. Fully exhausted because of his exertions the night before, he decided to cross the lawn and work through the hedge. He wasn't more than halfway to the hedge, when new pursuers tracked him.

These weren't men; they were dogs, huge mastiffs that issued thunderous barks. On the run, Stan brought up against the hedge, but found it too thick to push through. Before he could travel along to a spot that looked passable, the bounding dogs were upon him.

Knowing the ways of mastiffs, Stan halted abruptly, hoping that the huge beasts wouldn't go for his throat if he offered no resistance.

Great paws struck Stan's shoulders, but fangs stopped short of his neck. Stan's quick thought had saved him momentarily, and his dilemma was ended when a sharp call came from near the house. Hearing it, the dogs dropped away from their human prey, and an elderly but agile man came trotting into sight.

His face was withered, crablike, the sort that Stan would not have liked under less pressing circumstances. At present, however, he welcomed the crabby man like a long-lost friend. Stan didn't express thoughts verbally; he couldn't, for he was out of breath, but he did deliver a thankful gesture.

The withered man gave Stan a long look, then said in harsh, officious tone:

"Come with me."

They walked to the big gray house, the huge dogs following patiently. At the door, the elderly man motioned for Stan to enter; then ordered the dogs away. Following through the door, Stan's rescuer closed it.

Shouts from the woods had faded. Grimly, Stan hoped that this new refuge would bring him real shelter from all pursuers, whether man or beast.

CHAPTER VI. STAN GETS ACQUAINTED.

OLD Withered-face conducted Stan through a heavily furnished hall, to a little door that led to a flight of stairs. At the top, they entered a room which was quite obviously soundproof, for its walls were very thick. It was furnished with many curios, from tapestries to statuettes, and made a very picturesque den.

In the corner, however, Stan noted a desk, and an old safe behind it, which meant that the room had office purposes, also.

The old man brought a bottle of brandy from an ornamental cabinet and offered Stan a drink, which Stan accepted. The warmth of the brandy was welcome; with it, Stan felt a new interest in his surroundings, particularly the old man.

He noted that the withered fellow was studying him with sharp, beady eyes, and the reason suddenly struck home. The old man thought that his dogs had produced the rips in Stan's clothes, and was therefore trying to square the situation.

"My name is Victor Thorndon," the old man announced abruptly. "I am sorry because of what happened. It is too bad that you did not notice the signs that I posted, warning trespassers to keep off this property."

The hint was obvious. Thorndon wanted no lawsuits. He was smart enough, however, to promptly take cognizance of his visitor's plight:

"Of course," Thorndon added, "accidental trespassing can be excused. Let us say that you are now my guest, and as your host, I feel quite responsible for the damage caused. May I ask if you live near here?"

"No, I am something of a stranger," Stan returned. "I came to call on the Prendles, and was asking my way, when—"

He paused. His mention of the Prendles had produced a peculiar effect upon old Thorndon. Never had Stan seen a man's expression grow so canny, as Thorndon's did. Still, he decided to stick with his new story.

"I've met them only casually," Stan continued. "But I understand that Mr. Prendle is interested in oil, which used to be my business. I don't know Jack very well, but I've talked with Helene quite often. In fact, it was she who really invited me—"

Stan broke off as someone knocked at the door. The raps were heavy, but barely heard through the thick barrier. Thorndon noticed them and went to the door. Stan heard him conduct a conversation with a servant. Knowing that it might concern a prowler who had fled into the woods, Stan congratulated himself on having claimed an acquaintance with the Prendles.

"In fact," Stan continued, as Thorndon returned, "I thought this must be the Prendle house. You see, Helene invited me—"

"Yes, yes," interposed Thorndon. "Helene Prendle knows you quite well, you said."

"Yes, quite well."

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"Very odd, very odd." Thorndon turned his beady gaze upon his visitor. "Yes, very odd that she should not have recognized you when you accosted her on the road, not long ago."

STAN'S gaze went blank. It had never occurred to him that the gorgeous girl by the roadster could have been Helene Prendle. He had pictured her as the snobbish daughter of a testy old millionaire, not as the real Helene that he had so unexpectedly met. Out of his whirl, Stan heard Thorndon's voice again.

"My servants have just told me of that episode," Thorndon declared. "The men searching for you did not care to meddle hereabouts, because of my dogs. So we can call ourselves even on that score." Thorndon gave a chuckle. "And your promise to forget my dogs will receive my agreement to forget that you came here."

Weakly, Stan nodded. Thorndon poured another round of brandy, offering it with one hand, while he laid the other on Stan's shoulder. Refusing the drink with a headshake, Stan looked at Thorndon inquiringly.

"I take it, young man," said Thorndon, "that you are something of a fortune hunter. No offense, at all. I was the same in my younger days. May I ask your name?"

"Stanley Wilford."

Trying to make it positive that he had given his real name, Stan faced Thorndon squarely. More than ever, he felt the gimlet bore of the old man's eyes. Then, with a dry laugh, Thorndon swallowed the brandy himself, in the fashion of a toast.

"Good luck to you, Wilford," he announced. "It pays to be truthful on occasion."

Did the words mean that Thorndon already knew Stan's name, or that he had judged all by his visitor's gaze? The thing was making a sudden difference in Stan's own opinion, as he waited to hear what came next.

"You would like to meet the Prendles," declared Thorndon. "That much is plain. Very well, I shall arrange it, for I would like to have you meet them. Sometimes—he chuckled significantly—"it is well to choose other people's friends for them."

Stan began to understand that Thorndon did not like the Prendles; that in furthering Stan's path to such a meeting, he was figuring on giving the Prendle family considerable trouble. Meanwhile, another theory was growing larger in Stan's mind.

"I can introduce you at the Beach Club," continued Thorndon. "You will like it there, and you will meet the whole Prendle family, once you are living at the club. First, you must make yourself presentable. You have other clothes available?"

Again, the sharp eyes expected an affirmative answer. Stan gave it in the form of a nod, and produced the baggage checks, which he handed to Thorndon.

"I was going West," Stan said. "Yes, fortune hunting. Last night, I decided to remain and try the Prendles. My luggage is at Grand Central."

"I shall send for it at once."

Taking the baggage checks, Thorndon left. Alone, Stan decided that it wouldn't be necessary to call Frack, after all. He was now quite sure that Thorndon would do it for him. For the conclusion that Stan had reached, after Thorndon's cross-examination, summed up itself in a fashion that Stan regarded quite definite.

Mansion Of Crime

Victor Thorndon was the headman of the confidence ring!

WHEN Thorndon returned, his conversation convinced Stan further. The old man had one theme: he discussed the Prendle family, giving Stan many pointers that could prove valuable.

They lunched together, Thorndon and Stan, and afterward Thorndon introduced his guest to a library, which, he casually remarked, could swallow all of Theodore Prendle's much-prized books without showing visible signs of the increase.

Stan's luggage arrived at midafternoon. Thorndon wanted to look over the wardrobe, and after approving it, suggested a few additions. Thorndon insisted on ordering the new clothes from his own tailor, and taking care of the bill. He also thrust a few hundred dollars upon Stan, remarking that it was merely a loan, which his young friend could increase, if required.

During their chat, Stan had learned the names of persons well acquainted with the Prendles; hence when Stan arrived at the Beach Club, shortly before dinner, he was on the lookout for such people.

It required no introduction to stop at the club, which operated partly on a hotel basis, but Thorndon had evidently greased the way for Stan to form acquaintances. The club steward introduced Stan to various members, among them some of those mentioned by Thorndon.

At dinner, on the veranda which overlooked the Sound, Stan found himself with several of his new acquaintances, and others, who had just arrived.

Around the latter was a brisk, lean-faced man who was introduced as Albert Carthwright. The newcomer proved quite affable, which pleased Stan immensely, for Carthwright was marked on his list, not only as a friend of the Prendle family, but one who rated particularly well with Old Theodore Prendle himself.

The longer Stan chatted with Carthwright, the better he liked the man, and his only regret was the fact that he felt he was using Carthwright for an ulterior purpose.

Nevertheless, Stan quelled that thought with the hope that he could rectify such matters later. He was still chatting with Carthwright, when a stir came through the group. They looked up to see a scowling young man stride into the club, and out again. The fellow's dark glance was increased by a black eye which he couldn't cover.

Young Reggie Exeter," remarked Carthwright to Stan. "He had a brawl with some chap on the road, they say. Reggie always is too overbearing. Whatever came to him, he deserved. There was some discussion regarding Reggie's black eye. No one seemed to believe a claim that Reggie had made earlier: namely, that the black eye had come when he struck his face against a stone. Stan believed it, because he remembered that his punch had reached Reggie's jaw. But he was equally certain that the stone in question was the one that Reggie had introduced into the scuffle.

If Reggie noticed Stan, he didn't recognize him; but it happened that there were other matters on Reggie's mind, as Stan learned from Carthwright. Theodore Prendle had refused Reggie the privilege of coming to the house, hence Reggie had met Prendle's daughter, Helene, outside the grounds, to go riding that morning. But Reggie's brawl had ended the romance.

"Helene now agrees with her father," chuckled Carthwright, "and I'm not sorry. She's a lovely girl, Helene; too lovely to be wasted on a scatterbrain like Reggie Exeter."

Mansion Of Crime

"I should like to meet her," remarked Stan. He looked at Carthwright steadily. "Could you arrange it?"

Carthwright smiled. He liked Stan's frankness.

"I could," he said, "but it might be better done by one of the family. Jack Prendle, for instance. Here he is—I'll introduce you."

They arose to meet a rather dapper young man who had approached the table. When affable, Jack Prendle lacked the saturnine expression that characterized his scheming moods. He shook hands with Stan, and Carthwright left them, but not without some parting words to Jack.

"Wilford has just arrived from the West," said Carthwright. "He says he may be here a while, so we're getting him acquainted. He might fit into one of those parties that Helene gives at home."

"Good enough," returned Jack. Then, as Carthwright strolled across the lobby: "How about tonight, Wilford? Helene just reminded me that her bridge party will be one player short."

Stan held back a smile, as he soberly accepted the invitation. He was quite sure that the absentee would be Reggie Exeter. Evidently, Helene had counted on her father accepting Reggie as a caller again, until she had swung to the same side.

"I'll have to run into town," remarked Jack, glancing at his watch. "I'll call the house first and tell Helene you're coming. Carthwright will take you up there. It's not out of his way, and he may be stopping off to see dad, anyway."

Crossing the lobby, Jack met Carthwright coming back, and when Carthwright reached Stan, his broad smile told that he had heard the news. Carthwright gestured Stan out to the veranda.

"We'll finish a smoke," said Carthwright, "and then start up. Jack said he'd call the house and tell his sister to expect you."

Stan finished his smoke ahead of Carthwright, who by that time was chatting with others on the veranda. It struck Stan as the proper time to make a phone call of his own. Knowing the direction of the booths, he went there, only to stop short as he heard the voice of Jack Prendle.

Evidently, Jack had finished the call to Helene, and was making another. Not wanting to eavesdrop, Stan stepped out to the lobby and waited until Jack had gone. Then, entering the vacated booth, Stan called Roger Frack, to inform him of the progress made at Longwood.

From Frack's tone, which Stan noted closely, it was plain that the con man knew much about his progress. Frack spoke in short answers, which probably meant that he had a caller, but those answers were a give-away. If Frack hadn't learned the most important details, he would have asked Stan to call him later.

Jack was gone when Stan returned to the lobby, but Carthwright was ready to drive up to the Prendle homestead. Arriving there, Stan felt a thrill at an anticipated meeting, which promptly came. The meeting was his official introduction to Helene Prendle.

By evening, the girl was even lovelier. Her low-cut evening gown revealed a pair of exquisite shoulders that the riding garb had hidden. But Stan was particularly interested in the girl's eyes, as they met his own.

Mansion Of Crime

Helene recognized him, though she tried not to show it during their formal introduction. One thing did not escape Stan. It was the wince that Helene gave when she saw the faint trace of a welt that flanked Stan's cheek.

The others were moving into the card room, when Stan felt a soft hand clutch his arm. It was Helene's, and the girl was drawing him to a curtained space in the hallway. Her words were as soft as her touch.

"I'm sorry," she said sincerely. "Really sorry. But it wasn't what you did to Reggie that made me swing the whip. Reggie deserved all you gave him, and more!"

The blaze of recollective anger that came to Helene's eyes was directed toward Reggie, not Stan. The girl's next words were more apologetic than before.

"It was the way you looked at me," she said, "as though I, too, deserved something. I couldn't quite stand it; I'm too impetuous. But you were right—I deserved your contempt, and still do."

Abjectly, Helene lowered her gaze. Knowing the girl's spirit, Stan recognized the fullness of her apology. Rather than reply, Stan did the better thing. Gently, he took Helene's arm and turned her toward the other room. He was smiling when she raised her face, and in that smile the girl saw that the former episode was forgotten.

What she did not see was the bitterness that Stan repressed, not toward her but toward himself. He had gained the perfect introduction to Helene Prendle, one that would please such people as Roger Frack and—more important in Stan's mind—old Victor Thorndon.

The trouble was, Stan didn't care how he would rate with them. He was wondering, to his inward discomfort, how he would some day shape in the opinion of a person known as The Shadow.

CHAPTER VII. THE OTHER ANGLE.

STAN WILFORD had guessed wrong: Roger Frack did not have a visitor. It happened, though, that Frack was waiting for an important phone call. It explained why he had treated Stan's call in such short-clipped style.

Pacing his lavish apartment, Frack gave a bound when the telephone bell finally rang. As he spoke, he heard a woman's voice come over the wire, and a relieved smile covered Frack's face.

"Of course, Marcia," he said. "Yes, I can meet you there. No, I won't be long... Yes, very important—"

Hurrying from the apartment, Frack called the first cab he saw and rode to a night club called the Cafe Picaroon. The place was lined with booths, and in one of them Frack found the girl who had called him. By then, he had dismissed all thoughts of the cab which had brought him to the night club. The cabby, however, had not forgotten Frack.

The cabby was Moe Shrevnitz, The Shadow's agent. At a telephone half a block away, Moe was relaying word to his chief, telling where Frack had gone. The Shadow could not have been far distant, for within five minutes he arrived at the Cafe Picaroon, suitably arrayed in evening clothes.

As usual, when he visited such spots, The Shadow was guised as Lamont Cranston, wealthy man-about-town.

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Recognized by the head waiter, Cranston was offered the choice of any place he wanted, except the orchestra platform. With calm eyes that gazed deliberately from a mask-like face, he picked the booth next to the one occupied by Frack and the girl.

In passing, he glimpsed the girl's face. She was attractive, smart, and at moments, alluring, for she had black eyes that matched her raven hair.

The Shadow knew who she was, for she favored night clubs and rated well in Cafe society. Her name was Marcia Kennerd, and she came from somewhere in the Midwest. Just where, The Shadow had never bothered to find out, for black-eyed Marcia, though possessed of an interesting personality, had seemed far removed from byways of crime.

Even her acquaintance with Frack, which The Shadow had discovered for the first time, did not label her as crooked. If Marcia had money, as everyone supposed she did, it might mean that she was to become a dupe of the confidence ring, rather than a member.

The booths of the Cafe Picaroon were made of very strong plywood, which took a fine mahogany stain. They were thinner, however, than they looked, and conversation penetrated them almost as well as it did the walls of a telephone booth.

His ear tilted against the partition, The Shadow could catch all that was said without recourse to a tiny sensitive earphone that he had brought along, should it be needed.

"You're just the girl we need, Marcia," Frack was saying. "You've known Jack Prendle for a long while, but you have gotten nowhere."

"I never get anywhere," returned Marcia, in a steady contralto, "until I'm ready. That isn't very often. I find that a long-range trim is best. Men believe you, when you say that you've wasted the best years of your life on them."

"Years is good!" Frack declared. "You've only known Prendle a year. "You'll have to wait one more, at least."

"It may be worth it. They say the old man is worth barrels, and Jackie is the apple of his eye."

"The pineapple, you mean," retorted Frack. "Listen, Marcia; Jack Prendle has been on our list for a couple of years. We know more than you do about him."

"Odd that you've done nothing about it. I thought the quick clip was the standard system in your racket."

Frack did not reply for a few moments. The Shadow was getting ready to adjust the tiny earphone, when the con man's voice arrived again.

"We had him first," reminded Frack. "How we choose to handle him, and when, is our business. But it isn't healthy to muscle in on our game. The boss is giving you a break, in asking you to work with us."

"Fair enough." Marcia paused to light a cigarette. Then, in a blunt tone, she added: "Provided I know who the big-shot is. I don't work in the dark."

"You won't have to know," assured Frack. "Once you're in on this deal, you'll stay. The boss wants you to marry Jack Prendle."

Mansion Of Crime

IT was Marcia's turn for silence. Frack's suggestion completely surprised her. She couldn't seem to guess what lay behind the scheme, until Frack obligingly supplied the details.

"Jack Prendle comes in for big dough," said the con man, "a hundred grand, to start, provided the old man thinks he's gotten down to business. It turns out that old Prendle figures Jack will never do it without an anchor."

"Who told you all this?" queried Marcia. "Jackie?"

"What made you think that?" Frack demanded.

"It's the way Jackie would talk," replied Marcia indifferently. "I was just joking, so forget it. What makes you think I'd fill the bill?"

"The wife would need brains," explained Frack, "otherwise, it would be no go with old Prendle. You've got brains, and plenty. What's more, you know how to show them."

"But I'm not listed in the social register—"

"All the better. Old Prendle tore that book up today, when he handed the permanent bounce to a blue blood named Reggie Exeter, who wanted a daughter's hand and received a father's foot!"

Marcia's pose of indifference showed that she was really interested. She finally made her mood apparent.

"A swell trim," she mused. "The son playing the old man for a sap, and the daughter-in-law taking the cash from the son—"

"Not quite," put in Frack. "It would be you playing Prendle, right through Jack. If Jack started pressing for more dough, Prendle would snap like a clam."

"I get it. The idea, that is. But how much of the take do I get?"

"Twenty percent. A good-enough cut. All you've got to do, Marcia, is beam those soulful lamps of yours on Jack. You can bag him within a week!"

