

THE SILENT SEVEN

Maxwell Grant

Table of Contents

<u>THE SILENT SEVEN</u>	1
Maxwell Grant.....	1
CHAPTER I. DEATH AT MIDNIGHT.....	1
CHAPTER II. THE HOLLOW NEEDLE.....	6
CHAPTER III. KLEIN'S SOLUTION.....	11
CHAPTER IV. A STRANGE VISITOR.....	16
CHAPTER V. MURDER REVEALED!.....	20
CHAPTER VI. THE SCARAB RING.....	26
CHAPTER VII. A MURDERER ESCAPES.....	30
CHAPTER VIII. CARDONA CHECKS.....	35
CHAPTER IX. PAGET BECOMES ACTIVE.....	39
CHAPTER X. THE SILENT SEVEN.....	43
CHAPTER XI. PAGET SEES A SHADOW.....	49
CHAPTER XII. BLAKE TAKES A RIDE.....	54
CHAPTER XIII. VISITOR AT NIGHT.....	59
CHAPTER XIV. THROUGH NUMBER ONE.....	64
CHAPTER XV. THE TRAP.....	69
CHAPTER XVI. THE VERDICT.....	73
CHAPTER XVII. BLAKE'S VISITOR.....	79
CHAPTER XVIII. THE SHADOW ACTS.....	86
CHAPTER XIX. OVER THE WIRES.....	89
CHAPTER XX. THE EIGHTH MAN.....	92
CHAPTER XXI. DEATH IS DELIVERED.....	98
CHAPTER XXII. THE POWER OF THE SEVEN.....	102
CHAPTER XXIII. THE RETURN.....	108

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- [CHAPTER I. DEATH AT MIDNIGHT](#)
- [CHAPTER II. THE HOLLOW NEEDLE](#)
- [CHAPTER III. KLEIN'S SOLUTION](#)
- [CHAPTER IV. A STRANGE VISITOR](#)
- [CHAPTER V. MURDER REVEALED!](#)
- [CHAPTER VI. THE SCARAB RING](#)
- [CHAPTER VII. A MURDERER ESCAPES](#)
- [CHAPTER VIII. CARDONA CHECKS](#)
- [CHAPTER IX. PAGET BECOMES ACTIVE](#)
- [CHAPTER X. THE SILENT SEVEN](#)
- [CHAPTER XI. PAGET SEES A SHADOW](#)
- [CHAPTER XII. BLAKE TAKES A RIDE](#)
- [CHAPTER XIII. VISITOR AT NIGHT](#)
- [CHAPTER XIV. THROUGH NUMBER ONE](#)
- [CHAPTER XV. THE TRAP](#)
- [CHAPTER XVI. THE VERDICT](#)
- [CHAPTER XVII. BLAKE'S VISITOR](#)
- [CHAPTER XVIII. THE SHADOW ACTS](#)
- [CHAPTER XIX. OVER THE WIRES](#)
- [CHAPTER XX. THE EIGHTH MAN](#)
- [CHAPTER XXI. DEATH IS DELIVERED](#)
- [CHAPTER XXII. THE POWER OF THE SEVEN](#)
- [CHAPTER XXIII. THE RETURN](#)

CHAPTER I. DEATH AT MIDNIGHT

A CHILLING night drizzle swilled through Eighty-first Street. It enshrouded the wizened figure of an aged man, pausing before a brownstone house. He leaned on a silver-headed cane and pulled the collar of his heavy coat closer about his ears. His thin, parched lips moved soundlessly in a continuous muttering.

The house, a relic of other times, even as the figure that stood in the darkness before it, loomed gloomily, like a mammoth mausoleum. The old man seemed to dread entering it. Fear shown on his mummified face.

Then, with sudden effort, he climbed the steps with a crablike, sidewise gait. His trembling finger pressed on the polished doorbell.

Presently the door opened onto a darkened vestibule. The old man entered a dimly-lit hallway without a word. The person who had answered the door was, judging from his manner of deference, evidently a servant.

Silently he took the old man's coat and hat. Then he pushed aside a sliding door at the side of the hallway and

THE SILENT SEVEN

stood in a respectful attitude as his master entered.

There were two men waiting in the room.

One, a quietly-dressed young man, had a worried expression on his pale face. The other was perhaps forty years of age, a tall, debonair type of man, dressed immaculately in evening clothes. He was smoking a cigarette in the end of a long holder. His ease of manner contrasted with the nervousness of his younger companion.

Both men arose to greet the new arrival. The young man spoke quickly.

"I am glad you are here, Mister Marchand," he said. His tone indicated anxiety.

"I thought it best to return, Willis," said the old man, in a peculiar, peevish voice.

He looked sharply at the young man. Then he turned to the one in evening clothes and stared at him, questioningly.

"What brings you here, Paget?" he demanded.

The man removed his cigarette holder from his lips.

"I learned that you were returning, Mister Marchand," he said, with quiet deliberation. "I thought that you might wish to see me to-night."

"Willis," said the old man abruptly, "I told you to say nothing to any one."

"But Mister Paget knew of the attempted burglary," explained the young man. "He came here that night; happened to be passing at the time. I thought that he –"

"Very well," interrupted Marchand. "Who else knows about it?"

"Only Oscar."

The old man turned toward the door. The silent servant had entered. Marchand looked toward him, but did not speak.

Something in Marchand's eyes indicated that he was questioning the truth of Willis's statement. Oscar detected the look and nodded in corroboration.

Satisfied, the old man sat down in an easy-chair. Willis and Paget also took seats. Oscar remained standing by the door.

"Tell me about it," said Marchand, in a querulous tone.

"A WEEK ago," began Willis, in a hesitating tone, "something occurred that –"

"A week ago?" demanded Marchand sharply.

"Er yes, a week ago," replied Willis, uneasily. "That was the first time. But then we suspected nothing –"

THE SILENT SEVEN

"Hm-m-m!" interrupted the old man. "Go on."

Marchand turned in his chair and stared at Oscar, the serving man. In this way he was gaining the testimony of two men, for he was observing every expression on Oscar's face as well as listening to Willis.

Willis knew this. It increased his anxiety. He chose his words carefully to make every detail in his story accurate.

"When you went away, Mister Marchand," said Willis, "Oscar and I obeyed all your instructions. I performed my duties as your secretary. Oscar attended to his duties as servant. One of us was always in the house.

"One week ago to-night" the young man glanced at an old-fashioned clock on the mantelpiece "almost at this very time, just before midnight, Oscar tapped at the door of my room, where I was working.

"He whispered to me, sir, and said that he had heard a noise downstairs. We went down together and searched the house thoroughly. There was no one here.

"I believed that Oscar had been deceived by a noise outside. He finally was inclined to believe same as I did."

Oscar nodded slightly as Willis paused.

"Two nights ago," continued the secretary, "Oscar again knocked at my door, after I had retired. He seized my arm when I came into the hallway.

"We listened. Both of us heard slight sounds from the front of the house –"

"From my room?" questioned Marchand.

"From your room, sir. Before we could act, the door of your room opened. The ray of a flashlight swept down the hall, then disappeared.

"But, as chance would have it, the man who held the light must have seen us. We dashed forward. He gained the stairs ahead of us. I switched on the lights when we reached the first floor.

"The man had disappeared; but a few moments later, we heard a noise in the back hallway. We ran there and found the little window open. The man had escaped!"

"What did you do then?"

"I ran out through the front door. I saw a policeman passing. He went through the house with Oscar, after ordering me to call the police station. The patrol came and several policemen joined us. We could find no trace of the man."

Willis finished his discourse and waited for comment from Marchand. The old man still stared at Oscar. Then, suddenly, his gaze turned to Paget.

The man in evening clothes appeared to be indifferent to the conversation. When Marchand looked at him, he was inserting a new cigarette in the end of the fancy holder.

"What do you know about the burglary, Paget?" questioned Marchand.

THE SILENT SEVEN

"Not very much, Mister Marchand," replied the man. He paused to light his cigarette. "I was driving by that evening. I often come down Eighty-first Street on my way home.

"I saw the patrol wagon. I came in and joined Willis and Oscar. There wasn't a clew to the chap who escaped.

"I suppose that he ran away before he had an opportunity to steal anything."

"The door of your room was open, sir," said Willis, earnestly. "Under the circumstances, I took the liberty to enter. Oscar watched me from the door. The burglar had done nothing to the safe or the closet. Your desk appeared to be undisturbed.

"I believe that Mister Paget is right. Nevertheless, when we discussed the matter, we considered it advisable to telegraph you immediately."

"That's explained, Willis," said Marchand, tersely. "Tell me this: how did the burglar enter my room? Did he destroy the lock?"

"No, sir. He must have opened it with a special type of key. After I inspected the room, I closed the door. The spring lock closed automatically.

"No one has entered the room since."

THE doorbell rang. Oscar left the room. He returned to announce a visitor.

"Doctor George Lukens, sir," said the serving man, in a hollow voice. These were the first words he had uttered since his master's return.

"Usher him in," ordered the old man.

Doctor Lukens entered.

He was a man with bushy gray hair, and keen, quick-moving eyes. He was more alert than Marchand, yet he bore an appearance that placed him at approximately the same age as the master of the house.

Marchand did not rise to greet Lukens; but the physician approached with eagerness. It was obvious that he was a life-long friend of Marchand.

"Henry!" exclaimed Lukens.

He grasped Marchand's hand; then his gleam of friendship changed to a professional expression of concern.

"You are in good hearth?" asked Lukens.

"Passably," replied Marchand, with a sour smile. "I had a long trip to-day. That weak heart you have warned about is none too good. I wired you to come here, in case I might need you.

"You might remain a little while; but I doubt that I shall require any medical treatment."

The old man raised himself from his chair and walked to the door with his limping step. He rested on the cane when he reached the hallway.

THE SILENT SEVEN

"I am going upstairs," he announced. "I shall be in my room for a short while. You may all wait here until I return."

He drew a key from his pocket and went up the stairway.

THERE was a strained silence after Henry Marchand had gone.

Willis was obviously ill at ease. His face expressed the concern of his conscientious nature. He was hoping that Marchand would find nothing wrong in the room which the old man valued as a sanctuary.

Oscar was as impassive as ever. Paget seemed indifferent.

Doctor Lukens, knowing nothing of the matter which had been discussed, sat in a chair and lighted a cigar, content to await Marchand's return.

Willis glanced at Paget. The man in evening clothes shrugged his shoulders. The action reassured the young secretary.

Paget had belittled the matter of the attempted burglary. He knew, as did Willis, that Henry Marchand kept very little of value in the house.

The safe in the old man's room harbored only a miscellaneous cluster of papers. Willis had arranged these under his employer's direction before Marchand had gone away. Hence Paget's attitude expressed the thought, "Why worry?"

Minutes moved by. There was no attempt at conversation. Each man in the downstairs room seemed content with his own thoughts. They appeared to have imbibed the spirit of gloom which hung throughout the antiquated house.

The clock on the mantelpiece struck twelve.

"Midnight!" exclaimed Doctor Lukens. "I had no idea it was so late. I intended to be here shortly after eleven. Well, well! I am expecting an important phone call. I must be going home very shortly."

The physician became restless. He glanced at the clock, then beckoned to Oscar.

"I must leave soon," said Doctor Lukens. "Oscar, would you go upstairs and tell Mister Marchand that I cannot wait much longer? Perhaps he can come down immediately."

The serving man nodded. He left the room. Doctor Lukens followed him and watched him as he ascended the stairs. The sound of knocking was heard below. A pause; then another knocking.

Oscar came down the stairs. Willis, suddenly apprehensive, joined Doctor Lukens in the hall. Paget rose leisurely and followed.

"He does not answer, sir," said Oscar.

WILLIS went up the stairway, two steps at a time. The others followed and found the secretary listening at the closed door of the room.

Willis knocked twice. There was no response.

THE SILENT SEVEN

"You're sure he's in there, Oscar?"

The serving man nodded.

"Something has happened, then. What shall we do?"

Doctor Lukens settled the question.

"Break through the door," he ordered. Paget sprang to action. With surprising strength, he flung his body against the door but it did not yield. Oscar hurried away and returned with a heavy hammer.

Paget seized the tool and directed a series of well-aimed blows upon the lock. He battered the metal with no result. Then, changing his tactics, he drove the hammer through the wooden panel above the lock. Reaching through the opening that he had made, Paget released the lock from the inside and the door swung open.

Willis, unable to restrain himself, pushed the others aside as he dashed into the room.

Henry Marchand was seated in a chair before his desk. His head and shoulders rested on the top of the desk. His left hand was outstretched, with widespread fingers. His right arm lay limp at his side.

A shallow drawer was opened in the desk, just beneath the top. In it lay a sealed envelope.

Doctor Lukens bent over the huddled form of Henry Marchand. The others stepped back.

Willis, with wild, staring eyes, gazed about the room, as though inspecting the heavily-shuttered windows. Paget stood silently by, his cigarette holder in his hand.

The physician raised his head and turned to the waiting group. He scarcely seemed to see them or to observe their apprehension. His lips quivered as though he wished to speak but could not utter words.

Then, suddenly, he regained his voice and spoke. Slowly uttered, his words carried the grief of a friend mingled with the announcement of the professional physician.

"Henry Marchand is dead!"

CHAPTER II. THE HOLLOW NEEDLE

THE body of Henry Marchand had been removed, otherwise the room was the same. Its antiquated lights still cast their ghoulish gleam upon the scene.

Beyond the door through which the four men had forced their way, a dim hall light revealed a short, dark-visaged man who seemed to be awaiting some one. This was Detective Joe Cardona, of the New York police.

