

# **THE PLOT MASTER**

Maxwell Grant

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# THE PLOT MASTER

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## CHAPTER I. THE MASTER PLOTTER

A MAN was seated by the window of a luxurious living room. From this apartment, high in an exclusive Manhattan hotel, he commanded a sweeping view of Central Park, which lay spread beneath a dreary afternoon sky.

Smoking a thin cigar, this man seemed indolent as he surveyed the vista below. His eyes were languid; his face showed pale by the light from the window. Then, awaking from his reverie, he took on a change of countenance.

A twisted smile appeared upon the man's large lips. His eyes, half closing, gave him an evil leer. With a violent gesture, he flung his cigar into an ashtray. With fists half clenched, he arose and stared toward the door.

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His scowl showed impatience. He was expecting some one who had not yet arrived. Glancing at his watch, the waiting man emitted a low snarl that brooked ill for the person whom he was expecting. Then, as in answer to the man's impatience, the door of the living room opened.

The man at the window, tall in stature, glared venomously at the heavy, stalwart fellow who entered. He waited until the arrival had closed the door. Then, in a harsh voice, he demanded:

"Well, Marling. What has delayed you?"

"Sorry, chief," returned the arrival, in an apologetic tone. "Holley was out when I called at the Century Casting Company. I had to wait until he came back."

"Any news from Cedar Cove?"

"Nothing new."

The tall man grunted his disappointment. His lips, however, resumed their evil smile as some new thought came to his mind. Then Marling produced a newspaper and, with a grin, handed it to his chief.

The tall man stared at the evening issue. There, on the front page, was a photograph of himself, wearing the mild expression that he had owned before Marling's arrival. Beneath it was the name "Eric Hildrow."

"They know you're back from Cuba, chief," informed Marling, still holding his grin. "They've run that canned interview you gave them about the conditions on the sugar plantations. It ought to please the senator, to know you're back."

"He is pleased," asserted Hildrow. "A letter arrived while you were absent."

"From Washington, sent by Senator Ross Releston himself. He states that he will soon be ready to receive my report on Pan-American trade conditions. Cuban sugar interests the good senator."

A SARCASTIC smile was flickering on Hildrow's lips. The expression revealed him as a man of cunning. Marling nodded in approval of his chief's statements.

"That fits in with Stollart's last report," declared Marling. "The one that came to the Brooklyn post office yesterday, addressed to J.T. Ushwell."

"The name I use with Stollart," remarked Hildrow. "He was really bought over that fellow and he stands well with Senator Releston."

"You're sure that Stollart doesn't suspect –"

"That J.T. Ushwell and Eric Hildrow are one? Not a chance of it! No more than Senator Releston could suspect that I am playing a double game. My contacts with Releston have been entirely above board. I met him on business that pertains to international trade conditions. He regards me as an authority on such subjects.

"In fact, it was only in a passing manner that I learned of the senator's interest in the new submarine that Commander Dadren is developing at Cedar Cove. I took Stollart into our fold; and he has learned the rest. That keeps me in the clear."

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"Smart work, chief," commented Marling.

"In Havana," remarked Hildrow, "I contacted with a certain agent. I can tell you this, Marling: once we have gained the plans to Dadren's submarine, we can reap millions. I told the man in Havana just enough to arouse his full enthusiasm."

"One trouble, chief," objected Marling. "Negotiations before you have the plans well, it might queer the game."

"How? I did not mention Dadren's name. The agent in Havana knows nothing of the experimental work at Cedar Cove."

"But he might trace it through you."

"Do you think I am a fool?" snarled Hildrow. "Sometimes, Marling, you betray stupidity! I did not see that agent in my own identity of Eric Hildrow. I was Senor Angoston, from Buenos Aires, when I called on him."

"You were in disguise?"

"Certainly. With sallow face, a little pointed mustache"—Hildrow paused to press his fingers against his features "and darkened eyebrows. I talked in Spanish. The man in Havana thought I was in from South America.

"Always a disguise, Marling. That is the way I work. You do not appreciate it, for you are one who has my confidence. But with others — bah! unless I can trust them, why should I reveal my real identity?"

Hildrow chuckled as he strolled by the window. His pose had become languid again; he was almost dreamy as he stared out toward Central Park. Then, with characteristic suddenness, the plotter turned and snapped a question at Marling.

"Come!" he exclaimed. "You say that there is no new word from our man at Cedar Cove. He has gained no opportunity to seize the plans?"

"None at all."

"What about the commander? Does he still intend to make his trip to Washington? Tomorrow?"

"Apparently."

"That coincides with Stollart's report," nodded Hildrow. "The senator expects Dadren. We have known that for some time. Very well. When Commander Dadren flies to Washington, we shall gain the plans. What else was in the post office box, Marling?"

"A letter from Wenshell. He is still at Tarksburg, Virginia, with the air circus."

"All ready for any orders?"

"Yes. They are stranded there. They will break up as soon as he announces that he is out of funds."

"That will be to-day?"

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"Yes. To-night."

"Good!"

HILDROW assumed a pleased smile. The expression was an ugly one. Here, with only Marling to view him, the master plotter made no effort to cover his actual character.

"There was word from Korsch," stated Marling. "All quiet on the Potomac."

"Good!" laughed Hildrow. "The river air is excellent. Perhaps Dadren will enjoy it also."

"And a report from Nuland," added Marling. "He is waiting at Marrinack, Connecticut. Watching Death Island. Another search is to be made in Professor Whitburn's study."

"Another search?" quizzed Hildrow, angrily. "I thought that had been accomplished."

"Apparently it had, chief. But there still seems to be a chance that Professor Whitburn has a duplicate set of Commander Dadren's plans. A letter came in from Cedar Cove –"

"Enough, Marling!" snarled Hildrow. "This may ruin everything!"

"How, chief? If we grab Dadren's plans –"

"They will be worthless if Professor Whitburn has copies. This search must not fail. What is more, it must be accomplished to-night. At any cost!"

"Nuland says it will be –"

"But Nuland is not infallible." Hildrow yanked a watch from his pocket and studied the dial. "Four o'clock. How long will it take me to reach Lake Marrinack?"

"By car?"

"Yes."

"From three to four hours."

"That is sufficient. Come, Marling. I want to talk to you while I am preparing."

Hildrow paced across the living room. He entered a small dressing room and seated himself at a table before a mirror. Bringing out a box of make-up equipment, he began a transformation of his features.

MARLING watched in admiration, as his chief applied a brownish ointment that took away the pallor of his face. Then came action on the eyebrows. Tugging at them, Hildrow made them double in size. He dipped his fingers in a glossy cream and repeated the process. His eyebrows became almost black.

Flattening his sleek hair, Hildrow produced a tight-fitting wig, with heavy black hair. He donned it and surveyed his face. Then, with a final leer, he produced a chunky black mustache. Dabbing his upper lip with spirit gum, he put on the last article of disguise.

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As an afterthought, the plotter dug in a small box and found a small gold tooth. He slipped this over the upper bicuspid; then grinned at his reflection in the mirror. The fake gold tooth glimmered as Hildrow smiled.

Arising, Hildrow faced Marling. The tool stared. He would never have recognized his chief. The disguise, though exaggerated, was perfect, so far as a concealment of the plotter's normal features.

"Call the Western Garage, Marling," ordered Hildrow. "Tell them to have Mr. Collender's coupe ready. I have the licenses"—he tapped his pocket "and they have never seen Mr. Collender in person. They will see him now for the first time."

"All right, chief. Only one thing. When Nuland sees you —"

"He will recognize me. This is the disguise that I have always used with him. Moreover, he will recognize his countersign when I give it."

Marling nodded as he went to call the garage. Hildrow remained in front of the mirror. He adjusted his disguise; then reached in a table drawer and produced a pack of cork-tipped cigarettes. They went with the character that the plotter had assumed. Hildrow smoked panatela cigars only when he was himself.

TEN minutes later, a black-haired, mustached man strolled unnoticed from the lobby of the big apartment hotel. He hailed a passing cab and ordered the driver to take him to the Western Garage. Arrived there, he found a gray coupe standing just within the door.

The mustached man produced his license cards and handed them to the attendant. While the garage man was reading the name of Logan Collender, Hildrow was lighting a cork-tipped cigarette. The attendant returned the cards.

"All right, Mr. Collender," he said. "Here's your car. The tank's full. We changed the oil."

A nod. A glimmer of a gold tooth. Then Eric Hildrow, alias Logan Collender, entered the coupe and drove from the garage. The master plotter was on his way to Lake Marrinack.

## CHAPTER II. ON DEATH ISLAND

EARLY evening had arrived. Gloomy darkness had settled upon the waters of Lake Marrinack. A silent surface, undisturbed by ripples, had replaced the sparkling blue that distinguished this sheet of water.

Secluded from traveled highway, Lake Marrinack was a seldom-visited spot. Even the residents of the near-by town of Marrinack shunned the lake, for the place was one of evil superstitions. Weird rumors persisted regarding Lake Marrinack; and they centered chiefly on the solitary isle that rested in the midst of the lake.

Death Island it was called. The name had double significance. Not only had doom befallen upon certain persons who had lived there; the island also gave a foreboding appearance of death itself. Looming a mile out in the lake, the front cliff of Death Island bore a remarkable resemblance to a mammoth skull, grinning above the level of the waters.

Viewed in the paling twilight, Death Island was a fearful spot. Approach was impossible by the front, for the huge cliff offered no landing place. At one side of the island was a secluded cove. There, a small dock formed a landing spot. Beyond that, there was no visible sign of human habitation on the island.

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Thick woods obscured the lone house that stood behind the cliff. Yet the house itself was large. It was located in almost the exact center of the small island; and those visitors who had actually approached it agreed that the house was as spooky-looking as Death Island itself.

With walls of blackened stone, the house loomed forbidding among the trees. Long and high, it was flat-roofed, save for a square tower near the rear of the building. That tower, a white-walled addition to the house itself, looked like a ghostly form that had sprouted from the level roof.

Dim lights shone from the windows of the house on Death Island. Bars showed on those same windows. The strange abode was one in which uninvited visitors could expect no welcome. Curious people stayed away from the house on Death Island.

WITHIN the house was a room that contrasted oddly with the dull exterior. This was the front room on the ground floor. It was the private study of Professor Arthur Whitburn, the old inventor who owned the house on Death Island. Professor Whitburn's study was a cheery, well-lighted room.

This room was in great disorder. A large bookcase ranged along one wall, and fully half of its volumes had been removed. These missing books had not gone far. They were strewn about the study. Stacks on the tables, stacks on the chairs, stacks on the floor; besides these were other books, dropped at random, here and there.

In addition to the books, the floor and the furniture held mused heaps of papers. Glass jars, pieces of metal tubing, odd-looking mechanical contrivances added to the chaos. There was a shelf in the corner where these articles belonged; it was a disorderly as the room. Professor Whitburn had piled bottles and tubes haphazardly upon that shelf.

There was a desk near the center of the room. It was also a hodge-podge of books, papers, and apparatus. The only object that appeared to be in its proper place was the telephone. It stood at an angle, however, for it had been propped upon a crazy stack of handwritten manuscripts.

A wide window sill was also well littered with papers; but this spot showed some semblance of order. A large tiger-cat had chosen the sill for a resting place. Nestled there, the creature looked over the room with an expression of part ownership. The cat seemed quite at home in its select spot.

In fact, the cat was quite alert despite its assumed laziness. This was proven when the animal rose and arched its back when it detected the sound of footsteps from the corridor outside the study. Then, as the door opened, the cat nestled back on the window sill. It had recognized the approach of its master.

PROFESSOR WHITBURN entered the study. Old, stooped and thin, he was a man of curious appearance. His hair formed an untrimmed mass of white. His mustache also white was long, with drooping ends. But the professor's eyes were keen. His sharp gaze noted the cat settling back upon the window sill.

"Hello, Quex," chuckled the professor, approaching to stroke the cat. "What is the trouble? Has something disturbed you?"

The cat responded with a plaintive meow. The old man studied the animal closely. Quex blinked and emitted another meow. Then the cat subsided under the professor's friendly strokes. While he quieted his pet, Whitburn stared about the room in suspicious fashion.

A glare appeared upon the old man's countenance. With sharp eyes, the professor surveyed the stacks of books and heaps of papers. He moved away from the window sill and approached the desk. He lifted the telephone and looked at the manuscript beneath it. He picked up books and replaced them. Nodding, the old



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man turned toward the cat.

"You are right, Quex," declared Professor Whitburn. "Some one has been intruding here. You know when matters are wrong, don't you, old fellow?"

Pausing, Whitburn again looked about the room. He muttered to himself, then spoke half aloud, as if addressing the cat.

"Whoever came here was a fool," asserted the Professor. "He thought that I would not know. He believed that this disarray was pure carelessness on my part. Others have thought the same. They do not realize that I remember the exact place where I lay each object."

Again, a brief inspection. The cat watched the professor go to the bookcase and look at volumes that rested there, at an angle. Then the professor chuckled. His tone, however, betrayed anger along with mirth. Wheeling, he stalked to the door and opened it.

"Polmore!"

The professor paused after calling the name. He waited a few seconds; then heard a response from somewhere in the house. Footsteps followed. A frail, peak-faced man appeared from the corridor.

Whitburn beckoned the fellow into the study.

"Polmore," he cackled, "you are my secretary. Your services, however, are limited to handling my correspondence. You would find it difficult to locate objects in this room, would you not?"

"Yes, sir," responded Polmore.

"Do you think that I could discover anything if I looked for it?" demanded Whitburn.

"Perhaps, sir," assented the secretary. "But I should class a search as difficult."

"You are wrong, Polmore," chuckled the professor. "I could locate any book any paper almost instantly! That surprises you? I thought it would."

"Is anything missing, sir?"

"No. But articles have been moved. Polmore, I tell you some one has been prying in this study!"

"Impossible, sir! I was in here only a short while ago –"

"And you saw nothing amiss? That is no argument, Polmore. Not unless you disturbed my arrangements."

"No indeed, sir. I came in here only to learn if you had instructions for this evening."

"And you saw no one?"

"No one, sir."

The professor eyed his secretary sharply. Then, in a raspy tone, he demanded:

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"Where is Stephen?"

"In the laboratory, sir."

"And Bragg?"

"Upstairs, I believe."

"Summon them, Polmore. At once."

The secretary departed, closing the door behind him. Old Whitburn advanced to the window sill and began to stroke the cat. All the while, the old man's roving glance kept moving about the room. Then, with a crafty smile upon his face, Whitburn went to the desk.

From a drawer, he produced an automatic. Placing it on the desk, Whitburn drew a large watch from his pocket. He detached the timepiece from its chain. He opened the back and removed a tiny key that lay within.

Turning to the bookcase, the professor ran his hand along an ornamental molding at the top. His fingers stopped and pressed; then moved to the left. A portion of the molding went inward and slid beneath the next section. An opening showed; within it was a strip of metal, with a tiny keyhole.

WHILE Whitburn was going through this procedure, the door of the room was slowly opening. Some one was peering into the study. A watcher was observing the old man's actions.

Whitburn turned to the desk and picked up the key with his left hand; the automatic with his right. Intent, the old man did not know that a spy was watching everything he did.

Swinging to the bookcase, Whitburn unlocked the metal strip that had been hidden by the woodwork. The metal slid away. With his free left hand, the old man drew forth a small stack of papers. Chuckling, he brought his prize into the light. All the time, the man outside was watching.

Quex was looking toward the door. From his perch on the window sill, the cat noticed the moving barrier. Slowly, the animal had begun to arch its back. Suddenly, Quex emitted a fierce spit. Instantly, the door closed.

Professor Whitburn swung about. Holding the papers in his left hand, he leveled his automatic toward the door. His sharp eyes caught a tremble of the knob. Grimly, the professor waited. Silence followed; then a slight creak, from far beyond the door. It meant the departure of an intruder.

Across the study was a fireplace. The glow of a dying flame showed from burned logs. Stepping across the room, the old man stretched out his left hand and let the papers fall into the fireplace. The flames caught the dry sheets. Fire crackled as the papers burned.

Satisfied that he had destroyed his documents, Professor Whitburn went back to the bookcase. He locked the metal slide and closed the molding. He replaced the little key in the watch and put the timepiece in his pocket.

Footsteps from the corridor. This time, the professor caught the sound of approach. Quex arched his back. Whitburn chuckled in challenge. Then some one knocked at the door.

"Who is it?" rasped the professor.

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"Stephen, sir," came the response from beyond the door.

"Come in," ordered Whitburn.

THE door opened. A stocky, honest-faced man stepped into the room and stared puzzled as he saw the gun in Whitburn's hand. The professor lowered the weapon. He moved over by the window sill and began to soothe the tiger-cat.

"Where is Polmore?" inquired the professor, mildly.

"Looking for Bragg, sir," replied Stephen. "He called me from the lab a few minutes ago. He said you wanted to see me."

"I do. Have you a gun?"

"No, sir."

"Open the lower drawer of the desk. You will find three revolvers. For yourself, Bragg and Polmore. Have them ready."

"Very well, sir."

Stephen complied. Whitburn motioned for him to retain one gun after he had laid the three weapons on the desk. Stephen started to pocket a revolver. Whitburn shook his head.

"Have it ready, Stephen," he ordered, in a warning tone. "Danger threatens."

"Here?" questioned Stephen, anxiously. "On Death Island?"

"Yes," returned the professor, solemnly. "But we shall be prepared for it. Four of us, Stephen."

With this admonition, old Whitburn again turned toward the closed door.

Automatic clutched firmly in his clawlike fist, the aged inventor awaited the arrival of Polmore and Bragg.

With three henchmen at his bidding, Professor was ready to cope with the prowling enemies who had entered his abode.

## CHAPTER III. TO THE SHADOW

BLINK blink blink

A light was flashing from the cliff at the head of Death Island. The intermittent rays of a powerful electric torch were sending a coded message to the mainland.

Men were watching it from the darkness of the shore. Crouched near a small dock, they were picking out the import of the message. An evil laugh sounded in the thickened night.

"Did you read it, Nuland?" came a question.

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"Yes, chief," was the growled reply. "I got it."

"Act, then," came the order. "Put the telephone line out of commission. Temporarily as you did before. Then summon the men from the cottage. Where is the boat?"

"Fifty yards down the shore, chief. Behind the big rock."

"I shall meet you there. No hurry. We have ample time. Stealth is more important than haste."

"You're right, chief."

Nuland went away through the darkness. After the man's stumbling footsteps had receded, another laugh sounded by the shore. Its tone had changed. Eric Hildrow was sneering in his own fashion; not in the manner that he used in the character of Logan Collender.

The master plotter had arrived at the right time. Nuland, head of a crew stationed on the mainland, had been awaiting this signal from Death Island. Word had come. The crew was ready.

But Nuland, the lieutenant, was no longer in command. Hildrow, himself, was here to rule the game.

WHILE Eric Hildrow kept his evil watch on Death Island, Professor Whitburn and Stephen were still waiting in the study. Polmore had not yet returned; nor had Bragg put in an appearance.

Whitburn, grim, was gazing steadily toward the door. Stephen's frank face showed anxiety.

Even Quex shared the tenseness. The big cat was restless. The animal had risen on the window sill and was roaming tigerlike among the papers. When the cat paused and arched its back, both Whitburn and Stephen noted the fact.

Then came hurried footsteps in the corridor. Some one rapped at the door. Whitburn ordered the arrival to enter.

It was Polmore. The secretary was out of breath. He stared as he saw the guns that Whitburn and Stephen were holding. Whitburn put a querulous question.

"Well?" demanded the professor. "Where is Bragg?"

"Gone, sir," returned Polmore. "I looked upstairs for him, after I called Bragg. He was not there. I went down to the dock. No sign of Bragg. He is gone."

"How do you know that?"

"The little motor boat was missing, sir."

Professor Whitburn bristled. He stared at Stephen, who solemnly shook his head. Then he turned to Polmore. The secretary was ready with his answer before Whitburn put the question that was in his mind.

"Bragg said nothing about leaving, sir," declared Polmore. "If he had asked for the night off, I would have told you."

"That is the rule," declared Whitburn. "No one has the right to leave this island without my permission."

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"I always ask Mr. Polmore," put in Stephen, "and wait until he tells me that I have your permission, professor. Bragg always did the same –"

"Not to–night," interposed Polmore.

"That is evident," stated Whitburn, testily. "Well, there is one way to call Bragg to task. He keeps his car at the little garage in Marrinack. I shall call there and find out when he left. Pick up a revolver, Polmore."

While the secretary was obeying the order, Professor Whitburn thrust his automatic in a pocket of his smoking jacket. Stepping to the desk, the old man picked up the tilted telephone. He clicked the hook. The line was dead.

"Out of order," fumed the professor.

"Maybe some one has tampered with the line," suggested Stephen, in an anxious tone.

"It has been out of order before," declared Polmore. "Always temporarily. Perhaps, professor, it is merely an interrupted service."

"Probably," agreed Whitburn, in a dry tone. "Nevertheless, the coincidence is unfortunate. Gentlemen"– he paused to hang up the receiver and draw his automatic from his pocket "we are confronted by a most dangerous situation!

"Inasmuch as I can trust you both, I shall explain the menace that confronts us. I thought that I could trust Bragg also. His disobedience of rules, however, may mean that he is a traitor. If so, the danger is increased.

"Some time ago"– Whitburn stared steadily toward the door as he spoke "I discussed plans for a new submarine with Commander Joseph Dadren, a retired officer of the United States Navy. The commander was working on a tremendous invention: a submarine that would travel by almost automatic propulsion.

"As you know, I was engaged a few years ago in the development of torpedoes that moved by chemical action. (Note: See Vol. I, No. 4, "The Red Menace.") Commander Dadren has been seeking to accomplish the same result on a larger scale. He studied the principles that I had used with my torpedoes. He began where I had left off."

THE professor paused to shake his shaggy head. The gesture was one that indicated admiration for Commander Dadren's remarkable genius.

"The submarine," declared the old inventor, "has proven a success, despite my predictions to the contrary. Commander Dadren evolved new principles that aided him in his constructive effort. Nevertheless, he felt that he owed much to me; for my inventions had given him the inspiration.

"Not only that; he seemed to desire my opinion on the results he achieved. Therefore, he sent me a complete set of his plans. I am the only man except the commander himself who has seen those diagrams.

"I have kept the plans here in my study. I took pains to conceal them, knowing their importance. Should they fall into the hands of schemers, those plans could be sold to some government other than the United States.

"To–night, I discovered that an intruder had been searching through this room. Fortunately, the plans were untouched. At the same time, the fact that a search was made is proof that enemies are close at hand. When stealth fails, attack follows. That is something that I have learned through experience.

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"We may, this very night, find invaders on this island. That is why I expect you to aid me in repelling any foe. I can sense the imminence of an attack. Therefore, I intend to make an inspection of this house before it comes.

"Remain here, both of you, until I return. Stay on guard, with revolvers ready. I shall be gone but a short while. I wish to take advantage of the time that still remains to us."

With this admonition, the professor clutched his automatic and stalked from the room, closing the door behind him.

Stephen stood stolid. Polmore was nervous. The cat on the window sill, however, was no longer perturbed. It curled among the papers and sleepily closed its eyes.

OUTSIDE the study, Professor Whitburn walked hastily through the corridor until he reached a large central room where a clock was ticking loudly on a mantelpiece. The professor turned and went to the side door that opened to the path toward the dock. He made sure that the door was latched.

Moving to a flight of stairs, the professor ascended. He reached the second floor, then approached a locked door. Drawing a key from his pocket, the professor opened the barrier and went up a curving flight of stairs. He reached the old secluded tower.

This portion of the house formed a single room. It was almost pitch-dark; only a vague touch of clouded moonlight came from a skylight at the top.

In the corners of the room were large machines, covered with white cloths. These were devices for the projection of aerial torpedoes. The professor had experimented with them a few years before. Partly dismantled, the machines were no longer used.

There was a table in the center of the room. Groping through the darkness, the professor turned on a tiny light. He used this to find a pair of earphones and a mouthpiece. He made attachments that put a short-wave radio into operation.

Clicks sounded by the little light. A few minutes passed. Then came a response.

The professor began to dispatch in a code of his own. He paused to hear the answer. Then he resumed his sending. Although telephonic communication had been severed between Death Island and the mainland, Professor Whitburn had made contact with some one in the outside world.

The coded conversation continued. Sending and reception were terse. The professor signed off abruptly. He replaced the earphones and turned out the light. His chuckle sounded in the darkness. With surprising agility, the old man scrambled up on the table.

Stretching his bent form, Professor Whitburn managed to reach the skylight. He loosened a clamp and pressed upward. Rusty hinges groaned; then came a puff of night air through the opening. The professor tightened the clamp; bent downward and reached the floor. Softly, he went down the tower stairs and closed the door behind him.

The professor had noted the time of the clock in the lower room. He glanced at his watch in the dim light of the second-story hall. His trip to the tower had taken less than fifteen minutes. Again, the professor chuckled.

## THE PLOT MASTER

Prowlers the disturbed study the dead telephone line: these troubled him no longer. By means of the short-wave set, he had countered the thrust of impending danger. Time was the only factor that remained to be met.

Professor Whitburn had established radio communication with a man named Burbank, a person whom he had never seen. Yet he had followed Burbank's instructions to the letter. The opened skylight; the unlocked door to the tower both suited Burbank's request.

New confidence gripped Professor Whitburn. Through the old man's mind crept memories of the past when other danger had confronted him. He had been saved in that past by the intervention of a powerful friend known as The Shadow. It was on The Shadow that the professor depended in this present crisis.

For Burbank was the contact agent of The Shadow. By communicating with that distant listener; by following Burbank's prompt instructions, Professor Whitburn had paved the way for new aid.

Once again, the white-haired inventor was staking all upon The Shadow's prowess.

### CHAPTER IV. THE TRAITOR

WHEN Professor Whitburn arrived back in his study, he found two anxious men awaiting him. Stephen had become uneasy. Polmore's nervousness had increased. Both men seemed relieved by their employer's return.

Quex, coiled in a corner of the window sill, stretched lazily when he saw his master. The cat was used to the professor's sudden ways of leaving and returning. The old man smiled and stroked the cat. Quex began to purr.

"Is everything all right, sir?" questioned Polmore. "I was careful to latch the door after I came back from the dock —"

"Everything is well," interposed the professor.

"No sign of Bragg?" questioned Stephen.

"None," returned Whitburn, abruptly.

Minutes passed. All of Whitburn's previous worryment had gone. Stephen began to share his master's ease of mind. Polmore, however, showed new signs of nervousness. Whitburn noticed it and studied the secretary with a quizzical look.

"I'm thinking about Bragg, sir," declared Polmore. "I wonder if he really went to the mainland."

"You told us the boat was gone," reminded Whitburn.

"Yes," assured Polmore, "but Bragg may have had some other idea than an over-night visit with friends in New Haven."

"What makes you think he had that idea?"

"That's where he usually goes, sir. To New Haven."

## THE PLOT MASTER

"Ah, yes. I had forgotten it. Go on, Polmore. Tell me what else Bragg may have had in mind."

"Well"— Polmore was speculating "you said that someone had been here in the study."

"I did. Do you think it could have been Bragg?"

"Yes, sir. At first I thought he might have left after he was in here. But then I began to figure that he might still be on the island."

Professor Whitburn nodded; but his eyes were still questioning.

"You spoke of Bragg as a traitor," declared Polmore. "A traitor would resort to any trickery. Bragg could have taken that boat around the island and landed somewhere on the other side. There are several shallow places that would be suitable."

"I don't think Bragg would do that," objected Stephen. "Really, professor, he is —"

"Wait," interposed Whitburn, quietly. "Let us hear what Polmore has to suggest. Go on, Polmore."

"I think we ought to search the island," declared the secretary. "It wouldn't be difficult. All we'd have to do would be to go around the shore, looking for the boat."

"A good suggestion," nodded Whitburn. "Which of us should form the expedition?"

"Stephen and myself," replied Polmore, promptly. "You would be safe here, sir, with the door locked. We could make the search in less than an hour."

"I shall consider it," decided the professor. "First, let us see if the telephone is still out order."

HE went to the telephone and tried it. There was no response. Yet the old man persisted, with his intermittent clickings of the hook. Five minutes ten still he repeated his trials. At last, after a quarter hour had elapsed, the professor gave up the task.

"This is serious," he declared. "The telephone seldom remained out of order for so long a time. Perhaps the cable has broken between here and the mainland. Unfortunately, there is no way by which we can communicate with the telephone company."

"If we had the boat," reminded Polmore, "one of us could go ashore. If Bragg is on the island, we might trap him. We would then have the boat, in addition."

"Well reasoned," declared Whitburn, in a commending tone. "Yes, Polmore, I believe that we shall institute the search as you suggest. I think, however, that it would be unwise for me remain here."

"Why so, sir?"