Marcia's laugh had a well-tempered modulation. It carried a world of assurance, at first, then ended in a harshness. The Shadow heard her question:

"Have you forgotten Monte?"

The name struck home to The Shadow, just as Frack's had when mentioned by Skeet, the night before. Monte was obviously a con man in some way associated with Marcia, and among such swindlers, the name was uncommon. It smacked too much of the confidence racket to be used, except by a cocksure expert, or by someone who had it as a given name.

The Shadow knew of one who belonged in the latter class: namely, Monte Garlan, who had been curiously inactive during the past few years. Evidently, Monte had introduced Marcia as a con queen, and therewith retired on his laurels, letting her handle the more artistic trims.

"Monte is over at the Hotel Brookwood," remarked Frack. "I've told the big-shot. He said to take care of him."

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Again, Marcia supplied a jangly laugh, as she said, "You don't know Monte very well, do you?"

"I've met him a few times," returned Frack. "I know him well enough to take care of him the right way."

"Just what do you consider the right way?"

Frack waited before giving his reply. When he expressed it, he did so very coldly, in a single word:

"Permanently!"

That word meant murder, but Marcia accepted it with her former laugh, a rather lovely one. Nothing, it seemed, could have delighted her so much as this promise on Frack's part. It was the only thing needed to win her over.

"I'll start selling Jackie on wedding bells," she promised, "but if you're only giving me a week, you'd better go after Monte sooner."

"It's curtains for Monte tonight," assured Frack. "The big-shot said to swing it as soon as you signed up. Tune in on the midnight news broadcast, and look for photos in tomorrow's newspaper."

"Jackie has a radio in his car," laughed Marcia, as she rose from the booth. "I'm meeting him for dinner shortly, and I'll see that we're driving around at midnight."

FRACK and Marcia parted as they neared the door. The black-haired girl reclaimed a gorgeous leopard fur at the cloakroom, but The Shadow, strolling in Cranston's fashion, did not stop to speculate upon the appropriate features of the spotted coat.

Marcia wouldn't be using her claws this evening. The person to watch was Frack, who had taken on the assignment of Monte's murder. Seeing Frack head for a telephone, The Shadow assumed that the con man intended the deed by proxy.

Such proved to be the case. From an adjoining booth, The Shadow heard Frack's guarded orders to a crook named Napper, who was evidently of a caliber similar to the lamented Skeet.

Frack's instructions were very simple. Napper was to go to the Hotel Brookwood, make sure that Monte was out, then plant the proper sort of "pineapple." Evidently, Frack had mentioned the proper sort of bomb in an earlier call, for he added no further specifications.

The Shadow was gone when Frack came from the phone booth. The crook saw Cranston's back as the calm-faced customer strolled from the night club, but he took The Shadow for just another patron.

Frack wasn't thinking much about The Shadow; he was too sure that the cloaked fighter hadn't found the trail leading back from Skeet. Besides, Frack was too pleased over the deal that he had made with Marcia, to think of anything else.

As it stood, neither Frack nor Marcia had immediate cause to be worried about The Shadow. Both were off his calling list, for the present. With Frack still the go-between to a master mind higher up, The Shadow needed him around a while. As for Marcia, she had a week's work ahead of her, and could also wait.

The Shadow's own plans concerned a murderous crook called Napper, and a prospective victim, Monte Garlan, whose connection with the confidence racket warranted punishment, but not so stern a sort as death.

The scene of The Shadow's next endeavor was to be the Hotel Brookwood, Room 608, a number which Frack had obligingly mentioned to Napper. There, The Shadow intended to guard against surprises of the sort he had experienced at Stan's apartment, the night before.

Sometimes, surprises could come in reverse, but only when uncommon factors were at work. How uncommon were the factors in this case, The Shadow was to learn after he reached the Hotel Brookwood; not before!

CHAPTER VIII. EXIT THE SHADOW.

MONTE GARLAN was pacing the lobby of the Hotel Brookwood when The Shadow arrived there. The lobby was small, and Monte was recognizable halfway across it.

A sallow man, with a short but bristly mustache, Monte had a stoop that gave him the manner of a caged lion. Maybe he was worrying about the leopard situation; whatever the case, his expectant stalk past the telephones indicated that he awaited a call.

The Shadow, no longer Cranston, was fully cloaked in black. Peering from the gloom of a rear entrance, he was quite invisible. To his right, he saw a stairway which was poorly lighted. It offered access to the upper floors, so The Shadow took to the stairway without watching further.

Monte did not see him, nor did the hotel clerk, with whom the mustached man paused to chat. Few eyes could have discerned the cloaked shape that glided upward like filtering smoke.

Room 608 was close to an inside fire tower, the route by which Napper would probably come. It was highly improbable that Napper could have already arrived, unless the fellow had been casing the hotel with a pineapple on his hip, for The Shadow had made a short, quick trip from the Cafe Picaroon.

The first step, therefore, was to try Monte's door. It was locked, but The Shadow settled that question with an adjustable key. The locks in the Brookwood were quite old-fashioned.

Within the room, The Shadow locked the door and took his stand beside it. In so doing, he had chosen the simplest, but best of hiding places.

At the end of five minutes, another key was cautiously working in the lock. The door, when it opened, admitted a scrawny figure that reminded The Shadow of Skeet, except that the newcomer, Napper, was more huddled.

Closing the door, Napper felt for the light switch and pressed it. He was peering about the room as he did so, forgetting the area near the door itself. As a result, Napper saved himself a shock which was to come later. The Shadow happened to be standing right at the wary crook's elbow, with an automatic muzzle mere inches from Napper's ribs.

Napper, himself, was carrying a load of metal in the shape of a bomb that he clutched between his huddled arms. It had a magnetic effect, though Napper did not know it. As the thug started to sneak about the room, the bomb seemed to draw The Shadow's gun along with it. The Shadow, of course, came with the automatic.

Napper must have thought that he was seeing his own shadow whenever he glanced toward the floor, for he didn't learn the difference until he had found the place where he wanted to plant the pineapple.

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Napper's choice was a writing desk, near the corner, and as he stooped to slide the bomb beneath it, he turned and saw The Shadow looming above him. Sight of the black-cloaked invader fairly paralyzed the little crook, but he didn't drop his burden.

Instead, Napper arose at The Shadow's whispered command and kept his arms tight, afraid to make a further move. The Shadow motioned him out to the center of the floor.

NAPPER was well named. His eyes had a sleepy look, despite their cunning. He couldn't make up his mind what to say, so after a few feeble attempts, he gave it up. The Shadow, meanwhile, took a new stance, half behind Napper, who was faced toward the door.

"Just as you are, Napper." The Shadow's tone carried traces of a sinister laugh. "No picture could be better. We shall see how it impresses our friend Mr. Garlan!"

Hearing his own name, Napper managed a response.

"I don't know nothin'," he wheezed, in a peculiarly hoarse tone. Then, in the same voice: "Who's Garlan?"

"Monte Garlan," supplied The Shadow. "I thought that Roger Frack told you all about him."

"Never heard of Frack," hoarsed Napper. "Who's he?"

The Shadow's laugh toned close to Napper's ear. The bomb specialist didn't like it. He quivered until the mirth subsided, but all the while, he retained his grip on the explosive burden which represented his stock in trade.

It wouldn't be long before Monte returned to his room. When he arrived, he would see a tableau quite different from the one that Stan had viewed the night before. This wasn't a case wherein The Shadow would be accosting a man with a guilty conscience, whose first thought would be fear of the intruder in black. It was quite the reverse.

Crook or no crook, Monte would observe the signal service that The Shadow was performing for him. Sight of a bomb planted in one's room would be enough to win anyone's thanks toward the person who had trapped the would-be killer.

The Shadow preferred to leave the door unlocked and the lights turned on, to further Monte's first impression. Afterward, when Napper would be plucked of his bomb, Monte should be in a mood to talk.

There were footsteps outside the door; then an oily voice. It was Monte, calling good night to the elevator man, then telling him to wait. Monte had forgotten his key, apparently, but he finally found it. The key rattled in the lock, while the con man was calling back to the elevator operator that it was the right one. The Shadow heard the distant bang of the elevator door.

Then Monte, still busy with the key, was discovering that the door was unlocked. Apparently undaunted, he opened the door and stepped into the room. His sallow race went actually white, as he saw the scene arranged for him.

Trembling, Monte tried to back to the door; blundering against it, he sent it shut. Weakly, the con man sank to a chair.

Half a minute had passed before some semblance of his color returned. Then, shakily, Monte spoke.

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"Thanks, Shadow," he said. "It's no use to try to fool you. You've got me tagged, only"—he paused; his eyes went plaintive, like his tone—"only you can't have it in for me too strong, or you'd let me have—that!"

By "that," Monte meant the bomb, which Napper was gripping as firmly as ever. Monte nudged a thumb at the bomb, and Napper began to shift uneasily. The Shadow stiffened him with a gun nudge.

There's something you want to know, Shadow," affirmed Monte, somewhat wisely. "If you didn't, you wouldn't be giving me a break. I'll come clean, so shoot the questions. Mind if I light a cigarette? Some of the things you'll ask may need a few puffs while I think them over."

Apparently, The Shadow did not mind, so Monte reached into his pocket. Fumbling, he dropped a packet of matches to the floor, and stooped as though to reach for it. But Monte's hand didn't go after the dropping match pack.

Instead, it snapped from his pocket in upward fashion, as the beginning of a long dive that the crook made from his chair.

Monte's move was in the direction of the writing desk, which he wanted for shelter. But his hand wasn't going in the same direction. It held a stubby revolver which he was aiming at The Shadow, as he shouted:

"Duck, Napper! Get clear with the pineapple!"

THE split-second that Monte took for a side look at Napper was enough to defeat the thrust. The Shadow wasn't where Monte had seen him. Away from Napper, the cloaked fighter was coming in on Monte from the flank.

Instead of wasting time to reach his foe, The Shadow gave the writing desk a hoist. It took Monte off balance, sending him on a long sprawl across the room, the desk crashing with him.

More than quick work on The Shadow's part, the mode of attack had important design. Whatever Monte's previous importance to The Shadow's campaign, it was now tenfold greater, for the con man's surprise attack had revealed a new and important fact.

Instead of being a real victim, marked for death, Monte Garlan was a party to the bomb scheme arranged by Roger Frack at the order of someone higher up!

It showed the cunning of the master mind. A fake murder, craftily conceived. Monte's presence in the lobby, his stall with the elevator man, were but preludes to the climax.

Two witnesses—clerk and elevator operator—would swear that Monte had gone up to his room, which he actually had. But neither would know that he had gone there to meet the actual planter of the bomb that was due to blast soon after, and that both Monte and Napper were intending to steal out by the fire tower!

The Shadow knew. But he wanted more facts, that Monte alone could tell. Sprawled on the floor, half groggy and hunting for his gun, Monte could come later. At present, The Shadow was concerned with another, who constituted a real menace. Napper was by no means out of the commotion. Quite the contrary.

Across the room, the bomber was trying to gain the shelter of a closet, from which he could fling the bomb. He was hoarsing for Monte to get away before he let go, and the con man, on hands and knees, was making for the door, fumbling the revolver, which he was lucky enough to find along the way.

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Desperately excited, Napper looked ready to fling the bomb anyway, as The Shadow wheeled upon him. Darting sideways, the scrawny crook almost lost his grip on the explosive missile.

The Shadow's cloak made a long sweep under the impelling fling of his arm. It came upon Napper with enveloping effect, tangling the crook's arms in its folds. Fighting to wrench clear of the shrouding snare, Napper twisted himself further. He and The Shadow became a whirling pair amid blackness near the opened door of the closet.

Monte snatched at the door to the hall and pulled it open. He took a long dive through and turned with his gun, hoping to distinguish the cloaked shape from the other. He couldn't see the closet, but he did spot the flying figure that came twisting from it wearing the cloak. Monte gave a triumphant shout. He had The Shadow as he wanted him.

It all flashed to Monte. Napper had managed to retain the bomb and scoot into the closet. That left The Shadow one course only: to make for Monte's own exit, the doorway to the hall.

But the cloaked fighter who headed Monte's way was temporarily discommoded. High above his shoulder, the cloak was covering his face, as he tried to wrest it clear so he could see the doorway.

Wildly, Monte fired; he saw the cloaked figure stagger. Still, Monte wasn't sure that he had riddled The Shadow with those shots. The sprawl that the cloaked target took could be a fake, for Monte had heard that The Shadow used such tactics. Frantically, Monte cried:

"Chuck it, Napper! The bomb!" The pineapple scaled into Monte's sight. Turning, the con man dived for the open fire tower; as he went, he heard the sharp slam of the closet door in 608, the proper action for Napper, under the circumstances.

Hence, Monte did not see the bomb when it reached the huddled shape of blackness which formed an irregular blot on the floor of the hotel room. No one saw its burst, not even The Shadow, but many heard what happened.

Blasting just before it struck, the bomb roared in an explosion that wiped out the room and cracked every window in the old hotel. Breaking walls delivered showers of plaster. Chunks of furniture, scattering through Monte's room, were buried in a deluge from the ceiling.

The cloaked victim on the floor was gone; he had taken the bomb's full force.

Stumbling through smoky fumes that filled the corridor, Monte Garlan sniffed the clear air from the fire tower and coughed a laugh. Having found his proper exit, Monte was thinking of the way The Shadow had gone.

The Shadow's exit, Monte could well testify, had been the route of death!

CHAPTER IX. CRIME'S HIDDEN FACTS.

WHILE Monte, clinging to the fire-tower rail, experienced the imaginary sensation of an entire hotel heaving like a storm-tossed ship, his thoughts went back to Napper. Whatever credit Monte could take for finishing The Shadow, it was Napper who had eradicated the evidence. Things had worked as Roger Frack ordered them, and even better.

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This wasn't just a case of a bomb–shattered hotel room, with a supposed victim. There really was a victim, one whose remains, what little might be found of them, would pass for those of Monte Garlan.

There wouldn't be much to find, which was a good point. Certainly the gush of flame from the bomb must have consumed The Shadow's cloak and hat, which alone could serve to identify the actual victim of the tragedy.

But Napper was another matter.

Clutching the rail, Monte found that the hotel no longer seemed to sway. Anxiously, the con man stared back along the smoke–filled hallway, wondering how Napper had fared. That slam of the closet door had given Napper a buffer against the explosion, but it was possible that the scrawny bomber would have trouble extricating himself from the wreckage.

Monte didn't care much about Napper. Not enough to go back and try to help him out. In fact, if two bodies should be found in the hotel room, it wouldn't matter greatly. But Monte had pictures of rescuers dragging out Napper, half alive. In that case, Napper might be in a mood to denounce the pals who had abandoned him.

As Monte hesitated, feeling himself in a real quandary, he heard sounds from the blasted room. First came the thud of a falling door; then choky coughs. After that, there were footsteps, uncertain ones, indicating that Napper was picking his way through wreckage between the closet and the hallway door.

Finally, another clatter, closer, told that the man had reached the hallway and stumbled against a door that was hanging loosely on its hinges. The door flattened, and evidently Napper did the same, for Monte could hear groping sounds, accompanied by coughs from the floor level.

Crawling seemed to be Napper's best policy, as the fumes were not so thick along the floor.

Monte gave a cautious whisper:

"Napper!"

A wheeze answered. The words weren't distinguishable at first, because of the chokes that came with them. At last, however, Napper's hoarse, familiar tone was plain.

"That you, Monte?"

"Yeah," returned Monte. "How you coming, Napper?"

"All right." Napper was close in the darkness, rising unsteadily as he gripped the edge of the exit. Then, in anxious tone, his hoarse voice queried: "Say, Monte, what are you sticking around here for?"

"To help you out," lied Monte. "We got The Shadow, didn't we? That makes us pals for keeps."

"You gotta get going," insisted Napper, in his strained wheeze. "Getting The Shadow was one thing, but it wasn't what we came here for. You can't risk being seen around here. You're supposed to be croaked!"

Clangs were sounding from streets below. From the rail, Monte could see the lights of fire apparatus a few blocks away. He heard sirens; that meant police cars. He realized the importance of Napper's statement.

"Come on, then," began Monte. "You've got a car here somewhere, Napper, with a crew. Get me to it."

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"It would be a give-away," wheezed Napper. "You gotta pull a sneak, Monte. You start ahead"—the wheezed tone interrupted itself with a cough—"and I'll come along, if you see too many coppers, lay low until I draw 'em the other way."

Monte felt a pawing hand urge him down the fire-tower steps. He heard parting words, in Napper's wheeze:

"Get over to Frack's. Tell him I'll give him a buzz. We'll join up later."

Napper's coughs faded from Monte's ears, as the con man hurried down the steps. When Monte's footfalls had dwindled in their turn, the wheezing cough ended. Instead, the man who had remained in the darkness of the fire exit delivered a low, whispered laugh. It was like a tone from the grave.

The laugh of The Shadow!

MONTE wouldn't have believed it, had he been present to hear the mirth. Monte had last seen The Shadow sprawled on the floor of the hotel room. That was, Monte had seen a cloaked figure that looked like The Shadow's, but Monte had forgotten the preceding events, partly because he had not witnessed all of them.

In struggling with Napper by the closet door, The Shadow had smothered the scrawny crook with the cloak folds, much as one would gather a dangerous insect in a cloth. The Shadow had done a thorough job of it, for Napper carried a stinger in the shape of a bomb. In fact, The Shadow had whipped his cloak entirely off, to roll Napper completely inside it.

By that tangling process, The Shadow had acquired the bomb out of the folds which Napper was struggling against. Then, to keep his trophy secure, The Shadow had flung Napper, cloak and all, across the room.

The tangled, writhing figure in black that Monte had spotted from the door was Napper, not The Shadow. The shots that Monte fired were deadly ones. They had riddled the man in the cloak.

There was one thing more.

Monte had shouted for Napper to fling the bomb. Actually, he had been shouting to The Shadow, for Napper was dead. Since Monte had finished Napper and was starting flight, The Shadow would normally have delayed the throw, had he made it at all, until he, too, had reached the hallway, where, in the darkness, he could have escaped Monte's recognition as well then as later.

It happened that at the moment of Monte's cry, The Shadow had heard a whirl within the bomb itself!

