

MURDER MANSION

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I. PATHS TO CRIME

CLIVE WALDEN was worried, as he stared from the window of his hotel room. Worried, and with good reason. He had registered under his right name.

When worry gripped Clive, his face didn't show it. Instead, his lips took on a half smile, his eyes became cold steel.

At present, Clive was alone, so far as the hotel room was concerned; but there were plenty of persons outdoors. Clive was watching them, five floors below, a typical sidewalk throng as seen on a side street of New York after dusk.

One man detached himself from the throng and entered the hotel. Clive thought he recognized the fellow by his stiff gait, but wasn't sure. Still, Clive kept watching all the more intently. This was the time to watch: after Hemble had arrived. Back and forth across the lighted area that fronted the hotel, Clive's eyes roved restlessly in search of trailers.

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He saw none, though his eyes studied the patchy darkness most intently. Strange, the way that one segment of blackness seemed ready to edge into the light!

There were moments when the man at the sixth-floor window fancied that the darkness became an encroaching streak, with a slow, forward glide; but always it faded, easing back into the deeper blackness like a fleeting shadow. Clive was convinced that the wavering was entirely a thing of his imagination, when he heard a rap at his door.

The rap meant Hemble.

His lips relaxing into an actual smile, his eyes switching from cold glint to friendly twinkle, Clive Walden was debonair in manner when he opened the door and extended a hand in greeting.

It was Hemble who entered, stiffly, as always; his blunt face showed its usual solemn look. Hemble's expression had every mark of honesty, but with it a trace of dumbness.

Clive's wave gestured Hemble to a chair, and continued to a box of cigars on the table. Hemble was helping himself to a smoke when Clive remarked in an easy tone:

"I was getting worried, Hemble. I should have checked in under another name, but since I didn't mention it when I talked to you by telephone, I was afraid you wouldn't find me if I did."

The statement was a bit deep for Hemble. Evidently, he'd never heard of people using names other than their own, and couldn't quite grasp its purpose. Clive gave an indulgent laugh. He pulled an envelope from his pocket, extracted a batch of timeworn newspaper clippings, and spread them on the table.

"No use reading them," he told Hemble. "They're just for reference. They all say the same thing. They allege that I, Clive Walden, disappeared after removing the paltry sum of fifteen hundred dollars from the safe of the Browland Clock Co. in Riverdale. That was six months ago."

Hemble nodded, though his blunt face was a trifle puzzled. He finally asked:

"What does 'allege' mean?"

"It means the thing isn't proven," explained Clive. "So I won't be able to sue the newspaper for damages when I show I'm innocent. As if they hadn't damaged my reputation already!" There was a flare of anger plain in Clive's eyes.

"Look at this clipping, Hemble. It mentions that my uncle, Tobias Browland, owns the clock company and has recently appointed my cousin, Elbert Morion, as manager in my stead.

"It doesn't say, though, that I was leaving on a sales trip to get some business for the firm. Nor does it state that my travelers' checks were in the safe, which is why I opened it. I didn't touch a cent of company funds, Hemble! I'm sure you're one man who believes I didn't."

HEMBLE was proving the fact right then. He was pointing to the last paragraph in the clipping, which referred to Hemble himself. It didn't mention him by name; it simply spoke of the night watchman, which Hemble happened to be.

Clive read the paragraph in question and clapped an approving hand on Hemble's shoulder.

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"Good enough, Hemble!"

"I only told them what it says there," affirmed Hemble. "I hadn't any orders from Mr. Morion not to let you in the office after hours. I didn't remember seeing the safe wide open after you left. It wasn't until morning that they found it –"

"I know," interposed Clive wearily. "But only two persons had the combination: Elbert Morion and myself. Elbert happened to be in the town all night, so he couldn't possibly have come to the office, even without you seeing him."

"But there must have been somebody that I didn't see –"

"Unfortunately, Hemble, there was somebody that you did see. I was that somebody. So for six months, I've been dodging from one State to another so my dear cousin, Elbert, can't catch up with me and have me arrested and tried for a crime I didn't commit. There's been enough scandal, Hemble, without dragging the thing through court."

Hemble shook his head.

"There's no chance of that any longer, Mr. Walden."

"I know you think it's blown over, Hemble," declared Clive. "But the question is: are you sure?"

"Miss Trent will tell you the same thing."

Clive's eyes flashed.

"I'd like to see Gail," he said. "She's still out at the house in Riverdale, isn't she?"

"Yes, and I think she wants to see you, Mr. Walden. I hear that a lawyer is coming there tonight. It has something to do with old Mr. Browland's new will."

Clive's lips took on a half smile, and something close to a snarl escaped him.

"So Elbert has worked around to it at last," he said. "I knew he was trying to cut me out with Uncle Tobias. This is the night for a showdown. Did you bring your car here, Hemble?"

"Yes, sir. We can get out to Connecticut in a few hours. If you'll drop me at the factory, you can take the car over to the house. Nobody will see it if you park it under the big elm trees."

"I'll go along," decided Clive. "Yes, Hemble, I'm going to have a showdown. But I'll talk to Gail first; that is, if she'll talk to me. Maybe" – his tone was bitter – "maybe Elbert has sold her a wrong bill of goods, like he did with Uncle Tobias."

Whatever his opinion of affairs in Riverdale, Clive Walden had full confidence that he could handle them. His face lacked the hardness that meant suspicion, when he and Hemble reached the hotel lobby. In fact, Clive didn't bother to look around for any detectives who might have tracked Hemble from Riverdale.

He half-believed that the thing had blown over, on the basis that Elbert would be too interested in the matter of the new will to bother about his missing cousin for the present. It might be dangerous when Clive reached Connecticut; there, he would have to be wary, so he resolved to have Hemble travel back to Riverdale by a

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roundabout road.

But he no longer feared arrest while in New York, a thing that would involve extradition: a drawn-out process coupled with a lot of notoriety. Very probably, Elbert wouldn't want his own name in the papers from now on. In the opinion of Clive Walden, there was just one thing that Elbert Morion lived for, and that was the legacy that he would inherit from their uncle, Tobias Browland.

Until tonight, Clive and Elbert had rated equally in the matter; it was a known fact that their uncle had arranged to split his fortune between them.

According to Clive, Elbert was a man who believed that fifty-fifty should add to one hundred percent – for himself.

CLIVE was starting to express such opinions to Hemble as they crossed the hotel lobby, and Hemble had already begun to nod, which was odd, considering how long it usually took the dull-witted watchman to grasp things that were told him.

It didn't occur to Clive that Hemble might be nodding for another reason, for he never credited the fellow with being at all subtle.

It just happened that Hemble was much smarter than Clive supposed. Right under his companion's nose, Hemble was giving the nod to two men who were lounging in a far corner of the lobby. Had Clive seen that pair, he would have looked at them four times; twice for each. But he didn't happen to see them.

They weren't detectives. That was certain; in fact, too certain. They had the look of smart crooks, which they were. One was Lippy Carther, so called because of his heavy lips. He was also noted for his ability with a gun. The other was Mech Woodum; his nickname signified his mechanical skill in scientific pursuits, such as blowing safes.

Singly, those two could behave themselves, and did. Lippy, a lazy, stoop-shouldered type, with sallow, tired face, preferred the comfortable prop of a pool table to practicing target shooting with human ducks.

Mech had a real yen for mechanical matters and liked to tinker around repair shops; squatly of build, with broad face and strong, stubby hands, he had the appearance of a bona fide mechanic.

But when the two combined, crime was their motive, and they spelled TNT. Each liked to blast in his own particular way. It was crimedom's hope that the pair would some day land in a penitentiary together. In that case, the prediction was that Lippy would snipe the guards while Mech would blow a hole so big in the prison wall that all the inmates could ride out in trucks.

So far, Lippy and Mech hadn't been put to such a test, but they had handled plenty of others and were always ready upon call. Such were the men who took the nod from a cluck named Hemble, at present holding down a night watchman's job in the town of Riverdale!

As soon as Hemble had gone out with Clive, Lippy sauntered over to the desk and asked the hotel clerk if anyone had left him a message.

The clerk found an envelope addressed to Mr. Carther, and said that it had been left just a short while before. The clerk was right. Hemble had left that envelope on the way upstairs.

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Pocketing the envelope, Lippy sauntered from the lobby, and Mech followed. Without exchanging any comments, they turned along the street and finally reached a parked car. Mech took the wheel, and Lippy slid in beside him. As Mech started the car, Lippy gave a wary look back.

Lippy's eyes were good, but not good enough. After all, Clive Walden had taken a much longer look from his hotel-room window and had also been deceived. The deceiving thing was the blackness just away from the lighted entrance to the hotel. Blackness that looked solid, as most blackness did. Not being worried, Lippy gave it only a passing glance.

This blackness was solid.

As the crooks pulled away in their car, the inky thickness materialized itself into a living shape. Skirting the lighted area like a cloud of oily smoke, it showed itself briefly as a figure wearing a jet-hued cloak beneath a slouch hat of the same shade.

Like a living ghost, the creature in black was swallowed again by darkness, which, in this case, was represented by the interior of a waiting taxicab. As the mobsters turned the corner, the cab started up, its driver impelled by the whispered command of the strange passenger in the back seat.

Paths to crime had begun, and The Shadow, foe to men of evil, was on the trail!

CHAPTER II. THE FIRST HURDLE

LIPPY had the envelope open and was reading its contents by the dash light, while Mech cruised the car through traffic. Lippy gave a grunt that brought a grin from Mech.

"Zeke still got you guessing, Lippy?"

"Yeah," returned Lippy. "I thought he'd put us hep to why he's holding down that job in Connecticut. But he hasn't."

"Maybe he's doing it for a gag," suggested Mech. "A watchman at a clock factory! A joke – get it?"

"Making half a grand apiece ain't no joke. That's what Zeke Hemble will hand us for tonight."

"Yeah? How many guys do we have to croak?"

It was Lippy's turn to grin.

"None," he replied. "This thing is a pipe. We've got to play it neat – that's all. Zeke is going to drop off at the clock plant and let a guy named Walden take his car over to the house, five miles away. That's where we go first – to the house."

"Yeah? Why?"

"So one of us can do a drop-off and sneak the jellopy down the hill. where Walden can't find it. I'll handle that part."

"And what do I do?"

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"You go over to the clock plant and bring Zeke. He'll grab his jello and whiz back where he belongs, while we lam. If there's any trouble, we'll handle it. They won't have anything on Zeke. He'll be the same old watchman when they find him."

The idea of Zeke Hembel posing as a night watchman, and actually handling the task, pleased Mech Woodum immensely.

"What a set-up!" Mech chuckled. "Those Riverdale joskins taking Zeke for a boob, while he puts the kangaroo on this kack Walden!"

"Yeah," agreed Lippy. "But what's the dodge?"

"That's Zeke's business," returned Mech. "We'll handle our end of it, and let him take care of his."

Swerving the car, Mech took to a side street, something that Lippy couldn't understand. He remarked that they weren't on the route to Riverdale, whereupon Mech retorted that he wasn't going to use his own car for the expedition.

"I'm stopping off at a hot-car farm," he explained. "Those hustlers have been clouting too many heaps. They've got some sizzlers they want frozen, so we might as well handle it."

Lippy began to argue that a stolen car might bring trouble, but Mech promptly ruled him down.

"We don't get together often," said Mech. "Maybe some stoolie has been waiting to spot us, so he can spill the word. They'll have this heap tagged, but they won't be looking for us in a hot one. Get it?"

In his turn, Lippy argued that they'd be out of town before the police could pick up their trail. Mech made a grim rejoinder.

"I'm not thinking about the cops," said Mech. "Ever hear of a guy called The Shadow? He's heard of us."

Mere mention of the dread name made Lippy jittery. With gunnery his specialty, Lippy had but narrowly escaped The Shadow on more than one occasion. Anxiously, he looked back through the rear window. He saw a cab among cars that were following them, but before he could notice it closely, something else jarred his attention.

Lippy turned with a yelp to find his right hand surrounded by a mass of flame. Madly, he beat out the fire, and found his fingers pressing a few ashes of paper. Laughing, Mech tossed a dead match out of the car window.

"What's the idea?" demanded Lippy. "Trying to give me a hot mitt?"

"Just burning that note of Zeke's," returned Mech. "You won't need it any longer."

Lippy pulled another paper from the envelope.

"Lucky you didn't burn the map," he said. "It shows the whole lay."

"Look it over, and remember it," suggested Mech. "Then get rid of it. We're pretty near the farm."

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THE "farm" proved to be a side-street garage. As Mech pulled in, Lippy tore up the crude map and fluttered the pieces from the window. Mech blinked his lights and the garage door opened. The car pulled in so quickly that Lippy didn't sight a taxicab stopping a short way back.

From that cab came a figure cloaked in black.

The Shadow was deft at finding his way into garages. Suspecting that the mobsters intended to switch cars, he planned to stop them before they came out. A narrow alley gave him access to a window; through it, he reached a floor well stocked with cars.

A rear door was opening to another street, and The Shadow saw a car starting out. It wasn't the same car that had brought Lippy and Mech to the old garage.

With a sudden sweep, The Shadow was half across the floor, an automatic in his gloved fist. From his hidden lips rang a challenge that should have stopped the crooks right where they were: a mocking laugh that could only mean the challenge.

Along with the terror that it gave to men of crime, that mirth usually stupefied such bystanders as garage attendants, of whom there were four or five in sight.

This time, The Shadow's challenge brought a deluge in return. These weren't ordinary garage men; they were hot-car hustlers, crooks with as much at stake as the men whom The Shadow sought to stop.

The men on the floor were the ones who yanked guns in answer to The Shadow. Seeing the flash of their weapons, the cloaked fighter whirled.

Guns blasted from everywhere except the car that Lippy and Mech had taken. It kept on its way in a great hurry, while other gunners were aiming for The Shadow. More correctly, men were aiming for where they saw The Shadow last. His whirl had become a fade in among the ranks of stolen cars that were undergoing alterations.

Amid the barks of useless weapons came the answering power of an automatic that stabbed its messages from unexpected angles, winging the phony garage men in their tracks.

Staggering, howling, crooks sought cover. Some sagged to their knees; others propped themselves against car fenders and rallied to return the fire.

They thought they were fighting for their lives, which, in their language, meant they would have to give death to The Shadow. Wildly, they threw slugs among the cars, spraying fenders, doors and windshields with a rain of lead.

They might as well have been tossing spitballs. The Shadow wasn't anywhere around.

He had taken a zigzag route to the rear door in pursuit of the departing car. That door was the one place where the gunners didn't look for him, for the garage men thought that The Shadow's arrival marked a raid upon their own racket.

There were times when The Shadow arrived somewhere by accident, but crooks never recognized it. Without realizing it, they were simply helping him pursue the quarry that he really wanted.

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Mech and Lippy had swung a corner when The Shadow reached the rear street. Pausing in darkness, while guns still beat a futile tattoo within the garage, The Shadow looked for his cab.

It was piloted by Moe Shrevnitz, a fast-driving hackie in The Shadow's sole employ, and Moe should have caught his cue by this time.

But Moe, for once, wasn't on the job. Instead of the cab's familiar rumble, The Shadow heard only the wails of police sirens.

The hot-car farmers heard the sirens, too, and started for the rear exit. There, they were met by a laugh from darkness, and the laugh had sting behind it, in the way of gunfire. Stumbling thugs flopped back to shelter, tossing their guns to the center of the floor in token of surrender.

Moe's cab suddenly wheeled into sight, just ahead of the police cars. The Shadow sprang into the cab, leaving the garage situation to the competent hands of the police.

"Sorry, boss!" Moe was voicing his apology, as he whipped the cab around the corner. "I was picking these up, when the shooting started."

The corner turned, Moe thrust a hand through the window and placed a clump of torn papers in The Shadow's gloved hand. Then, eyes glued ahead, Moe was looking for a car that might be the one The Shadow wanted.

In his turn, The Shadow saw that the fugitive vehicle had passed from sight. He told Moe simply to avoid the police cars and drop the chase.

While Moe was doing it, The Shadow deftly pieced the torn papers. They proved a find, indeed. Rough though Zeke's map was, its features were complete.

It marked the clock factory, the house, and the number of the highway that passed near both. Most important, it had a penciled road crossing that bore the name: "Riverdale."

TEN minutes later, Moe's cab stopped in front of a little restaurant. Instead of The Shadow, a tall, leisurely passenger stepped out and went through the pretense of paying his taxi fare.

As he strolled into the restaurant, people recognized him by his calm, hawkish face that was quite immobile in expression. His evening attire was also a characteristic touch.

The gentleman from the cab was Lamont Cranston, wealthy New York clubman. Of late, Cranston had dined frequently at this restaurant, always with a young lady named Margo Lane, who happened to be awaiting him at present.

They made a charming pair when they faced each other at a secluded table, the fastidious Mr. Cranston and the alluring brunette across from him. But their conversation, conducted in an undertone, was by no means trivial. It was prompt and to the point.

"About Gail Trent," began Cranston in a casual tone, though Margo sensed that he wanted a rapid answer. "Does that invitation to visit her still stand?"

"It has for six months," returned Margo. "I've renewed it at the proper intervals. But you told me, quite a while ago, Lamont, that the matter of Clive Walden was the sort that would run its own course."

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"It's on the homestretch," Cranston announced, "and looks like a photo finish. Speaking of photographs, I'm sorry I don't have one of Walden. I saw him this evening, but didn't recognize him."

The paradox rather puzzled Margo until Cranston detailed that he had been watching two other men, whose ultimate destination had proven to be Riverdale. Having recalled a rather handsome chap who left the hotel earlier, Cranston had stopped back there on his way to meet Margo.

"I asked for Clive Walden," said Cranston, "and learned that he had checked out. I take it that he's gone to Riverdale –"

"Where those other two are to meet him!" put in Margo breathlessly. "That's why he gave them the map!"

Cranston shook his head.

"We're not certain on that point, Margo. There was another chap with Walden, who looked like a Riverdale product. Too much so, to suit me. He might have passed the map to Lippy and Mech. For that matter, they may have picked it up elsewhere. We're going to Riverdale to find out."

"But they're already on the way," protested Margo, "and I'll have to call Gail, to remind her of the invitation. What's more, I shall certainly have to pack. Gail would think it odd if I didn't bring some luggage."

"You'll have plenty of time for those details, Margo. I'm going ahead, alone."

Diners at other tables saw Cranston and Margo rise to leave the restaurant, and supposed they had remembered an appointment that couldn't be postponed for something trivial like dinner.

The surmise was correct, more or less, but it didn't account for the reflective gaze on Margo's face, which turned suddenly to one of happy inspiration as she neared the door.

Margo had been pondering on the emphasis which Cranston had given the word "ahead;" though its stress was slight, she had caught it, and at last was understanding it.

Cranston expected to reach the Browland estate, in Riverdale, ahead of others besides Margo. Specifically, he would be ahead of Lippy Carther and Mech Woodum, though he might not overtake Clive Walden.

Dropping off at her apartment, Margo Lane watched Cranston's cab swing eastward and knew her theory was right. Cranston was going to the airport, where he kept his wingless autogiro. Soon, that craft would be spinning in a beeline, straight for Connecticut, aiming for a landing near Browland's Riverdale estate.

There was another detail that Margo mentally added. She knew that her friend Lamont Cranston would not appear as pilot of that ship. Instead, like the giro itself, he would be a thing of darkness: The Shadow!

At this very moment, men of crime who were congratulating themselves upon having eluded The Shadow were bound for another meeting with the same black-clad foe who had sent them into flight!

CHAPTER III. WITHIN THE MANSION

IT was very dark under the great elms where Clive Walden parked Hemble's car. Though Clive had small opinion of the watchman's brainwork, he was forced to concede that the elms were a perfect choice. Reaching the trees was easy, because they were on a slope, to which Clive coasted after cutting off the motor.

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Furthermore, the space could be left in the same silent fashion, and the elms were located on a little-used drive where the parked car wasn't visible to anyone who entered the grounds by the usual route of the large gates down by the main highway.

Perhaps if Clive had seen Hemble's friends, the ones who knew the man as Zeke, he would have sensed the full situation. As it was, Clive hadn't an idea that Zeke was teamed up with crooks.

As least, Clive Walden was operating on his own, and needed no such helpers for the showdown that he planned as his evening's work.

Stealing out between the elms, Clive saw the looming mansion – a great, scraggly bulk that magnified itself to towering proportions in the night. The huge house was farther up the slope and thus added the hill's height to its own. Clive couldn't recall having viewed it from the elms at night.

Previously, all his visits to his uncle's house had been quite open, his method of approach directly from the front, where lawns formed a gentle slope up to the imposing residence.

Against the hulking shape, Clive saw lights from windows; they looked very dim because the rooms were large and the lamps set deep.

Avoiding the front, Clive skirted toward a level space where a driveway cut past a side door. In the old days it had been a porte-cochere, used as a carriage entrance, with an extended roof set upon wooden pillars.

Much though Tobias Browland lived in the past, the old man had been forced to have that roof removed because the entrance was too narrow for automobiles. All that remained of the porte-cochere was an ornamental cornice outside the hallway window on the second floor. The cornice was of marble and showed white against the gray stone of the mansion.

As Clive expected, the door was unlocked. He entered carefully, however, ready at any moment to drop back and slide into the shrubbery that lined the entrance. Encountering no challengers, he moved in from the high-stepped entry, through a dim-lit vestibule, and into a larger hall.

Across it, he saw the curtains that represented the dining room. There were lights beyond the curtains, and voices told that the family was still at dinner.

The curtains stirred, signifying that a servant was coming from the dining room. Clive took quickly to a passage at the left, tiptoeing softly because the floor was stone.

This was an old section of the house, preserved from Revolutionary days, and it brought Clive flush against a door that was hardly wider than his shoulders. The door had a closed bolt, heavy and old-fashioned. Carefully, Clive drew it back and opened the door.

He went through sideways and half a dozen paces brought him to a narrow stairway almost as steep as a ladder. Moving up the creaky steps, Clive felt his shoulders brush the wall on either side. These were the old back stairs of the Colonial period, and they were no longer used.

They had a tragic history: at least three members of the Browland family had fallen down those stairs in the course of two centuries, and Clive recalled that none of the unfortunates had survived. Keeping those stairs closed-off was a habit with Tobias Browland.

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At the top, Clive encountered a closed door, locked from the other side, but it was no trick to open it. Using a pocketknife, he pushed it through the keyhole and forced the key out from the other side, where it dropped with a muffled thud upon a carpet.

Probing under the door with a pencil, Clive found the key and worked it through, breaking the pencil point in the process.

From his side, he unlocked the door, and then came the only difficult part. The door opened inward, over the stairs themselves, and swinging it wasn't easy from this side, as Clive had to retire down the steps to do it.

His position was slightly precarious as the door swung toward his left, but he grabbed to the right and caught a post of an old, forgotten balustrade that ran along a ledge on the level of the second floor.

The door, in its turn, came flush with a narrow ledge on the other side, and Clive ascended, drawing the door after him, taking care to replace the key on the side where he had found it.

MOVING along the hallway, Clive passed his uncle's study. The door was invitingly ajar and the room was lighted; but instead of stopping, Clive continued past a corner and reached the top of the main stairway which went down to the great hall below.

He listened again for voices, and heard them, Gail's among them. The sounds carried well from the dining room, but Clive couldn't quite distinguish the words.

Impatiently, he turned and went back to the study. Crossing its threshold, he gazed about at a scene that was all too familiar. Tobias Browland never rearranged his study. It was exactly as Clive had seen it six months ago.

He saw the massive, flat-topped desk, with the ornate lamp upon it. The roomlight came from the old-fashioned lamp, and it gleamed upon the antique inkstand and the quill pen that stood upright in a little container filled with birdshot. Across the room was the large fireplace with its gargoyle andirons; the tongs and shovel were meticulously placed, as usual.

There were the bookshelves, of course, behind Browland's desk, and the volumes looked as though they had not been touched for years. In the far wall, Clive saw Browland's ancient safe, the old one that he had brought here from the factory. It occupied its own special alcove, and it was, indeed, a relic.

They made their safes fancy in the old days. This one had double doors, with a dial in the center. It was painted black, and it was decorated with gold. The name "Tobias Browland" ran in a curve across the front, above the dial. Gilded ornaments were painted beneath, and even the gold border around the safe front was done in ornamental style.

It wasn't the sort of safe that would bother a modern expert. Clive's lips gave a bitter twist when he remembered how another safe, the new one at the office, had contributed to his present ill repute.

If anyone found him here, alone in a room containing a safe, he'd probably be accused of another crime. People wouldn't stop to consider that this safe in Browland's study held nothing of great value. Clive happened to know what its contents were.

The study safe was simply the repository for old historical records of the clock factory, some old books that Browland had collected, and various family heirlooms no more remarkable than the inkstand on the desk.

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They were better than junk, those items; they might bring several hundred dollars if sold to interested purchasers, but they weren't the sort of stuff that a thief could fence at worthwhile profit. They were so definitely—tagged that it would be obvious where they came from.

There were some sheets of writing paper lying on the desk. Taking one, Clive drew a pencil from his pocket and started to write a note. Finding the pencil broken, he used pen and ink instead, replacing the quill exactly as he had found it.