"If we should find Bragg, I would want to speak with him. Suppose you and I search, Polmore. Let us leave Stephen here."

"That would hardly be fair, sir. Stephen can not well refuse to remain. Yet it was my suggestion —"

"Very thoughtful, Polmore. Then you can stay."



## THE PLOT MASTER

"I would rather not, sir."

"You fear danger?"

"No, sir. But the responsibility you must consider that. How can I protect something that I have never seen? These plans of which you have spoken, they –"

"They are here in the study. That is all you need to know. It would be best for you to stay here, Polmore."

"But the surface of the island is rough. You could not stand the heavy effort, professor. Climbing over huge rocks –"

Whitburn waved his hand in interruption. He drew his large watch from his pocket, unhooked it from the chain and placed it on the table.

"Time has flown," he remarked. "It is quarter to ten fully half an hour since I returned from my inspection of the house. Stephen" he turned to the stolid man "do you have a watch with you?"

Stephen nodded.

"Then I shall leave mine here," decided Whitburn. "Polmore, we shall be gone until half past ten. That is, unless we encounter Bragg in the meantime. Do you still object to staying here on guard?"

"I guess not, sir." Polmore eyed the watch that the professor had placed on the desk. "Three quarters of an hour isn't very long. You can let Stephen do most of the heavy work, scrambling over the rocks."

"Another good suggestion," nodded Whitburn. "Come, Stephen, we must start."

USHERING Stephen from the study, Whitburn followed and closed the door behind him. The two men passed through the corridor.

Stephen reached the outer door, opened it and stepped to the path. It was then that he felt the professor clutch his arm.

"Wait!" ordered the old man, in a whisper. "Step back into the house! Say nothing!"

Stephen obeyed. As soon as they were inside, the professor closed the door with a slight slam. He held Stephen silent. Minutes passed, one by one. At the end of five, the old man delivered a soft, whispered chortle.

"The time is right," he decided. "Come, Stephen. Follow me. Make no noise. Have your revolver ready."

Stephen nodded as he caught the whisper. He was puzzled by the professor's actions; he became more perplexed when the old man led him back toward the study. Stephen thought that they were going to make a new search upstairs, in case Bragg should be lurking there.

At the study door, the professor again gripped Stephen's arm. Then, with a quick movement, Whitburn turned the knob, opened the door and sprang into the room. He held his automatic ready. Stephen was close behind him, revolver leveled.

## THE PLOT MASTER

THEY caught Polmore in the act. The secretary was beyond the desk. He had opened Whitburn's watch to get the key. He had pressed back the molding and had managed to unlock the metal slide.

At the moment of Whitburn's return, Polmore had one hand in the empty space behind the bookcase.

"Step away!" rasped Whitburn.

Polmore obeyed. Gunless, he had no other alternative. He had placed his revolver on the table, never suspecting that Whitburn and Stephen would return so soon. The old professor glared at his secretary.

"We know the traitor," he declared. "You managed only to deceive yourself, Polmore. Thanks to Quex, on the window sill, I knew that some one had been prowling just before Stephen arrived."

"It might have been Bragg. But you overplayed your hand. You wanted me to remain here. Why? Because I had the watch. I suppose you have communicated that fact to my enemies. You saw the secret of my hiding place.

"I tricked you, Polmore. As soon as I left my watch on the desk, you changed your tune. You were willing then anxious to stay here. You are the traitor you, the man I trusted!"

Polmore quailed beneath the professor's severe gaze. He tried to talk, but only wordless gasps came from his trembling lips. It was plain that Polmore was an amateur accomplice. The professor took advantage of the fact.

"You have been long in my employ," he declared. "Therefore, your treachery began at a recent date. Some one bribed you to betray me. Who was the man?"

"He he called himself Satterly," stammered Polmore. "Reginald Satterly. But but I'm not sure that was his name. He was a tall man – tall, with a red mustache red hair and he wore a monocle."

"Did he talk like an Englishman?"

"Yes but I think he was faking it. He was disguised I'm sure of it when I met him in New York. He well, he offered me a job at first. Then he paid me a thousand dollars. He wanted me to make sure whether or not you had the plans."

"Have you seen him since?"

"No, sir. Truly, I haven't. I met a man that works for him. A rough-looking chap named Nuland. In a cottage on the mainland. I I signaled Nuland to-night."

"When you pretended to be looking for Bragg?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where is Bragg?"

"He went to New Haven. He asked me to speak to you this afternoon. I told him later that I had, that you had said he could go. He won't be back until to-morrow morning."

"I see. You thought it might be easier with Bragg out of the way."

## THE PLOT MASTER

"Yes, sir."

PROFESSOR WHITBURN turned to Stephen. The faithful man was ready. He had listened while the professor had forced the full confession from Polmore's lips. Stephen advanced and pressed his revolver against Polmore's ribs. He backed the secretary into a corner.

"Hold him there, Stephen," ordered Whitburn. He glanced at his watch on the desk. "It is now five minutes past ten. We have not long to wait."

"For what, sir?"

Stephen put the question without taking his eyes from Polmore.

"For a solution to our problem," chuckled Professor Whitburn. "We shall turn Polmore over to a person who will question him further. Perhaps we can gain more facts pertaining to the true identity of this briber who called himself Reginald Satterly.

"As for you, Polmore, you can forget all about those plans that I received from Commander Dadren. So can the man who bribed you. The plans were of no use to me. When I suspected that their hiding place was known, I destroyed them."

As he spoke in a dry tone, the old professor was stroking the cat upon the window sill. As he paused, he felt Quex arch his back.

Alarmed, Whitburn turned toward the door. A sudden gasp came from the old man's lips. Stephen heard it. He turned; then sullenly dropped his gun.

A man was standing in the doorway. Sallow-faced, with black mustache and hair, he wore an evil leer. He was holding a revolver, covering those within the room. Behind him were three ruffians, also carrying leveled guns.

Eric Hildrow had arrived.

A TROUBLED look came over Professor Whitburn's thin countenance. Trapped, the old inventor knew that this enemy had heard his final words to Polmore. Moreover, Whitburn recognized that Hildrow though different from Polmore's description must be the master plotter.

Eyeing the professor, Hildrow sneeringly revealed the very fact.

"I am Reginald Satterly," scoffed the disguised man. "Also Logan Collender, whom you now see. You are right: I am disguised. Disguised when I am Satterly; disguised when I am Collender. Moreover, those identities are but a few of the many that I can assume.

"My real name; my true personality those would not concern you. I prefer to keep them to myself. As Satterly, I bribed Polmore. As Collender, I command these men who are with me. They have watched this island from the mainland."

A pause. Twisting, the lips beneath the black mustache formed a sour, cunning smile. Then Hildrow spoke in an insidious tone.

## THE PLOT MASTER

"Fortunately," he remarked, "Polmore left his key outside the door, with a note beside it. He informed me that he would do so when he flashed his signal to the mainland. We expected to find you alone, Professor Whitburn.

"You are right in assuming that I came to obtain those duplicate plans. But you did not divine the purpose for which I wanted them. I intended to destroy those plans. You have saved me the trouble.

"All that remains is the elimination of yourself. For good measure, I shall dispose of this man Stephen also. You will not live, professor, to tell of this invasion, nor will Stephen be alive to state how you died."

With this pronouncement, Eric Hildrow turned to growl an order. Nuland advanced, followed by the others of the evil crew. Professor Whitburn and Stephen stood helplessly awaiting the doom that was to be theirs.

Yet the old inventor was unflinching. Despite the closeness of death, he still had hope of rescue. He had sent his message to The Shadow.

## CHAPTER V. THE CLOSED TRAP

WHEN Eric Hildrow had led the way into the house on Death Island, he had adopted one precaution. He had left a man on guard in the boat which the raiders had used to reach the isle. This fellow was waiting close beside the little dock that lay on the shore below the house.

The guard did not know what was taking place within. A dozen minutes had passed since Hildrow and the crew had left. At first, the watcher had speculated on how soon the raiders would return. He had been looking into the darkness that shrouded the big house.

Then his eyes had turned. He had heard a distant sound, high above the mainland. It was the rhythmic purr of an airplane motor. Staring at an angle toward the sky, the lone guard tried to make out the night flyer's lights.

He saw no blinks in the darkness. That surprised him, for he had located the direction from which the plane was coming. While he still stared, the watcher heard the sound of the motor fade. Complete silence followed.

The man at the dock laughed gruffly. There was no landing place on Death Island; nor was there a field on the mainland anywhere near Lake Marrinack. He saw grief for any aviator who would attempt to bring a ship to earth hereabouts.

When the noise of the motor did not resume, Hildrow's henchman decided that the plane must have been further away than he supposed. Flying low, it could have passed beyond the wooded stretches of the mainland.

The man's verdict was completely wrong. The sound that he had heard was closer and higher than he had supposed. In fact, the throb of the motor had ended at a spot one mile above the skull-like cliff at the head of Death Island.

SHROUDED in absolute darkness, an autogyro was settling silently upon the island. With its windmill blades retarding its vertical drop, the ship was responding to the guidance of a master pilot.

Keen eyes were staring downward through the night. The Shadow, in response to the call received through Burbank, was coming to the aid of Professor Arthur Whitburn. Winging northward from a field near New York City, The Shadow had reached his chosen goal.

## THE PLOT MASTER

A clump of blackness in a shiny sheet of black. Such was Death Island, in the center of Lake Marrinack. Nevertheless, The Shadow's keen eyes had discerned the blotchy outline of his objective. With Death Island found, he had picked another mark.

That was the whitened roof of Professor Whitburn's house. Tall trees held it in darkness during the beginning of The Shadow's descent. But as he boldly dropped his flying windmill toward the center of the island, The Shadow caught the faint outline of the landing spot he wanted.

A soft laugh sounded by the controls of the autogyro. The tower at the back of the roof was plain, now that the view was closer. Piloting his ship with uncanny skill, The Shadow picked the space in front of the projecting tower. Like a winged creature from the outer spaces, the autogyro settled amid the trees and came to a perfect landing on the roof of the house.

The wheels rolled forward for a single turn. The ship wavered slightly, then remained still. Nosed almost against the house tower, the autogyro was resting in an area but little larger than its own dimensions.

Motion in the darkness. The Shadow was alighting from the ship. Invisible amid the enshrouding night, he moved forward to the square tower. In agile fashion, this mysterious visitor swung up toward the skylight that Professor Whitburn had left opened in anticipation of his arrival.

TIME had elapsed since Eric Hildrow and his ruffians had entered the house. Down in the hallway beside the outer door, Nuland and two others were holding Professor Whitburn and Stephen against the wall. Hildrow had left the prisoners with Nuland while he had made a trip with Polmore.

The two were returning. They arrived from a doorway that led to the cellar. Hildrow was smiling in his insidious fashion. He stopped to face Professor Whitburn and spoke in his sarcastic tones.

"Polmore has shown me your submarine chamber," remarked Hildrow. "An interesting room, professor. I understand that you once conducted experiments with torpedoes from that spot. The machines there interested me, even though they are partly dismantled. I also noticed the periscope that you did not remove.

"But most of all" Hildrow was leering villainously "I observed that the chamber is practically air-tight. Once you and Stephen are locked within that room, your doom will be assured. So, professor, I shall put your submarine chamber to a new use. It will become your tomb."

Turning to Polmore, Hildrow put a question. Polmore nodded and brought an envelope from his pocket. Hildrow received the envelope and looked at Whitburn.

"A note," remarked Hildrow. "from Polmore to Bragg. When Bragg returns to-morrow, he will report in your study, as usual. This message will tell him that you have left the island. Bragg will come to New York, to find you at the place designated in the note.

"Do you admire my cleverness, professor? You should. By permitting Bragg to return and leave unmolested, I shall create the impression that all is well on Death Island. I do not care to remain hereabouts with my companions. We shall leave immediately after placing you and your man in the submarine room.

"Ah, yes!" Hildrow leered as he caught a glimmer in the professor's eyes. "You are thinking of something that you hoped I had forgotten. You had an idea that I had overlooked your cat. Bragg might suspect something if he found the animal here alone. Get the cat, Nuland; take it to the submarine room along with the men."

## THE PLOT MASTER

WHILE Nuland headed toward the study, Hildrow motioned to the other men. They marched Whitburn and Stephen toward the cellar stairs, where Polmore pointed the way.

As the armed men descended with the prisoners, Nuland appeared with Quex. The tiger-cat was clawing at its captor.

"They have gone down, Nuland," remarked Hildrow. "Put the cat in the room with them and wait for Polmore. He will give you further instructions. Do exactly as he orders."

Nuland nodded while he was snatching the cat's claws from his collar. Then he followed the path that the others had taken. Hildrow spoke to Polmore.

"I shall place this envelope in the study," growled the plotter. "In the meantime, go down to that submarine room. Give Nuland the signal to kill Whitburn and Stephen. Shoot them down, and allow a couple of bullets for the cat."

"They can't escape from that room," returned Polmore. "Just as you said, chief, they'll suffocate."

"I know they haven't a chance. That does not matter. No one can hear the shots. Kill them; then lock the door. That gang of Nuland's can stand some target practice. I want killers working for me."

"Watch the job, Polmore. It will do you good. You turned yellow to-night; but I can forget that fact. I shall have other work for you. I want you to be steeled. Proceed with the order."

With that, Hildrow turned and strolled toward the study. Polmore watched his chief pass along the corridor. White-faced, the traitor stood beside the door. Unused to murder, he was hesitant about giving the grim command to Nuland.

Polmore was yellow. But in his yellowness, he gave thought to his own welfare. As he hesitated, he realized that his position with the chief was none too secure. Hildrow had deliberately ordered the secretary to start the massacre because he wanted to test Polmore's mettle.

Realizing this, Polmore forced a fierce grin to his lips. Deliberately, the man adopted the attitude of a fiend. Self-encouraged, this tool began to share the evil nature that characterized Eric Hildrow. Polmore turned toward the cellar steps.

So intent was Polmore that he gave no thought to his surroundings. Mumbling furious words, he was staring straight ahead. He did not glance toward the stairway that led to the second floor. Hence he did not see the eyes that were burning from the dim steps.

The Shadow had arrived just after Hildrow's departure. He had watched the flickering expression that had shown on Polmore's face. Outside of that observation, The Shadow had, as yet, learned nothing. But his keen study of Polmore was sufficient to tell him that malice was afoot.

The menace had fallen upon the abode of Professor Arthur Whitburn. The old inventor was in danger. Polmore was on his way to complete some evil chain of action. Of that, The Shadow was certain.

As Polmore's figure started down the cellar steps, The Shadow advanced from darkness. The dim light showed him as a fantastic figure. A being cloaked in black, with slouch hat pulled low upon his forehead. A spectral personage, whose glowing eyes showed vengeance, The Shadow was moving to thwart murder.

## THE PLOT MASTER

Whipping from the folds of the cloak, The Shadow's hands produced a pair of mammoth automatics. With these weapons in readiness, the black-garbed avenger stalked forth on Polmore's trail. Descending a flight of curving stone steps, The Shadow closed the gap between himself and Professor Whitburn's treacherous secretary.

THE SHADOW paused when he arrived at the final turning point. A massive metal door stood open. Beyond it was the submarine chamber. Short steps led down into the pitlike room. A single ceiling light showed the grim scene.

Like victims in a medieval prison, Professor Whitburn and Stephen stood facing the firing squad. Two men were covering them, while Nuland stood ready with another gun.

Polmore had also drawn a revolver. On the lowest step, he was ready to issue Hildrow's manifesto.

Slowly, The Shadow's automatics came to aim. The cloaked rescuer was ready. The Shadow knew that Polmore's command to kill would be the proper signal for his own attack. Stopped on the point of murder, men of crime would be most vulnerable.

"Give them the works!" said Polmore, suddenly. His voice sounded strained. "Kill them, Nuland! The chief said to kill them! Both of them and the cat!"

The added statement came blurted from Polmore's lips. Nuland, a professional killer, grinned as he heard it. About to repeat the order to his men the pair were awaiting his word Nuland turned to look at Polmore's whitened face.

There was contempt on Nuland's features as the man eyed the pale secretary. Then, on the instant, the expression changed. Purely by accident, Nuland had seen beyond Polmore. He had caught the outline of the blackened figure that stood in the doorway to the room.

"The Shadow!" Nuland shouted the name as he spied the burning eyes above. "The Shadow! Get him!"

With the order, Nuland aimed past Polmore. With gun on the move, the killer pressed the trigger for a first wild shot. That bullet was the last that he was to deliver. Hard on the bark of the revolver came the burst of an automatic.

As Nuland's shot went wide, The Shadow's zimming bullet found its mark. Nuland staggered. While echoes still resounded, his revolver went clattering to the stone floor. Then the man himself keeled sidewise and sprawled dead.

NULAND'S minions had turned with the shots. They were caught helpless, their guns lowered and unready. There were two, however, who acted without an instant's delay. Professor Whitburn, amazingly agile, came springing upon one foe, while Stephen, close behind him, landed on the other.

At that instant, The Shadow whirled. He had not discounted Polmore. A coward at heart, the secretary was most dangerous in an emergency, for fear for himself could inspire him to frantic effort. At this moment, Polmore was profiting by Nuland's failure.

Polmore had sprung away at the sound of the shots. Back against the wall, he had swung about to aim steadily for the figure in the doorway. He had The Shadow covered. He was out to kill. But his very deliberation proved his undoing.

## THE PLOT MASTER

As fierce eyes blazed upon Polmore, an automatic swung with them. A black-gloved finger pressed the trigger with split-second precision. Polmore wavered. His face became sickly as his numbed trigger finger failed to respond. With a croaking gasp, the traitor sank dying to the floor.

As The Shadow swung away from Polmore, he saw Stephen stagger. A killer had dealt the man a glancing blow with his revolver. That same killer was turning to get The Shadow. An automatic ended his attempt. Flame flashed from the muzzle of The Shadow's left-hand gun. The would-be killer tumbled to the floor.

One enemy remained. That was the man upon whom Whitburn had sprung. The fellow had gone down beneath the professor's attack. Brief seconds, however, had changed the tide. The old inventor had clutched the throat of his foe; now the grasp was loosening.

The Shadow could not fire. Whitburn's body intervened. But the black-clad fighter came promptly to the rescue. Springing down the short steps, he crossed the room and wrested the professor away from the fighting crook.

Snarling, the man aimed up from the floor. The Shadow whirled upon him. The automatic dropped from The Shadow's left hand; the gloved fist caught the crook's right wrist and sent it upward. The killer's revolver spat flame. Its slug sizzled past the brim of The Shadow's hat.

A clawing hand caught The Shadow's shoulder, before the avenger could deliver a shot with the second automatic. The Shadow grappled with the crook. Locked together, the two staggered halfway across the room.

Then Professor Whitburn, crouched by the wall, saw The Shadow slump. A gasp of alarm came from the old inventor.

The cry was premature. As Whitburn stared, The Shadow came up. Above him was the clawing, struggling form of the crook. The Shadow had gained a jujutsu hold. With a mighty lunge, he sent his enemy whirling across the floor. A scream; a head-first crash upon the floor; then the thwarted killer rolled over and over until he struck the wall.

While Professor Whitburn gazed in profound amazement, Quex, the cat, sat blinking upon a dismantled machine beside an old torpedo tube. Back with its master, the feline had scrambled there the moment that Nuland had released it.

The Shadow, with his final lunge, had whirled close to the machine where the cat was resting. He had dropped his second gun. As he reached to recover it, The Shadow heard the cat emit a snarling hiss. Whitburn, staring, saw the animal arch its back. But The Shadow looked toward the door.

At the head of the steps stood Eric Hildrow, still wearing the disguise of Logan Collender. The arch-fiend had arrived to witness the annihilation of his minions. Gun in hand, Hildrow saw The Shadow.

Had he paused to aim, Hildrow would have met the same fate as his henchmen. But the plotter was too wary. As The Shadow's gun came up, Hildrow leaped for cover, back behind the huge metal door that stood open beside him.

The Shadow fired. His first shot whistled through the doorway and nicked the stone stairway. Then, as The Shadow moved sidewise to gain new aim, the metal door came swinging shut.



## THE PLOT MASTER

Aiming with a momentary glimpse of Hildrow's mustached face, The Shadow delivered a second shot. The bullet flattened against the steel of the closing door.

With that, the barrier clicked in place. As echoes died, the clatter of a closing lock came from the steel door. Then faint footsteps died from beyond the solid steel. Eric Hildrow was departing by the upper stairs.

The master villain had resorted to his original plan: Death by confinement, within the suffocating walls of the air-tight submarine chamber. Bodies of his obliterated henchmen remained with those who still lived. That did not matter to Eric Hildrow.

The master plotter was departing, with Professor Whitburn and Stephen entombed. Quex, the cat, was also there; the note to Bragg had been placed upon the desk in the professor's study.

But with the prisoners that he had originally doomed, Eric Hildrow had interred another living being. Deep in the cellar vault was The Shadow. The arch-enemy of crime was encased in a trap of death!

## CHAPTER VI. THE SHADOW WAITS

A LAUGH resounded within walls of stone. A tone of whispered mockery; a rising note that reached a shivering crescendo, the laugh awoke strange echoes that answered in ghoulish discord. Such was the laugh of The Shadow.

Professor Whitburn stared bewildered. The closing of the metal door had placed him in the grip of dismay. He had seen an end to everything, a tragic finish to the climax of The Shadow's rescue.

Yet The Shadow laughed. Mocking the man who had trapped him, this master fighter was as challenging as before. Professor Whitburn could not understand. He did not know that The Shadow relished such situations as this. Rarely was The Shadow trapped. When he encountered a seemingly hopeless snare, he found the plight intriguing.

Silence followed the dying echoes. Gleaming eyes turned upon Professor Whitburn. Then came the whispered tone of The Shadow's voice. It was a keen command.

"Speak!" ordered The Shadow. "Tell what occurred before my arrival."

The professor nodded. He knew The Shadow for a friend. Despite the fact, old Whitburn was awed by the presence of this being in black. His tones, usually harsh, were almost feeble as he began the story. But as he continued, Professor Whitburn gradually gained his ease.

The inventor ended with a statement regarding the note that had been left for Bragg on the study desk. His tone was almost pathetic as he completed his own summary.

"Bragg will leave," he declared. "Of course, his arrival could not aid us, for the air in this chamber will be exhausted before morning. But if Bragg could only learn that we were dead, he might at least warn Commander Dadren regarding this terrible enemy. Logan Collender Reginald Satterly whatever the man's true name, I class him as a fiend who will stop at nothing."

Stephen had come to his senses while the professor was speaking. The man was staring steadily at the ominous figure of The Shadow. He trembled when he heard the sinister tone of the voice that replied to Professor Whitburn.

## THE PLOT MASTER

"Have no fear for Dadren," declared The Shadow, in a tone that bore a tinge of mockery. "I made arrangements for his welfare, immediately after the call from you. He will be warned of danger."

WITH that, The Shadow turned and began to inspect the submarine chamber. He stopped by the machine on which Quex was curled. The cat blinked and turned away from The Shadow's burning eyes. A soft laugh whispered from unseen lips.

The Shadow remembered this submarine room. Once he had rescued his agent, Harry Vincent, from imprisonment within these very walls. Deep beneath the house, this room was below the level of the lake. It fronted on a subterranean channel under the island.

Professor Whitburn had used it for torpedo tests. At the time of Harry Vincent's imprisonment, the torpedo tubes had been in use. A girl Arlette Deland had been a prisoner with Harry; and the agent, at The Shadow's command, had sped the girl to safety within a torpedo.

But none of these contrivances were usable at present. Machinery dismantled, torpedoes gone, the room was but a relic of Whitburn's former experiments. Just above the machine on which Quex rested was a periscope that formed a solid shaft up through the top of the room. This led above ground, and the professor had used it to watch the progress of his torpedoes.

At the time of Harry's imprisonment, there had been water sluices in the submarine chamber. These had been installed in order to flood the room in case spies tried to enter. No longer needed, the sluices had been blocked.

But the locked door still remained. The Shadow had opened it once from the outside. The inner wall, however, offered a most difficult task one that would take hours, at least. By morning before the barrier could be cut life could no longer exist in this cramped space. Moreover, Bragg, returning and departing, would be on the way to Eric Hildrow's toils.

Yet The Shadow approached the door. He studied its smooth, riveted surface. He saw that with few tools available, this means of exit afforded slow progress. With him, The Shadow had another means of attacking the door. Two powders, mixed, would form a high explosive that might blast the barrier from its hinges.

Here, again, was danger. The steel door was unusually formidable. Should a first blast fail, as was highly probable, the fumes would exhaust the remaining air supply. That would hasten death instead of prolonging life.

WHILE The Shadow was examining the door, Quex rose from his perch. In placid fashion, the big cat dropped from the machine and stalked over to the stone steps. Ascending, Quex began to claw at the fringe of The Shadow's cloak.

Lowering his gaze, The Shadow looked at the cat. Quex moved to the door and showed the claws of one paw as he scratched inquiringly at the steel barrier. The Shadow laughed softly; then turned toward Professor Whitburn.

"Quex always does that," explained the white-haired inventor. "If he is locked out at night, he claws at the front door until I open it."

The cat began to mew.

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"That follows," added the professor. "Then, if no one answers, he sits by the door. He waits until he is admitted. Twice, when I was away all night, I returned to find him waiting for me."

The Shadow made no response. Yet his steady gaze impelled the professor to a further statement.

"If that fiend had left Quex in the study," declared Whitburn, "Bragg would have known that something was wrong. When he returns to-morrow, you understand."

"And if the cat had been taken from the house," whispered The Shadow, "then —"

"Quex would come back to the front door," completed Whitburn, "to wait there for the first person who might arrive. If he could only be where Bragg could find him —"

Whitburn shook his head as he speculated. He watched The Shadow come away from the door. He saw the cloaked rescuer stop at the periscope above the machine.

The periscope consisted of a lower reflector, connected with another mirror above the ground. Between the two were lenses. Only the lower reflector was visible; the rest of the apparatus was encased in the tube that led up through the low ceiling of the room.

The Shadow studied the periscope. Whitburn thought that he was trying to sight through it. The professor could see no purpose in such action, for nothing could be gained by staring out into the blackness above ground.

As Whitburn watched, however, he suddenly realized The Shadow's purpose. The periscope was patterned after those used in undersea boats; its construction, though, was of the most simple sort, for it had no water to encounter. The encasing tube merely protected the apparatus; and it was firmly fixed in position.

That tube had given The Shadow a solution to the problem of failing air. With gloved hands, he began to detach the lower reflector. That done, he worked to remove the lenses and other connections from within the tube itself.

PROFESSOR WHITBURN chortled. The Shadow was forming an air shaft to the clear atmosphere above. Emptied of its equipment, the periscope tube formed a tunnel six inches in diameter, leading straight upward. Only one problem remained. That was the upper reflector.

Sudden dismay gripped Whitburn as he saw The Shadow blink a flashlight up through the tube.

"The upper reflector is encased," exclaimed the professor. "It is larger than the tube. It is screwed in place. Even if you break its bottom lens, you can not obtain air. There is an outer glass, off at an angle —"

He shook his head as he paused. The Shadow was unscrewing a long bar from the machine beside the old torpedo tube. With it, he could attack the lower lens of the upper reflector; but as Whitburn had said, it would be impossible to curve this bar and reach the outer glass.

The Shadow, however, had another plan. From beneath his cloak, he drew forth an odd device. It was a rubber suction cup one of those which The Shadow used to scale vertical walls. The rubber disk was just a trifle smaller than the periscope tube.

Laughing softly, The Shadow used a clamp to fit the disk to the end of the steel bar.

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He thrust the disked end of the bar straight up the periscope tube. Whitburn could hear the squidge of the rubber sucker as it pressed against the lower lens at the top of the tube. Then he began to revolve the bar. The professor gaped.

The suction cup had gained a grip. By twisting the bar, The Shadow was unscrewing the mushroom cap that covered the upper end of the periscope tube. After a few moments, The Shadow thrust the bar upward. A puff of air came down the shaft.

Jerking at the bar, The Shadow managed to detach the suction cup. Professor Whitburn could hear the loosened cap rattle away from the top of the tube. The submarine chamber was no longer a death trap. The prisoners could remain here indefinitely, with no danger of suffocation.

Yet this passage to the outer air afforded no means of escape. Professor Whitburn wondered what would follow. There would be no chance of communication with Bragg when he came on the morrow. That meant prolonged entombment, with eventual starvation.

THE SHADOW had produced a sheet of paper. On it, he was printing penciled words. A message but to whom? Whitburn as puzzled; so was Stephen. Then they watched the Shadow wad the message into a small packet which he tied with a short piece of stout cord.

A soft laugh. The Shadow turned and advanced to the steel door. Even then, the watchers did not divine his purpose until they saw him stoop beside the cat that was waiting on the steps. Quex offered no protest as The Shadow attached the message to the top of a thin leather collar that the cat was wearing.