The "right sort of pineapple," so Frack had described it. The "right sort" was a time bomb! No wonder Napper had hesitated about flinging it, for the act would have been useless.

The scrawny crook had been fighting for time, all along, faking the business of time throw. He'd been trying to get clear and leave the pineapple with The Shadow at the final moment.

At that final moment, The Shadow did have it, but the door of the closet was fortunately close by. Tossing the infernal machine, he had whisked into the only shelter that offered. A close call, that one, for the bomb had exploded before it struck beside the cloak-wrapped form of Napper. However, the closet door, though battered, had proven sufficient buffer to preserve The Shadow from the explosion.

During his crawl to the fire tower, The Shadow had heard Monte's whisper: "Napper!" It gave The Shadow an inspiration. Monte thought The Shadow to be dead; he could continue to believe so, and pass the word along

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to Frack. Together, the two would soon be gloating over The Shadow's finish.

Then, a living ghost, The Shadow would drop in to see them. Clad in a new cloak to go with the slouch hat that he still wore, this master of vengeance would hear the confessions of both. It was the kind of visitation that would loose a pair of tongues, particularly when The Shadow backed up his ghostly pose with a brace of automatics.

Through his coming excursion, The Shadow felt sure that he would learn the identity of the big brain behind the confidence ring.

From below, The Shadow heard a car roar away. It contained Napper's gun crew; they weren't waiting for the bomber. The Shadow heard shots, the spurts of other motors; Police were on the trail.

Again, The Shadow laughed. This would further Monte's getaway, and also The Shadow's own.

REACHING the street, The Shadow sidled through alleys and finally contacted Moe's cab. Riding to the Cobalt Club, where he held a membership as Cranston, The Shadow smoothed his attire and entered, having left his slouch hat in the cab.

From a phone booth, he called Frack's number and spoke in Napper's wheeze. He inquired if Monte had arrived, and received an affirmative reply.

"I'm going to lam," declared The Shadow, hoarsely. "The bulls went after my crew. If they wise to who the bunch is, they'll have me tagged. They know my racket is pineapples."

"Good enough, Napper," assured Frack. "See me when you get back to town, in a month or so. You can count on plenty for the job you did, a lot more than I promised you. Helping Monte get The Shadow calls for big dough. The boss won't forget it."

Having thus disposed of the Napper proposition, The Shadow strolled from the club. As Cranston, he entered a limousine, instead of Moe's cab. From beneath the rear seat of the big car, he produced a reserve outfit of black cloak, hat and gloves. He was ready for his excursion to Frack's.

Something was already happening at Frack's. From behind the window curtains, Monte was peering anxiously to the street, where he saw police cars halted. Anxiously, Monte pointed them out to Frack.

"You fool!" exclaimed Frack. "They must have traced that cab you took. What did you do—get tough with the driver?"

"I had to nudge him with my gun," returned Monte, "because he got suspicious after I'd sneaked into the cab. But he didn't get a look at my face."

"Come on!" snapped Frack. "Out the back way. Get into my coupe and lay low. I'll join you."

Monte was crouched in the coupe, when Frack came sauntering from the rear door of the apartment house. But Frack had hardly entered the car and taken the wheel, when a shout came from the corner.

Seeing that the shouter was a patrolman, Frack spurted the car away. Shots followed him, but Frack whipped around the corner, getting safely clear. Police cars were belated in taking up the pursuit.

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Ten minutes later, Cranston's limousine rolled through that same rear street. From the stir in the neighborhood, and the blue-clad figures that he saw at the windows of Frack's lighted apartment, The Shadow knew exactly what had happened. In Cranston's tone, The Shadow spoke to Stanley, his chauffeur. He told him to drive home, to New Jersey.

At midnight, The Shadow tuned in on the news broadcast. He heard the news that Frack had promised Marcia, and more. Not only had Monte Garlan perished in a hotel blast; the police had found his mangled remains, and had traced the murderer. The bomb planter, according to the law's account, was Roger Frack, another confidence man, long at odds with Monte Garlan.

It was morning, when Lamont Cranston spread his newspaper across the breakfast table and saw the photographs that Frack had also promised. The chief picture showed the wrecked hotel room; and there was a smaller one, of Monte Garlan. But there were other photos, that had not been planned. One was a view of an apartment; the other, a portrait of its missing tenant, Roger Frack.

The Shadow toned a whispered laugh. No mention of Napper, the actual bomb planter, who, though really dead, was supposed to be on the lam.

The situation, however, was even more curious, considering the hidden facts with which The Shadow was acquainted. Roger Frack, murderer, and Monte Garlan, his victim, had actually fled together and were hiding out somewhere, one as anxious as the other to avoid the law!

Then, turning the page, Shadow saw another pair of portraits, those of Jack Prendle and Marcia Kennerd. Here was more news that The Shadow had expected, but not for a week, at least. Jack and Marcia had been married at Greenwich, Connecticut, some time after midnight. Through influence, they were able to have the waiting period waived.

Hidden facts went deeper. In the light of his own findings, The Shadow could understand why Frack and Monte had faked a murder, which Marcia supposed would be real. He was interested, too, in the marriage of Jack and Marcia.

Its swiftness indicated that Jack Prendle, for some reason, had probably been quite as eager to begin the matrimonial venture as had Marcia Kennerd. But behind it all was the evidence of a controlling hand, the hidden master of the confidence ring, who kept the puppets dancing even though some strings had tangled.

There would be other puppets on the go, before this sham drama was concluded; among them, Stanley Wilford and Helene Prendle. But The Shadow wanted to watch the dance a while, before intervening to grasp the strings. His hand could work better hidden; since crooks supposed that their foe, The Shadow, was dead, the opportunity would be perfect.

Again, The Shadow laughed.

He knew!

CHAPTER X. DAYS OF DOUBT.

A DOZEN days had passed, days of doubt for Stanley Wilford, though he was finding life quite pleasant at Longwood. Still a resident of the Beach Club, Stan was seldom there. He was spending most of his hours at the Prendle mansion.

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Jack and Marcia had returned from their honeymoon; together with Helene and Stan, the steady visitor, they formed a rather happy group, much to the pleasure of old Theodore Prendle, who beamed and boomed from the head of the table when they all dined together.

It was plain to Stan that Jack had risen much in old Prendle's estimate; but the reason was not Jack, himself. It was Marcia, and Stan could understand why.

The black-haired bride with the flashing eyes was a creature of winning charm. Marcia's poise was perfect; she kept her sophistication hidden under a show of frankness. It pleased old Theodore Prendle, who was quite susceptible to such graces. Stan, too, would have been wholly deceived by Marcia, if it had not been for Helene.

To Stan, Helene had lost none of her initial loveliness. Her frankness toward him had developed into trust. Often, when her eyes met his, Stan could read the thoughts behind them; but always, he wondered if there might be more.

There was.

Helene had never forgiven herself for the incident that Stan had so readily forgotten. The flush that sometimes came to her cheeks was induced by recollection of a whip lash she had once delivered, but wished that she had received instead.

Perhaps Stan no longer remembered the sting he had received, but Helene could recall it and actually feel the cut that it must have given the man she had come to love.

On his part, Stan was trying to restrain all surges of affection. He couldn't mention his real sentiments while under a cloud. He wanted to be so situated that he could leave Longwood forever, without making Helene bear the burden of regret for his departure. The only way was to keep up a matter-of-fact pose under all circumstances, which Stan had somehow managed.

Recognizing his mood, though not understanding it, Helene tried to help. Always, as on this particular evening, she was ready to turn the conversation to topics that concerned others than herself and Stan. Thus, noting that Stan had become reflective, and not knowing what his thoughts might bring, Helene mentioned the subject of Marcia, as she had before.

"I like Marcia," the girl declared sincerely. "In fact, I always shall like her, unless she, herself, should force me to feel otherwise."

"Do you mean," queried Stan, "that Marcia strikes you as a doubtful quantity?"

"She does," returned Helene. "She is a sleek creature with claws, that she never uses. But if she does—"

"Someone will feel them," interposed Stan. "Probably it will be Jack."

"No, never Jack. Marcia does not love him enough for that."

Behind the paradox of Helene's words, Stan saw deep logic. His expression became inquiring; he wanted to hear more.

"This business that father is backing," said Helene. "You know, he advanced a hundred thousand dollars for Jack to start it. Do you think that he talks to Jack about it?"

"I should suppose he would."

"He doesn't," Helene assured. "He talks to Marcia. She is the one who discusses the expenditures, and listens to father's advice, while Jack sits idly by."

"But Jack must in some way be responsible!"

"He will be held responsible," predicted Helene, "in case anything goes wrong, later. Marcia will blame him for everything, whereas Jack's only fault is that of spending more money wastefully than he ever did before."

"Because he is now on a salary basis?"

"Exactly! So the fault is not really his. Meanwhile, Marcia's in a position to spend ten dollars where Jack wastes one, if she should care to do so."

Stan thought it over, as they strolled across the moonlit porch. His car was parked near, and Helene accompanied him, until they reached it. Then, Stan asked:

"What are you going to do about Marcia?"

"Nothing," returned Helene. "Absolutely nothing, except to remind father that he once said that whatever he did financially for Jack, he would do for me. That may postpone matters for a while. Father hasn't yet lost control of the cash that he advanced to Jack."

STAN drove away. He had told Helene earlier that he had an appointment at the Beach Club. Actually, he had to stop at Thorndon's, as a matter of policy.

Finishing the roundabout trip from one estate to the other, Jack pulled up in back of Thorndon's gloomy mansion. No dogs greeted him, for Thorndon had sent the mastiffs away.

Ushered into Thorndon's soundproof den, Stan found Prendle's rival in a very affable mood. Thorndon chatted about various matters, and occasionally slipped in questions regarding Stan's new friendship with the Prendles. He asked about Jack and Marcia, too, as though he wished all members of the family well, with the exception of Theodore Prendle.

Answering the questions casually, Stan recognized all the while that Thorndon was probing. On his side, Stan was seeking the purpose behind the old man's game.

Ever since his installation at the Beach Club, Stan had been receiving money without asking for it. Though it came anonymously, he attributed it to Thorndon. On his rare visits to Thorndon's, the old man always inquired, smilingly, if Stan required further loans, and seemed quite pleased when he learned that Stan did not.

So far, however, Thorndon had not chosen to unmask himself as the real head of the confidence ring. The only contact that Stan received had been through phone calls from Roger Frack.

The first had been rather a nerve-racking experience, a chat with a hunted murderer who was somewhere in hiding. But there had been no way of tracing Frack from that call, or any of the later ones. With each call, Stan had supposed that it would be the last.

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On the first occasion, Frack had gloatingly informed Stan that The Shadow was dead. It hadn't been a bluff to put Stan at ease; Frack really believed it, or he wouldn't have said so, for Stan knew Frack's blunt ways.

Actually, however, the call had given Stan greater qualms than any he had previously experienced. He felt that his strongest friend was gone, and the belief accounted greatly for Stan's reserve toward Helene. He couldn't play along with crime far enough to put Helene in any jeopardy, not with The Shadow departed from the scene.

Stan's reflections were ended abruptly by Thorndon, when the old man remarked:

"Since Jack Prendle is now a businessman, I must meet him. I may have a business matter that will interest him. Perhaps you might drop in with him some evening, Wilford."

"Jack isn't much of a businessman," countered Stan. "He's running the business in his wife's name, from all I hear. Marcia must be a smart girl. Old Prendle thinks so."

"No smarter than Jack, perhaps," affirmed Thorndon dryly. "Hasn't it occurred to you that he might be responsible for the quick marriage? By settling down as a domestic man, Jack found a way to open his father's coffers."

The new angle rather surprised Stan, until he realized it might be just another display of old Thorndon's cunning. Still at loss for a reply, Stan was saved the trouble when a servant knocked at the door.

Oddly, the message was for Stan. He learned that a friend was waiting for him at the Beach Club; that the matter was urgent. About to depart, Stan turned questioningly to Thorndon.

"Since I'm a friend of the Prendles," he demanded, "why do you suppose the message came here, the one place where I probably wouldn't be?"

"They may have called there first," smiled Thorndon. "You must not forget, however, that I really introduced you at the Beach Club. Of course, my call to the manager was strictly confidential, but he is one person who might expect you to be here."

As he drove to the Beach Club, Stan's thoughts turned to Jack. Perhaps Jack was clever, as Thorndon suggested. Playing the stooge while his father passed cash across the board to Marcia, was a neat game, but Stan was wondering what would happen to the money later. Perhaps Marcia passed it along to someone else, who would then deliver it to Jack—

No, the thing seemed too complicated. Stan preferred to accept Helene's opinion: that Jack was simply urged by an immediate desire for cash, with little regard for the future. So analyzing, Stan arrived at the Beach Club.

ENTERING the lobby, Stan looked about, but no one hailed him. He went to the veranda, saw people that he knew, chatting there, among them Albert Carthwright. None of them seemed to be looking for Stan, so he went into the lounge, hoping that he might find the "friend" that Thorndon's servant had mentioned.

The lounge proved a blank, and Stan was more puzzled than ever, when he suddenly remembered the telephone booths. He went there.

A man sidled from a booth to meet him. Stan stopped, frozen, as he stared at the dark, wise-featured visage of Roger Frack!

"What's the trouble, Stan?" giped Frack, in an undertone. "I'm no ghost. You act like you'd seen The Shadow."

Shakily Stan darted a look toward the lobby. He saw several persons there, most of them strangers. One in particular, a man with calm, hawkish features, was comparatively close. He happened to be at the desk, arranging for a room.

Stan urged Frack deeper from sight and peered at the lobby again, waiting until the hawkish stranger had gone upstairs, accompanied by a bellboy, with his bags.

"Why did you come here?" Stan demanded, facing Frack. "You could have phoned me."

"Not from where I am at present," returned Frack coolly. "It might be traced. Besides, I've heard from the big-shot. He's ready with the proposition."

"I'm not sure that I want it, Frack."

"As foolish as ever, aren't you, Stan? Listen: You won't have to do anything you wouldn't want to do. Nothing like robbery, or—"

"Or murder?"

Frack smiled away the reference that Stan inserted so sharply. Smooth as ever, the go-between continued:

"No crime at all, Stan. You won't even have to act as front. We're letting you out easy; that is, the big-shot is. He just wants to be sure that you stay around, and when everything has blown over; you'll get your bum checks back."

Stan waited, knowing there would be more. Frack added it, coolly as ever.

"All you have to do," he said, "is ask Helene Prendle—"

Frack's words ended in a choke, as Stan's hands caught the fellow's throat. Flaying the man back and forth beside the booths, Stan grated in his ear:

"You leave Helene out of this!"

With that, he relaxed his grip. Frack sagged against a phone booth, clutching his throat to ease the pain. His eyes glared; then, finding his voice, he panted:

"You fool! Why couldn't you hear me through? You wouldn't want Helene left out of it, not if you knew what we're asking. We're giving you the chance you've hoped for. We want you to marry Helene Prendle!"

CHAPTER XI. ACROSS THE SOUND.

THE effect of Frack's completed statement was exactly what the crook expected. Stan Wilford went breathless with amazement, his eyes took on a transfixed gaze.

Still rubbing his neck, Frack smiled. He had put the idea across as the bigshot wanted, and he had realized something that he hadn't thought about before. If entirely on his own, Frack would have sprung the

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proposition by telephone; but it wouldn't have done.

Stan would certainly have hung up. The way that he had gone after Frack's throat, was proof. Frack had simply underestimated Stan's impetuous way. In fact, Frack was still underestimating it, as he was soon to learn. Stan's present happiness, though genuine, was only temporary.

Peering out to the lobby, Frack saw that the commotion had not caused any glances toward the phone booths, probably because there was considerable conversation over by the doorway to the veranda. Turning again to Stan, Frack found his companion quite calm.

"It sounds like a good proposition, Frack," Stan declared. "I suppose you want my answer right away."

Frack nodded. He didn't recognize the turbulence that Stan's pose hid. Once a first impulse had passed, Stan could cover up perfectly. Inwardly, Stan was boiling, furious at the scheme. He understood, at last, that crooks were really working through Marcia, to reach old Theodore Prendle, and that they would have worked through Stan, had he married Helene first.

In light of what Helene had stated earlier, Stan was sure that crooks had seen the one flaw in the game: namely, that Prendle might suddenly decide that he was favoring Jack, at Helene's expense. So they wanted Helene married, with Stan as the candidate, to keep peace in the Prendle family. With The Shadow gone, the confidence ring expected no outside interference.

There was a way to balk them; to break the whole game wide open. Stan was ready to start it, when he heard Frack undertone:

"No strings at all, Stan. Take your time, go away for a while, if you want. We don't care what happens long as you don't take too long. Suppose we give you a month; longer, if you really need it. But you'll be squared with us, beginning with the day you marry Helene Prendle—"

This time, Frack saw what was coming—one of Stan's hands, instead of both. But the one hand was clenched in the form of a solid fist. Frack ducked the punch and countered. He wasn't a set-up, like Reggie Exeter. Stan's swings were driving Frack away from the phone booths, out into the lobby, but the crook had forgotten caution. He wanted space.

Frack found it. Warding off a few punches, he came in with a rush. He might as well have tried to smash a stone wall, chin first. Frack's surge, in which his own swings went wide, brought him squarely in line with Stan's hardest punch.

Frack's feet went out from under him so swiftly that he thwacked the back of his head against the tiled floor and rolled limp beside the desk, where a startled clerk was grabbing for the telephone, shouting for police.

Club members rushed to grab Stan. They thought he had felled Frack permanently. Albert Carthwright was among them, shouting for order, telling them that he could vouch for Stanley Wilford. But there was another, ready to testify in opposite style. The other was Reggie Exeter.

To date, he had not recognized Stan as his assailant on the road, but sight of Stan in action brought back Reggie's recollections.

"He's the bounder!" bawled Reggie. "The cad who would have murdered me, if my grooms hadn't come in time! You've just seen how murderous he is!"

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Half a dozen hands were gripping Stan, and Reggie was trying to put in some punches, which Carthwright restrained, when Stan, finding his senses, gave a nod toward Frack, who was rising slowly to his hands and knees.