Footsteps came from the stairway. The detective became alert. He raised his hand in greeting to a tall, broad-shouldered individual who arrived at the top of the stairs.

The newcomer was Cardona's superior, Inspector Timothy Klein.

The two men entered the room. In brief, matter-of-fact tones, Cardona gave the circumstances of Henry Marchand's death. Then he pointed to the open drawer in the top of the desk. He removed the envelope from

THE SILENT SEVEN

the drawer, and extracted a folded paper.

"The envelope was sealed," explained the detective. "I opened it. Here's what I found inside."

Inspector Klein studied the paper. It was thickly inscribed with a series of curious, unintelligible marks.

"A code," remarked the inspector.

Cardona nodded. "But I can't make anything out of it."

The inspector handed the paper to Cardona, who pocketed it, with the envelope.

"What else have you found out?" asked Klein.

Cardona referred to a written report.

"Four men were here when Marchand died," he said. "They all entered the room together. We have gone over the place thoroughly. It seems impossible that any one else could have been in the house."

"Marchand died here, alone. I have quizzed all the witnesses, separately and together. I have also learned facts regarding each of them. They all appear reliable."

CARDONA paused and laid four separate sheets of paper upon the desk. He took a chair and proceeded with more detailed information:

"Oscar Schultz," he read. "Servant of Henry Marchand for more than twenty years. Considered faithful and honest. Says very little and answers questions readily, though briefly."

The detective read from references on the second sheet.

"Harvey Willis," he said. "Age twenty-eight. Secretary to Henry Marchand for two years. Seems genuinely broken up by his employer's death. A weak type, but very conscientious. Has always followed Marchand's instructions to the letter."

Klein raised his eyebrows as Cardona read the third name.

"Rodney Paget," said the detective. "A friend of Henry Marchand –"

"You mean the young clubman?" interrupted Klein. "The polo player?"

Cardona nodded. "He's not so young, though. About forty."

"I'm going back a few years," returned the inspector, with a smile. "Young Paget comes from a good family. I knew his father thirty years back. Always well liked."

"This is Rodney, Junior, eh? He has good connections, but I don't think he inherited much wealth. What's his connection with Marchand?"

"Paget is connected with a brokerage house. He handled stocks and bonds for Marchand. He came here to-night to see the old man."

THE SILENT SEVEN

"All right. Who's the fourth?"

"Doctor George Lukens."

"Of the Telman Hospital," grunted the inspector.

"He was Marchand's physician," explained the detective. "He came here to-night after receiving a telegram from Marchand. The old man was not well. He wanted the doctor to be here when he arrived."

"A good group of witnesses," commented Klein.

"More than that," declared Cardona. "They were instrumental in bringing the police immediately upon Marchand's death.

"This case puzzles them as much as it does me. If there are clues to Marchand's death whatever may have caused it they have supplied important items of information that will prove valuable."

"For instance?"

"Lukens, to begin with."

"Marchand had a weak heart. He had returned from a long trip. Lukens, as his physician, thought at first that heart failure was the cause of Marchand's death.

"With another doctor, that would probably have ended the matter. But Lukens is so thorough that he looked for something else.

"He conferred with the police surgeon. They brought in a toxicologist. They are convinced that Marchand's death was caused by some unusual poison. They have not yet discovered the mode of application."

INSPECTOR KLEIN looked around the room as though seeking some spot in which a concealed person might be present. The detective smiled.

"We've searched this place thoroughly," he said. "Willis and Oscar helped us. It's lucky that they did. See that closet door?"

The inspector nodded.

"Unless you turn the knob twice before you pull the door," said Cardona, "you will get a face full of tear gas. Just a little idea of Marchand's. He has an alarm wired to the knob of the safe."

"This desk?"

"Unprotected. But look at the clever construction of this drawer."

Cardona pressed the drawer inward. There was a sharp click. The detective jumped back instinctively. Then he looked closely at the desk.

"Look at that!" he exclaimed. "It's cleverer than I thought! What happened to the drawer, anyway?"

The compartment had closed so perfectly that neither the inspector nor the detective could find its outline in

THE SILENT SEVEN

the woodwork.

"Neither Oscar nor Willis knew about this drawer," said Cardona. "I pushed it in before, but not all the way.

"Now I've locked it. How in blazes are we going to open it?"

"We'll try later," said the inspector, dryly. "Anything more?"

"Yes," returned Cardona, turning away from the desk. "It was Willis who called the police. He and Oscar believe that the house was entered twice during Marchand's absence.

"The first time, Oscar heard a noise downstairs. The second time, they discovered a man in this room. The burglar escaped through an open window on the first floor. They gained no description of him.

"The second attempt caused them to summon Marchand home."

"Why?"

"Because the old man was very particular that no one should enter this room."

"Why?"

"We do not know, unless the answer is in the code message which we found in the drawer. I have traced Marchand's career. It is above reproach. He had no enemies.

"He retired from the woolen business twenty years ago. Since then he had increased his wealth by profitable investments.

"Willis is familiar with all of his financial affairs, and they were very simple."

"If there was nothing here," observed Klein, "why did the burglar enter?"

"Marchand is known to own some valuable jewelry," said Cardona. "The gems were owned by his deceased wife. They are not kept here. They are in a safe—deposit vault.

"My theory is that the burglar thought they were somewhere in this room, yet he didn't try the safe."

"Hm—m—m!" observed the inspector. "Maybe both times he was discovered before he had an opportunity to make a thorough search."

"Still, I can see no connection between his attempts and the death of Marchand," said Cardona. "Willis thought there might be a connection; but he has no theory. Nevertheless, he called in the police."

"Very good," said the inspector. "Now you've brought us back to the starting point Marchand's death. All else is superficial, for the present.

"How was Marchand poisoned? That's what we'll have to find out."

THE inspector arose and paced around the room. Detective Cardona looked at him in admiration.

Joe Cardona was looked upon as the smartest detective in New York; but he knew that his real ability could

THE SILENT SEVEN

not approach that of Inspector Timothy Klein. Cardona's superior was a man who dealt in simple facts; who reached to the heart of crime. He reduced all information to the lowest quantity before he acted.

The inspector stopped pacing. He pointed to the desk.

"Open that secret drawer again," he said.

Cardona inspected the desk. He moved his hands down the side, seeking some spot that would yield. His efforts brought no result. He opened an ordinary drawer in the center of the desk.

"Maybe there's some kind of a key here," he said.

Among other objects, he found a pair of dice.

"Look at these," he said. "Lying seven up."

"Seven," commented the inspector, taking the dice. "There's been a lot of crimes in which the number seven has figured. Remember that bank robbery, where they left seven pennies in the safe?"

"Maybe the same gang has something to do with this."

"Let's keep away from vague theories, Joe," said the inspector. "Get that secret drawer open. Any sign of a key yet?"

"Here's a thimble," said Cardona.

The inspector took the object. It was a silver-plated thimble that had been lying amidst a pile of paper clips.

"Hm-m-m!" grunted the inspector. "Funny thing to find in an old man's desk."

The detective made no comment in return. He closed the drawer. He moved his hand along the side of the desk, following a line where he knew the shallow secret compartment must lie.

He paused near the back of the desk. His fingers were upon an ornamental molding that was divided into sections. Cardona tapped and detected a movement in the woodwork.

As he pressed upward, the tiny segment of molding slid into the top of the desk, showing a hole beneath. Cardona removed his hand; the segment dropped.

"Look here!" exclaimed the detective.

The inspector leaned over the side of the desk.

"Watch this," said Cardona. "I slide this piece of molding up like this. See? Then it drops back again. Now I push it up with one finger; then insert another finger in the opening beneath."

INSPECTOR KLEIN'S brawny fist descended upon the detective's wrist. Cardona's arm dropped away from the desk. The tiny bit of molding slipped back into place.

The detective looked at the inspector in amazement, as one would stare at a man who had gone suddenly insane.

THE SILENT SEVEN

"What's the idea?" he blurted, unable to restrain his anger.

The inspector handed him the thimble.

"Put that on your finger," he said. "Then push your finger in the hole when you raise the molding."

The detective obeyed, wondering. When he pressed with the finger that wore the thimble, the secret compartment suddenly appeared at the front of the desk.

"Did you notice anything?" asked Klein.

"Yes," replied the detective, still puzzled. He looked at the thimble. "It seemed as though I struck metal."

"Pliers?" demanded the inspector.

Cardona felt in his pocket and produced a pair of tweezers.

"Those will do," said Klein.

He leaned over the desk and raised the sliding molding with the thumb of his left hand. Holding the tweezers in his right, he probed the hole beneath the molding.

Slight clicks followed; then the inspector twisted his hand and drew out the tweezers.

Raising the instrument to the light, he revealed a short, slender point of metal, clipped between the ends of the tweezers.

"It looks like a needle!" exclaimed Cardona. "Like the needle of a sewing machine."

"It is a needle," said the inspector quietly. "Look at the point of it. A hollow needle, with a remarkably sharp point. Only the thimble prevented it from piercing your finger.

"If you had not worn the thimble on your finger –"

The inspector paused to gaze steadily at the detective. A look of enlightenment was dawning on Cardona's face.

"If I had not worn the thimble –" came the detective's words.

"– you would have died as Marchand died!" was the inspector's ominous reply.

CHAPTER III. KLEIN'S SOLUTION

INSPECTOR TIMOTHY KLEIN stood in the center of Marchand's room. Hands behind his back, he surveyed a group of men gathered before him.

The group included the four who had found Marchand's body. With them were the police surgeon and the toxicologist who had been called in by Doctor Lukens.

Joe Cardona was in the background, leaning against the wall.

THE SILENT SEVEN

"So you found the mark on Marchand's finger?" questioned Klein.

"Yes," replied Doctor Lukens. "On the second finger of the right hand. But I am at a loss to explain how it came there."

The inspector smiled as he looked at the other men present. All seemed bewildered, with the exception of the toxicologist.

"Show them, Joe," ordered Klein.

The detective came forward. He swung the desk away from the wall so that its side faced the group.

With his right hand he operated the movable molding, raising it with his forefinger and pressing his second finger into the opening beneath. With the action, the secret drawer shot from the front of the desk.

The witnesses came forward in surprise. They examined the mechanical apparatus on the side of the desk. Then Klein moved them back and beckoned to the toxicologist.

"I sent for this man without telling you, doctor," he said to Lukens. "You were one of the four who discovered Marchand's body, so I left you out of it for the time being. I wanted him to see what he could find on this."

The inspector exhibited a small envelope, from which he dropped a hollow needle upon the table.

"Don't touch it!" warned the toxicologist. "It contains a very virulent poison! It caused Marchand's death!"

"When Marchand operated the secret drawer," explained Klein, "he wounded himself with the needle point. That is why he died.

"This discovery, made by Detective Cardona and myself, explains the death of Henry Marchand. He was the victim of his own snare!"

"His own snare?" questioned Lukens.

"Positively," replied the inspector. "We all know the precautions the man adopted the closet, protected by tear gas; the safe, with its electric alarm.

"The drawer" he tapped the desk "which he seemed most anxious to guard, was protected by the poisoned needle!"

RODNEY PAGET broke the few moments of silence which followed.

"It's rather surprising," he said, "that Mister Marchand should have done this. He must have had enough wisdom to know that he would need some other method of opening the drawer. It doesn't sound logical –"

The inspector smiled as he held up his hand in interruption.

"Marchand was fully prepared," he said. He drew the thimble from his pocket. "Cardona found this in the desk. The old man had it handy, so that he could open the secret compartment without injury. In fact, it was this very thimble that prevented Cardona from suffering the same fate as Marchand.

THE SILENT SEVEN

"By some freak of fate, the old man forgot to put the thimble on his finger. It was probably due to his condition after the long journey."

Doctor Lukens nodded. He turned toward Paget as though to corroborate Inspector Klein's theory.

"I can readily understand that," said the physician. "Mister Marchand was very forgetful. He used to complain of the fact to me.

"When he arrived home last night he was worried. He went upstairs in haste. It is not at all surprising that he forgot to take the proper precaution.

"The document in that secret compartment was evidently of great importance to him. He wanted to be sure that it was safe. He did not realize the mistake he was making."

"Perhaps you're right, doctor," agreed Paget. "Mister Marchand used to forget some very important matter regarding his investments."

"Willis will remember this," declared the physician. "When Mister Marchand installed the tear-gas ejector on the closet, he nearly set it off by mistake. Mister Marchand told me about that himself."

"Yes, sir," said Willis. "He also had trouble with the alarm on the safe. He forgot to disconnect it three times. Both Oscar and I answered it."

Inspector Klein approached the secretary.

"Did you have any knowledge of this secret drawer in the desk?" he asked.

"No, sir," replied Willis.

"How about you?" asked the inspector, addressing Oscar.

The servant shook his head.

"Very few persons came in this room, sir," volunteered Willis. "Mister Marchand had me here on secretarial duties. He occasionally conferred alone with Mister Paget or Doctor Lukens. Offhand, I can think of no one else."

The inspector looked around the room.

"This place looks prosperous enough for a safe cracker to try it," he announced. "I can't see any connection between the attempted burglaries and this unfortunate accident that killed Mister Marchand. Of course, it was the telegram that brought him back."

He slapped his hand upon the table.

"This case is obvious," he declared. "Death by misadventure. The circumstances were very unusual. I nearly lost a good man because of it" he indicated Cardona with his thumb "but we were fortunate.

"Detective Cardona has full reports. Give him a complete analysis of the poison in the needle. That's all."

"One moment, inspector," said Doctor Lukens. "I am speaking now as a friend of Henry Marchand as his

THE SILENT SEVEN

closest friend.