Noting a black blotter on the desk, Clive decided it was safe to use it, and did. He was folding the note when the clock chimed from the mantel.

It was a beautiful old clock, with posts of polished brass supporting its glass panels. It had an ornamental face, with a border of rhinestones that had become dull through age. Its chimes were clear and musical, but not overloud. When they began, they awoke responses from other parts of the house.

Little clocks tinkled; from downstairs, a great grandfather's clock was chiming, while a series of bongs toned from the direction of the kitchen. Like the clock on the study mantel, those others bore the name "Tobias Browland" on their faces, some in tiny letters, others in bold.

When the chorus of ding—dongs ended, Clive heard an echoing series of tinkles from a distant room and knew that his uncle would be annoyed. Old Browland always listened to the clocks, and didn't like it when one was so late that it sounded the hour all by itself.

PERHAPS Clive's ears were keener when he listened for the clock notes. He caught a sound from the front stairs and knew that his uncle was coming up. Hurriedly, Clive left the study and turned into a side passage.

He was just out of sight when he turned to see his uncle approaching the study. He spied only Browland's stooped shoulders and the back of his head.

Then Clive himself was approaching a room. It was Gail's room; the door was shut, so Clive thrust the folded note under the door. Taking a circuitous route among the labyrinth of hallways, he passed the window above the old carriage entrance and finally circled back to the front stairs.

There, rather than go past the open study where his uncle was, Clive descended cautiously to the front hall.

Outside the dining room, he paused to listen. Hearing two voices in earnest conversation, he lifted the edge of the curtain and looked through. He saw his cousin, Elbert Morion, talking to Gail Trent.

Gripping the curtain with one hand, the doorway with the other, Clive restrained his growing impulse to step through and confront them.

Mere sight of Elbert angered Clive. His cousin was handsome in a sleek way. Elbert's profile, as Clive saw it, was somewhat overpointed and marked him as a man of talkative type. But when Elbert talked, he put an earnest tone behind his words, and his expression matched his voice.

He was very persuasive, particularly with ladies, and Clive received the annoying impression that Elbert was actually convincing Gail.

Certainly, the girl was listening intently. Her very lovely face was genuinely earnest. When she nodded, Clive saw that she wasn't aware of the stray locks of fluffy brown hair that drooped waywardly upon her forehead. When Gail reached that stage, it showed that she was convinced.

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Clive didn't like it; he felt that if anyone had a right to convince Gail of anything, that person was himself.

"So you see, Gail," Elbert was saying, "it wasn't the question of the estate that caused me to denounce Clive. I am not gaining a single penny from my uncle's new will."

Gail nodded; then her hazel eyes showed bewilderment. She expressed the thing that she couldn't understand.

"But why should your uncle transfer Clive's share to me?" she queried. "I'm not related to him."

"Your father was my uncle's best friend."

"Of course. But still, it is not sufficient reason –"

"It is reason enough for me," interposed Elbert. "You see, Gail, I wouldn't want to profit by Clive's loss. It would make it look as though I falsely accused him of rifling the office safe in the clock factory. I only did my duty."

"I know you feel that way, Elbert." Gail paused, then added: "But why should I be the one to profit?"

Elbert smiled suavely, and Clive hated him the more. It took more ounces of restraint on Clive's part when he heard Elbert's next question:

"You're in love with Clive, aren't you, Gail?"

"I don't know," the girl replied slowly. "I think I was once, Elbert, but I am no longer sure."

"If you marry Clive," reminded Elbert, "he will get his share of the estate through you. I won't stand in your way, Gail. I assure you, the matter of the office safe has been dropped."

When Elbert gave assurance, Clive invariably doubted it. But he let his doubt rest for the present. He heard a stir from the kitchen and knew that the servants were moving about.

In accordance with his usual plan, Clive reserved the showdown for the future. As he turned to sneak across the hall, he heard Elbert tell Gail that Hadley Corring, the lawyer, would soon arrive.

GOING out by the carriage door, Clive followed the drive toward the rear of the house. A sudden sweep of light curved in from the front lawn, caused by the headlights of an automobile that was coming in by the main drive.

Clive dived for the house wall; against the gray stone, he showed as a darting figure trying to escape the glare. Then he was gone into the shrubbery.

Clive doubted that he had been seen from the car, which he was quite sure belonged to Corring, the lawyer. In ducking into the shrubs, he looked back over his shoulder and saw that the lights no longer bored upon him. However, as he followed the direction of the beam, Clive spied something else.

It was a figure, more fleeting than his own. A shape revealed so briefly, so grotesquely, that he scarcely granted it reality. Momentarily, it reminded Clive of a mammoth bat; then he had the exaggerated impression that it could be a human form clad in a black cloak.

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Those were momentary impressions only, for the phantom shape faded so immediately that it seemed no more than a product of Clive's fancy.

It was real enough, that shape that Clive saw. The Shadow had arrived at the Browland mansion. Oddly, it didn't occur to Clive that so strange a creature of the night, if it existed, could have caught sight of him in the glare of headlights from Corring's car.

By the time that Corring's car stopped by the carriage entrance, Clive was around the back corner of the house. He was too far away to hear the whispered laugh that muffled itself and was lost amid the breeze that creaked the branches of the elms.

The mirth was proof that The Shadow had spied Clive Walden and was moving close upon his trail!

CHAPTER IV. THE MAN FROM THE NIGHT

THE doorbell clanged loudly when Corring rang it. A stolid-faced servant answered the summons and admitted the lawyer. Corring entered the house, revealing himself as a dry-faced man whose gray hair marked him well-up in years. He gave the servant a brief nod.

"Good evening, Ambrose," said Corring in an affable tone. "Where will I find Mr. Browland?"

Before Ambrose could answer, Elbert Morion stepped from the dining room and advanced, his hand stretched out in greeting.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Corring," said Elbert. "Uncle Tobias is in the study. Ambrose will show you up. I shall join you very shortly."

Returning to the dining room, Elbert found Gail awaiting with another question.

"Why did your uncle send for Corring?" she asked. "He isn't his regular lawyer, is he?"

"I think that he is going to be," replied Elbert, with a smile. "Our other attorney, Grath, is too prejudiced in Clive's favor."

"Too prejudiced!" Gail exclaimed. "You are the prejudiced person, Elbert –"

"I was speaking for Uncle Tobias," interposed Elbert smoothly. "He is prejudiced against Clive. If he were not, he would not be making a new will."

The statement left Gail blank, as Elbert's canny logic so often did. Elbert liked it when Gail went blank. He approached the girl, rested his hand lightly upon her arm and drew her unresistingly toward him.

"If you would only trust me, Gail." The words were honeyed from Elbert's lips. "Trust me, and believe me. You would then understand that my love is more real than Clive's. Love unexpressed is always stronger. The long months I have waited are proof of my sincerity. This is our time, Gail –"

Almost without realizing it, Gail was in Elbert's embrace. His circling arm was comforting, his dark eyes had a warmth.

Gail's face was tilted upward; she was offering her lips for the first kiss that Elbert had so long awaited, when the swing of the door in from the kitchen suddenly cast romance into oblivion. Elbert was annoyed, Gail was

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embarrassed, as they turned to face the intruder.

The arrival was Jasper, the other servant. He was taller, thinner than Ambrose and a bit soft-footed. Jasper gave an apologetic bow, then spoke to Elbert.

"I'd like the key to the liquor closet, sir," the servant said. "Mr. Corring prefers a special brandy. Mr. Browland wanted the bottle taken to the study, but I am afraid that Ambrose forgot."

"I shall remind Ambrose," returned Elbert, testily. "The brandy is in his department, Jasper."

Elbert turned on his heel and started upstairs, while Jasper bowed himself back into the kitchen. Gail smiled, despite herself. She remembered that Jasper liked to serve special liquors because he enjoyed sampling them. Elbert hadn't forgotten Jasper's trait; hence he was delegating the duty to Ambrose.

Since Elbert was going upstairs, Gail decided to do the same. She wanted to look at the guest room and see that it was properly arranged for Margo Lane, who had called awhile ago to accept Gail's standing invitation for a visit.

There were a few items in Gail's own room that might make the guest room more comfortable. So Gail stopped at her own room on the way.

She found Clive's note under the door.

FROM the moment she plucked the folded paper from the floor, Gail was breathless. She was sure that it was a message from Clive, and she recognized his writing the moment that she opened the paper.

It was written in red ink which added to its imperative touch. The note was brief, another feature that rendered it effective.

Clive had simply stated that he must see Gail as soon as possible; that he would be waiting for her in the old summerhouse in back of the mansion. He hadn't included his own name nor any signature. They weren't necessary.

Standing with the paper gripped between her hands, Gail underwent a medley of emotions. Her memories of Clive surged upon her like the sweep of waves upon a beach. They were washing away those mounds of sand that Elbert had so patiently created during the past six months.

Reason wasn't to be considered where love was concerned. Gail loved Clive; the thrill she received from this message convinced her. Any rational attempt to transfer such affection to Elbert was entirely out of the question.

Yet Gail felt a regret where Elbert was concerned. It faded when she heard him come from the study. Fearful that Elbert might find her holding Clive's note, Gail crumpled it and dropped it into the wastebasket, along with some other wadded pieces of note paper that she had thrown away that afternoon.

Stepping from her room, Gail met Elbert in the hall. He was going downstairs, so she accompanied him.

They reached a nook in the corner of a great library where shelves of books rose from floor to ceiling. They heard Ambrose coming downstairs, calling to Jasper.

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"Uncle Tobias wants them to witness the new will," Elbert explained. "Of course, I can't witness it because I am mentioned in it."

A thought occurred to Gail.

"If Ambrose and Jasper are witnesses," she said, "it means that they will receive nothing from your uncle. After all these years –"

"After all these years," put in Elbert, picking up Gail's statement, "Uncle Tobias can rely upon me to take care of his servants. You can share in that privilege, if you wish, Gail."

Somehow, Elbert's mention of sharing brought back his recent proposal. Probably he was thinking that he and Gail would share everything in the future. The thought horrified the girl, as it wouldn't have a short while before. That note from Clive had banished all of Elbert's spell over her.

Elbert was explaining exactly how the will was made. The house and all the property surrounding it would be Gail's share, the legacy which had formerly been allotted to Clive. All of Tobias Browland's personal effects would go to Elbert.

They included the library, valuable portraits and other paintings, even the clocks. Of course, the business records and the heirlooms would be Elbert's, too. Roughly, the apportionments were equal, for Tobias Browland's personal effects were numerous and valuable.

"I'm glad you're keeping the house," said Elbert in a sentimental tone. "You'll have the fixtures and the furniture, of course; in fact, everything that isn't specified as mine, Gail. I think that Clive would have sold the house, but I know you won't."

Gail gave a nod. She liked the old mansion and its furniture, and had often said that Browland's study should be kept exactly as it was. Elbert remembered that opinion. Smiling, he said:

"You can keep the study clock, Gail, along with the rest of the smaller things there. Of course, the desk, the safe, the fixtures, will be yours anyway. This library, the paintings, all of uncle's various collections, are technically mine. But since everything will really be ours –"

He was getting back to the unfinished business in the dining room, and Gail regretted the weak moments when she had yielded to his persuasive words of love. She had to find a quick excuse to leave the library.

"I'm very tired," said Gail. "If you'll excuse me, I think I'll go to bed."

"But you can't," reminded Elbert. "Your friend Margo will be here later."

"You can call me when she arrives," decided Gail. "I'll slip on a negligee and come downstairs. Meanwhile, a nap will refresh me."

GAIL started from the library, and Elbert followed. He wanted to induce her to remain, but couldn't think of a good argument.

Elbert's mind was partly on the study; he knew he might be summoned there, any moment. So he smiled at Gail when she went upstairs, and then began to pace the lower hall.

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In her own room, Gail was a bit awed by the task ahead. She was afraid that Elbert would reverse his expressions of good will toward Clive if he knew that his missing cousin had returned. He might guess the truth if Gail didn't happen to be taking a real nap when Margo arrived.

The thing to do was prepare the full pretense, and find a chance to meet Clive, in between. So Gail decided actually to go to bed.

She undressed hurriedly, put on a nightie and tucked herself into bed. Lights out and door ajar, she listened intently for her opportunity to slip downstairs. Her slippers were right beside the bed and her negligee was in the closet, and so was her fur coat. She was thinking in terms of the coat, rather than the negligee.

At last, she heard the study door open. They were calling Elbert, and Gail waited tensely, until he had actually come up the stairs. Sliding from the bed, she picked up her slippers and stole to the closet, where she found the fur coat immediately, by its touch.

Still carrying the slippers to avoid their clatter, Gail stepped soft-footed from her room and took the roundabout route to the front stairway.

In the study, Tobias Browland was standing at his desk. A tall, imposing man despite his years and a recent spell of ill health, he was the most impressive person in the group.

On the desk lay the new will. It was typewritten, and ran to two pages. The first page was turned back, and on the next, Browland's signature stood out in purple ink. Beneath it were the signatures of Ambrose and Jasper, the required witnesses.

Folding the top sheet back as Elbert approached the desk, Browland handed the will to Corring. The lawyer carefully folded the document and placed it deep in his inside pocket.

With a broad smile, Browland told Ambrose to pour another glass of brandy for Corring.

All that while, Gail was moving silently down the stairway, clutching the banister with one hand, and looking back over her shoulder. She could see the light from the study door, shining with a bluish gleam from the strong desk lamp. The men were out of sight, but their voices had halted and Gail was afraid they might hear her.

She went clear across the hall, to the little passage to the side door, before putting on her slippers.

That done, Gail was still careful to avoid any clatter. On tiptoe, she was drawing her fur coat about her, reaching for the door with her other hand, when it opened of its own accord.

A man moved in from the dark, and Gail stepped back from the vestibule, her lips eagerly phrasing a whispered name:

"Clive!"

Then, in the light of the hall, Gail Trent halted, chilled despite the thickness of the fur garment that enveloped her. Who the man from the dark might be, she couldn't tell. He might be Clive, for all she knew, for there was no way of identifying him.

The man was masked. His eyes peered from the slits of a blue bandanna handkerchief that had its corners dangling down to hide his entire face. His dark-gray hat was drawn low upon his forehead. His only

utterance was a low-voiced snarl that anyone could have chosen as an audible threat.

To back that threat, the masked man gripped a revolver; his hand, thrust forward, pressed the muzzle close to Gail's breast. So close, that the thumps of her heart seemed to pound against the metal itself.

Crime had come to this mansion. Death loomed as a threat to those within the house, and Gail Trent was the first to meet with the pressing menace. Whatever its purpose, crime was taking sway despite the presence of The Shadow!

CHAPTER V. CROSSED BATTLE

MOVING steadily forward, the masked invader gave a sideward twist with his gun that pivoted Gail full about. Instinctively, the girl knew that he wanted her to turn around and raise her hands.

Gail could feel the slide of the muzzle along the fur until it prodded her anew in the center of her back. Then she was beginning a slow march straight toward those stairs that she had so recently descended, and accomplishing it with a quietness that surprised her.

Perhaps the pressure of the gun was keeping her on tiptoe. At least, her slippers didn't clatter as she had feared. On the steps, it became even easier. Going up was a silent process, particularly when life depended upon it. That life did depend on such a threat was evidenced by the whisper close to Gail's ear.

"No noise, or you'll go first!"

Even the voice was muffled by the masking handkerchief. It sounded much like Clive's; too much, to please Gail. Still, she couldn't be sure, for the whisper was forced and the acoustics of the lower hall were very poor. She'd need more than a whisper to identify this man as Clive, or anyone else that she might know.

The half-hour chimes sounding from the grandfather's clock were like a death march, ending unfinished. Gail shuddered to their brief tune as she reached the top step. She stumbled.

Fortunately, the slight noise she made was timed to the last chime. Steady again, she was pacing toward the study, wondering why the masked man hadn't fired.

It was slowly dawning on her that his goal was the study itself; that she had merely interrupted his trip there. On the very threshold of the room, Gail paused abruptly, facing the men within. They turned at sight of her.

Old Tobias Browland was towering behind his desk, with Elbert Morion just beside him. Over by the fireplace, Hadley Corring was staring Gail's way over the brim of a lifted brandy glass. Ambrose and Jasper looked stupefied at sight of the girl in a fur coat, which, no longer drawn tightly, showed patches of a nightgown beneath it.

Then Gail was sprawling across the floor, shoved roughly by the man behind her. She tangled in the fur coat as she fell and lost one slipper that went sliding somewhere beneath Browland's desk.

Like the coat, Gail was askew, a shoulder emerging from one fold of the fur, a knee from the other. Ambrose and Jasper were coming forward to help her to her feet, while Elbert was stirring from beside the desk.

The masked man stopped them with a snarl. For the first time, they looked his way.

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He was no longer concerned with Gail. She was out of the situation as much as a rug on the floor. The invader was sweeping his gun savagely about the semicircle, as though ready to jab a shot at instant notice.

Men were letting their hands come up. Brandy trickled from Corring's tilting glass and licked down his fingers. Nervously, he let the glass fall. It crashed on the stone hearth. The masked man wheeled toward Corring.

That was the moment when old Browland showed his stuff. Uncle Tobias wasn't going to see a guest murdered before his eyes. Wheeling to his right, toward Elbert, Browland began to pounce toward a corner where a heavy cane was leaning against the wall.

That walking stick was Browland's favorite weapon. He used it to beat off vicious dogs and thrash rowdies who trespassed on his property. If this masked man wanted a showdown, Browland intended to give him one, cudgel against gun.

The bellow that Browland voiced was a mistake. It told his intent, and the masked man was about before old Tobias could get underway. Elbert intervened, in a fashion that captured Gail's whole admiration as she stared up, helplessly, from the center of the floor.

WITH his left hand, Elbert sent his uncle back behind the desk, where Browland caught himself as he landed in his chair. Lunging low across the desk, Elbert was well beneath the level of the first shot the masked man fired.

Then, with his right hand, Elbert grabbed the ancient inkstand. Sidling off from the desk, he slung it at the masked man just as the fellow side-stepped toward the door to get a better angle of aim.

The invader actually had a bead on Elbert, but couldn't hold it. The inkstand was flying in his direction, and he made an instinctive duck to avoid it. Tilting upward, the revolver merely poked a bullet into the filigreed ceiling.

Ambrose and Jasper were at the fireplace. Bowling Corring aside, they grabbed the fire tongs and poker, respectively. On hands and knees, Gail scrambled from their path so they could charge at the foe who blocked the doorway. The masked man stabbed another shot in Elbert's direction.

The bullet crashed the desk lamp at its bulkiest part. Bashing the metal standard, it sent the whole lump tumbling to the floor, where the glass shade shattered, along with the lighted bulb, darkening the room, except for the flicker of firelight and the dim glow from the hall.

Elbert was quite safe; not only had he dropped below the path of fire, but the lamp had stopped the bullet short of him. The clatter of the falling cane told that Elbert was deep in the corner.

Elbert's bravery had certainly stemmed the attack; now, Ambrose and Jasper were taking over. Coming from the darkness, armed with metal bludgeons from the fireplace, they were a real threat, and the masked man knew it.

He sprang from the room, slamming the door in the faces of the servants. Madly, Ambrose and Jasper tried to get the door open, and bungled each other's effort. Elbert almost tripped over Gail as he hurried to join them.

Then the door was open and Gail saw Elbert pressing out into the hall along with the servants. Ambrose and Jasper went toward the front stairs, but Elbert turned the other way, shouting for them to follow him. Gail heard his call:

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"The fellow has gone down the old stairs! Hurry! We can still overtake him!"

Reaching the hall with Corring, Gail saw that the door to the old stairway was open. Elbert was diving beyond the doorway, and as he went, a revolver barked up from the darkness. Then there was a clatter from the stairs themselves, proving that the masked man was in flight.

In single file, Ambrose and Jasper sprang down the old stairs after him, and Corring followed, carrying the corked brandy bottle as a weapon. Elbert was on his feet when the lawyer reached the stairs, and he was quick to follow Corring.

It was all quite vague in the dim light of the hall, but Gail managed to make out what happened. She decided to go down by the front stairs; lacking one slipper, she tripped as she started that direction.

Coming from the study, Browland saw the girl stumble and came her way instead of following the others by the old stairs. Gail was clutching the banister at the top of the front stairway when Browland gripped her arm.

He didn't want her to go down, but Gail insisted, so Browland accompanied her. As they reached the hall below, they halted abruptly. Things weren't going as well as they hoped.

The masked man was in the vestibule, wangling his gun. He was holding the servants at bay; behind them were Elbert and Corring, who had likewise come through the passage leading from the bottom of the old, narrow stairs.

The invader had only two shots left. He knew that if he used them, he would still have pursuers upon his trail. Apparently, his gun gestures, the incoherent snarls that accompanied them, were offers of a compromise. If allowed to go his way, he wouldn't fire those two remaining shots.

At that moment, he saw Gail and turned his gun her way. The others, looking about, realized that the masked man was taking the girl as target, to give teeth to his threat.

Browland reached to draw Gail behind him, but was stopped by a vicious gesture from the revolver.

Gail saw Elbert, screened by the servants, reaching for Corring's brandy bottle, intending to throw it as he had the inkstand. It would suffice, at least, to spoil the masked man's aim if he fired at Gail.

By then, the masked man's hand was behind him; he found the door and opened it. He was aiming his gun; whether he intended to fire or make a quick dart away, was still a question, when an unexpected answer came.

It came in the form of fantastic blackness, a figure that shaped itself from the night itself, looming in like a mammoth human bat to infold the masked man in its huge wings.

Out of that shape, Gail alone saw black-gloved hands, one gripping the masked man's gun wrist, the other taking him by the throat.

The revolver spoke once. Its jab was toward the ceiling of the vestibule, for its owner was folding backward under the grip of The Shadow. Letting the fellow deliver useless shots was simply policy on The Shadow's part. The gun, emptied, would be permanently useless.

But with the single shot, Gail shrieked convulsively, as mere relief for her tautened nerves.

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Her scream brought double results. Elbert flung the brandy bottle. It shattered against the door of the vestibule, spattering both The Shadow and his prey with its contents. The other result came from outside.

Another man, hearing the shot and Gail's scream, sprang up from the shrubbery, to grapple with the living blackness that obscured the doorway.

The man from the bushes was Clive Walden. The masked man in The Shadow's grip was Zeke Hemble, for The Shadow had pulled the mask aside enough to get a close view of the crook's face.

But The Shadow was gripping Zeke no longer. Instead, he sent the fellow sprawling in from the vestibule for others to grab. The Shadow, in his turn, was being throttled by Clive, and had to ward off the new attacker.

Thanks to Clive's misguided effort, Zeke didn't travel far under The Shadow's shove. He came about in time to avoid both capture and recognition by Elbert and the others who were charging his way. Pointblank, Zeke aimed for The Shadow, who was grappling with Clive on the outer steps.

This time, Zeke wasn't going to miss. He was holding his final shot as he lunged toward the door, intending to fire true even if The Shadow rolled down the steps.

Zeke's pause was too long. The Shadow and Clive took the dive, but not in the direction Zeke expected. Instead, they went sideward, off into the shrubbery, impelled that direction by The Shadow.

Zeke heard them lash the bushes as he came through the door. He stopped only long enough to aim at blackness just below the side of the steps. Pulling the trigger, he gave a gleeful snarl.

Satisfied that he had at least wounded The Shadow, Zeke sprang across the driveway and off into the darkness, ahead of Elbert and the rest who pursued him. Hearing him dash across the gravel, all four followed him: Elbert, Corring, and the two servants.

Only Tobias Browland and Gail Trent remained in the mansion, listening to the shouts of four men who were all in pursuit of one. But Gail was thinking of another – a rescuer who had come and gone so rapidly that he seemed like a living ghost.

Of all those who had stared from within the mansion, viewing inexplicable happenings at the doorway, Gail Trent alone had seen The Shadow!

CHAPTER VI. HUNTERS AND HUNTED

A SILENT struggle was underway deep in the shrubbery. It was beginning when Zeke fired, and his lone shot hadn't disturbed it. For The Shadow, knowing that the masked fugitive would deliver the shot, was certainly not a person who would have waited to receive it.

There was plenty of blackness close to the steps, but none of it contained The Shadow, as Zeke should have realized when he didn't catch sight of The Shadow's antagonist, Clive Walden. In his great lunge, The Shadow had cleared an entire bank of shrubs, carrying Clive with him.

Naturally, Clive landed first. Unwary fighters always did, when they grappled with The Shadow. He used them to break his own fall, much like the trick of a cat landing feet downward.

Usually, with The Shadow's weight added to their own, such sprawlers crumpled; but Clive hadn't. The bed of soft shrubbery eased his plunge and kept him in a fighting mood.

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Recent happenings were rather twisted, in the opinion of The Shadow. Whether Clive Walden proved honest or crooked, he wouldn't be helping things for himself, or The Shadow, by bringing the hunt in this direction. That was why The Shadow used silent tactics in dealing with Clive.

The muffling element was The Shadow's cloak. He had it off his shoulders and over Clive's head, its folds tightened around his adversary's neck, much as one would twist a sack. Flat on the ground, Clive found his struggles suppressed by The Shadow's elbows and knees, which pinned him during the garroting process.