"Don't hold me!" Stan shouted. "Grab that fellow! I had to slug him, because I recognized him! He's Roger Frack, the fellow the police want for the murder of Monte Garlan!"

Men turned, but they didn't let go of Stan. It was fortunate they weren't holding Stan's feet, as well as his hands, for Frack, hearing the accusation, whipped a revolver from his pocket and aimed it, madly. Then Stan's foot came into play.

The kick he gave was lengthened, because his body was supported. His foot reached Frack's gun hand and nearly broke it. The revolver went bouncing across the lobby, toward the door.

Frack dashed after it, with Carthwright in hard pursuit. Stan, released at last, was leading another surge, with others at his heels. But they weren't in time to help Carthwright.

Gripping Frack as the fellow gathered up the gun, Carthwright was forced to dodge a savage swing. Floundering on the lobby floor, he was a target for Frack's gun; but Frack, seeing a crowd after him, made for the outer door.

Then Stan and others were stumbling across Carthwright as he sought to scramble for safety. Picking themselves up, they ran outside just as a car came driving up, with Jack Prendle at the wheel. With Jack were Marcia and Helene.

The girls were startled by the commotion from within the club, particularly Helene, who saw Stan, much mussed and excited, at the head of the mad throng. It was Jack who pointed, and shouted:

"He went that way!"

Stan and the rest followed the direction of Jack's pointed finger, but it was wrong. Just then, a police car arrived in response to the clerk's summons. Its spotlight, cutting at another angle, showed Frack making a wild dart toward a car that was parked behind the clubhouse.

Stan decided that Frack must have reversed his course in the darkness; by then, he and his crowd were well astray. Two policemen were leaping in ahead of them, with drawn revolvers.

From the car behind the clubhouse came a sudden rat-tat-tat that sent the officers ducking. It was the rattle of a machine gun, swinging into action. Stan grabbed the men nearest him and rolled them to the ground. He thought it was all up with the two officers. Then, his head tilted askew, Stan saw a figure at an upper window of the clubhouse.

From Stan's angle, the form was visible against a dim light. It was a cloaked shape, a figure that wore a slouch hat. Others might have masqueraded in that costume, but only its real owner could deliver the laugh that came above the machine-gun's tattoo.

The Shadow!

Two hands launched thunderbolts from the muzzles of heavy automatics. Those bullets, coughed from the throats of well-aimed guns, took immediate effect. The rattle of the machine gun ended, its handlers downed before they had swung their rotating weapon far enough to drill the officers with its fire.

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Slumping men could be seen in the rear of the parked car. The Shadow had picked them off with absolute precision.

The car's driver was busy at the wheel getting off to hurried flight, while a gunner beside him was taking pot shots with a revolver back toward The Shadow's window. But The Shadow was no longer there.

Looking upward, men beside Stan were wondering why the gunner was shooting at the window at all. Unlike Stan, they hadn't seen The Shadow, in the first place.

It happened that Stan had seen The Shadow then, and afterward. He had watched the black-cloaked marksman finish those quick stabs with a sweep across the window sill, an actual vault to the ground, some ten feet below. But The Shadow was no longer in the hyacinth bed where he had landed. Stan caught a glimpse of him rounding the rear of the club.

The Shadow was after Roger Frack!

The thing struck home to Stan, as he realized that Frack couldn't possibly have reached the car. Playing a hunch, Stan pointed, and shouted to the others:

"There goes Frack! Down toward the shore!"

They were in luck, the moment they got beyond the clubhouse. Frack had doubled back, temporarily eluding The Shadow, though it wasn't a fault on the cloaked pursuer's part.

The Shadow had purposely gone far, when he heard Stan's yell, so as to be sure of cutting Frack off from final escape. He was leaving it to Stan and the rest to nab Frack, if the crook tried a reversal.

Unwisely, they came in a cluster. The hasty shots that Frack delivered made the whole crowd dive. Profiting thereby, Frack leaped to a short pier and took off from the end of it, landing in a speedboat that awaited him.

Almost at the shore, Stan felt a tight hand grip his arm. It was Helene, who told him tensely:

"Come! Hurry!"

The girl took Stan to another speedboat, her own, which was at the near end of the pier. With Helene at the wheel, they were roaring in pursuit of Frack and his companion in the boat ahead. Both had turned, and were shooting with revolvers. Helene was plowing right into the spatter of the bullets.

Stan saw the man with Frack, but it was impossible to distinguish his face at that distance. It would have amazed Stan had he known who the fellow was. Frack's companion happened to be Monte Garlan. The "dead man" had not deemed it wise to show his face ashore.

"We're faster than they are," Helene was saying. "We'll overtake them, Stan—"

The bullets were coming thicker. Deliberately, the man beside Frack was rising, gripping a shotgun, ready to add its blast, when Helene's boat roared up behind. Weaponless, Stan suddenly realized the predicament and grabbed at Helene's hands. She wouldn't release the wheel, or even deviate from her course, until, at the most needed moment, a swashing craft cut across the bow.

It was another boat, just out from shore, a cloaked pilot at its helm!

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Beginning his own pursuit, The Shadow had seen Helene's folly and was slashing across to stop her. The girl jerked the wheel, but not enough; it was Stan who supplied the rest. He landed one sweeping hand against Helene's face, flinging her aside; with the other, he hauled the boat about just as The Shadow, maneuvering the other way, cut clear.

The sides of the two boats almost scraped; then they were spurting apart, as Monte blasted with the shotgun.

Expecting a crash, Monte had hoped to get both boats at once; instead, his pour of slugs found neither. Frack was speeding the fugitive craft away, and The Shadow was resuming the chase, but the boat that he had commandeered was not fast enough to overtake the one ahead.

By then, Helene's speedboat had swung completely from its course. Stalled in the wake of the others, Stan realized that it was entirely out of the race.

TURNING to help Helene, Stan started an apology, when he saw her indignant gaze. He was saying that he hadn't meant to slap her so hard, when he noticed that the indignation had gone. It was Helene who murmured the apology, as she nestled close to Stan.

"I was wrong," she insisted. "I was steering us right into trouble. As for the slap, it merely evens up."

"Evens up?"

"Remember our first meeting?" queried Helene, her face turned upward. "How quick I was with the whip?"

Stan smiled. A sudden thought was stirring him. It was the thing that had begun the evening's trouble—Frack's suggestion that he, Stan Wilford, should propose marriage to Helene Prendle. Whatever the game might be, Stan had been sure that crooks were playing it only because they believed The Shadow dead,

But The Shadow was still alive, and closer to the game than ever!

Out of that came Stan's conviction that he was a free agent; even more, he could reason sensibly that with The Shadow still alive, it would be possible to balk crime thoroughly, by following the course that Frack had advised when the crook supposed The Shadow to be dead.

Stan's gaze turned to the lovely eyes that looked up from his shoulder. He couldn't have stopped the words that left his lips:

"Helene, will you marry me?"

For answer, the girl drew away, took the wheel and started the motor again. As she spurted the speedboat forward, Stan saw that she wasn't heading back to the Long Island shore but was veering out into the broad expanses of the Sound.

"You're bound for Connecticut!" Stan exclaimed.

"Of course!" assured Helene. "Didn't Jack and Marcia get married in Connecticut? Why wait, when we've made up our minds?"

"Why wait?"

Stan echoed the query as he looked back toward the Long Island shore, so far behind them. He was hoping that The Shadow would fully understand.

CHAPTER XII. CRIME'S SHOWDOWN.

THE honeymoon was over. Stan and Helene had returned to Longwood, after an absence of less than two weeks. They couldn't have remained away longer, for they were mutually agreed that their presence was needed. Telegrams from Theodore Prendle, increasing in their urgency, stated that he was anxious to start Stan in business, as he had Jack.

That Theodore Prendle approved of his new son-in-law was manifest on the day that Stan and Helene returned. Stan's discovery of Frack, the wanted murderer at the Beach Club, had given him a high rating, since no one presumed that Stan and Frack had ever been friends. At least, none who might have presumed it were willing to state their claim, with the possible exception of Reggie Exeter.

Helene's former suitor had created quite a fuss, by referring back to the day when he had first met Stan. He described Stan as a "tramp" and a "ruffian," but everyone laughed at the terms. They said that Reggie had probably viewed Stan through a black eye, darkly, and besides, they discounted Reggie's statements, because he had all the air of a rejected suitor.

Stan didn't bother to call Reggie to task for the remarks. He knew that the effete society man would never back them up.

Furthermore, Theodore Prendle was highly pleased over the Reggie incident. It was the first thing upon which he congratulated Stan. He admired Helene's discretion in keeping it a secret, until Stan had become well established in Longwood. Then Old Prendle changed the subject to a little matter of one hundred thousand dollars, his wedding gift to the new couple.

Thus, Stan found himself in conference, one afternoon, with Prendle and three others: Helene, Jack and Marcia. Prendle began by describing how he had finally placed Jack in the brokerage business, with offices in downtown Manhattan.

"The buying and selling of securities is still important," boomed Prendle. "Of course, it depends upon knowing the market, and I am sure that Jack will have good advice on that point."

Prendle looked approvingly at Marcia as he spoke. He couldn't look at Jack because that young man had strolled into the library, to look over some of the books, the kind that had interesting pictures. Stan was where he could see Jack, and he caught a good glimpse of the young man's face. He noted Jack's shrewd, sidelong look back to the study.

How far Jack's indifference went, Stan wasn't sure. To some extent, at least, it was just a superficial pose. Of one thing, however, Stan was certain. He knew definitely that Marcia was linked to the confidence racket, and it would be a set-up for her to dispose of Jack's funds in seemingly legitimate style. Faking sales of stocks and bonds at the wrong time was very, very easy.

While listening to Prendle's talk, Stan found himself staring across the study, off through the window to a double line of high hedges, beyond which he could see the turreted top of Thorndon's mansion, looming like some feudal castle.

The other mansion seemed close to Prendle's, too close to suit Stan. He was glad that the hedges intervened.

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They made it a long journey around. True, one might find a way through the hedges, though Stan had never tried. Unlike others who frequented Prendle's, Stan knew little about the grounds.

His strolls were always with Helene, and he found her far more worthy of his admiration than trees or hedges. In fact, Helene was worthy of admiration at this moment, for she was whispering softly to Stan, bringing his attention back to the conference, so deftly that her father didn't notice that Stan's thoughts had wandered.

WITH a jerk, Stan came from his reverie. He forgot the face of Victor Thorndon, which he had been picturing as a thing with a devil's leer. Memories of Thorndon's dry, sarcastic tone were fading, too, as Stan heard Prendle's booming voice.

"You know the oil business, Stanley," Prendle was saying, "so I am putting you into it. Pick out the properties you like, and buy them. Don't be cramped by so small a limit as one hundred thousand dollars. It will be just an experimental fund."

Stan turned to Helene.

"Looks like we'll have to take another honeymoon, Mrs. Wilford," he said. "Most of the real oil properties are a long way from here."

"Very well," smiled Helene. "We can start whenever you say, Mr. Wilford."

Her tone was different from her smile. It carried warning which Stan understood. Both he and Helene would have to remain at Longwood until other matters were settled. Matters which concerned Jack and Marcia.

To Stan, it was like finding adventure on the doorstep. While stalling along with the prospective oil business and letting Theodore Prendle retain the funds, Stan's real interest would be in the stock market.

He was quite determined to see that Marcia did not take advantage of fluctuations after they occurred, by pretending that Jack's business had lost money on securities that went down.

Helene, of course, knew Stan's determination. Her words had simply been a reminder. On later thought, Helene realized that Stan's mention of an immediate trip to Oklahoma had just been a bluff.

Affairs in the Prendle household were of definite interest to certain outsiders. One, in particular, was a guest at the Beach Club, who had come there the night of Stan's run-in with Frack. That guest had liked the atmosphere of Longwood, and had remained. His name was Lamont Cranston.

It was easy for Cranston to make acquaintances, once people learned who he was. He was wealthy, and had quite a reputation as a globetrotter. Troubled world conditions, it appeared, were the only reason why Cranston no longer liked to travel.

It happened, however, that there was a real Cranston, who was still a traveler. The genuine gentleman was at present in a spot where war had not yet struck. He was scaling some of the most difficult peaks in the Himalaya Mountains of northern India.

The guest at the Beach Club was Cranston's double. They weren't twins; normally, they did not even look alike. But the duplicate Cranston was a master of make-up, and he had played the part of Cranston so long that the two could mistake each other for their own reflections in a mirror. This man who called himself Lamont Cranston was The Shadow.

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From his new acquaintances at the Beach Club, The Shadow had weeded out those who did not count. Of the remainder, his very best find was Albert Carthwright.

Genial, active, and always quite obliging, Carthwright was a natural friend to choose; but those were not The Shadow's reasons, he had learned that Carthwright was the one man in Longwood who actually enjoyed the full confidence of Theodore Prendle.

This afternoon, Carthwright intended to take Cranston up to the Prendle mansion and introduce him. He made a phone call first, to make sure that Theodore Prendle was not engaged. Rejoining Cranston, Carthwright smiled and said that the Prendle family had been in conference, but that their business had just been finished.

Leaving the club, The Shadow and Carthwright stepped into a high-powered roadster that bore the initials "L. C." With The Shadow driving, Carthwright guided the way to the entrance that led into the Prendle grounds.

THEY found Theodore Prendle in his study, resting behind his desk. He looked quite tired, but he beamed a greeting and gave Cranston a strong handshake.

"I've just been putting my son-in-law into business," Prendle explained. "He's going into oil. It interests him, and I am confident that he will succeed. It is marvelous what business has already done for my son Jack. He used to be lazy, and wasteful of money. Now, he is always alert, and securities have become his only interest."

A snore interrupted. It came from the open door of Prendle's private library. Rising abruptly, Prendle went to the door and looked through. The words that he boomed were violent.

Past Prendle, The Shadow and Carthwright could see Jack spring to his feet from the chair wherein he had gone to sleep.

Savagely, Prendle took the book that his son had been reading. It had literary value, but that wasn't why Jack had chosen it. The book dated from a period when writers had dealt with subjects which were nowadays taboo.

With the air of a boy who had been caught stealing apples, Jack went slinking out through the study, while his father was angrily replacing the volume where it belonged.

In Cranston's style, The Shadow flashed a look toward Carthwright, indicating that he would prefer to be absent when Prendle engaged in epithets regarding Jack. Carthwright nodded, and went into the library to soothe Prendle, while The Shadow strolled out through the hall.

There was no sign of Jack, but The Shadow overheard voices from a sun porch. The place was perfect for eavesdropping, and from all that had happened in the Prendle family, The Shadow felt that the proper people should have listened in to previous conversations; hence, he resolved to apply the policy at present. Through the thick gloom of the big hall, The Shadow reached the doorway to the sun porch.

Stan was talking ardently to Helene.

"It means a showdown with Marcia," Stan was saying, "and I'm the one to have it."

"I could talk to her more tactfully," insisted Helene. "After all, I've been in this family longer than she has."

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"That's just the trouble," rejoined Stan. "What amounts to more, is the fact that I'm in the same boat as Marcia. We are both newcomers. We won't have to be nice."

"Very well," agreed Helene. "Marcia is in the cardroom playing solitaire. I'll wait here, Stan."

The Shadow drew back, letting Stan move past. Instead of following immediately, The Shadow kept his gaze fixed across the sun porch, through one of the far panes. In the early dusk, he saw a man sneaking from the cover of the high hedge that marked the edge of the Prendle estate.

It could have been Jack, off to sulk alone, but The Shadow decided otherwise. He watched the man go from sight under the shelter of hedges closer to the house.

Meanwhile, Stan had reached the cardroom, to find Marcia engaged in a game of Canfield. He closed the door and Marcia heard it. She spoke without looking up:

"Hello, hubby dear."

"Deal yourself another jack," returned Stan coolly. "Then take a look at the joker in the pack. I mean myself!"

Marcia came about with a tigerish glare, very plain in the light of a floor lamp. It was the first time since Stan had met her that she had revealed such an expression. Knowing that she'd given herself away, Marcia slashed the cards from the table and came to her feet.

"What are you doing here?" she hissed angrily. "You... you... why, you're a crook yourself!"

"Harsh words, lady," Stan replied. "How are you going to back them?"

"I'll leave that to Jack—"

"By telling him what your real name is? I don't think so. That marriage certificate of yours wouldn't be worth waste paper if you did!"

A look of sudden alarm gripped Marcia. Then her eyes brightened, as she looked beyond Stan. In his turn, he heard the opening of a window, and for a moment thought that Jack Prendle had chosen this unusual mode of entry.

Stan turned, quite confident that he could deal with his indolent brother-in-law. But the visitor wasn't Jack.

A man with a gun had entered, his face wearing an ugly glare that was meant for Stan. That darkened visage belonged to Stan's "friend," Roger Frack. His glare, though it could have been a death threat, meant otherwise to Stan Wilford.

With a sickening sensation, Stan realized that crime's showdown was due; that he, for some reason, was to listen to terms, instead of making them!

XIII. THE TRAIL TO COME.

As soon as he was sure that Stan did not intend to try his hand at punches, Frack put away the gun. He gestured Stan to a chair, and the young man seated himself stolidly. Frack gave a chuckle of relief.

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"I thought I'd have to use that rod," he declared. "It would have been tough for you, Stan, if I had."

Not so tough as Frack supposed. He was actually the man who had been threatened. Indeed, Frack was still under the muzzle of a gun much bigger than his own, a gun that he did not see. It was poked through the crack of the cardroom door, gripped by an intruder who had gained that wedge while Stan and Marcia had been exchanging ill-meant compliments.

The Shadow had decided that the man from the hedge was Frack, and had promptly prepared for the fellow's entry.

The Shadow's position now served as a listening post from which he could hear all phases of the coming conversation. He watched Frack open negotiations with Marcia.

"How's it going?" queried Frack. "Is the draw string off the money-bag?"

"It will be," returned Marcia, in her cold contralto. "I figure I can write off five grand a week for the next six months, without my dear father-in-law losing any of his confidence in me."

"The boss thought you could," returned Frack. Then, turning to Stan: "You ought to be able to work even faster."