"The circumstances of his unfortunate death are, as you say, obvious. But I am extremely anxious to learn the meaning of the paper that was in the envelope. It contained a code message, I believe. Is there no way that we can decipher it?"

Detective Cardona produced the envelope. The inspector handed it to Doctor Lukens.

"It is no longer evidence," declared Inspector Klein. "It is a personal document belonging to the estate of Henry Marchand. We shall leave it in your possession, Doctor Lukens."

"But I cannot decipher it," objected the physician. "Nor do I know who could do the work. Yet it seems important to me.

"A document so highly valued by Henry Marchand by my old friend who –"

"Let me have it," said Cardona quietly. "I'll have photostats made of it, doctor, and I'll return the original to you.

"I'll turn the copies over to some experts. They can decipher nearly anything. You'll hear from me later."

"Regarding the newspapers," began Doctor Lukens.

"They won't run much of a story on it," said Inspector Klein reassuringly. "It isn't a murder; it isn't even a suicide. Death by misadventure.

"If any one had wanted to kill Marchand, they would have got him while he was away from here. They don't come into houses like ghosts. That's what I told Detective Cardona.

"Tell me how Marchand was poisoned," I said, "and we'll have the solution." Right, wasn't I, Joe?"

The detective grinned and nodded.

BACK at headquarters, Cardona turned out a colorless report covering the case of Henry Marchand. The theatrical aspects of the tragedy did not impress him. The detective was too used to death to see anything dramatic in the finding of Marchand's body.

He had been perplexed by a mystery; with the aid of Inspector Klein, he had solved it. No murder and no crime. An unfortunate combination.

Cardona's only reflections on the matter concerned his own narrow escape. He did not care to dwell upon his mistake. The inspector had apparently forgotten it. That pleased the detective.

The newspapers covered the story, and Cardona minimized the case. The circumstances of the death were interesting, and the finding of the code was an added point. But as an accident, the death was not a highly sensational one.

The name of Henry Marchand was little known. The old man had lived as a recluse for many years. Hence the story was printed in condensed form, and was crowded off the front page by the excitement of a gang killing that occurred the same night.

THE SILENT SEVEN

Cardona expected to hear no more from the press. He was mildly surprised the next day when one newspaperman approached him for an interview. This was Clyde Burke, an ex-reporter who wrote occasional feature stories. He had known Cardona for several years.

"Say, Joe," said Burke, "that Marchand case was a funny one, wasn't it?"

"Nothing much to it," replied Cardona. "I gave the dope to the inspector. He figured it out right. Accidental death."

"How about the code in the old man's drawer?"

"It doesn't interest us. Probably some private data that belonged to Marchand. I had photostats made so the experts can get busy on it. I did that to please Marchand's friend, Doctor Lukens, but I sent them all away and gave the original back to Lukens."

"I'd like to see it. Maybe I could figure it out."

Cardona was thoughtful.

"I guess I could recall one of the copies and let you have it. But you're not reporting for a paper now, are you, Burke?"

"No. I'm running a clipping bureau."

"Fine job for a newspaperman. Give me your address, Burke. I'll send the code along by mail."

"By the way, Joe," said Burke, "what's the low-down on this Marchand case? The sheets didn't carry much of a story on it."

The detective seemed reluctant to talk; then, prompted by Burke's questioning, he eventually delivered all the important details of Marchand's death.

CLYDE BURKE returned to his office. There, with the facility of a trained journalist, he typed the essential features of the detective's account. Beneath the report he placed the words: "Copy of code will follow."

Cardona had assured him that the photostat would be sent promptly. Burke sealed the report in an envelope.

He left the office and boarded a subway train. He left the tube at Twenty-third Street. He entered an old office building, ascended the stairs, and stopped before an obscure office. The faded letters on the glass, of the dingy door bore the name:

M. JONAS

Burke dropped the envelope in the mail slot in the door.

Burke's work was completed. He had delivered the inside story of the Marchand case. His report contained full details of the solution established by Inspector Timothy Klein.

But there was no mention in his report of the pair of dice that showed the number seven. The tiny cubes had been forgotten in Inspector Klein's theory. They had been classed as totally unimportant.

CHAPTER IV. A STRANGE VISITOR

A LIGHT clicked; the rays of a green-shaded light focused upon the polished surface of a table top. The gleam revealed a rectangular sheet of paper, covered with strange, queerly formed characters. It was the photostatic copy of the code found in the secret drawer of Henry Marchand's desk.

Beside the code lay a pile of papers. All else was in blackness.

Two slender, white hands appeared beneath the light. Quick-moving, sensitive fingers distributed papers from the pile until the table top was covered with the slips.

These papers bore penciled notations. Evidently they had been made in an effort to solve the code. They represented hours of work which had been halted and was now being resumed.

The hands produced a sheet of thin cardboard, its surface filled with carefully cut holes. The fingers moved the cardboard and placed it upon the photostatic copy of the code. Only certain characters showed through the holes in the cardboard.

The hands worked swiftly, changing the position of the cardboard in an effort to form new combinations of visible characters.

The code was now being submitted to a thorough test. The hands went from one sheet of paper to another, seeking some bit of information that might lead to the desired result.

At times the hands paused and remained motionless. When they did, the most unusual feature about them was a gem that glowed from a ring on the third finger of the left hand.

The stone was a girasol, that strange jewel sometimes called the fire opal. Its depths reflected a deep crimson light that glowed like a living coal.

The hands rested upon the table, so motionless that they resembled carved ivory. The brain that controlled those hands was thinking, puzzling over some problem that confronted it.

One hand disappeared and produced a watch. The timepiece, glittering on the table, registered five minutes after ten.

Time passed. The watch recorded midnight.

Then came a hollow laugh from the darkness above the hands. Soft and sinister, the laugh echoed from the invisible walls of the room until it became nothing more than a ghostly whisper.

The hands shot into action. They swept up the slips of paper and deposited them upon the copy of the code. The right hand carried away the watch. A click; the light went out.

Again came the laugh. It pervaded the solid darkness. Then the room was silent. The being who had occupied it was gone.

A TAXICAB rolled up Broadway shortly after midnight. Several persons hailed it at intervals, thinking that it was empty. The driver paid no attention to them, for he had a passenger.

The man in the back seat was shrouded in darkness. He was clad in black that rendered him almost invisible

THE SILENT SEVEN

from the street. His face was hidden beneath the broad brim of a black hat. His head was bent forward. His unseen hands were at work. Their long fingers were stroking the sides of the man's face, as in an effort to change the features which existed there.

The cab stopped at a brownstone house on Eighty-first Street. The passenger reached through the partition and paid the driver. He opened the door and stepped from the cab.

The driver looked about him in amazement. He realized that the door of the cab had opened; but what had become of the rider? In some mysterious manner the man had disappeared when he reached the sidewalk.

The driver shrugged and drove on.

THE house where the cab had stopped was the residence of Henry Marchand, deceased. Its thick, sullen portals and shuttered windows indicated that the building was empty. But there was a light upstairs in the room which had once been Marchand's sanctuary.

There, at the desk which the old man had used, sat Doctor George Lukens. The physician was lost in thought. Before him lay the unfolded sheet of paper that bore the original code found in Marchand's desk.

The physician's brow wrinkled as he vainly studied the code. The oddly formed characters resembled the letters of an unknown alphabetical system. Doctor Lukens was at loss to find a starting point. He rubbed his forehead.

Forgetting the code for the moment, he drew a letter from his pocket and read it mechanically. He placed his finger upon one paragraph in the letter.

"We have been entirely unable to solve this code," he read half aloud. "It does not correspond to any system of code message that we have ever before encountered. We have no clew as to the system employed. It is something entirely new."

The physician tossed the letter to the side of the desk. Once again he began his study of the original code. He mumbled as he stroked his chin.

"The experts cannot solve it," were his words. "Since they have failed, what can I do?"

It was not a sound that made Doctor Lukens raise his head. He was governed, instead, by one of those strange impulses that all human beings have felt the mental impression that some other person is close at hand and watching.

This influence became so strong in the mind of Doctor Lukens that he suddenly forgot the code, leaned back in his chair, and glanced to the right. Then he started in amazement.

Seated beside the desk was a man clad in black. His figure seemed unaccountably dim in the gloomy light of the room. He was looking at Doctor Lukens, and the man's face was vividly strange. An exclamation of astonishment came from the physician as he surveyed the countenance of the visitor.

It was smooth as parchment. It was masklike in its expression. The eyes were obscured by large, heavy-rimmed spectacles which were supplied with dark-tinted glass.

Doctor Lukens had an impression that there were unusual eyes behind those glasses; that the stranger wore them to conceal the vivid sparkle of his eyes.

THE SILENT SEVEN

"Who are you?" demanded the physician.

"You would not know my name," replied the man in calm, even tones.

"What are you doing here?"

"I have come to see you" the stranger extended a long, black-clad arm, and his hand rested upon the code "to see you about this. You are anxious to solve it, I believe?"

"I did not hear you come in," said Doctor Lukens coldly.

"You were engrossed in your work," replied the stranger, quietly. "I did not care to disturb you."

The physician rubbed his forehead with both hands. He realized that he had been under a nervous strain. He supposed that he had not heard the man ring the bell of the front door.

"Perhaps I have been overtaxing myself," he admitted. "I remember now that I told Oscar to send up any one who might come to see me about the code.

"I must apologize for being brusque. I have been greatly disappointed, because no one has been able to gain results with the code."

THE stranger bowed slightly in acceptance of the physician's explanation. Doctor Lukens handed him the letter that lay at the side of the desk.

"I thought that I had heard from all who received a copy of the code," said Doctor Lukens. "This is the last letter that I received. It is substantially the same as the others.

"None of the experts have had success. Yet I have been assured that the best minds have been at work upon the code."

The stranger read the letter. He nodded his head slightly as he perused its contents. He placed the letter upon the desk and stared thoughtfully at Doctor Lukens.

"What is your opinion?" questioned the physician.

"The experts have stated the facts," the strange man spoke.

"Why, then, have you come to see me?"

"Because I should like to see the original code. I have examined a photostatic copy only. I have formed my opinions. I do not believe that I shall change them. Nevertheless, I should like to see the original."

Doctor Lukens handed over the required document. The stranger studied it for several minutes while the physician watched him in bewilderment. At last the man with the dark-tinted glasses replaced the code on the desk.

"The photostatic copy is identical," he said. "That is all I needed to know."

Something in the man's tone inspired Doctor Lukens with hope.

THE SILENT SEVEN

"Ah!" exclaimed the physician. "You believe that a solution is possible?"

The stranger shook his head.

"Quite the contrary," he replied. "Like the others who have examined it, I must say that I can read no message in it. It is not a cryptogram. It is not a numbered code. It does not correspond to any existing system of code making."

Doctor Lukens sighed in disappointment.

"There are various systems of code," explained the visitor in his quiet, easy voice, "and all codes are not decipherable. There are certain codes which depend upon artificial languages or vocabularies known only to those who have prepared them. Such codes are virtually unsolvable.

"I have examined many codes. In every one I have at least found a clue to the system involved. I have met with systems that are apparently new; yet in each instance they have borne some similarity to an existing type of code.

"The experts to whom you have sent copies of this code have doubtless had experiences similar to mine. Therefore I concur with their decisions but I must add a statement of my own."

Doctor Lukens listened intently. The stranger did not speak for a moment. He was thinking, about to phrase an important statement.

"The experts," resumed the stranger, "say that they can not solve the code. Do they say that it is impossible to solve the code?"

"They have implied it," returned the physician promptly.

"They are correct in that implication," said the stranger. "I suppose then that their reason lies in the fact that the system of the code is entirely unique."

"That is certainly the reason."

"It is not a good reason. The solution of any code is within the realm of possibility even though its system is entirely new."

"Then the code can be solved?" There was sudden hope in Doctor Lukens' voice.

"No."

"Why not?"

"A code," said the man in black, "is a message transcribed into some ingenious system of lettering or characters. Am I correct?"

"Certainly," agreed Doctor Lukens.

"Then this is not a code!"

"Not a code?"

"No," replied the stranger with a faint smile. "Even the man who wrote it cannot solve it. It is merely a collection of oddly shaped characters arranged to deceive those who attempt to read it!"

CHAPTER V. MURDER REVEALED!

DOCTOR GEORGE LUKENS was thoroughly amazed by the statement made by his strange midnight visitor. The emphasis of the man's words impressed the physician. A train of confused thoughts ran through his brain.

The revelation that the characters on the paper found in Marchand's desk were not a code, but a meaningless jargon, seemed unbelievable. Nevertheless, Doctor Lukens did not doubt the truth of the man's declaration. The stranger seemed too sincere.

"You seem perplexed," observed the stranger. "I do not wonder that you are. You have convinced yourself as others have done, also that this paper bore a coded message.

"I do not blame the experts for their opinions. When they have tried every system known to themselves, they naturally assume that they have encountered something new."

"But you did not assume that," returned Lukens.

"No," replied the stranger, "because I am more confident of my ability. When I had studied the supposed code and subjected it to all my tests without a single clew, I knew that there could be but one answer: the paper is a hoax!"

"What, then, is its purpose?"

"To mislead. To arouse false theories. To accomplish the very thing which has been accomplished. To make people believe that Henry Marchand's death was an accident when in reality it was a cleverly contrived murder!"

"A murder!" Lukens gripped the arms of the chair.

"Speak softly," urged the stranger. "I am talking to you in confidence. I closed the door when I entered. We must be overheard by no one."

The physician nodded.

"I must admit," said the stranger quietly, "that the circumstances of Henry Marchand's death substantiated my belief that the paper was a spurious code.