Gargling sounds ended within the tightened cloak; Clive went entirely limp. The Shadow arose and drew back a lap of the cloak.

He had handed out stiff medicine; but in this case, there had been no other choice. At least, it was sufficient and Clive would soon get over it. When men fought against that slow-choking process, their strength spent itself beyond normalcy.

It would be ten minutes, at least, before Clive really recuperated, and that was much less time than The Shadow needed for other pressing business.

Without bothering to reclaim his cloak or look for his hat in the shrubbery, The Shadow emerged and cut across the gravel. He had good reason for leaving Clive twisted in the cloak. He didn't want anyone to find the fellow during his own absence. The Shadow intended to return and haul Clive away somewhere for a very definite chat.

Besides, The Shadow had no time to lose. He couldn't spare even the quarter minute needed to regain his garb and put it on. He was remembering the map that Moe had picked up outside the hot-car farm. Its features were etched in The Shadow's mind.

A tiny flashlight twinkled beneath the big elms. Its beam showed that Zeke's car was no longer there. Someone had coasted that car away while The Shadow, following Corring's arrival, had taken up Clive's blind trail to the summerhouse. The same shots that brought The Shadow to the mansion had brought Clive, too, leading to later complications.

But it couldn't have been Zeke who coasted the car. It was either Lippy Carther or Mech Woodum, the pair of Manhattan bad men who had come to this vicinity, arriving after being overtaken by The Shadow.

It didn't require expert deduction to tell where they had taken the car. There was only one path along which it could have coasted: an old driveway leading downgrade from the elms.

Somewhere below, Zeke Hemble would soon be getting into that car, probably close to a spot that was marked on his map. He would be going one way, Lippy and Mech another. The hunt for a missing masked man would eventually enmesh Clive Walden, who no longer had a car available.

AS for the hunt itself, it was assuming remarkable proportions.

Flashlights were blinking everywhere. Cars were coming in by the main gate, some with spotlights that swept across the broad lawns. A big floodlight was beaming from the mansion, probably turned on by Tobias Browland.

Of course, Clive wasn't found yet; he was lying too close to the house. It was The Shadow, now attired as Cranston, who was in danger of discovery.

MURDER MANSION

Zigzagging from his course to avoid the glare, The Shadow paused in the very shelter of a car that had come up the main drive and turned off across the lawn, to be out of the way.

The car had a searchlight, but it was pointed in the direction opposite to The Shadow's approach. Close by the car, The Shadow saw men come into the light.

One was Elbert Morion; the other the servant, Jasper. Elbert was dangling a revolver; Jasper held a bandanna mask. They gave the trophies to a long-jawed man who was wearing a leather jacket and an oversized felt hat.

"We found these near the driveway, sheriff," informed Elbert. "They belong to the man who invaded the house."

The sheriff nodded.

"I heard about it from that lawyer fellow, Corring," he drawled. "Whoever the man is, we'll find him. I have a dozen deputies closing in on the house."

Elbert stared, with puzzled expression.

"A dozen deputies?" he queried. "Why such a turnout, sheriff?"

"A tip-off," was the laconic reply. "Somebody phoned, said there'd be trouble here. Told us to wait at the main gate until he joined us. We were there, waiting, when the shooting started."

The Shadow was moving away, making a speedy detour back to the old driveway. This was indeed a snare deluxe. Crooks themselves had phoned that tip-off. It hadn't hurt their plans, at all; instead, it had aided them.

Waiting at the gate, the sheriff and his posse were too far away at the start. When shots brought them, Zeke was already in flight, after chucking away his mask and gun. Flight that took him the other way, toward where his car was.

True, the sheriff's men had spread in circle formation. But Zeke was outside the circle, as were his comrades. Closing in, the deputies would surely bag Clive. Maybe Clive was lucky to be lying senseless; at least, it meant that he didn't know about the tight spot he was in.

But it didn't signify that Clive was nothing more than a poor, innocent dupe. This situation might have the earmarks of an ugly feud: crook against crook.

Whatever the situation, The Shadow intended to alter it, very promptly. He, too, was slipping the cordon, and he knew exactly where he could find Zeke's car, if he hurried.

His flashlight close to the ground, The Shadow was picking the course of the old driveway. Well below the house, he found that it curved amid the trees, and leveled at a fork. There, The Shadow paused to listen.

At first, he heard nothing but the tumult of a small creek that marked the boundary of Browland's well-wooded estate. Then he caught other sounds: the slight tumble of small stones from an embankment; the heavy breathing of a man who had reached the trees from a stretch of lawn.

There was a thud as the arrival reached the portion of the drive that forked to The Shadow's right; then, the man began to move away from the keen-eared listener.

MURDER MANSION

Silently, The Shadow stalked him, but the man gained in the darkness. The next sound that The Shadow heard was that of an automobile starter. Zeke was in his car; he had found it where his pals had coasted it. He was going to pick his way along the darkened drive and leave the grounds by a rear exit.

THOUGH guised as Cranston, The Shadow might well have been a stalking shape of blackness, judging by the challenge with which he halted Zeke's departure. That challenge was a strange, sinister laugh that crept weirdly through the trees, above the murmur of the brook.

Zeke must have waited, to listen. He finally used the starter again; this time, the motor throbbed. Again, The Shadow's laugh crept from the darkness. This time, its eerie tone was ahead of Zeke's car.

A car door clattered open. Zeke was frantic, crouching somewhere near the car, hoping to hear the laugh again. So The Shadow voiced it, and Zeke thought he had it spotted. He opened fire with a spare gun that he kept hidden in the car, and aimed his shots toward the spot from which he thought the laugh came.

Zeke was wrong by about forty feet. The laugh challenged him from a new location. Madly, Zeke wheeled and stabbed a shot again. This time, he was ten feet closer.

In response came the report of an automatic. It missed Zeke by a scant foot and clanged the fender of his car. Madly, Zeke fired for The Shadow's gun spurt, only to receive a reply from another direction.

The crook scrambled wildly from the vicinity of his car. The Shadow's second shot had almost skimmed him.

Even in Cranston's attire, The Shadow was unseen in this thick darkness; for that matter, Zeke was practically the same. It was just that The Shadow moved about and picked his aim more sensibly than Zeke did. So sensibly, in fact, that the thuggish watchman was lucky to be still alive. The Shadow could easily have pegged him, had he chosen.

Actually, The Shadow was working to a different purpose. He was deliberately missing Zeke by inches, to edge the crook away from his ear. The Shadow's fire was the very thing that would bring the sheriff and his men, that they might capture the real invader who had entered the Browland mansion and make him tell his whole story!

The Shadow's gun was doing all the talking, and his laugh accompanied it. Zeke was afraid even to fire at the spurts, which were always in different places.

Knowing that his car was marked, Zeke was scrambling up the embankment, hoping to dash away across the edge of the lawn where the going was faster. He ducked back suddenly as a big light, from a car that was swinging over the lawn, glared in his direction. Then, fearing The Shadow more, Zeke came up, aiming at flashlights that were bobbing rapidly his way.

As Zeke fired, a hand plucked from the embankment behind him and spilled him into the fringe of trees. The Shadow's grab sent the murderous shots wide. Then flashlights were focused hard on Zeke, and he staggered to his feet to shoot at them.

The deputies were swifter; they blasted with whatever weapons they had. Zeke was the central point of that combined fire. He was dead before he struck the turf; his watchman's revolver flipped from his hand.

Then the glare from the approaching car was slicing the embankment at an angle, for it had crossed the lawn and reached the trees. It outlined another figure, and the deputies were making a great hue and cry. The man that they saw was Cranston; they didn't know that he was fighting on their side.

MURDER MANSION

Much did The Shadow wish for his habitual garb of black, as he sped back along the forgotten drive, zigzagging from creek to embankment. Half a dozen men were after him, and he couldn't quite manage a perfect fade-out. They were shooting, and he returned the fire, purposely aiming high. It seemed the only way to discourage them, for men were apt to drop to shelter under a barrage.

Not these. They had finished Zeke too easily. They wanted to nail the man who was still dodging them.

One gun exhausted, The Shadow drew another. He was at the fork, stabbing shots up in the tree branches, when a man launched from a rock beside him. The fellow was a deputy, slinging a gun as he came.

The Shadow warded the blow but partially. Receiving a glancing stroke, he stumbled groggily, then flung his empty gun at his opponent.

The deputy ducked. Slicing through the brush, The Shadow came atop a large rock and rolled across it, intending to do some shooting with his other gun. The rock proved a better bulwark than he wanted. The drop on the far side measured about twelve feet.

Losing his good gun as he grabbed for the rock, The Shadow took the plunge, and crumpled when he struck the stony shore of the creek, just below.

Out of the cloak and hat that were famous as his battle garb, The Shadow was out of battle, as well.

CHAPTER VII. VANISHED SHADOWS

THREE men were viewing the dead body of Hemble, the night watchman from the clock factory. Two of those men knew Hemble quite well, though they did not call him by his nickname, Zeke. One man was Elbert Morion; the other was Sheriff Quincy, whose deputies had bagged Zeke.

"It's Hemble, all right," observed Elbert, in a moody tone. "What he was doing over here, I can't understand. He belonged at the factory."

"Maybe the masked man showed up there first," declared the sheriff. "Hemble might have followed him here."

"You think that Hemble gave you the tip-off?"

"I'm not sure, Mr. Morion, but the voice over the phone was something like Hemble's."

The third man in the group gave a dry smile. He was Corring, the lawyer. He spoke in a rather sarcastic tone.

"It wouldn't occur to either of you," suggested Corring, "that Hemble could have been the masked man who invaded Browland's study in such outrageous fashion?"

Both Elbert and the sheriff promptly vetoed Corring's theory. They argued that Hemble couldn't possibly have reached this area while the deputies were closing in. Elbert was quite sure that the masked man must have been someone else.

"I'm wondering about Clive Walden," he said slowly. "This night is certainly one that my precious cousin would have chosen to return home, provided he knew about the new will that Uncle Tobias made."

MURDER MANSION

"Say, that's something!" exclaimed the sheriff. "Walden might have gone to the factory first, maybe to get at the safe again. He's certainly spent all the money he took the last time."

"Hemblem was rather stupid," said Elbert, regretfully. "Clive made a dupe of him once, and might have done it again."

"Let's get over to the factory," suggested the sheriff, "and see if we can find any evidence there."

Even though Hemblem had fallen while shooting at the deputies, there was still reason to doubt that he was a crook. Another gunner had been active in this area; some of the deputies were inclined to believe that they had encountered two or three.

Engaged in a fight to begin with, Hemblem might have mistaken the deputies for other persons. The trouble was, none of the searchers could find the man, or men, who had represented the opposition. The only evidence that they brought back was a .45 automatic, which the sheriff took along with Hemblem's revolver.

One deputy found some spare cartridges lying near a rock; The Shadow had brought them out, intending to reload. But that was the last trace of the missing fighter.

Perhaps a longer search would have uncovered Cranston, but the sheriff assumed that any strangers had fled far, by this time. He felt it more important that his men rejoin the slim cordon up by the mansion, and tighten the net. He argued – and both Elbert and Corring agreed – that the masked man who began the trouble might still be trapped near the house.

Since Hemblem's car was handy, the sheriff suggested that they use it for the trip to the clock factory. Elbert and Corring joined him; they pulled away, while the deputies clambered up the embankment.

FOR several minutes, only the soft music of tumbling waters disturbed the darkened scene. Then, above the water's babble, came the sound of men who were clattering across the creek, from rock to rock. They stopped on the near side and listened to the dying purr of Hemblem's car.

It was Lippy Carther who undertoned:

"That was Zeke's jellopy, Mech."

"Yeah," Mech Woodum growled. "The depts must have croaked him."

"How did they get here in the first place?"

"Zeke called the tin star. He figured the guy would bring along a lot of jabories. Shaking them should have been a breeze for Zeke. Only, it wasn't."

Lippy wasn't quite so pessimistic. He argued that Zeke was the watchman, or "bugster," as Lippy chose to term it, at the clock factory. Maybe Zeke had squared himself with the Johnny Laws, and gone back with them to the factory.

"Not much chance," gruffed Mech. "We heard Zeke do a skid off the big rock, didn't we?"

"Maybe it wasn't Zeke," returned Lippy. "Let's take a look–see and find out."

MURDER MANSION

Using flashlights, the mobsters came under the lee of the big rock and discovered the sprawled form of Cranston.

Though lack of his black garb had brought The Shadow to this plight, his present identity served him well. Lippy and Mech had been too far away to hear the laughs that had so confused Zeke. The Shadow's second automatic had fallen between two rocks; hence the crooks had no idea that he was anyone but Cranston.

In fact, they didn't know that he was Cranston. They merely classed him as some stuffed shirt who must have been at the party in the mansion. Probably trailing Zeke, he'd slipped from a rock and come to grief.

"This guy ain't Walden," declared Lippy. "We saw Walden down at the hotel. He's got a cousin, though."

"Yeah, a bird named Morion," recalled Mech. "This might be him."

"What'll we do with him? Croak him?"

"Not until we know what happened to Zeke. Let's haul this guy over to the bus."

The car was parked across the creek; Mech had driven it there through a shallow ford. Working back across the rocks, the thugs managed to drag Cranston with them, though they did considerable splashing on the way.

They loaded their unconscious prisoner in the rear seat of the stolen sedan. Piloting the car out through the woods, Mech took a road that led to the clock factory.

Knowing that only a few men had gone there, the crooks were sure that they could prowl around a bit and possibly contact Zeke, if he proved to be alive. Being burdened with a prisoner rather annoyed them. They wouldn't have handled one if they hadn't been working for Zeke and doing nothing except on his say—so.

Nor would they have handled this prisoner, had they known, or even guessed at, his identity. That is, they would not have handled him as they were at present.

For years, Lippy and Mech, like all men of their ilk, had held the impossible hope of finding The Shadow under circumstances resembling these. This pair would have weighted their prisoner with all the slugs in their guns had it occurred to them that he might be The Shadow.

Zeke Hemble, of course, had known that The Shadow was about, but he hadn't lived to pass the news on to his pals. The only other persons who had really seen The Shadow were Gail Trent and Clive Walden.

AT that very moment, Gail was thinking of The Shadow in terms of Clive.

She had gone upstairs to reclaim her slipper from beneath the study desk, and while she probed for it, the darkness reminded her of that mass of human blackness that had swallowed a masked furtive outside the door to the driveway.

Gail hadn't seen what happened to The Shadow. He had simply disappeared. Odd, the way he had come and gone, whoever he was; but the question that perplexed Gail most was why Clive hadn't appeared upon the scene. She wondered if he had run into previous trouble with the black-cloaked fighter from outdoors.

Then the horrendous thought gripped her that Clive could have been the masked man. Certainly, Clive had been in the house earlier, and must have used the old stairway to reach the second floor.

MURDER MANSION

If so, Clive was actually a lawbreaker. The fact that the masked man had fled by the old stairway indicated his full familiarity with the house.

The note under the door!

It could mean that Clive had sought to decoy her to the summerhouse just so that she would be out of the way. Not because he really cared for her, but because he feared that she might recognize him despite his mask.

Finding her slipper, Gail took the side passage toward her room, weighing the opinion that so horrified her.

At least, she still cared somewhat for Clive. The fact was proven by the way her mind groped frantically for some better theory that would be in his favor. At last, Gail found one. She decided that Clive could have still been waiting at the summerhouse, too far away to hear the shots within the mansion.

In that case, he might have known nothing until excitement began outdoors and lights showed everywhere. Still regarding himself a fugitive, Clive might very well have made a rapid departure before the searchers came his way. Gail's one regret was that he might suppose that she had summoned the law after finding his note.

Gail was at the window that opened above the old carriage entrance. She raised the sash and leaned out, resting her hands carefully against the marble cornice, for it had weakened since the porte-cochere had been removed. Peering as far as she could, Gail saw that the bobbing flashlights made a circle much closer than the summerhouse.

If only Clive had managed to keep beyond that cordon! Very probably he had, but Gail found herself worrying about The Shadow. He had come to her aid, that rescuer in black, and he might still be close at hand. If so, The Shadow stood in danger of capture.

The lights were very close and moving nearer. They were sweeping toward the door just below Gail's window. The girl's eyes were suddenly riveted by a stir from the shrubbery which only she was close enough to see.

A figure emerged, and Gail suppressed a cry of alarm. It was a shape cloaked in black, wearing a slouch hat. She was right: her rescuer was trapped!

Not for long.

FROM her vantage spot, Gail saw how effectively that jet-hued garb could serve its wearer. The man in black was simply dropping back each time a beam of light came his way. The shrubbery, even the gray wall, gave him a background with which his figure blended sufficiently to avoid the observation of the searchers, who were more distant than Gail.

He was right beside the steps and reaching for them, when the cornice cut off Gail's sight of him. She leaned farther forward; feeling the marble wobble, she clutched it and drew her weight back, fearing that she would loosen the block of stone upon the man below.

Her fright ended, Gail remembered that her own room afforded a view of the carriage entrance.

She hurried to the room and peered from its darkened window. She saw the door, and noticed that someone was moving a car toward it. Headlights suddenly bathed the door in a much brighter glow than flashlights

could provide.

Not only the door, but the steps and the shrubbery flanking it were revealed in vivid light. Gail wanted to shriek from the window, telling the deputies not to fire at the man who crouched there.

Before she could call, she realized that it wasn't necessary. The brilliant light showed blankness. Within the dozen seconds that Gail had taken to get from one window to another, the cloaked visitor had disappeared.

This was, indeed, a night of vanishing Shadows. In his time, The Shadow had performed some remarkable fadeouts. But never before had he been observed in two places at the same time. It happened that The Shadow was still a helpless prisoner in a car manned by two murderous crooks.

Yet Gail Trent had seen him outside the mansion door. An odd riddle, this business of two Shadows; one that was to have further and more startling consequences before it ended!

CHAPTER VIII. CROOKS DECIDE

THE clock factory occupied a group of old-fashioned brick buildings that dated from the period when Tobias Browland had taken over the business from his grandfather. The arrangement afforded many places to park a car unnoticed, so Mech chose one.

He gleamed a flashlight into the rear seat, saw that Cranston was still unconscious. Mech nudged Lippy and the two crooks slid from their car.

Seeing lights in a window, they approached it. Looking through a heavy grating, they saw the interior of the office, with Elbert Morion stooping in front of a safe. He had finished looking inside of it and was closing it. The thugs watched him rise, shaking his head.

Both knew that Elbert must be Clive's cousin, the manager of the clock factory. They saw Corring, too, but identified him as a guest from the Browland mansion, rather than a lawyer. It further established their idea that Cranston was just another guest. Probably both Corring and Cranston had been helping the deputies hunt for vanished marauders.

The sheriff was also on the scene, but the crooks gave him little notice. They were looking for Zeke, and they still kept watching, hoping he would appear. Meanwhile, a conversation was going on within the office, but the thugs didn't overhear it because the windows were tightly closed.

"If Clive opened this safe again," declared Elbert to his companions, "he didn't take anything. That wouldn't be to his credit, because there is no money here. I've been having it deposited in the bank every night for the past six months.

"I don't think Clive did open it, though. Not that he's had a change of heart" – Elbert's tone carried marked contempt – "but because I don't think he could have managed it. I changed the combination the day after the robbery."

Corring gave one of his dry smiles.

"In that case, Elbert, you can place this in the safe." He drew out the sealed envelope containing Browland's new will. "I must catch the next train into the city, and I wouldn't care to carry the will with me, considering that marauders might still be about. They might even follow me."

MURDER MANSION

Elbert drew his hand away as Corring extended the envelope. A headshake was his answer to the lawyer's request.

"I'm mentioned in that will," he reminded. "You should know better than to suggest that it be placed in my keeping, Corring. Why not intrust it to the sheriff? He has a safe in his office."

Learning that the sheriff's office was on the way to the station, Corring decided to follow that plan. He handed the envelope to the sheriff, who looked at it closely, then placed it in his pocket.

Looking about to learn the time, Corring saw a dozen clocks that told it. He decided that he had better start for the station.

Having found nothing resembling a message from Hemble, the three men went their way, Elbert pausing to lock the office door behind him. Mech dropped down from outside the window, but Lippy clutched him and gestured.

"Maybe you ought to try that coffin," suggested Lippy, referring to the safe. "If Zeke got his, we ought to get ours, in the way of the dough he promised us."

"I asked Zeke about the box," returned Mech. "He said it wasn't worth souping. It's a John O'Brien."

In the parlance of safe-crackers, a "John O'Brien" signified an empty. Zeke had learned that Elbert wasn't keeping cash in the office safe. Informed on the point by Mech, Lippy dropped from his perch and started back toward the car, only to have Mech tug his arm.

Mech wanted his companion to come around the corner of the building. Lippy obliged, only to have Mech thrust him back before they came into the open.

The three men from the office were getting into their car, and their conversation was heard by the two mobbies. It included mention of Zeke: regrets that the watchman was dead, though the sheriff began to gruff a few doubts regarding Hemble's integrity.

Elbert changed the subject by saying that he'd call some of the factory hands, from the sheriff's office, and have them take over the watchman's duty.

Coring suggested that they go to the station first and that Elbert make the call from there. Corring was becoming more anxious about his train.

ANXIETY had faded from the minds of Lippy and Mech as they retraced their way to the car. No need of further concern regarding Zeke, for they had learned that he was dead. The crooks weren't going to get their promised dough, so they decided upon a prompt trip back to New York.

The matter of their prisoner bothered them. Starting the car after the sheriff and the others left, Mech told Lippy to "take a gander at the stiff in back," which Lippy did, and then announced that the prisoner was still senseless.

"Good enough," decided Mech, as he swung the car into a highway. "He won't know what hit him. Not that I care. It's just that we want to get this over with, the easy way."

To Lippy, the "easy way" meant using a gun. He pulled his revolver and pointed it at the slumped figure in the rear seat, with Cranston's white shirt front a perfect target.

MURDER MANSION

At that moment, The Shadow's life hung by something thinner than a thread: namely, the hair trigger of Lippy's .38.

Fate couldn't have played an odder trick than making Mech Woodum save The Shadow's life; but that was exactly what happened, at least for the time being. Mech pushed out his hand and drew Lippy's gun from its target.

"Lay off," growled Mech. "A blast from that beater will wake every joskin in the county! With all the dough we aren't getting for tonight, you want to go wasting slugs!"

Lippy reversed the gun in his hand and leaned over the back of the front seat, intending to bash Cranston's head with the revolver butt. Mech hauled Lippy's arm down before it could swing.

"Hold it," said Mech. "Just keep one mitt on the door handle, and be ready to shove the guy when I give the word. Remember that place where the creek cuts deep alongside the highway? That's where we'll dump the stuffed shirt."

"He's on the wrong side of the car –"

"Not the way we're headed," interrupted Mech. "So unclax until we get there."

With about five minutes to go, Lippy subsided in the front seat and opened the window beside him. Mech was driving rapidly, and the cool night air whipped into the sedan. Lippy didn't particularly appreciate the fresh breeze. He was simply stretching out to get a good view of the gorge.

It came, under the glare of the headlights, a perfect locale for crime. The roadway was high above the creek, and the incline, fifty feet or more, was both steep and rocky. There was a guard rail for a curved stretch, but it ended where the road straightened. There, only a small, narrow embankment, much like a high curb, served as protection.

Dumping a person over that mound was a matter of timing, only. Lippy swung around, took the door handle with one hand, and laid the other hand on the shoulder of the swaying figure in the back seat.

Mech braked the car as it hit the straight stretch, and voiced the single word:

"Now!"

TWO hands shot to their task, and completed it. But they weren't Lippy's hands. Instead, they were the hands of Cranston.

Like iron vises, those fists that were actually The Shadow's took the crook in a grip as unsparing as the one The Shadow had used on Zeke. The uncloaked fighter clamped the wrist above the door handle, and at the same time clutched Lippy's throat.

When the crook tried to claw with his free hand, The Shadow was quicker, with a lifted elbow. Bringing the elbow down, he trapped Lippy's hand beneath it.

Mech wasn't watching Lippy's progress. Instead, he was jockeying the car, jerking it out toward the embankment to aid Lippy's disposal of the prisoner. As Mech veered inward again, The Shadow and Lippy were thrown toward the door, and their weight did the thing that Lippy's strength couldn't manage.

MURDER MANSION

Lippy's hand jabbed the door handle and released it. The door flapped wide, and Mech heard it. Right then, he realized that Lippy was having trouble, for the fellow didn't roll back into the front seat as he should have. Mech darted a gaze to the rear.

Seeing what was happening, he yanked a gun and tried to slash across the seat back at Cranston's head. A deft twist on Cranston's part and Lippy's skull intervened. Then Mech realized that if he used bullets to send Cranston rolling through the door, the prisoner still might retain a grip on Lippy, taking Mech's pal with him.

To settle that point, Mech swerved to the inside of the road.

At that moment, other headlights caught the sedan in their glare. They were coming fast around a bend ahead, due to meet Mech's car, glare-to-glare, near the end of the straight stretch.

Mech swerved for the embankment again. He didn't care what happened to the other car, but he didn't want a collision that would leave him stranded on this remote road.