"He will, if he goes to Oklahoma," informed Marcia, "and takes that precious wife of his along. It will make it a lot easier for me, too. Of all the--"

Frack interrupted by going for his gun. He meant the weapon for Stan, but his snarl was directed toward Marcia. Half to his feet, Stan subsided, while Frack let the gun drop back into his pocket.

"Thanks," said Stan to Frack. "I'm glad you remembered that I don't like Helene brought into these conversations. As for you"—he looked at Marcia—"we'll be seeing each other after Frack is gone. One more wisecrack, and as soon as Frack leaves, I'll smash that card table over your head so hard that your shoulders will be black and blue!"

"One happy family!" jeered Frack. Then, briskly: "Here's the whole story, Stan. You did what was wanted—you got married. You knew that we were working through Marcia, but you weren't sure that the big-shot intended to use you, too. He does. I've talked to him this afternoon.

"We've known that you'd go in for oil. Making bum guesses in that dodge is anybody's privilege. You'd better pick good ones on your own, though, because you're going to buy a lot of lemons that the big boss shoves your way. We want fifty out of that first hundred thousand. We'll talk over the next consignment after you come back from the West.

"We'll help you alibi yourself. The bum wells won't look like lemons. We've got some nice capped ones in the lot, that will gush long enough to square you. Maybe you'll bring in some winners with your half, but if you do, we'll expect fifty percent of any take."

Stan rose, carefully, so that Frack wouldn't pull the gun. Folding his arms, he said firmly:

"No go, Frack. I'll take the rap on those phony checks, first. If I do, I'll queer Marcia's set-up, too."

"You won't take the rap," smiled Frack. "Without mentioning any names, there's somebody you care a lot for. Somebody you couldn't forget for five years. You couldn't stand a trip to the Big House."

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"I'm willing to chance it," returned Stan, his lips tightening as he thought of Helene. "After all, if I crack this racket wide, maybe those checks won't stand against me. Have you ever thought of that, Frack?"

"The big-shot has."

"Then tell him what I've said. And, by the way"—Stan decided to put a hard shot home—"tell old Thorndon that I won't be dropping in to see him any more."

STAN'S thrust electrified Marcia, more than Frack. With a gleeful gleam in her savage eyes, the black-haired girl swung to Frack, exclaiming:

"So Thorndon is the big-shot! The guy that really has it in for old Papa Prendle. I'm glad to hear it, Frack"—she paused, abruptly—"or am I?"

The doubt in Marcia's eyes caused Frack to play her against Stan.

"Thorndon is very smart," said Frack. "I know him. Remember, Stan, how you got a phone call at his place, saying that I was down at the Beach Club?"

"I remember."

"You see, Marcia?" queried Frack. Thorndon looks smart and acts smart. He's smart enough to be the big-shot."

Never having met Thorndon, Marcia still clung to doubts that no longer influenced Stan. In her own sharp style, she countered Frack's statement.

"I figure differently," she declared. "I'd say that somebody who looked dumb and acted dumb might be the big-shot. It's a long way around to Thorndon's, even though he lives next door. But maybe the dough takes a long way around, too, and comes back to someone closer to home than Thorndon."

Stan's mind flashed promptly to his once-rejected theory that Jack Prendle might be maneuvering the whole racket from under his father's wing. But he liked this game of tit-for-tat, particularly as it enabled him to disagree with Marcia.

"I say that Thorndon is the big-shot," insisted Stan. "But why argue it?"

Frack's eyes showed a wise gleam. Somehow, he preferred Stan's bluntness to Marcia's intuition. For one thing, he knew that if he said that Stan was right, Marcia would not believe him, even if Frack did speak the truth. There was something else in Frack's mind, too, that a keener brain than his had originally suggested.

"You'd better call on Thorndon again," said Frack to Stan, "and ask him for those checks of yours, that he's keeping in his safe. But don't make it later than tomorrow midnight. You'll be leaving for Oklahoma the next morning."

Stan actually looked as though he was considering the proposition. With a wise sneer, Frack turned toward the window. Marcia followed him and held him back.

"You've forgotten one thing," said Marcia. "Those gambling markers of Jack's. He wants ten grand to pay them."

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"The big-shot says it's too much," returned Frack, "he knows all about them. He says they aren't worth over five."

"More of Jack's bluff?"

Frack ignored Marcia's double-edged query. She tried another tack.

"If Jack's on the level," she insisted, "he really needs the dough. He's been acting confidential; says his father would call off the business proposition if he had to lift another IOU."

"Did Jack say who's holding those markers?"

"No," returned Marcia. "He won't tell me. That's why I put it down as some more hooey."

"Better forget it," snapped Frack. "If Jack is as smart as you think he is. He'll find an out. If he doesn't, we will. That sort of stuff is all doped out ahead of time. The boss has a brain."

WHILE Frack was sliding through the window and closing it behind him, The Shadow withdrew from the doorway. As Cranston, he strolled toward the closed door of Prendle's study.

Hearing a booming tone from within, The Shadow paused to attract the attention of Blair, who was coming from the kitchen. He did it by lighting a cigarette.

"I'm afraid, sir," said Blair, approaching, "that Mr. Prendle is still busy."

"Quite all right," assured The Shadow calmly. "Tell Mr. Carthwright that I'll see him later at the Beach Club. I can arrange to meet Mr. Prendle tomorrow evening."

"Thank you, sir."

Outdoors, The Shadow reached his car, released the brake and coasted down the drive, with dim lights. Near the exit, he heard the roar of a motor from somewhere along the road. Starting his own motor with a mild purr, The Shadow soon picked up the trail of a car which he knew must be Frack's.

The trail that The Shadow followed was a comparatively short one. It ended in a parking lot near a place that served shore dinners.

By the time The Shadow, cloaked in black, had left his roadster and approached Frack's car, the fellow was gone. The hum of a speedboat from a small pier told that his pal Monte had been waiting, and that the two were off again. Back in the roadster, The Shadow slid from his cloak, as a hobbly man approached and asked:

"Want to park, sir?"

"No, thanks," replied The Shadow. "I just wanted to chat with a friend of mine, but he left in his speedboat."

"You'll have to wait until tomorrow night, then, when he comes back to get his car. Every night, he comes back. Of course, if you know where he lives—"

"I don't. That's the trouble."

"Nor do I," said the hobbly man. "Can't be more than a few miles, though. Some nights, when it's been quiet, I've heard his boat go sput-sput and stop, somewhere up near the point."

Mentally pigeonholing that information, The Shadow drove back to the Beach Club. He soon received a call from Carthwright, inviting him to return to Prendle's house after dinner. The Shadow accepted in Cranston's tone, but his whispered laugh was his own after he hung up the receiver.

The Shadow had intended to keep close vigil at the Prendle house tonight. It would be easier from within as Cranston, than from without as The Shadow!

CHAPTER XIV. THE LAST NIGHT.

STAN WILFORD had been glum for twenty-four hours, a condition which Helene blamed on Marcia. Evidently, Stan had not managed well with his first encounter, but Helene did not question him about it. Knowing Stan's determination, she was sure that he would have another try, with better results.

Usually friendly, Stan had not been too affable toward a gentleman named Cranston who had called the evening before. But this was a new night, and with a formal dinner scheduled, Stan should be ready to come out of his mood. He was putting on his Tuxedo, when Helene reminded him that Cranston was to be a dinner guest.

"I'm afraid Mr. Cranston had a rather drab time of it," said Helene. "Suppose we show a little more enthusiasm than we did before."

Fixing his bow tie at the mirror, Stan nodded, and Helene saw him add a reflected smile. It faded, though, as soon as she looked away, a fact that the girl did not observe.

At dinner, Helene found herself sandwiched between Stan and Cranston, while Marcia, smiling sweetly from the opposite side, was flanked by Jack and Carthwright.

Helene was wearing a golden evening gown, with slender shoulder straps, one which some people would have defined as rather scant. She was wearing it because Stan liked it, although she would have preferred another.

Helene's attire, however, was in no way daring when compared with Marcia's. The black-haired beauty's gown matched her raven locks, and hadn't any shoulder straps at all. In fact, when Marcia reached down to pick up a dropped napkin, she reminded Helene of someone dipping in the bathtub to find a cake of soap.

But the rest of the time, Marcia kept her shoulders high enough above the table to reveal some of the gown beneath them.

Marcia seemed proud of those bare shoulders, the way she so often shrugged them; but it didn't occur to Helene that she was displaying them for Stan.

Not because Marcia wanted Stan to admire them; she just wanted him to see that they hadn't yet been marred by the wreckage of a card table, and her shrugs indicated that she never expected that they would be.

There was to be a dance at the Beach Club that evening, and it was the chief conversational subject. It was to be the first dance that Stan and Helene would attend since their marriage, hence Helene was quite enthusiastic.

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"We won't stay long after midnight," Helene promised Stan. "I know you're keeping office hours."

"I thought Stan was going on a business trip," put in Jack. "Wasn't that what you said, Marcia?"

A slippered foot caught Jack's shin beneath the table, but Marcia merely smiled as she shook her head.

"Stan mentioned the trip himself," she told Jack, "and I told you about it later. But it won't be for quite a while, I understand."

"But you said—"

From his place near the foot of the table, Jack caught a glint from the eyes of Theodore Prendle. Stan had referred to the trip during the business conference that Jack had missed while pursuing literary studies and catching up on sleep.

"We'll go to the dance, too," Jack told Marcia, to divert the conversation. "But I think we'd better get home before midnight. I'm keeping working hours, too."

He smiled toward his father, hoping for approval, but Theodore Prendle remained stern. Turning to Carthwright, Prendle talked of other matters, that soon drew Cranston into the conversation.

They were still chatting when the dinner ended. With the others getting ready for the dance, Prendle suggested that Carthwright and Cranston accompany him into the study.

"Sorry, Mr. Prendle," observed The Shadow. "I shall have to run into town. The trip will take me about two hours—"

"Then you'll be back afterward?"

"Won't it be too late?"

"Not at all," assured Prendle. "I always stay up after midnight on evenings when the children are out."

His emphasis on "children" was given as Jack passed. Evidently Prendle intended to check on his son's new policy of sleeping by night and working by day. The term certainly did not apply to Helene, for she wasn't far away and she gave her father a smile, which he returned.

Once away from the Prendle mansion, Cranston became The Shadow. He drove his swift car to the shore restaurant; rolling past the parking lot, he noted that Frack's car wasn't in the line. Swinging away, The Shadow traveled farther.

Near the point that the hobbly man had mentioned, The Shadow parked the car beneath convenient trees and used a tiny flashlight to probe his way to the shore. The ground was rocky here, with roads few and poor. The woods, however, were thick all along the shore.

After searching the immediate terrain, The Shadow picked a jutting rock above the Sound, there to watch for Frack's return by boat, with Monte.

NEARLY an hour of dancing was over at the Beach Club, when Helene approached Stan, dangling a ribboned card. She showed him its name list, then said:

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"I still seem to be popular here. You're sure you don't mind, dear?"

"Not if you save me a few dances," spoke Stan, trying to smile. "After all, I'm your husband."

"Only three others," said Helene. "They'll take about half an hour. The next dance is yours, if you're still here to ask me for it. I'm keeping it open."

Her eyes were sparkling with the merriment that she felt, and Stan did his best to reciprocate. But he couldn't down the glumness which he felt.

"I'll cancel them all," began Helene. "Right away, if you want—"

"No, no."

"Then you're sure you don't mind?"

"Not at all!"

"Very well." Helene laughed, and supplied another of her quips. "I'll keep them. After all, this isn't our last night together."

The first of Helene's three partners came to claim her. Stan's eyes followed Helene as she walked away. Never had she seemed lovelier, not even on that day when the sun had added the golden burnish to her hair. Stan liked the golden gown because it reminded him of that first meeting with the girl who had so willingly become his wife.

But Stan's thoughts were on the future, not the past. Dully, he repeated words that Helene had just said:

"If you're still here... our last night—"

Stan wondered if he would be here after tonight; wondered if he could be. Midnight, the deadline, was looming only a few hours ahead. Midnight, because he'd have to be up early to catch a plane for his Western trip. By midnight, crooks would know that Stan wasn't going West at all. They would carry through their threat against him.

His last night for five years, perhaps forever! Much though Helene loved him, Stan could never ask her to forgive him after crime's showdown was made public.

The last night!

But not the last night for Jack and Marcia, who had stopped near Stan. They had begun to wrangle, and their argument wasn't the first that had disturbed their matrimonial career; nevertheless, Stan envied them.

He'd spoil Marcia's game—he'd see to that; but he doubted that any jury would convict her. The confidence ring wasn't holding a sword over Marcia's head, like the one that hovered above Stan's.

Words of the discussion reached Stan. Jack was tired of the dance and wanted to start home. Marcia was suggesting that he go out in the car and sleep for an hour, if he wanted; after that, she would be ready to leave.

Jack finally decided that it was a good idea. He left. With that, an inspiration struck Stan.

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He had only half an hour, but he could use it!

SLIDING through the nearest door, Stan went out to his own car. Five minutes later, he reached the Prendle mansion. He stopped in back, and came in through the door that led past the study. There, Stan paused abruptly.

Blair was crossing the hallway, to answer a summons from the study. Watching, Stan saw the scene within. Theodore Prendle was stopping a chat with Albert Cartwright. Booming at Blair, Prendle asked:

"Was that Mr. Jack who just drove in?"

"I don't know, sir," replied Blair. "I can look about and find out if Mr. Jack is in the house."

"If he is," said Prendle, "send him here, to the study."

The door closed. Within the study, Carthwright shook his head. He could foresee a stormy scene.

"I think you should prepare the figures," Carthwright told Prendle. "Show Jack in black and white just what the brokerage business means. Make him understand that he can't expect Marcia to do all his work for him."

"Marcia probably will, anyway," Prendle said. "Nevertheless, I'll try."

"Let me know when you have finished."

With a doubtful headshake, Carthwright went into the private library, to mull among his favorite books, which he often did when Prendle was busy. Still shaking his head, he closed the door behind him as he went.

Meanwhile, Stan had reached his room on the second floor. There, he brought his .32 from a deep-hidden spot in the closet. He stole from the room, the gun in his pocket, pausing only when he heard Blair coming up the steps, calling:

"Mr. Jack!"

Dodging Blair was costing precious moments. Finally clear of the butler's vicinity, Stan hurried outside. Instead of going to his car, he ran along the driveway, keeping on the grass so that the pound of his feet couldn't be heard. Past the big gate, he turned along the road and jogged to the entrance of the Thorndon estate, where he turned in.

It would have been shorter, much shorter, through the spite hedges, but Stan doubted that he could have found an opening. A good runner, he managed to increase his pace, even on the upward slope to Thorndon's. He estimated the time at some six or seven minutes, for, as Marcia had said, it was a long way around to Thorndon's.

He could only spare a few minutes with Thorndon, if he wanted to get back to the dance within the half hour; but Stan felt that the interview could be extended. Once under way, the type of persuasion he intended would surely bring results.

It wouldn't matter, then, if he kept Helene waiting. This would no longer be their last night, once Thorndon handed over the incriminating checks.

Breathless, Stan paused outside the great gray house; then tried the door through which Thorndon had once conducted him. It was unlocked, indicating that the servants were still about, and Stan heard signs of these servants as he sneaked through to the obscure stairway.

Stan reached the door of Thorndon's den and rapped, cautiously, as he had heard a servant do.

There was no answer. Thorndon evidently couldn't hear so light a tap, and Stan didn't want to hammer harder. He turned the doorknob, found that it yielded. A moment later, he was inside the den, closing the door with one hand, ready to draw his gun with the other.

He didn't see Thorndon, so supposed that the elderly man was out. Stan's eye was attracted to the safe in the corner; he hoped that Thorndon had left it open. It was worth a try; otherwise, Stan might have to wait until Thorndon returned.

Stan was muttering imprecations toward Thorndon all the while that he approached the corner. His mutters ceased abruptly when he passed the desk.

It wasn't fair to hate a dead man. Victor Thorndon was definitely dead. Head on the floor, right under Stan's halted feet, crabbier in death than he had been in life. Nor was the manner of that death a thing to doubt.

Someone had shot Thorndon right through the heart, here in this soundproof room where no one could have heard, leaving the murdered man and his bloodstained shirt front as bold and glaring evidence of crime!

It was the next man's task to wonder who had done the deed, and Stanley Wilford happened to be next!

CHAPTER XV. WAYS IN THE DARK.

THORNDON'S room was silent as a tomb, which indeed it was, considering that it contained a stone-dead occupant. It had another, who was very much alive: namely, Stan Wilford; but for the time being, he was as motionless as the thing upon the floor.

Thoughts were crashing through Stan's brain like breakers hitting a shore. The murder of Thorndon might mean the end of the confidence racket. Or was it just the beginning? Had the big-shot died at the hand of some lieutenant, envious of the master's power? Someone, perhaps, like Frack!

It might be. Still, there was another possibility. Thorndon's death might mark him as a victim, not the controller, of the confidence ring. It was difficult to picture Thorndon as a victim of anything, but the evidence was on hand to prove that he was such. The evidence, in the form of Thorndon's body.

The case was no suicide. There wasn't a gun in sight, except the one that was hanging limply from Stan's own fingers.

Death, itself, wasn't the thing that made Stan wilt. It was the mystery behind it, the purpose of the killing, the fact that the crime had shattered all of Stan's set notions. More than ever, he had to learn if Thorndon really did control the confidence ring. The blackened safe, glistening from the corner, might hold the answer!

Coming from his coma, Stan stepped over Thorndon's body and approached the safe more closely. He still had wits enough to use a handkerchief before he tried the big handle. The safe came open quite readily, to show an absolute void.

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Thorndon's murderer had rifled the safe completely, before making his departure!

Something shot to Stan's mind: a hackneyed statement about murderers returning to the scene of their crime. Stan didn't suppose that murderers ever did; still, he could see a reason why this one might.

Thorndon's safe must have been well stocked, and the killer wanted something of the many things within it. That being the primary motive, the murderer had taken everything, to sort his trophies elsewhere. If he hadn't found what he wanted, he might come back.