"I am familiar with the most important details. On that account I see great flaws in the theory which Inspector Klein presented as a solution of Marchand's death."

"What, in particular?"

"First," continued the strange man, "the preventive measure of a poisoned needle.

"Marchand had an alarm upon his safe; a tear-gas ejector upon the closet door. Neither of these were dangerous. Why, then, should he have a death-dealing device hidden in this desk?"

THE SILENT SEVEN

"Because this paper code or no code must have been of vital importance –"

"You are wrong, Doctor Lukens," interrupted the stranger. "If the secret drawer contained a vital secret, Marchand would not have placed a murderous device there.

"Had some one died in this room, the old man could not have explained the matter except by disclosing a secret which he was most anxious to preserve."

"That is true," admitted the physician.

"MARCHAND'S death," resumed the stranger, "was attributed to his forgetfulness. Marchand knew himself that he was forgetful, did he not?"

"He did."

"Why, then, would he have been so foolish as to lay a snare for himself?"

"I see your point," agreed Doctor Lukens. "Of course, Marchand must have been anxious to preserve the secret of this hidden drawer –"

"Of course," interposed the stranger, "and the ingenious mechanical arrangement was sufficient in itself.

"No one would ever have suspected the existence of the drawer. Why the necessity of the poisoned needle?"

"But the needle was there! And the thimble, too!"

The stranger smiled at the physician's words.

"The needle and the thimble," repeated the man in black. "Also the spurious code sealed in an envelope."

"That's right," agreed Doctor Lukens. He drew the opened envelope from his pocket. The stranger reached over to examine it.

"Let us suppose that this document was considered valuable by Henry Marchand," suggested the stranger. "Why did he keep it here rather than in a safe–deposit vault?"

"So it would be where he could watch it or refer to it," replied the physician.

"Agreed. Kept in a concealed drawer, opened by an ingenious device, the paper would be well protected.

"But why should it be in a sealed envelope? That would be no deterrent to a thief who might discover the secret of the drawer. Marchand could not have wanted to protect the envelope. A clever thief, stealing the document, would substitute a similar envelope stuffed with blank paper.

"Moreover, if Marchand had been trying to decipher a code which he did not understand, he would not have kept it sealed."

"It does seem illogical," admitted Doctor Lukens.

"Illogical," said the stranger, "and improbable."

THE SILENT SEVEN

"What, then, is the answer to this riddle?"

"A new theory," said the stranger. "We must gather every bit of information that may serve as a clew.

"There is a murderer in this. We must consider the subject from his standpoint."

"You have a theory?" Lukens queried.

"More than a theory." The calmness of the stranger's voice chilled Lukens. "I have a solution!"

THE stranger folded his hands beneath his chin and rested his elbows on the arms of his chair. His darkened spectacles gave him an owl-like appearance.

"Some one," said the man in black, "learned of the existence of the secret drawer in this desk. That person surmised that the drawer contained something probably a document of importance. He resolved to steal it.

"He entered this house, made his way into the room, and managed to open the drawer. He stole the article that he desired. That took place on the first night that Oscar suspected a burglar in the house."

"There was a second burglar –" began Lukens.

"I know," interrupted the stranger. "That became necessary."

"Why?"

"Because the thief had to make provision for the return of Henry Marchand."

"I see!" exclaimed Lukens. "He took this paper with its pretended code. He wanted to put it back before Marchand discovered that it was gone."

"No," said the stranger patiently. "He took something else. Something he did not wish to return. He did not want Marchand to know that it was gone.

"More than that, whatever he took could not have been of use to him until Marchand was dead!"

"So he planned a deliberate murder an ideal murder, because it timed Marchand's death simultaneously with the old man's discovery that his secret possession had been stolen.

"The thief entered this house a second time. He put the poisoned needle in the secret spot where the hidden drawer was released. He left a thimble in the desk. Only one touch remained.

"He did not want Marchand to be found dead beside an empty drawer. So he played his master stroke this spurious code. He knew that it would be found; that those finding it would believe it to be Marchand's secret.

"Even now the murderer is chuckling. The supposed code can never be solved. Hence no one so the murderer believes will ever gain a clew to Marchand's real secret."

"This is astounding!" declared Doctor Lukens. "It completely changes the solution of Marchand's death. But you who are you –"

"There was just one flaw," interrupted the stranger, ignoring the physician's question. "The murderer used a

THE SILENT SEVEN

sealed envelope. Perhaps he thought it would be more impressive for the code to be found sealed.

"He did not realize the weakness of the situation; neither, for that matter, did the inspector or the detective who investigated the case."

"The murderer," murmured Doctor Lukens. "Who can he be?"

"Some one who knew Henry Marchand well!" declared the stranger in an ominous tone. "I do not think the man knew what he was stealing. I believe he surprised Marchand one time when the old man was opening the secret drawer.

"Henry Marchand feared a burglary because his very life depended upon whatever he had hidden. He came here immediately when he learned that some one had entered the house. He came back to die."

Doctor Lukens opened the drawer in the center of the desk and produced the thimble. He handed it to the man in black, who examined it. The stranger replaced the thimble in the drawer and saw the pair of dice lying there.

He took them out. They showed the number seven. He dropped them on the table; again they registered seven.

"Loaded," said the stranger. "That's curious. Always seven. Did you ever connect the number seven with Henry Marchand?"

"It seems to me I did," said Lukens thoughtfully. "But I can't recall the circumstances. Do you see any significance in the number seven?"

"Yes. It may lead us to the murderer."

"Do you suspect Oscar?" Lukens asked.

"Perhaps."

"Willis?"

"Perhaps. I even suspected you, Doctor Lukens."

The physician gasped in indignation.

"I watched you," said the visitor. "You did not see me here. Your interest in the false code showed that you did not know it was spurious. I resolved to explain the matter to you and to ask your aid."

"How can I aid you?"

"By living here as an executor of Marchand's estate. Study the two men who lived with Marchand. Watch for new developments."

Doctor Lukens nodded.

"In the meantime," continued the stranger, "I shall investigate others who –"

THE SILENT SEVEN

"Whom, for instance?"

"Any one who was closely associated with Henry Marchand. I am convinced that the old man was murdered; the problem now is to find what was stolen and to trace the criminal."

DOCTOR LUKENS nodded in agreement. He drew a handkerchief from his pocket and mopped his forehead. The physician noted that the visitor was strangely calm.

"There may be danger here," said the stranger. "You may find some clew among Marchand's effects. You may learn of others with whom he has been associated. Some specter of the past may rise to confront you. If it does, you must recognize it."

"I shall be prepared," said Lukens firmly. "It is a duty to my old friend, Henry. You have convinced me, also. Your ability amazes me. Though I have never seen you before, I have confidence in you. I should like to know your name."

The man in black stood up. His tall form cast a long, thin shadow that stretched fantastically across the width of the room.

Slowly, noiselessly, he walked to the door; there he turned and stood facing the physician. Now, at the edge of the room, the stranger's face was scarcely discernible in the gloom.

"I am a friend," said the man in black. "My name does not matter."

"But what are you a detective?"

A soft laugh came from the man at the door. It was a whispered laugh with a sinister tone that made Doctor Lukens shudder involuntarily.

"Perhaps," said the visitor. "You may rest assured that in this case I am seeking the murderer of Henry Marchand; and that when I discover him, he will pay the full penalty for his crime."

"Then you may count upon my full cooperation," declared the physician.

"Your cooperation," replied the stranger, "and your silence! I shall come again out of the darkness. If you receive a message from me, you will recognize its authorship. Should you require me urgently, call this number."

The man stepped back across the room and placed a card in Doctor Lukens's hand. The card bore a telephone number. The stranger turned and walked from the room.

As the door closed behind the man, the physician hurried in pursuit. He reached the head of the stairs and switched on the light in the hall below. He saw the man at the bottom of the stairs, standing beside a table.

The stranger had put on a black hat with a broad brim. His arms were outstretched as he drew a black cloak about his shoulders.

Doctor Lukens called, but the stranger made no reply. Instead, he moved toward the front door and opened it.

Lukens, hurrying down the stairs, arrived as the door closed behind the man in the black cloak. The physician opened the door and emerged upon the steps. He thought that he was but a few paces behind his departing

THE SILENT SEVEN

visitor; yet the man was nowhere to be seen. He had stepped from the house and had disappeared.

FOR several minutes Lukens gazed up and down the street, seeking some trace of the vanished stranger. His efforts unavailing, the physician returned into the house. As he went up the stairs, Oscar appeared.

"Oh!" exclaimed the servant. "I heard you. I wondered who was coming in."

"I just went downstairs with our visitor. Did he tell you his name, Oscar?"

"Who?"

"The man who was here. The man in the black cloak."

"I saw no man, sir."

"What! Didn't you let him in a half hour ago?"

"No, sir. I have been asleep since ten o'clock."

Doctor Lukens gasped.

"Was the front door locked?" he questioned.

"Certainly, doctor," replied Oscar. "I always lock it and bolt it, sir."

"It's unlocked now," said the physician grimly. "I was outside a moment ago."

Oscar hurried downstairs to lock the front door. Doctor Lukens, his head bowed in thought, went into the room where Henry Marchand had died. He slumped into the chair before the desk.

It all seemed unreal. For a minute the physician believed that he had been the victim of hallucinations produced by the mental effort he had undergone in his study of the code.

Then his fingers fumbled in his vest pocket, and he brought out the card which the man in black had given him the card which bore the telephone number to be called in an emergency.

Doctor Lukens smiled. Here was tangible evidence. This was a clew by which he might trace his visitor and learn the man's identity.

Convinced of the reality of the situation, Doctor Lukens pondered deeply over the information which the man had given him. The logic of the stranger's arguments had created a profound impression in the physician's mind.

"It is true," murmured Doctor Lukens. "True that my old friend Henry was murdered. This man has revealed the fact. Whoever he is whatever he may be he is ready to trace the murderer. I shall aid him as he wishes!"

The physician stared at the wall as his mind reverted to the mysterious man who had come to see him.

"Who can he be?" asked Doctor Lukens. "Where did he come from? Where did he go? It is unaccountable." The physician pictured himself standing outside the front door, staring through the darkness.

"Strange!" he exclaimed. "He vanished as he appeared like a living shadow!"

CHAPTER VI. THE SCARAB RING

THE next morning Doctor George Lukens went to his home. Upon leaving Marchand's house, he called Harvey Willis and told the young secretary that he intended to return and stay in the old brownstone mansion.

The physician explained that he was about to take a vacation, and that he would like to be present to go over Marchand's effects a duty which Willis had expected to perform.

When he reached his own residence, the doctor called the offices of the telephone company. He brought out the card that the stranger had given him and requested that the number be traced. He was told to await a report.

During the interim, Doctor Lukens packed his suitcase. In going through a bureau drawer, he came upon an object that brought back unhappy memories.

It was a gold ring upon which was mounted an Egyptian scarab. It was not an article of great value, and Doctor Lukens had almost forgotten it. The ring had been given to him several months before by Henry Marchand.

"This ring," the old man had said, "is the only article of jewelry that I have ever worn. I do not want to wear it now. I do not want to deposit it with the gems that belonged to my wife, for it is not a part of that collection.

"Somehow I value this odd ring, and I am afraid to keep it because I might lose it. You never lose anything, George.

"Fear of losing this ring has become a mania with me. If you have it, I know it will be safe. If I never ask for it again, keep it as a memento."

Doctor Lukens had been well acquainted with his patient's mental quirks. He had taken the ring and had placed it in this drawer, which he always kept locked.

The physician had no fear of theft or burglary. He had doubted the importance of the ring; in fact, he had believed that Henry Marchand would forget all about it.

Now the scarab ring seemed precious to Doctor Lukens. The ring was a souvenir of his dead friend. Tears dimmed the physician's eyes as he examined the ring and looked at the green beetle mounted on the gold.

He glanced at the inside of the ring and noted a series of tiny scratches. He was about to study them more closely when the phone rang. Doctor Lukens slipped the ring on his finger and answered the call.

THE telephone company reported that the number he had requested was a pay-station booth in the Grand Central Station. Doctor Lukens gasped; then he laughed as he hung up the receiver.

A moment later his mirth changed to serious thought. He called another number. A man's voice answered.

"Barlow," said the physician, "are you busy this afternoon and this evening?"

"No, sir," came the reply.

THE SILENT SEVEN

"I have a job for you. Go to the Grand Central Station. Look over the telephone booths in an indifferent manner, you understand. Find one that bears this number" the physician referred to the card and gave the number "and station yourself near at hand. Notify me if you see any one loitering about that booth.

"If the phone rings about nine o'clock this evening see who answers it. Call me promptly at Mister Marchand's home."

"Very well, sir."

The physician rubbed his hands in satisfaction. He completed the packing of his suitcase. He felt that he was entering an unusual game, and that new and interesting developments would come. He left his apartment, called a cab, and rode to Marchand's house.

There he discovered a visitor Rodney Paget. The suave, immaculately clad clubman was with Harvey Willis in the room where Henry Marchand had died.

The secretary was busy going over the old man's effects articles, chiefly, which had been brought from the safe. Paget, his long cigarette holder in his hand, was watching indolently.

"Good morning, doctor," drawled Paget. "Just dropped in to say hello. Willis told me you were coming today. How are you?"

"Well, thank you," snapped Lukens. He turned to the secretary. "Willis, I told you not to do this work until I arrived."

"I was just arranging things, sir," replied the secretary. "Mister Paget asked me if I had begun, and I told him I was waiting for you. He suggested that I put things in readiness."

"Obey my orders after this," retorted Lukens.

There was a pause. Then Paget spoke.