Lifting the docile feline, The Shadow carried Quex to the periscope tube. He lifted the cat and pushed it into the six-inch shaft. Whitburn and Stephen could hear Quex clawing at the smooth inner surface of the tube.

Holding the cat there with one hand, The Shadow reached to the machine and obtained the lever, which still had the suction cup in place. He raised the disked end of the rod and used it to support the cat within the periscope tube. With both hands, he thrust the rod slowly upward.

Quex was riding up on an improvised elevator. The Shadow could hear the cat clawing and shifting about. Then the top of the rod reached the ground level. The rod shook slightly as Quex plopped off the suction disk and landed on solid earth. The Shadow withdrew and removed the rubber cup.

"Quex will go to the front door!" exclaimed Whitburn. "Bragg will find him when he returns! He will read the message! Does it tell him that we are imprisoned here?"

"Yes," responded The Shadow, in a laughing whisper. "Bragg will release us. We can wait until the morning. Commander Dadren is warned. We have no need for immediate escape.

"Let us wait for Bragg. It is important that I see him. For I intend to take his place to-morrow. I shall go to the address mentioned in the note that our enemy left upon your desk.

"We have air. An attempt to force the steel door is unnecessary. Particularly because I must see Bragg when he returns. In the meantime, professor, I advise sleep for you and Stephen."

WHITBURN nodded. He looked about the room and shrugged his stooped shoulders as he viewed the bodies of the four enemies who had fallen in their fight with The Shadow. Picking an obscure corner, the old inventor sat down and rested his back against the wall.

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Stephen chose another clear place. Stolidly, he watched Whitburn and saw the professor begin to doze. That was sufficient. Stephen closed his eyes; five minutes later, he was also asleep through sheer weariness.

The Shadow still stood beside the machine at the bottom of the periscope tube. Immobile, he had become a living statue. Untired, he had no need of sleep. His keen eyes glistened as they surveyed the dozing men. A soft laugh rippled from his hidden lips.

After that came silence. Ticking minutes left the scene unchanged. Sprawled bodies on the floor of this odd chamber; two living men lay asleep in their corners.

And in the center of the stage, The Shadow. Victor of the fray, he had devised a way to counteract the death trap. He had found a method of informing Bragg that his master was locked in the submarine room.

Weird master of the scene, The Shadow was planning for the coming day. In the meantime, spectral and immobile, he was biding the passing hours until dawn.

## CHAPTER VII. AT CEDAR COVE

WHILE exciting events had been happening at Death Island, all had remained quiet at Cedar Cove, the spot where Commander Joseph Dadren had established his headquarters for submarine experiments.

Located on the Carolina coast, Cedar Cove was an ideal place for tests of the sort that the commander was making. Five miles from the nearest town, isolated amid a forest of pine trees, the cove was obscure and unfrequented.

Moreover, it was suited to secrecy. A single channel connected the cove with deep water. On the innermost shore of the cove was a chasm between two low ledges of rock. This formed a natural inlet wherein Commander Dadren housed his undersea craft.

Less than thirty feet in width, the cleft between the cliffs had been boarded over and topped with a boat house. The entrance to the inlet was protected by heavy, doorlike screens which could be raised and lowered.

Dadren's experimental craft was a small one. It remained undercover except when the commander employed it for tests. Four men were constantly on duty in the boat house. These were trusted aids, chosen from petty officers who had seen service in the United States Navy.

Near the boat house was the building that served as headquarters. This was a square-shaped structure, one story in height. It formed a type of blockhouse, with an inner court. Windows on the outside were protected by heavy bars; those on the court had crisscrossed screens of stout wire.

The main hall of the headquarters house was a sort of clubroom where Dadren's workers congregated. Off the hall were doors that led to smaller rooms. Some of these were quarters for the men. Others were testing rooms that opened from side corridors.

At the rear was a large room that served as Dadren's laboratory. It had a steel door connecting with an inner office. The little room was windowless.

A score of men constituted Dadren's crew. On this night some had retired; others were on duty at the boat house. The rest, half a dozen in all, were gathered about the big fireplace in the front section of the main hall.

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Two solemn-faced men were acting as patrol. Together, they made the rounds of the square house, while the others sat and chatted at the fireplace. A radio, turned down, was furnishing a melodious musical program.

AMONG the men seated in the main hall was a quiet, watchful individual, less talkative than his companions. This chap was Commander Dadren's secretary. He had been recommended to the confidential post through Professor Arthur Whitburn. There was a definite reason for the professor's recommendation. The secretary's name was Harry Vincent. He was an agent of The Shadow.

Harry was speculating as he sat before the fire. He was thinking of the events that had brought him here. Once it seemed very long ago Harry had aided The Shadow in giving protection to Professor Whitburn. Following that episode, The Shadow had kept in occasional contact with the old professor, through Harry.

One month ago, Harry had paid a visit to Death Island. There, he had learned of Commander Dadren's experiment. Harry had reported to The Shadow. New contact had followed with Whitburn. Through the old professor, Harry had gone to Dadren's headquarters to take the job of confidential secretary.

Passing weeks had given Harry no inkling of impending trouble. Commander Dadren's methods seemed airtight. None of his subordinates knew the full extent of his inventions. Moreover, they were paired when they worked, so that no man could attempt any surreptitious action without being observed by a companion.

The only weak point was the fact that Dadren had finished the extensive plans of his completed submarine. Those plans were somewhere in his inner office; and every man at Cedar Cove knew it. But outsiders had no chance of getting by the guards; and the system of pairing workers made it impossible for a traitor if one were in camp – to conduct a secret search.

To-morrow, the commander intended to fly to Washington, accompanied by Hasker, the mechanic who had charge of Dadren's amphibian plane. Harry had reported that fact to The Shadow. He had added that nothing of a suspicious nature surrounded the proposed flight.

So to-night the last night at Cedar Cove Harry Vincent felt sure that any danger period had been passed.

MIDNIGHT had arrived. Harry had been waiting for the hour. If The Shadow had new orders, they were due. Harry rose from his chair; while others chatted he strolled to the radio and turned the knob. He switched from the music of a Richmond station just in time for the announcement of a program from WNX, New York.

The radio announcer was beginning a discourse on the merits of heavy winter overcoats manufactured by a New York concern. His voice came over the air; and it carried an emphasis on certain words:

"To prevent winter colds, follow the plain advice that will save many a trip to the doctor. Read our free booklet 'When North Winds Blow.' Join with those who are wise. Make plans to be healthy this winter –"

The announcer droned on. Harry heard no further words that were stressed. He knew that the message had been given. Buried in the announcement was the emphasized order from The Shadow:

"Prevent plane trip North with plans."

In the past, Harry had received many such messages from The Shadow. Somehow, his mysterious chief had arranged a method of putting hidden sentences into the regular station announcements. But on this occasion, Harry was startled by a difference.

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At the end of the announcement, the speaker made a passing statement before the music began. His words were:

"This program is an electrical transcription –"

A recorded program! The cleverness of the idea was impressive. This announcement must have been spoken a few weeks ago, implanted upon a studio record that had been laid aside until required. The Shadow had prepared it for an emergency.

Thus Harry realized that The Shadow might be far from New York. There had been no need for him to visit Station WNX and arrange for a planted announcement. With a record ready, it had simply been a case of telephoning instructions to use it.

Although he did not know the details, Harry had struck upon the exact truth. Before leaving New York to rescue Professor Whitburn, The Shadow had ordered Burbank to call the studio and state that Program R344 WC was to be used to-night. That had all been planned beforehand.

Thus The Shadow, imprisoned with Professor Whitburn, had assured the old inventor that all would be well at Cedar Cove. For unless The Shadow returned to New York and canceled his original instructions, the emergency order was sure to be received by Harry Vincent.

BACK in his chair near the fireplace, Harry was thinking quickly. He knew that a task lay before him. To try to warn Commander Dadren would be a false step. As confidential secretary, Harry might be able to give advice, provided that danger seemed present at Cedar Cove. But so far, there had been no indication of an existing menace.

Harry smiled. Again, he was benefiting by The Shadow's forethought. He had received instructions covering just such an emergency as this one. It was Harry's appointed duty to create the thought of danger by action of his own.

Of all those stationed at Cedar Cove, Harry was the only one not paired with a companion. He had arrived long after the others. His recommendation from Whitburn and his service as Dadren's secretary had separated him from the others. In conformity with Dadren's system, however, Harry was supposed to keep with the company except when performing actual duty.

Therein lay Harry's opportunity. After a few minutes of planning, The Shadow's agent arose and approached Wilkins, who rated the highest of those in the main hall. Harry remarked that he had work to do for Commander Dadren.

"I have to type some letters for the skipper," he told Wilkins. "I'll use the machine in my room. Let me know when the skipper comes in."

Wilkins nodded. Harry turned and entered a little room that opened from the hall. He turned on the light and closed the door behind him. This room served as both bedroom and office, so far as Harry's own work was concerned. A cot stood in one corner; opposite it was a table with a typewriter.

Reaching beneath the table, Harry brought out what appeared to be the case of a portable typewriter. He unlocked it and opened the top. Inside was a machine that bore a resemblance to a usual portable. With it was a coil of insulated wire, with a plug on the loose end.

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Harry connected the cord with a wall socket. He was about to press a lever when he remembered something. Seating himself at the table, he opened a drawer and brought out a few letters that he had already typed. He laid them beside the real typewriter; then inserted a blank sheet of paper and typed a letter halfway through.

That done, Harry stepped from the desk and pressed the lever on the portable machine. There was a slight whirr, then the false typewriter began to click. Its action was irregular; at the end of a series of clicks a little bell rang, and the carriage slid back to begin again.

Harry had received this device from The Shadow. It was serving an excellent purpose. Out in the big hall, the men could hear the pounding of the keys, the sliding of the carriage. They would swear, later, that they had heard Harry Vincent typing in his room.

WHILE the mechanism clicked, Harry stole toward the door and pressed the light switch. With the room in darkness, he went to the window and softly opened it.

The window was barred with a crisscross wire grating; but Harry had previously loosened the frame. He pushed the barrier outward, jamming it so that it hung as if hinged to one side of the window. Harry dropped into the inner court.

He had long since planned this emergency trip. It required stealth, for too much noise might attract the attention of men patrolling the halls about the block-shaped building. Crossing the court, Harry reached the window of the laboratory.

Here were bars like those on the windows of his own room. Instead of attacking the frame, Harry produced a pair of small but powerful wire clippers. Using both hands to gain more pressure, The Shadow's agent began to clip the crisscross wires, just within the frame.

The task needed endurance. Each wire seemed tougher than the one before. But Harry had confidence that he could accomplish the job with speed. He succeeded. Less than five minutes after the departure from his room, he had the bottom and lower sides cut loose.

Harry pried the wires upward. As he had anticipated, the window, itself, was unlocked. With a grating covering it, Commander Dadren seldom locked the sash. Harry opened the window and entered the laboratory.

He needed no flashlight for the work that lay ahead. About the lab were tables. The drawers contained papers formulas, typewritten instructions that were of little consequence. An intruder, however, might have found them worthy of inspection. Opening the various drawers, Harry removed the papers and scattered them about.

There was a file cabinet in the corner. Harry approached it in the dark and opened the topmost drawer. He removed several files, let their papers scatter; then took another sheaf and raised it to the top of the cabinet. In three minutes, Harry had given the appearance of a quarter hour search. He was ready for the finish.

On top of the cabinet was a rack of test tubes, several beakers and a hydrometer jar. The last named was a tall object, easily toppled. Thrusting a stack of papers along the top of the cabinet, Harry deliberately knocked over the hydrometer jar, which he could barely see in the semidarkness. The glass object toppled against the rack of test tubes.

With a final push, Harry sent the jar and the tubes clear of the filing cabinet. The wavering hydrometer jar took along a beaker; the entire lot went crashing to the stone floor of the laboratory.



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As the crash was sounding, Harry was diving for the window. He sent a chair skidding against a table; another jar toppled and rolled to the floor. Then Harry was through the window, heading back across the inner court.

AS he gained his own room, Harry pulled in the grating and lowered the sash. Amid the clatter of his fake typewriter, he could hear the sounds of scuffling feet from the outer hall.

At the table, Harry never bothered to turn off his machine. He simply yanked the cord from the floor plug, dropped it in the box and shut the lid. The interruption of the current stopped the ticks of the fake typewriter.

Next, the door. Harry reached it just in time. He pressed the light switch, turned the knob and opened the door. Wilkins was already on the threshold, coming to summon him to join the others. The rest of the men had headed for the lab.

"Come along, Vincent," ordered Wilkins, in an excited tone. "We're heading for the lab."

"What's up?" inquired Harry, as they started along the hall.

"Didn't you hear the glassware smash?" returned Wilkins.

"No," responded Harry. "I was typing; then I heard you fellows shouting out here."

"That's right," nodded Wilkins. "You wouldn't have heard the noise from the lab. I remember! I heard your typewriter clicking away. Before the noise came from the lab and after that, too."

Harry smiled to himself as they reached the door of the laboratory, where the two patrolling men had used a key to enter. His first task had been accomplished. He had started trouble here at Cedar Cove.

Yet, with it, he had established a perfect alibi. Wilkins had already put himself on record as a witness to the fact that Harry had been working when the crash sounded within the laboratory. The Shadow's plan had worked.

Confident that his own part in the game would never be known, Harry Vincent entered the laboratory along with Wilkins. There they joined the half dozen men who were already speculating on what had become of the mysterious intruder.

## CHAPTER VIII. THE CONFERENCE

IT did not take long for the warning of a marauder to spread about the headquarters at Cedar Cove. The alarm was passed to guards outside the buildings. Wilkins ordered a prompt search of the entire premises.

All the while, the men remained in pairs. Wilkins had a teammate, like the rest, a fellow named Holgate. The two remained on guard in the laboratory after the others had set out to look for the intruder. Harry remained with Wilkins and Holgate.

While these three were looking about the laboratory, Commander Joseph Dadren entered. He had been summoned from the boat house.

The arrival of the skipper brought a prompt report from Wilkins, who accounted for every one in the place. Holgate seconded all of the statements. Both men mentioned that Harry had been working on the typewriter.

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Pair by pair, searchers and guards returned. All made their reports. No trace had been found of any intruder. Dadren sent the men back to their posts. Leaving Harry in the laboratory, he went into the inner office. He returned, wearing a satisfied smile. Harry knew that he had found the plans still safe.

"Everything is all right, sir?" questioned Harry.

"Yes," returned Dadren, dryly, "except for the fact that some one actually broke into the laboratory. That is serious enough. Don't you think so, Vincent?"

HARRY studied the commander. Dadren was a tall, wiry man, whose weather-scarred face marked him as a sea dog. Blunt featured, square-jawed, he was a type of person who dealt in facts. His inventive genius lay chiefly in his ceaseless experimenting and his perseverance. The commander was a man who seldom deviated from a fixed purpose.

Harry knew that. He realized, also, that he must use tactful methods in suggesting that new danger might be encountered. Dadren was a fearless man. The simple suggestion that Dadren should postpone his trip would not go far. Harry used the commander's question as a wedge of another sort.

"I think it is serious," agreed Harry. "Look about, sir, and see for yourself. That fellow must have been mighty anxious to get in here, the way he chewed up those wires."

"He blundered, though," remarked Dadren, looking about the room. "Knocking over a lot of glass looks like the work of some ordinary miscreant."

"I don't agree, sir," put in Harry. "I think the man was working in the dark. He may have seen the light in my room, where I was at the typewriter. He was probably afraid to use a flashlight, while somebody was about."

"But why should he have searched the laboratory? If he came here after my plans, he should have known that they were in the office."

"I don't think so, sir. This is your private lab. He found papers here. He would have been a fool not to inspect them first. He probably used a flashlight for that, keeping it well guarded."

"But what about the filing cabinet?"

"He made a natural mistake there. Opening the drawer without the light, he may have set some papers on top in a perfectly off-hand manner. That could have started the crash."

The commander nodded. He was half convinced. Harry put in another thrust.

"The fellow's get-away," he said, "is proof that he was no apprentice. He made his way out of the court, even while the alarm was on."

"That is true," nodded Dadren. "He came in, too, while the place was guarded. Over the roof was the only way."

"Unless he started from the inside," suggested Harry.

The commander stared steadily at his secretary. Harry met the gaze unflinchingly. He saw a troubled look cloud Dadren's face.

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"I take it, Vincent," he said, dryly, "that we have a spy in our midst."

"Maybe two, sir."

"Two?"

"Yes. The men are paired."

"I see" Dadren was nodding slowly "yes, Vincent, your point is well chosen. At the same time, I doubt it. I took great care in teaming up my men. I doubt that any one man could induce another to act as his accomplice."

THERE was a pause. Harry saw Dadren look to the door of the inner office. The commander had locked it after coming out. Harry saw a new chance to talk.

"I mentioned a possibility, sir," he said. "I do not think it would be wise to ignore it. You can never trust too fully in the men whom you choose. In fact, that was why you obtained me through Professor Whitburn."

"Did Whitburn tell you that?"

"Yes. He said that you wanted a first-class recommendation before taking any one into your employ."

"I wanted you for a secretary, Vincent. That was a more important post than any other. I had men whom I could trust; but they were not qualified for the job."

"I know that, sir. Don't think that I am trying to belittle any of the men who were here when I came. I am merely speaking of my own experience."

"With Whitburn?"

"Yes. I worked for him once, when he was developing his aerial torpedoes. He thought that all of his men could be trusted. He was wrong."

"Suppose I change the men about," suggested Dadren, in a tone that indicated a willingness to receive advice. "If two of them have conspired, they would be separated."

"That might end trouble here," agreed Harry. "In fact, it would certainly put a quietus on their game."

"I shall do it," declared Dadren. "To-night, Vincent, I shall prepare the new list and give it to you in the morning. If spies are present, their efforts will be nullified."

"Except for one point," put in Harry. "The most important point, commander."

"What is that?"

"They will have no further purpose here."

"Why not?"

"Because the plans will be gone. You are taking them to Washington."

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"That is a point, Vincent. Well, that makes it all the better. They made their attempt to-night. They failed. There is no cause for further worry."

"There is every cause for worry, Commander."

Dadren looked at Harry in surprise. The commander thought that his final statement had settled the matter. Harry had reopened the question. What was more, he spoke with assurance; for he felt certain that the trend was turning the way he wanted it.

"To-night was the beginning, sir," stated Harry, in a serious tone. "The beginning not the end. An attempt was made to steal the plans for your new submarine. That attempt will be repeated."

"Not here, if I have taken the plans away."

"That is exactly what I fear. An attack made elsewhere might succeed. You are heading into danger, sir. Grave danger, as to-night's episode proves."

"I do not fear danger, Vincent. It cannot be avoided."

"It can. Most effectively."

"How?"

"By keeping the plans here."

THE commander stared at his secretary. Harry's suggestion seemed preposterous to Dadren. Shaking his head, the naval officer spoke emphatically.

"I am taking those plans to Washington, Vincent," he declared. "They are ready to be delivered to Senator Releston. After he has seen them and approved, they will go directly to the Navy Department."

"I advise a postponement, sir," returned Harry, boldly. "Put the men on new shifts. Keep the plans here. Bait those spies. Make them reveal themselves –"

"Enough," interrupted Dadren. "You are here to take orders, Vincent – not to give them. Have you completed those letters I gave you this afternoon?"

"Not quite, sir."

"Finish them. I shall be in to sign them."

Dadren's tone was terse. Harry acknowledged the order; then left the laboratory and went back to his office. He was determined that when Dadren came to sign the letters, he would bring up the subject once again. At any cost, the commander must be prevented from taking the plans to Washington.

Harry looked glum when he reached the big hall. Wilkins was at the fireplace; the fellow arose and followed Harry into the little room. He watched Harry sit down at the typewriter to finish the half-completed letter.

Wilkins suspected nothing. He merely wanted to talk about Commander Dadren. Wilkins was afraid that the skipper would be wrathful because the unseen intruder had escaped. Harry assured him that Dadren was calm. Wilkins went out and Harry resumed his typing.

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TEN minutes later, Commander Dadren appeared carrying a letter file. He closed the door of Harry's room and stood by while his secretary completed the typing of the last letter. He wrote his signature on the different letters that Harry had typed. Then he opened the folder that he had brought with him. From it, he removed a large, flat envelope. He placed the envelope on the table beside the typewriter.

"Vincent," remarked the commander, quietly. "I have been thinking over what you had to say. I am beginning to agree with you. There is danger ahead. I do not fear it; but that is no reason why I should jeopardize my invention.

"This envelope contains plans for the new submarine. It is to be delivered, unopened, to Senator Releston, in Washington. But I do not intend to take it on my flight to-morrow morning. I shall carry a portfolio that will apparently contain the plans. This envelope, however, will be in your briefcase.

"To-morrow morning" the commander's voice was scarcely more than a whisper "I shall order you to come to Washington by train. Purely for incidental work, so far as anyone else will know. But I am counting upon you to carry the envelope to Senator Releston. Deliver it to him the morning after your arrival, unless you hear from me in the meantime."

"Very well, sir," agreed Harry.

"I have great confidence in you, Vincent," added Dadren. "Particularly because you were recommended by Professor Whitburn. I liked the way you spoke to-night. You went beyond your province; but you gave me something to think about.

"You are right when you believe that I may be the target of the enemies who failed in to-night's plot. They will never suspect that I turned this important envelope over to you. Lock it up in your table. Keep it there until you leave."

With this admonition, the commander turned and opened the door. As he stepped into the hall, he swung about and spoke to Harry in a matter of fact tone.

"Don't forget to include my forwarding address," he said. "Put it in every letter, Vincent. Then go over those expense sheets and check the figures. I want to find out exactly where the errors lie. File all my old correspondence. I want all that done before morning."

The commander walked away. Harry feigned dejection as he stood in the doorway. Wilkins, at the fireplace, noted Harry's expression.

"Did the skipper hand you extra duty, Vincent?" questioned Wilkins.

"I'll say he did," replied Harry. "I've checked those expense sheets three times. Five dollars and thirty-two cents is the error that shows up. I'd rather pay it out of my salary than bother about finding it."

"Tell that to the skipper," laughed Holgate, who was seated beside Wilkins.

"Maybe I will," growled Harry.

Returning to his room, Harry closed the door. He left the light on while he locked the big envelope in the table drawer. Then, as an afterthought, he opened the door and began to go over expense sheets, at the table, where men in the hall could see him.

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HALF an hour passed. The men turned off the radio and headed for their rooms. Ten minutes after all were gone. Harry closed the door and extinguished the light. He was sure that no one suspected the important part that Commander Dadren had given him.

The Shadow's scheme had worked. Harry Vincent had done well in the emergency. He had managed to obey The Shadow's order. He had prevented the plane trip with the plans. Yet Harry was not quite sure that he had fulfilled the complete injunction.

Commander Dadren was flying to Washington, as scheduled. That trip had not been prevented. Nor could it be. Further argument with the stern commander might cause trouble. Yet Harry felt that he had accomplished the important part of The Shadow's order. The plans, at least, were not going with Dadren.

The Shadow relied upon his agents to use their own judgment in a pinch. Harry Vincent had played his hand with success. He had done the most within his power. To-morrow, a report to The Shadow. Then to Washington with the plans that Dadren had given him.

## CHAPTER IX. THE SHADOW STRIKES

ONE hour after dawn, Harry Vincent was awakened by a knock at the door of his room. He answered the call, to find Wilkins and Holgate awaiting him.

"The skipper's ready to take off," informed Wilkins. "Wants you down at the cove, Vincent. Says to bring along those expense sheets and whatever else you have."

With the order delivered, Wilkins and Holgate departed. Harry dressed hurriedly. He unlocked the drawer of the desk and removed the envelope that contained the plans. He put it in a briefcase along with other papers. Then he hurried from the big blockhouse.

Commander Dadren's plane was drawn up beside the boat house landing. An amphibian ship, it was equipped to take off from water or ground. This type of plane was suited to Dadren's needs, for the cove offered the only landing spot in the vicinity. Traveling to Washington, Dadren would be flying over land; hence he could use any airport that he might require.

The commander was standing on the planking by the boat house. Although attired in civilian garb, he had the bearing of a naval officer. Harry, approaching, easily distinguished the skipper from the rest of the crew.

Arriving, Harry noted Hasker in the amphibian. The mechanic was a heavy-set, rough-faced fellow who had accompanied Dadren on other flights. He seemed impatient to start the trip.

Dadren, too, appeared anxious to be off. He beckoned Harry to hurry up. When Harry reached his side, Dadren spoke in a querulous, testy tone that all could hear.

"What kept you, Vincent?" he demanded. "I told you to be up at dawn. I wanted to see those expense sheets."

"I have them here, sir," apologized Harry, exhibiting the briefcase. "I have corrected the expense errors; and I have arranged the letters for the files."

"I don't have time to go over them now," returned Dadren. "Half an hour would have sufficed. You have been neglectful, Vincent. You have caused me a great deal of trouble."

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"Sorry, sir."

"That doesn't help. However, I shall give you another chance. Get busy this morning. Complete your work here. Then bring all your papers to Washington."

"By train, sir?"

"Yes. Wilkins will drive you into town in time to catch the afternoon express. I shall need a secretary after I reach Washington. Meet me to-morrow, at my hotel."

Dadren stepped to a wing of the ship. He drew a small portfolio from beneath his arm and stowed it in the pilot's seat. The commander took the controls, with Hasker perched in the open seat behind him.

A few minutes later, the propeller of the amphibian was whirling. The plane started across the blue-watered cove, heading in the direction of the inlet. It gathered speed; its glistening wings rose above the water. Rising, the plane headed seaward, then banked and swung along the coast. Commander Dadren had begun his flight to Washington.

HARRY VINCENT left the boat house while the other men were standing about. Returning to headquarters, he entered the empty building and made directly for the telephone. He put in a call to the hotel that was located five miles from Cedar Cove.

Over the wire, Harry Vincent talked briefly with a man named Cliff Marsland. In guarded tones, Harry indicated what had happened at Cedar Cove. No one listening could have caught the gist of his remarks. For Harry was talking to another agent of The Shadow.

Cliff, waiting near Cedar Cove, would put in a long-distance call to Burbank. Unless instructions came back to the contrary, Harry Vincent would follow Commander Dadren's order. He would leave for Washington, taking along the set of plans that the skipper had given him.

Harry was sure that no danger remained at Cedar Cove. Last night's episode had been of his own doing. As yet, there was no indication that a spy actually was in camp. Harry had acted only at The Shadow's bidding; and even now, Harry wondered what had inspired The Shadow to send his emergency order.

If outside persons were trying to learn the secret of Commander Dadren's model submarine, they could learn nothing at Cedar Cove. Dadren was canny; he had tested different devices at various times. The submarine, now beneath the boat house, was incomplete. An inspection of it would reveal nothing to spies.

Only the plans were complete. They held the secret of an invention that was apparently destined to revolutionize naval warfare.

Entering his own room, Harry Vincent stowed his precious briefcase in the closet. He locked the door; then sat down at the table and began to work on detailed report sheets. He was determined that no one would learn that the plans were in his possession.

COMMANDER DADREN'S amphibian was a slow ship. Its heavy landing equipment handicapped it. That was why Dadren had taken off so shortly after dawn. He wanted to arrive in Washington before noon, and he needed an early start to accomplish his desire.

Plodding through a head wind, the cumbersome plane jounced north across the Carolina coastal region. Dadren was a stolid pilot; Hasker, behind him, seemed accustomed the monotony of the journey. As slow

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hours moved by, the ship reached Virginia and continued onward. Washington was not far away.

All the while, the commander had his portfolio close beside him. It was wedged between his body and the side of the pilot's seat. With his goal almost reached, Dadren smiled beneath the goggles that he had donned. He felt sure that Harry Vincent had been over-apprehensive, so far as danger was concerned.

Then came a break in the monotony. Dadren was flying at an altitude of five thousand feet. Nearly a mile below, lay a wooded acreage; beyond it, the spread-out buildings of a small town. The chart showed the place to be the village of Tarksburg.

Between the woods and the town was an open stretch that looked like a flying field. Two biplanes were in sight; as Dadren passed above, one of the ships took off. It ascended with surprising speed. Watching the plane, Dadren was sure that a stunt flier was at the controls.

For a dozen miles, the commander kept his amphibian ahead of the biplane. He had almost forgotten the stunt flier when he suddenly became aware of the fact that the ship was above him. The biplane was passing the amphibian, traveling at the higher altitude of six thousand feet.

As the commander stared upward, the first inkling of danger came. Something cold was thrust against the back of Dadren's neck. Turning to glance over his shoulder, the commander looked into the muzzle of a revolver held by Hasker.

WITH his free hand, the mechanic pointed upward. His face assumed a grim scowl. His lips framed words that Dadren could not hear; but he easily made out Hasker's statement. The mechanic was stating:

"Follow that ship."