The swerve was too much. The road was slightly downgrade and a new curve was starting. Furthermore, Mech had his mind on another clash with his gun, and began one as he handled the wheel with his other hand.

The Shadow's fist left Lippy's partially choked throat and grabbed for Mech's descending arm. Needing a gun, The Shadow intended to twist Mech's out of his hand.

A twist, indeed. It did more than take the gun. It took the car right off the road. Wheels hit the embankment, and Mech's one hand couldn't yank the sedan back into control.

The approaching car was hitting the inside of the road, where the ground went upward to the hill brow; bouncing about, its headlights gave its driver a full view of what happened to the sedan.

As though an invisible collision had occurred, the sedan toppled in the other direction, took a long roll into yawning darkness and disappeared, lights and all.

It was like The Shadow's roll across the big rock, only on a vaster scale. Crashes of small trees, the clatter of rocks, told that the doomed car was bound on a long plunge.

One figure was flung from it as the car hurdled the brink. The long lurch carried the vehicle beyond the flying form. Hitting the sharp slope, the car bounded rather than rolled. It was like a creature hobbling on one stilt, for the edge of the flapping door hit the rocks first and made the bounds eccentric.

A few such crashes and the door was ripped away; then, with smashes that echoed loudly from the gorge, the sedan transformed itself into junk metal, so emphatically that no one still within it could have possibly survived.

Springing from the car that had halted on the road, a horrified girl dashed over to the low embankment toward which the headlights were pointed. The glare showed Margo Lane. She hadn't witnessed the struggle in the other car, and didn't connect The Shadow with it, until a singular event brought her stock-still and staring.

Something like a mammoth beetle was crawling up from the rocks just below the embankment. It became a human shape as it groped over the mound and came into the car lights.

MURDER MANSION

For a moment, Margo thought that the figure's black attire was a cloak; then, as the man came slowly to his feet, she recognized it as a torn evening jacket. She also recognized Cranston's bruised and bloodstained face above the much-mussed shirt front.

"Lamont! You're hurt!"

MARGO was grabbing Cranston's arm, and it was doubly fortunate that she did. First, because he was swaying back across the embankment until she halted him. Again, because a gun began to stab upward from below.

Evidently another man had been flung from the bounding car, with a luckier landing than Cranston's.

The first shots were wide, proving that the marksman was a bit dazed, too. But had Cranston slumped to the embankment, he would have become an easy prey, for clattering stones told that the other man was climbing upward to try shots at closer range.

Margo didn't wait for him. Tugging Cranston to his feet, she piloted his stumbling steps to her coupe and thrust him in beside the driver's seat. Slamming the door, Margo hurried to the other side and took the wheel.

Shoving the car in gear, Margo wheeled precariously close to the ravine edge as she straightened her course toward Riverdale. Then the car was whining in second gear, its speedometer creeping close to forty as it made the bend.

Margo fancied that she heard shots from far back the road, but they couldn't count. She was out of range, and out of sight as well.

It was well that Margo had been delayed in getting off from New York. She couldn't have chosen a better time to come along this road. Her efforts had certified The Shadow's self-rescue, and she was carrying her half-conscious friend to safety.

Behind lay tragedy. Of two crooks in the shattered car, one had perished, leaving the other to seek vengeance upon a man whose name he didn't know. Probably, the survivor would recognize Cranston if he saw him again. The question was: would he meet Lamont Cranston or The Shadow?

Only The Shadow himself could have answered that question, and in his present state, The Shadow neither knew nor cared.

CHAPTER IX. TRAGEDY AHEAD

MARGO was really worried when she pulled her car in through the gates of the Browland estate. Cranston hadn't spoken a word all during the ride; he was leaning back, his eyes closed, his face very white, despite its blood streaks.

Of course, Margo didn't know that The Shadow's plunge in the car was his second ordeal of the evening; that he had recuperated from the first one only because of the strong, refreshing breeze through a car window that one of his captors had unwisely opened.

As for events at Browland's, Margo knew nothing about them.

She began to learn soon after she wheeled into the long driveway. Swinging flashlights signaled for her to stop the car; as she did, men with badges came up to the window. The deputies were polite when they saw

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Margo; their looks became doubtful when they spied Cranston.

"Who is this man?" a deputy demanded. "Where did you find him?"

"His name is Lamont Cranston," returned Margo, very coolly. "He is a friend of mine and was bringing me here from New York, when another car nearly drove us off the road. We nearly tipped over, and Mr. Cranston was hurt when he went out through the door."

So far, Margo was drawing neatly on her imagination to properly patch the facts. Then, in a worried tone, she added:

"I'm afraid the driver of the other car was drunk; otherwise, he would have stayed on the road. He went over the edge of a ravine. I called to him and he didn't answer, so I hurried here with Lamont."

Mention of the ravine produced a marked effect. Deputies sprang into their cars and sped for the scene of the wreck. They had finished their fruitless hunt for a masked man who had disappeared near the Browland mansion; hence, they were free to go. Others jumped on the running board of Margo's coupe and guided her up to the house.

They were pulling in by the side entrance, when another car overtook them. It brought Elbert Morion and Sheriff Quincy. As they stepped out, Elbert began to inquire anxiously if all were well within the house, while the sheriff demanded to know why the deputies had dropped their search.

The house door opened and Ambrose appeared. He answered Elbert's question, stating that all had been quiet since the masked man's flight. The deputies were telling the sheriff that the hunt was finished. Whoever they were looking for had somehow managed to slip them.

"He must have gone into the house," began the sheriff. "We must resume the search there."

The deputies argued that they had kept lights fixed on the house. Ambrose, when questioned, testified that he had seen no one enter, and Jasper, arriving at that moment, declared the same.

Then Margo was doing all the talking, quite indignantly. Introducing herself to Elbert, she pointed to Cranston.

"He may be badly hurt," asserted Margo. "Can't this wrangling wait until you've taken him into the house and called a doctor?"

Elbert detailed the servants to help Cranston inside. He stirred as they eased him from the car. Wavering from Ambrose to Jasper, Cranston opened his eyes wearily and saw Margo.

Noting it, Margo began to talk to the sheriff, telling him the same yarn that she had given the deputies. By the time they reached the door, Margo glanced at Cranston again, saw the faintest of smiles playing on his lips.

The smile was his approval of Margo's story; his thanks for informing him of it. The Shadow would support those details when he gave his account later.

WITHIN the mansion, Gail Trent, looking from her window, could see the approaching procession. Recognizing Margo, Gail hurriedly smoothed the negligee that she had just put on and started from her room.

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As she neared the main stairway, she saw Tobias Browland at the top. He had just come up from the library, and was going to his study. Apparently he hadn't noticed the arrivals outdoors. He was turning the other way, so Gail didn't bother to call after him.

She was on the stairs, about to call down to Margo, when her own surprise halted her. Gail hadn't noticed Cranston's condition when she saw him from the window. In the light of the hallway, she observed his blood-streaked face as he wavered, hesitatingly, between Ambrose and Jasper.

Realizing that he must be one of Margo's friends, Gail turned about, intending to hurry to the guest room and have it ready if they brought Cranston upstairs.

Gail saw Browland again.

The old man had gone past his study; for a moment, Gail wondered why. Then she remembered the door to the unused stairway. It was still open, as pursuers had left it when they chased the masked man from the study.

That door was an obsession with Tobias Browland. He had installed it just so the forgotten stairway would remain unused. Those stairs were a jinx, in his estimate. As a child, he'd witnessed the last of the three fatal falls that had thinned the Browland family.

He'd sworn that if he ever owned the house, he would block off the fatal stairway; and he had. Lately, he'd talked of nailing the top door shut, instead of leaving it merely locked, but hadn't quite gotten around to the task. At present, Browland was at least closing the door, as he always did when he found it open.

Gail saw him take the first downward step necessary to reach the door, which was open on its inward hinges. Her attention was immediately diverted by a swirl of blackness.

It wasn't from the old stairs; it came from the hallway beyond them. Blackness that Gail immediately distinguished as a man in a flowing cloak, a slouch hat on his head.

The Shadow again!

Having seen her rescuer enter the house, Gail wasn't surprised that he was in the upstairs hall. The thing that startled her was the quick lunge that the cloaked intruder made for the old stairway, where Browland had stepped down. There was a clatter from the narrow stairs as the cloaked man thrust into the darkened opening. Gail heard a sharp, though muffled, cry.

She thought that the man in black was grabbing Browland, only to change the opinion, an instant later, when the piercing call was drowned by an added clatter, which, in turn, took on a dwindling sound.

Gail saw The Shadow draw back from the stairs, staring down, and she could picture what had happened as plainly as though she viewed it, too.

Browland had given the cry; he was causing the clatter. Like three of his lamented ancestors, the old man was taking the long plunge down the precipitous steps to the stone passage at the bottom. Like a dive from a ladder, it was a pitch that couldn't be halted.

Blackness swirled again before Gail's eyes. It wasn't the motion of the figure that she thought was The Shadow. The man in black was still fixed in the doorway, fascinated by the tragedy that he was witnessing: the death that lay ahead for Browland.

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Gail's vision was blotted by her own horror; with it came the terrible conviction that she had mistaken a foe for a friend. That thrust of black-robed arms that she had first thought was a grab at Browland now had all the features of the absolute reverse.

How simply a lunge could turn into a shove! Delivered against Browland's back while the old man was off balance, the merest push was enough to start him on his way to doom. That was why the man in black had entered the house and was lurking in the upstairs hall.

He'd come here to murder Tobias Browland, and to Gail, the masquerader, so familiar with Browland's habits, could be one person only: Clive Walden!

GAIL was stumbling down the front stairway, calling, beckoning, pointing, all at one time. She didn't have to tell people that something had happened on the old stairs. They had heard it more plainly than she, for Browland's fall had ended in a very heavy crash in the passage below the narrow steps.

With it came a sharp sound, like a pistol crack, that carried even to Gail's hearing and chilled her, though she didn't know what it meant.

Never before had Gail heard the peculiar impact of a skull meeting stone with all the force that a headlong dive could gather. That crack marked the instant death of Tobias Browland.

Others who heard it were already on their way to the passage. Elbert Morion and Sheriff Quincy were dashing side-by-side. The sheriff was pulling a gun, so Elbert gave him precedence.

Ambrose and Jasper couldn't follow immediately, because they were burdened with Cranston. Ambrose drew Margo over to take the burden on his side, and Jasper promptly shifted Cranston's weight to the girl.

Margo managed to reel her wearied friend into a chair, while the servants were grabbing up their former weapons, tongs and poker, which they had left handy in the lower hall.

In the old stone passage, the sheriff was stumbling over Browland's body. Though the light from the lower hall was vague, Quincy saw enough to know that Browland was dead. Browland's skull reminded the sheriff of an egg in a dropped crate. With a sickened grunt, Quincy shifted back against Elbert.

"No need to look, Mr. Morion –"

"Look up there!" Elbert interrupted. "I see someone at the top of the stairs!"

The sheriff saw only blackness; his eyes were troubling him at the moment. Weakly, he handed his gun to Elbert, but the blackness was gone when the latter fired toward the stair top, across the sheriff's stooped shoulder.

Claiming that the man was gone, Elbert shoved forward, but Quincy blocked his way. The sheriff strode over Browland's body and tripped on the old man's cane, which had fallen down the stairs with him and was lying, half-splintered, on the steps.

Grabbing the cane as a weapon, the sheriff hurried up the narrow steps, Elbert following with the gun. At the top, they saw Ambrose and Jasper coming from the front stairway with their improvised weapons.

The servants had finally understood Gail, and were passing along the word about "someone in black" who had hurled Browland to his death. It fitted with Elbert's claim of a figure at the stair top – one at which he had

fired too late.

From there, the search spread. Pouring into the mansion because they heard the gunfire, the sheriff's men were told to join the servants in the hunt and at the same time make sure that no one slipped from the house.

Elbert came downstairs, to join Gail and Margo in the lower hall. Cranston, his eyes apparently closed again, was actually a witness to their discussion.

Sadly, Elbert announced that his uncle was dead; that tragedy of yore had again gathered a Browland into its fold. But this time, death had been no accident – in Elbert's opinion. He blamed it all on the man in black, who – by Gail's own testimony – had played a hand in the game of death.

Gail herself had gone completely silent. When called upon to repeat her testimony, she simply declared that she had seen a cloaked man in the upper hallway turned toward the old stairs at the very time she heard Browland's fall begin.

Such a statement was sufficient for the sheriff and the deputies when they completed their search.

Like Elbert, they agreed that Browland's death was murder, committed by a marauder cloaked in black who might be the masked man that they hunted earlier. They didn't realize that their description of a wanted killer fitted a personage known as The Shadow, who was famous as a foe to crime, not as a perpetrator of evil.

Two persons realized it. One was The Shadow himself present in the guise of Lamont Cranston; the other, his friend Margo Lane. Their eyes met in one of the moments when Cranston opened his, and their exchange of glances was expressive.

Whatever blemish might attach to the reputation of The Shadow, it was a certainty that the real owner of that title could never be held to account for the death of Tobias Browland. In reality, The Shadow and Lamont Cranston were one.

Not only had Cranston been in the lower hall when Browland took the fatal tumble; but, of all the persons below, he was the last who could possibly have had a hand in Browland's death. At the time the tragedy occurred, Cranston hadn't even recuperated from a near tragedy of his own.

The Shadow seldom dealt in alibis. At present, however, he had a perfect one. The very men who hunted for The Shadow would be the ones to testify that Lamont Cranston, in reality The Shadow, was not the cloaked marauder that they sought!

CHAPTER X. ONE NIGHT LATER

HIS head heavily bandaged, and one arm hanging in a sling, Lamont Cranston was drowsing in an easy-chair in the corner of the Browland library. It was dusk, and the glare of the reading lamp bothered his eyes, so he had laid his book aside.

Cranston's condition had been classed as rather serious the night before. His own physician had been summoned from New York, and had declared that it would be unwise to move him from the mansion. Suffering from what might prove to be a serious brain concussion, Cranston had occupied the guest room overnight.

Today, his condition had considerably improved, and a phone call to Dr. Sayre, the physician, brought results. Sayre had decided that the patient could sit up, after listening to Cranston's own report of how he felt.

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Sayre privately guessed that Cranston had faked things one way, then the other. Cranston had a habit of doing just that.

What Sayre didn't know was the real reason for the patient's improvement. Of course, Cranston couldn't state it to the physician over the telephone while other persons were about. It was Sheriff Quincy who produced the cure.

This morning, the local law-enforcement officer announced that no one was to leave the mansion until further notice. Should the mystery man of last night still prove to be around, the sheriff wanted witnesses on hand to identify him. If it happened that he was gone, there might be a chance of luring him back, should all occupants of the house remain.

Obviously, Quincy had been talking to Elbert, and Clive's name had come up again. Very probably, Elbert had also emphasized that Clive was anxious to see Gail.

As an occupant of the house at the time of Browland's death, Cranston naturally came under the same edict, as did Margo. Having no further reason to force his presence on the place, The Shadow had therefore decided that the role of Cranston should become that of a convalescent.

Still, it wasn't wise to overdo it. He wanted to balance things right in between. A position which would allow him to relapse, or completely recover, as occasion might demand, was something very ideal.

In fact, Lamont Cranston was looming as the key figure who could solve this case of crime. Odd that he should be operating as Cranston, and not as The Shadow. Even odder that, as Cranston, he was almost completely inactive.

There were times, however, when The Shadow preferred oddities, and this was one. Certainly, crime itself had so far provided much of the bizarre, and The Shadow could afford to treat it in similar fashion.

Of course, the tired Mr. Cranston knew all that was going on. He learned it, on the installment plan, from Margo Lane, every time she dropped into the library.

Browland's body had been removed, but some of the crime's exhibits remained up in the study. One was a bandanna mask; another, a revolver found with it. Hemble's watchman's gun was also there, as was a .45 automatic found down by the creek, along with some loose cartridges.

Cranston smiled when Margo gave him that report. Later, he would have to take a look for the loaded gun that he had lost between the rocks.

Most of these exhibits were in Browland's desk, because only the dead man had the combination to the safe. However, an expert was coming today to open the safe. Its contents, at least, were listed, and Margo managed to smuggle a copy to Cranston.

Having something of a flare for antiques, he was able to appraise the special heirlooms that the safe contained, and recognized that they couldn't possibly bring more than a thousand dollars.

The precise Mr. Cranston added that to other items. He was trying to calculate Browland's total estate in round figures. He doubted that a forced sale would bring it beyond fifty thousand dollars.

It divided about equally: half for the house, with its fixtures and actual furniture; the other half for the paintings, the library, and various antiques that the old man had collected.

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As for the clock factory, Cranston knew that it was on its last lap. The name "Tobias Browland" had looked fine on clock faces back in the days when their dials were the size of a harvest moon. It could be seen, and recognized, on such clocks. But those days were gone, and so was the fame of Browland, the clock-maker.

There was this, however, about Tobias Browland: the man had never speculated; on the contrary, he had been classed as a miser. This all might be a game involving hidden wealth, enough to bring about a murder. Therefore, Cranston was keenly interested when Margo brought him data about Browland's new will – facts obtained from Gail.

It seemed that the new will differed from the old only in the point that half of the estate – specifically, the house and the furniture – would go to Gail Trent instead of Clive Walden. The status of Elbert Morion was unchanged. He was to get the personal property, as in the old will.

THESE facts were what Cranston contemplated, as he rested with his eyes half closed. Conceivably, Clive Walden might have held a grudge against his uncle because the latter was changing the will; but hardly enough for Clive to masquerade in a borrowed hat and cloak and pitch the old man down the narrow stairs.

If Clive would want to pitch anyone, anywhere, he would probably prefer to take it out on his cousin, Elbert Morion, on the supposition that Elbert had framed him for the robbery at the factory.

Therein lay another element. Zeke Hemble, the night watchman at the factory, was a crook, though only The Shadow seemed to have learned it. Quite possibly, Zeke had robbed the safe on his own. He might have gotten jittery and resolved to clinch the case against Clive.

Such would explain Zeke's masked entry, his tip-off to the sheriff, the need for pals to help, his departure, that Clive might be caught in his stead.

The question was: had Zeke planned further gain by his venture? The logical answer was yes, and the why of it was something that still made The Shadow ponder.

There was, of course, the rivalry between Clive and Elbert over Gail. By marrying Gail, Clive could regain his heritage under the new will. In his turn, Elbert could come in for the same share should he become the lucky suitor.

Each had about the same to gain, but in neither case was murder necessary. Hastening the death of Tobias Browland couldn't have any bearing on the matrimonial situation.

Cranston's reflections were ended by a mouselike scraping behind some curtains in the corner. He turned as the curtains brushed his shoulder, and smiled, knowing that the mouse was Margo.

She had unlocked the door from the other side and was using it to reach Cranston on the sly. The door opened from a musty old music room leading off from the hall.

Leaving the door slightly ajar, Margo slid from the curtains and began to whisper new facts. The status of Zeke Hemble was still unchanged. Deputies had found the body of Mech Woodum in the wrecked sedan; he had been identified as a crook, and the car a stolen one.

But there was no trace of Lippy Carther, the crook who had escaped the smash. Nor did the police suppose that Woodum had known Hemble well enough to call him Zeke.

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That news off her mind, Margo proceeded with something that interested The Shadow more. Elbert had reached the lawyer, Corring, by long-distance telephone in Chicago. Corring was concluding his business in the Midwest, and would arrive tomorrow evening. Until then, the new will was to remain right where it was: in the sheriff's safe.

Realizing that the will was very important, Quincy was keeping a trusted man on steady duty in his office. He'd learned that Mech Woodum had a former reputation as a safe-cracker.

Even though Mech was now identified with the hot-car racket, the sheriff wasn't taking any chances, considering that a man of Mech's special ability had visited his bailiwick.

Cranston's eyes closed again. Very quietly, he questioned:

"What about Gail? Has she heard from Clive yet, Margo?"

"She can't have heard from him, Lamont," insisted Margo, a trifle annoyed. "This is the fifth time you've brought up the subject. Gail has been so honest with me, that when she says she hasn't heard from Clive, I'm sure –"

"Sure of what, Margo?" Cranston interposed. "That she is really in love with Clive?"

Margo's face became reflective. Cranston was watching her, his eyes wide open.

"Gail says she's not in love with Clive," began Margo, slowly. "She claims she can't choose between him and Elbert. And yet –"

"And yet?"

"I'd think, considering the circumstances, she would have made up her mind by this time. She's been seeing Elbert for six months, and all that time Clive has been away."

"Gail has chosen, Margo."

PROPPING himself up in the chair, The Shadow put the case conclusively. Both he and Margo knew that Clive had been around the night before. As a basis, The Shadow assumed that Gail, in some manner or other, had learned of Clive's presence. Right there, Margo put in an objection.

"Then Gail might have mistaken Zeke for Clive."

"Perhaps she did," was Cranston's agreement. "But she knew there was someone else around when I grabbed Zeke at the side door."

Margo nodded. That part was logical.

"And with Clive a hero in Gail's eyes," The Shadow added, "she could have supposed that I, the rescuer, was Clive."

"Why... why, yes."

"I left Clive in the shrubbery," continued The Shadow, "but I didn't come back, as I had hoped. My cloak and hat were handy, and it's obvious that Clive must have used them. Otherwise, he could not have made a secret

entry into the house with all those lights about."

"So far, so good," conceded Margo, with another nod. "Clive was the man that Gail saw upstairs wearing the cloak and hat. She screamed that he shoved Browland down the old stairway. Then Elbert said he'd seen the murderer, too —"

The rest began to dawn on Margo, as though she had caught and was sorting out the very thoughts that The Shadow had in mind. Cranston's lips held their smile, more graphic than words.

Margo was remembering how Gail, freed from the first wave of excitement, had no longer claimed that the man in black had helped Browland down the stairs of death. She merely said she'd seen the cloaked intruder at the stair top, turned toward Browland as he fell.

Only one thing could have changed Gail's story. That thing was Elbert's testimony. Gail knew how anxious he was to pin fault on his cousin, Clive. His tirade against the unknown in black made Gail instinctively think in terms of Clive.

Unwilling to play into Elbert's hands, Gail would obviously prefer to be in Clive's arms. Margo nodded in response to Cranston's smile. He was right: Gail's true love was Clive.

"Either Gail will find Clive," predicted Cranston, "or he will come to her. So keep close check, Margo, and tell me when they meet."

"But how will I know who he is?" queried Margo. "I've never met Clive Walden."

A soft laugh came from Cranston's lips — a strange echo, it seemed, from a time when he had been a different personage: a being cloaked in black. His answer came in the even tone that was typical of Cranston, though his statement was one of the most unusual that he had ever uttered.

"You will recognize Walden on sight, Margo," assured Cranston. "He will be someone that you have heard of often, and have seen on more than one occasion. Clive Walden will be The Shadow!"

CHAPTER XI. SHADOW MEETS SHADOW

CRANSTON'S predictions had a way of coming true; but this time, he had called the turn almost to the dot. Already, Gail Trent was on the verge of a meeting with Clive Walden.

In her room, Gail was plucking a sheet of crumpled paper from the wastebasket: the note that Clive had left the evening before. She wanted to read it again to learn if there could be a deeper meaning in the simple message. But she had scarcely begun to open the paper when she heard the creak of footsteps from the hallway.

A dresser drawer was half open. Quickly, Gail dropped the wadded paper into it. Turning about, she closed the drawer behind her and faced the door defiantly.

Gail's eyes were blazing in the mild light of the room. She thought the approaching person was Margo, whose actions at times today had impressed Gail as a trifle snooty. Friends though they were, Gail intended to tell off Margo, quite properly.

Then the girl's eyes lost their blaze and were open wide. The figure that paused upon the threshold was cloaked entirely in black. His hat was drawn deep upon his forehead and he kept it tilted forward to avoid the

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light. Gail couldn't see his face, but she gave a glad cry.

At that moment, curiously, Gail was thinking of The Shadow as a separate identity. Though Cranston's theories were quite correct, Gail's mind had drifted more and more to the first time she had seen The Shadow, when he had handled a masked foe so impressively at the door.

She'd given him the benefit on his own merits, in the case of Browland's death, even though she supposed that he might be Clive.

Gail's happy tone brought a swish from the doorway. With it came the man in black. Sweeping away his slouch hat, he took the girl in his arms, and she was looking up into Clive's face.

Flooded with emotion, Gail was nearly weeping at the happiness of this reunion. Then, Clive's voice was whispering close to her ear.

"What a fool I was to think you'd mistrust me, Gail! I should have known that you'd meet me at the summerhouse if you possibly could."

"I was going there this evening, Clive," Gail responded. "I had to wait until it was dark enough."

"I was waiting for darkness, too. Fortunately, this house becomes gloomy early. I've been hiding in the attic."

"The attic?" Gail brushed the mist from her eyes. "Why, they searched there, Clive!"

"Not the old part, where you have to crawl down to the lower level. I even had trouble finding it. They didn't find it at all."

Clive paused; when he spoke again, his own voice choked:

"Uncle Tobias? Is... is he dead?"

Gail gave a slow nod.

"If I only could have saved him," declared Clive ruefully. "He was just stepping down when I came around the corner. I was close; I heard him stumble. When I grabbed for him, he was already tumbling, cane and all. I heard you scream." Clive paused and met Gail's eyes. "You thought I pushed him, didn't you?"