"You are staying here, doctor?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the physician.

He went to the desk and began examining some papers that had been taken from the safe. Suddenly he wheeled and looked at Paget. The clubman was standing at the left. Lukens acted so quickly that he surprised him.

Paget had been staring at the papers, Lukens thought. The man's gaze turned hurriedly, but too late to escape the doctor's notice.

"I must be going," drawled Paget. "I shall return later, doctor. I thought that you might find something concerning my business with Mister Marchand. Perhaps by this evening –"

"Drop in then, if you wish," said Lukens brusquely. He watched Paget suspiciously as the man left the room. The physician made no comment to Willis, who was busy at the safe.

The secretary had removed everything from Marchand's safe and closet. Doctor Lukens was surprised at the amount of work he had accomplished. Every small article had apparently been gone over while Paget had

THE SILENT SEVEN

been present.

The doctor set to work to examine Marchand's effects. He labored slowly and found the job tedious. There was very little of interest.

OSCAR served dinner at six o'clock, before Doctor Lukens had completed his examination. The serving man requested an evening off, and Lukens granted it.

Immediately after dinner the doctor and the secretary went back to work. The final examination was completed. Willis prepared to replace everything where he had found it. He was interrupted by the doorbell.

Paget, attired in evening clothes, came upstairs with him.

"Good evening, doctor," Paget said lazily. "Anything of interest to me?"

"Nothing."

Paget dropped into a chair and gazed carelessly at Willis. The physician sat beside Paget and also watched the secretary as he worked.

Once again Doctor Lukens obeyed the impulse to turn toward Paget. He discovered the visitor looking at the scarab ring on his left hand.

Paget smiled sheepishly.

"Curious ring, doctor," he said, indicating the object with his hand. "I do not recall seeing you wear it before."

"It belonged to Henry Marchand," replied the physician. "He presented it to me some time ago. I came across it to-day in my home."

The physician had scarcely completed his statement before a suspicion seized him.

Why had Paget noticed the ring? The clubman was not usually observant. At that instant Doctor Lukens suddenly realized that Paget, when he had visited the house in the morning, had been staring at the scarab ring not at the papers which Lukens had held.

The physician's suspicion must have been reflected by Paget. The man arose and stretched his arms.

"Must be going," he drawled. "Society affair to-night. Have to attend them, you know good business."

He extended his hand.

"Good-by, doctor," he added. "May not see you for some time. Guess my business with Mister Marchand is now ended. If anything turns up, notify me."

Doctor Lukens kept staring at the door through which Rodney Paget had gone. He heard the front door close downstairs. The physician turned to Willis.

"Take a night off," ordered the physician. "You look pale and weak. It's not yet nine o'clock. Go and see a movie."

THE SILENT SEVEN

The secretary seemed to brighten at the suggestion as Lukens waved his hand toward the door.

"I'll be in at eleven thirty," promised Willis.

"All right," laughed Lukens. "I guess Oscar will be back before that. You both like to go to bed early. Run along. I won't lock the front door."

Lukens was meditative after the secretary's departure. He drummed upon the desk with his open hand, and the clatter of the scarab ring caught his attention. He snapped his fingers with a sudden idea.

He referred to the card in his pocket. Using the telephone at the side of the room, he called the number which the mysterious stranger had given him the night before.

"No answer," he murmured after two minutes had passed. "I hope Barlow is on the job."

BARLOW was on the job. At that exact time he was watching the phone booth. He heard the ringing of the bell. It ended. Barlow waited a short while; then entered another booth.

Had Barlow been watching the busy refreshment counter across from the phone booth he might have seen one of the white-coated attendants leave his place. Barlow would have suspected nothing in the man's action, for the attendant passed out of sight behind the partition in back of the counter.

There the attendant dialed a number. Upon receiving a reply, he merely grunted a few unintelligible sounds and hung up the receiver with the air of a man who had obtained a wrong number.

Immediately afterward the attendant was back at the counter, serving a new customer.

The telephone rang in the upstairs room where Doctor Lukens was seated. The physician answered it.

"Barlow?" he said. "Nothing doing there? No one showed up? Thanks. You can drop the job now. It was just an experiment."

He hung up the receiver.

"A hoax!" was Lukens's comment. "A hoax unless Barlow was not discreet and frightened the man away. Yet I can't understand —"

The telephone rang again.

A whispered voice responded to the physician's answering word. Doctor Lukens recognized the tones of the mysterious stranger.

"Do you wish to see me?" came the voice.

"Yes," replied Lukens almost involuntarily. "I have found —" he glanced at the ring on his finger, then hesitated. "I can tell you when I see you. Can you come here now?"

"Immediately."

"No hurry," said Lukens suddenly. "Say within an hour."

THE SILENT SEVEN

He hung up the receiver.

"That was a mistake," he murmured. "An hour may be too soon. I should have told him to call back. But then, he might have suspected. Well, it's a case of trusting to luck."

He picked up the telephone and called police headquarters. He asked to talk to Joe Cardona. The physician uttered an exclamation of satisfaction when he heard the detective's voice over the wire.

"Ah! Cardona!" he said in a low voice. "This is Doctor Lukens. I am in Henry Marchand's house. Can you come right away?"

"What's it about?" asked the detective curiously.

"I don't know," replied the physician frankly. "I expect a visitor. Who he is what he is I do not know. His purpose may be important. Come at once. The door is unlocked. Move upstairs cautiously, and keep out of sight in the hall.

"I am in the room where Marchand died. If my visitor is here, you will overhear the conversation. If he has not yet arrived, you will see him come in later. I expect him within an hour."

"Right!"

Lukens hung up the receiver and began to pace the room. Then he seated himself in the chair at the desk and feigned deep thought. He kept his back to the door; he was anxious to learn if he could detect the stranger's approach.

He picked up the dice and held them on the palm of his right hand. He shook them thoughtfully, then closed his fist over them and gripped the cubes tightly.

The impression that some one was entering the room suddenly dominated the physician's mind. He fought against it momentarily; then turned quickly in his chair.

With a mad effort he scrambled to his feet. Before him, halfway across the room, stood a man who held a curious revolver. The muzzle was muffled by a silencer. The gun was directed toward the desk.

A cry escaped the physician's lips. It was a cry of recognition of sudden understanding. It was the man as much as the gun that alarmed him.

In the fraction of a second the physician realized the situation. Before he could act, he saw a finger press the trigger. With a sighing gasp, Doctor George Lukens collapsed upon the floor!

CHAPTER VII. A MURDERER ESCAPES

IT was nearly an hour after the physician's phone call when Detective Cardona reached the old house on Eighty-first Street. He did not enter the brownstone mansion immediately upon arrival. Instead, he stood across the street and uttered a low, almost indistinguishable whistle. Two men came from the darkness.

"Here's the lay, boys," whispered the detective. "I'm going in that house to see a man upstairs. There may be nothing to it, but I want you to hop in quick if you hear anything. How long have you been here?"

"Only about two minutes," replied one of the men. "We put a couple of uniformed men out back, like you

THE SILENT SEVEN

told us."

"Good. Has any one gone in?"

"Not since we've been here."

"All right. There's no rush about it. If I come out first, be ready to grab the next fellow that comes out if I give the signal.

"If I want you inside, you'll hear from me. If I don't come out in thirty minutes, move into the house. If any guy enters, spot him, but don't stop him. Savvy?"

"We got it."

The detective sauntered across the street and silently entered the brownstone mansion. He found the front hall dimly lighted. He moved softly up the carpeted stairs.

Cardona remembered this house. He prided himself on the softness of his approach.

At the head of the stairs he saw the light thrown into the hallway from the open door of the room where Lukens expected a visitor.

There was a dark spot on the opposite side of the hallway. It offered an excellent observation place. Cardona slipped to the location; there, crouching low, he turned to look into the silent room.

The desk was obscured from view. Cardona shifted to the side, risking a momentary chance in the light.

There the detective rested motionless, too astounded to take instant action.

Face down on the floor lay the body of a man! The bushy gray hair identified the person as Doctor George Lukens. The arms were outstretched, as though the dead man had made a despairing effort to throw himself upon an attacker. The fists were clenched; but there was something about the left hand that halted the detective's gaze.

The third finger of that hand projected straight outward from the closed fist!

Beside the body was a living man, a figure clad in black. Enveloped in the folds of a huge cloak, this living person seemed like a specter of the night a sinister being of another world, whose mammoth shadow lay across the body sprawled upon the floor.

CARDONA experienced a sensation mingled with fear and amazement. He recognized the being in black. It was one whom he had never encountered, yet whom he knew existed.

The detective realized that he was viewing a figure that had brought terror to the underworld; whose very existence was a mystery to the police and criminals alike. Cardona's lips were dry as they phrased two words which the detective did not utter aloud.

"The Shadow!"

The demand for action surged through Cardona's brain. The police had nothing on The Shadow. The mysterious man had been accused of crime, yet nothing had ever been proven against him.

THE SILENT SEVEN

On the contrary, he had on occasions helped the police in their war against crime, but always in his own mysterious way. He had never appeared in the light as a detective.

His purpose here to-night was a mystery to Cardona. That The Shadow was the visitor expected by Doctor Lukens the detective did not doubt.

Cardona, shrewd though he might be, was a man who jumped to immediate conclusions. Here was tangible evidence.

A dead man Doctor George Lukens who had been alive less than an hour before. Hovering over him was this monster of the night, the only person in the house. A dead man and a live man. The evidence lay against The Shadow.

Cardona had come to listen as a concealed observer. Now his purpose was to seize and capture a man whom he felt certain was a murderer.

The circumstances were pressing. Had his men been close by, Cardona would have proceeded cunningly. Had he felt that he was dealing with an ordinary criminal, he would have simply covered the man and demanded his surrender.

But he had heard too much of The Shadow. Now that the myth of the underworld had become reality, Cardona hesitated at halfway measures.

Death to the murderer was his only course!

The urge to observe what The Shadow was about to do restrained the detective momentarily, but he overcame the temporary hesitation. Drawing his automatic, Cardona straightened up and sprang into the room.

The sound of his approach made his presence known to the man in the black cloak. So promptly did The Shadow act that his motions seemed simultaneous with those of the detective.

Cardona's arm, usually sure and firm, trembled slightly with excitement as his finger touched the trigger of the automatic. Then came a revolver shot; but not from the detective's gun. From beneath his cloak, the man in black had whipped out an automatic.

Flinging himself full length on the floor to escape Cardona's aim, The Shadow had fired from an angle. The bullet struck the detective's revolver just above the handle, grazing Cardona's fingers. The damaged gun fell from the detective's numbed hand.

As The Shadow started to rise, Cardona threw himself at the man in black. Angered, the detective forgot that he was at the mercy of his antagonist.

One shot from the automatic would have ended the detective's plunge. But The Shadow did not fire. Instead, he bent forward as Cardona fell upon him. As the detective's bleeding hand grasped the black cloak, The Shadow lifted his shoulders and precipitated Cardona head foremost on the floor.

Cardona threw out an arm to protect himself and was partially successful, although he was half stunned by the force of his fall. As he tried to recover himself, he had a dazed view of a swiftly-moving form in black. The Shadow hurried from the room toward the stairs.

THERE was a loud clatter at the front door. The two plain-clothes men stationed by Cardona had rushed

THE SILENT SEVEN

across the street at the sound of the shot.

The Shadow, standing at the head of the stairs, would have been a perfect target for their automatics; but they did not realize his presence until they had come halfway up the steps. Until he moved, he seemed nothing more than a blot of blackness against the wall.

With the approach of the plain clothes men, The Shadow turned and sprang down the hall. The cries of the men followed him. Revolvers were discharged wildly.

The Shadow stopped short, and his tall, black-clad form drew itself tensely against the wall. Two policemen were coming up the back stairs. That avenue of escape was cut off.

The detectives, shouting to the policemen, came running down the hall. They stopped in the gloomy darkness as the policemen met them. The four men had lost their quarry.

They were standing within a few feet of the doorway where The Shadow, calm and motionless, was waiting. Slowly, inch by inch, the door began to open inward, without the semblance of a sound. The Shadow was escaping from their midst!

While the four minions of the law were wondering, this incredible man of the night was leaving them. With iron nerve, he was moving with patient slowness, giving no sign that might betray his presence.

But for an unexpected incident, he would have made his secret exit.

It was Joe Cardona who unwittingly frustrated The Shadow's escape. The detective, tottering unsteadily, came from the room into the hallway. He placed his hand against the wall and found a light switch. He remembered it from his previous visit to the house.

An instant later the hallway was flooded with light. A sharp cry came from one of the plain-clothes men. There, plainly visible against the white background of the half-opened doorway, stood The Shadow!

A policeman acted promptly. As The Shadow twisted through the doorway, the man in uniform leaped upon him. The others followed before The Shadow could elude them. The Shadow gripped the doorway as the four men came down on him.

Cardona, suddenly restored to his senses, came down the hallway. He knew the formidable powers of the man whom the officers had captured. "Don't let him get away!" he cried. "Shoot him!"

There was no chance to obey the last command. The captors were too closely gathered to risk a gun shot.

Then The Shadow became suddenly submissive. His automatic had been wrested from his hand, a plain-clothes man, frisking through the folds of the black cloak, brought forth another gun.

"I've got the rods," the man exclaimed. "Hold him, boys."

The policemen were pinning The Shadow's arms against the wall. The plain clothes men stepped back as Cardona approached.

The detective did not waste an instant. He stepped up to The Shadow and reached for the broad-brimmed hat which had shifted forward so that it completely hid the face beneath the brim.

THE SILENT SEVEN

AT that instant The Shadow came to life. He swung his body toward one side with terrific force.