Stolidly, Dadren turned to look ahead. Again, the gun muzzle pressed against his neck. The danger had arrived. As Harry Vincent had warned him, there was a traitor in camp. Hasker, the mechanic, had been delegated to gain the submarine plans.

Dadren delivered a smile that Hasker could not see. Under other circumstances, the commander might have ignored the traitor's order. By killing Dadren, Hasker would risk his own life.

For a moment, Dadren was on the point of banking the amphibian. Fancy work at the controls would put Hasker in a sweat. Dadren doubted that the man would have nerve to shoot once the straight course ended, for he would be fearful about reaching the controls.

Then Dadren changed his mind. Here was adventure to his liking. He had prepared for such an emergency as this. The envelope now held by Harry Vincent would nullify the theft of the portfolio that Dadren held. Nodding to indicate his willingness to obey Hasker's order, the commander took up the course set by the biplane.

The two ships deviated from the route to Washington. They passed over hilly terrain that took them on a northwest course. Then the biplane, a mile ahead, began to circle for a landing. Dadren conformed. He saw the other ship glide downward toward an obscure landing field, just west of a wooded hill.

Hasker's pressing gun was firm. Again, the commander nodded. Banking, he duplicated the biplane's maneuver. He brought the amphibian to earth one minute after the other ship had landed.



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As he came to a stop upon the old field, Dadren saw men scramble from the grounded biplane. He stopped the motor.

"Climb out!" came Hasker's growl. "No funny business, or you'll get a bullet in your neck! Leave that package you've got with you."

Dadren stepped from the plane; all the while, Hasker covered him. Three men approached; their leader was dressed like an airplane pilot. He also had a gun. He gave a nod to Hasker and the mechanic alighted, bringing the portfolio.

"Stay here," growled the pilot of the biplane, turning to his men. "We'll take care of this mug."

The pilot and Hasker marched Commander Dadren toward the trees. They came to the marks of an old dirt road and continued into the woods. There they saw a man waiting. He was tall, his face sported a heavy black beard.

"Who's that guy?" questioned Hasker, suspiciously. He was speaking to the pilot of the biplane.

"The chief," was the reply.

"Don't look like him," stated Hasker, still suspicious. "He never had a beard when I met him."

"It's phony," chuckled the pilot. "That's where the chief is smart. He wears one rig when he meets me another when he meets you. Different rigs at different times –"

THEY had arrived beside the bearded man. Commander Dadren stopped. He was face to face with Eric Hildrow; but the master plotter was wearing another of his rough disguises. Dadren, eyeing the beard, could not trace Hildrow's features.

"Good work, Wenshell," said Hildrow, to the pilot of the biplane. "I shall need you no longer. Take care of Commander Dadren's plane; then return to the Tarksburg field. Be ready to disband the air circus – or what remains of it after you have heard from me."

"All right, chief," returned Wenshell.

"You also have my commendation, Hasker," said Hildrow, smugly, while Wenshell was walking away. "Inasmuch as you came with Commander Dadren, I shall have you remain with him. You have the plans?"

"In here, chief," returned Hasker, showing the portfolio.

"Good," said Hildrow. Then, to Dadren: "Come, commander. We are awaiting you."

"Come where?" questioned Dadren.

"To the machine that I have waiting," chuckled Hildrow. "A short motor trip will take you to the comfortable place that I have provided for your stay with us."

"Who are you?"

"That is difficult to say." Hildrow chuckled again as they walked along, with Hasker bringing up the rear. "To Hasker, I am known as Philip Pelden. To Wenshell, I am Carl Ostrow. Korsch the man we are about to

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meet also knows me by that name. But others have met me in various identities."

A turn in the dirt road revealed a stocky, hatchet-faced man standing beside a parked sedan. Commander Dadren knew that this must be Korsch.

Smiling within his false beard, Hildrow introduced the rogue to Dadren; then pointed out Hasker, whom Korsch had never met before. Hildrow motioned Dadren toward the machine.

"Wait a moment," objected the commander. "It is time that these high-handed methods were ended. You have the portfolio which contains my submarine plans. Why do you intend to keep me prisoner?"

"For reasons of my own," snarled Hildrow, half forgetting the smug tone of the part that he was playing. "You are coming with us, commander. By force, if necessary."

"And you intend –"

"To do with you as I see fit. We have your plans; I intend to hold you so long as you may prove necessary."

"And after that?"

"I shall hold you longer, if you are not troublesome. But if risk is involved, I shall do away with you."

Hasker was close with his revolver. Korsch had also drawn a weapon. Hildrow stepped up to the commander, found an automatic in his pocket and took the weapon. Dadren knew that a fight would be hopeless. With a shrug of his shoulders, he entered the machine.

Hasker followed. He and Dadren occupied the rear seat, while Korsch took the wheel. Hildrow, carrying the portfolio, stepped in front with Korsch. He looked around to make sure that Hasker still had his revolver trained on Dadren.

AS Korsch started the car, Hildrow opened the portfolio. He found an envelope and tore it open. He drew out a sheaf of diagrams. They were inscribed in India ink, on sheets of tracing paper. Sight of the tough cloth sheets brought a snarl from Hildrow. The fact that the diagrams were on transparent material aroused suspicion in his mind.

"Are these the originals?" he challenged, turning to Dadren.

The commander made no reply as he met the plotter's glare. Again Hildrow glared.

"You have tried to trick us," he declared. "Professor Whitburn had duplicate plans. Those have been destroyed. Possibly they were the originals. It is also possible that another set exists. These tracings do not satisfy me."

Dadren remained unresponding. Hildrow recognized that he could not combat the commander's iron will. Turning to Hasker, Hildrow snapped a new question.

"Where are the originals?" he demanded. "Back in the office at Cedar Cove?"

"I don't think so, chief."

"Why not?"

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"Because the skipper Dadren, here told Wilkins to end the patrols while he was away. Last night somebody I don't know who it was tried to break into the lab. If the originals were back at headquarters, Wilkins would still be patrolling –"

"That's enough. It is apparent that nothing can be learned at Cedar Cove. Do you think that these tracings are the only plans?"

"I guess they are, chief. Unless they –"

"Unless what?" demanded Hildrow, as Hasker paused.

"When we were ready to hop off," remarked Hasker, in a reflective growl, "Dadren here said something to his secretary. Told him to come up to Washington. To bring papers with him. Vincent is leaving on the afternoon express. I was just thinking, chief, that maybe Vincent –"

"Never mind the 'maybe', Hasker," sneered Hildrow, still staring squarely at Commander Dadren. "You told me all I need to know. That fellow Vincent is the man we want."

Turning, Hildrow buzzed instructions in Korsch's ear. The hatchet-faced man nodded, as he turned the car on to a main road. One mile further on, he took another side road and pulled up beside an old house where a coupe was standing.

As Hildrow alighted from the sedan, Korsch gave a signal. A couple of tough-looking aids stepped from the coupe.

Hildrow beckoned Hasker from the sedan. One of Korsch's men entered the back and took his post beside Commander Dadren. The other took Hildrow's place in front. Hildrow gave an order to Korsch.

"Take this man up the river," ordered Hildrow, indicating Dadren. "Hold him there until you receive further orders. I am taking the coupe. Send a man in to get it from the usual Washington garage."

THE sedan pulled away. Hildrow watched until it was out of sight. Then the false-bearded plotter beckoned to Hasker. The two entered the coupe. Hildrow took the wheel; as the car started toward the main road, he spoke to Hasker.

"I am taking you to Tarksburg," declared Hildrow. "There we shall make new contact with Wenshell. You will operate with him. We are going to capture those missing plans."

Hildrow continued to talk in a cold, harsh tone as he guided the coupe along the high road. As the plotter talked, Hasker listened, signifying his understanding by occasional nods. Spellbound by Hildrow's cleverness, Hasker was hearing the scheme whereby his evil chief expected to gain new success.

## CHAPTER X. THE SHADOW'S TURN

WHILE Eric Hildrow was planning to follow up the capture of Commander Joseph Dadren, he was doing so with the confidence that, thus far, his methods had been entirely successful. Hildrow was sure that he had disposed of troublesome persons on the night before.

The arch-plotter would have been astounded could he have looked in upon the house of Professor Arthur Whitburn. The building on the wooded isle stood serene amid the morning daylight. Death Island had lost its

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sinister aspect. Within the house itself was a scene of quiet comfort.

Professor Whitburn was in his study. The white-haired inventor was working at his flat-topped desk. He had cleared away books and papers in order to make room for Quex. The big tiger-cat was lapping up the contents of a large bowl of milk.

Bragg had returned that morning. He had found the note on the cat's collar when he had discovered Quex at the front door. Bragg had descended to unlock the door of the submarine chamber. Professor Whitburn and Stephen had accompanied him up the stairs.

Bragg had not seen The Shadow. That spectral visitant had remained silent and motionless in his place by the torpedo tube. His keen eyes had been fixed upon Bragg when the man entered; but Bragg, horrified at the sight of dead bodies, had never glanced in The Shadow's direction.

Professor Whitburn had left the door open after he and Stephen had joined Bragg. Up in his study, the old inventor had given Bragg a brief description of what had occurred. He had given credit to himself and Stephen for thinking out the scheme of putting Quex through the periscope tube. Furthermore, he had motioned to Stephen to say nothing to the contrary.

Stephen had gone to the laboratory. Bragg had returned to the motor boat to get some packages that he had brought from the mainland. Professor Whitburn had said that he wished to be alone. The old man had an idea that he would soon receive a visit from The Shadow.

A SOUND from the door caused Quex to look up from the bowl of milk. The professor stared in the same direction. His face showed annoyance when saw Bragg standing in the doorway.

"I did not tell you to come back here, Bragg," declared Whitburn. "Moreover, you must knock when you wish admittance to this room."

No reply. Whitburn stared at the placid, rounded face of his subordinate. Bragg was a man with a somewhat owlsh expression. His lips had a solemn droop that they maintained while Whitburn stared.

"What ails you, Bragg?" demanded the professor. "Why do you stand there staring like a lout? Speak up, man!"

A soft laugh came from Bragg's drooping lips. The sound brought Whitburn to his feet. Though the laugh was no more than a whisper, it carried an echo of the mirth that the old professor had heard within the walls of the submarine chamber.

This was not Bragg. It was The Shadow!

The thought was startling as it drove through Whitburn's brain. The professor understood what The Shadow had meant when he stated that he would like to see Bragg after the man returned.

The Shadow had come from the submarine chamber. Ascending to the roof, he had obtained a suitcase from the autogyro. In the lonely tower room, he had made himself up to resemble Bragg. The rest of his plan was apparent to Professor Whitburn.

Looking to the desk, the old inventor picked up the note that Polmore had written for Bragg. It had not been opened, for Bragg had come directly to the submarine room after discovering Quex outside the front door.

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The Shadow took the message that Eric Hildrow had dictated to Polmore.

He read its contents; then returned the note to Whitburn.

The message instructed Bragg to come the Hotel Halcyon, in New York; there to inquire for Professor Whitburn. Its tenor indicated that the professor had left for an important conference; that he wanted his aids there to listen in on the discussion of some new experiments.

"Do you intend to go in Bragg's place?" inquired Whitburn, looking up at The Shadow.

"Yes. I shall leave immediately." Whitburn was astonished at The Shadow's excellent counterfeit of Bragg's voice. "I entered here to learn what you might think of my disguise."

"It is remarkable!" declared Whitburn. "It deceived me."

"That is sufficient. One other point. If your telephone service has been restored, I should like to make a call to New York."

Whitburn had forgotten the telephone. Turning to the instrument, he raised the receiver and clicked the hook. He shook his head. The line was still dead.

"My call can wait," asserted The Shadow. "In the meantime, follow these instructions. Leave the island, taking Stephen and Bragg with you. Also remove the cat. It is important that our enemy does not learn that a rescue was effected."

"But he may send some one back here to look around —"

"That is unlikely. A spy would not approach closer than Lake Marrinack. Any sign of life upon Death Island would attract an observer. If all appears deserted, I doubt that an agent would approach."

WITH this statement, The Shadow turned. He left the professor's study and walked through the corridor to the stairs. He reached the tower where he picked up his bag. Leaving by the skylight, he boarded the autogyro.

Then came a remarkable maneuver. The flat roof offered very little opportunity for a take-off. The only factor that favored The Shadow was a breeze that came through the trees from the front of the house. But The Shadow kept his ship facing straight toward the tower at the back.

The propeller began to whirl; the fan above the ship spun also as the motor roared. Then the autogyro started straight for the tower at the rear, traveling in the direction of the wind. An observer might have expected an immediate crash.

None came. Instead, the autogyro spun about. Braking one wheel, The Shadow caused the ship to turn in a twisting circle. The right wing grazed the tower; then the about face was completed. The autogyro was headed directly into the wind; for the ship was moving toward the front of the house.

The quick whirl had given momentum to the autogyro. It produced the added impetus upon which The Shadow had counted. The windmill blades were lifting; the speeding propeller aided. The ship took off before it had reached the front of the house.

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Rising, its ascent became almost vertical. The undercarriage scraped the twigs of the nearest tree; then the autogyro was clear.

Bragg, down at the dock, heard the roar of the motor. Staring, the man saw the autogyro rising above the trees. He wondered what this ship was doing at Death Island. Anxiously, he hastened to the house to report to Professor Whitburn.

ONE hour later, The Shadow landed at the Newark airport. Disguised as Bragg, he lost no time in getting to a taxicab. He entered the car, carrying his bag. He gave the driver an address in Manhattan.

Arriving in the city, The Shadow left the cab and called another. He wanted to break the trail. He did not wait to put in a call to Burbank. That could come later; the sooner that he performed Bragg's mission, the more effective would future measures be.

The new cab reached the Hotel Halcyon. This building was an old-fashioned structure, located in a dingy part of town. Yet it was the type of place that an old man like Professor Whitburn might have chosen for a temporary residence in Manhattan. The Shadow entered the lobby.

He spoke to an idling clerk. In Bragg's voice, he inquired for Professor Whitburn. The clerk looked at the register; then nodded.

"Room 406," he said. "The professor came in late last night. Said to send up anybody who asked for him."

There were loungers in the lobby. As soon as the arrival had entered the elevator, one man spoke to another. The speaker was the man whom Hildrow had left at the dock on Death Island, the only survivor of Nuland's crew.

"That's Bragg," he whispered to his companion. "I know the guy. We've been watching him along with others. That's why the chief put me here."

"You're sure it's him?"

"Positive!"

"Come on, then."

THE pair entered the second elevator and told the operator to take them to the fourth floor. They were following less than two minutes after The Shadow. He, however, had reached the fourth floor and was already knocking on the door of 406.

Someone unlocked the door. Guised as Bragg, The Shadow entered to find two men standing in what appeared to be the outer room of a suite. In a quizzical tone a perfect counterfeit of Bragg's The Shadow asked:

"Where is Professor Whitburn?"

"Is your name Bragg?" questioned one of the men.

The Shadow nodded.

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"All right, then," said the fellow. "I'll call the professor. He's taking a nap in his room. Say, Jerry"—this was to the other man—"show Mr. Bragg that model engine that the professor wanted him to see."

Jerry nodded and turned to a suitcase. The other man entered an inner room. Playing the part of Bragg, The Shadow stood idly just within the door. His rounded face looked complacent; his hands were resting in his coat pockets.

"Stick 'em up!" came a sudden order.

Jerry had brought a .38 from the suitcase. Whirling, he was covering this visitor whom he thought was Bragg. He saw an amazed expression come over the droop-lipped face. Thinking he had a soft victim, Jerry was totally unready for what occurred.

The Shadow half staggered backward, just as Bragg might have done in the face of a gun. As his left hand came up empty, his right was momentarily out of sight, due to a slight turn that he gave his body. Then he wheeled the other way. His quick-moving right hand whisked an automatic from his pocket.

Jerry never had a chance to press the trigger on which his finger rested. The automatic barked with split-second speed. Jerry staggered; his hand lost its grip on the gun. Again, The Shadow whirled.

This quick move was a timely one. The fellow who had made pretense of summoning Whitburn had turned immediately when he had gained the other room. He, too, was covering the form of Bragg. The flash of the automatic brought him into action. Quickly, the fellow fired.

His bullet sizzled by the spot where The Shadow had been; inches only from the place where The Shadow now stood. The revolver bullet flattened itself against the wall. Before the would-be killer had a chance for new aim, another burst came from The Shadow's .45s.

Another human target plopped to the floor. The Shadow, swinging inward as he fired, had picked his mark with perfect precision. Moreover, he was swinging toward the inner room, to deal with any others who might be lurking there.

Then instinctively, he whirled toward the outer door. Gifted with uncanny intuition, The Shadow had not only divined that other foes were absent in the inner room; he had also guessed the spot from which a new attack might come.

THE unlocked door was swinging open. Framed in the portal were the two crooks from the lobby. Shots had told them that something was amiss. Plans for Bragg's capture and murder had not included gunplay in the hotel itself.

While his gun-holding right hand had been reaching forward, almost probing the spaces of the inner room, The Shadow's left had dropped to its original position within his pocket. As his right hand swung toward the outer door, this hidden left also snapped into view, carrying a second gun.

Had they been dealing with a black-cloaked fighter, the new arrivals would not have had a chance. But The Shadow was here as Bragg. His disguised form was plainly visible against the window. Both entrants recognized their foe. They were ready with their guns.

The Shadow beat them to the shots. His automatics boomed a simultaneous welcome as the killers opened their hasty fire. Revolver bullets sizzled through the air. The whining slugs shattered windows.

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But The Shadow, still whirling, had standing marks. The missives from his automatics found living bodies in their paths. Hildrow's reserve assassins went slumping helplessly.

Moving toward the door, The Shadow pocketed his gun and yanked open the suitcase that he had previously placed on the floor. From it, he produced cloak and hat. Here, away from the light of the windows, he performed a black-out as he donned his chosen garb.

A flexible briefcase followed. It contained The Shadow's make-up equipment. It would later hold the hat and cloak. This object went from view. Pausing, The Shadow listened. He could hear shouts from outside the room; but they were all far below.

One man, slumped against the wall, was staring with glassy eyes. Dying, the rogue had seen The Shadow's transformation. His blood-flecked lips were trembling with fear. The Shadow turned his burning gaze upon this crippled foeman.

"Name your chief!" came the hissed whisper. "Speak, while you still live!"

The dying man quivered. Pain was forgotten in the midst of the fear that shook him. The frustrated murderer coughed; then gasped:

"I I don't know who he is."

"You have seen him," hissed The Shadow.

The sinister tone brought another tremor to slumping shoulders. The sagged gunman coughed out another statement:

"I I've seen him," he gasped, "but it it ain't him. He he's different, the chief is. Like last night" – the fellow paused and The Shadow knew that he was the one who had escaped from Death Island "he was he was a guy with a mustache then. But he changed changed it later to a beard –"

That was all. The man had talked beyond his time, spurred by the presence of The Shadow. He toppled from the wall and sprawled crazily upon the floor. He had told all that he knew; and his dying statement had corroborated The Shadow's previous supposition.

The master plotter was the enemy. One who had many agents, who knew him in different guises. But now was no time to speculate upon Eric Hildrow, the villain whose name The Shadow had not yet learned. Shouts from a stairway told that police were arriving.

The Shadow swept into the hall. He spied a flight of stairs and sprang up them just as bluecoats appeared from below. On the fifth floor, The Shadow headed straight for the elevator shaft. Stopping there, he pried doors apart just as a car came up and stopped at the fourth floor.

Softly, The Shadow lowered himself through the opening and closed the doors noiselessly behind him. The car had delivered two officers. It descended, and The Shadow rode down with it. At the ground floor, he slid over the top of the car, worked down its partly grilled side, then dropped a floor to the basement level. This was possible, for all the elevators were in an open shaftway. There, he pried open a pair of doors and moved swiftly through gloomy cellar corridors.

FIVE minutes later, Bragg appeared upon a secluded street. He was carrying a well-stuffed brief case. The Shadow had stowed away his black garb. It had aided in his escape. That was sufficient.



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Entering a large drug store, The Shadow went to a telephone booth. He dialed Burbank's number and spoke in a low, whispering tone. Over the wire came Burbank's report, telling of Commander Dadren's departure from Cedar Cove. The contact man added further intelligence from Cliff Marsland. Harry Vincent was taking the afternoon express. Cliff was going with him.

Then came another report. This was from Clyde Burke, an agent of The Shadow who worked as a reporter with the New York Classic. It was Burke's job to forward important news flashes before they were printed.

"Dispatch from Washington news bureau," informed Burbank. "Officials at the airport are expressing anxiety about the plane flown by Commander Joseph Dadren. One hour and a half overdue, coming from the Carolinas."

A soft laugh sounded in the telephone booth. Its whispered tone was grim. The Shadow knew that Dadren had been intercepted. More than that, he foresaw what might follow. His answer to Burbank was a prompt one.

"Contact Miles Crofton," ordered The Shadow. "Order him to the Newark airport. To join a man named Bragg who has an autogyro there. He will follow all instructions that he receives from Bragg."

"Orders received," responded Burbank.

A few minutes later, a taximan pulled up beside the curb near the big drug store. He opened the door to let an owlish, round-faced man step aboard the car. The passenger was carrying a briefcase.

"Where to, sir?" inquired the taximan.

"Newark airport," replied The Shadow, in the solemn voice of Bragg.

## CHAPTER XI. ON THE NORTHERN EXPRESS

COMMANDER JOSEPH DADREN had been captured at noon on this eventful day. At three o'clock, The Shadow had demolished a squad of Eric Hildrow's minions who had attacked him at the Hotel Halcyon. Shortly after six, Harry Vincent was eating dinner aboard the Northern Express.

This was the train that Harry had taken from the town near Cedar Cove. It was a slower train than the through limiteds. At the same time, it was equipped for long-distance travel. The only day train on the line, it did a large business in passengers between way points.

Seated at a table across from Harry was Cliff Marsland. The two had not talked together. To all appearances, they were strangers chance travelers on the same train to Washington. All the while, however, Cliff was keeping Harry in view. He knew the importance of the briefcase that his fellow agent carried.

Dusk had settled while Harry and Cliff were finishing their meal. The Virginia landscape had grown hazy. Harry glanced about the dining car; then arose and left by the rear door. Cliff followed half a minute later.

Harry's course led back through the Pullmans that were attached to the rear of the train. When he reached the last car, Harry walked into a passage that led along the right side. This car was half-compartments, half-lounge a combination car that had come through from the South.

Two men were seated by the rear window that opened on the observation platform. Harry looked them over;

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then took a chair midway in this section of the car.

Shortly afterward, Cliff Marsland arrived and seated himself at the writing desk near the front.

The train was coming to a stop, in a fair-sized city. This was the last stage of the run; from here on, it was a two-hour-trip straight into Washington. The express waited a minute at the station platform; then chugged slowly out into the yards.

Lights showed through the dusk as the train was gathering speed. Harry caught snatches of a conversation between the two men at the rear of the car. One was pointing through the window.

"That's the new airport –"

"Well equipped. Say there's a plane landing –"

"Hope he isn't bringing anybody for this train –"

"Not likely. Most people transfer south from here. Looks like that fellow's going up again, don't it?"

Harry did not catch the reply. He was interested in observing some persons who had just entered from the passage at the front of the car. They were passengers who had come aboard at this stop.

One was an elderly man with a cane, who looked like an old-time planter. With him was a middle-aged lady who was dressed in black, which somewhat lessened her stout appearance. The third was a brisk-looking fellow of about thirty-five. He had the manner of a traveling salesman.

Cliff, looking up from a letter that he was writing, gave these arrivals an inspection. Harry caught a slight nod; it was Cliff's signal that they had passed his observation. Harry shifted back into his chair and leaned his elbow upon the briefcase that he had beside him.

The two men at the rear were still talking about the plane that they had seen. Harry noticed one pointing out through the back window. Then he looked frontward again as another person entered. This was a uniformed brakeman, a member of the train crew.

Harry began to read a newspaper. Cliff resumed his writing. Both were caught off guard by the sudden commotion that passed through the car. A growl came from up front. Harry stared in that direction. Two masked men had entered from the passage.

Both were uncouthly dressed. They wore bandanna handkerchiefs about their faces. They must have come aboard and entered one of the compartments ahead of the lounge, where they had lurked until this moment. They were flashing large revolvers.

"Put your hands up!" came the order.

ONE fellow nudged a gun into the brakeman's ribs while the other covered the rest of the car.

The brakeman faltered. His hands went up. The gun moved away. Passengers began to copy the brakeman's example. In a scared tone, the brakeman urged them to do so.

"Don't offer resistance," he blurted. "Everything will be all right. Just remain quiet –"

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"Shut up, shack," growled one of the bandits, using the hoboes' term for brakeman. "We're running this. Say you look like the mug that bounced me off a freight near Chillicothe. If I thought you was the guy –"

"Forget the shack," broke in the other. "Keep 'em covered, Louie, while I collect. Keep your hands up all of you. This gat has a hair-trigger."

WHILE Louie covered the car, the other bandit started along the line. He passed up Cliff Marsland until later. He snatched a purse from the lady's lap and tugged three rings from her fingers. He whisked a wallet from the old gentleman's inside pocket. He was about to approach the traveling man when he noticed Harry Vincent.

"Keep 'em up, mug," he ordered. "That briefcase of yours looks good to me. Just what I want to load the swag. What'd I tell you, Louie? I said we'd pick up a bag on the train."

With that the fellow jabbed his gun against Harry's chest and reached for the briefcase. Staring across the car, Harry caught Cliff's eye. He saw that Louie had left Cliff uncovered. Feigning fear, Cliff looked too pitiable to make trouble.

Harry gave a slight nod. Cliff caught it, and was about to give a negative sign. An attack was too dangerous, while Harry had a gun muzzle thrust against his body. But as the collecting bandit drew back with the briefcase, Harry acted.

With a quick move of his left hand, he caught the gun barrel and thrust it away from his body. The bandit clutched the gun; he almost lost his balance as Harry gave a twist. The revolver boomed. Its bullet splintered the back of a chair and flattened against the steel side of the car.

Then the revolver clattered to the floor as Harry, rising, delivered a haymaker to the bandit's chin. The fellow went sprawling upon his back. Harry had scored a knock-out punch.

Cliff had lost no time. He was picking his chance with the same skill that Harry had shown. Louie was swinging to aim at Harry. Cliff came up from the writing desk and drove a left hook to the fellow's chin. Louie's head cracked back against the metal front of the lounge compartment. As Louie sagged, Cliff bore him to the floor.

Harry saw the action. He sprang upon the man whom he had downed and yanked away the fellow's mask. Astonishment came with understanding. The stunned bandit was Hasker.

Harry saw Dadren's mechanic open his eyes. Grimly, Harry clutched the traitor's throat, ready to pound his head against the floor if he offered new resistance.

Then an arm came under Harry's chin. The Shadow's agent was yanked back, struggling. He was in the clutches of the old man with the cane. Then another fighter joined the fray. It was the old lady, minus hat and wig. A man in disguise. Both were working with Hasker.

UP at the front, Harry caught a glimpse of Cliff Marsland struggling with the brakeman. That fellow, too, was an impostor. He was a pretended member of the train crew a crook who had stepped aboard with the others.

The traveling man was springing forward to aid the fake brakeman. Four against two, these minions of Eric Hildrow had delivered a well-timed counterthrust against the agents of The Shadow.

The struggle would have been a short one but for the intervention of the two men from the rear of the car. When they saw the woman's wig fall to the floor, they gained an inkling of the game. As Hasker came to his

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hands and knees, reaching for his gun, the two men fell upon him.

Hasker lost his revolver. The crook who had played the part of an old man, sprang to aid him. He and Hasker delivered punches to the men who had intervened. Harry, wresting free from his lone antagonist, grabbed the revolver and fired toward the front of the car.

The shot, aimed high, caused commotion there. As three men turned to draw guns on Harry, Cliff gained a chance to bring out his automatic. Then some one landed upon Harry's back. The Shadow's agent went to the floor.

The last impression that Harry gained were odd ones. Crooks again grappling with Cliff; something thumping upon the roof of the car; the distant blare of the locomotive whistle far ahead.

Then a gun barrel glanced against the side of Harry's head. Stunned, the Shadow's fighting agent lay motionless.

Hasker, the briefcase under his arm, glared viciously as he reclaimed his revolver. With a snarl, this aid of Eric Hildrow's prepared to kill the man who had come from Cedar Cove.

## CHAPTER XII. FROM THE NIGHT

CLIFF MARSLAND was helpless. Backed against the front wall of the car, he was standing with arms pinned behind him. The fake brakeman, the pretended salesman, were the pair who held him at bay. The second bandit the fellow whom Cliff had slugged had not removed his mask.

This man was Wenshell. He and Hasker had led the expedition. The others all disguised were crooks who had served with Wenshell's fake air circus. Gangsters all, Eric Hildrow had relied upon them to pull this coup.