"At... at first, Clive."

"Of course! It did look bad. Besides, you didn't know that I was the man at the stair top. I had to pick these up to get into the house. The chap who was wearing them gave me a real tussle out in the shrubbery."

GAIL stared, in real surprise. So Clive hadn't been The Shadow when she first saw him. Though Clive didn't realize it, Gail had a sudden surge of doubt, for her swing in Clive's favor was based on her recollections of the early episode involving her own rescue.

At least, Clive was honest about the matter, and that was sufficient to curb Gail's new doubts. A bit abashed at having doubted him at all, Gail snuggled deeper into his arms.

"Tell me," queried Clive. "What about Hemble?"

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"He was killed," Gail replied. "They don't know what he was doing around here." She looked up suddenly. "Why did you ask about Hemble?"

Clive explained that he'd heard the deputies mention the fellow. He hadn't stayed in the hidden attic all last night. He had made a trip to the kitchen to obtain supplies, and found that his borrowed garb was a great help when it came to keeping out of sight. He'd heard other things, too.

"This Cranston chap," said Clive. "Why did he come along with that friend of yours, Margo Lane?"

"He intended to drive the car back to New York," responded Gail. "They nearly had an accident on the way. Lamont was quite seriously hurt, as it was."

Clive nodded.

"I heard the deputies say that, too," he declared. "But it strikes me as a bit thin, a man being hurt in the car that wasn't wrecked."

"Lamont happens to be a millionaire," informed Gail. "He wouldn't have been in the other car with an automobile thief."

"I wasn't thinking of the other car."

"What were you thinking then, Clive?"

Gail's tone was a bit angry. She didn't like Clive's suspicious manner. It wasn't fair that he should doubt other people, particularly a man so friendly as Cranston, when Gail was giving Clive himself the benefit of some questionable situations.

"It's all so mixed, Gail," said Clive, at length. "I was just wondering who had this hat and cloak at the start. I doubled on my tracks; so did Hemble, it seems. Maybe Cranston did the same. I must get to the bottom of all this, Gail. By the way: that note I wrote you. Of course, you destroyed it?"

Gail was drawing away. She turned about again in front of the dresser. Her mistrust was increasing.

"Don't worry about it, Clive," she said crisply. "I disposed of the note."

Clive's frank manner returned. He drew off the cloak and tossed it across his arm, with the slouch hat.

"I won't need these any more," he declared. "I'll leave them in the study, where the sheriff can find them. I know I can depend on you to come to the attic and keep me posted on other developments. You see, I trust you, Gail."

"It's quite time you did, Clive."

"I don't blame you for wondering at times," insisted Clive in an earnest tone. "I've been in a tougher situation than you realize, because you always get a sugar-coated story from Elbert. He wouldn't have hesitated at using you to lure me back here."

"Leave Elbert out of it, Clive."

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A smile of agreement appeared on Clive's face. It had the cold touch that denoted worry, but Gail construed it differently. She took Clive's expression to mean that he would like to count Elbert out of matters permanently, as his Uncle Tobias was.

"Elbert won't leave himself out," began Clive. "I came here on that account, Gail. I knew the will was being changed –"

"Who told you?" interrupted Gail quickly.

"I mean," corrected Clive, "that I thought it would be changed."

"Your share is now in my favor," said Gail. "That should suit you, if you really trust me, Clive."

"It suits me. Quite!"

AS Clive turned to leave, Gail followed. She didn't want him to go away hurt back to his lonely hiding place. Along the hallway she was protesting in low, ardent tones, that she cared for Clive but that she couldn't stand his grudge against the world, which went so far as to include a very amiable stranger like Cranston.

As they reached the door of the study, Clive paused, and smiled in much more pleasant fashion. He rested his hand tenderly on Gail's shoulder, as he said:

"I'm going in here to leave this borrowed outfit. I can't wait longer, Gail, because I hear someone coming up the front stairs. Make sure they don't come into the study."

Clive was closing the study door behind him when Gail turned around to see Margo on the stairs. Again, Gail felt a surge of apology for having felt meanly toward Margo. Certainly, Margo's progress up the stairs had not been stealthy in the least.

"I... I must talk to you, Margo," declared Gail seriously. "It's about – well, it's about so many things. I really need advice."

Gail was placing her hand on the study door to make sure that it was fully closed. Margo thought that Gail wanted to hold the conference in that particular room, and therefore stepped forward. Quickly, Gail caught Margo's arm.

"Not here!" Gail exclaimed. "In my room, Margo. We mustn't disturb anything in the study. I know the sheriff wouldn't like it. I... I was just making sure that the door was locked."

Not only Gail's expression but her voice, gave away the fact that something in the study worried her, and Margo took it that something might mean someone. Gail's tone was rising, as though she wanted it to be heard within.

"I'd like to talk to Lamont," Gail added, still loudly, as she and Margo passed the front stairway. "He's such a good friend of yours, Margo. Perhaps he knows – well, perhaps as an outsider, he could answer some problems better than – well, better than Elbert could."

They were out of sight of the study, and Gail promptly reduced her voice. Reaching her room, she sat down; then started to rise again. She'd forgotten to close the door, and Margo saw to it that Gail didn't.

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Very much by chance, it seemed, Margo took a chair that partially blocked the door. Gail hesitated; then decided that it wouldn't be good policy to bother with the door at all.

Gail was definitely troubled, and Margo was somewhat irked herself. Gail might just as well have shouted: "I've seen Clive!" If Margo had gotten upstairs sooner, she might have seen him, too, in The Shadow's borrowed garb.

Margo simply hadn't thought that Cranston's prediction would be fulfilled so soon; hence, she had taken her time coming up. To make amends for it, she was listening to Gail with one ear for outside sounds with the other.

Having mentioned Cranston, Gail was asking questions about him, wanting to know why Margo hadn't told her that he was coming too. She wondered if Cranston acted leisurely always, or whether his accident had been responsible.

She wanted more details about the accident, too. She was getting quite pointed with her remarks, because she wanted to hold Margo's full attention.

Meanwhile, Margo was hearing sounds – creaks from the direction of the study door. They paused; then, when Margo was about to relax, they began again. Gail didn't hear them; she was too deep in the bedroom. So Margo made a suggestion.

"Suppose we go down and talk to Lamont, Gail. He can answer these questions better than I can. As for advice, I know that Lamont can give it."

They were on the way from the bedroom, when Margo heard sounds anew along the hall. Making the turn ahead of Gail, she was sure that she caught a glimpse of a black cloak near the doorway to the old stairs where Tobias Browland had taken his fatal fall.

Not wanting Gail to guess that she had spied The Shadow's imitator, Clive Walden, Margo paused to warn Gail that they mustn't tax Cranston with too many questions.

"He may be napping," said Margo. "If he is, we shouldn't disturb him. You understand, don't you?"

Gail nodded, meaning that she understood. But she didn't really understand. Secretly, Margo was smiling at the thought of anyone catching Cranston napping. To do that, they would have to catch The Shadow off guard, too.

She forgot that Cranston, almost by his own admission, wasn't exactly The Shadow for the present. He had bestowed that title upon Clive Walden.

Assuming, however, that Cranston had equal rights to be called The Shadow while someone else was prowling in his favorite garb of black, he could at least be caught napping, under given circumstances.

AT that moment, Cranston was entirely off guard. He was resting back in his easy-chair, and the slight motion of a curtain by his shoulder merely made him smile.

He remembered that Margo had left the door from the music room open. Cute of her to try to sneak into the library without him knowing it.

Cranston made a slight shift in his chair, to obtain a view of the curtains from a mirror on the side wall. He was just reaching the proper angle, when he learned that his visitor wasn't Margo.

A gun muzzle pressed against Cranston's neck. A voice as cold as the steel told him to stay right where he was. It was the nudge of the gun that gave Cranston's head the final shift that enabled him to see the mirror.

He saw a cloaked figure looming from the curtains; recognized the gun as one of his own automatics.

It was a case of Shadow meeting Shadow – and Lamont Cranston, the genuine Shadow, even though he lacked the proper accouterments, was at the mercy of the impostor who wore the garb of black!

CHAPTER XII. THE SHADOW'S FINISH

FOR the first time in his long career of battling crime, Lamont Cranston was learning fully why he, when garbed as The Shadow, could strike terror into the hearts of hardened crooks. In studying the most effective measures of approach, he had never been able to appreciate the surprise that his sudden arrival produced.

He was getting the full effect, at last.

The jab of a gun against his neck wasn't a new experience for The Shadow; seeing himself on the other end of the automatic was the real novelty. Viewed in a mirror, the sight was totally unreal.

Perhaps he hadn't fully recovered from the slight concussion that his physician had exaggerated to suit his, The Shadow's, convenience. Whatever the case, The Shadow couldn't shake off the illusion that the figures in the mirror were placed wrong.

His senses grasped the notion that he was the cloaked person with the gun; that the helpless man in the chair was someone else. Always, when trapping an evildoer, The Shadow pictured the man's sensation. It seemed that this time he had projected his imagination too far.

He didn't belong in the chair, yet he was clamped there by invisible bonds that wouldn't let him spring back into the shape of blackness that should properly represent The Shadow.

It was the sense of touch that forced The Shadow to the realization that he was still Cranston, and helpless. The back of his neck kept telling him that a gun muzzle was chilling it. His ears caught a harsh undertone, and it served further to bring him to reality. It wasn't his, The Shadow's voice, that commanded him to raise his arms.

Slowly, Cranston's hands came upward, and now, as The Shadow of the past, he was recalling all he had said to Margo about The Shadow of the present.

He'd expected Clive Walden to make use of the borrowed garb, but this went beyond predictions. There must be some reason why a man garbed as The Shadow would pick Cranston for a victim. One reason, in particular.

The man who wore the cloak and hat was definitely deep in crime. So deep, that he wanted to dispose of The Shadow. Not only that, but the masquerader had a clear knowledge of the inside facts.

Possessing the cloak and hat, he knew that The Shadow was at large, and had presumed that he would choose this mansion as a base while investigating crime.

MURDER MANSION

One man, alone, had so situated himself. That man was Lamont Cranston.

Having thus divined why he had been chosen as a target by the false Shadow, the helpless Mr. Cranston was puzzled to find himself still alive. Most men deep-dyed in crime would have blasted The Shadow the moment they held the chance. Therefore, it was plain that the pretender in the cloak must have something more at stake.

The answer struck home.

It wouldn't do for Cranston to merely be found dead beside his chair, slain by an unknown assassin. This killer wanted to place the guilt on someone other than himself. He was waiting for witnesses to view the fatal deed.

Death to The Shadow, delivered by The Shadow!

At least, it would forever cover up the fact that Lamont Cranston was The Shadow; but that was no comfort for Lamont Cranston.

THE sound of footfalls, coming toward the library door, directly from the hall, were tokens of approaching death. So was the harsh whisper when it came again; the renewed prod of the automatic added emphasis.

Cranston's hands came higher, shakily, as his shoulders bowed forward in response to the quiver of his neck.

Good business, those shakes. The false Shadow noticed them, as the real Shadow could tell, by sidling a glance toward the mirror. Thinking he had his victim badly worried, the cloaked crook wouldn't be too hasty with the gun. The false Shadow wasn't worrying about split seconds; the real one was. He felt that he had gained a few.

Margo's voice called from the doorway:

"Lamont!"

She wasn't alone, for footsteps continued even though Margo halted. It was a help, for the masquerading murderer would prefer two witnesses rather than one. Particularly another witness besides Margo, who knew Cranston very well and might not give an exact version of his death.

Cranston's lips opened. The man behind him saw the motion in the mirror and voiced a low snarl for silence. Cranston took it to mean that his hands should go higher, and again his neck inched forward. He looked very funny in the mirror, his head poked forward in ostrich fashion, his trembling hands wiggling behind his ears.

At that moment, Margo stepped into the library. Her gasp riveted her a few paces inside the room. She was staring, unbelieving, at the scene, more surprised than Cranston and much more horrified.

To her, the false Shadow looked real for the curtains gave him a spectral background. Yet she knew he couldn't be The Shadow; not with Cranston also on the scene.

Cranston didn't see Margo. He was still considering his own reflection and that of the cloaked imitator behind him. He was listening, too, for the footsteps that would denote the arrival of the second, and really important, witness: Gail Trent.

Those footsteps came, and with them, a horrified tone of accusation in Gail's voice.

MURDER MANSION

"Clive!"

Gail's expression of the masquerader's identity was the equivalent of a trigger tug. Though she didn't realize it, she might as well have used her own finger to deliver the shot that was meant to rid the world of The Shadow, in the person of Lamont Cranston

There was only the fraction of a second between Gail's outcry and the shot that came. But there was one person in the room who dealt in such fractions.

He was The Shadow; the real one.

Quicker than the other man's trigger finger, Cranston's left hand made a rightward thrust. It was a perfect jab, for the hand was behind his head, thanks to the gradual cringe that Cranston had introduced. The gun blasted with a roar that nearly made Cranston's head burst, but the effect of the shot was on his eardrum only.

The automatic was no longer at Cranston's neck when it sputtered. Flame from the muzzle merely scorched his jaw. The bullet didn't come that close. Wide by the fraction of an inch, the slug found its lodging place in a bulky book on a shelf across the library.

The false Shadow twisted to try another shot. He learned then why Cranston had keeled him to the right. He couldn't take aim by a mere swing of the gun; he had to twirl his body half about.

Cranston was moving faster, no longer a pitiful invalid. His bandaged left arm, which he had raised from his sling, was quite as rapid as his right.

Crossing his right forearm, Cranston's left hand took another hold on his cloaked attacker. Margo and Gail saw a blackish mass come whirling through the air. The flying figure toppled the chair and both landed on the floor. The gun went scaling from the hand that poked from the tangled sleeve of the borrowed cloak.

Rolling on his back, the man in black made a blind thrust as Cranston sprang his way. Gail couldn't see Clive's face, for the slouch hat had come clear down to the masquerader's chin. But the kick that the sprawled man gave was luckier even than he hoped. His feet struck the chair, shot it forward just as Cranston lunged.

This time, it was Cranston who hurdled forcibly, to land shoulder-first upon the floor. His antagonist was rolling toward the curtains; coming to his knees, he grabbed them and hauled himself through.

As he dived from sight, he yanked at his hat with one hand and plucked the cloak with the other. Showing the same good footwork, he kicked the door shut behind him.

CRANSTON was coming to his feet, scooping up the automatic on the way. He drove for the curtains, with Margo close behind him. Grabbing the knob of the door, Cranston tried to shove the barrier open. It didn't give. The fugitive in black had twisted the key.

From the doorway to the hall, Gail was calling for the servants, and both were responding. Ambrose was coming from the kitchen; Jasper down the front stairway. They heard a man dashing across the hallway and went after him.

Meanwhile, Cranston was reversing his course, with Margo still following. They were making for the doorway where Gail stood.

MURDER MANSION

Gail sprang aside to let Cranston pass. It took him a moment to avoid her, and during it, he could hear shouts and scuffles from the hallway. Then, springing into sight, Cranston saw two men reeling, each in a different direction.

One was Ambrose; he was clawing at a black cloak that had been wrapped about his head and shoulders. The other, Jasper, was struggling to get a slouch hat up from his eyes.

Even The Shadow couldn't have turned that double trick more neatly than his imitator had. Getting the garments clear, Ambrose and Jasper were half bewildered, not knowing which way to turn. Nor did The Shadow know, for he was too late to witness any of the struggle.

One man, alone, was able to guide the chase. He was coming in from the vestibule.

The arrival was Elbert Morion. He had driven into the driveway a short while before. He didn't bother to find out what had happened; he could see all he needed. Wildly, Elbert gestured toward the passage to the old stairway.

"There he goes, you fools!" Elbert howled at the servants. "Go after him, but look out! He has a gun! I heard him using it!"

Ambrose and Jasper sped for the old stairs, casting cloak and hat aside as they went. Elbert turned to follow them, then paused as he heard the side door slap open, to admit a pair of deputies. Before he could tell them where the fugitive had gone, Gail joined him.

"It was Clive," she said firmly, "and I can tell you where he went. He is hiding in the attic, in the old part. You can find the entrance if you look carefully."

"I'll find it," promised Elbert, as he beckoned to the deputies. Then, turning, he saw Cranston, holding the automatic. "Ah, Cranston!" Elbert added. "You have a gun. Are you coming with us?"

For answer, Cranston extended the automatic to Elbert, almost letting it fall as the other man took it. Then, wavering, Cranston would have slumped if Margo and Gail hadn't caught him.

Margo explained that he was having another of his dizzy spells; that he had overexerted himself in fighting off the attacker who had fled.

Elbert waited no longer. He hurried upstairs with the deputies at his heels.

Slumped in a chair, with Margo standing by to see that he didn't topple, Cranston watched Gail pick up the cloak and hat. Holding the garments in each hand, Gail turned and said:

"We've seen the finish of the masquerade."

By that, she meant that they had seen the finish of The Shadow, for Gail considered that personality to be nothing more than a false identity that Clive Walden had assumed for purposes of crime.

Cranston reached weakly for the cloak and hat, and Gail handed them to him, as souvenirs.

Margo agreed that it was the finish of the masquerade, but not with the rest of it. She knew what Cranston's acceptance of the garments meant.

The Shadow was coming back into his own!

CHAPTER XIII. THE SHADOW RETURNS

VERY shortly, Cranston's dizzy spell was over. He arose from his chair, pressed his hand to his head, and decided that some fresh air would do him good. He was still carrying the hat and cloak when Margo and Gail helped him to the side door.

When the door was opened, Cranston leaned against the doorway and took long breaths.

Sounds of heavy pounding could be heard from somewhere in the house. Evidently, Clive's pursuers had run into a blocked door. Gail looked toward Margo anxiously.

It was difficult to tell whether Gail hoped that Clive would be captured, or whether she was longing for his escape. Even Gail couldn't have answered the question at the moment.

Margo, catching a glance from Cranston, turned to Gail.

"We can go upstairs," said Margo. "Lamont is quite all right. I suppose we ought to learn what's happening, so we can tell him later."

Lamont proved that he was quite all right as soon as the two girls left. Stepping out to the driveway, he picked a car that had its motor running.

In their hurry, the deputies had left it as it was. Easing the car into gear, The Shadow headed it toward the elms. When he reached the slope, he cut the motor off and coasted it down the old driveway, using only the dim lights.

The trouble upstairs lay with the attic door. Usually, the attic wasn't locked, though the key always hung beside the door. Browland had used it as a strongroom at times when the mansion was empty; at other intervals, the attic was always open. At present, the attic was locked and the key was gone.

This backed Gail's statement that Clive had gone to the attic. Very probably, he had closed the door and locked it from the other side. The lock, of course, was strong, and so was the door. Ordinary pounding was bringing no result. Elbert sent the servants downstairs to see what they could find in the way of battering-rams.

Outside, more cars were coming up. A deputy had called the sheriff, telling him that the Browland mansion had again become a madhouse. Entering, the sheriff found the servants gathering the implements that Elbert wanted.

Ambrose was carrying a hatchet and an ironing board. Jasper had a big log, and intended to bring an andiron from the fireplace in the study.

Learning that Clive Walden was trapped in the attic, Sheriff Quincy gave a pleased grunt, then turned to men who accompanied him.

"Stay outside," Quincy told them, "in case he makes a run for it. He's a killer, this fellow. We may have to give him leeway."

MURDER MANSION

Reaching the attic, the sheriff suggested that the door be settled by the simple process of blasting the lock with gunshots. The others stood back, while Quincy demonstrated just how it was done. He used most of the shots in his revolver, so he stopped to reload. Then, thrusting the door open, the sheriff bawled:

"Come out, Walden! If you don't, we'll shoot to kill!"

Outside the doorway, Gail gave a nervous gasp. Margo steadied her, whispering that Clive would certainly surrender. The sheriff repeated his command, but there was no response.

Elbert suggested searching the hidden section of the attic. They found it, with an old trunk wedged tightly between two slanting beams that practically hid the opening.

Men worked in gingerly fashion to remove the trunk, while the sheriff kept telling Clive that resistance would be no use.

"I'll give you while I count ten to come out, Walden –"

The sheriff's idea of ten was fifty. He'd repeated that warning five times. Finding it didn't work; Quincy crawled into the hidden room. Flashlights threw a glare ahead of him; guns bristled in the glow, ready to open fire if Clive made trouble.

Clive didn't make any trouble. He couldn't.

He wasn't in the hidden room.

CRAWLING out, after a thorough search of the low-roofed cranny, the sheriff was half sheepish, half angry. He wanted to know who had seen Clive come to the attic. Gail stepped forward. Again, her loyalty to Clive was subduing her accusations.

Gail admitted that she'd talked to Clive; that he had mentioned the attic as his hiding place. She added that he had been wearing the hat and cloak, but had stated that he was leaving them in the study. But she was no longer sure that Clive was the man who had made the attempt on Cranston's life.

"Clive would have certainly come here," insisted Gail. "So maybe it wasn't Clive. Maybe" – she stared, horrified – "maybe someone attacked Clive first, and took the hat and cloak away from him!"

The sheriff scoffed at such a theory. He turned to the two servants and demanded to know what the man in black had looked like while he was tangling them in the discarded garments.

"He looked like Mr. Walden," declared Ambrose. "As near as I could tell, sheriff."

"I'd say the same," added Jasper. "I only had a glimpse of him, while he was shoving the hat down on my head. But when Miss Trent mentioned Mr. Walden, it struck me she was right."

The sheriff began peering into trunks, some too small to contain anyone larger than a midget. At last, he came to an attic window. It was circular in shape and swung on a pivot in the center.

There was just about enough space for a man to squeeze through; but outside, the wall was sheer. Noting a similar window at the other end of the attic, the sheriff went there. This time, he made a find.

MURDER MANSION

The window opened just above an el, which was a little lower than the one that held the hidden extension of the attic. It was an easy drop to the el roof; the question was, how far a man could travel after reaching it.

The sheriff was calling for a volunteer, when he heard a shout from below. Deputies had spotted Quincy at the attic window.

"Spread out!" bawled Quincy. "We're sending a man down. Watch where he goes, and look around there."

The choice of a volunteer was easy. Elbert undertook the task. He said that he knew the house as well as Clive, and probably better. He was irked because he had forgotten about the old hiding place in the attic. He'd climbed the roof when he was a boy and wouldn't have any trouble.

Not wanting to be burdened, he handed The Shadow's automatic to Margo, and told the sheriff to keep the flashlights busy and have revolvers ready.

Elbert squirmed through the lower half of the circular window, found the el roof with his feet, and slid down to it. With the flashlights playing their beams, he soon picked an easy course toward the ground.

It was just a case of moving from roof to roof. Off an edge of the el, Elbert saw a bay window projecting from the second floor. Dropping to its top, he crossed it and saw the top of a porch, and lowered himself to it.

Walking along, he went from sight; then returned. On the ground, deputies spread out farther with every move that Elbert made.

"He might have used the cornice over the old carriage entrance," Elbert called up to Quincy. "Still, it's pretty wabby. By the way, Gail, you ought to have it cemented. The house is yours, now, you know."

"Never mind whose house it is," shouted the sheriff. "Tell us where else Walden might have gone."

"It's an easy drop from the other end of the porch roof," Elbert informed. "Over toward the elms."

The sheriff saw lights beyond the clustered trees and called for men to pass the word along to watch that direction. Then, telling Elbert to stay right where he was, Quincy ordered the rest downstairs. Going with them, he announced that they would all join the cordon and close in toward the house, with the exception of Gail and Margo.

The girls were to stay inside the door, keeping it closed. Noting that Margo had a gun, the sheriff told her to have it ready.

IT had taken a long time for the hunt to reach this final stage. Margo remembered abrupt quarter-hour chimes from the grandfather's clock at the time she and Gail had gone upstairs. At present, the same clock was breaking its tune on the three-quarter-hour note.

She wondered what Cranston had been doing in those thirty minutes!

From the sheriff's standpoint, the time had been well spent, for everything had been done quite thoroughly. Reaching the most distant outpost, Quincy ordered the men to close in. The cordon neared the elms and stopped. Flashlights focused on a man who was leaning against a tree, smoking a cigarette.

The man was Clive Walden!

MURDER MANSION

Raising his hand, Clive gave a welcoming wave. The sheriff approached him with a leveled gun, while others steadied their weapons in the same direction. Clive laughed, pleasantly and lightly.

"So you came down from the attic," declared the sheriff. "We thought so!"

"The attic?" Clive echoed. "Don't tell me you were looking for me up there!"

"Where else could you have been?"

"Coming in from the gates. I stopped here to watch Cousin Elbert doing exercises on the roof. I heard somebody yell about moving in toward the trees, so I decided they would be a good place to wait."

The sheriff decided to cut the argument short.

"It's no use, Walden," he said. "We know you were prowling around the house wearing a black hat and cloak. If those things don't belong to you, who owns them?"

Clive didn't answer. It wasn't necessary. The real owner of the mysterious garb suddenly announced himself. His proclamation was a mocking laugh that quivered from outside the ring of flashlights.

Men wheeled as one, to probe the darkness. Only the fact that their lights were many enabled them to spot The Shadow.