The policeman who held The Shadow's right arm was flung against Cardona. The Shadow's hand came free.

The plain-clothes men, coming in, were momentarily halted by the forms of Cardona and the officer. The other policeman still held The Shadow in a viselike grip, but he was no match for the man in black. With amazing strength, The Shadow lifted the man off the floor. Turning toward the doorway, he flung his foe against two new men who were entering.

Three quick strides and The Shadow's black form was silhouetted against the window across the room. It required several seconds for him to open the sash.

Shots rang out and glass was shattered. The Shadow's form slumped, but it straightened quickly as the would-be captors came across the room in triumph.

With one sweeping motion The Shadow vaulted the low sill and dropped from the window, just as a hand plucked the folds of his black cloak. The Shadow slipped free of the garment, leaving it in the hands of his foe.

The plain-clothes man leaned from the window and aimed his automatic at the thin black figure on the ground below. Bullets ricocheted from the stone alley as The Shadow fled. The last shot whizzed above him and carried his hat from his head.

The Shadow swooped the hat from the ground as he turned the corner of the house. From the alley came the sound of a mocking, triumphant laugh.

Detective Cardona directed the pursuit. His men had not been badly injured in the fray. They hurried from the house by both doors in a mad effort to trace the man who had eluded them.

Cardona leaned against the wall beside the door of the back room. Then, picking up the black cloak which had been thrown on the floor, he walked slowly back to the room where the body of Doctor Lukens lay.

The detective found his automatic and laid it on the desk. He sat in a chair and stared at the physician's body. He rubbed the side of his head and tried to ward off the dizziness that was overcoming him. He looked up.

Before him stood a tall, thin man clad in a close-fitting black suit. The man's arms were folded. His head was bowed, and his face was shadowy beneath the brim of his hat.

STEADYING himself with one hand, Cardona reached for his automatic. The man in black laughed softly. He drew his cloak from Cardona's knees. He wrapped the cloak about his shoulders and raised the collar high above his chin.

Cardona was examining his automatic. He saw the reason for The Shadow's laugh. The gun was useless. The Shadow's shot had ruined it. The detective tried to rise from his chair, but sank back helplessly.

"Cardona," said The Shadow in a low, weird whisper, "I am not your enemy. I did not kill Doctor Lukens. I came here to protect him. Do you understand?"

The detective nodded.

"Your men have captured my weapons," continued The Shadow in that same strange voice. "You will find

THE SILENT SEVEN

that the bullet that killed this man does not correspond to either of my automatics. The murderer left here before I arrived. He has taken the gun with him."

Quietly The Shadow stooped over the body of the dead physician. He opened Lukens's clenched right hand.

The pair of dice dropped upon the floor. They showed the number seven a five spot and a two.

"There is a connection," said The Shadow, rising. "Those dice were in Marchand's desk. This murder like Marchand's death has something to do with the number seven.

"Perhaps some fiend has planned seven murders. Perhaps" his voice was thoughtful "there are seven persons involved. Follow that clew. Seek the murderer.

"I shall tell you more. The gun was probably fitted with a silencer. That extended finger of Lukens's left hand shows a purpose. The murderer desired a ring that he was wearing.

"Seek the murderer" The Shadow's voice was sibilant "and I shall aid you. Premeditated murder, with Doctor Lukens taken unaware. I shall aid you. When I am certain of the murderer's identity and have fathomed the plans of his associates, I shall reveal them to you."

Cardona saw the flash of two burning eyes that peered from the depths below the broad-brimmed hat. He clutched the arms of his chair to fight off dizziness. Then The Shadow was gone.

Outside, the two plain-clothes men were returning from their fruitless pursuit. They were startled by the sound of a long, taunting laugh that seemed to come from nowhere and that dwindled away to a mysterious nothingness.

It was the laugh of The Shadow!

CHAPTER VIII. CARDONA CHECKS

"GEN'LEMAN callee you on phone, sir."

Rodney Paget sat up in bed. It was morning. He was in Jerry Burnham's apartment. Burnham's Japanese valet had roused him.

"All right, Kama," said Paget. "I'll answer."

He arose slowly and leisurely put on a pair of slippers. He yawned as he went into the living room, followed by the valet.

"He downstairs, sir," informed Kama. "He say he wanee see you."

"Hello," drawled Paget, speaking in the house phone. A note of surprise entered his voice. "Oh, yes. I remember you. I met you at Marchand's house the night the old man died. Come right up."

Paget went back in the bedroom and put on a dressing gown. Another man, similarly attired, appeared in the hallway. The newcomer bore the tired look of a man who had awakened from a sleep disturbed by alcoholic memories.

"What's up?" he asked.

THE SILENT SEVEN

"We're up, Jerry," replied Paget with a laugh. "And a detective's coming up. He'll be here in a minute."

"A detective?"

"Yes. His name is Cardona. Something to do with the death of old Marchand."

Kama answered the knock at the door. Cardona walked in. He nodded to Paget in a friendly manner.

"Sit down," urged Paget. "This is Mister Burnham, Mister Cardona –"

"Glad to meet you," said the detective. "I called at your apartment, Mister Paget. I was told that you could be reached over here."

"I've been here all night," said Paget, with a laugh. "That is, all night, since three o'clock in the morning." He glanced at a clock on the bookcase. "Look at that," he added. "Nearly eleven, and I'm just getting up."

"What do you want to see me about, Cardona? Something to do with Marchand?"

"Not Marchand."

"Who, then?"

"Haven't you seen the morning papers?"

"Not yet. I just got up. We generally read the evening papers around here. What's happened?"

In reply, Cardona drew a newspaper from beneath his arm and handed the journal to Paget. The clubman blinked as he observed a familiar face picture on the front page; then his eye caught the headlines.

"Jove!" he exclaimed. "Doctor Lukens murdered!"

PAGET stared with wide-open eyes as hastily perused the paragraphs below the headlines. He seemed to have forgotten his customary indifference.

He devoured the printed lines. Then he cast the newspaper to the floor. His face was sober as he stared at the detective.

"You were there," Paget said solemnly. "You had the man. Why didn't you hold him?"

"He knocked me out," admitted the detective. "My men let him slip away. Nearly winged him when he jumped out of the window. Didn't even see his face, though."

"This is terrible news, Cardona," Paget said slowly. "I hope you get the murderer!"

"You may be able to help," responded the detective. "We're after every bit of evidence that may lead to a clew."

"Where was Oscar the servant?"

"Out for the evening. So was Willis. Both have perfect alibis checked."

THE SILENT SEVEN

"I see. Then Lukens was alone."

"Yes. Willis came in about midnight. He went all to pieces when he found the police there. He was all garbled for a while.

"This morning he talked better. He told us that you had been there and had left the house some time before he went out."

"That is correct."

"Here's what I want to know, Mister Paget. Did you notice anything unusual at the house when you were there? Do you recall the exact time you were there? Anything that Doctor Lukens said or did?"

"I was only there a few minutes," said Paget thoughtfully. "I had dinner, here, with Mister Burnham. It was about quarter of eight when I left it's only ten minutes by cab to Marchand's house so I must have gotten there about eight.

"I arrived back here at eight thirty. I remember looking at the clock after I came in, because Jerry and I wanted to start out before nine o'clock.

"Didn't I tell you that I would be back by half past eight, Jerry?"

Burnham scratched his head.

"Yes, I remember it," he said. "Eight thirty by the clock right there on the bookcase. I said to be back by nine. You said you'd be back by eight thirty, and you were.

"Jack Greylock came in a couple of minutes before you. He'd probably remember it, too. He was only half lit at the time."

"Back here at half past eight," said Cardona, making a notation on a pad. "That figures you at Marchand's house from about eight to eight twenty. That was pretty close to what Willis said."

"HALF past eight," interrupted Jerry Burnham, still scratching his head. "That was the time. Kama" the Japanese servant entered "what time did Mister Paget come in here last night you know, when Mister Greylock was here. Just before we went out together?"

"Bigee clock strike halfee past eight," said the Japanese.

"Great boy, Kama," said Burnham approvingly. "That Jap knows everything. That's why I keep him. Best man I ever had."

"Between eight and eight twenty," said Cardona, with a satisfied voice. "That much is settled. Did Doctor Lukens appear at all worried?"

"He looked tired," said Paget. "Said he had been working all afternoon, and had just cleaned up the job. Willis was putting everything away. He looked tired, too."

"Did he say anything special to you?"

"Nothing. I merely stopped in to inquire if he had found records of any uncompleted business that concerned

THE SILENT SEVEN

me. I handled a few of Marchand's investments, you know. The old man was a friend of my father."

"I see." Cardona arose. "That's all, Mister Paget," he said. "Sorry to disturb you. Thanks for the information. I'll put your testimony on record. It about cleans up all that I can get."

"I'm always glad to help you, Cardona," said Paget, rising and walking to the door with the detective. "Too bad you couldn't get me earlier this morning."

"Burnham and I didn't get in until after three o'clock. We were on the go from half past eight, with Greylock and two or three others. Made the rounds of the town and we've been sleeping it off here."

"Right-o," interposed Burnham, "and I'm going back to get some more sleep."

The detective left the apartment. Rodney Paget turned to Kama.

"Breakfast," he ordered.

While Paget was eating, the Japanese servant stood beside the table.

"Bigee clock in the living room," said Kama. "He go slow last night."

"Clock go slow?"

"Yes, sir." Kama produced a watch. "You go out, Mister Paget, I lookee at clock. Clockee say eight. I lookee at watch. Watchee say pretty near nine."

"You come in, I hear bigee clock strike halfee past eight. I lookee at watchee after that. Watchee say pretty near halfee past ten."

"Yes?" questioned Paget curiously.

"Then you go outee with Mister Burnham," went on Kama. "After you go, I lookee at clock again. Clockee say pretty near eleven. I lookee at watch. Watchee say same as clockee pretty near eleven."

"Well, well," observed Paget.

"I thinkee it funny," added Kama. "I thinkee someblody pushee clockee back. Then slame someblody pushee clockee up. Clockee right now. Clockee always right. Exclept last night."

"Listen, Kama," said Paget. "Have you been drinking some of Mister Burnham's liquor?"

"No drinkee, Mister Paget. No likee stuff."

"Well, don't say anything to him about the clock. Forget it, understand?"

Kama nodded.

"That man who was here," added Paget. "Do you know who he was?"

The Japanese shook his head.

THE SILENT SEVEN

"Forget him, too," ordered Paget. "He was just a friend of mine, who stopped in to tell me some news. The clock's all right now, isn't it?"

Kama nodded.

"Well, since it's all right, forget it. The clock struck half past eight when I came in, didn't it? Just remember that part. Maybe your watch was wrong. Half past eight. Remember?"

"You come in at halfee past eight," repeated Kama.

RODNEY PAGET finished breakfast in his usual leisurely fashion. He took a bath and dressed. It was afternoon when he prepared to leave the apartment. Burnham was still sleeping.

Paget handed Kama a ten-dollar bill before he left.

"What time did the clock say when I came in?" he asked.

"Clockee strike halfee past eight," came the parrotlike reply.

Paget rode along Eighty-first Street in a taxicab. He gazed curiously from the window as he passed the brownstone house where Doctor Lukens had died. He noticed a policeman standing by the front steps.

A faint smile appeared upon Paget's lips.

Reaching in the watch pocket of his trousers, the clubman drew forth an object and held it in his half-closed hand. It was the scarab ring which Doctor Lukens had worn the night before the ring which had once belonged to Henry Marchand.

Still smiling, Paget replaced the ring in his pocket. Calmly and leisurely, he opened his cigarette case and removed a cigarette. He put it carefully in the long holder.

Rodney Paget was puffing slowly and contentedly when the cab stopped in front of the Merrimac Club.

CHAPTER IX. PAGET BECOMES ACTIVE

SEVERAL days had passed since the murder of Doctor George Lukens. The hue and cry of the tabloids had died away. The death of the physician had become one of those unsolved mysteries that are soon forgotten.

The pair of dice with their constant seven were not even mentioned in the newspapers. Cardona had pocketed the cubes and had shown them to Inspector Klein. They had seen a strange significance.

At intervals, New York had been victimized by startling crimes that had gone unsolved. There had been no direct proof that they had been the work of the same organization. The only clew had been the fact that the number seven had appeared, in each instance.

The bank safe had contained seven pennies. Seven buttons had been clipped from a murdered man's coat. A dying gangster had gasped the word "Seven" when the police had captured him during an attempted burglary.

There was little discussion of Lukens's death at the Merrimac Club, although the physician had been a member. The members kept to themselves as a rule. Once a man had become accustomed to the silence of the vast rooms, he moved about in his own particular fashion.

THE SILENT SEVEN

Rodney Paget had been a member for years. He liked the club because of its atmosphere of privacy. The only thing that made him uncomfortable was the occasional danger of being posted for back dues. That was an unpardonable crime, and Paget had barely escaped it at different times during his long period of membership.

In fact, the threat was hanging over him at the present time, and it worried him. For there were various reasons why Rodney Paget did not wish his name to become suddenly conspicuous.

Perhaps that was the reason why Paget did not realize a new habit that he had formed. It had become his procedure to enter the reading room immediately upon arriving at the club.

There were seldom many members present. Paget never gave a thought to them. Hence it became his daily procedure to go to the newspaper table and pick up the Morning Monitor one of the oldest, most conservative of New York journals.

In it he studied each advertisement in a slow, careful manner, paying particular attention to the column headed, "Situations Wanted Male." After that he folded the newspaper so that the front page appeared in view.

Each day when he performed this function, Paget left the table and leisurely inserted a cigarette in the long ivory holder.