Death to Harry Vincent. Such had been Hildrow's order. The others Cliff Marsland and the two men who had intervened could wait. Wenshell did not know that Cliff was with Harry. The two men from the back of the car sat cowed in chairs, covered by revolvers. Wenshell looked on approvingly while Hasker aimed his revolver for Harry's heart.

Wildly, Cliff Marsland struggled. Curbed, he resorted to a momentary subterfuge. To turn Hasker's attention, he shouted a warning that the man thought came from Wenshell.

"Look out!" cried Cliff. "Look out for the door of the platform!"

Instinctively, Hasker turned his eyes in that direction. So did others, including Cliff. Then The Shadow's agent stared, as amazed as the others. His wild cry had become a prophecy. The door of the platform was swinging inward.

THEN, from the blackness of the night appeared a looming form. A figure with a cloak that wavered in the wind; burning eyes that glowed from beneath the broad brim of a slouch hat. Beneath those eyes were the looming muzzles of mammoth automatics. Guns that were held in black-gloved fists.

Cliff had heard that thump on top of the car. He knew its meaning. The Shadow had arrived in his autogyro. Entrusting the controls to the hands of a skilled pilot, he had ordered a landing on the rear car of the speeding train.

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The ship must have taken off immediately; but The Shadow had remained. Gripping the roof of the observation platform, he had swung downward and inward to the platform itself. Too late to join the train at the last stop, he had overtaken it by air!

The Shadow could have fired from darkness. Such was not his choice. Viewing the scene within, he had stepped into sight that he might draw the aim of desperate marksmen. The Shadow's scheme worked.

Hasker swung his revolver upward. So did Wenshell. Leaders of the crew, crooks at heart, these two knew the menace of the black-cloaked stranger from the night. Both sought to fire.

Hasker failed. As Wenshell's revolver barked, The Shadow's automatics flashed tongues of flame. With those shots, the cloaked avenger did a fading sweep to the side, timed to a lurch as the train took a curve.

Wenshell's bullets shattered the windows at the back of the car. Hasker, clipped by an opening shot, sprawled forward upon Harry Vincent's senseless form. Then a skimming slug found Wenshell's heart. The second crook dropped.

Four others were yanking guns. Cliff Marsland was forgotten. His automatic had been wrested from him. He was a nonentity now, so far as the other crooks were concerned. But Cliff was ready to aid The Shadow.

He gave no thought to the men beside him. The swinging train might disturb their aim. Those close to The Shadow were the ones that Cliff wanted. As guns roared, Cliff sprang forward, just as the foremost crook went down.

That was the one who had worn the woman's disguise. Cliff landed on the rogue who had played the part of the old gentleman. He landed on the fellow and caught his gun arm just as the crook was about to press the trigger. They sprawled together on the floor, struggling for the revolver.

The path was opened. Brakeman and salesman fired shots that whistled close to The Shadow's form. The automatics gave their answer. The two crooks went sprawling.

Cliff had a strangle hold on his adversary. A swing of the train turned the tables. Clawing fingers gripped Cliff's throat. Choking, Cliff heard a final shot from the rear of the car. Hands loosened as the crook rolled dead.

STRUGGLING to his feet, Cliff saw The Shadow step out through the opened door. He caught the strident cry of a mocking laugh; then the sound cut short as the door swung shut. It was followed by a hissing noise. The Shadow had pulled the bell-cord, out on the darkened platform.

The half-dazed men who had aided Cliff and Harry, were coming to their feet, along with Cliff. Harry had opened his eyes. Two snarling crooks, mortally wounded, were trying to rise from the floor. Then the train conductor came bounding in from the passage, followed by a trainman.

A wounded crook aimed for the conductor. Cliff landed on the fellow. The trainman took care of the second.

As the express slackened its speed, Cliff was giving brief words of explanation. The masks worn by Hasker and Wenshell supported his statements.

A train robbery had been thwarted. The fake brakeman; the disguises of the others all were fitting testimony. Harry Vincent was joining with Cliff Marsland. The two strangers were giving their story.

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"Some one from the observation platform –"

The conductor started back as he heard these words. He wanted to learn the identity of the mysterious rescuer. He was too late. Before he could reach the door, a figure dropped from the platform of the slowing train.

CROUCHING upon the roadbed, The Shadow watched the rear lights of the train as they dwindled. The Northern Express came to a stop. A brakeman was alighting with his lantern, coming back along the track.

But The Shadow, too, was on the move. Gliding from the roadbed, he pressed his way through a mass of bushes and reached an open hillside. He waited there, watching the distant train. He heard the blare of the whistle. It was the signal calling in the brakeman.

The conductor had evidently ordered the train to proceed to the next town. The locomotive chugged. The Northern Express moved on.

The Shadow stooped toward the ground, planted an object there and touched a fuse.

A vivid flare burst forth as The Shadow stepped away. A greenish fire illuminated the rough ground. A ball of light shot upward and burst into a pyrotechnic display. A second followed; then a third. After that, the green fire flared, wavering.

From high above, the autogyro came swishing down through the night. Miles Crofton, the pilot, had followed along the right of way. Hovering, he had turned off the motor. The autogyro made a landing beside The Shadow's flare.

The black-cloaked figure appeared ghoulish as it stepped into the realm of light. Rising to the cockpit behind the pilot's seat, The Shadow dropped beneath the path of the slowly revolving blades that turned above the strange machine.

Miles Crofton waited at the controls. This man knew the prowess of The Shadow. Crofton had once been tricked by men of crime. The Shadow had rescued him from a hopeless situation. A daredevil, a stunt flier, Crofton had since been ready to do The Shadow's bidding.

That landing on the moving train had been the greatest feat of Crofton's career. Yet he knew that The Shadow had inspired it. Nerved by the thought of the part that The Shadow had elected to play, Crofton had succeeded in his task.

He did not know what had happened aboard the Northern Express. He knew only that The Shadow had returned. The whispered laugh that Crofton heard was proof that the cloaked master had accomplished his design.

WHILE blades turned lazily, while the propeller continued its slow spin, The Shadow rested deep in thought. Again he had delivered a thrust against the master plotter whose name he did not know. Henchmen of crime had been defeated. Harry Vincent still held the all-important plans that Commander Dadren had given him. He had done his part well.

The Shadow was considering the next move. With it, he was calculating upon what his enemy would do, once he had learned of the defeat which his underlings had suffered. Again, The Shadow laughed. Then, leaning forward, he hissed his order to Miles Crofton:

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"To Washington."

The pilot nodded. The motor roared. The autogyro wobbled on rough soil. Its wheels bounced from the ground. Rising, the ship whirled forward, gaining speed with altitude.

Far below, The Shadow could spy the gleaming headlights of the Northern Express, stopped at a small station. Then the autogyro had left the toylike train far behind.

Speeding into Washington, The Shadow was due to arrive before his agents. When Harry Vincent and Cliff Marsland reached their destination, he would be there to meet them. The Shadow, triumphant, was ready to offset the next stroke that came from Eric Hildrow.

### CHAPTER XIII. IN WASHINGTON

AT nine o'clock the next morning, Harry Vincent was seated by the window of a room in a Washington hotel. Smoking a cigarette, The Shadow's agent watched the passing traffic along a broad boulevard. A smile showed on Harry's lips.

The fray aboard the Northern Express had been explained to the satisfaction of the law. The train had steamed into Washington one hour late; but Harry, Cliff and the other two passengers in the lounge car had been cleared of all responsibility. More than that, they had earned the commendation of the sheriff in the town at which they had stopped.

A newspaper which lay on Harry's writing table carried two headlined stories. One concerned the disappearance of Commander Joseph Dadren. It was believed that the former naval officer had crashed in some wooded district. The other story told of the holdup aboard the Northern Express. Neither the bandits nor their accomplices had been identified.

That was the reason for Harry's smile. He had concealed the fact that he was in the employ of Commander Dadren. He wondered what the newspapers would say should they learn that Hasker mechanic missing with the lost flier was one of the bandits who had been killed in the fight aboard the train.

The public was not to know of this connection. There was one man, however, who must be informed. That was Senator Ross Releston. Arriving at the Union Station, the night before, Harry had gained a note, thrust in his hand by some one passing in the crowded train shed. A message from The Shadow, ordering him to this hotel.

Here, Harry had found a room reserved for him; a new note on the writing desk. Further orders from The Shadow. Harry was to call on Senator Releston this morning, to deliver the envelope from Commander Dadren.

Senator Releston lived at the Hotel Barlingham. Leaving his own hotel, Harry hailed a taxi and stepped aboard with his precious briefcase.

The driver started off along a diagonal avenue, sped for a dozen blocks through a network of streets that bewildered Harry. Then the cab swung two-thirds of the distance around a parklike circle and took to another avenue. It stopped in front of the Hotel Barlingham.

THE hotel, although modern, was older than most of the large establishments that Harry had seen in Washington. Conveniently situated in the Northwest District, it was close to the centers of activity. This had

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probably recommended the hotel to Senator Releston, together with the fact that the avenue in front of the Barlingham was less traveled and more quiet than other thoroughfares.

The lobby was ornate, but rather antiquated. At the desk, Harry learned that the senator's apartment was on the sixth floor. As he rode up in a jerky elevator, Harry wondered why Releston had chosen so old an establishment. He learned the reason when he arrived on the sixth floor.

When he rang a bell at the door of Room 642, Harry was admitted by a plainly dressed servant. He found himself in a large lounge room, which apparently served as a waiting room, for doors led off in every wall. Glancing through one opened portal, Harry saw an inner hallway with more doors.

It was evident that the Hotel Barlingham was specially arranged with many-roomed apartments. It afforded space that the more modern hotels could not provide except at exorbitant rates.

The servant stood waiting, while Harry looked about. Then the man inquired:

"Your name, sir?"

"Mr. Vincent," replied Harry.

"You have an appointment with Senator Releston?" asked the servant.

"Not exactly," returned Harry. "Simply inform him that I have come from Commander Joseph Dadren."

At that moment, a tall, stoop-shouldered man was passing through the inner hall. The fellow caught Harry's words and stepped into the waiting room. His long, pointed face was quizzical. He spoke to the servant.

"Who is this gentleman?" inquired the newcomer. "Has he told you his business, Smedley?"

"He comes from Commander Dadren," responded the servant.

"Then I shall talk to him, Smedley," decided the stoop-shouldered man. "You may go."

As soon as Smedley had departed, the lanky man turned to Harry Vincent. He introduced himself as he extended his hand.

"My name is Stollart," he announced. "I am Senator Releston's secretary. You are from Cedar Cove?"

"Yes."

"And your name is –"

"Harry Vincent."

"Wait here." Stollart paused to glance at the briefcase under Harry's arm. "I believe that the senator will see you."

Harry sat down in a comfortable chair. He waited for about one minute. Then Stollart returned and requested him to follow. They went into the little hallway, turned left and came into a room that was furnished like an office.



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A gray-haired man was seated behind a desk. His face was kindly in expression, yet it possessed a ruggedness that Harry noted instantly. Senator Ross Releston had steely eyes that showed him to be a man of determination. Rising to greet his visitor, he delivered a handshake that was viselike. Then the senator turned to introduce a man who was standing by the desk.

HARRY VINCENT stared as he recognized a square, firm face. Sharp eyes met his gaze, then twinkled as a slight smile appeared upon lips that were ordinarily set and sober. Harry knew this visitor in Senator Releston's office.

"Vic Marquette!" exclaimed Harry. "You are here –"

"In behalf of the Secret Service," returned Marquette, as Harry paused. "For the same purpose that brings you, Vincent. Matters concerning the disappearance of Commander Joseph Dadren."

"You men have met before?" inquired Releston, in a tone of surprise.

"Yes," returned Vic, dryly. "On several occasions. Particularly at a place called Death Island, where Vincent was the confidential secretary of Professor Arthur Whitburn."

"Ah! Commander Dadren's friend."

"So I understand. Am I correct, Vincent, in assuming that you met Dadren through Whitburn?"

"Yes," nodded Harry, in reply to Vic Marquette's question. "Professor Whitburn recommended me to Commander Dadren. I was at Cedar Cove, serving as the commander's secretary. I spoke to him yesterday morning, just before he took off on his flight to Washington."

"He gave you a message for me?" inquired Releston, anxiously.

"More than that," replied Harry. "He entrusted to me the plans for his new submarine. I have them here, in this briefcase."

Senator Releston had seated himself behind the desk. He came to his feet when he heard Harry's statement. He reached for the envelope that Harry withdrew from the briefcase. Eagerly, he ripped it open and drew forth pages of well-inked diagrams.

"Here they are, Marquette!" exclaimed the senator, as he went through the heavy pages. "Apparently Dadren was too wise to risk them in an airplane flight. He must have scented danger. Dadren is a clever man."

SPREADING the plans upon the desk, the senator opened a small envelope that had come with them. He read the message that he found within. His face clouded for the moment.

Harry, Vic and Stollart watched Releston's change of expression.

"An odd situation," stated the senator, as he began to gather up the sheets of plans. "It would have been best if Commander Dadren had entrusted all of his diagrams to Vincent. We would then hold them in their entirety."

"Some of the plans are missing?" inquired Marquette.

"According to the note," replied the senator, "these plans are incomplete. We must, however, give credit to Commander Dadren for his cleverness. This diagram, for instance" – he examined a sheet and passed it to

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Vic "is lacking in certain important details."

"Why?" questioned the Secret Service operative.

"Because," returned Releston, referring to the note, "part of the plan was done on transparent paper. Commander Dadren made only this single set; but unless the transparent sheets are placed upon the others, the plans are useless.

"Commander Dadren tells me, in his message, that he is bringing the necessary tracings. Until we have them, we have nothing. At the same time, if the commander has fallen into evil hands, his enemies are thwarted.

"They have captured plans that look like duplicates. Actually, they have only gained the missing portions of the diagrams. It is a stalemate, gentlemen. What the consequences may be is something that I can not venture to predict."

"I can," put in Vic Marquette. "This will work out well, senator. I came here because I suspected that Commander Dadren had been taken prisoner by unscrupulous enemies. I have been wondering whether or not he was still alive. Now I know he is."

"Because of these incomplete plans?"

"Yes. They won't harm Dadren until they get these plans to go along with the others. Probably they're puzzled, wondering whether Dadren's tracings are fake or genuine. He's probably smart enough to keep them guessing. Meantime, senator, we can turn these plans over to the Navy Department."

"No," replied Releston, shaking his head. "Commander Dadren states that he does not want that done until he adds the tracings. Read the note for yourself, Marquette."

Vic looked annoyed when he faced the firm-visaged senator.

Releston smiled. Rising, he went to a corner of the office and drew back a curtain to reveal the steel door of a vault.

"This is my strong-room," he announced. "A bank in my home city was installing a larger vault. I purchased the old door and had it brought here. The closet into which it opens is metal-lined and protected with alarms.

"No one knows the combination but myself. I change it frequently and I allow no one in here while I am opening the vault. You may rest assured, Marquette, that Commander Dadren's plans will be quite safe while they are here."

"You are sure that no one can enter –"

"My subordinates can all be trusted. Stollart here, is thoroughly reliable. My servants Smedley and Williston are quite trustworthy. Stollart"– Releston turned to the secretary "conduct Mr. Marquette and Mr. Vincent to another room while I put away the plans."

THE secretary led the way out into the little hall. Instead of taking Harry and Vic into the waiting room, he continued onward and ushered them into a living room. Vic looked about and noted a bolted door.

"Where does that lead?" he questioned. "Out into the main hall on the floor?"

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"Yes," replied Stollart. "This room is an extension of the senator's suite."

"Then any one could enter by that door."

"Hardly. It is always kept bolted."

While Vic Marquette paced about, Harry Vincent sat down in a chair by the window. Stollart stood at the side door of the room.

Then came a call from the senator's office. Releston had put away the plans. He was summoning the other men back.

"Go into the office, Stollart," suggested Vic. "Tell Senator Releston that I am talking with Vincent. We will join him later."

Stollart hesitated.

"Orders from my superior," added Vic. "I am questioning Vincent about conditions at Cedar Cove. Tell the senator he will have my full report."

Stollart departed. Marquette closed the door to the inner hall. He came over by the window and spoke to Harry in a low tone.

"VINCENT," said Vic, frankly, "this is not the first time our paths have crossed. I mentioned Death Island to the senator; I could have added other incidents. In fact, our last meeting was here in Washington, at the time of the embassy murders." (Note: See Vol. VIII, No. 3, "The Embassy Murders.")

Harry nodded.

"You are an agent of The Shadow," continued Vic, quietly. "He has aided me in the past. I know that he must have arranged for you to be at Cedar Cove. On that account, I do not intend to cross-examine you.

"It was The Shadow who brought me here to-day. I received a telephone call last night. I recognized the voice of The Shadow. He gave me an important tip; to communicate with Senator Releston regarding the disappearance of Commander Dadren.

"When you walked in, I knew that The Shadow was playing his part in the game. I knew that he expected me to cooperate with you. I am ready to do so. With that understanding, I should like to hear anything that you are permitted to tell me."

"That fits in with my instructions," replied Harry, in a frank tone. "However, there is very little that I can tell you. I was watching affairs at Cedar Cove. I found nothing to report. Then I received instructions to prevent Commander Dadren from taking off with the plans.

"I faked a burglary in the commander's laboratory. Dadren thought enemies were about; he gave me the plans that I brought here to Senator Releston. I thought that I was carrying the plans complete. But there is something else, Vic. That robbery on the Northern Express, last evening."

"You were in the mess?"

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"Yes but I gave a name other than my own. I knew that Senator Releston would clear me if the sheriff learned that I had given a fictitious identity. Those bandits, Vic, were after the briefcase that I carried."

"You knew them?"

"One of them."

"Who was he?"

"Hasker, the mechanic who disappeared with Dadren."

VIC MARQUETTE stopped his momentary pacing. He stared at Harry in amazement. This, indeed, was news to the Secret Service operative. At last, Vic found his voice.

"Great work, Vincent," he commended. "Keeping that out of the news was a big help. They've got Dadren. It's a sure bet they'll be after the plans that the senator is keeping here. You heard me suggest that those plans be taken to the Navy Department."

"I did. Do you intend to press the matter?"

"No. I have changed my opinion. I want the plans to remain here."

It was Harry's turn to show surprise. Vic Marquette smiled. Then the Secret Service man explained himself.

"The plans will stay here," he declared. "So will you and I. We'll work together watching them, along with these subordinates whom the senator trusts. A lot of visitors come here, Vincent. The senator has his regular offices over in the senate building, but he receives certain persons here.

"We're going to check on every one who comes in. We'll see if the crooks show themselves. When they do, we can trap them. I'll arrange matters with my department. So far as The Shadow is concerned well, it will be your job to keep in touch with him."

Vic motioned Harry from his chair. The Secret Service man led the way back to Releston's office. They found the senator seated at his desk. Stollart was in a corner, filing papers in a large cabinet.

"I've been talking with Vincent," declared Marquette to Releston. "He tells me there was trouble at Cedar Cove the night before Commander Dadren left. I think that we may be due for trouble here, if you keep those plans in your safe."

"I am following Commander Dadren's request," returned the senator. "He entrusted the plans to me and specified that they should be kept here until –"

"I know," interposed Vic, bluntly. "But he also trusted Vincent; and I have my duties as a Secret Service operative. That's why I'm suggesting that Vincent and I remain here while you are keeping the plans in your vault."

"An excellent suggestion!" commended Releston, warmly. "I shall feel much more at ease if you two are on duty. Arrange that as you see fit, Marquette. This apartment is a large one. We shall have room for you."

"Good!" declared Marquette. "One more point, senator. We have every reason to believe that Commander Dadren has been abducted. Vincent was aboard the Northern Express last night. One of the unidentified

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bandits was Hasker."

"What! The mechanic with Dadren?"

"The same. He was in the plot. He came with the gang because he could point out Vincent. Those bandits were fakes. They were after the briefcase that contained the plans."

"This seems incredible! Yet we can rely upon Vincent's statement."

"Exactly, senator. It's a good break that the news was kept out of the newspapers. That's why I want it all to remain quiet. Let the public think that Commander Dadren crashed."

"But if he was actually kidnapped, the law should know –"

"The law does know. I shall report to my superior. Leave this to the Secret Service, senator. It's our best chance to find Dadren."

Senator Releston considered Vic's statement. At last, he nodded his consent.

"For the present, Marquette," he said, "I shall agree to your suggestion. If you fail to gain results, I shall reverse my decision. The case is in your hands for the time being."

Vic Marquette smiled in satisfaction. He nodded as he turned to Harry Vincent. The game was on. Vic and Harry were installed. They had begun their duty as guardians at the spot where new crime must surely strike.

## CHAPTER XIV. REPORTS RECEIVED

FIVE days had passed since Harry Vincent's arrival in Washington. Air scouts had combed the region south of Washington. They had gained no sign of Commander Dadren's lost amphibian. The disappearance of the former naval officer was no longer news. It was classed publicly as another tragedy of the air.

High in a Washington hotel, a calm-faced personage was seated at a table, reading a message inscribed in blue-inked code. Keen eyes studied the written lines, eyes that burned from a hawklike visage. They watched the bluish code words fade.

This was The Shadow. Registered under the name of Henry Arnaud, he was staying in Washington. The fading message was a report from Harry Vincent. Like all communications between The Shadow and his agents, it was written in ink that vanished, thanks to a formula of The Shadow's creation.

As at Cedar Cove, Harry had found nothing amiss. He and Vic Marquette were constantly on duty, along with Stollart and the servants. They had checked on the various visitors who had come to Senator Releston's. None had aroused their suspicions.

Harry's report struck one sour note. That concerned the attitude of Senator Ross Releston. In his agreement with Vic Marquette's plan, Releston had specified a temporary arrangement, dependent upon progress in the finding of Commander Dadren. Vic, counting upon a move by the enemy, had made no step in the search for the missing flier.

Hence Senator Releston had openly announced that the time limit was nearly up. Soon whether Vic liked it or not the senator intended to make public certain facts regarding Dadren's invention. The result would be a

## THE PLOT MASTER

nationwide man-hunt.

Harry had passed this news along to The Shadow. It brought no worryment to The Shadow's masklike visage. Dropping the blank report sheets into a wastebasket, The Shadow laughed softly. Staring from the window, he studied the varied vista of the national capital. His eyes gleamed.

Somewhere close at hand lay the master plotter. Well did The Shadow know that the unknown enemy would not be far. Though Eric Hildrow had managed to keep his identity from The Shadow, he had failed to cover up his methods.

At Death Island, at Cedar Cove, Hildrow had utilized an excellent spy system. Traitors had aided him in his attacks upon Professor Whitburn and Commander Dadren. When he chose to open a drive on Senator Releston, new minions would be on hand to aid him. The fact that Harry Vincent had discovered no spy at Releston's was not surprising to The Shadow. Hildrow's men were capable hands when it came to covering up their work.

The Shadow suspected a traitor at Releston's. Stollart, Smedley or Williston any one of the three might be the man. It was also possible that some regular visitor Harry had listed more than a dozen of the senator's friends could be the agent used by Hildrow.

But nothing could be gained by uncovering the traitor. The Shadow had learned conclusively that Hildrow kept his real identity from the men who worked for him. The unmasking of a new spy would lead to a blind ending.

The Shadow was playing a waiting game. That was why he liked Harry Vincent's news. If Senator Releston raised a hue and cry, Hildrow's task of gaining the plans would be toughened. The Shadow knew that Hildrow the unknown was probably receiving reports that matched those sent by Harry Vincent.

IN all his surmises, The Shadow was correct. On this very afternoon, Eric Hildrow, guised as himself, was standing by the window of a living room apartment. He, too, was staring out over the city of Washington.

A knock sounded at the door. Hildrow answered it to admit Marling. His chunky aid was glum. He passed a letter to his chief.

"From Stollart," informed Marling. "Addressed to J. T. Ushwell, general delivery window at the Arlington post office –"

"I can read the address," interposed Hildrow, testily. "You've read the letter; give me your opinion while I'm reading it."

"The senator's going to spread the news," declared Marling. "That's enough trouble, isn't it? Meanwhile, Marquette and Vincent are hanging about. There's no chance to crack that vault. If Stollart could only get the combination –"

"He never will," put in Hildrow. "Even if he did, a raid on the Hotel Barlingham would be a mistake. Gunmen would be good hands to aid a getaway –"

"Well, if Stollart opened the vault, he'd be ready for a getaway."

"He would be stopped before he started. No, Marling, I have been waiting solely for another purpose."

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"To trick The Shadow?"

"Yes. He is our most powerful enemy."

There was a short pause. While Hildrow speculated, Marling grunted.

"Maybe The Shadow's still on Death Island," he declared. "There's been no sign of Whitburn; and you locked The Shadow in with him. Probably they're both dead –"

"Don't be a fool!" snarled Hildrow, turning his pasty face toward Marling. "Do you think that was Bragg that shot up the mob in the Hotel Halcyon? What about the fellow who dropped in on the Northern Express? He got Wenshell and Hasker, didn't he?"

"Yes. It looked very much like The Shadow –"

"It was The Shadow! He's here in Washington. He knows that I've got to make another move. I've been outwaiting him, that's all. But only because I did not want to press matters. Never be too quick with any scheme, Marling, no matter how effective it may seem. Sometimes, a change of the wind may bring a new idea."

"Well, the wind's changed, chief."

"Hardly. This action of Releston's was to be expected. It merely means that I must utilize the plan that I have been holding for such an emergency."

"You're going to Releston's yourself?"

Hildrow chuckled.

"I have been there, Marling," he declared, "as myself. Simply to talk about international trade relations. To emphasize the personality of Eric Hildrow. I am going to pay further visits to our friend the senator."

"But when I go to get the plans, it will be in another guise. One that Releston or any one else will never suspect. That, however, will come later, Marling. The immediate job is to forestall the senator's present intention. He must be weaned from his idea of starting a search for Commander Dadren."

"How can you stop him from doing that?" inquired Marling.

"Through Dadren," chuckled Hildrow. "Marling, bring me that set of diagram tracings."

"The photostatic copies that you made?"

"No. The originals. I am going out with them. Remain here until I return."

WHILE Marling was obtaining the plans, Hildrow donned the disguise that he used on the day of Dadren's capture. The black beard obscured his pallid features when he strolled from the little apartment.

Ten minutes later, Hildrow walked into a drug store. He made a telephone call from a booth; then left and strolled in the direction of the Mall. Reaching Pennsylvania Avenue, he hailed a taxi and ordered the driver to take him to an address on the Northwest outskirts of the capital.

## THE PLOT MASTER

The cabby took Hildrow for some foreign diplomat. Reaching the Naval Observatory, he threaded his way along Wisconsin Avenue, then turned to another street, still wondering from what embassy his passenger had come.

Hildrow left the cab at the street corner that he had designated. He showed no haste as he strolled along for a space of about fifteen minutes. At last he reached a small vacant lot that automobiles used as a free parking space. Spying a dull green coupe, he approached and opened the door.

A rough-faced fellow was behind the wheel. The man nodded when he saw Hildrow's black beard. A member of Korsch's crew, the waiting driver had recognized the disguise that the plotter was wearing.

Hildrow gave no order. He simply took his seat in the coupe and sat silent while the driver started the car.

The fellow was picking a route that avoided traveled highways. Most of the roads that he chose were well-paved, but only for a short stretch did he follow a course where traffic thickened. That was along a highway that led by the bank of the Potomac. Shortly afterward, the driver veered off to the right.

Several miles further on, the coupe turned southward, heading directly toward the river. Coming through a woods, the driver chose a road where jagged rocks jutted up from muddy ruts. Then came a bend of the river. They had reached an isolated spot above the Great Falls of the Potomac.

The river was wide at this point. The coupe had arrived close to the lower end of a thick-treed island that caused the spreading of the stream. Picking a grassy road that was scarcely more than wheel tracks, the driver swung the coupe toward the river bank. There a short bridge led over to the island.

Lost in the bend of the river, spanning the narrowest section of the stream, this bridge looked frail and forgotten. No chance motorist would have attempted to test the wavering structure. It took sharp eyes to see that the underpinning had been reinforced with new beams that made passage possible.

Rolling across the bridge, the coupe came almost to a stop as it reached the end. It jolted downward. Then it cut through a roadless clearing and stopped beneath a clump of trees. Ordering the driver to remain, Hildrow alighted.

WITH a small portfolio under his arm, the master plotter took a path that ended suddenly beside the walls of a small frame house. Some one spied him from the porch. It was Korsch.

The hatchet-faced man nodded his welcome and opened the door for his chief. Hildrow went into a roughly furnished room that looked like an office. He sat down at a desk; Korsch entered and closed the door.

"How is the prisoner?" quizzed Hildrow, in the sarcastic voice that he used with this disguise. "Has he shown any inclination to talk?"