He was springing from a car on the main driveway, a car that deputies recognized as their own. Again, his strange taunt sounded, waking echoes from the gray walls toward which he darted. Men began to shoot their revolvers; in response, The Shadow stabbed his automatic.

The Shadow's shots were as mirthful as his laugh. He was firing them so high that they whistled well up in the branches of the elms. He wasn't trying to hit anyone with the bullets from the gun that he had found on a brief trip down to the rocky creek. Other marksmen were aiming at The Shadow in earnest, but their fire was as useless as his own.

Bullets were simply bashing the wall of the house. The Shadow had reversed his direction and was off somewhere in the surrounding darkness. So certain were the deputies that he would seek the house as refuge, that they still believed him to be lurking under its walls

They poured forward in a body, to find themselves meeting each other at a place where the wall formed a windowless abutment. From the distance, it seemed, they heard a trailing laugh. They turned, to sweep the lawn with their lights.

Within the house, Margo heard a light tap at the side door and believed she recognized it. She pressed forward, with Gail following. Worried by the shots outdoors, Gail stepped out to peer at the lights. Margo, still in the doorway, heard the swish of a cloak beside her. Then the gun was gone from Margo's hand.

The hall lights gloomed, ever so slightly, as an entering figure obscured them. With a look over her shoulder, Margo caught a brief view of The Shadow's racing figure.

The sheriff arrived bringing Clive, and Elbert appeared, too, having made a hurried drop from the roof when the shooting lulled. They entered the house and went to the library, since it was the only room large enough for the conference that was to come.

MURDER MANSION

LAMONT CRANSTON stirred from his easy-chair, placed his hand to his bandaged head and blinked, rather dazed, at the crowd that entered. His puzzled attitude was proof to all but Margo – and perhaps another – that Cranston couldn't have been anywhere else but here during the recent commotion.

Only Margo, however, was able to understand the mere trace of a smile that Lamont gave her. She knew that The Shadow was himself again. He had established the fact that he was a distinct individual, who could return and vanish as he chose. Any others, clumsy in their actions, had been mere masqueraders.

There was something else about The Shadow's brief return and the disappearance that concluded it. The event was a fair warning from The Shadow; one that all might well heed. It meant that he would reappear again when the right time arrived.

That time would depend upon further evidence, not yet gathered by The Shadow. Evidence which by its very nature would explain the real reason for the untimely death of Tobias Browland, former master of this mansion where crime held sway despite The Shadow's presence!

CHAPTER XIV. MATTERS OF CONSCIENCE

THE main purpose of the conference was to question Clive Walden regarding his recent actions; but it wasn't very easy to begin the quiz. Elbert Morion attempted the natural start.

He wanted to know why Clive had been prowling about wearing a black cloak and hat. Clive's answer was a shrug, with a questioning glance at the others present.

All of them, with the exception of Cranston, had seen The Shadow crossing the lawn while Clive was under the muzzles of half a dozen guns. To emphasize that point, Clive put a question to Elbert.

"I'll ask you the same thing," said Clive. "What were you doing, Elbert, when you wore that costume you just spoke about?"

"I was on the porch roof," snapped Elbert. "I couldn't have jumped up there from the middle of the lawn."

"And I didn't drop out of the elms," retorted Clive. "Which counts us both out. Let's shake on it. We haven't seen each other for six months."

Elbert refused Clive's proffered hand. Looking about, Elbert noted Cranston and appealed to him.

"This chap in black," said Elbert. "He tried to murder you, didn't he, Cranston?"

"I hardly think so," was Cranston's calm reply. "He had a gun right against my neck, but didn't use it. When I whacked his hand away, he fired. I suppose it was all in fun."

"All in fun! Preposterous, Cranston!"

"It might have seemed so at the time," Cranston agreed, "but not considering the reports of what happened outside, just now. I understand that a dozen men were shooting at this chap, in earnest, while he was merely using his gun to nip the top buds off the elm trees."

Elbert looked at the sheriff, saw him rubbing his chin, much impressed by Cranston's logic. If Cranston thought that The Shadow had been indulging in mere theatricals, Sheriff Quincy saw no reason to dispute it. But Elbert was persistent.

MURDER MANSION

"You can't deny the masquerade, Clive," he declared. "Gail says she saw you wearing that trick outfit."

Clive gave a steady glance toward Gail, who promptly lapsed into her mood of the previous evening.

"I thought I saw Clive," the girl declared. "It was dark, and I might have supposed that he was wearing a cloak and hat."

"But you saw Clive," persisted Elbert. "Here, in the house."

"I know I saw someone in a hat and cloak," parried Gail. "I was thinking of Clive, as I often do, so I could have supposed that he was Clive."

Margo turned to Gail and inserted some support.

"We both saw the man in question," declared Margo, "when he was here in the library. But I couldn't see his face at all. Could you, Gail?"

Gail shook her head. Margo turned to Cranston.

"Could you, Lamont?"

"No," replied Cranston, "and I had the best chance of all. You see, I was tossing him about a bit. He wasn't wrapping my head in his cloak" – Cranston's gaze fixed on Ambrose – "nor was he pulling that hat of his down over my eyes." Then, with a look toward Jasper, Cranston added: "It's rather difficult to see through a hat when it's over your eyes."

Both servants had been anxious to repeat their earlier testimony that the man in black was Clive. Cranston's subtle comments spoiled the show, so far as they were concerned.

Ambrose gave a slight headshake. He wasn't sure that his opinion would be of use. Jasper's silence indicated that the other servant had come to a similar decision.

Elbert still pressed the matter.

"Rather a coincidence," he said to Clive, "that you should come home on this particular evening, at this very hour."

"Not at all," rejoined Clive. "It happens that I have an appointment here."

"An appointment with whom?"

"An appointment with our lawyer, David Grath."

"Grath used to be our lawyer," retorted Elbert, "but he is no longer."

"He still thinks he is," declared Clive. "He's coming here, bringing the will that Uncle Tobias asked him to keep. I wonder if that's Grath's car that just arrived outside."

IT turned out to be Grath's car. In a few minutes, the attorney entered. He was a stubby man, very brisk of manner, and he shook hands with Clive as soon as he saw him.

MURDER MANSION

"Sorry about your uncle," spoke Grath. "Too bad you were away when he met with the accident, Clive. I'm glad you called me when you arrived in town this afternoon. Well, I've brought the will, as I promised."

Grath was drawing an envelope from his pocket, and of all the silent persons in the room, Gail was the most astonished. It didn't occur to her that Clive had made the telephone call from Browland's study.

Gail was actually wondering if she had really seen Clive after dusk. She'd heard of strange daydreams that were extremely real, and the meeting might have been one of them.

After all, she had been thinking of Clive for six months, and she recalled times when she had fancied she'd heard his voice speaking to her. Possibly her mind had jumped a greater gap because of the stress following the tragedy in the mansion.

Noting Gail's dazed mood, Elbert decided to switch the subject back to other matters. He turned to Grath.

"That will is canceled," declared Elbert. "My uncle made a later one, Grath. Corring was the attorney who drew it up for him."

Grath looked about, expecting to see Corring, whereupon Elbert informed him that the other attorney was not yet back from Chicago. Grath remarked testily that he should at least have been informed that Tobias Browland had intended to change his will, even though the new one had been drawn up by another lawyer.

Going further, Grath said he couldn't understand why he hadn't been called on for the service, instead of Corring.

"I'll tell you why you were left out," declared Clive. "Elbert didn't trust you, Grath, because you are a friend of mine. Elbert poisoned my uncle's mind against you, as he did in my case."

"Your case, Clive, is quite different," snapped Elbert. "You are still wanted for that robbery of six months ago!" Elbert swung to Quincy. "There's your man, sheriff! Take him!"

Gail started to intercede in Clive's behalf; she faltered. Both Cranston and Margo noted that she was adopting a neutral attitude. She'd gone far enough in Clive's behalf, retracting the statements that she had seen him clad in black. It was time that Gail gave Elbert a break, even though he had forgotten his promise to drop all past charges against Clive.

The arm of the law, personalized by the sheriff's beefy hand, was clamping down upon Clive. The young man twisted away angrily, and turned to Grath.

"You're a lawyer, Grath. Can't you help me out of this mess?"

"With the greatest of pleasure," Grath responded. Then, to Quincy: "Why go to a lot of bother, sheriff? If you arrest Walden, I'll have him out with a habeas corpus writ before you've locked him in a cell."

Elbert pressed forward.

"Not so fast, Grath," he declaimed. "There's plenty of evidence against Clive. Fair evidence, too. He knew the combination to the factory safe. He was seen to enter the office –"

"By whom?" put in Grath quickly. "My client admits nothing. The burden of proof is upon you" – Grath's smile was shrewd – "or your witness."

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Grath was not only familiar with matters of six months ago; he had heard of Hemble's recent death. The former watchman was the only witness who could have sworn that Clive visited the factory the night the safe was robbed. In intimating that fact, Grath just about ended the case against Clive, so far as robbery was concerned.

For a moment, Elbert was quite taken aback. He looked at the sheriff, who shrugged helplessly. Then Elbert steadied his eyes on Clive, and spoke in what seemed an affable tone.

"You win, Clive. I won't insist that you be arrested for robbery."

CRANSTON saw that Clive caught an added meaning to Elbert's look. In his turn, Clive glanced sourly at Grath, who was smiling over his accomplishment. A fine accomplishment, indeed.

Whatever doubts it raised on the robbery matter were counterbalanced by the fact that Clive might have coaxed Hemble to his death, for the very purpose of eliminating the only witness in the case.

Grath, the smart lawyer, didn't even catch Clive's glance. Grath was handing his envelope to Quincy.

"Keep it, sheriff," suggested the lawyer. "You have the new will, so you might as well hold the old one, too. You can produce them both, tomorrow, when Corring arrives. I shall be here, of course."

"You're welcome to stay overnight," spoke Elbert, in his most pleasant tone. "In fact, Grath, I insist that you stay. Sheriff Quincy has placed this house under sort of a quarantine. All persons who enter are supposed to remain."

Grath rubbed his hands and nodded, as though the prospect pleased him. He stopped suddenly, when he realized that his situation applied equally to Clive. Throwing a worried look at his client, Grath was met with a half smile that carried contempt of Grath's legal ability.

"I'll stay," Clive decided. "That is" – he eyed Elbert – "if you think the house is safe while I'm inside it."

"The sheriff can station a man in the study," retorted Elbert coolly. "That's where you'd be most likely to operate. Uncle's old safe is in there. Remember?"

Clive doubled his fists and made a forward gesture. Hoping that he could tag an assault charge on his cousin, Elbert baited Clive further.

"We haven't been able to open the old safe yet," he remarked. "The expert hasn't arrived. Perhaps you would like to pinch hit for him, Clive. Or – do you always need to know the combination when you open a safe?"

The bait was too fancy. Clive became a wise fish and didn't take it. Elbert dropped his foxy tactics and became the perfect host, telling his new guests that the servants would show them to their respective rooms.

At least, Elbert had won his point of keeping Clive in custody, although his cousin would be a tenant of the mansion, not a prisoner in the local jail.

When everyone else had gone, Margo looked at Cranston, who was still reclining in his easy-chair. He arose and removed the cushion; from beneath it, he produced a folded black cloak and a flattened slouch hat, smiling as he did.

"You'd better be careful, Lamont," whispered Margo. "Someone might see you taking those things upstairs."

"Go ahead, then," suggested Cranston, "and let me know when the way is clear."

Margo went out into the hall, then turned to call back softly that no one was about. When Lamont didn't appear, Margo frowned and came back into the library. She stared about, much puzzled.

Cranston was no longer in his chair; in fact, he wasn't even in the room. It was Margo who received the next token that the way was clear.

It came from somewhere on the main staircase – a low, whispered laugh, carrying to Margo's ears. The girl suddenly realized how foolish it had been to warn Cranston that he might be seen while carrying the cloak and hat. His way of carrying them was to put them on.

Even Margo hadn't seen Lamont when he passed her in the hallway. Her mysterious friend had again become The Shadow!

CHAPTER XV. DEATH COMES BEFORE

THINGS were tense within the Browland mansion when evening again arrived. Dinner was over and this evening Cranston, much recuperated, had dined with the rest. They formed a group about the dining room table. Gail between Clive and Elbert; Cranston next to Margo.

There was a sixth chair, vacant. It belonged to Grath, but he had left. The sheriff had called to take Grath to the station to meet the other lawyer, Corring.

The feud between Clive and Elbert was buried, a fact which only made the scene more tense. Neither man would have shown courtesy to the other if each hadn't felt that he was due for some sort of triumph at the other's expense.

Of course, the whole thing hinged on the return of Grath and Corring. Each lawyer would be bringing a sealed envelope, and both envelopes would be opened. The merits of the old will would be matched against those of the new.

As Grath had mentioned during dinner, wills were delicate legal instruments, at best. There was always a chance that one could be broken.

In a sense, this scene resembled the time when crime had first struck within the mansion. Ambrose and Jasper seemed to remember it, as they went their separate ways. Each servant, moving in and out, covered a little sphere of his own. Any time one infringed upon the other's duty, he backed out suddenly as though rapped on the nose.

Last night's mix-up in the hallway had much to do with it. Ever since, Ambrose and Jasper had been intimating that the other was to blame because they hadn't caught The Shadow. He certainly couldn't have muffled one with the cloak and suppressed the other with the hat at the same instant.

One servant must have been the first to tackle the masquerader, and each claimed the distinction. Which, in turn, could account for the fact that both had become dubious about insisting that the false Shadow was Clive Walden.

To be positive on that score, either Ambrose or Jasper would have to concede that he had taken a longer look than the other, and such an admission would brand the man who made it as second best.

MURDER MANSION

The point intrigued Cranston. It was typical of servants, to stickle about petty matters.

Elbert broke a run of silence to lean forward and speak across to Clive.

"If you'd like to go over those inventories, you can," said Elbert. "They are up in uncle's study."

"Thanks," returned Clive. "I think I should."

"Quite right," agreed Elbert. "There is still a chance that the old will may hold."

"I don't believe so," responded Clive, with a headshake. "I'd like to check over things on Gail's account, that's all."

Elbert gave a very understanding nod. Both cousins were going the limit, hoping to gain Gail's preference. Elbert provided an added touch as Clive reached the door.

"By the way, Clive," he called, "the safe is open. I left it that way. You might check on the items in it."

"But they're yours, aren't they?" queried Clive. "Under the terms of either will?"

"All the more reason that someone else should check them," answered Elbert. "If there are any doubtful items, we can settle their status without dispute."

IT was all so very ducky, that it began to worry Margo. She looked toward Cranston hopefully, but he maintained his calm-mannered silence. There were moments, though, when Margo wondered why she should be puzzled. The whole case was so very, very simple.

Unquestionably, Elbert had urged his uncle to make a new will, whereas Clive had hoped that the old one would stand. The transfer of Clive's legacy to Gail had simply switched the object of the rivalry. The man who married Gail would gain whatever else he wanted.

Or would he?

There, Margo was stumped. The strange death of Tobias Browland; the part played by Zeke and his pals; finally, the attempt to take Cranston's life and thus dispose of The Shadow – all were points that indicated a mighty scheme fostered by a crafty mind.

Jasper entered the dining room.

The thin servant stopped near Elbert and made one of his apologetic bows.

"The key to the liquor closet, sir. Mr. Corring is coming, you know. I believe there is another bottle of his favorite brandy."

"If there is," returned Elbert, "Ambrose will get it."

"But it should really be in my department, sir –"

"And would be, Jasper," Elbert interposed, "if you hadn't abused the privilege when it was yours."

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Jasper left in his soft-footed style. When Ambrose came in, Elbert beckoned to the stolid servant, then reached to his pocket for the keys, only to find he didn't have them.

It was Gail who produced them. Elbert had given her the keys the night of her uncle's death, saying that the house was now hers.

Soon after Ambrose left, Elbert suggested that they go to the library. He wanted to be near at hand when Corring and Grath arrived. Reaching the hall, Elbert thought he heard a car and hurried to the side door, but it was only a deputy coming to take over another's duty.

Ambrose went upstairs with the brandy. The servant was still gone when Elbert hurried to the door again in response to a knock. He came back, his face annoyed.

"Only a deputy wanting to know when the sheriff would be back. He should certainly have arrived by this time."

Gail suggested that Corring's train might have been late. Elbert went to the door, opened it, and stepped out. He came back shaking his head.

"No sign of a car," he said. "You can usually hear them half a mile away. Well, I suppose we shall just have to wait."

He began to bring down books from their shelves to show them to Cranston and Margo. Most of them were historical volumes, some mentioning the old Browland mansion, with illustrations of it in the early days. Elbert was looking for another picture when Gail exclaimed excitedly:

"I hear a car! They're coming now!"

Hurriedly, Elbert closed the book and thrust it back on its shelf. He started out of the library, and Gail followed. Cranston gave a nod to Margo; they arose and went along.

It might be that the delay had been something more serious than a late train. Therefore, The Shadow was anxious to witness the arrival of the sheriff and the lawyers, and hear, first-hand, whatever they had to tell.

Both Cranston and Margo were in the hallway before Elbert reached the side door. They saw him stop with Gail and wait, because Ambrose was ahead of them.

Having returned from his trip up to the study, Ambrose was performing his regular duty of answering the door. He, too, had heard the car and knew the importance of the coming visitors.

Ambrose was very punctual about answering the door. He had opened it when Cranston and Margo joined Gail and Elbert. All four were crowding through the vestibule when Ambrose took a few forward paces to the outside steps.

The car was stopping in the driveway and Elbert gave a call from within the doorway:

"Hello! Corring?"

The men from the car gave an excited shout, which halted Elbert at the door edge. Simultaneously, there came a cracking sound from somewhere above.

MURDER MANSION

It was outside the house, and it might have been from the sky, for all that Margo knew. Her thoughts, though, jumped blindly to the elms with their high-reaching branches.

THEN Margo was being bowled aside, and Gail was swept the other way, by the spreading arms of Cranston. He was lunging for the doorway, pausing only for another sweep at Elbert, to keep him where he was.

Ambrose was Cranston's objective; the servant had heard both the shouts and the crackle. Recoiling first, then looking upward, Ambrose was standing with horror-stricken face.

The servant was throwing up his arms as if to ward off some menace from which his body cringed away; but his feet were rooted at the ends of his paralyzed legs.

Though Cranston was moving with the famed speed of The Shadow, it was impossible for him to save Ambrose. The man's life depended upon his own action, and his slow-moving brain didn't respond to the rapid emergency.

Indeed, it was only by remarkable skill that The Shadow saved his own life at the final instant. The crackle was a huge clatter when Cranston's figure reached the door. Both Gail and Margo shrieked when they saw a great thudding curtain of white bash down toward the would-be rescuer. One pace more and Cranston would have been within its folds.

He stopped himself with a hard, hooking grab at the doorway's edge. Throwing himself into a spin, Cranston actually bounced back and forth in the doorway.

The thing that struck Ambrose didn't bounce. It flattened the stocky servant so suddenly that he seemed to disappear into the ground. A weight of about half a ton was landing in one lump, striking Ambrose upon the head and shoulders. The massive object was the marble cornice that belonged above the side door.

Unable to balance himself in the doorway, Cranston reeled outward and down the steps amid a rising cloud of white dust. Small chunks of stone were dropping, dislodged by the fall of the unmoored cornice. They missed Cranston, but he sprawled over the marble slab itself and rolled to the driveway.

He was picking himself up when Elbert sprang down the steps. The sheriff and the two lawyers hurried over from the car, while Margo and Gail halted in the doorway.

They all saw that Cranston was unhurt following his desperate attempt to rescue Ambrose. It was very fortunate that Cranston hadn't started his drive a trifle sooner.

In that case, he'd have been with Ambrose when the smash came, and some idea of his probable fate could be gained by a view of Ambrose. The servant was at the bottom of the steps; he was under the jagged slab of marble which was about half the size of the doorway.

Ambrose's head was crushed, worse than Browland's had been; one shoulder looked like a pancake. His arms and legs, all awry, were poking from the edges of the fallen cornice. Death had struck anew at this mansion of disaster.

Death so emphatic that it seemed designed by a power greater than any human hand!

CHAPTER XVI. TWO IN A ROW

MEN were staring up at the window above the side door, their faces very grim. Their minds were conjuring phantom images of a ghostly form in black. They were remembering how Gail had claimed that she saw such a figure, the night when Tobias Browland fell down the old stairs.

They weren't thinking in terms of The Shadow.

He had somehow assumed a distinctive personality through his actions last night, when he had led the deputies a wild-goose chase across the lawn. His gunfire, aimed away from his pursuers; his evasive laugh; finally, the fact that he had gone away from the mansion itself – those had counted in The Shadow's favor. The figure that had prowled the house was different.

He was a masquerader, a menace, an imitation of the true Shadow. He was someone who borrowed a cloak when he wanted to deal in death. He'd been present when Browland died, and he had apparently tried to murder Cranston. It might chance that he would be around again, gloating over the death of Ambrose.

Hence, eyes were peering hard at the window, the spot where the man might be. Eyes saw blackness, but it was only the darkness of the window itself.

One man, of course, knew that no masquerader would be seen. The man who knew was Cranston. Having reclaimed his favored garb, he was quite sure that no one else could be using it. Nevertheless, Cranston was studying the window as keenly as anyone. He hoped to catch a glimpse of someone.

The fall of the cornice could hardly be attributed to chance. It was much more likely that someone at the window had deliberately shoved the loosened stone and sent it on its way.

Death had come before The Shadow expected it. Odd, too, that it should have fallen upon Ambrose. But it wasn't odd that the window above proved empty when The Shadow's keen eyes probed it. The man who had shoved the cornice could easily have slipped away from the window, even before Cranston had made the heroic attempt to rescue Ambrose.

Unfortunately, none of the men from the automobile had noticed the window when the cornice fell. The crackle of the stone was the thing that caught their attention, and their eyes had instinctively followed the great slab during its drop.

Some of the sheriff's men were arriving from their outposts, attracted by the crowd on the driveway. Quincy assigned them the task of removing the cornice and the body.

Side-stepping the double obstacle, he entered the door, beckoning for those who belonged in the house to follow.

Margo and Gail stepped back into the vestibule. From behind them Jasper's face was peering, very white.

The servant saw Elbert enter, and queried in faltering tone:

"What... what happened outside, Mr. Morion?"

"The cornice dropped on Ambrose," returned Elbert. "You might have been the victim, Jasper, if you had insisted upon taking over Ambrose's duties."

"He was answering the door, sir?"

"In a way, yes. He was looking outside to see if the car had arrived. We've been expecting it for the last half-hour –"

Elbert paused, abruptly. He happened to remember that he was the person most interested in the car's arrival. Gail recalled it, too. She clutched Elbert's arm.

"You'd been to the door three times, Elbert!" the girl exclaimed. "Had you gone out on those steps?"

"Only briefly," Elbert replied slowly. "Just out and in. If I'd seen the car, I would have waited on the steps, of course."

"Perhaps that cornice was meant to fall on you instead of Ambrose!"

THE others crowded close at Gail's words. All were in the hallway by this time, and Cranston's keen eyes were studying the various faces. Both lawyers, Corring and Grath, were asking questions, as though the hallway were a courtroom.

Sheriff Quincy was saying something about taking a look at the window on the second floor. Elbert turned to Jasper.

"Were you upstairs, Jasper?"

"No, sir," the servant replied. "I was in the kitchen, where I belonged."

"I was upstairs," spoke a voice from across the hall. "It was very quiet in the study, until the commotion began down here. What was it all about? It sounded as if somebody had been murdered."

The voice was Clive's. He was looking about, counting faces, from where he stood at the bottom of the main stairway. Evidently Clive wasn't including the servants in his tabulation, for he seemed to think that everyone was all right. Otherwise, his reference to murder would hardly have been good form.

"Someone has been murdered," declared Elbert bluntly. "Ambrose was the victim, but it seems to be the consensus of opinion that death was meant for me. Ask them what happened. They will tell you, Clive."

There was a slight trace of smooth sarcasm in Elbert's tone, which indicated a renewal of his feud with Clive. But Elbert's voice was quite consoling when he spoke to Gail

"You'd better let us thrash this out," said Elbert. "Why don't you rest yourself meanwhile, Gail? Margo will stay with you, and we'll call you when we are ready for the meeting in the study."

Elbert gestured toward the stairway, and Margo threw a look toward Cranston, who nodded. As the girls left, Cranston turned to join the group and witness Clive's reaction to the details of Ambrose's death. A few moments later, Elbert was with them, his eyes fixed hard on Clive.

"Too bad about Ambrose," Clive was saying glumly. "If I'd had my way, that cornice would have been removed long ago. Uncle Tobias thought it made a nice decoration, but I could see no use for it."

One man was moving away from the group, unnoticed even by Cranston. The man was Jasper. His style, as usual, was soft-footed, but his knees were a trifle shaky and his face was still very white. He started first

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toward the kitchen; then turned to the main stairs and went up to the second floor.

Margo happened to see him while she and Gail were turning the corner toward the bedroom. Looking back, Margo noted that Jasper was going to the study.

He looked numb; his gait was mechanical. Margo decided that Jasper must have realized that he was now the only servant in the house and that it would be his task to prepare the study for the coming conference.