On this particular day, it was late in the afternoon when Rodney Paget entered the Merrimac Club. He went directly to the reading room. His face bore an anxious expression, which was odd, for Paget's demeanor was usually a pronounced calm.

The lateness of his arrival meant that he had been on an all-night party, for Paget always began his day by appearing at the Merrimac Club.

Paget, although careless in his hours, was not excessive in his indulgences. It was actual anxiety, not weariness, that controlled him this afternoon.

As he was turning the pages of the Morning Monitor, Paget started suddenly. A man was standing beside him. Paget recognized Walter Steuben, another club member. He laid the newspaper on the table and nodded.

"Rodney," said Steuben quietly, "I want to know about that five hundred dollars. It's been a month since you promised me –"

Paget gripped the man's arm.

"Listen, Walter," he replied, "it's coming shortly. Give me just another week –"

"I need it now."

"But I have to pay my dues," pleaded Paget, in a low tone. "I can't be posted, Walter. Give me just one week –"

Steuben nodded reluctantly and walked away as another man passed. Paget wondered if he had been overheard.

He did not recognize the passer-by, as the man's back was turned, but he watched the fellow until he had taken his place in a corner of the reading room, where he sat obscured behind an unfolded newspaper.

THE SILENT SEVEN

PAGET referred to the Morning Monitor. He reached the desired page, and an exclamation nearly came to his lips. He placed his finger upon a paragraph and read the words eagerly.

Suddenly he felt a chilling sensation. Steuben's interruption came back to him, and Paget became suddenly suspicious. Without raising his head, he turned his eyes to the right.

The man in the corner was still behind his newspaper, but Paget had a strange, unaccountable intuition that sharp eyes were watching him. He suddenly gained the impression that there were holes in that unfolded newspaper many small, unnoticeable holes through which he was being observed.

Then, for the first time, he realized that he had made a regular practice of searching through the Morning Monitor each day when he arrived at the Merrimac Club. This action had been the only regular procedure in his otherwise unregulated life.

A deluge of thoughts gripped Paget's mind. He controlled himself, carefully folded the paper, and sauntered across the reading room. There he sat in a chair and stared straight ahead; but his eyes could barely see the man with the newspaper.

Half an hour went by. Neither Paget nor the other man made a motion. Finally the strain told on Paget. He arose and walked by the man.

He made no effort to repress his smile. The man was asleep!

Paget strolled from the reading room. He sauntered from the club and stood outside in the gathering dusk. Here, again, he felt the sensation of some one watching him.

He wondered if the man had really been asleep. He controlled the desire to return and see.

Instead, Paget called a cab. He rode to his apartment uptown. Arriving there, he made a careful search of every room.

Satisfied that he was alone, Paget entered a small closetlike alcove that led off from the bedroom. There was a window in the alcove – a high window with a small rolled-up blind. Paget drew down the shade.

A large sheet of paper fluttered to the floor.

Paget had performed this action in the semidarkness of the alcove. He went into the windowless hall and turned on the light. He scanned the sheet of paper, reading it as though to refresh his memory.

Satisfied, he replaced the paper against the shade; he let the shade fly up and the document was again concealed. A clicking sound informed him that the roller had locked automatically.

Paget laughed softly. All anxiety had left his face. He now seemed full of enthusiasm. With an effort he restrained himself and resumed his accustomed languor.

He had forgotten the man at the Merrimac Club in his elation.

BUT at that very moment, the man at the Merrimac Club was becoming suddenly active. The reading room was deserted, for most of the men in the club had gone to dinner. The man arose from his chair and revealed the features which Paget had vainly sought to observe.

THE SILENT SEVEN

The man's face was a strange one smooth, expressionless, and masklike. It was the face of the stranger who had visited Doctor Lukens, the night before his death.

The calm-faced man went to the newspaper table. He turned the pages of the Morning Monitor. He stopped at the section of classified ads. His eyes gleamed as they found a paragraph under the heading "Situations Wanted Male."

The paragraph read:

Executive. Man of 23 years experience will accept responsible position. Minimum \$9750 a year. Will deal with corporations only. BX-86.

The man laughed as he read the terms of the advertisement. His laugh was hollow scarcely more than a whisper yet it had a weird sound in that silent room.

The stranger folded the newspaper and walked into the lobby. He entered a telephone booth and called a number.

"Metrolite Hotel?" he asked. His voice was quiet. "Room 874."

The man spoke again a few moments later.

"Mister Vincent?" he asked. "Sorry I can not go with you to-night. I am detained at home. I have to stay there once in a while. You understand, of course."

The emphasized words phrased the sentence: "Go at once."

Twelve minutes later, Harry Vincent, agent of The Shadow, alighted from a taxicab across the street from Rodney Paget's apartment house. He strolled toward the side of the building and looked upward toward the lighted windows.

He made a careful calculation. He discovered one particular window – the living-room window of Paget's apartment. The window was lighted.

Harry returned to a vantage point, from which he could watch the door of the apartment house. He waited patiently for nearly ten minutes. A man came slowly along the street and stopped a few feet away.

"Harry," said a low voice.

"Hello, Clyde," replied Vincent, in the same low tone. "I think you're in time. I know what he looks like. When he comes out, I'll tag him. You follow me. Be ready to take up the trail if I think he suspects me."

"Right."

A man appeared beyond the revolving door of the apartment house. He emerged to the street and looked slowly in both directions.

It was Rodney Paget. The man was swinging a light cane and smoking his inevitable cigarette. He sauntered along the street aimlessly. Harry followed.

PAGET apparently was in no hurry. He walked several blocks; then turned toward Broadway. He stopped

THE SILENT SEVEN

once or twice in front of different restaurants, and Harry loitered well behind.

At last one eating house caught Paget's fancy. He entered and went to a table at the end of the room. Harry lingered outside until Burke arrived.

"We can go in without being noticed," whispered Harry. "Paget is not facing the door. We can take a table near the front."

The two men entered the small restaurant and ordered dinner. Facing each other by the front window, they could both observe Paget's back while the clubman was dining. Paget appeared to be in no hurry with his meal.

"P-s-st," signaled Harry.

Clyde looked to the left without moving his head. He noted that Paget was rising from the table at the end of the room.

The man had turned slightly so that his profile was visible. He drew a watch from his pocket and noted the time. Then he surveyed the restaurant in a curious way. Neither Harry nor Clyde made a suspicious movement.

Paget paid the waiter and looked about him. Then he strolled to the back of the room.

"He's telephoning," whispered Clyde. "There's a booth in the corner. I can just see the edge of it."

Harry nodded.

Minutes dragged by. Harry became uneasy. He glanced toward the back of the room. Then he leaned across the table.

"That's a long phone call," he whispered. "I'm going back there to look up a number."

He arose and went to the back of the restaurant. Clyde saw him as he stepped beyond the booth. Then Harry's face turned suddenly toward the table, where Clyde Burke was sitting and the newspaperman observed a look of profound amazement on his friend's features. He arose in response to a signal from Harry.

"Look!" exclaimed Harry, when Clyde reached him. Vincent was pointing to the telephone booth.

Clyde Burke was too astonished to reply. They were in the extreme corner of the restaurant, in an obscure spot flanked by plain, painted walls. Before them, its entrance toward the back of the restaurant, was the telephone booth. It was absolutely empty.

Rodney Paget had disappeared!

CHAPTER X. THE SILENT SEVEN

A MAN appeared in the lobby of an old apartment house just off Broadway. The place was deserted. It was antiquated in appearance, and showed signs of having once known better days.

The man opened the solid door of the automatic elevator. He entered, closed the door behind him, and pressed the button marked with the figure four. The elevator, its mechanism groaning, moved slowly upward.

THE SILENT SEVEN

The man placed his forefinger upon the red button marked "Stop." He watched the door of the elevator and noted the number designating the third floor.

The instant the bottom of the elevator reached the top of the door that led to the third floor, the man pressed the stop button. The elevator came to a halt between the third and fourth floors.

The passenger turned to the back of the elevator. It consisted of two metal panels with a vertical division between them. The man placed his hand upon the division and pushed it upward several inches. Pressing his hand against the panel on the right, he moved it to the left.

An opening appeared in the back of the elevator. Beyond it was a narrow doorway cut through the brick masonry of the elevator shaft.

The man stepped through the opening. He closed the panel of the elevator behind him. Something clicked; the mechanism of the elevator began to grind as the car descended.

The lobby downstairs remained deserted for a few minutes. Then a side door opened, and Rodney Paget emerged. He stepped out of the old storeroom through which he had come.

He looked cautiously about the lobby. The street door was solid, and no one could be seen from outside. Paget glanced at his watch. It registered five minutes past eight.

The clubman moved across the lobby in a stealthy manner. He hastily opened the elevator door and slipped through. He breathed a sigh of relief as he pressed the button by the figure four.

Like the man who had gone before him, Paget kept his finger upon the red stop button. He was tense, waiting for the proper instant. He had the air of one who has embarked upon a dangerous adventure.

When the elevator had cleared the third floor, Paget pressed the stop button. He turned and his hands trembled slightly as he found the movable panel and opened it. The darkness of the passage through the wall momentarily discouraged him. He hesitated on the brink; then, with a sudden effort, he stepped through the opening.

He closed the panel behind him and released a catch which he discovered by feeling in the darkness. He stood in a listening attitude while the car descended to the first floor.

PAGET walked straight ahead, through impenetrable darkness. His hands were outstretched before him. At last they encountered a smooth wall.

Feeling to the right, Paget sensed a turn in the passage, but he did not follow it; Instead, he moved his hands to the corner of the wall. There his fingers discovered a tiny crevice! In it was a small, almost unnoticeable projection.

He pressed the projection, and the smooth wall slid back. It revealed a room lighted by a dim red light. When Paget entered, the wall closed behind him.

The room was small and barren. In one corner lay a dark mass of cloth. Paget stopped and lifted a dark-blue robe, topped by a cowl. He donned the garment and stepped to the wall opposite the spot where he had entered.

He tapped the wall seven times. A momentary silence; then seven answering taps were heard. Paget tapped

THE SILENT SEVEN

five times. A portion of the wall slid open.

Paget entered a larger room where four hooded men were standing. One of them approached him. The room was filled with a dim, weird light.

"Seven," came a whispered voice. The word was uttered by the hooded figure that stood before Paget.

"Silence," whispered Paget, in reply.

"One," came the next challenge.

"Five," was Paget's response.

"Our name."

"The Silent Seven."

"Our sign."

Paget raised his hands to the front of his robe. The fingers of his right hand were spread; two fingers of his left hand were extended.

The gesture signified the number seven. It satisfied the challenger.

"Our amulet," came the next request. Paget held out his left hand, palm down. There, on his third finger, rested the scarab ring which had once been worn by Doctor George Lukens.

The hooded challenger leaned forward to inspect it. He showed his approval by stepping backward.

Paget, without noticeable hesitation, took his place near the wall beside the three hooded men who stood there.

An ominous silence hung over that group of strangely clad men. The suspense chilled Rodney Paget. They were waiting, and no motion was made by any one. At length, seven light taps were heard.

The hooded chief stepped forward and tapped the sliding door seven times. Six knocks came in reply. The wall moved to the side and another hooded man entered. He answered the challenges that had been given to Rodney Paget.

The only difference was in the reply given to the word "One." Paget had responded "Five." The newcomer answered "Six."

There was a prolonged wait after the sixth man had been accepted by the challenger. Then came another tapping. The new entrant replied "Seven" to the word "One." He was accepted.

The challenger walked backward to the far side of the room and raised both hands. Paget followed the example of the others as they sat on stools near the walls of the room.

"WE are the Silent Seven," said the central figure, in a low-pitched voice. Every word was audible; some peculiar acoustic condition of the room gave the tone an awe-inspiring sound.

THE SILENT SEVEN

"The Silent Seven," repeated the others, in a whisper.

"We command the Faithful Fifty," came the voice.

"The Faithful Fifty," was the whispering echo.

"Our identities are unknown," declared the speaker. "Each of us was appointed by the founder of our order he who first was Number One.

"Should new members be needed, I shall appoint them. Their names will be known to me alone. That is my oath."

"You have declared the oath of Number One," was the response.

"Be wary with the Faithful Fifty," came the speaker's voice. "Reveal yourselves only in extreme necessity. Otherwise, deal with them through the countersign."

"Through the countersign."

"Or through the cipher."

"Through the cipher."

"Or through me, your leader."

"Through our leader."

There was a short silence. The speaker then made an announcement.

"To-night," he said, "we have assembled at the request of Number Five. We shall hear him break the silence."

Rodney Paget arose unsteadily. He moved to the end of the room opposite the chief and made the sign of the seven with his hands. The leader made the same sign in return.

"Brothers of the Seven," said Paget, in a low voice, "I have brought you a plan."

He was surprised at the sound of his own tones. His words did not seem natural. It was impossible to recognize a familiar voice in this strange room.

Paget gained reassurance. He had feared these men until now, but he was rapidly becoming confident.

"My plan," he continued, "will bring us millions. In order to accomplish it, I must have full services of the Faithful Fifty. I have used some of them before now" he was glib as he spoke this falsehood – "but I need the services of those most suited to my present needs. I wish to obtain them through Number One."

"Does your plan require crime?"

The interrupting voice was that of Number One.

"Yes."

THE SILENT SEVEN

"Of what nature?"

"Abduction."

"Is that all?"

"There may be complications," ventured Paget uneasily.

"There are no complications to the Silent Seven," declared the leader. "To us, all crimes are one and all are justifiable. Each crime must serve a purpose that is useful to us.