He might return, too, in order to suppress clues that he could easily have forgotten in his haste. He must have been hasty, or he would have done the sorting of the safe's contents while still here. All very logical, but Stan was wasting time. Furthermore, he hadn't found what he had come for—his checks.

Then, one thought ruled above all.

That thought was Stan's sudden desire to clear these premises; to let the future take care of itself. Thorndon's death might be the respite that he needed, but it was imperative for Stan to cover the fact that he had come here at all. He could do that only by getting back to the dance before Helene discovered his absence.

Mechanically, Stan reached the door.

He pressed his handkerchief against the knob and wiped it. He would have to do the same with the knob on the other side. Funny, how such details could concern an innocent man. But Stan didn't feel wholly innocent.

He had come here to threaten Thorndon with a gun; maybe the man before him had merely done the same. Unless that man was Frack, a crook already branded as a murderer!

Stan's fingers hadn't turned the knob, yet it seemed to be moving under them. A sudden alarm seized him. Leaving the handkerchief hanging as it was, Stan leaped back, yanking his gun from his pocket. The weapon came upward automatically, as the door swung inward. The words that left Stan's lips seemed to be uttered by someone else:

"Stand where you are, Frack!"

Stan's hoarse challenge halted the man on the threshold. The fellow made a move to dart away; then he let his hands go upward. Stan stared at the shrewd, but startled, face in front of him, and his mind flashed back to a mistake that he had made the day before. This time, he had done the same thing in reverse.

The fellow who was sneaking into Thorndon's den when Stan halted him was not Roger Frack.

This man was Jack Prendle!

THAT Jack was scared, was evident. But he was scared in a rattish sort of way, as though a guilt lay on his own conscience. The one thing that nerved Jack was his sight of Stan's paled countenance. Jack became cool, even before he noticed that Stan's gun hand was shaky.

"All right, Stan," said Jack. "You made Thorndon hand the stuff over. Pass it along to me."

Stan stepped back, to get a new grip on his gun. Jack was showing the very talents that Marcia had mentioned; he was certainly smarter than he had ever been before. He poked into the room, looked at the safe, and totally ignored Stan's gun. At last, he noted Thorndon's body.

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"So you killed him," remarked Jack, turning about. "But it's all right, Stan. I can't turn sorry over Thorndon. Give me what I asked for and I won't talk."

"No wonder you won't!" retorted Stan, suddenly. "Why should any murderer talk? You can't bluff me, Jack. You were here first. You killed Thorndon!"

"And came back?"

"Of course! Because you didn't find just what you wanted—or did you? Wait a minute"—Stan was jabbing the revolver against Jack's ribs—"while we talk this over. Maybe you came here to cover up some evidence of the crime itself. In that case, you're just staging a bluff. I've heard that you can be a good bluffer."

Swung completely to Marcia's theories; Stan could picture Jack the big-shot in the confidence racket, a man who worked from the best of cover. As a millionaire's son, with a fortune coming to him, Jack wouldn't be classed as a murderous seeker after wealth.

Very clever, his scheme of bringing Marcia into the game, to play him as a dupe in a system whereby Jack could rob his own father. But Stan decided that Jack had gone too far with it.

The catch was, as Stan saw it, that Jack was after Helene's fortune as well, and could therefore afford to pay Marcia a percentage in his own case. This was to be the real showdown, with Stan the man in charge, but it could better be decided in the Prendle mansion, where Jack, ahead of Stan at every step, had doubtless stowed the contents of Thorndon's safe.

Contents that had never included Stan's own checks. Those must have been in Jack's possession all along. No wonder Frack had said they were at Thorndon's! The game had been to coax Stan here and let him be blamed for murder!

"We're going out together," undertoned Stan, still prodding Jack toward the door. "Very quietly, you understand"—he was plucking the handkerchief from the inner knob—"so that no one will hear us."

Using the handkerchief, Stan turned and closed the door, wiping the outer knob. His gun was just behind Jack's back; only inches behind it, Stan thought, until he heard a clatter ahead.

Springing about, Stan saw Jack finishing a sneak to the stairs. Looking back over his shoulder, Jack had stumbled on the top step!

Therewith, Jack was inspired by thoughts of flight alone, and Stan was equally determined to overtake him. Jack was plunging down the steps, Stan leaping after him, to seize him at the bottom. Stan was using his fists; one still held a gun, purely because he hadn't had time to pocket it. But Jack was grappling with a fury that Stan could hardly credit.

Slugging, warding, locking together at times, they reeled through the hallway to the outer door. They heard shouts from behind them, given by Thorndon's servants, who had heard the fray and were coming from all parts of the house.

Crossing a step beyond the outer door, Jack tripped Stan neatly and sent him into a stumble. When Stan caught his feet again, he saw Jack racing like mad along the driveway, toward his car, which was parked at the nearest clump of trees.

BIG porch lights blazed suddenly from in front of Thorndon's house, and Stan was dashing in the opposite direction to get clear of the glare.

Servants saw him and came shouting after him, though Stan, by then, was beyond the range of the lights. They halted when Stan fired shots in the air; then, to his consternation, Stan found himself against the double hedge.

He went clawing along it, hunting in the dark for openings. He used the rest of his shots to keep the servants off. Then a space opened and Stan was through one hedge, only to be blocked by the next. Darting along it, he finally came to a gap in the farther hedge and broke through.

Halfway to the Prendle house, Stan halted and flung his revolver as far as he could. The gun was empty and totally useless, even for scaring off pursuers. A last dash brought Stan to the door that led past Prendle's study.

As he stumbled into the house, the study door wrenched open and he saw both Prendle and Carthwright, alarmed by his sudden entry.

Just then, a car whipped into the drive. It was Jack arriving home, proving that he had shown better judgment than Stan, in his manner of return.

Haltingly, Stan began to tell of trouble outside, of shooting that he had heard from the direction of Thorndon's. Then Jack was rushing into the house, stopping to stare at Stan and inquire what the trouble was.

Flashlights had broken through the double hedge. Thorndon's servants were invading the sacred Prendle preserves. The hunt, it seemed, was closing in upon Stan Wilford. He could hear the word "Murderer!" whispering in the very air.

The story which Stan would have to tell eventually was one that no one would believe. No one, except a single friend, if that being could be found. The hope that he might arrive flashed home to Stan as a last, desperate thought.

That one friend was The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVI. TWO MARKED MEN.

AT the moment when Stan so badly needed The Shadow, his cloaked friend was engaged upon another mission, several miles from Longwood. It was a task that The Shadow had expected to accomplish long before Stan might require him, for The Shadow had not expected Stan to move until midnight.

As usual, The Shadow had considered all factors in the case, including Victor Thorndon, but he had classed Thorndon's situation as one that could also wait. The Shadow intended to get back to Longwood soon, but believed that he still had time to investigate a boathouse that was tucked deep in a cove on the shore of the Sound.

The Shadow did not stumble on the boathouse accidentally. It was a result of his policy to wait and watch for the return of the speedboat. Arriving soon after The Shadow began his vigil, the craft had cut off its motor exactly as the man at the parking lot had described.

By calculating the distance that the noise might have carried, and gauging it in relation to the shore line, The

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Shadow was within a few hundred yards of the spot where the boat landed. The discovery of the boathouse was a natural consequence of his probe in that direction.

The place could not have been better situated to serve men of crime. The shore of the cove was irregular, making a jut into a line of zigzag rocks. From out on the Sound, the boathouse could not be seen, for the rocks looked like a solid row. Once there had been a pier at the entrance of the tiny channel leading into the boathouse, but it was gone.

Crooks had probably disposed of the last remnants, in order to make their hide-out secure. Only by creeping along the shore, as The Shadow did, could anyone have found the few bits of old planking that had been tossed among the rocks.

Though it had been abandoned, the boathouse was in good condition. It was a two-story structure, its upper floor supported between two rocks. The cleft below was where the speedboat had gone, and the opening, by the time The Shadow saw it, was closed again with a battered wall of planking.

The rocks were gray, the boathouse a weather-beaten white, hence all could be seen whenever straggly moonlight filtered through the clouds. Trees formed a solid background for the setting, and the woods flanked in upon the boathouse, like some monstrous creature prepared to engulf the abandoned structure. There were no lights whatever, though The Shadow was sure that the boathouse had occupants.

At least two men. Two marked men: one, Roger Frack, branded as a murderer; the other, Monte Garlan, listed as the victim of the very crime that had sent Frack into hiding!

It was a question, whether there were others. That question had to be settled. Remembering how crooks like Skeet and Napper had participated in previous crimes, The Shadow knew that others might be around; perhaps some of the leftovers who had served those two dead killers.

Nor had The Shadow forgotten the night when Frack had approached Stan Wilford at the Beach Club. Then, Frack had been given support by machine-gunners, who had not been heard from since. That mob had fled by car, instead of boat, but they could have rejoined Frack later.

Keeping along the rocks, avoiding any use of a telltale flashlight, The Shadow reached the upper level of the boathouse, to find it solidly walled. He crept farther, came in back of the structure on the landside.

There, actually feeling the darkness ahead of him, The Shadow found a gap among the trees. Something bulked in the darkness; it was a car.

An old car, The Shadow learned, as he used the flashlight guardedly, keeping the glow within the folds of his cloak and staying close to the side of the vehicle. The same car that had carried the machine-gunners from the Beach Club. It was dented with bullets, some The Shadow's, others supplied by the police who had fired after the fleeing car.

The Shadow whispered a laugh.

Crooks hadn't been free to abandon this rolling junk heap. Boxed in on Long Island, they had been forced to hide it to create the impression that they had gotten away. The heap was a fugitive, like the crooks themselves!

How they had brought it here, was plain, after The Shadow had made a short excursion through the woods. There wasn't any road to the boathouse, but when the place was built, materials had been dragged to it from

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the land side.

The route was still clear, a bumpy avenue that crossed tree roots and dodged rocks as it worked its way through the woods. With not even ruts to mark it, still it was wide enough to take a car through.

Crooks had probably found this ancient byway from the boathouse end. The Shadow was willing to concede that the outlet, somewhere inland, would be almost impossible to find. If underbrush did not hide it, crooks would certainly have masked that outlet since the time when they had brought the fugitive car to its present parking place.

It was when The Shadow returned to the battered car, that he obtained his first proof of men in the vicinity. Despite his precautions, his flashlight must have given an unguarded blink, for it brought a response, like an answering signal, from the brush a dozen feet away.

There was a slight crackle of the brush; the responding flashlight blinked again, much closer. A hoarse whisper came:

"That you, Artie? This is me—Louie. Been up to the road, like you said—"

Louie was close enough by then to see that The Shadow was not Artie. A chance blink of the fellow's flashlight gave him a view of the waiting form in black. Sight of The Shadow usually froze crooks and stilled their tongues for a short time. But it wasn't astonishment alone that kept Louie where he was and prevented the outcry that he wanted to give.

The Shadow's flashlight was away, beneath his cloak, with his guns. His gloved hands, free and rapid, had unlimbered from the ends of his long, swift-moving arms. Close enough to spot The Shadow, Louie was also close enough to be reached. The hands took him by the throat, suppressing even a tiny outcry.

The crook fought hard, but briefly. Scrawny, like the other mobbies that the confidence ring preferred, he was being lashed about so rapidly that he couldn't find a foothold: hence, his attempts at grappling were wild and useless. The fray ended in a dull thud as Louie's head, impelled by The Shadow's swing, caromed from the side of the old car.

Though somewhat muffled, the tinny sound carried. It brought a bob of flashlights front the other side of the boathouse. One man was growling, as he approached; the fellow was probably Artie, who seemed to be the leader of this fugitive mob. Suspiciously, Artie and his crew crept in upon the car, some skirting wide in order to surround it.

They weren't forming a complete circle. They thought they did not need to. The wall of the boathouse completed the gap. It was the only spot that The Shadow could reach without immediate detection, and he went that way, dragging Louie's light weight along.

He wasn't heard, for the searchers were making more noise than he was. By the time they closed in upon the car, The Shadow had gained the boathouse wall.

Propping Louie upright against the wall, where the stunned thug rested stiffly, The Shadow reached for the roof. It was inches short of his stretch, but he found a way to reach it.

A chunk of loose timber jutted from the frame of the windowless boathouse, at the level of the second floor. It was a short two-by-four, which The Shadow propped on end. Using it as a step, he made a rising reach against the wall, caught the roof edge and clung to it with his fingers, as the two-by-four tumbled to the soft

ground.

Getting a better grip, The Shadow drew himself up to the roof and flattened on its almost level surface, his hand reaching for a gun. Artie and the rest might be moving this way at any moment. If they saw Louie's propped form, they would suspect The Shadow's presence.

The lights were still at the ear, probing inside it. Artie's growl told that he wasn't convinced of something that the others had suggested: namely, that some animal, from a stray cat to a wild deer, might have blundered against the car and made the tinny noise.

Others were waiting in the darkness until Artie finished his search of the car, and the interval was made to order for The Shadow. It gave him the chance he wanted to suppress all evidence of his arrival and departure.

STRETCHING down from the roof edge, The Shadow reached for Louie. The stiffish crook was swaying when The Shadow's hands touched him, and his shoulders were too low for The Shadow to quite reach. Then, at the very moment when the stunned thug began to sag, The Shadow clamped the fellow's chin.

Slowly, steadily, he drew Louie upward; shifted one arm beneath Louie's as soon as it was possible. With a sideward roll farther onto the roof, The Shadow brought his burden across the edge.

Louie stirred, tried to mutter something, which The Shadow promptly suppressed by gagging him, with a handkerchief from the thug's own pocket. Using a loose rope and a spare belt of his own, The Shadow bound the prisoner hand and foot.

All the while, flashlights were blinking against the side of the boathouse, where crooks had finally come. But Artie and the rest saw nothing of The Shadow or Louie. Both were above their level of vision.

Loss of the spare belt did not bother The Shadow. He always wore belts in threes, since they took up practically no more space than one. They came in handy in such cases as Louie's, especially when the prisoner happened to have a belt, too, which meant that The Shadow needed to use but one spare.

By now, Artie's crew was around the boathouse. The Shadow saw their quarters, an old work shack on the other side, visible from the boathouse roof. They weren't going back to it, however, for Artie, still growling, had decided to keep his men on patrol until Louie returned to report from the road.

Inasmuch as Louie wasn't going to return, the prospect was by no means perfect for The Shadow.

The longer he waited, the more vigilant crooks would become. To start a battle with them would be foolish, since The Shadow's actual mission concerned Frack and Monte. Besides, The Shadow had no time to waste. He wanted to get back to Longwood before anything happened there.

Something had happened, during the very minutes that The Shadow was scouting around the boathouse. Thorndon was murdered, and Stan was in trouble; but The Shadow still calculated that such events, if scheduled, would not come until midnight.

In surrounding the boathouse, mobbies followed the same policy that they had with the car. They formed a semicircle, instead of a complete one. Just as the blank side wall of the boathouse had formed part of their earlier cordon, so did the front of the structure serve when they girded the boathouse itself.

The channel leading into the boathouse was below the ground level, hence hard for the crooks to reach. Besides, it was watery and could therefore be watched from the rocks that loomed above the inlet.

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It didn't occur to Archie's human watchdogs that the boat entrance could be reached from one spot: namely, from the roof of the boathouse itself.

But it did occur to The Shadow, who happened to be upon the roof.

Leaving Louie helpless, The Shadow crept to the front of the roof and peered down into absolute blackness. The moonlight, such as it was, couldn't reach the water close to the boat entrance.

Easing over the edge, The Shadow began a two-story descent into a darkness that would have suited a pit. The trip wasn't risky in itself, for The Shadow would have fallen into water. But the splash would have made him a target for a dozen guns.

There wasn't much of a surface to clutch, but, fortunately, the front of the boathouse had a jutting ledge, which The Shadow's feet encountered just as he was beginning to slide, despite himself.

From that level, the rest was easy. The planking which closed the boat entrance, just beneath the ledge, was loose and easy to grip. Almost at water level, The Shadow hooked an upright beam and wedged himself past the edge of the shaky planking, into the boathouse itself.

He saw the speedboat drawn up beside a little landing, which had steps up to the floor above. At the top of the steps, The Shadow found a door and tried it. The door was unlocked, for Frack and Monte expected no trouble from that direction. Opening the door a crack, The Shadow peered through.

IN a square room, filled with broken-down boat equipment and lighted by a hanging lantern, he saw the two marked men. They had been playing cards beneath the lantern, but at present, Frack had stepped away. He was unclamping a door at the rear of the room, an affair that was hinged at the top, with the clamp at the bottom.

From the back of the boathouse, which The Shadow had not closely inspected, the odd door probably looked like part of the solid wall.

"Artie and the bunch are on the prowl," spoke Frack, his head cocked in listening attitude. "I'm going out to see what's up. Stick here, Monte."

Frack slid out beneath the door. As it flapped shut, The Shadow stepped into the room and gave a whispered laugh that brought Monte full about.

Seeing the black-cloaked avenger, Monte's sallow face made a quick change to pallor. Half springing, half sprawling from his chair, the crook tugged a gun from his pocket, only to let it slip from his fingers at sight of a muzzle boring right between his eyes.

Without shifting aim, The Shadow made a deft, sideward shift, plucking Monte's falling revolver from the air before the weapon could thump the floor. The Shadow's laugh, though still low-toned, denoted coming triumph.

In capturing Monte Garlan, one of the two marked men, The Shadow had paved the way to his taking of the other, Roger Frack!

CHAPTER XVII. A QUESTION OF TERMS.

IN trapping Monte, The Shadow had taken the supposed dead man fully unawares, and in more ways than one. The capture was one thing; bagging Monte alone was an additional feature. Furthermore, The Shadow's next shift had a purpose.

Swinging about, keeping Monte covered all the while, he put the crook's face right into the light, while The Shadow himself kept to the fringe of the glow. All that Monte could see were burning eyes—the glowing orbs of a superhuman inquisitor.

Monte knew he had to talk. He wanted to talk; it was his only hope. He spoke in a hoarse whisper, pleading at first and quite incoherent, but The Shadow did not hurry him. The Shadow felt that he could spare a few minutes in taking the facts as Monte preferred to give them.