There was more than that behind Jasper's action.

DOWNSTAIRS, the group had come to an agreement. The sheriff's suggestion was a good one: namely, to have a look at the window above the cornice. If there was anything queer about the accident that killed Ambrose, traces might be found at that spot.

Clive was blandly suggesting that the house be searched, to see if someone had entered and gone into hiding. Others besides Elbert gave him a doubting stare. It sounded like a clever cover-up for Clive's past actions.

"We'll have a look at the window," decided Elbert, "and then proceed with our scheduled business in the study. By the way" – he was looking about as they neared the stairway – "where is Jasper? I think we should have him with us."

"I suppose he went back to the kitchen," said Clive. "I'll call him."

The rest were already on the stairs, Cranston among them, when Clive called for Jasper. The fellow didn't come from the kitchen, though he should have heard the call.

At that moment Cranston looked upward, and saw the study door at an angle from the stairs. The door was closed.

It flashed suddenly to The Shadow that Jasper might have gone there. If so, there wasn't a moment to be lost. Ideas had begun to fall in line very rapidly.

Others wondered at the speed that Cranston suddenly displayed. Despite his present guise, he had the swiftness of The Shadow as he took the steps by pairs, making for the study door. Though they didn't guess what was on his mind, others knew he had some purpose and sprang to follow him.

Cranston, too, was calling Jasper. His words were:

"Jasper – wait!"

The study door was thick. If Jasper happened to be beyond it, he might not hear the call. Therefore, Cranston didn't slacken pace. A dozen feet ahead of the others, he grabbed the study door and pushed it open.

He was right; Jasper was in the study. The thing that The Shadow wanted to ward off, had already happened.

To steady himself after what happened to Ambrose, Jasper had gone for the brandy bottle. He'd lost no time in swallowing a stiff drink. The bottle was back on the study desk, and Jasper was setting an empty glass beside it, as he turned guiltily toward the door.

Jasper was drawing the back of his hand across his mouth, to wipe away traces of the brandy that was trickling down his chin. He wanted to face the arrivals in the manner of a perfect servant.

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Jasper's hand didn't complete its sweep. Instead, it stiffened. His eyes bulged suddenly, as if staring right through Cranston. As his hand sagged under its own weight, Jasper's lips were revealed.

They were parted in a twisted grin that much resembled a hideous leer. His other hand flattened against the desk. Jasper tried to stop his sway but failed.

He was tumbling forward as Cranston reached him, and his weight had the inertia of the marble block that had so recently tumbled upon Ambrose. Cranston couldn't do more than divert the fellow's fall.

The sheriff, springing through the door that Cranston had opened, made a hard lunge to halt the servant's sideward collapse. Like Cranston, he couldn't stem Jasper's dead weight.

Dead weight, because the man himself was dead!

His fall broken, Jasper didn't thud the floor too hard; but it was hard enough to give his body a slight roll that brought it face upward. Bulged eyes were already glassy. The leer on Jasper's dips was frozen.

TWO in a row: Ambrose and Jasper.

That the first death wasn't an accident was proven by the second. Someone had certainly shoved the cornice down upon Ambrose. For someone had designed the death that overtook Jasper. Even the blundering sheriff couldn't overlook the evidence. He saw it before Cranston gestured solemnly toward it: the glass beside the brandy bottle.

Picking up the glass, the sheriff sniffed it. He detected an odor quite apart from the grapelike scent of brandy. It was the smell of almonds, significant of a virulent, quick-acting poison.

Uncorking the brandy bottle, Cranston noted the same odor. The brandy itself had been doctored with the poison. Anyone who tasted it was doomed. Jasper had set the precedent.

A hush fell upon the room where a surrounding group of men were staring at the second man who had met death, in their very sight, within the space of a dozen minutes.

One face was masklike: Cranston's.

Behind those immobile features, the brain of The Shadow was at work. For the second time in those same dozen minutes The Shadow had been too late to frustrate murder. But the deaths of both Ambrose and Jasper could be explained.

Strange though The Shadow's theory might be, he was looking forward to its proof. Looking forward, because the proof, in whatever form it took, would necessarily be more singular than the murders that preceded it!

CHAPTER XVII. THE HAND FROM THE PAST

A LITTLE thing like a missing cornice was promptly forgotten when so potential a substance as poisoned brandy lay at hand. Sheriff Quincy took over, and for a start demanded to know all about the bottle. Elbert Morion told him the simple facts.

The bottle belonged in a liquor cabinet, along with a great many others. Ambrose had been told to bring it upstairs because Corring preferred this particular brandy.

MURDER MANSION

Learning that the keys to the cabinet had been in Gail's possession, the sheriff sent for her. After Gail recuperated from the shock of Jasper's death, she stated that the keys hadn't been out of her possession until she gave them to Ambrose at the dinner table.

The next thing needed was the history of the bottle after Ambrose took it from the cabinet. It was a fresh bottle, opened only that evening, for the last one had been broken in the fray with the masked man who had first introduced crime to the Browland mansion.

Clive offered evidence.

"Ambrose must have brought the bottle up here," he stated, "because he was the only person who came into the room while I was going over the lists."

"You say he must have brought it up," put in the sheriff. "Didn't you see him bring it?"

"No," returned Clive. "Ambrose was trying not to disturb me. He must have set the bottle down quite carefully, without my notice."

"You should have heard him pull the cork."

"I didn't. The first time I saw the bottle was when I left here. I was in a hurry at the time, because I heard the commotion downstairs."

Clive's testimony was somewhat substantiated when a deputy brought word that there was a corkscrew lying on the liquor cabinet, with the cap of a brandy bottle beside it. Obviously, Ambrose had pulled the cork before bringing the bottle upstairs, which was why Clive hadn't heard the pop of the cork.

The sheriff was repeating for the tenth time that he would find out why someone wanted to murder the servants, when Corring put in an objection.

"No one wanted to kill the servants," Corring argued. "Someone tried to murder Elbert, to begin with and picked Ambrose by mistake. In this case, I was to be the victim, because the brandy was meant for me. Jasper happened to take a drink of it before I had the chance."

Corring's logic was good. The Shadow had expected him to present it. He had wondered how long it would be before the idea occurred to the lawyer. It was only natural that Corring should express the point ahead of the others. He was the person who had the narrow squeak.

The deaths of Ambrose and Jasper were taking on the nature of an unintended sacrifice: one, in behalf of Elbert; the other, on Corring's behalf.

"And now," said Corring, noting that the sheriff had accepted the theory, "I propose that we proceed with the reading of the wills. My time is valuable, Quincy, and so is Grath's. Why not let us handle our business while you proceed with your investigation of these deaths?"

For answer, the sheriff produced the two envelopes that he had brought from his office and handed each to the proper lawyer. He decided to let his investigation wait until the wills were read.

CORRING bowed toward Grath.

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"On the chance that these wills may have much to do with recent crime," declared Corring pointedly, "I suggest that both be read in detail. The one you drew up is the earlier will, Grath. Perhaps you should read it first."

Grath agreed. The envelopes were opened. Grath began to read his will aloud, while Corring checked by his. It became evident immediately that the wording ran much the same, except that Gail's name had been substituted for Clive's in the later will.

In droning voice, Grath read the statement:

"And I, Tobias Browland, do hereby bequeath to my nephew, Clive Walden, my house, the land upon which it stands, the fixtures and furniture said house, except as may be later specified –"

The droning continued. Finished with his reading of Clive's share, Grath came to Elbert's.

"And to my nephew, Elbert Morion, I, Tobias Browland, bequeath my personal property, to wit: my library and its books; all paintings in my art gallery; my collection of antiques. I also bequeath to said Elbert Morion my safe and its contents, consisting of family heirlooms and business records."

At that point, Grath paused to turn a page. He adjusted the reading glasses that he was wearing. By then, Corring had stopped checking on the second will, having found the statements regarding Elbert to be identical for several paragraphs.

"There is a final paragraph," declared Grath. "It simply says that any money among Browland's effects shall be divided equally between the heirs."

"To the last penny," added Corring, with a smile. "The will I hold states the same thing, Grath. I don't have to refer to it. I remember it."

Grath showed the final page of the will he held. It bore the signature of Tobias Browland, boldly written. With it were those of two witnesses.

One witness was Gail's father, who had been alive at the time when the will was drawn. The other was that of a former servant in Browland's employ, a man who was still alive, but too old for further service.

It was Corring's turn to read the new will aloud. He did so in a drone that matched Grath's:

"And I, Tobias Browland, do hereby bequeath to my ward, Gail Trent, my house, the land upon which it stands, the fixtures and furniture of said house, except as may be later specified –"

And so on, until Corring had concluded with Gail's share, always emphasizing her name by way of contrast to Clive's. Coming to Elbert's share, Corring read it even more mechanically:

"And to my nephew, Elbert Morion, I, Tobias Browland, bequeath my personal property, to wit: my library and its books; all paintings in my art gallery; my collection of antiques. I also bequeath to said Elbert Morion the contents of my safe, consisting of family heirlooms and business records."

Flipping the page over, Corring turned to Grath.

"Here is the final paragraph," said Corring, "referring to the money. It is very obvious in this case that the heirs meant are the ones mentioned: namely, Gail and Elbert. There can be no possible dispute on that point."

MURDER MANSION

"You may examine Browland's signature and those of the witnesses, who happen to be Ambrose and Jasper. The fact that both witnesses are recently deceased can in no wise invalidate the will. Some persons may have that erroneous impression, but we are attorneys, Grath. We both know –"

Corring paused, staring hard at Grath, whose face had taken on a surprising change. It was difficult to describe or classify Grath's expression. It showed a mixture of amazement and triumph; with it, a doubt that bordered upon absolute unbelief.

Corring began to think that Grath was having a heart attack and stretched a supporting hand in his direction. Grath pressed the hand aside. He took off his glasses and looked straight at Corring.

"You and I both know one thing, Corring," stated Grath. "A will, to be valid, must have the signatures of the testator and those of the witnesses. The original will has those, Corring, but this later one –"

AS Grath shrugged, Corring looked at the original will lying on the desk, its signatures showing purple in the yellow glow of the desk lamp. Then Corring turned his gaze to the will that he himself had drawn up at Browland's request.

Grath's eyes had already viewed the final page. So had others: The Shadow's.

From where he sat, Lamont Cranston was looking right between the lawyers. He knew the reason for the conflicting expression on Grath's face. He watched the horrified astonishment that took hold of Corring's features when, in, his turn, Corring looked at the final sheet of the will.

The signatures that Corring had mentioned – those of Tobias Browland and his servants, Ambrose and Jasper – simply did not exist!

Where signatures should have been, the sheet was blank. Three names, all belonging to men of the past, had perished with them. Some other hand, also working in the past, had wiped off those all-important signatures as clearly as a wet rag taking chalk from a blackboard.

Whose was the invisible hand?

How had the hand, itself, accomplished the result?

What bearing did the result, in turn, have upon recent crime and tragedy within this house?

Those questions were flashing to every mind while Corring was frantically holding the new will to the lamplight, hoping to find some traces of the missing signature, believing, perhaps, that the heat from the lamp would restore the vanished ink.

Men were answering their self-put questions. All but Corring. He was too wrapped up in his efforts to regain the writing; efforts that were utterly without avail.

The men who had the answers turned to Clive Walden. His own face blank, Clive read their accusations. One man, of course, was Elbert Morion. Another was Sheriff Quincy, whose animosity wasn't unexpected. But even Clive's own lawyer, Grath, was among the accusers.

Elbert became the spokesman

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"It's very plain, Clive," he said coldly. "You are the gainer because the signatures are missing. The old will names you as an heir, while the new one gives your share to Gail. If you can explain this –"

"Explain it!" broke in Clive. "Explain something that happened to a will that I never even saw! Why, I wasn't anywhere around here!"

"I really hope you weren't," returned Elbert. "After all, Clive, I can be neutral. My share of the estate is the same in either will. I hope you can prove that you had no hand in this. You have simply to establish the fact that you were elsewhere on the evening when the will was signed."

It was something that Clive couldn't prove, and knew it. He'd been here, in this very house, at the time Elbert specified. But Elbert's words were not the reason why Clive suddenly lost heart. He was in a mood to fight it out, tooth and nail, with every man who tried to outargue him.

With every man. Not with one girl.

The girl was Gail Trent. She was seated near the door, and her eyes were fixed on Clive. The light that Clive knew so well was gone entirely from her eyes. Her face showed no accusation; not even reproach. It registered hurt.

Hurt that came from Gail's heart. All her belief in Clive was broken. One element had carried her all along: love for Clive and the trust that went with it.

She had thought that such trust was shared. Whatever was hers, was Clive's, and Gail had been sure he understood and was willing to reciprocate. No longer was she sure. She couldn't be.

Clive wanted everything for himself. Such was the only answer; otherwise, he wouldn't have cared a whit about the change in his uncle's will. His return could only mean a plot on his part to make the old will stand by somehow nullifying the new will – a thing which had been done.

A campaign of three murders, all for Clive's benefit. Tobias Browland, maker of the will was dead, as were the witnesses, Ambrose and Jasper. Bold crimes, with Clive ever on the spot, using Gail's loyalty to help him over some of the rough spots. Such were the thoughts that flooded Gail's mind; and Clive understood.

CLIVE watched Gail approach Elbert and press her hands upon the rival cousin's arm. When the hurt look left Gail's face, it was because her eyes met Elbert's.

By then, Clive no longer cared what happened; he felt that Gail was lost to him forever. He didn't hear the sheriff's voice announcing his arrest for triple murder. Nor did Clive feel the handcuffs that clamped, cold, on his wrists.

They hauled Clive to his feet and marched him from the room. His lips showed that hard half smile, the calloused expression, that really hid a deep emotion. On his way to jail, Clive didn't bother to look back at the faces in the room. It was no use. They would all accuse him.

So Clive thought, but he was wrong.

One face was totally impassive. It belonged to Lamont Cranston. Its very immobility was expressive, and there was one person who understood Cranston's mood. Margo Lane knew that Cranston was reserving decision in this case.

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What else was in his mind, she couldn't guess. Often, Margo had tried to penetrate Cranston's inscrutable gaze, and had failed.

For Cranston's face, when it took that look, was a mask for the mind behind it: The Shadow's!

Margo gained one glimmer only, and it was really the result of her own intuition. She was considering the thing that Cranston had foreseen: the mystery of the vanished signatures that belonged on the new will.

It seemed that murder was out; but was it? That question, Margo realized, was all-important to The Shadow.

The real riddle remained to be solved, and it was a riddle of the past. Everything that had happened later stemmed from that one initial crime: the trick that caused the signatures to vanish. A crime of lesser consequence in itself, it had proven heinous, for it was the direct cause of more deaths than one.

How facts could be fitted to reveal the hand responsible for evil was a problem for The Shadow. Whether the burden belonged upon Clive Walden, or otherwise, was not the immediate issue. The problem was to reconstruct the operation of the crime itself.

Once all the facts of the machination were recognized, later events would piece into the picture and thereby clear the entire case.

The Shadow knew!

CHAPTER XVIII. THE NEEDED LINKS

LAMONT CRANSTON was in the Browland library looking through some of the old volumes in the historical collection. The excitement of the previous evening had overtaxed his strength, and he was again undergoing recuperation.

When Margo Lane came into the library, she was almost convinced that Lamont's relapse was real. He certainly couldn't be solving the mystery of Browland's will here in the library. Others were at work on that matter, in the study, and by right, Cranston should be with them. Furthermore, the will seemed very far from his mind when he inquired in a tired but whimsical tone:

"And how is the other invalid?"

"You mean Gail, of course," replied Margo. "She's still in her room, as she has been all day."

"You've talked to her, as I advised?"

"Of course. But whenever she answers, which is very seldom, she does it with sobs."

Cranston nodded slowly. He still believed that Gail would recover from her lovesick condition and talk to Margo. For that matter, Margo shared Cranston's belief but was tired of waiting for Gail to come around.

"The experts are still working on the will," announced Margo. "They've given up on one idea, though. Those signatures couldn't have been written in disappearing ink."

Cranston's eyes showed interest.

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"The ink was dark–blue," continued Margo, "or very nearly purple. There's a bottle of it on the shelf in the study closet. The bottle that Ambrose always used to fill the inkstand."

A nod from Cranston. He had seen the bottle.

"They've written with it," added Margo, "and blotted it with all sorts of acid solutions. I think they made it vanish a few times, but when they did, the paper went with it."

"The same paper that Browland used?"

Margo nodded. She explained, further, that the experts had used a mixture of starch and iodine to produce what looked like dark–blue ink.

They'd written with the solution; then bleached it, only to find that they could trace the writing under a fluorescent light. But neither such light, nor anything else, sufficed to make the will show its vanished signatures.

"Starch and iodine are not the answer," assured Margo, "nor any other of the purple concoctions they've tried. They just can't find the formula, if there is one, although the study is beginning to smell like a chem lab."

Cranston decided to look in on the experts. He rose wearily from his chair and started upstairs with Margo. At the top, Cranston turned to the girl and suggested:

"Why not try to talk with Gail again?"

"It won't do," returned Margo glumly. "She's been given too much leeway, Lamont, and the same was true of Clive. What good would it be to quiz either of them? If they broke down and told something more, it would only be what we already know."

"Leeway always helps," declared Cranston. "If you really encourage Gail, she may, talk further than you – or even she, herself – might expect. Do what you can, Margo."

Cranston continued into the study, to see how the chemists and other experts were making out.

THERE were four of them, and they had begun to dispute among themselves. One man was still arguing in favor of inks. He was drying a dozen sheets of Browland's watermarked paper, and was experimenting in reverse.

He was using secret inks that did not show until developed by some process. From simple lemon juice, which revealed itself when he heated the paper over the desk lamp, the expert was going into chemical methods that accounted for the smells that Margo had mentioned.

The room reeked with ammonia fumes, because the chemists had been using a copper–sulphate solution; which the ammonia developed into pale–blue writing. The trouble was that he couldn't make the writing disappear the way the signatures on the will had vanished.

He did have a combination of linseed oil and ammonia that appeared when the paper was soaked in water and vanished when it dried. But that didn't fill the bill at all. The study merely smelled worse after the experiment.

The others called upon Cranston for an opinion. They believed that they were entirely off the track. The only answer appeared to be that someone had switched the signed will for a blank. The thing was possible, of

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course. In fact, The Shadow had been considering it, all along.

Either Corring, the lawyer, or Quincy, the sheriff, could have made the switch, but The Shadow saw no reason to tag either of them as suspects. Clive hadn't even handled the will; nor, for that matter, had Elbert. True, one or the other might have taken it from the sheriff's safe, but The Shadow remembered that trusted men had been constantly in Quincy's office.

The real answer lay with the will itself. Somehow, the brain that arranged the writing's vanish had also foreseen the expert tests that would follow, and had therefore allowed for them. The fact remained that the document had been actually signed by Browland and two witnesses.

Looking about the study, The Shadow visualized the scene. He saw the desk lamp, the sheets of paper showing very white under its glow. He noted the bullet dent in its heavy base and remembered that a masked intruder, Zeke Hemble, had provided some diversion soon after the will was signed.

He looked at Browland's chair, then to the corner where the old man had kept his cane handy to repel just such invasions as Zeke's.

All these points were hearsay, for The Shadow had not witnessed the scene itself. However, all the persons present at the time had agreed in their accounts. It could be that certain details had escaped mention. If so, The Shadow wanted them. Mere trivialities, perhaps, that hadn't seemed worthy of account, yet those could be the needed links.

There was one person who could provide them – honestly and, The Shadow hoped, with new sidelights. That person was Gail Trent. Sooner or later, she would break her silence if Margo's sympathy continued. It was better to depend upon Margo, then to approach Gail direct.

Thoroughly on the defensive, Gail would hold back testimony, as such, but she would be equally willing to unburden her full troubles to someone she could fully trust.

GAIL did trust Margo.

Proof of it was evident in Gail's room. There, Gail was in bed, her face deep in the pillows, which occasionally emitted a muffled sob.

Gail had been in bed until noon, when she had dressed and come downstairs for lunch. Mere sight of the dining room had been too much.

Hysterically, Gail had rushed upstairs again and thrown herself back into bed. Her clothes were scattered all about the room, where she had flung them in her haste.

Bed was her one refuge; when the pillows didn't suffice, she could pull the covers over her head and shut out all the world, including Margo. At present, however, Gail was aware that Margo had come into the room, and she didn't mind it.

Turning her head slightly, Gail opened one eye and peeked at Margo, who wasn't even looking Gail's way. Margo was going about the room gathering Gail's clothes and arranging them very neatly, on a chair. She went to the window and drew the shade a trifle, to cut off the afternoon sun.

As an afterthought, Margo went to the closet and brought out Gail's slippers and negligee, arranging them at the foot of the bed. She brought a vase of flowers from the dressing table and placed them on the window sill,

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where Gail would see them when she opened her eyes. Turning, Margo tiptoed toward the door of the room.

Sudden appreciation gripped Gail. She tilted up in bed, fought back a sob, and called chokily:

"Margo!"

The break had come. Gail began to sob out all the facts that she had previously retracted, admitting her faults and begging Margo's advice. For a while, there wasn't any advice that Margo could give, for Gail was merely recounting established details. Then came the crux.

Gail was no longer sobbing. Her tone was defiant, when she declared:

"Clive thinks I can't prove anything against him. If I hadn't once loved him, I would show him that he is wrong. By rights, I should show him!"

"You can't prove that he was here the night his uncle died," returned Margo. "You didn't really see him, you know."

"But I still have the note he left!" exclaimed Gail triumphantly. "Clive thinks I destroyed it, but I didn't."

"What note, Gail?"

"Why, the one that said to come to the summerhouse," Gail replied. "I thought I'd mentioned it, just now. It was under my door, and it's in Clive's writing."

Sliding from bed, Gail went to the dresser and opened the top drawer. She found the crumpled sheet of paper and unfolded it. Finding one side blank, Gail turned it over. The other side was blank, too.

"How stupid of me!" Gail exclaimed. "I must have taken the wrong paper from the wastebasket. I threw the note there, along with some letters I hadn't finished." She looked across the room and added: "And the wastebasket has been emptied!"

Margo detected a new note in Gail's tone. In a very few minutes, Gail had lost her ardor toward denouncing Clive and seemed really glad that the incriminating message was gone. But Margo, stirred by another thought, pressed the matter of Clive's note.

"Was it written in pencil?" Margo queried. "Or in ink?"

"In ink," replied Gail. "I remember that part, perfectly. You see the ink was red, so vivid that the writing startled me when I saw it."

Gail shuddered. "It made me think of blood!"

Margo pondered, then said firmly:

"I think we should tell Lamont about it."

Gail hesitated, hedging mentally, as on previous occasions where Clive's fate was concerned. Then, remembering that the evidence was gone, she decided that Cranston could be told. In fact, Gail seemed quite willing to talk to Margo's friend.

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"Hurry into some clothes, then," said Margo. "I'll be down in the library with Lamont. You can join us there."

MARGO took the crumpled paper along. Cranston had returned to the library, and looked up from his book when Margo arrived.

She told him about the note that Clive had written, and explained that it must have been on a sheet much similar to this. However, Margo finished that statement with an added word:

"Unless –"

Cranston was holding the paper to the light. He saw its watermark, the sort found on the bond paper in Browland's study. The sheet was thin, for notepaper. Folding the blank paper, he put it in his pocket and gave Margo an approving nod. Then:

"Red ink, Gail said?"

"Yes," repeated Margo, "but I don't think there's any red ink in the house. There might be at the factory, but we're not at all sure Clive stopped there. The ink must have been in his own fountain pen, if he carried one. But people don't usually have red ink in fountain pens."

Gail arrived at that moment. She was wearing the negligee, and had put it on in a hurry. She was anxious to make sure that Margo reported everything correctly to Cranston. Gail was pleased when Cranston proved himself a stickler for accuracy.

"Could Clive have written the note in the study," he queried, "before the others came upstairs?"

"I suppose so," replied Gail. "He would have passed the study on the way to my room."

"The study door was open?"

"I'm sure it was. Yes, I remember seeing the light, every time I passed it. The study lamp is quite bright."

"Yet it wasn't bright enough for you or any of the others to recognize the masked man when he arrived."

As Cranston spoke, Margo gave him an anxious look, fearing that he was trying to trap Gail and that she would become mistrustful.

Gail's confidence, however, had been fully won. She furrowed her forehead, really wondering why the masked man's bandanna handkerchief had served him so well in a light that was really bright.

"His face was mostly a blur," said Gail slowly. "You couldn't quite tell where the mask ended. Of course, he had it down to his chin, but it must have flapped some when he moved around. Yet I couldn't glimpse his face at all.

"Really" – Gail's gaze was very honest – "if I thought that Clive was the masked man, I'd tell you so, Mr. Cranston. But I really don't know."

"The bandanna, of course, was blue?"

Gail nodded. Again; Margo thought that Lamont had tried a trick. He'd seen the bandanna, a blue one, picked up on the lawn. He might be testing Gail's story. Then Cranston was asking Gail for a detailed version of the

fray with the masked man.