"No," growled Korsch. "Say, chief, if you'd let me put the clamps on the guy —"

"He would still refuse to speak," interposed Hildrow. "No, Korsch, such tactics are useless"— he paused dryly, then added "for the present."

"Do you want to talk to him, chief?"

"That is why I telephoned to the road house, to order your man to come for me."



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"All right, chief. Up in his room or down here?"

"Here. A change of environment may please him."

Korsch nodded. He turned and went out through the door. Eric Hildrow smiled through his black beard as he placed the portfolio upon the desk. The master plotter had completed his scheme.

Here, within the portfolio, were the tracings that he had taken from Commander Joseph Dadren. Those stolen plans were the bait with which Eric Hildrow intended to trick his prisoner.

### CHAPTER XV. TERMS AGREED

COMMANDER DADREN was blinking when he entered the little office. Korsch had brought him from a room where blinds were drawn. The light of afternoon proved dazzling to his eyes.

Hildrow motioned to Korsch, who had followed Dadren with a ready gun. Korsch lowered the window shades halfway, then departed at Hildrow's bidding. The bearded plotter motioned Dadren to a chair.

"Well, commander," he began, when the prisoner was seated, "how have you been enjoying yourself here?"

No response from Dadren.

"River air should be healthful at this season," continued Hildrow, "particularly along the Potomac. This spot is really picturesque. It is only a short trip from here down to the Great Falls."

Dadren was showing sudden interest on his weather-scarred face. Until now, he had been unable to guess the location of the hidden cottage. He blinked again as he stared at his bearded captor.

"And the Great Falls," resumed Hildrow, "are not far from Washington. So you see, commander, that your friends are really close at hand."

Dadren eyed the bearded man suspiciously. This voluntary information sounded like a come-on game. That was the very effect that Hildrow was trying to produce. He wanted Dadren to be doubtful at the outset.

"Korsch tells me," declared Hildrow, "that you will have nothing to say to him. In the meantime, I have been examining the plans that I took from you. I cannot decipher them, commander.

"It appears to me that certain portions of the diagrams must be missing. I failed to gain the other plans that I sought. Therefore, I have been unable to check upon these drawings. In a word, commander, you have me at a loss."

Hildrow was becoming serious. His tone had lost its sarcastic tinge. Dadren was still waiting to learn the connection between the first remarks and this admission of failure.

"Possibly, commander," declared Hildrow, earnestly, "you could be prevailed upon to supply the missing portions of the plans from memory. Indeed, you might be persuaded to do so. Korsch, for instance, believes in harsh methods.

"But I have considered that angle and I have come to a conclusion. It seems to me that we can reach an agreement that would be satisfactory to both of us. I have spoken of how close this island is to Washington.

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"That is because I want you to know how near you are to freedom."

A GRIM smile appeared upon Dadren's lips. The commander did not trust the disguised plotter. Deliberately, he challenged Hildrow's words.

"This talk means nothing," asserted Dadren. "Until you admit your identity, I shall have no dealing with you."

Hildrow eyed Dadren steadily. He studied every contour of the commander's rugged face. Then, in a cautious tone, he said:

"To tell you who I am would endanger me. If you will listen to my plan and agree to a compromise, I shall reveal my identity. Is that agreeable?"

"I make no promises in advance."

"But you will hear my terms?"

Dadren considered. Hildrow had promised much. Apparently, the man was anxious to make some deal. Dadren came to the conclusion that he had nothing to lose by acceding to the last request. He nodded his assent.

"Very well," declared Hildrow. "Let me explain, first of all, why I wanted the plans that you were carrying to Washington. I knew that the possession of those plans might mean a chance for profit. That is why I seized them.

"I am not an agent of a foreign government. I am working entirely on my own. I simply wanted to offer the plans to the highest bidder. Professor Whitburn destroyed the set he had. That helped me for the existence of any duplicates would end my game. I was sure that I could gain your originals.

"Money is what I am after. But the game has become too dangerous. Apparently, your secretary I refer to Vincent has delivered another set of plans to Senator Ross Releston. That leaves me with a useless possession."

Slowly, Hildrow drew forth the tracings from the briefcase. He looked dejected as he spread the stolen diagrams upon the desk.

"I hold these," he said bluntly, "and I hold you. Frankly, I doubt that I can force you to supply the missing links in these plans. Should I undertake to make you build a new model submarine, the process would require your removal to a foreign land. I lack the funds to accomplish it.

"I know the general principle of your invention." Hildrow paused to study the tracings. "An undersea boat, equipped with chemical tanks into which water is introduced when the ship submerges. The chemical agency, I understand, will supply the motive power for the submarine.

"Ships that are shells, lessened from the burden of heavy motors. Boats that can carry the maximum capacity of torpedoes. But the vital parts of this invention are missing from these plans. I congratulate you, commander, upon your canniness."

"Proceed with your offer," suggested Dadren.

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"Very well," declared Hildrow, muffling a smile within his beard. "I am willing to return these plans to you. I am ready to release you, for a cash consideration.

"Twenty-five thousand dollars is the price that I ask. That amount will reimburse me for the expense that I have undergone. It will allow me sufficient funds to clear the country. It will release me from an embarrassing situation."

HILDROW waited. He was banking heavily upon Dadren's reaction. The commander did not know that Hildrow had dealt in murder. The treachery of Hasker had been the only evidence of Hildrow's scheming, so far as Dadren had observed.

Dadren's smile became one of contempt. Meeting Hildrow's gaze, he voiced his opinion of the disguised crook. Dadren was blunt.

"You are talking like a kidnaper," he declared. "A man in your position should be anxious to get out of it."

"I am," admitted Hildrow. "Frankly, commander, I have not yet been branded as the type of criminal you mention. But I fear that I may be. That is another reason why I desire to make terms. That is why I have set the price so low.

"Hear me out. If you accept my offer, you have merely to write a letter to Senator Ross Releston, telling him not to issue a statement that you have been abducted. According to the newspapers, your plane crashed between Cedar Cove and Washington.

"In your letter to Senator Releston, you must add a mention of the price required. I shall dictate the letter for you to copy. State also that if the senator accedes, he has only to keep the news from the press. That will tell me that payment will be made."

Dadren was thinking. His first impulse was to deride this criminal; but second thought advised him to consider further. Hildrow had issued veiled threats. Forced measures to make Dadren complete the plans; removal to some place where he would have to conduct new experiments under threats of death or torture these were elements that Dadren did not overlook.

The stern-faced commander did not fear such procedure. But he was thinking of his country; of what his invention would mean to the government that he had served. He knew what he thought Hildrow did not know: that these tracings were necessary to the other plans. He also knew that twenty-five thousand dollars was a sum that Senator Releston would produce without a murmur.

"I might consider your terms," parried Dadren, with feigned reluctance. "I see, however, where they could prove unsatisfactory. How could the senator know that he will actually gain my release after he has paid the sum you ask?"

"I do not ask the money in advance," purred Hildrow, now becoming persuasive. "I merely want assurance that it will be delivered."

"By whom?"

"By yourself."

"To whom?"

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"To a man whose name I shall reveal along with my own, if you agreed upon the compromise."

"Name the intermediary."

"Very well," declared Hildrow. "I shall do so. You must agree never to mention his name in connection with your abduction. I rely upon your honor."

"That is odd," scoffed Dadren. "You are no man of honor."

"But you are," returned Hildrow. "Do you consent to keep silence if I tell you the name of the man who will receive your payment?"

Again, Dadren meditated. He could see no occasion to refuse this request. Quietly, he said:

"I agree."

"The man's name," announced Hildrow, "is Eric Hildrow. He is a friend of Senator Releston. An expert on international trade conditions."

"I have heard of him."

"You will secretly pay him the money that the senator gives you."

"Yes."

"I trust you, commander," said Hildrow, seriously. "Therefore, I shall reveal my true identity."

Hildrow ripped the disguise from his face. Dadren was amazed at the change. He studied the pallid countenance that the beard had hidden. Hildrow, in turn watched every detail of Dadren's expression.

"Who are you?" questioned Dadren.

"Eric Hildrow," replied the plotter.

THE revelation produced a marked effect upon the commander. Dadren was astonished at the depths to which Hildrow had sunk. He was also impressed with the belief that the man's plight must be desperate. With it, he realized that he had promised not to mention Hildrow's name.

That was Hildrow's crafty touch, the gaining of that promise. It showed him to be a trickster, even when he was laying his cards upon the table. It brought conviction to Dadren's mind. Hildrow observed it. Producing pen and paper, he passed them to Dadren.

"I shall dictate the note, commander," he declared in a weary, almost apologetic tone.

Dadren took the pen. He wrote the note, word for word, as Hildrow gave it, following the pattern that the plotter had previously outlined. Hildrow read the letter when Dadren had finished. Blotting the ink, he enclosed the message in an envelope and asked Dadren to address it.

"I shall mail this letter," announced Hildrow. "For the present, however you will have to remain here, commander. I shall order Korsch to make your stay as pleasant as possible."

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He gathered up the plans and placed them in the portfolio. He tucked the little case under his arm and made another apologetic statement.

"I must retain these," he said, "until I know that the terms have been accepted. After that, commander, I shall return them to you. That will be on the day of your release."

Dadren watched Hildrow put on his false beard. Then the plotter called for Korsch. The fellow entered. Hildrow used a disguised tone to instruct him that Commander Dadren was to receive friendly treatment despite his imprisonment.

Then Hildrow left. He joined the man in the coupe and was driven back to Washington. He transferred to a cab near the outside of the city. Later, he arrived at the quiet apartment house.

MARLING was waiting when Hildrow walked in. He saw his chief remove the disguise. He listened while Hildrow, chuckling, gave him the details of the conference with Dadren. Marling stood astounded while Hildrow produced the letter that the commander had written.

"Mail it, Marling," ordered Hildrow.

"I can't," protested Marling. "Have you gone crazy, chief? Sinking the whole works for twenty-five grand? Leaving yourself in Dadren's hands? Say, if I mail this letter, it means —"

"It means," interrupted Hildrow, with a chuckle, "that we shall gain success. Once that letter is mailed, Marling, those missing plans will practically be in my hands. Are you fool enough to think that I talked straight to Dadren?"

"Listen: While I made my terms, I watched him. I studied his face until I knew it as well as my own. I have his photograph, here in this table. It is an excellent likeness, the one that Hasker sent us from Cedar Cove. That is all I need."

A look of understanding began to dawn on Marling's thick-set face. Again, Hildrow chuckled. He saw Marling grin and nod.

"You've got it," laughed Hildrow. "Mail the letter and come back. I shall give you the details on your return. A tip to Stollart will be easy. After that the game is mine."

As Marling hastened from the apartment, Eric Hildrow strolled to the window. He lighted a panatela, then stared out toward the city. A mile away he saw the squatty outline of the Hotel Barlingham.

A twisted smile appeared upon the plotter's face. Eric Hildrow had bluffed Commander Joseph Dadren. The next to fall for the game would be Senator Ross Releston. And with them, The Shadow would be deceived.

So thought Eric Hildrow.

## CHAPTER XVI. TERMS ARE MET

"LOOK at this, Marquette."

Senator Releston passed a letter to the Secret Service operative. Releston was seated at his desk, opening the morning mail. Vic was close by; Stollart was at the filing cabinet in the corner.

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"From Dadren?" queried Vic, in amazement.

"Looks like it," responded the senator. "The signature appears genuine. Come here, Stollart; perhaps you can help us."

The stoop-shouldered secretary approached and studied the letter. He nodded; then went to the filing cabinet and produced other letters. He brought them to the desk. These letters were under Dadren's file; though typewritten, they had the signature. It matched.

"Call Vincent," said Releston to Stollart. "I want to talk to him."

The secretary went out and returned with Harry. Releston motioned the young man to a chair. Referring to the letter, Releston began to speak.

"Here is a communication," he declared, "that was mailed in Washington late yesterday afternoon. It purports to be from Commander Joseph Dadren.

"He wants me to guarantee twenty-five thousand dollars for his release. I am to make the payment as he will tell me. I have merely to refrain from issuing a statement that the commander has been kidnapped.

"Such action or lack of action will satisfy his captors. If I agree, Commander Dadren will come here a free man, prior to Thursday noon, bringing with him the complete set of missing tracings that belong with the plans."

"You're wrong there, senator," put in Marquette. "Read that last part again. It says that he will bring his set of duplicate plans."

"You're right," declared the senator, referring to the letter. "But I don't see that there is any difference, Marquette."

"There's plenty of difference," asserted Vic. "Somebody dictated that letter to Dadren. The fellows who have got him don't know that the tracings go with the other drawings. They think he simply had duplicates."

"An excellent point, Marquette," approved Releston. "It is your turn, Vincent. You have heard Marquette's criticism. Tell me: as Dadren's secretary, does this sound like a letter that the commander would have written?"

HARRY took the message and read it carefully. He shook his head.

"Commander Dadren would not have used this wording," said Harry. "He copied it from some one's dictation. There is proof of it. The letter was written slowly and carefully. Commander Dadren usually scrawled messages in haste."

"Ah! You believe that Dadren actually wrote the note?"

"Absolutely! It compares with certain expense sheets that he made out for me to copy. Those were items that he took time to write with care."

"There's a point, senator," added Vic. "If they'd been faking Dadren's writing, they'd probably have picked one of his scrawly samples. Don't you think so, Vincent?"

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"Probably," agreed Harry. "I have the expense sheets with me. We can make a comparison."

Ten minutes later, the expense sheets lay beside the note that Dadren had written. Senator Releston was nodding in conviction that the letter was genuine. The other three men agreed with him.

"That settles it," asserted the senator, firmly. "We shall meet the terms. We shall expect Dadren's arrival. All of us. The senate is not in session. I shall spend all my time here."

"Count on me," put in Vic Marquette. "I'm not going to move out until Dadren shows up. You'll be here, too, Vincent?"

"I have to go to the Navy Department," recalled Harry. "At three o'clock, Wednesday afternoon. I'll be gone one hour. Merely to give a statement about the men employed at Cedar Cove. The department may take over the commander's equipment."

"You'll be here practically all the time then," stated Vic Marquette. "We'll have Stollart with us besides. Well, senator, I see it the way you do. Let's get Dadren safely here. Of course, there's liable to be trouble about the money –"

"Not a bit," inserted Releston. "I shall pay it gladly. I would deliver twice that sum four times the sum without a question. Provided that Dadren is delivered. I haven't seen the commander for two years" – Releston paused reflectively "but I should be able to recognize him. Most of our negotiations were by correspondence."

"Has Stollart met him?" questioned Marquette.

"I don't think so," replied Releston. "Have you, Stollart?"

The secretary shook his head.

"I've only seen Dadren's photograph," remarked Vic. "But Vincent served as his secretary. We'll count on you, Vincent –"

"Commander Dadren can identify himself," interrupted the senator. "Our plans are made. We shall adopt a policy of the strictest secrecy. Inform no one else. Do nothing that may frustrate this arrangement."

SHORTLY afterward, Senator Releston left for the senate building. Harry remained in the office. Vic Marquette spoke to him.

"I'm going over to make a routine report," said the operative. "Stick around, Vincent, while I'm gone."

Harry nodded. Vic departed, and not long afterward Stollart left the room.

When the secretary had gone, Harry sat down at the desk. Keeping an eye on the door, The Shadow's agent drew a pen from his pocket and inscribed a report to The Shadow.

Going to the window, Harry folded the message and put it in an envelope. He made a slight motion with his hand. The envelope flashed in the sunlight. Across the street, a man noted the signal.

Harry thrust the envelope in his pocket and walked to the door. Stollart was not about, nor were the servants, Smedley and Williston. Harry did not like to leave the office; he and Cliff always stayed there, except when

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Senator Releston was on hand. But he felt sure that a brief departure would cause no harm.

He went out through the waiting room and opened the front door of the apartment. Leaving the door ajar, Harry headed for the elevators and loitered by the mail chute.

The man who had seen him from across the street was Cliff Marsland. Cliff would come up on the elevator to the floor above; then descend by the stairway. That would be Harry's opportunity to pass him the envelope. They had worked the stunt before.

BACK in the apartment, Stollart had returned to the office. The secretary's face showed tenseness. Stollart was holding letters in his hand; he intended to tell Harry Vincent that he was going out to mail them. But Stollart saw no sign of Harry.

Quickly, the secretary crossed the room. Seating himself by the desk, he called a number. He knew that it was a pay booth in the Union Station. Some one was supposed to be on hand to receive the call.

A ringing sound; then came a voice that Stollart had heard before, although he did not know the speaker. It was Marling. He spoke a key-word that Stollart understood. Lips close to the receiver, Stollart gave the news.

"All set," he whispered hoarsely. "They fell for it... The time for the deal will be Wednesday afternoon, right after two o'clock. Vincent will be out. For an hour. Navy Department... No, nothing important... Yes, he'd probably recognize Dadren... I'll be ready..."

Stollart dropped the receiver abruptly and moved over toward the filing cabinet. He had heard the sound of a closing door. A few moments later, Harry Vincent sauntered into the office. Harry had passed the report to Cliff. He had arrived too late, however, to catch Stollart telephoning.

It was not long before Vic Marquette returned. Senator Releston came in later. The vigil had begun. From now on, those in the know would await the promised arrival of Commander Joseph Dadren.

Harry Vincent was satisfied. He had sent word to The Shadow. His report, though brief, had missed no point.

But Harry Vincent was not the only one of the four watchers who felt that he had played an important part. Stollart, the smug secretary, had also passed the word along. Another of Eric Hildrow's traitors, Stollart had paved the way for the master plotter's coming stroke.

## CHAPTER XVII. THE SHADOW LAUGHS

NIGHT. A light was glowing in the room of Henry Arnaud. But the occupant of that room was not in view. The light came from a table lamp that held a heavy shade. The only sphere of illumination lay beneath the lamp itself.

Hands appeared beneath the light. Long, white hands, with fingers that moved like detached creatures. Upon one finger glittered a resplendent gem: The Shadow's girasol. That jewel was the only token of identity that The Shadow wore.

Temporarily, this Washington hotel room had become The Shadow's sanctum. Here, The Shadow was analyzing the purpose that lay behind the letter from Commander Dadren. The Shadow had read Harry Vincent's report in its entirety.



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Pen and paper beneath the light, The Shadow was inscribing written thoughts in ink of vivid blue, that faded as soon as it had dried. This was The Shadow's method. His keen deductions came readily from the moving pen.

Unlike Senator Releston and Vic Marquette, The Shadow was finding a catch in the terms which Commander Dadren had suggested. He knew that the letter had been dictated. He was looking for the ideas that lay behind it.

\$25,000

The Shadow's hand inscribed the sum required. A soft laugh sounded from the gloom above the lamp. The Shadow could see the reason for the sum specified. Eric Hildrow the man whose identity was yet unknown to The Shadow had chosen that amount with a purpose.

He had picked the highest sum at which he thought Senator Releston would not balk. It was not the money that he sought. The amount would be trivial to so masterful a plotter. Man of murder that he was, Eric Hildrow would have decided to kill Dadren rather than let him go at so low a price.

Agreement

The single word appeared from The Shadow's pen. It told what lay behind Hildrow's scheme. By getting Releston's accord, by lulling the senator to a belief that Dadren might be released, the plotter had forestalled Releston's intention to notify the press.

Informant

Again, The Shadow laughed. How had the unknown plotter discovered that Releston was about to spread the news? Why had he acted at the most crucial moment? There could be only one answer: A spy in Releston's camp.

Stollart

The Shadow inscribed the name upon the blank space from which the preceding word had faded. Polmore had been close to Professor Whitburn. Hasker had been Commander Dadren's most trusted mechanic. It was obvious that Stollart was the only man in a position to watch Senator Releston as closely as the master plotter required.

A pause. Then The Shadow's hand moved again. Slowly it inscribed two words; they told in brief, the substance of Hildrow's game. They announced the only stake that the crooked plotter could be after.

The plans

THE SHADOW'S deduction was well-calculated. He had noted an important item in Harry Vincent's report. That was the fact that Dadren's letter had specified that the commander would return bringing the "duplicate plans."

A crafty statement. The plotter had used it to fool Dadren. It had deceived Vic Marquette as well. The Secret Service agent thought that the enemy had gained no inkling of the purpose which Dadren's tracings were designed to serve.

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But the Shadow, convinced that Stollart was a spy, saw clearly that Releston's secretary must have informed the master plotter of the letter that Dadren had enclosed with the plans themselves. Stollart, like Harry and Vic, had been present when Releston had told the story of the tracings.

How did the unknown schemer intend to gain the plans from the senator's vault? The place was too well watched. Stollart, a spy and not a fighter, could not be depended upon to gain them. Harry's description of Releston's strong room had satisfied The Shadow.

Strategy, not strength, would be the method by which the unknown plotter would gain those plans. Dadren's letter had paved the way. Seeking a method by which the master crook could profit by Dadren's message, The Shadow found the answer.

His pen moved swiftly upon the paper. The Shadow was summarizing the facts that he had learned, through various sources, about Eric Hildrow. Professor Whitburn had supplied information. Polmore, in his confession to the professor had named the master crook as Reginald Satterly.

A tall man a red mustache hair of the same color a monocle

These notations faded. Then came Whitburn's own description of the man whom he had seen; the one whom Nuland had recognized as his chief.

Sallow black hair black mustache

A dying crook had coughed out a confession in the Hotel Halcyon. His description of Eric Hildrow had begun like Whitburn's. Then the man had added words which The Shadow now wrote:

Changed to a beard

That change had come after the departure from Death Island, when Hildrow was faring forth to arrange for the capture of Commander Dadren. That was the guise in which Dadren must have met him. The character of a bearded man.

Three disguises; beneath them, a face of which The Shadow had no description. In the battle aboard the Northern Express, tools of the master plotter had also been effectively disguised.

Though Hildrow's various make-ups may have been hastily donned, there was no question but that the rogue was a master in the art of disguise. Therein lay his strongest forte. It was the weapon upon which he trusted in all his dealings.

The Shadow laughed as his hand wrote prophetic words. The inscription faded. Then an object came into the light and rested there. It was a photograph of Commander Joseph Dadren; one that Harry Vincent had sent to The Shadow weeks ago.

KEEN eyes studied the portrait. Their glare seemed to burn through the picture, as if seeking the face of the villain who was using Dadren in order to accomplish a fell purpose. Softly, The Shadow laughed.

He had noted every feature of Dadren's face. He would not forget the details. He pressed the photograph to one side. Then he made a last notation:

Wednesday. Two o'clock.

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The time that Harry Vincent was scheduled to go to the Navy Department. The beginning of a short period when Harry, who knew Dadren well, would be absent from Senator Releston's.

As the writing faded, The Shadow inscribed two new words, both of which related to that hour on the coming Wednesday:

Before. After.

A whispered laugh crept through the room as The Shadow clicked the light switch. A form moved softly toward the window and drew aside the curtain. Keen eyes gazed off toward the myriad lights that formed a resplendent glow about the capital city.

Gazing upon the scene, The Shadow laughed again. The echoes of his low, sinister tone seemed to repeat the words that he had written.

"Wednesday two o'clock before after –"

There lay the crux of coming combat. There was The Shadow's plan to offset the cunning of the unknown plotter, Eric Hildrow. Both would move. One would win. The Shadow's laugh betokened confidence.

Hildrow's hidden purpose; his coming thrust to be delivered at a timely hour these were factors that others had failed to see. The depth of Hildrow's strategy had baffled Dadren, Releston and Marquette.

Harry Vincent had not seen the game. The Shadow, alone, had analyzed it. Moreover, he had picked the one way by which Hildrow's methods could be most effectively thwarted. What Hildrow planned; the measures that could beat him these were the thoughts that sprang in detail through the brain of that being beside the window.

New crime would strike in Washington, that city that sparkled beyond The Shadow's window. Theft of mighty consequence; murder of a man who had striven to aid his country these were the crimes that must be beaten.

Only The Shadow knew.

## CHAPTER XVIII. WEDNESDAY BEFORE TWO

WEDNESDAY afternoon found Harry Vincent in the office of Senator Releston's apartment. Vic Marquette was there; so was Stollart. Only Senator Releston was absent.

Morning hours had drifted by. No word had come from Commander Dadren. These waiting men had discussed the matter; both Harry and Stollart had agreed with Vic Marquette when the Secret Service operative had proclaimed that the commander would not show up before to-morrow morning.

Two o'clock was nearing. Harry was due to leave shortly for the Navy Department. The footsteps from the hallway broke the monotony. The three men turned, to see Senator Releston enter.

Releston's quizzical look was answered by a shake of Vic Marquette's head.

"No word from Commander Dadren," mused the senator, seating himself at the desk. "I am inclined, Marquette, to believe that we are the victims of a hoax. We may have made a grave mistake by giving our

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acquiescence to that note from Dadren."

"Don't make any change until to-morrow noon," put in Vic. "We'd better play the game the way we started it, senator."

"Certainly," agreed Releston. "Nevertheless, I –"

He paused. Smedley had entered to announce that a caller was in the waiting room. He handed a card to the senator. Releston came up from his chair and made a gesture with both hands. Smedley, understanding, hurried out to call the visitor.

"Is it Dadren?" demanded Vic.

Releston nodded. He was too excited to speak. Then Harry Vincent, looking toward the door saw Commander Dadren enter.

SENATOR RELESTON recognized the visitor's face. He came around the desk to shake hands with the rugged-faced commander.

A smile appeared upon Dadren's lips as the freed prisoner spied a box of cigars upon the senator's desk. Without a word, he released his hand from Releston's and helped himself to a perfecto. He lighted the cigar, delivered a grunt of satisfaction and seated himself in a chair. Puffing contentedly, he began to speak.

"I can talk now," declared Dadren. "I haven't had a smoke for a week. Those rascals left me without a cent in my pockets, otherwise I would have stopped at a cigar store on my way here."

"Where were you held prisoner?" questioned Releston.

"I don't know," replied Dadren. "Today, I was blindfolded and placed in an automobile. The car seemed to drive in circles. Men on both sides of me ruffians with revolvers.

"They brought me into Washington. I guessed, from the sound of traffic, that we were in the city. Then they shoved me from the car. I ripped away the blindfold. I was in an alleyway a block below this hotel."

"What kind of a place did they have you in?" inquired Vic Marquette.

Dadren stared suspiciously at the Secret Service operative. Releston introduced Vic. Then Dadren spied Harry Vincent and came to his feet to shake hands with his secretary. After that, he remembered Vic's question.

"We can talk about that later," declared the commander. "Another matter is more important. Tell me, senator, are the plans safe? The ones that Vincent brought?"

"They are here in my vault," declared Releston.

"Let me see them," suggested Dadren.

Releston waved his hand toward the door. While Dadren looked puzzled, Harry explained that the senator allowed no one in the office while he turned the combination of the vault. Harry led the way into the front living room. Marquette and Stollart followed. Dadren sank comfortably in a chair and puffed deeply at his cigar.

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Soon Senator Releston joined them. He gave the diagrammed sheets to Dadren. The commander studied them and nodded in satisfaction.

"All is well," he declared.

"You have the tracings?" questioned Releston.

"No," answered Dadren. "I destroyed them."

"What! You mean –"

"They were unnecessary. That is, I can copy them from memory. I destroyed them as a gesture."

"For the benefit of your captors?"

"Yes. They thought the tracings were duplicates. They let me go because they could not get the originals, which were necessary to their game. So I tore up the tracings after they handed them to me. A bluff. It was a good policy."

Harry Vincent happened to glance at his watch. Dadren noticed the move and shot an inquiring glance toward his secretary. Harry explained that he was due at the Navy Department. He gave the reason.

"I can call them," he added. "Perhaps they would delay the inquiry –"

"You don't know the department," interposed Dadren. "You must go there at once, Vincent. By the way, don't mention that I am back. I prefer to announce that fact myself."

"Very well, sir."

AS soon as Harry was gone, Senator Releston and Vic Marquette were ready with new questions. Commander Dadren waved his hand in an annoyed fashion. He turned to Stollart.

"I left my suitcase in the waiting room," said Dadren to Releston's secretary. "It contains a few papers that my captors returned to me. Nothing pertaining to the plans" – this was to Releston "but there are letters to which I must refer. Could you get it for me?"

The final remark was to Stollart. The secretary nodded and started for the little hall. Dadren called after him, asking him to bring in the box of cigars from the senator's desk.

"I could smoke steadily for a week," laughed Dadren. "It's funny, now that it's past, but it's hard to go without tobacco, when a man is a heavy smoker like myself."

Stollart arrived with the suitcase. Dadren placed it beside his chair, but did not open it. He stretched one leg upon the heavy bag; with cigar between his fingers, he spoke to Releston and Marquette.

"Let's leave the questions until later," he decided. "Only one thing is on my mind right now: Those diagrams that I destroyed. I want to reconstruct them. I can do it by making notes to begin with. Is this man your secretary, senator?"

He indicated Stollart. Releston nodded.

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"Has he studied the submarine plans?" inquired Dadren.