Once Monte's testimony was registered, The Shadow would be ready for Frack. When Frack talked, as he would under the right persuasion, The Shadow could tally his statements against Monte's. Whatever did not fit, would be the subject for further questioning, under additional persuasion.

"You knew I wasn't croaked," began Monte, keeping his hoarse tone low as he saw a gun nudge from below The Shadow's eyes. "You're the only guy that does know it, Shadow, except Frack and the big-shot—"

"And the big-shot—"

The Shadow's interruption, a repetition of Monte's words, carried a question that Monte understood. The fellow licked his lips anxiously, putting all the sincerity that he could into his rattish countenance.

"I don't know who the big-shot is." Monte's tone was anxious. Honest, Shadow! Frack knows because he's part of the outfit. I didn't belong. I was brought into the mob, because—"

"Because—"

For a moment, Monte hesitated. Something told him that The Shadow had already divined the answer to the fake murder which had taken Napper as an unintended victim. He felt, too, that The Shadow could have named the big-shot behind the confidence racket. Helplessly, Monte moved his lips.

A voice spoke, but it wasn't Monte's. It came in a vicious snarl from behind The Shadow's back. The speaker was Frack; his words were cool:

"Don't budge, Shadow!"

A thump followed Frack's statement. It told that he had come up through the hinged door, effecting a silent entrance that would have been impossible with any other type of barrier. In turning Monte to the light, The Shadow had put that door behind his own shoulder. He hadn't expected Frack to contact Artie so quickly and return in so short a time.

With a sidle glance, The Shadow saw the glimmer of Frack's leveled revolver. Frack could see The Shadow's automatic and was watching it fixedly. Since The Shadow followed Frack's instruction and did not budge, the big .45 still kept Monte covered. Hence Monte, too, stood as he was.

The wavery glow of the lantern was revealing a remarkable tableau. The Shadow had found two marked men;

but, in turn, he, too, was marked. Monte was helpless under The Shadow's gun, but Frack's aim toward The Shadow nullified the situation for the present. How long the nullification would last, was a thing to be learned. Frack tried to find out.

"Move away, Monte," growled Frack. "I've got The Shadow covered! Don't worry."

The Shadow whispered a laugh for Monte's benefit. It promised Monte a taste of something if he did move. So Monte stayed just where he was.

"A neat game, Shadow," complimented Frack, "but it won't work. If you blast Monte, I'll blast you. I mean it!"

Frack did mean it, but the fact did not encourage Monte. He wasn't willing to sacrifice his own life to end The Shadow's. The choice, however, was not up to Monte at all. It lay with Frack.

"Suppose you hear my terms, Shadow," suggested Frack. "Maybe you know that something is due at midnight. I went out to see if there was a message from the big-shot, but there wasn't. So it means that the job will be handled like we scheduled it. Sooner, maybe, than at midnight. It all depends."

Deciding that he had revealed enough, Frack came directly to the terms.

"We'll make a deal," he said. "You stay here, Shadow, until the job is through. After that, we'll let you go, because you won't be able to bother us. If you don't like sticking around, you can ride with the mob out toward the end of the island. When they let you go—"

THE SHADOW'S laugh interrupted. The idea of any mob letting him go, once they had control of him, was something for ridicule, even in a tight spot like this. Hearing the laugh, Frack snarled angrily:

"You've heard my terms, Shadow! Remember, if you blast Monte, you're through—"

Again, The Shadow interrupted, his strange mirth significant despite its repressed mockery. Whether that laugh was prompted by a preconceived design, or a sudden inspiration, only The Shadow knew. The tone, this time, was meant for Frack, not Monte, for The Shadow's eyes were glinting half across his shoulder, in Frack's direction.

As Frack stared, suddenly riveted by the whispering taunt, The Shadow spoke.

"You are wrong, Frack," he toned. "If I blast Monte, you will be through."

Frack gave a nervous start. His eyes had lost their sharpness.

"You are known as a murderer, Frack," continued The Shadow. "The law is hunting you and you do not like it. You have learned what it means to be hunted and you are afraid. You are looking forward to the day when that hunt will cease, and all the while, your only solace is the fact that you can prove, if necessary, your innocence of the crime for which you are sought."

Those words, spoken deliberately, had a telling effect upon Frack. He drank them in, despite himself; his changes of expression revealed how they were drilling home. The Shadow waited for Frack's reply. None came.

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"What good will crime's profits do you," queried The Shadow, "if your whole future requires perpetual flight? For the brand of murder will be permanent, Frack, unless Monte lives to testify that you did not kill him!"

Only a few minutes before, Monte hadn't been willing to sacrifice himself, even if it meant The Shadow's death. Now, Frack was experiencing a similar sensation.

The Shadow had analyzed Frack right; the con man wasn't a murderer by nature. He'd be willing to kill privately, or in an open fray, but he couldn't stand the gaff that an outright murderer would accept. Nevertheless, Frack made an attempt to parry.

"You know I didn't kill Monte," he began. "You know it very well, Shadow—"

"But who else knows it—"

"The big-shot does!" returned Monte, in reply to The Shadow's sibilant interruption. "Artie's mob doesn't, because I kept them out of it, like the big-shot wanted. But he knows, and that's enough—"

"Enough to sign your death warrant, Frack. The brain behind your game is too cunning to support a wanted murderer. You have one hope only, Frack: Monte must live!"

Finishing those words, The Shadow deliberately moved his gun toward Monte, who quailed in shivering fashion. But the effect upon Frack was even greater. Numbly, Frack let his gun fall, to extend his hands piteously.

"No, no, Shadow!" he pleaded. "You give the terms; I'll take them. Anything—if you let Monte live!"

The Shadow still kept Monte covered; for Monte, not Frack, had become the man to watch. It was simply a case of keeping Monte cowed to a degree where it would not be necessary to shoot him.

Meanwhile, Frack would obey The Shadow's mandates quite as much as if under a gun point also. In fact, the muzzle that kept Monte in line was controlling Frack, as well!

"Speak to Artie," The Shadow told Frack. "Tell him that you are leaving in the speedboat; nothing more. Stay close, so that I can hear you.

Frack made a trip to the hinged door. He raised it slightly; stooping at the opening, he called to Artie, who answered. Frack said that it wouldn't be necessary to guard the boathouse any longer; that he was going out.

"What about Louie?" questioned Artie, from outside. "He hasn't come back."

Anxiously, Frack looked to The Shadow, who undertoned, so low that Artie could not hear:

"Tell him you told Louie to wait along the shore; that you intend to pick Louie up in the boat."

Frack passed the statement along to Artie, who went away grumbling that he should have been informed on that point long before. The hinged door slipped from Frack's wavering clutch. The Shadow told him to clamp it and come along.

PRESSING Monte ahead with the gun muzzle, The Shadow forced the fellow down the steps and into the speedboat. Frack followed like a patient dog; when The Shadow told him to open the barrier to the channel, he did so.

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From the darkness of the speedboat came The Shadow's next whisper, ordering Frack on board. Frack came with alacrity, and took the wheel when The Shadow commanded.

Starting the motor, Frack guided the boat out through the channel. From above, Artie's men couldn't make out the figures in the darkened cockpit. The boat reached the Sound, where The Shadow gave Frack new directions. He was to steer for Longwood, at top speed, and beach the craft at the nearest landing to the Prendle estate.

A strange trio, the occupants of that speeding boat! The Shadow seated between two marked men, heedless of Frack on one side, but keeping his gun tight against Monte on the other.

Murderer and victim to the world, Frack and Monte were just another pair of crooks to The Shadow, though the way in which he had bagged them was indeed unique.

Likewise, the plans that The Shadow had for that pair were quite unusual, as both were to learn when they heard more of The Shadow's terms.

CHAPTER XVIII. A MATTER OF MURDER.

IN returning to the Prendle mansion, The Shadow was bound for a place where crime was already under discussion. It had been that way for a half hour or so, much to the amazement of Stan Wilford. His own blundering entrance into the house had seemed a give-away to Stan; but it had not proven so.

Not yet.

Later, it would be remembered, that blundering arrival of Stan's, but for the present, someone else was answering questions. Thorndon's servants had arrived, first to say that they were hunting two unknown men who had staged a battle in the neighboring mansion; later, to announce that they had found their master dead in his den.

Such news had called for police investigation, and after a look at Thorndon's body a rangy detective named Hewitt, who represented the local force, had come over to the Prendle house to learn the situation there.

The man that Hewitt chose to question was, of all people, Theodore Prendle!

Stan couldn't believe it, at first, as he stared in through the study door to see his father-in-law seated behind the desk, under cross-examination. Yet it was logical enough, on second thought, for Prendle's dislike toward Thorndon was a thing well known.

Fortunately, Theodore Prendle had an alibi and was able to sustain it, thanks to the time element.

Thorndon's servants remembered when their master had gone up to his den, and he had been there only fifteen minutes before the battle between two intruders had led to the discovery of Thorndon's body.

None of the servants recognized Stan and Jack as the brawlers; they had fled too quickly to be identified. They weren't even sure that the one who had done the shooting was the murderer. It was certain, however, as Detective Hewitt sagely stated, that the killer had entered, done his deadly work and departed within a specified quarter hour.

That very quarter hour was a time which Theodore Prendle could account for, with witnesses to support him.

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Prendle had been watching the clock on his desk, as he always did when Jack had agreed to come home early.

"Thorndon must have been going up to his den when I heard the car drive in here," declared Prendle. "The time tallies."

"It does precisely, sir," stated Blair, who was standing by. "I noticed the clock in the hall."

"And you came back, Blair—"

"At five-minute intervals, sir, to report that Mr. Jack was not yet home. Each time you answered me."

Prendle delivered Hewitt a stern glance, which somewhat satisfied the detective. It was highly obvious that no one could have gone to Thorndon's, committed a murder and come back with the contents of the safe in less than five minutes, not even if he knew a short route through the hedge.

Hewitt calculated that it would take at least ten; however, he sent one of Thorndon's servants to try it.

Hewitt announced that the servant's trip would be the final test of Prendle's alibi; that further investigation could wait until the fellow returned.

"Why wait?" It was Carthwright who put the query. "I can vouch for Mr. Prendle. I didn't notice his clock, because it was turned away from me. But I was here with Mr. Prendle all evening. He never left the study."

"You were here when he called Blair?" queried Hewitt. "You heard Blair return to make those five-minute reports?"

"Of course!" returned Carthwright. "I said I was here all the while. I would suggest that you proceed with other angles of the case."

HEWITT decided to do so. Looking about, he saw Jack, who was standing near the door.

"So they thought you came in," stated Hewitt, suddenly. "If you did, where were you when Blair looked for you?"

"I hadn't come in," returned Jack shrewdly. "In fact, I hadn't even left the Beach Club. I must have been there while the mess was happening at Thorndon's."

Jack sidled a glance toward Stan, as if defying him to dispute the testimony. Naturally, Stan said nothing, but Marcia spoke up. She had returned from the dance with Helene. In a very sweet tone, Marcia said:

"Of course, Jackie was at the club. He left only a little while before I did. Poor dear, he was tired and I thought he ought to come home."

It was an absolute lie, but one that Stan could not afford to challenge until he knew exactly where he stood. Prendle, with his usual look of approval toward Marcia, believed the statement.

So did Hewitt, when he looked at Marcia. Dark eyes, black hair, and shoulders that seemed ready to leap from the gorgeous evening gown, were convincing arguments to the detective.

Eyes all for Marcia, Hewitt didn't notice the girl in gold who moved closer to Stan's corner. But Stan did, for Helene was plucking his sleeve and looking up appealingly. Her question was a whisper:

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"What can I say, Stan? I know that you left early, because Reggie came to ask me for a dance. He said that you had gone, and when I looked for you, I saw that you had."

"Just tell the truth," responded Stan, in an undertone. "But wait until you are questioned."

"You mean... that you went to Thorndon's?"

"I can tell you everything later, Helene. There are other matters to be straightened first."

Helene's eyes carried something much like accusation. Uneasily, Stan shifted away. Looking at the darkness outside the study window, he wondered where The Shadow was. Stan still was counting on the cloaked friend who might somehow be able to solve the riddle of the Thorndon murder.

At that particular moment, the Shadow was much closer than Stan supposed. He was right outside the Prendle home, near the front door, and he had two companions with him: one, a man who moved saggingly ahead of The Shadow's gun; the other, a follower who kept close to The Shadow's heels.

"Far enough," decided The Shadow. "I shall wait here with Monte, Frack, while you go inside the house."

Frack began to mouth protests. The Shadow promptly suppressed them.

"I'm giving you ten minutes," he told Frack. "When they find out who you are, you can tell them all you know, including the name of the man you call the big-shot."

"But I may get croaked—"

"Not if you watch yourself. Of course, Frack, you are free to do as you wish. But if you try the wrong thing, you won't find Monte when you come back."

Nervously, Frack started away and approached the house. He gave a last, worried look; then entered. The door had hardly closed behind Frack, before The Shadow bore down on Monte.

Lowering his gun, The Shadow produced a belt, instead, caught Monte's hands and strapped them. Next, he bound Monte's feet with the crook's own belt.

Losing his balance, Monte rolled to the soft ground of a shrubbery bed. Kneeling upon the mobster's back, The Shadow gagged him with a handkerchief and rolled him face upward. Helpless, Monte heard a laugh that seemed to fade.

MEANWHILE, Frack had stopped in the big hall of the Prendle house. He had seen a man who looked like a servant coming in through a rear door. The man was expected in the study, and Frack could hear someone questioning him.

Unnoticed in the hall, Frack took advantage of the break to grab up the telephone. He knew something which The Shadow hadn't learned. Artie had tapped a telephone extension and had run a connection to the old shack near the boat house.

Calling Artie, Frack told him to bring the whole crew in the old car, a trip which, even with the rough road for a start, should not take more than a quarter hour. But Frack added that Artie and his men were to stay in the offing until he called for them. If he didn't call, they were not to move, no matter what happened. Frack wasn't taking any risks on the Monte proposition.

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By the time the call was finished, five minutes of Frack's time was gone. Nervously, he sidled toward the study wondering if he could manage a stall when he arrived there. It wouldn't do to try much funny stuff; otherwise, The Shadow might move in to take a hand—without bringing Monte.

In the study, Hewitt had finished talking to Thorndon's servant. The trip by the short route had taken the man eight minutes at a fair pace. Prendle couldn't have made it in less time, so Hewitt declared that the alibi stood.

Meanwhile, Stan, reluctantly keeping away from Helene, had come closer to Jack. Stan saw his brother-in-law turn.

"Pass over the stuff from Thorndon's, side-mouthed Jack. "You'd better, before you're searched. You can slip me the gun, too. I'll get rid of it for you."

"Maybe you'd better slide the stuff to me," returned Stan. They might search you first. You've been questioned; a search ought to be likely."

"The won't find anything on me."

"Maybe they will on Marcia," suggested Stan, with a glance in the girl's direction. "It wouldn't take long to search her. If you gave the evidence to her, and they find it, her testimony will be blotto!"

Jack gave a shrug, and turned away. For the first time, Stan was glad that he hadn't found his checks at Thorndon's. He was pleased, too, that he had chucked his gun into the woods, even though it wasn't the weapon responsible for Thorndon's death.

Stan looked at Hewitt, wondering what came next: at that moment, the rangy detective was addressing Theodore Prendle.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Prendle—"

"You ought to be!" boomed Prendle. "Move some of these people out of here. No, not that way! That door leads into my private library. As to my statement—"

"You've already made one, Mr. Prendle."

Prendle shook his head. He had come from behind the desk and was crowding people toward the outer door. From that cluster, Stan saw Prendle pause, his hand pressing the knob of the door that led into his precious library.

"I shall make an exact statement," insisted Prendle. "One that will stand on permanent record. I shall prove that I never left this room. Blair will make a similar statement, as will Carthwright. When their testimony is thoroughly checked with mine—"

Something clicked sharply very close to Stan's shoulder. It was the light switch and Stan thought, for the instant, that his shoulder, or Jack's, had accidentally pressed it, bringing the immediate darkness. Then came proof that a hand from the huddle had done the deed, with fell design.

Along with the sudden clatter of a door, a gun stabbed through the darkness. Almost from Stan's elbow, the spurt was aimed toward the library door, where Theodore Prendle had been standing. A quick, straight shot, delivered by an unknown hand, with a prompt result to follow.

Hard upon the gun burst came a high, startled cry from Theodore Prendle, broken by the thud of the elderly man's body as he tumbled in the darkness!

CHAPTER XIX. OUT OF BLACKNESS.

The study was a madhouse in the darkness. Everyone was struggling, some to get from the room, others to seek the shelter of the corners.

One person, at least, was after a murderer. Stan Wilford was doing his best to find the killer. Stan had wheeled to grab for the gun, as a starter.

Stan found it, only to have it snatched away. He grabbed it back and tried to punch the man who had it. He heard a snarl from Jack Prendle, who struck back in return.

They grappled, Stan struggling with one hand only, for his other had found the gun again. Right then, Stan realized that Jack was staging a one-handed grapple, also.

They were bowling across the room, no longer wrestling. It was a struggle for the gun, and Stan had both hands on the weapon, as did Jack. They encountered lighter hands along the way, and flung them aside. Bringing up hard against the desk, Stan and Jack were still at it, when the lights came on.

It was Carthwright who had pressed the light switch. Seeing the two strugglers and what they were about, he yelled for others to grab them.

As Hewitt and a couple of servants sprang to the task, Carthwright came with them. He managed to tug the revolver from the combined grasp of Stan and Jack; in fact, both were willing to let him have it, rather than yield to the other.

The revolver was larger than Stan's. It was a .38, of modern make, and Stan was quite sure that it must be the death weapon that had killed old Victor Thorndon. What it had done to Theodore Prendle, Stan couldn't tell as yet, for people blocked his sight of the library door.

He saw Hellene in a corner; she was rather dazed, and her golden gown was rumpled, which made Stan realize that she must have gotten in the way of himself and Jack. He was solaced somewhat when he saw Marcia, scowling while she held her hand against her jaw. She had gotten in front of one of the early punches, and Stan rather hoped that it was one of his own swings.

By then, Stan was being dragged to the center of the room, along with Jack. Both were staring toward the library door which had gone open under Prendle's falling weight. For Theodore Prendle was lying motionless, face downward, well across the threshold of the library.