She told of Elbert's intervention: how the flying inkstand had spoiled the masked man's aim. The shot that hit the lamp broke the bulb, she testified, and that produced darkness. She described how Ambrose and Jasper led the chase, carrying fire tongs and poker as weapons.

"Of course, Browland brought his cane," put in Cranston. "He was apt to grab it in an emergency, wasn't he?"

"I suppose he brought it," returned Gail. "I don't remember seeing it when Mr. Browland caught me at the front stairway, so I wouldn't fall. But he must have had the cane, because he was carrying it later, when he fell down the old stairs.

"You were here then, Mr. Cranston. Don't you remember how the cane clattered down the old stairs, too?"

Cranston remembered, and nodded. The afternoon was late, so he ended the quiz. He had to go to New York, he said, but he would return later; perhaps tomorrow.

The girls saw him to the door and watched him drive away in Margo's car. Gail was disappointed. The conference had begun so nobly, only to arrive nowhere.

Margo admitted disappointment, too. She really believed that Lamont had wearied. She could only hope that he had gleaned something of real value from his chat with Gail. But she was sure that he had not learned very much.

It happened that Margo had failed utterly to penetrate the Cranston mask. Her friend, The Shadow, had welded all the needed links. Far sooner than Margo or Gail expected, The Shadow would return to crack the case wide open.

More than murder would come out. Motive would be revealed, treachery exposed, and crime's accomplishment nullified. For The Shadow intended to solve the riddle of Browland's unsigned will by restoring it, signatures and all!

CHAPTER XIX. CRIME'S METHODS

IT was evening, and a group was gathered in Browland's study to listen to an illustrated lecture. Quite a letdown, after the part that this room had played in tragedy, but the sheriff had hopes that the lecture would produce results. On that account, he had brought Clive Walden from the county jail to witness the event.

The lecture was to be given by the experts who had tried every known device, so they said, to restore the signatures, if any, that had once been on Browland's second will.

They had failed, but Clive didn't know it. So the sheriff was trying a little psychology. The idea was for the experts to act as wise as they looked, and go through with the same experiments they had tried that afternoon.

It seemed to be working rather well. From across the study, the sheriff watched Clive, who was seated between two guards. He noticed that Clive was restless and kept glancing his way often.

If the sheriff had turned around, he would have seen Gail Trent behind him and might have realized that Clive's glances were on her account.

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Margo Lane was on one side of Gail, Elbert Morion on the other. Gail kept exchanging words with her companions, and every time she turned toward Elbert, Clive's face took on a bitter smile that his eyes backed with a steely glint.

The sheriff didn't know that those were symptoms of worry. He simply decided that Clive was a hard nut to crack, but that sooner or later the smile would be gone and the prisoner's eyes would show a hunted look, instead of hard challenge.

The experts were using Browland's old safe as a stand for a projector, and were turning the light on a screen they had hung on the opposite wall. The slides they were showing illustrated the methods of developing hidden writing.

After such preliminaries, they turned off the projector and began a demonstration with sheets of paper, chemical preparations, and fluorescent lights, talking with a great deal of technicality.

The sheriff decided to play his hand. He interrupted the chemist who held the floor.

"Can't you explain this in simpler terms?" queried the sheriff. "So that we can all understand it?"

"Certainly," said the chemist, responding to the cue. "It means, sheriff, that we shall certainly restore the writing on that will. We can't use all these tests on the document at one time, and there are some which will require special care. You may rest assured, however, that we shall have the signatures before tomorrow noon."

The sheriff looked at Clive and noticed that he had become indifferent. He gestured to the experts; they started to take the projector from atop the heavy safe. It was then that a voice from the hallway stopped them. Everyone recognized the calm tone as Cranston's.

"Hello," he greeted. "Trying some more of those tests that won't work? You chaps are certainly persistent."

Sheriff Quincy felt like adding another sudden death to those that had occurred within the mansion. The sheriff would have liked to deal it, with Cranston as the victim. He threw a quick look at Clive and saw the prisoner's face switch to a genuine smile.

Cranston's banter had told Clive exactly what this get-together was about. He relished the joke on Quincy, whose bluff was uncovered.

LAMONT CRANSTON was quite himself again, the indolent New York clubman who found life boring. He was wearing evening clothes and sported a silk hat and a cane.

In chatty mood, he explained that he was on his way to a party in New Haven and had made a detour to Riverdale just to see how things were coming along. He was swinging his walking stick idly as he leaned in the doorway.

"Do you know," Cranston resumed, "I thought I might give you some help. When I arrived back in town, I called a consulting chemist and asked him about inks that disappeared."

Cranston didn't pause to add that the consultant had been himself, though in a different personality. As The Shadow, he had spent some time in his own laboratory trying an experiment. Continuing, Cranston said impersonally:

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"I learned of some stuff called hydropide. It's made by adding phenolphthalein to ammonia. Of course, you must have the right proportions, if you want the best results. In that case, you can use hydropide like ink, only it doesn't last. It fades out, and that's the end of it."

The experts laughed. One of them spoke:

"Very thoughtful of you, Mr. Cranston. It just happens that you've overlooked the most important detail. Hydropide is a red solution. Browland's will wasn't signed in red ink. The ink used was a dark-blue, slightly purple."

Cranston gave a nod.

"I confess my ignorance," he said. "I had a druggist make up some hydropide and send it over. I found out that it was red. However, an odd thing happened –"

He paused; stepping into the room, he hung his cane on the back of a chair and brought an envelope from his pocket. Laying it on the safe beside the projector, he asked to see Browland's will, the one without the signatures, promising to be very careful of it.

Folding back the first pages, he hung them over the screen on the far wall, so that the last page of the will was on display.

Going to the projector, he focused it on the will. He asked that other lights be turned off; while that was being done, Cranston opened the envelope. From it, he produced slides of colored glass and began to insert them into the projector.

"A chap at my club goes in for lighting effects," explained Cranston. "Theatrical work, optical transformations of stage scenery, and that sort of thing. I asked his advice."

First, an orange slide; then a blue one. Cranston was making pretty colors, which transferred themselves to the screen, but did nothing more. He used a red instead of the others, throwing a lurid light through the room. He replaced the red with green, and rubbed his chin in rather puzzled fashion.

Then, choosing a slide which was marked "Amber," he started to put it in back of the green; changed his mind and slid it in front. The slight change in tint was the needed touch.

Persons closest to the screen observed a faint trace of something on the last page of the will. Cranston stepped over and pointed triumphantly. He found Quincy right beside him.

"See, sheriff?" Cranston queried. "The signatures! Faint, I admit, but it brings them out. I can tell you something else. If you take a photograph through a special kind of filter, it will step them up."

"Here" – he thumbed through a notebook and tore out a page – "this tells you the right filter and how to set the camera. I picked up some information on that point, too."

Squinting, the sheriff was reading Browland's signature on the will, with those of the servants who had witnessed it. The two lawyers were present, and had approached to stare over the sheriff's shoulders.

They both agreed that the will was valid; that photostats, if they came up to Cranston's claim, would stand as added proof in any court.

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Removing the will from the screen, Cranston gave it to the sheriff. He took a piece of paper from his pocket, used a bit of adhesive tape to attach it to the screen. Under the peculiar light, the paper showed a message. Gail was close enough to recognize it.

"Clive's note!" she exclaimed. "The one he left under my door that night –"

THE girl had spoken before she realized it. There was a hoarse cry from Clive as he bounded to his feet. The guards caught him and pinned his arms behind him. Clive was storming at Gail, accusing her of treachery. His guards finally silenced him.

"Just a piece of paper that I happened to pick out of a wastebasket," remarked Cranston. "While I was here, I wanted to make a few notes on some books in the library. When we were testing the lights at the club, I used this paper for a background, and the writing popped in sight."

How accidental it all seemed! If Margo Lane hadn't known that Lamont Cranston was The Shadow, she would have believed that he had stumbled on so many things by chance. But Cranston was by no means through with his lucky stumbles.

He removed the slides from the projector, and in the white light, produced a little bottle of hydropide. He wrote a few lines and held them to the light. They showed in vivid red, exactly as Clive's note had first appeared to Gail. Still keeping the paper in the light, he dropped a blue slide in front of the projector.

Not having had time to fade, the red writing blended with the blue glow to produce a definite purple, the reputed color of the ink with which the will had been signed!

"You see," remarked Cranston, "we have blue reading lamps at the club. They're quite the thing nowadays. So when the hydropide came over from the druggist, I thought, at first, that it was dark-purple instead of red."

He stepped over and turned on the desk lamp, then went back and detached the projector.

"That's very odd!" Cranston looked at the paper again and saw red writing on it. "I supposed that this desk lamp would have a blue bulb, too."

"It did have!" broke in Gail. "I remember! Jasper put in a new bulb that afternoon. He said that Mr. Browland wanted better light in the study."

"I see," remarked Cranston. "And did Jasper fill the inkstand, too?"

"No. Ambrose attended to such matters. He was always very careful to keep the inkstand filled –"

Gail broke off, surprised by the faces about her. She suddenly realized that she had implicated the servants in the plot. Each had played his part in preparing the scene for the signing of a will that would repudiate itself.

But the fact that Ambrose and Jasper had been accomplices in no wise cleared Clive of the major blame. He saw that accusations were coming his way. Clive became canny.

"Why would Ambrose or Jasper work against my uncle?" demanded Clive. "He had treated them well for years."

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"In the past, yes," observed Cranston. "They must have been thinking of the future, hoping for a share of the estate. As witnesses to the will, they could not be named in it. Each might have willingly listened to other offers."

Clive tried another tack.

"If you think I murdered my uncle, you're wrong. Gail didn't even see me at the time. She saw someone in a black cloak."

Gail wanted to remind Clive that he had appeared in that same cloak, later, but Cranston intervened.

"Let's look at the old stairway," he suggested. "Talk of a man in black reminds me of a chap called The Shadow. He stamps out crime. If Gail saw him, he must have been trying to aid Browland."

Clive gave a sly glance. Cranston's efforts to vindicate The Shadow were helpful to Clive. He followed willingly when the guards thrust him toward the hall. Cranston walked ahead; since he was carrying a cane, he decided to represent Browland.

Pushing the door inward over the old stairs, Cranston stepped downward, wangling his cane back and forth.

"I don't see how Browland could have been carrying his stick," said Cranston. "Look. Mine is as long as the distance across these very narrow stairs. Hello! What's happened?"

A FEW steps down, Cranston no longer had his cane. Its handle had caught on an old rail post on a level with the second floor. The ferrule was wedged beneath the door and the ledge on the other side. Cranston couldn't find his cane in the dark, until he stumbled against it as he came up the steps.

Fortunately, Cranston was stumbling up; not down. Hands caught him from above; he steadied, eased down a few steps and worked himself under the cane, rather than attempt to tug it loose. Joining the others, Cranston looked down the stairs.

"So that was it!" he exclaimed. "You can't even see the stick. No wonder Browland's cane was splintered! It must have wedged the way mine did. But he certainly wasn't making a test of the stairway."

"Of course he wasn't," put in Elbert. "I don't believe that Uncle Tobias was carrying his cane. I'd say that someone jammed it there. You've cleared The Shadow, Cranston. Our task is to find the real murderer."

Eyes were already fixed on Clive, as he stared at the death snare that Cranston had duplicated in such accidental style. It certainly explained Browland's death. Stepping down to close the door, as was his habit, the old man couldn't have missed tripping over a cane wedged at floor level.

All eyes bore accusation, Gail's included. But Margo was looking at Cranston. He gave a slight shrug and turned away. It signified that he had solved the whole thing as a matter of routine; that done, he was going on his way.

Too bad, thought Margo, that it had to be Clive, but the circumstances were all against him. She'd have liked to go alone, with Lamont, but realized that she ought to stay with Gail. So, with the rest, Margo retraced her way to the study, where they were taking Clive.

She didn't even listen for the strain of a parting laugh that she sometimes heard when Cranston lapsed into his other self. Margo was sure that it would not come. Though Cranston had answered certain riddles, they had

merely pinned matters more firmly on Clive Walden.

Solving crime by simply establishing the obvious could be no triumph for The Shadow!

CHAPTER XX. THE FINAL CLAUSE

CLIVE WALDEN didn't long resist the grilling that began when he reached the study. Bombarded with accusations, he volunteered to answer them by telling his whole story. They let him talk, and he gave the details simply, bluntly.

He'd come back to learn what was happening in his uncle's house. His friend, Hemble, the watchman, had double-crossed him by moving the car from the elms while Clive was in the mansion.

Obviously, Hemble must have had crooks aiding him, to further some plan of his own which would make Clive the scapegoat.

Denying that he had played any part in his uncle's death, Clive claimed that he had returned to the attic, the night of his meeting with Gail, and had stayed there until he heard pounding at the door. Admitting that he had left by the roof route, Clive simply said that his questioners knew the rest.

Elbert Morion took the floor.

"We know the rest, Clive," he assured. "Clever of you, to lay a death trap for Uncle Tobias. Cranston's discovery makes it impossible for us to prove that murder against you. But when circumstantial evidence strikes twice in ten minutes, pointing to one man only, it cannot be disputed.

"You were up here, alone, when Ambrose brought the bottle that he had opened. You were the only man who could have poisoned that brandy as bait for Jasper. You knew how to bring Jasper to the bottle. Death would be a sufficient shock for his nerves.

"The death of Ambrose – How simple it was for you to reach the window above the side door and loosen the cornice when Ambrose stepped beneath; then to come downstairs and play innocent, while Jasper, remembering the bottle and needing a drink, came up here to his doom."

With that, Elbert swung to Corring.

"We were both fools," Elbert told the lawyer, "to think that murder was meant for us, while Clive was simply disposing of two accomplices, as he probably did with Hemble."

The case was perfect. Staring, Clive could find no suitable answer. He rose to his feet when his guards urged him. He was due for another march back to the county jail, a death parade, for no jury would acquit a man on a charge of double murder that provided both motive and means.

An interruption halted Clive. The telephone was ringing on the study desk. The sheriff answered it, held a short but pointed conversation, and then hung up. His face showed that the call had impressed him.

"It was from New York," Quincy announced. "The police commissioner was on the wire. They've been checking on that crook who spilled himself into the ravine, Mech Woodum. They say he left New York with a pal, Lippy Carther.

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"The main thing, though, is that both were friends of Hemble. They called him Zeke, the commissioner said, because his specialty was picking small towns as places to operate, and playing dumb while he was there."

Hope flashed to Clive's face. He swung to his cousin.

"You see, Elbert?" put Clive. "There goes your robbery charge. Hemble must have rifled the factory safe himself, and let me take the blame. He came here for bigger game, thinking he could frame me again.

"Maybe" – Clive nudged to the study safe that bore the name of Tobias Browland in letters of gleaming gold – "maybe Hemble thought he'd find more money in there."

The matter provided a brief delay, even though Elbert scoffed at Clive's theory. Margo was thinking hard about the call from New York. She didn't doubt that Lamont could have arranged it, for he was a great friend of the police commissioner. But the call was too well timed.

Cranston must have doubled back, after leaving the mansion, and simply made the call from the extension phone downstairs. A very simple matter, calling the local operator and asking for a test ring. Lamont could have talked to the sheriff and represented himself as the police commissioner.

Perhaps Cranston was about to return in person. Eagerly, Margo looked to the doorway – and gave a little gasp that others heard. Yes, Lamont was back, but he was no longer Cranston.

He was The Shadow.

INSTANTLY, Margo understood why The Shadow, as Cranston, had cleared all blemish from his other personality. He had needed to return as The Shadow to settle final facts that only his cloaked presence could back. Already, The Shadow was creating awe. Men sat transfixed as they faced him.

His first words, uttered in whispered tone that carried traces of a laugh, were cleverly put, indeed. They implied that he had been outside the study door when the sheriff received the commissioner's call, thus bolstering the accepted belief that the call was genuine.

"So you have learned about Zeke Hemble," spoke The Shadow. "It was time you did. He was the masked man who entered here, but his purpose was not robbery. He was also an accomplice in the matter of the will."

Elbert Morion, less awed than the others, looked toward the sheriff and gave a knowing nod. The Shadow was pinning one more fact on Clive Walden.

"Zeke placed one shot well," The Shadow continued, his whisper carrying a trace of sibilance. "He crashed the lamp and broke its blue bulb, thus rendering a valuable service to a criminal scheme."

No one was surprised that The Shadow was acquainted with the trick of the blue light. His whole appearance, together with his speech, marked him as a being who would be acquainted with the vital facts.

"A criminal scheme," repeated The Shadow, "fostered by a clever plotter who dealt in triple murder because he had much to gain, or much to lose, if the new will stood."

This was tagging it hard on Clive. A smile showed on Elbert's smooth features. He was liking The Shadow more and more.

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"Zeke's invasion was merely a fake," The Shadow concluded. "He had a task to do, and did it. A task more subtle than picking the lamp with a bullet. He had to delay that shot, at first.

"You must all realize" – The Shadow was advancing into the room – "that another article required some attention. I refer to – this!"

Stretching a gloved hand, The Shadow advanced it to the desk and lifted the old-fashioned inkstand!

Even the slowest thinker present could not fail to grasp the import. The trick of the vanishing signatures had depended upon the red fluid that passed as ink, as well as the blue lamp bulb.

The imitation ink could not be left as an exhibit. Disposing of it was a vital matter. And someone had disposed of it in a most natural and effective fashion.

Elbert Morion!

The whole thing flashed to Gail: how Elbert had chucked the ink-stand at the masked man while the latter was bluffing with his gun.

She found her voice and began to proclaim the fact, while Corring, on his feet, was booming his support of her testimony: a game between Zeke Hemble and the man who had hired him, the real master of the show, Elbert Morion!

THE SHADOW was pointing to the exact spot where Zeke had stood. He was indicating something that he had noted that afternoon: not evidence, but the lack of it, which counted even more.

On the rug where the inkstand had struck, there wasn't a trace of any stain. Small wonder. The "ink" was the hydropide that Cranston had mentioned. It had dried and vanished, true to form.

Clive swung to Elbert.

"So that explains it!" snapped Clive. "You had Hemble fixed six months ago. You gave him the combination and he rifled the office safe of what little it had to put the blame on me. He pretended to be my friend, and coaxed me here at the time you stipulated. So that he and a couple of crooks like him could frame me again, this time for murder!"

Elbert took it all quite coolly.

"The facts are unsupported," he declared. "Suppose that I wanted to get rid of both Ambrose and Jasper. What opportunity did I have to murder them?" His tone was defiant. "Can anyone tell me?"

The Shadow's laugh announced that he could.

"The process was very simple," came The Shadow's sibilant tone. "You made each servant believe that he was the sole accomplice. Ambrose thought that the ink was the whole trick. Jasper believed the light to be responsible.

"Each dreaded the time when the blank will would be shown. Each was ready to lie, saying that he wasn't sure that he had signed it, but feared that the other's testimony would outweigh his. So you prevailed upon each to dispose of the other.

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"Ambrose put the poison in the brandy, confident that Clive would be blamed when Jasper died from it. Jasper stationed himself at the window above the side door and pushed the cornice when Ambrose appeared below. He was sure, too, that Clive would be blamed."

The "perfect" case against Clive Walden faded into insignificance as The Shadow revealed these details of supercrime that Elbert Morion had concocted. Then, before Elbert could offer a word in dispute, The Shadow added:

"I should have foreseen your intent, Morion, when you masqueraded as myself the night you threatened Cranston. You learned that Walden had worn my hat and cloak and that Gail knew it. When you found those garments, here in the study, you decided to murder Cranston in Gail's presence.

"When you fled, you dumped them on Ambrose and Jasper, while you made for the side door and doubled back again. It proved them both to be your accomplices. When each was reluctant to support the other's testimony, it looked like a game between them.

"Cranston must have thought so. It wasn't until Ambrose met with sudden death that Cranston realized Jasper's danger. Each was really trying to outsmart the other –"

Gail Trent didn't hear the rest. Her eyes brimming, she was looking to Clive Walden, seeking his forgiveness for her doubts. He had left the cloak and hat in the study, as he promised, with The Shadow's gun and cartridges.

Clive smiled as he returned Gail's gaze. He couldn't blame her doubts, considering that Elbert was their sponsor.

Then Elbert's voice was heard, challenging The Shadow's accusations.

ELBERT was brazen in tone, sneering that his accuser's words were mere fancy. Even if they proved correct, the mutual murders in which Ambrose and Jasper had indulged were their own deeds, not Elbert's.

"You dealt in murder of your own," The Shadow interposed. "Someone set the death snare for your uncle, and you were the man. You took the cane when you pursued Hemble. You wedged it on the old stairway. You expected Browland to follow immediately, but it was not until later that he stepped into the trap."

Again, Gail looked at Clive. These words were substantiation of Clive's claim that he had tried to save his uncle when he stumbled on the stairs and took the cane with him in his fall. Elbert, however, was still contemptuous of The Shadow's accusations.

"I murdered my uncle?" queried Elbert. "What possible motive could I have had?"

The Shadow turned to the lawyers who were standing by. He spoke in a commanding tone:

"Read both wills! Specifically, the final clause dealing with Morion's share of the estate."

Grath read the excerpts from the old will, first:

"I also bequeath to said Elbert Morion my safe and its contents –"

The Shadow gestured that Grath had read enough. He turned to Corring, who quoted from the new will:

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"I also bequeath to said Elbert Morion the contents of my safe –"

Another gesture, then The Shadow's tone.

"Not quite the same," he declared, "though they were accepted as identical. Tobias Browland was a man of judgment. He once favored his nephew, Elbert; then changed his opinion. So he bequeathed to Gail Trent his most valued possession: the safe which was in this room. He knew that Gail intended to marry Clive –"

The Shadow did not finish. Diving for the desk, Elbert scooped out the watchman's gun that once belonged to Hemble. It was loaded, and Elbert hoped to down The Shadow with it. He stiffened as he heard a taunting laugh.

Eyes rising ahead of the revolver, Elbert saw himself covered by a .45 automatic in The Shadow's gloved hand.

Then came a snarled voice from the doorway.

"Lay off, Shadow," it said. "I'm taking over!"

Eyes turning, The Shadow saw Lippy Carther. The missing marksman had muscled back into the picture at a most untimely moment. Lippy held a revolver trained on The Shadow, but he wasn't quite ready to fire. Elbert was partly in the way.

"Move out, Morion," spoke Lippy to Elbert. "I thought you double-crossed Zeke, but it looks like you didn't. Anyway, a guy that stands up to The Shadow is right enough for me."

Before Elbert could make the shift that Lippy wanted, The Shadow whirled. He caught Elbert, sent him on a spin across Lippy's path.

The Shadow couldn't fade, for everyone else was diving for the sides of the room. He wheeled for the only space that offered momentary respite: the front of Browland's big safe.

Guns were barking, but their aim was wide. They were missing The Shadow and bashing against the safe. Suddenly away from the great black box, The Shadow fired at the really dangerous member of the pair before him, Lippy Carther.

From his new angle, The Shadow had the advantage. He pumped shots home before Lippy could manage accurate aim. Lippy pitched to the floor, his gun slipping from his hand.

Elbert hadn't waited. He was out through the door, having spent most of his bullets. The Shadow was after him, and the persons scattered about the study could hear the titanic laugh that the black-clad fighter uttered. The mirth promised doom for Elbert Morion, but the shots that listeners heard were not from The Shadow's gun.

A few barks from Elbert's gun, while The Shadow's laugh continued; and then –

A SHRIEK echoed through the mansion. As it trailed, it was accompanied by the crashing tumble of a human form, that ended in a hard but muffled smash against awaiting stone.

A sharp pop sounded – the cracking of a human skull. After it came a slight but curious clatter of a stick of wood rattling down a flight of very steep steps.

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Elbert had fled by the old stairway, forgetting that Cranston's cane was still wedged across its breadth. His murder of his uncle was proven by Elbert's own demonstration. The duplicate of the pitfall that he once created marked the end of Elbert Morion.

A great hush lay within the upstairs study, until Margo Lane glanced toward the old safe. Her exclamation brought the full attention of the others. Half a dozen bullets had bashed the safe front and left their marks. Not mere blackened dents, but scars of gold that matched the decorations on the front.

Clive Walden reached the safe, and his arm encircled Gail Trent when she arrived. Like the rest, they saw what the brilliant spots meant. Clive stroked his fingers over the letters that spelled his uncle's name. They were not mere letters of guilt.

They were gold, real gold, like the whole bulk of the safe! Bullets that missed The Shadow had knocked away black paint, proving the sort of metal of which the safe was made.

Gold, to the weight of hundreds of pounds, representing hundreds of thousands of dollars!

This was the real wealth of Tobias Browland, which only his nephew Elbert had guessed until The Shadow divined it.

A miser at heart, Browland had sworn some artisan to secrecy and had him construct a safe entirely of gold, masked by black paint, except where stenciled name and decorations peered through.

By the new will, which The Shadow had restored, this wealth belonged to Gail Trent and would be shared by the man she really loved, Clive Walden. Such was the uppermost thought of all who viewed the reunited pair – with one exception.

Though she was glad that all had turned out well for Gail and Clive, Margo Lane was standing by the study door, listening for a token from the night.

This time it came, faint, distant, trailing, but lacking nothing of its strange, expressive mirth.

The Shadow's laugh of triumph over crime!

THE END