"No," replied Releston.

"But you two have?" asked Dadren, indicating Vic along with the senator.

"Yes," answered Releston.

"Then I must request privacy," asserted Dadren. "My plans, senator, are something like your vault. They have a combination which must be kept secret. If I dictated to a person who has not examined the plans, he will know nothing. I should like you and Mr. Marquette to be absent."

So speaking, Dadren picked up the plans that Releston had brought from the vault. He began to look over the diagrams.

Senator Releston suggested that Dadren and Stollart go in the office. The commander smiled and shook his head.

"This room will do," he said. "After I have finished the dictation, I shall be ready to go to the Navy Department."

"I'll go with you," offered Vic.

"Very well," agreed Dadren.

Releston arose and went toward the office. Marquette followed. Dadren motioned to Stollart to close the door. The secretary did so. He was alone with Commander Dadren in that single room which extended out from Senator Releston's spacious apartment.

WHEN Senator Releston reached his office, he seated himself behind the desk. Vic Marquette, however, remained standing. The operative began to pace, restlessly. Silent minutes passed. At the end of ten, the door opened and Stollart appeared.

"Where is Commander Dadren?" questioned Releston.

"He departed, sir," replied Stollart, seriously. "He took the plans and my shorthand notes. He said he would have the notes typed at the Navy Department."

"He departed!" cried Vic Marquette. "Which way did he go?"

"Through the outer door of the living room," replied Stollart. "He ordered me to bolt it after him. I did. Then it struck me as rather peculiar that he should choose that exit —"

Vic Marquette leaped for the telephone. He called the desk. He learned that several persons had just come down on an elevator. The clerk had seen them go out; he could not say, however, if any answered Dadren's description.

"Call the Navy Department," suggested Senator Releston. "Perhaps they —"

"No use," growled Vic. "That's the last place we'd find him. That man was an impostor. I was beginning to suspect it. He's taken the diagrams with the tracings. He's landed the works!"

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With this statement, Vic became glum. He stared at the senator, whose face reflected the same expression. Only Stollart was unperturbed. Unnoticed, the secretary was wearing a smile of satisfaction.

By skillful stratagem, an impersonator of Commander Joseph Dadren had boldly walked into Senator Releston's abode. He had asked for the plans that had been brought by Harry Vincent. He had received them.

Coolly, this crafty worker had followed up his deception. Such was the aftermath of the letter from the real Commander Dadren. A keen brain had designed a simple but effective method to gain the priceless plans that had lain behind the formidable door of Senator Releston's impregnable vault.

### CHAPTER XIX. WEDNESDAY AFTER TWO

TWO o'clock.

Vic Marquette, pacing nervously, noted the time. Senator Releston was at his desk, deep in thought. Stollart stood inconspicuously at one side.

"I thought of calling Vincent," said Marquette, savagely. "But that wouldn't do any good. He's over at that inquiry; it would be a tough job to get hold of him."

"There is still a chance," declared Releston, "that we have not been deceived. I still think that a call to the Navy Department –"

"Would ruin everything," broke in Vic. "Listen, senator. If that was really Dadren who came here, all we've got to do is wait. Let him handle the matter the way he wants. But if the fellow was a faker, we could call every department in Washington and it wouldn't bring him back."

"You are right, Marquette," admitted Releston, with a solemn nod.

"Dumb work on your part, Stollart," accused Vic, whirling to the silent secretary. "If you hadn't let him get away; if you'd only come in here to tell us he was going –"

Protest showed on Stollart's face; it was Releston, however, who intervened.

"Save criticism for yourself, Marquette," he said, sternly. "Do not shift the blame to Stollart."

Vic subsided glumly. He resumed his pacing. Two minutes passed; then came footsteps. Vic turned to see Smedley enter. The servant looked puzzled.

"What is it, Smedley?" inquired Releston.

"Commander Dadren has arrived, sir," returned the servant. "He is in the waiting room. But I don't understand –"

"Dadren has returned?" exclaimed Releston.

"But he hasn't, sir," protested Smedley. "He announced himself as if he had never seen me before. And he looks a bit different, sir."

"The real Dadren!" shouted Vic, pouncing toward the door.

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Before Vic reached the portal, Dadren himself appeared. He had heard the cries; he had come to learn the trouble. Under his arm he carried a portfolio. Smedley was right; this Dadren looked different from the other.

SENATOR RELESTON recalled a definite appearance of the first visitor's face. Firm features, so well molded that they had been almost masklike. This man looked less like Dadren than Releston had expected. Had the two been side by side, the senator would have chosen the first Dadren as the genuine. Circumstances, however, made him decide in favor of the newcomer.

Vic Marquette had denounced the first visitor as an impostor. Releston had given accord. Both took it for granted that Commander Dadren stood before them. In fact, the naval officer looked bewildered at the excitement which his arrival had created. Looking past Releston and Marquette, he caught sight of Stollart.

A warning signal from the secretary. It was Stollart, at present, who was troubled. While Releston and Marquette had been registering elation, Stollart had lost his smug satisfaction. Sight of this new face; a glimpse of the portfolio both were enough to tell bad news to Stollart.

"At last." Dadren appeared relieved as he forced a smile, yet all the while his eyes were watchful. "Here I am, senator, with the missing portions of the plans."

Advancing to the desk, he opened the portfolio. From it, he drew forth the sheets of tracings and spread them out that all could see.

"Give me the other drawings," suggested the commander. "I shall show you how they fit."

"We have bad news, commander," interjected Releston, going back to his desk. "The plans the ones Vincent brought are gone!"

"Gone!" exclaimed Dadren.

Looking about, he caught Stollart's eye. Again a danger signal came from the troubled secretary. Dadren looked to Releston for an explanation.

"More than a half hour ago," stated the senator, "a man came here and announced himself as you. He looked like you, commander. He wanted the plans. We gave them to him."

"What! Without demanding proof of his identity?"

"Vincent was here. He took the man for you."

"But did the rogue have tracings?"

"No. He said that he had destroyed them; that they were unnecessary. He was in the living room with Stollart, dictating notes. He left by the outer door."

"Is this Stollart?" demanded Dadren, looking at the secretary.

Releston nodded.

"What did the impostor dictate?" inquired Dadren, looking steadily at the secretary.

"Odd references that I could not understand," was the reply. "It sounded like a rigmarole. But I thought —"



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"Of course." Dadren's tone was caustic. "Nobody thought. What kind of a story did this fellow tell you?"

"None," growled Vic. "That's just why I began to suspect him. He said he was brought blindfolded into Washington; that –"

"You have told me enough," interposed Dadren. "Listen to my story. You will know then why the rogue came here. In a sense, I am to blame for what has happened. Yet, do not be alarmed. We are better off than we were before."

RELESTON settled back in his chair. Vic Marquette looked tensely interested. Stollart was listening carefully.

"My captors," explained Dadren, "were holding me in an old shack somewhere near a railroad. I feel sure that it was on the Richmond line. South of Washington. I could hear trains going by at night.

"Their leader, a black-bearded villain, could make nothing of the plans I carried. He thought they were duplicates of those that you received from Vincent. He wanted the originals. So he politely returned me these duplicates and suggested a compromise, through the letter that he made me write.

"To-day, the bearded man went away. I suspected a ruse. I managed to talk with the guard whom he had set over me. That fellow, like others on duty at the shack, seemed discontented. Talking with the guard, I explained the terms that I had made. I learned something.

"The black-bearded rascal had told his crew that he was getting fifty thousand dollars for my release. He was to split half of the money with them. My guard saw from what I had told him that he and the others would be left holding the bag. That was my wedge."

"I begin to get it," affirmed Vic Marquette.

"I told my guard that I wanted to escape," resumed Dadren. "I said that the bearded chief was double-crossing me as well as his own men. I offered amnesty to all and added that I would pay them the twenty-five thousand that I had promised to their leader.

"I impressed the dissatisfied guard. He was going to talk it over with his companions. I told him to wait, until they had proof of their leader's perfidy. The guard came in the cell where they were holding me. He aided me in wrenching away the bars, a job that I had failed to do alone.

"Then he locked the door and remained outside while I escaped. I made for the railroad. A freight was coming from a siding. I clambered into an open box car and rode into Washington. I came here at once.

"This being Wednesday"– the speaker paused deliberately "I figured that I could anticipate any game that our enemy was playing. Bringing the tracings with me, I was sure that all was safe. I thought that to-morrow, Thursday, would bring the crisis. But I was wrong."

DADREN paused. Then, in a sour tone, he added:

"The crook came here ahead of me. In disguise. Something that I had not expected. What a terrible mistake to let him get away with those plans. Nevertheless, we can defeat him."

"How?" queried Vic.

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"Here are the tracings," responded Dadren. "The villain does not know their value. He has merely reversed the situation. He has the plans, we have the tracings, instead of the other way about."

"Say" Vic Marquette had a sudden thought "that fellow seemed to know what the tracings were for. How do you explain that, commander?"

"I can answer it." The unexpected statement came from Stollart. The secretary was speaking earnestly. "Remember, sir"— Stollart turned to Releston "that the impostor stalled a bit when the tracings were mentioned?"

"I do," recalled the senator.

"That's when he realized their importance," added Stollart. "He was bluffing, feeling us out. He caught on without our knowing it."

"Stollart is right!" shot Vic Marquette, pounding the desk. "That guy's headed back for the shack in Virginia, to get these tracings that he had returned to Commander Dadren."

"We can trap him there," added Senator Releston. "With Commander Dadren free and safe with us, we can move at once. This is a job for the Secret Service, Marquette."

"You're right it is, senator," chimed Vic. "I'm calling the chief right away. We'll have a squad down there to grab the whole outfit. How close can you give us the trail, commander?"

"I paced five hundred and fifty steps from the shack to the siding," declared Dadren. "I came in from the east side of the railroad, on a direct line. While in the box car, I counted sixty-three telegraph posts until we reached a little station called Alora."

"That's enough," decided Vic. "Let me have the telephone, senator —"

"Just a moment," interrupted Dadren. Vic stopped. "These plans"— Dadren picked up the tracings "must go in the vault at once."

"I shall place them there as soon as Marquette calls," promised Releston.

"And I'll stay here with the senator," added Vic. "The chief will handle the squad."

"I must see Vincent," declared Dadren. "Furthermore, I should report at once to the Navy Department."

"Vincent is down there," put in Stollart, "at an inquiry that concerns Cedar Cove —"

"What!" exclaimed Dadren. "I must go there, at once. This is important, senator. I can report to the department, see Vincent and talk at that inquiry, all at once."

"Shall I go with him, senator?" questioned Vic.

"You belong here," insisted Dadren. "You represent the Secret Service. I have placed the tracings in your charge. I may have to mention that at the inquiry. Otherwise, the Navy Department might demand the tracings."

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"You should stay here also, senator. Nevertheless, I should like to have some one accompany me. I shall be safe, for I am sure that my abductor has not yet learned of my escape. At the same time, I prefer to have some one with me –"

"Take Stollart," interposed Releston, indicating the secretary.

"Good!" A faint smile began on Dadren's lips. Stollart, too, showed repressed satisfaction. "Very well, senator"– Dadren waved his hand toward the desk "you have the all important tracings. You know me to be the real Commander Dadren.

"Come, Stollart. We must start. I shall call you from the Navy Department, senator."

Turning on his heel, the second visitor strode from the office. Stollart followed close behind him. Vic Marquette grabbed the telephone, while Senator Releston remained at his desk.

While Vic was telephoning, Releston heard the outer door slam as token of a departure. The gray-haired senator smiled. Not for a moment did he suspect that he and Marquette for the second time within an hour had become the dupes of a clever game.

## CHAPTER XX. TO THE HIDE-OUT

OUTSIDE the Hotel Barlingham, the man who looked like Commander Dadren beckoned Stollart toward an obscure alleyway. There the two stepped into a coupe. Taking the wheel, the impersonator headed toward the Northwest District. Then, in a growl that resembled Eric Hildrow's, he questioned:

"What happened, Stollart? Give me the details."

"I thought it was you, chief," replied the secretary. "I was taken in, like the rest of them."

"You fool! You knew that I wouldn't arrive until after two o'clock. I didn't want to meet Vincent."

"I thought you had changed your plan –"

"I hadn't. We've been tricked as badly as Releston and Marquette. Do you know who that first fellow was?"

Stollart shook his head.

"The Shadow!" hissed Hildrow.

Stollart trembled at mention of the name.

"The Shadow came into the game," asserted Hildrow, his voice incongruous as it came from lips that looked like Dadren's. "He wanted the plans and he got them."

"He may come back for the tracings," suggested Stollart, in an awed tone.

"That won't matter," declared Hildrow. "I have photostats. We've got to land the plans, that's all. If we get them, Releston can keep the tracings. Anyway, I still hold Dadren. That's the one club that may work."

"What fooled me," stated Stollart, "was when the fellow wanted to dictate notes in the living room. He

## THE PLOT MASTER

hoaxed Releston and Marquette into leaving. Then he began to talk."

"He dictated?"

"No. He told me what to do to sit tight while he ducked out through that front door. Bolt it after him, stall around for ten minutes or so, then go back and tell the senator that he had left for the Navy Department with my notes."

"And you fell for it!"

"I thought it was you, chief."

"He didn't give you the countersign?"

"No; but I didn't expect it. I knew you were coming, made up like Dadren. Ducking out through the front door was just what you might have done."

"I guess you're right," admitted Hildrow.

THE car was circling. Hildrow was taking an aimless course, apparently intending to remain in Washington. Plotting some counterstroke, he at last announced the beginning of a method.

"I'm sending you back, Stollart," he decided. "Keep an eye on what happens. We'll frame our scheme while we ride along."

"But The Shadow –"

"He won't come back. Don't worry. He'll be after me. He's wise enough to know he can't trace me through you. Your hide will be safe, Stollart."

"I'm not sure about that."

"Why not?"

"Because of something that just hit me. Listen, chief; you figured that The Shadow beat you to it, coming in there with the same disguise you're wearing."

"That's it."

"Do you think he's better at make-up than you are?"

Hildrow considered. Then he shook his head. That was an admission that he did not care to make.

"I don't think he is, chief," insisted Stollart. "Maybe he's a rum at that game. You've got it down perfect."

"All right. What are you driving at?"

"Well, if it was The Shadow who came in there, he took a long shot. Too long a shot. One that wouldn't have worked."

"On account of Vincent?"

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"That's it. He couldn't have fooled Vincent. You didn't want to risk it, chief. That's why you came after two o'clock."

"Well, if it wasn't The Shadow," sneered Hildrow, "who was it?"

"Commander Dadren himself," returned Stollart.

HILDROW shoved the brake and brought the car up to a curb. He turned to stare at his accomplice. Stollart was solemn. He could see a puzzled expression on Hildrow's face.

"Figure it this way, chief," suggested Stollart. "The Shadow got into the game. He was trying to trace Dadren. He found him."

"How do you know?"

"I'm guessing. But it's a good guess. Suppose The Shadow discovered where you've hidden Dadren. Would he be able to get him out?"

"Yes"—Hildrow was slow with the admission "but when the crew found Dadren missing—"

"He wouldn't be missing."

"Why not?"

"Because, chief, The Shadow could have taken his place. Armed and ready for immediate action, he wouldn't mind a fight—"

"But Korsch knows what Dadren looks like."

"So does Vincent. Better than anybody else."

Hildrow whacked a big hand squarely upon Stollart's back. For once, the master plotter was enthusiastic.

"You've got it, Stollart!" he exclaimed. "The whole thing fits. The Shadow found the hide-out. Got in with Dadren and talked to him. Dadren spilled the news about the letter that he had sent to Releston."

"That's the only way it could have leaked out," put in Stollart.

"So The Shadow steered Dadren back to Washington," continued Hildrow. "The Shadow stayed in his place. But even then, The Shadow was foxy. He told Dadren to get the plans clear away from Releston's."

"Because he suspected that you had a spy there," added Stollart, in a troubled tone. "Dadren didn't have to fool anybody. He was himself. But he fooled me. The Shadow had tipped him to look for a spy, chief. The Shadow knew you were coming in as Dadren."

"That's why Dadren told me to work with him. I gave myself away, thinking Dadren was you. He's ducked somewhere. He's waiting out of sight in Washington. Waiting for The Shadow to show up."

Grimly, Hildrow wheeled the car from the curb. He took a new course. Stollart, still troubled, spoke as they rode rapidly along.

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"You're not taking me back to Releston's, chief," he pleaded. "I tell you, I'll be a goner if you do. I've worked with you. The jig's up. I've got to duck for cover –"

"That's what you're doing," interposed Hildrow. "I'm doing two jobs at once. We're heading for the hideout where I had Dadren. It's a safe place."

"Far from here?" Stollart was still troubled.

"Up the Potomac," responded Hildrow. "We're moving there fast. Not on your account, Stollart because you're safe enough. I'm out to get The Shadow before he makes trouble."

"Korsch is guarding the fellow that he thinks is Dadren. The Shadow will be smart enough not to make a break until he knows Dadren is in the clear. I got in mighty close after Dadren. The Shadow doesn't know how quick I worked."

"We'll be back at the hide-out before he pulls his get-away. Likely, anyway, that he'd wait until nearly dark. Thinking I was buffaloeed. Figuring me running around Washington like a loon."

HILDROW pressed the accelerator as they came to a clear stretch of road. The coupe swayed along at terrific speed. The crook handled it with care at every turn. Soon he was on the course that led above the Great Falls.

He did not speak again until they had reached the wheel tracks that led to the decrepit bridge. Then the master plotter turned to Stollart, who was sitting, anxious-eyed, beside him.

"All quiet along the Potomac," chuckled Hildrow. "There's the old bridge. Korsch has a cottage hidden on the island. We're here in time. We'll find our man."

With this prophecy, Hildrow turned the car across the bridge. All was silent about the cottage when the master plotter and his accomplice alighted.

Only the faint rippling of the river disturbed the peaceful scene. Korsch, coming from the porch, stared in amazement as he saw a man whom he mistook for Commander Dadren. The hatchet-faced man reached for a gun; then he caught a signal from Hildrow.

Korsch understood. Nodding, he preserved the silence as the two approached. In a whisper, Hildrow introduced Stollart; then explained matters to Korsch. Quietly, they went into the house.

The lull had been maintained. Eric Hildrow, craftier than ever, was preparing for a battle with The Shadow.

## CHAPTER XXI. THE SHADOW'S FIGHT

AS soon as the arrivals had entered the cottage, Korsch went into a room on the right. Three men were lounging there. Korsch beckoned to them. Drawing his revolver, the hatchet-faced man buzzed instructions to these underlings.

Korsch led the group upstairs while Hildrow and Stollart were entering the little office. Still wearing the disguise that made him resemble Commander Joseph Dadren, Hildrow took a chair behind the desk. Producing a revolver, he laid it beside him. The pair waited.

Upstairs, Korsch and his squad were cautiously approaching a closed door, where a guard was on duty.

## THE PLOT MASTER

Motioning this man aside, Korsch unlocked the door and opened it. He entered a somber room. Its windows were closed with shutters; only the lifted slats admitted light.

A figure stirred on a cot. Korsch studied a dim face. This prisoner looked like Dadren, but the light was too dim to be certain. Covering his quarry with the gun, Korsch ordered him into the hall.

The prisoner stepped squarely into the path of looming muzzles. Surprised, he raised his hands. Korsch tapped him for weapons and found none.

"March him downstairs," he ordered. "Hold him outside the office until I go in."

The prisoner was conducted to the ground floor. Korsch paused by the office door. These men of his had not seen Hildrow's face. Korsch explained.

"You'll see the chief behind the desk," he stated, "but he won't be wearing the beard. He'll look like Dadren, just like this guy does. Keep the prisoner covered."

Korsch entered. He took his stand by Hildrow. The plotter gripped his gun. Both he and Korsch were covering the door when the other man thrust the prisoner into view.

Hildrow stared at the blinking countenance of Commander Joseph Dadren. The light was full upon the prisoner's face. Hildrow saw a puzzled look in Dadren's eyes as the commander stared at him.

The prisoner knew that this was Hildrow. Korsch's reference to the chief was proof of that. But the astonishment that showed on Dadren's face was genuine. He had not expected Hildrow to be in this disguise.

RISING from his chair, Hildrow stared across the desk. He examined Dadren's countenance at close range. The others stared in unrestrained interest. Like a man inspecting his own reflection, Hildrow was studying every detail of Dadren's face.

"Guns down," ordered Hildrow, lowering his own revolver. "There's nothing to worry about. This is Commander Dadren, right enough. We still hold him"—a chuckle—"and Senator Releston will pay high to get him back."

"Take him upstairs, Korsch, and keep a double guard. We thought you had fooled us, Dadren. You made a good guess, Stollart"—without turning, Hildrow was speaking to the man in the obscure corner—"but your hunch was wrong. The Shadow never located this hide-out—"

Hildrow paused abruptly. Dropping back from the desk, he turned. With him swerved Korsch and the other members of the crew. Commander Dadren, too, was staring with blinking, astonished eyes.

From the corner had come a hissing, warning laugh. Sinister mockery, it taunted men of crime. Turning to the source of that uncanny sound, Hildrow and his band found themselves faced by a pair of automatics in the hands of Stollart.

No longer was the secretary playing a timorous part. He was not Stollart. He was The Shadow. Though he wore the pointed countenance of Stollart, his real identity was plain. Burning eyes were focused upon the men who stood in the path of the big automatics.

NOT a gun hand rose. The Shadow's laugh and his blazing optics were too great a threat. Cornered killers shook.

## THE PLOT MASTER

Then came the sneering, gibing whisper of The Shadow's voice. Scornful words came from his disguised lips.

"This ends your game," pronounced The Shadow. "Your plots are finished. The end began when I entered Releston's, disguised as Commander Dadren. But that was only the first step.

"I knew that Stollart was your spy. Alone with him, I took him from the picture. He lies helpless, bound and gagged, in the closet of Senator Releston's living room. Ten minutes was all that I required for a quick change.

"Make-up was in my suitcase. Stollart's face was in front of me, staring up from the floor. I changed my disguise; instead of being Dadren, I became Stollart. I awaited your arrival."

The Shadow was speaking straight to Hildrow. The master plotter stood half stunned by this revelation. He realized the supercraft of The Shadow.

As Stollart, The Shadow had deliberately argued Hildrow into a false belief. He had talked Hildrow into bringing him here. Thus had The Shadow reached the big shot of the game; through Hildrow himself he had found Commander Dadren and has performed a rescue.

Doom. Hildrow could see it. He expected no mercy from The Shadow. Hildrow, himself, had tried to murder The Shadow on Death Island. With tables turned, the crook knew that he was due to receive the punishment that he deserved.

Startled minions stood quivering. Hildrow could expect no aid from them. The Shadow's laugh burst through the room; its triumphant mockery was ghastly amid those closed-in walls, where ghoulish voices hurled back echoes of the sardonic taunt.

Then the door swung open. Framed in the portal stood a staring man whose right hand held a flashing revolver. It was the odd member of Korsch's crew, the fellow who had met Hildrow, that day in Washington.

Stationed off the island, the man had come here for instructions. He had heard the echoes of The Shadow's laugh. Astonished, he had flung open the door. The leveled automatics told him who the enemy must be.

"GET him, Pete!" blurted Korsch.

Pete fired as The Shadow spun back into the corner. A bullet buried itself in the wall. Flame sputtered from an automatic. The Shadow's answer found its mark. Pete slumped. But those shots brought conflict.

Hildrow and Korsch came up with guns. The Shadow whirled toward the door as Hildrow fired. A bullet zipped past The Shadow's shoulder. Before The Shadow could respond, before Hildrow could fire again, a form came flinging forward.

Ferociously, Commander Dadren threw himself upon the arch-crook. He caught Hildrow's gun hand. The commander had cleared the desk with a headlong dive. His forceful attack bore Hildrow against the wall. The two men plunged to the floor, grappling.

Korsch's shot came simultaneously with a spurt from The Shadow's left-hand automatic. A bullet whined through the doorway, passing an inch above The Shadow's head.

The Shadow's aim, however, had not failed. Korsch staggered, clipped by the leaden missive from the .45.



## THE PLOT MASTER

The other men, four in number, were clustered by a corner near the door. They, of all present, had been least ready. Unlike Hildrow and Korsch, they had not seen Pete arrive. Events had happened with split-second rapidity, too swift for them to follow.

They were wheeling toward the door, however, when The Shadow neared it. Had the master fighter kept on through the opening, swinging guns might have found him for a target. But The Shadow, thoughts working with lightning speed, countered with the unexpected.

Abruptly ending his mad whirl, he doubled his tracks. Like a human juggernaut, he hurled himself straight into the group of gunmen. With arms that swung like steel pistons, he used his automatics like a brace of cudgels.

One weapon cracked the skull of an aiming foeman; another lost his revolver as a swinging automatic smashed his wrist. A third, aiming, dodged instinctively as he fired. His bullet buried itself in the ceiling.

The fourth fighter, balked of aim as The Shadow came upon him, made a wild effort to grapple with this powerful foe. With the upward sweep of a powerful forearm, The Shadow hoisted this fighter from the floor and sent him spinning upon the fellow who had dodged.

The man with the numbed arm dove for the door, unable to regain his gun. Of the two whom The Shadow had sent sprawling, one rolled over and took hasty aim. As his gun was coming up, one of the automatics was swinging down. The Shadow, moreover, was fading to the floor.

Revolver and automatic loosed their belching tongues of flame. The two shots roared together. As a bullet singed the surface of The Shadow's shoulder, a big slug found the crook's heart. The Shadow, dropping clear to the floor, was face to face with the last of the four.

The man pounced toward him. They gripped and rolled in a struggle that rivaled the fight between Hildrow and Dadren, over by the further wall. They came to a deadlock. The Shadow had dropped one automatic. The other, still held tight in his right fist, was beneath his foeman's arm.

BLOOD was flowing from The Shadow's wounded shoulder. His adversary was powerful. The Shadow, for the time, could not fling him free. Staring over his enemy's shoulder, The Shadow saw Hildrow and Dadren come staggering from behind the desk.

Faces that looked alike; yet The Shadow could tell the real from the false. He saw Hildrow twist partly free, then send Dadren crashing against the wall. The commander sank halfway to the floor. Hildrow aimed to kill.

With a mighty effort, The Shadow twisted the body of the man with whom he fought. As he swung the foeman as a shield, he pressed the trigger of his automatic. A bullet skimmed past Hildrow's neck.

The plotter spun about. The involuntary move saved him. The Shadow, loosing another shot, could not turn his wedged gun soon enough to follow the moving target. But the bullet splintered woodwork less than a foot from the big shot's body.

Hildrow sprang for the door to escape that moving gun muzzle. His only target was the body of his own henchman. He could not reach The Shadow. But the automatic, thrust past a human rampart, was dangerous.

The Shadow fired again as Hildrow neared the door. With that effort, he twisted free from the man who grappled him. Hildrow had paused for an instant. A sizzling bullet; sight of The Shadow's burning eyes and a glimpse of the rising form these were too much. Hildrow sped for safety.

## THE PLOT MASTER

Turning quickly, The Shadow swung toward the man whom he had spilled, expecting final trouble from that foe. The crook, coming up from the floor, was aiming while he leered. The Shadow sought to beat him to the shot.

A race that was almost instantaneous. One of those hazards which The Shadow had risked time and again. A contest that depended upon the last instant. Such was the quick, grim drama that came to an unexpected end.

Commander Dadren, crawling from the wall, had plucked up a loose revolver. Resting on one arm, the commander had aimed for the rising gunman. Dadren's shot came in that tiny interval of time that yet remained.

As the revolver flashed, the crook hunched. His gun arm wavered and his snarling face dropped. The flame from The Shadow's automatic stabbed through the pungent smoke that filled the room. The bullet sizzled just above the crook's drooping head.

No need for another shot. The last foeman was plopping to the floor. Plucking up his second automatic, The Shadow wheeled toward Dadren, who was rising with a firm clutch on his smoking automatic.

Nodding, the commander came to his feet. As The Shadow headed through the doorway, Dadren followed. The Shadow and the man whom he had rescued were hot on the trail of Eric Hildrow.

## CHAPTER XXII. PURSUIT DELAYED

AS The Shadow and Commander Dadren reached the ground outside the cottage, they heard the roar of a motor. Eric Hildrow had gained his coupe. He was on his way to the bridge that led from the little island.

Dashing through bushes, The Shadow spied a second car parked well across the clearing. It was Pete's sedan. Hildrow, in his mad flight, had forgotten it.

The Shadow clambered aboard. Dadren leaped in beside him.

The key was in the ignition lock. Hildrow had either been seized by panic or had counted on his last henchman to slay The Shadow. Perhaps both possibilities were correct. All that mattered was the pursuit which The Shadow took up at once.

The tracks through the trees took a sweeping curve on their way to the bridge. It was a wide detour that The Shadow remembered. Ignoring it, he drove the sedan straight through a clump of bushes.