Stan glanced at Jack, who returned the look with visible signs of horror. Neither doubted that the death gun had done service again, eliminating Prendle like his rival, Thorndon. No one approached the body, for all eyes were concerned with Stan and Jack. Of those two, one must be the murderer!

Laying the death gun on the desk, Albert Carthwright faced the pair. He showed the solemnity of a judge, as he phrased the words that were in other minds.

"One of you killed Victor Thorndon," Carthwright accused. "That same man has just murdered Theodore Prendle in our presence. But whichever is guilty—his eyes swung from Stan to Jack and back again—"the

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other is to be commended, insomuch as he tried to prevent this murder."

"I can take credit for that," put in Jack stoutly. "I might as well tell the whole story. I was at Thorndon's, too. I tried to keep Stan from getting away. We were the fellows who staged that fight there."

"You mean you killed Thorndon," retorted Stan, "and tried to plant the thing on me! I was trying to stop you, when you tried to run. I should have realized that with one murder to your discredit, you would be quick to make another."

Carthwright motioned for people to hold the two young men apart.

"Either statement may be true," he declared soberly. "Jack Prendle never agreed with his father on anything. It is quite possible that he could cast relationship aside and actually murder his own father. On the other hand"—Carthwright shook his head—"we must remember that Stanley Wilford is a newcomer. For all we know, he may be an adventurous fortune hunter, with ugly schemes in mind. Still, remember what I first declared: if one is wrong, the other must be right. The difference is as sharp as black and white!"

NEVER before had Stan envied a person who could cringe and seek for undeserved sympathy. But that ability actually proved to be a talent, the way that Jack displayed it.

Timing his action neatly, Jack suddenly broke down, but not to make a confession of guilt. Instead, he began to gush about his poor, dead father in a manner that no one considered ridiculous—except Stan.

Even Helene was touched, as she naturally would have been, considering that Theodore Prendle was her father, too. But when Jack's breakdown turned everyone against Stan; when even Carthwright suggested that he be taken into immediate custody, it was Helene who rallied to Stan's support.

Springing from the corner, Helene fought off Hewitt when the detective tried to put handcuffs on her husband.

"Stan couldn't have killed father!" she asserted. "He couldn't have, any more than Jack. No, no! You must listen! You must hear all that Stan has to say. He may help you to find the real murderer!"

Maybe the fact that Stan was looking everywhere prompted Helene's final words. Whatever the case, in his hunted search for another friend, Stan saw what Helene wanted. He spied a man who, in Stan's estimate, could have slain both Thorndon and Prendle.

The man was Roger Frack.

There wasn't any reason why Frack should be here, or anywhere else, except for some purpose of crime. Maybe Thorndon was head of the confidence ring, after all, and Frack had decided to take over the racket. Perhaps Prendle knew more about Thorndon than people supposed, and was therefore the one person who could have picked Frack as the murderer.

Stan, of course, was going on the supposition that Frack was already a killer. Actually, Frack hadn't killed Thorndon, any more than he had murdered Monte. Frack had been with the fake dead man, Monte, at the time of Thorndon's death, for it had happened while the speedboat was entering the boathouse along the Sound.

As for killing Prendle, it was ridiculous to blame the deed on Frack. He was out in the hall when the shot was fired from within the study.

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However, logic had gone to the winds. By identifying Frack, a reputed killer who had no business here, Stan gained another break.

Letting go of Stan, Hewitt grabbed Frack instead and dragged him into the study. Proud that he had bagged a man who was definitely a criminal, the detective thrust Frack up to Carthwright, saying:

"Here's our man! He fired the death shot!"

Carthwright didn't agree. He saw that Frack could not have been in the study at the time of the gunshot. He said that Frack's case could wait; whatever bearing it had on the case was something to be discussed later. He doubted that Frack could provide any worthwhile evidence, and hearing that statement, Frack went silent as a clam.

So far, The Shadow had not appeared upon the scene, and considering all that had happened in the past few minutes, Frack decided that he could stall for a good while longer.

Stepping to the door, Carthwright stood solemn and erect. Raising one hand, the grizzled man declared:

"Someone fired a shot from here. It killed Theodore Prendle over there—"

He turned as he spoke, bringing his hand downward like a pointing gun. The gesture wasn't completed, before Carthwright halted. His eyes had a disbelieving stare, as he looked toward the open door of the library.

All was dark in that other room, save for the glow of embers in a fireplace; but Carthwright was not staring into the depths. He was looking at the threshold.

Only a few moments before, Theodore Prendle had been lying dead upon that threshold. Dead, so far as witnesses knew, though none had thought to examine the body, because the quest for a murderer had occupied all attention.

They were as stunned as Carthwright, those others who turned to see what he observed. If dead, Theodore Prendle had become a very active corpse.

PRENDLE was rising slowly to his feet. His hand pressed to his head, he was muttering:

"The door... it gave way. I struck something... before he could catch me. I remember... I was saying—"

Swaying, Prendle was caught by those nearby. They helped him to the chair behind the desk, where he kept repeating the things that he had said before. His sudden sprawl, which had rendered him temporarily unconscious, had been enough to jolt his memory. It had been a lucky fall, however, for it had saved Prendle's life.

Stan remembered how he had heard the clatter of a door before the gunshot. It meant one thing only: that someone had been peering through from the library, with the door a trifle ajar. Someone who, at the moment the lights went off in the study, had yanked the door wide, so that Prendle would fall away from danger.

Only one person could have acted with such foresight and precision.

The Shadow!

Blackness was The Shadow's habitation. Except for the trifling glow of the fireplace, the library was a mass of darkness, the very place where The Shadow would logically be. Stan fancied that he heard a weird whisper come from that gloom. The impression proved more than fancy.

The strange mirth grew!

Then, as all eyes were fixed upon the opened doorway, the author of the laugh appeared. He was like a batch of incoming darkness spreading into human form. Cloaked shoulders cut off the feeble glow from the fire; then, like a materialized ghost, The Shadow was complete. Fully across the threshold, he stood within the study, where all could see him.

His eyes might have been blazing coals that he had borrowed from the fire, so fierce was their burn. They were a threat to malefactors, those eyes, and beneath them, thrust from a gloved fist, was an automatic, ready to speak at its owner's wish.

The folds of The Shadow's cloak were stirred by a wavering breeze that came through an opened window in the library, the route that The Shadow had used for entrance.

Fading, The Shadow's laugh left indelible impressions upon all who heard it. That tone was The Shadow's assurance that he, for one, could reveal the brain behind crime—the murderer who had slain Thorndon, only to fail at death to Theodore Prendle!

CHAPTER XX. CROSSED CROOKS.

IT was Roger Frack who wilted first in the presence of The Shadow. Already beneath the cloaked master's sway, Frack remembered that he had been tardy in following The Shadow's orders.

Anxious to make peace with the black-clad avenger, Frack poured his own guilt first, to make it clear that he was going through with a full confession.

"I started all this!" gulped Frack. "I talked Marcia into marrying Jack." He gestured toward the couple, as he mentioned them: "What's more, I talked Stan into marrying Helene."

"Not quite, Frack," put in Stan. "You may recall that I told you I wouldn't marry Helene. There was another reason why I did."

"I was the reason," announced Helene, before Stan could continue. "Whatever Stan has done, or might have done, he is my husband by my own wish."

There was a low whisper of approval from The Shadow, the real maker of the match. Frack heard the whisper, too, and took it differently. To him, it was an order to proceed, which he did gladly, for Frack was coming to the fact that most concerned himself and his own future.

"I didn't murder Monte Garlan," Frack announced. "It was a fake job, the whole thing. I can prove it by Monte. He's been hiding out with me, all along. He's here somewhere. I know, because The Shadow brought him."

Frack looked toward The Shadow, but it was not the cloaked master's moment to reply. Someone else was taking the floor.

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"You double-crosser!" Marcia hissed, as she lurched toward Frack. "You said you were getting rid of Monte. But you didn't trust me; you had to make sure I'd pass over the dough. You knew I wanted Monte murdered—"

Jack had grabbed Marcia, to keep her from reaching Frack; but she, herself, cut off her statement. If Monte should turn up dead, after all, Marcia would be branded as a party to his death. Her admission had already gone too far, and Frack was pleased enough to regain some of his suavity.

"I said I would take care of Monte," he remarked. "That was all. You misinterpreted me, Marcia."

"You're still a double-crosser," snarled Marcia, deciding that discretion no longer counted. Then, wresting herself from Jack's grasp, she wheeled on him and added:

"That goes for you, too!"

"How?"

"Don't try to kid me, Jackie," sneered Marcia. "The way you jumped to this marriage stuff, I should have known it was phony."

"I didn't pull a phony," Jack retorted. "I overheard my father saying that he would start me in business if I married the right girl. I needed money badly, to pay off gambling debts. I thought you were great, Marcia—"

"Sure, you thought I was great! That's why you had Frack fix it. But you weren't worrying about gambling debts. You wanted to get all your father's dough through me and Stan. You had to keep me in line and you knew you could, by faking Monte's death. You knew that Monte was my husband; that while he was still alive, you'd have an out—"

Again, Marcia was spouting too much. She realized it when she met Jack's vacant stare. The angle of Monte was certainly new to Jack, but not to The Shadow. His laugh told that he had divined the answer long before, the only plausible answer, considering the circumstances.

By loosening Frack's tongue, as a start, The Shadow had forced Marcia into the things she said, for he knew well what her fury would produce. But there was more to come.

AT the desk, old Theodore Prendle had recovered from his lethargy. The things he heard were shocking him into interest. Turning appealingly toward his father, Jack saw that his one hope of regaining paternal forgiveness lay in telling the real source of his trouble.

"Victor Thorndon bought up my gambling debts," admitted Jack. "He didn't just hold one I O U—he had a batch of them. But he kept raising the price; that's why I had to go and see him. It wasn't just the money, it was his meanness toward you. Tonight was the deadline.

"You must have known it, Frack"—Jack was turning to glare at the con man, who nodded reluctantly—"because only a smart crook would have made that sale to Thorndon. Whatever you know, you'd better tell."

There was threat in Jack's tone, but it didn't count. Frack was taking orders from The Shadow, whose gun gesture he saw. Frack promptly came clean.

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"I sold those markers to Thorndon," he admitted. "But that was a long while ago. We needed them back, after we got started on the bigger game. They had to be gotten—"

"Along with my checks?" queried Stan hotly, as Frack hesitated. "If Thorndon wasn't behind the racket, how did he happen to have the checks?"

"He didn't have," Frack replied. "The idea was to get you over to Thorndon's, too. The big-shot wanted a real hold over you and Jack, he wanted you both to think you were up against a murder rap. But I don't think"—Frack was looking warily around the room and making uneasy shifts—"that he expected you both to show up at once."

Matters were clearing rapidly. At that moment, The Shadow could have pressed Frack's mention of a big-shot, and brought the final showdown. He preferred, however, to let the case clear itself, for things were working as The Shadow had planned them. Particularly, when Theodore Prendle began to speak.

"I understand you better, Jack," he said to his son. "What you have admitted shows that I misjudged you. Any one persecuted by Thorndon has my sympathy.

"As for Marcia, she has not only proven herself quite unworthy of our trust; she has ended the problem of what to do about her case. Being already married to a husband who is still alive, she can't worry us.

"As for you, Stanley"—Prendle turned to his son-in-law—"it is quite evident that you were working against those who tried to control you and make you party to their schemes. I feel sure that my original judgment of you was justified, and I know that Helene agrees."

Helene did agree. She was at Stan's side, pressing his arm tightly. Helene was smiling; she didn't notice that her father's face was still serious. Stan saw it, and knew why.

The Prendle family had solved its own problems, but that would not suffice. The question of Thorndon's murder still lay between Stan and Jack, for both had admitted their trips to the other house.

THEODORE PRENDLE looked to The Shadow, saw encouragement in the eyes of his rescuer. The Shadow was counting upon Prendle to dig deeper into the case and bring up some new evidence from the past. A thought came to Prendle; he turned to Jack.

"Tell me, Jack," he questioned. "Just how did you learn that I meant to set you up in business, and do the same for the man who married Helene?"

"I heard you talking to Carthwright," replied Jack, a bit dejectedly. "Blair would have caught me, if I hadn't bluffed him. I faked a telephone call while he was watching. It was right after you went outside to bawl out Reggie Exeter."

"I remember, sir," said Blair to Prendle. "Come to think of it, Mr. Jack did seem to be using the telephone as a ruse."

"He called from in here?" queried Prendle, picking up the telephone. "Didn't you think that it was odd for Jack to be using this phone?"

"He was calling from the hall, sir." Blair corrected himself: "That is, he was bluffing, as he terms it, with the hallway telephone. The door to the study was closed."

Prendle nodded.

"Of course it was," he recalled. "I closed it. You remember, don't you, Carthwright"—he swung to his friend—"you must remember, because you were here. I didn't mention my plans to anyone else."

"Yes," said Carthwright, "I was here."

"You were here this evening, too," mused Prendle. "I was just going into details about that, when the lights went out. I fell through the door, and heard a shot. But you weren't here all the time, Carthwright. You were in my library for fully fifteen minutes, while I was going over figures and Blair was trying to find Jack."

"Fifteen minutes, Carthwright, when it takes less than ten to go to Thorndon's house and back. The library has windows, you know, Carthwright—"

The library did have windows. One was open and the breeze from it apparent, for The Shadow had stepped clear of the connecting door. In fact, the sweeping breeze seemed to catch The Shadow's laugh, when it picked up from Prendle's pause.

It was The Shadow who had last opened that window, to look in upon the study scene; but the fact didn't help Carthwright.

Prendle's pretended friend had opened the same window, earlier, to make his secret trip to Thorndon's. Carthwright was the murderer who had left with the papers from the safe!

It couldn't have fitted better. Stan's return had been the cue for Carthwright. He had expected to wait until nearly midnight, when Jack returned, a time when Thorndon, who always sat up late, would be totally unprotected. But Carthwright couldn't let the opportunity pass when Stan returned.

Knowing that Stan would take the long way around, Carthwright had found an excuse to enter the library, leaving Prendle occupied. The short cut had enabled him to reach Thorndon's house, force the victim to open the safe, and then murder the old man—still with time for Carthwright to be out before Stan arrived there.

As for Jack, his own trip to Thorndon's, direct from the Beach Club, was luck upon which Carthwright had not counted, coming so soon after the murder.

Luck that had proven ill for Carthwright. Jack's meeting with Stan had produced the brawl which placed both under suspicion, instead of carrying, secretly and separately, the fear of being implicated in a crime. Carthwright hadn't wanted a showdown while he still sought wealth, but it had come, leaving him but one alternative: to alibi himself fully.

Hence Carthwright's shot at Prendle. He had turned out the lights and used the death gun, then thrust it into the grabbing hands of Stan and Jack, each snatching for the other! Carthwright needed to kill Prendle before the latter detailed the facts of those vital fifteen minutes when Carthwright had been in the library, instead of the study.

Carthwright's cringe was an unneeded confession of his part. He was the brain behind the confidence ring, the big-shot whose name Frack soon would have mentioned. Weakening, he began to slump near Prendle's desk; seeing him make a reach to steady himself, Prendle scooped up the murder gun and stepped aside with it.

Prendle forgot another gun, one of his own, that he kept in a desk drawer. Having faked a failure under The Shadow's very gaze, Carthwright reversed his style. He yanked the drawer open, snatched Prendle's gun and

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wheeled back to a corner, foolishly thinking that he could beat The Shadow to the shot.

At that moment, Frack gave a yell. Windows crashed in and men came through them: Artie and his crew.

Marcia, darting for a corner like the others, seized the revolver that had originally been Carthwright's, but which was now in Prendle's hands. The tigerish girl was so quick, that Prendle did not have a chance to keep the gun.

The Shadow was blasting at the windows, using two guns to drive back Artie's tribe. They fell back like a wave striking a sea wall, literally wilted by the hail of lead. The window sills were their high-water mark. The shots that they fired were delivered while they hurtled backward. None of those bullets took effect.

During that rapid interlude, The Shadow had no time to handle Carthwright or Marcia. He was an open target for both their guns, yet neither weapon fired in his direction.

On impulse, The Shadow decided to ignore them, for he knew their make-up. Each would go after the most hated foe. In Carthwright's case, that foe was The Shadow; but Marcia had another choice. Of all persons she detested, Carthwright, the double-crosser, had first claim.

While Carthwright, determined upon another kill, was taking deliberate aim at The Shadow, Marcia stabbed quick shots at the murderer. Riddled by the bullets that kept coming until the gun was empty, Carthwright coiled on the floor without firing a shot of his own.

THE room was clear, with Marcia holding the empty gun. Hewitt took the weapon from her and slapped handcuffs on her wrists, while The Shadow, at the window, was firing after the fleeing members of Artie's staggered and depleted crew.

At the door of the study, Stan and Jack delivered Frack to the detective. Unarmed, the con man had simply tried to flee, only to be tackled.

They went outside, to find Monte trussed beneath the shrubbery—a pleasing discovery for Frack, whose life depended on it, though he was sure to pay a penalty for other crimes now known.

For Marcia, it released her from complicity in a murder that had not happened, but it marked the end of her hope to pillage the Prendle fortune on her own.

In the study, The Shadow stooped above Carthwright's body and brought out two slim batches of paper. He spread Jack's gambling markers in one hand, for Theodore Prendle to see the trophies that Carthwright had brought from Thorndon's safe. In the other hand, The Shadow made a fan of Stan's checks, which Carthwright, brain behind the confidence ring, had been carrying all along.

Stepping through to the library, The Shadow dropped both batches on the embers in the fireplace, where Carthwright had burned the rest of Thorndon's papers, after his return. Then, moving to the open window, The Shadow was blotted by its background, the darkness of the outside air.

He was gone, through the window and beyond, when Stan and Helene came from the study and stood by the darkened window. But the happiness of their reunion was made complete by the fading tone they heard from somewhere in the direction of the double hedgerow.

It was strange mirth, that throbbed a triumph over crime, yet which carried assurance and approval for those who had striven on the side of right.

The farewell of The Shadow!

THE END.