The thicket crackled as the car ripped through on level ground. The wheels spun on a slimy spot, then took hold. Whining in second gear, the sedan jounced up a slight embankment and came crashing through more bushes, out to the traveled path. The Shadow shifted to high.

The Shadow had clipped off a third of the distance to the bridge. Hurling forward, the sedan was on the trail of the coupe. Dadren, hanging to the ledge of the window, had not noticed the blood that stained The Shadow's shoulder. He was blurting out the facts that he knew.

"He'll head for Releston's," stated the commander. "We must stop him. His name is Eric Hildrow. He told me. Eric Hildrow a pretended friend."

THE SHADOW laughed softly as he heard the name. Hildrow had been listed among those who had visited

## THE PLOT MASTER

Senator Ross Releston. Dadren's statement supplied the one point that The Shadow wanted. He knew his many-faced enemy by name, at last.

The bridge. As The Shadow whirled the wheel despite his numbed arm, he gripped it with his weakened hand and yanked an automatic from the pocket of the coat that he was wearing.

The sedan shot upward over the raised approach, like a ski-jumper on the take-off. It ploughed down upon the loose planking with terrific force. The reinforced bridge held. The Shadow, gun in hand, leaned from the opened window by the driver's seat.

He took steady aim for the coupe which he now saw for the first time. It was on the far side of the bridge, within range of The Shadow's fire. Just as Hildrow's car reached the ground, The Shadow pressed the trigger.

The coupe jolted with the shot. The Shadow had picked a rear tire. As the crippled car went bouncing onward, The Shadow aimed for the other wheel. The sedan was midway on the bridge. Commander Dadren delivered a chuckle as he also drew a gun. Another shot by The Shadow and the master marksman would have Eric Hildrow at his mercy.

Just as the sedan had passed the center of the bridge, at the very moment when The Shadow's finger was about to press the trigger of the level gun, a terrific roar thundered upward from beneath the bridge itself.

The center of the structure lifted. The end portions heaved, then tilted downward from the force of the explosion. The sedan went skidding on the shore side of the shattered bridge.

A sidewise tilt would have plunged it into the Potomac, but for The Shadow's skill. His foot pressed the accelerator as his left hand dropped its gun and yanked the wheel. The sedan leaped forward as it crashed through the flimsy rail. It toppled on its side and crashed on the stony bank of the river.

For a moment, the car seemed on the point of rolling back into the water. Then it stopped, tilted at a precarious angle. The Shadow turned the key; then opened the door and edged out.

Commander Dadren followed. Both had escaped injury, it seemed. Then The Shadow slumped as his left leg gave beneath him.

Commander Dadren saw the bloodstained shoulder. He realized for the first time that his companion had been wounded in the fight.

Resting on the bank, The Shadow pointed weakly ahead. Dadren shook his head.

The coupe had made an escape, despite its jouncing wheel. It was too late to overtake it on foot. It must be more than a mile ahead. The sedan was badly wrecked. Two wheels were broken; the radiator was driven back upon the motor. Rust-colored water was forming a slow, trickling rivulet down the bank of the Potomac.

BACK in the office of the cottage, a man was leaning heavily upon the desk. His head was lowered; his eyes were glassy. But a leer showed on his hatchetlike face. It was Korsch.

Though mortally wounded, Hildrow's lieutenant had revived for a final effort of evil. His left hand was supporting him. His right was dipped into an open drawer. There it still clutched a little lever.

## THE PLOT MASTER

The bridge had been mined as an emergency precaution. Korsch, knowing that Hildrow was pursued, had pressed the switch that controlled the charge. Seeking to block The Shadow from the mainland, he had nearly succeeded in eliminating the master fighter.

Korsch began to weaken. His fingers loosened from the lever. His right hand went to his chest; his left arm wobbled. A cough racked his frame; then Korsch toppled and went rolling on the floor. A final gasp; the lieutenant was dead.

MORE than a mile beyond the bridge, Eric Hildrow had stopped the coupe upon the stone-jagged road. Feverishly, he was removing lugs from the left rear wheel. The man who had fled ahead was with him. His numbed arm was recovering; he was jacking the car while Hildrow worked to remove the ruined tire.

Both had guns in readiness while they hastened to put on the spare. They were ready to take to the woods should The Shadow and Dadren appear. As minutes passed, Hildrow began to chuckle.

"Korsch did it," he announced to his companion. "They're trapped in the sedan, both of them. Dead, perhaps. But we have no time to return and see. We'll be on our way inside of three minutes. More important work lies ahead."

BACK by the shattered bridge, Commander Dadren had completed first-aid upon The Shadow's wounded shoulder. Though not serious, the wound had bled profusely. The Shadow had held up despite the weakening from loss of blood. The crash; an injured leg those had been added to the wound.

Endurance had failed at last. Commander Dadren, realizing the amount of blood that his rescuer had lost, was amazed that The Shadow could have kept on to the bridge. As he stared at the pale features which counterfeited those of Stollart, the commander was due for more astonishment.

The Shadow's eyes began to burn. Dropping his right hand to the ground, he thrust his form up from a reclining position. He reached his feet and began to limp on his weakened leg. Despite the pain, he delivered a soft laugh.

Resting his arm upon Dadren's shoulder, he raised his right hand slowly and pointed off through the trees. Dadren began to object. The Shadow would not listen.

"Come!" ordered The Shadow, in a quiet, steady tone. "Take up the trail."

WITH Hildrow, in Washington, The Shadow had lingered while playing the part of Stollart. The trip to the island, once begun, had required a full hour because of its winding, changing course and the bad roads encountered.

More time had elapsed at the cottage. There had been another interval after the crash. A clouding sky was bringing dusk when The Shadow and Dadren reached the end of the jagged road and stumbled to a better though little-traveled highway.

To the left was the way by which The Shadow had come with Hildrow. That was the road which the plotter must have taken. Despite the time lost by the changing of a tire The Shadow and Dadren had seen the old shoe lying near the jagged road Hildrow must by now be nearing the capital.

Instead of taking the course to the left, however, The Shadow, leaning heavily on Dadren, urged the commander to the right. Again, The Shadow had made a clever deduction.

## THE PLOT MASTER

There were no houses along that road to the left. It was miles to the nearest habitation. Yet Hildrow must have kept close contact with the secluded island. There was no telephone line into Korsch's den, therefore, the contact point must be somewhere else close by.

Pete's arrival was a further indication of that fact. The man who had come in the sedan probably had headquarters only a short way off. The road to the right offered the one solution.

The Shadow and Dadren traversed half a mile. The Shadow was making rapid progress, despite Dadren's protests. The road kept curving to the left; The Shadow knew that it must miss the river, which twisted in the opposite direction. But he was looking for lights, not for water. He spied them through the increasing dusk.

A short bend had brought them into sight of an old roadhouse, which formed the center of a little settlement. This must have been Pete's headquarters. The Shadow knew that a telephone would be available.

As they plodded on, The Shadow spoke to Dadren. The commander nodded as he heard the instructions. They were almost at a dilapidated garage when The Shadow gave his final reminder.

"Call Marsland first," he said, in a steady whisper. "Then Releston. Then come into Washington."

"But you are not leaving –"

The Shadow stopped Dadren with a warning motion. They were close to the garage. Standing in front was an antiquated roadster, that shook from the explosions of its running motor. One light alone was gleaming from the front of the car. The driver had stepped into the garage to purchase a new bulb.

"Proceed," ordered The Shadow. "Make the calls from the roadhouse."

He shifted his arm from Dadren's shoulder and swayed for a moment. Dadren paused; he caught the flash of The Shadow's compelling eyes. Nodding, Dadren turned and strode along the road.

Shedding his weakness, The Shadow approached the roadster. Opening the door, he moved noiselessly behind the wheel, drawing his weak leg in after him. He closed the door softly.

The owner of the car had come from the garage, talking with the proprietor. The man was holding the new bulb. He was about to step forward past the hood when The Shadow jammed the car in gear.

The rattly roadster shot away from beside its astonished owner. Shifting rapidly to second, The Shadow gave it gas. Then into high. Its one lamp blazing through the increasing darkness, the roadster took the bend. Thanks to the twisting course of the road, The Shadow gained a speed that a swifter car could not surpass if it came in pursuit.

EIGHT minutes after The Shadow had made off with the rickety roadster, Cliff Marsland strode through the lobby of a Washington hotel. The firm-faced agent of The Shadow was carrying a suitcase. He had received a call from Commander Joseph Dadren.

Reaching a parking space a quarter-block away, Cliff handed in a ticket. He stepped into a mammoth roadster, a high-powered car of foreign make, and rested the suitcase in a wide, deep niche behind the seat.

The motor throbbed. The lights came on. Cliff piloted the car to the street and headed for an avenue. The huge car sped forward, noiselessly increasing its speed. Cliff smiled grimly. This machine would roar when it reached the open road.

## THE PLOT MASTER

Cliff was on his way to meet The Shadow. He had heard the route from Dadren. He would be on the watch for a one-eyed roadster that would be straining every bolt to gain its topmost speed.

Then the transfer. With The Shadow, Cliff would head back for Washington. The Shadow would be busy with the suitcase while Cliff drove. It was anticipation of that coming ride that caused Cliff's smile.

For The Shadow, traveling to frustrate crime, would order speed. This car was built for rapid travel. Whatever the game The Shadow had at stake, Cliff knew that the goal would be reached in record time.

### CHAPTER XXIII. HIGH WATER MARK

A SOLEMN group was gathered in Senator Releston's office. In this quiet room of the large apartment, Releston was listening to comments that came from Vic Marquette. Harry Vincent, also present, was puzzled by the situation.

"It's got me beat," admitted Vic. "I don't know which one of those birds was phony. It looked like both. No Commander Dadren at the Navy Department. Nothing down at that siding in Virginia. Fifty men on the job; they covered the entire territory around that station called Alora. They haven't found the shack; not even the siding, for that matter."

"We have been hoaxed," agreed Releston. "But I cannot understand what has become of Stollart. Do you think that he has met with harm?"

"Probably," declared Vic, "The whole mess is black as ink. Tougher than anything I've ever encountered. Suppose, for instance, that the first man here was really Dadren –"

Vic paused as Smedley entered. The servant had come to announce that Mr. Eric Hildrow was calling. Senator Releston nodded.

"Does he have an appointment?" he inquired.

"He says so," replied Smedley.

"He must have made it by telephone," mused Releston. "While Stollart was here. I leave all that to Stollart. I shall see him, Smedley."

"But listen, senator," began Vic, "we've got other matters –"

"I can make the interview short," interposed Releston. "We have discussed all points and have arrived nowhere. We can wait until Mr. Hildrow leaves."

"But we ought to be here, Vincent and I."

"That will be quite all right."

Smedley returned with Hildrow. Pale-faced, almost weary of manner, the visitor shook hands with Releston. He seated himself beside the desk and refused a cigar that the senator offered him.

"I always smoke these," declared Hildrow, smiling wanly. He drew a small case from his pocket and extracted a panatela. "Will you try one, senator? They are a special brand I picked up in Cuba."

## THE PLOT MASTER

Releston accepted. Hildrow settled back in his chair. He began to mention shipping conditions; then looked about questioningly, noting Harry and Vic.

"Mr. Vincent is my new secretary," explained the senator. "Stollart has gone on vacation. You have seen Vincent here before. Mr. Marquette is his assistant. Go on, Vincent. Arrange those files of the Congressional Record, as I told you."

Harry took the tip. He went to a corner where the publications were stacked and began to make a pretense of sorting them. Vic came over to aid him. Hildrow resumed his talk.

THE master plotter had played one card, a subtle suggestion that Harry and Vic would leave. Releston, unsuspecting his visitor's real purpose, had balked the game without knowing it.

Hildrow had another card up his sleeve. It was a better bet if he played it right. He came quickly to the point that he was after.

"Senor Danzola of Havana is a man of high intelligence," stated Hildrow. "He has an excellent connection with the steamship lines. He believes that the export of sugar cane has been retarded by certain persons in New York."

"Did he name them?"

"Yes. He stated that –"

Hildrow paused. He looked over to the corner. Then, in a confidential tone, he leaned forward on the desk.

"I do not like to mention the names that Danzola gave," he said, in a confidential tone. "I promised him that I would mention them to no one but you, senator."

"Do not mind Vincent or Marquette."

"On my previous calls," reminded Hildrow, with a disarming smile, "you usually talked with me alone. Not even Stollart, your regular secretary, remained with us."

"Those Congressional Records must be filed," said the senator. "I must refer to them for a speech that I intend to prepare to-night. Suppose, Hildrow, that we postpone this conference until to-morrow."

"I am leaving for New York, senator, this evening. I require only a few minutes to give you this important information. Could we retire to another room since your secretaries are busy here?"

"Certainly," replied Releston, seeing an easy solution that would leave Vic and Harry guarding the vault. "We can go into the front living room, Hildrow."

Releston arose. Hildrow repressed a smile. He shot a wary glance toward the corner, then got up from his chair to follow the senator. At that moment the telephone rang.

"Answer it, Vincent," ordered Releston, pausing at the door. "Tell me who it is."

Hildrow stopped beside the senator. Harry went to the telephone. He gave his name in brisk fashion, announcing himself as the senator's secretary. The voice that came over the wire stopped Harry short.

## THE PLOT MASTER

THE speaker at the other end was Commander Joseph Dadren.

Instantly, Harry stopped the exclamation that was coming to his lips. The presence of the stranger, Eric Hildrow, was the reason why he curbed himself. Yet Harry did not fully succeed in covering his surprise.

Vic Marquette had noted it. The Secret Service operative was watching from the corner. So had Releston. The senator was stepping in from the door, eyes on Harry. He passed Hildrow, who was looking on in an apparently indifferent fashion.

Brief, terse statements were coming from the commander. Harry was mentally registering each phrase. Then came the startling finish. The name of the master plotter.

"Eric Hildrow."

This time, Harry managed to repress his new surprise. With assuring words that ended the call, he replaced the double-ended desk phone on its stand. He had the instrument in his left hand; that side of his body was toward the door. Harry let his right hand drop to his coat pocket.

"Hold it!" came a fierce warning from the door. "You're a dead man, Vincent, if you pull that gun! Up with your hands! Make it quick!"

HARRY obeyed. He found himself facing Hildrow. The man's face showed evil in the light. Twisted lips were forming a snarl. The master crook had drawn two revolvers. One was trained on Harry. The other was swaying back and forth between Marquette and Releston.

"All hands up!" ordered Hildrow. "Line over here. If it wasn't for the servants being around, I'd blot out the three of you. Make it fast, or I'll start the works anyway!"

Three men followed the order. Herding the trio with the senator in the lead, Hildrow ordered the procession into the living room. No other alternative offered. The men marched forward.

Hildrow forced them into the living room. The servants were on the other side of the apartment. Neither Smedley nor Williston appeared to make trouble, which was fortunate, considering Hildrow's threat.

Ordering Vic and Harry to back into a corner, Hildrow covered them with one gun and motioned to Releston with the other. He snarled an order that none had expected.

"Open the door of the closet," voiced Hildrow. "You'll find Stollart there. Release him."

Releston obeyed. He found the missing secretary bound and gagged on the floor.

Harry and Vic stared in amazement. Hildrow became impatient. He kicked the door to the inner hallway. It slammed shut. This was to offset discovery by the servants.

Prompted by Hildrow's threatening voice, Senator Releston produced a pocketknife and managed to cut the cords that bound Stollart so tightly. The secretary came to his feet. He recognized that Hildrow must be his chief.

The plotter barked an order. Stollart came to action. He frisked Harry Vincent and Vic Marquette, finding one automatic on each man. Hildrow ordered him to cover the two with the guns.



## THE PLOT MASTER

Keeping an eye on Senator Releston, Hildrow went to the shelf that The Shadow had mentioned. Pocketing one revolver, he reached up and found the missing plans that The Shadow had left there.

FROM far away outside the Hotel Barlingham came the whine of sirens. Stollart, his voice quavering, asked:

"What's that, chief?"

"A fire somewhere," returned Hildrow. "Keep those men covered, Stollart. Fire if they move an inch."

The wailing noises were coming closer. Hildrow ignored them. Holding the plans in his free hand, the master plotter sneered his victory.

"No need to open that safe, senator," he chuckled. "Those tracings are not needed. I have photostats. I do not care if a portion of the plans exist. I, alone, have the complete diagrams, now that I have gained these underlying sheets.

"All that remains is to make sure Commander Dadren dies. That call that Vincent answered indicates that he is still alive. His rescuer The Shadow is probably dead. I shall trap Dadren.

"But first, the lot of you will die." Nearer sirens blared as Hildrow paused. "Prepare for death, the three of you. I have stationed competent aids about this hotel. My get-away is assured. Then will come the final search for Dadren."

Pocketing the plans, the master plotter deliberately drew his second revolver. Four guns were covering the doomed men. Hildrow seemed to relish his plan of murder. He had reason. For Eric Hildrow's fortunes evil though they were had reached high water mark.

Despite the intervention of The Shadow!

## CHAPTER XXIV. THE LAST SETTLEMENT

THE sirens which Eric Hildrow had ignored were not the whines of fire engines. While the master plotter had been gaining the missing plans, a dozen police cars had undertaken a most unusual chase.

A huge roadster had entered the limits of Washington, traveling at a speed of nearly one hundred miles an hour. Its driver blaring a horn that sounded warnings a full block ahead, the car had roared along a broad avenue toward the business district of the capital.

Traffic had been disrupted. Pedestrians had ducked for cover. At hurricane speed, the mammoth roadster had cleared a path before it. But in the wake of this foreign-built car came a deluge of pursuers.

Motorcycle cops and patrol cars had taken up the chase. The big machine had outdistanced them. Its speed had decreased to eighty as it neared the center of the city; then had come another lessening of pace. Yet the most ardent pursuers had failed to catch up with it.

New patrol cars, cutting in, had complicated the chase. By the time the big car was in sight of the Hotel Barlingham, it seemed that half the police of Washington were on its trail. Then the foreign roadster did an unexpected circuit about a circle. It cut along a street that led to the Hotel Barlingham.

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CLIFF MARSLAND was the grim driver of that roadster. Blaring his warning, he had cut a swath toward his goal. He was not the daredevil that Miles Crofton was. In an autogyro, Cliff would have admitted his inability.

But Cliff was an accomplished driver. He knew this car. Like Crofton, he was inspired by the companion who rode with him. For beside Cliff sat a silent figure cloaked in black. During the early portion of the ride, The Shadow had donned a garb that he had taken from the suitcase in the car.

The Shadow had regretted that he had not kept Miles Crofton in Washington. Crofton had brought the big touring car to the capital, to leave it with Cliff Marsland. The car had been there to serve The Shadow. For once, the cloaked warrior had not anticipated an emergency which had come.

But Cliff Marsland had proven his ability in the pinch. He had cut away precious seconds during this roaring trip. A soft laugh came from hidden lips as The Shadow viewed the home stretch. Whining sirens from behind meant nothing. The goal lay half a block ahead. Cliff had made it in a time limit that Crofton would have envied.

Cliff jammed the brakes and shot the roadster into the alleyway beside the Hotel Barlingham. As the big machine swerved, The Shadow raised a gloved hand and pressed a phial to his lips. Purple liquid showed by the dashlight as The Shadow lowered the tiny bottle.

A strengthening elixir, included in the suitcase. The Shadow had reserved this dosage for the finish of the run. Already well recovered from his loss of blood, he was making final preparation for the ordeal that lay ahead.

The roadster jammed to a stop in the darkness of the alley. The roaring trip had been made through lighted streets. Evening had settled. It was gloomy in this spot. The Shadow could be distinguished only by his soft laugh.

Cliff saw a shape glide across the alley. He spied a man standing by a service entrance to the hotel. The fellow looked like a watcher. Cliff heard the man growl a challenge. He saw the fellow flash a revolver.

Then came a stroke from the dark. The guard thudded to the pavement. A black shape blotted out the illumination of the service entrance. Then The Shadow was gone.

Cliff smiled tensely. The Shadow had anticipated this. He had given Cliff the tip in whispered words. Cliff knew what to do. He had his alibi for the police. He needed it, too, for they were here.

SOME had spotted Cliff entering the alley; others had doubled back; more had gone around the block. The roadster was the center of a glare of headlights. None opened fire, now that the machine was stopped. But they came piling in, a dozen of them, ready with revolvers. A powerful flashlight showed Cliff Marsland.

"Climb out of there," came a gruff command. "What was the idea, you doing ninety down the avenue?"

"An emergency," returned Cliff, coming peacefully to the street.

"Yeah?" The officer grunted. "Well, spill your alibi. We're ready for a laugh, after that chase."

"Look across the street and you'll see it," stated Cliff.

One of the cops turned a flashlight in that direction. The glare showed a hard-faced rowdy laying flat on the sidewalk. Two cops hurried in the direction. Others turned to Cliff.

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"I drove this car," stated Cliff, quietly, "in behalf of Commander Joseph Dadren, of the United States Navy. I brought him here to prevent the murder of Senator Ross Releston."

Exclamations from the cops. One growled his disbelief in the statement; but another joined with Cliff.

"Say," put in the second officer, "Senator Releston does live here. This is the Barlingham."

"Who knocked out the guy across the street?" demanded a policeman.

"Commander Dadren," responded Cliff. "He chose this entrance because he believed that others, on the avenue and further street, would be more heavily guarded. Thugs are about, to cover the murderer."

The easy tone impressed the officers. The one who had supported Cliff was quick to give a suggestion.

"If this fellow's right," said the cop, "we're dubs to be standing here. A couple of you boys watch him. I'm taking a look for these thugs he spoke about."

Two officers took Cliff in charge. The rest set off on the run. Two headed through the service entrance. The others circled the hotel in both directions to cover the main doors. Cliff Marsland settled back in the seat of the roadster.

UPSTAIRS in the Hotel Barlingham, two men were standing in the sixth-floor hall. One was Marling; the other, a crook. Hildrow's chief lieutenant was troubled. He had heard the sirens coming closer. He had heard their whines reach a finish.

"Sounds like a fire," he said. "I wonder if it's here."

"It might be," returned the underling. "Say, if it was in that corner apartment —"

"I'm taking a look," broke in Marling. "Listen: If we get in a tight place, make out we're fighting a fire. There's an extinguisher, over past the elevator. Be ready with it."

Marling sneaked toward the main door of Releston's apartment. He drew a revolver with one hand; a key with the other. The key was a duplicate of one that Stollart had sent. Marling unlocked the door into the waiting room. He entered softly and locked the door behind him.

The aiding mobster was standing with one hand on the fire extinguisher, which was of the heavy, cylindrical type. He was ready to lift it from its place, if Marling should give the word. Anything might have happened in that apartment where the chief had gone.

A shade of blackness fell across the extinguisher. The gunman wheeled. He was too late. From the stairway had come a form cloaked in ink-hued garb. The Shadow was springing upon Marling's aid. A chopping left arm descended. An automatic thudded against the mobster's head.

The fellow toppled. His hat rolled on the floor. His gun clattered; The Shadow stopped it with a quick motion of his foot. For one brief instant The Shadow listened.

He had seen Marling enter the waiting room. He knew that Hildrow must be inside. Marling would surely lock the door behind him. Time out to pick the lock would be time lost, despite The Shadow's swiftness at such work. For the climax would be in that extending living room, where bolted doors could resist advance.

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The Shadow gazed straight toward the door that led from the hallway directly into the living room. He knew exactly where the bolts were located. A foot above the knob. Strong bolts, but an old door. Not too formidable.

A soft laugh sounded in the hallway.

Turning, The Shadow brought the big fire extinguisher from its place on the wall. With strength regained, he came sweeping down the hallway, an avalanche in black. Powerful arms swung forward as The Shadow reached the door that led to the living room.

The fire extinguisher crashed the barrier with the driving force of a battle-ax. Straight for the bolted side, a super stroke delivered by a being of mighty will. Wood yielded to metal.

The Shadow's terrific blow shattered bolts and woodwork. Ripped free, the door swung open on yielding hinges. The Shadow had struck it from an angle; the fire extinguisher, released, went hurtling through into the room beyond.

ERIC HILDROW turned as he heard the crash. Both revolvers unlimbered, the evil plotter was on the point of murder. A one-man firing squad, he had just delivered his final scornful speech to the men huddled helpless in the corner.

The big extinguisher was bounding straight toward Hildrow. Dropping back as he turned, the big shot avoided its path. Knowing that a menace lay behind, he aimed for the shattered doorway.

Hildrow's revolvers spoke. Aiming for blackness, the crook found a living target. The Shadow, lunging through the door, had sprawled upon the floor. Hildrow's lower gun clipped that same right shoulder. The Shadow rolled backward.

Hildrow fired again, a wide shot, as the left hand of The Shadow whipped into view. Then, as Hildrow came bounding upon his wounded prey, The Shadow's automatic flashed. At close range, into an approaching target, its work was perfect.

Eric Hildrow seemed to poise in air. Then, crumbling, he rolled forward upon The Shadow's prostrate form. Dead, the master plotter lay bulky upon the living avenger who had slain him.

In turning on The Shadow, Hildrow had instinctively relied on Stollart. The secretary, however, proved to be a poor man in the pinch. That was due, in part, to a quick cry from Harry Vincent that came as Hildrow launched his attack on The Shadow.

"Get Stollart!"

Vic Marquette followed Harry Vincent. Together, they sprang upon the hesitating secretary. Stollart staggered back against the wall, his arms driven upward. Harry wrenched an automatic from his clutch. Vic delivered a punch and grabbed for the other gun.

Harry turned quickly. The door from the inner hall had swung open. Marling was on the threshold. Harry knew he must be an enemy. The Shadow's agent aimed; but Marling was beating him to it.

A roar from the floor. The Shadow, writhing from beneath Hildrow's body, had swung his good arm upward. He was expecting Marling. His flashing automatic was directed toward that inner doorway.

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Marling wavered; he tried to hold his aim. Then came Harry Vincent's shot, straight for the lieutenant's body. Mortally wounded by The Shadow's slug, Marling succumbed upon the instant when Harry's well-aimed bullet reached its mark.

Echoes subsided. Then, from below in the hotel, came muffled shots. Gunfire on the streets. A weary laugh from The Shadow. The police, deliberately drawn hither by Cliff Marsland's mad race, were fighting Hildrow's band.

All remaining aids had come with Marling. The Shadow had foreseen such action. Racing toward his goal, he had summoned the law to take care of these lesser foemen. The last of Eric Hildrow's evil cohorts were encountering their doom.

WHEN Commander Joseph Dadren arrived at Senator Ross Releston's apartment, he found the gray-haired statesman seated at his office desk. Releston greeted Dadren with a smile. On the desk lay Dadren's plans, with the necessary tracings superimposed upon them.

"All is complete," declared the senator. "Our enemies have been eliminated. Marquette, of the Secret Service, is here." Releston turned to introduce Vic. "He and I shall keep the plans until to-morrow. Then we can send them to the Navy Department under proper guard."

"But I intended to take them!" exclaimed Dadren.

"Unfortunately," smiled the senator, "you cannot do so. You are wounded, commander."

"Wounded?"

"You are supposed to be. But another person has undergone that trouble for you. The person who rescued you, commander. He came here, also, to deal with Eric Hildrow."

"A serious wound?" inquired Dadren, anxiously, as he began to understand.

"The same shoulder," replied Releston. "A bad wound, but one that should not prove serious. We thought it best, commander, to tell the police that you were the wounded man.

"There was a complication about a car coming through Washington at ninety miles an hour. That was settled easily, because the driver said the car was yours. Our patient let us call him Commander Joseph Dadren is resting comfortably under the care of his secretary, Harry Vincent."

"And the physician says –"

"That commander Dadren will be up and about within a week. Inadvisable, however, to move him. The police were satisfied, when I explained about the plans. They removed Eric Hildrow's body, together with others that were about the hotel. Stollart is in custody.

"Let me suggest, commander, that you leave to-night for Cedar Cove. Keep your arrival quiet. Remain there until you hear from me. Then you can return to Washington."

Commander Dadren smiled as he shook hands with Senator Releston. He walked out talking with Vic Marquette, while Releston put the completed plans in the big vault.

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THE next morning, Harry Vincent entered a secluded room of the apartment to speak to the convalescent who was propped in a chair by the window. The one to whom Harry talked looked much like Commander Joseph Dadren. For The Shadow, foreseeing complications, had donned his former make-up while riding into Washington with Cliff Marsland.

Harry had learned the details of Dadren's visit from Vic Marquette. He related the story to this patient by the window. Stern lips that looked like Dadren's emitted a soft, whispered laugh.

The last touch had been delivered. The Shadow's triumph had been gained. But his part remained unknown, save to those few whom he knew would keep the secret of his hidden might.

Again, while his keen eyes peered toward the city beyond his window, The Shadow laughed.

THE END