"We demand power and wealth. Society is our prey. We stop at nothing. We ask only that the gain be worth our attention."

"My plan fills that requirement."

"What do the Seven say?" asked the leader.

"Let Number Five reveal his plan to Number One," came a voice. A chorus responded, "Aye."

THE leader approached and produced a board which bore a sheet of paper. He placed a pencil in Paget's hand. There, in that weird room, amidst those hooded figures, the man who had declared himself as Number Five began to write.

At times his hand hesitated. The presence of the leader urged him on. He completed his work.

The leader moved back, carrying the board with him. He was deliberate as he read the words which Paget had inscribed.

He perused the message a second time, as though committing it to memory. Then he pulled the paper from the board.

Paget's heart sank as the leader tore the paper into halves and quarters; then he felt a thrill of elation when the leader spoke.

"The plan is good," declared Number One. "What do the Seven order?"

"Let Number One decide," came a reply.

"Aye," affirmed the whispered chorus.

"We shall accept it," said the leader. "Has Number Five any further request?"

"I shall need money," said Paget boldly.

"How much?"

"Ten thousand dollars."

"It is granted," was the leader's prompt reply. He beckoned to Paget. When the latter approached, the leader wrote a few cryptic words on a card and showed it to him.

THE SILENT SEVEN

Paget nodded his hooded head. The leader destroyed the card, and Paget retired.

"Shall the silence become unbroken?" questioned the leader. There was no reply.

The leader turned and uncovered a niche in the wall. Standing there, was a candelabrum with seven lighted candles. The leader spoke.

"The Seven," he said.

"Silence," replied the others.

The leader extinguished one of the candles.

"Number Seven," he said.

One of the hooded figures rose and turned his back to the leader. The wall slid back and Number Seven departed. The wall closed.

After a short wait, the leader put out another candle. This time he named Number Six, and a second man left. When the leader extinguished a third candle, and called for Number Five, Rodney Paget followed the actions of the others.

As soon as the wall had closed behind him, he removed his robe and went down the passage to the elevator. There he found a button in the wall. The car came up, and Paget entered it.

He lost no time in his departure. Three minutes after his dismissal, he was riding down Broadway in a cab.

PAGET attended the theater that night, but he began to show signs of poorly restrained impatience before the show was over. After the last act, Paget left the theater with unusual haste.

He turned his steps toward Sixth Avenue, and stopped at the corner of Forty-fourth Street. A few minutes later, a cab pulled up beside the curb.

"Taxi?" asked Paget, speaking from beside the car.

"Busy," replied the driver.

"Faithful," said Paget, in a low voice.

"The Fifty," replied the driver.

"Silence," said Paget.

"The Seven," came the response.

Paget placed his hands against his chest, one hand outspread, the other clenched to form a fist. The driver made the same sign.

It was the signal of recognition that identified the members of the Faithful Fifty, the men who served the Silent Seven. The driver opened the cab.

THE SILENT SEVEN

Paget instructed him to drive to the Merrimac Club. As the cab moved out between the pillars of the elevated, the driver's hand appeared through the partition that separated the back seat from the front. An envelope dropped to the floor.

Paget picked it up and put it in his pocket. He did not linger long at the Merrimac Club. He strolled about and smoked a cigarette. Then, leisurely as ever, he left the club, summoned a cab, and rode home.

But in the privacy of his own apartment, behind the drawn shades of the living room, Rodney Paget became suddenly eager.

He pulled the envelope from his pocket and tore off the end. His fingers trembled as he spread open the envelope and reached in to grasp the contents. A gasp of satisfaction followed.

Crinkling in his hands was a wad of crisp new, five-hundred-dollar bills.

Paget smiled as he counted them. Twenty in all. It was the ten thousand dollars he had requested from the Silent Seven!

Paget marveled at the power of the mighty organization. He realized that he had associated himself with masters of crime. With inexhaustible funds, with fifty determined workers at their call, the Silent Seven was an unknown band of terror.

CHAPTER XI. PAGET SEES A SHADOW

THERE was no appreciable change in Rodney Paget when he appeared at the Merrimac Club the day after the meeting of the Silent Seven. All traces of anxiety had left his features. His habitual composure was completely restored.

With Paget, languor was natural, not affected. The drooping fingers with their ivory cigarette holder hanging from them, indicated a man of some ability. For Paget was a deep schemer, whose greatest ability was his lack of unrestrained emotion.

He arrived at the club shortly after noon, and one of the first persons he encountered was Steuben. He drew his friend into a corner and pressed something into his hand. Steuben, upon looking at the article, was surprised to find a five-hundred-dollar bill.

As Paget turned away from Steuben, a solemn-faced man whom he did not recognize walked by. He wondered if this could be the individual who had been in the room the day before.

Paget strolled about the club for more than an hour. He appeared languorous and entirely disinterested in the surroundings. Actually, he was watching for some one; and he was sitting in the lobby when the expected individual arrived.

A short, dark-complexioned man came into the Merrimac Club. He walked with an air of importance, and he seemed to express self-satisfaction in every mannerism. He had a businesslike stride; he stared straight ahead.

His keen eyes, his thin, straight lips, and his carefully pointed moustache, added to his expression of superiority. He did not see Paget until the latter greeted him.

"Hello, Wilbur," drawled Paget, taking his cigarette holder from his lips. The newcomer stopped.

THE SILENT SEVEN

"Ah, Rodney," he said. He extended his hand and Paget rose to meet him.

"Lunch together?" questioned Paget.

The man glanced at his watch.

"All right, Rodney," he agreed. "I have an appointment at two. Just a bite, and then I'll hurry on."

THE man with whom Rodney Paget was lunching was Wilbur Blake, one of the wealthiest young men in New York. Blake was several years Paget's junior. He had inherited millions, and moved in the most exclusive circles, and frequently traveled from New York.

He lived at Newport in the summer, and visited Florida in the winter. This was one of the intervals during which he lived in his palatial Long Island home.

Paget had known Blake since boyhood, and he had often wished to capitalize upon his acquaintance with the multimillionaire, but he had considered it the part of wisdom to desist.

Blake had ended several friendships because people had tried to take advantage of his wealth. Hence Paget seemed to avoid Blake rather than to seek his company. This attitude had brought results.

Rodney Paget was the one member of the Merrimac Club whom Wilbur Blake would have been willing to accept as an intimate friend.

The waiter took the order. Blake twisted the ends of his moustache and stared across the room.

Paget opened a drawling conversation, which resulted in Blake inviting Paget out to his country house. Paget accepted.

While Blake ate hurriedly, Paget was leisurely. He watched his friend closely, as though interested in every action that Blake made.

The millionaire did not observe this. He was in a hurry to complete his meal. He finished long before Paget was through, and left the table with a brusque reminder that to-morrow noon his chauffeur would call for Paget.

Paget watched Blake as he left the dining room. Then, as the waiter was bringing dessert, the clubman inserted a cigarette in the long holder and puffed thoughtfully.

A vague semblance of a smile appeared upon his lips.

Later in the afternoon, Paget returned to his apartment and packed two large suitcases. When he had completed the operation, he entered the alcove and looked at the window shade. There he stood in prolonged indecision.

Finally he shrugged his shoulders and left the apartment. He went to the club and dined alone.

At eight o'clock, he strolled to the street and summoned a taxicab.

With all his languorous manner, Paget was secretly observant as the cab left the front of the club. He saw another cab move after him. He rubbed his chin and nodded to himself.

THE SILENT SEVEN

His cab reached the Pennsylvania Station. There, Paget threaded his way through the busy throng, and suddenly emerged at another entrance, where he hurried away in another cab.

This time, when he looked behind him, a smile of satisfaction appeared upon his face. He was confident that no taxi was on his trail.

Paget's destination was a street in the Nineties, east of Lexington Avenue. There, he left the cab and walked several blocks, turning two or three corners.

He arrived at an old house that had been converted into an apartment. He slipped into the dingy vestibule and rang a bell. A whistle came from the speaking tube on the wall.

"Okay," replied Paget.

The door clicked and the clubman entered. He went up two flights of stairs and tapped at a door in the corner. The door opened, and Paget entered. He was in a poorly furnished room. A single light gleamed from a table in the corner.

The only occupant was the man who had admitted Paget. This individual was obscured in the semidarkness. The occupant closed the door. Paget took a chair beside the table.

"Well?" questioned his host.

"It's set," replied Paget.

An exclamation of satisfaction came in reply.

"When?" asked the man.

"I don't know," answered Paget. "Soon, though."

"It had better be soon!" retorted the man sullenly. "I've waited a long time. I'm broke. Owe them fifty dollars rent, among other things."

"I'll fix that," said Paget easily.

"You've said that before. I've waited long enough."

"You have to wait." Paget spoke sharply now.

"I know that. You've got me where you want me. I can't squawk. I've played the waiting game fair enough. But it gets tiresome. I want action."

"How's this?"

PAGET'S hand appeared in the light holding a roll of bills. The other man responded with a gasp of eagerness. He came forward and reached for the money. Paget let him take it.

The man dropped into a chair beside the table and counted off twenty-five ten-dollar bills. His hands moved excitedly.

THE SILENT SEVEN

When he had completed his counting of the currency, he raised his head, and for the first time his features were completely visible in the table light.

A sallow face, with quick, active eyes; thin lips beneath a moustache with pointed waxed ends. The features bore an almost identical resemblance to those of Wilbur Blake.

"A little less eagerness," said Paget quietly. "It doesn't go with the part."

The man nodded. Then he gave a short laugh.

"The laugh can be improved," added Paget. "Don't use it often. Now try this. I'm making a hint that makes you suspect I want a favor from you."

The man's eyebrows crept close together. His eyes became fixed and steady. The expression on his face betrayed suspicion.

"Good," said Paget. "Now try this one. I've fooled you, laying you open to an idea without you knowing it. For instance, I want to visit you. I've just told you that I'm not doing anything right now, and you're thinking about inviting me out to see you."

The man's eyelids raised.

"That's it," declared Paget. "You've got it perfectly. I watched to-day, to make sure –"

The man smiled.

"Be on hand here, in the evenings," Paget said.

"Right."

"Above all –" The words suddenly froze on Paget's lips. He was staring beyond his companion, gazing intently at the window. The man noticed his eyes and began to turn. Paget gripped his wrist and muttered without moving his lips.

"Look this way," were Paget's words. "Don't turn."

Paget's lackadaisical manner returned instantly. His eyes shifted toward the floor, but they were still in the direction of the window. Paget inserted a cigarette in his ivory holder.

His companion thought he was no longer intent. Yet Paget had lost none of his alertness. He was watching something on his dim floor a huge shadow that lay motionless, projecting inward from the window.

Paget's eyes never left the floor. His companion wondered, but made no comment. Two minutes went by. The only action in the room was that of Paget's hand as it lifted the cigarette holder to and from his lips.

The black splotch that lay on the floor was motionless.

Paget arose. He walked toward the door. He turned and his eyes sought the floor. Still they saw no motion in that shadowy blot, yet Paget was sure that its position had changed.

The shadow had receded. The clubman gave no sign of his discovery. He walked to the door and placed his

THE SILENT SEVEN

hand upon the knob. Then he swung about.

The black blot was moving now, drawing toward the window, shrinking into nothingness. Paget watched it, expecting it to stop. Instead, it disappeared with amazing suddenness.

With quick strides, Paget pounced across the room and reached the open window. His companion joined him. The man started to speak, wondering if Paget had gone suddenly insane. The clubman brushed him back.

"Keep away!" exclaimed Paget, as he leaned from the window.

BELOW him was a courtyard at the side of the building. A light from the street showed nothing but the rough brick wall of the old house. To the left was a corner, barely six feet away. There was no window directly below; the nearest was twenty feet to the right.

"The back of the house!" exclaimed Paget. "Do you have a window there?"

His companion shook his head.

"What's up?" he asked.

"I thought I saw some one at the window," said Paget.

The man laughed.

"It would take a human fly to come up that wall," he said. "You're seeing things."

"I saw a shadow on the floor," returned Paget. "It moved away. It looked like the shadow of a man a large shadow that shriveled."

"Did you see any one outside?"

"No. He might have gone around the corner of the house."

"Hanging on those bricks?"

Paget shrugged his shoulders. The man's incredulity was logical. Still, Paget was sorry that there was no back window through which he might have made a quick inspection.

He decided to forget the matter, after adding one word of caution.

"Be careful, Dodge," he said. "I didn't want you to look toward the window. The less you are seen, the better."

The man nodded. He replied in like manner.

"Watch the Dodge stuff," he warned. "It's a bad name to call me –"

"All right for the present," said Paget. "I don't use it much. It's the first time I've said the name to–night. As soon as you get placed, I'll forget the name Dodge, unless –"

"Unless?"

THE SILENT SEVEN

"Unless you try a double-cross!"

The man nodded.

Rodney Paget took one more glance from the window. Half satisfied, he waved good night to his companion and left the room without another word.

Outside the building, he looked cautiously up and down the street. Seeing no one, he walked away.

The shadows on the street seemed real to Rodney Paget as he threaded his way to Lexington Avenue. He stopped a cab and rode to his apartment. At the door of the building, he looked across the street, staring suspiciously at the blackness of the opposite sidewalk.

Finally, convinced that his imagination was at work, Paget entered the apartment house. Lights appeared in his windows. Fifteen minutes later, they went out.

Rodney Paget had retired.

It was then that the shadowy mass across the street began to move. Something like a solid form emerged and flitted ghoulishly away.

As it neared the avenue at the end of the street, the moving shape again merged with the black fronts of the building. From that moment, the keenest eye could not have detected its presence.

A taxicab stopped in answer to a whistle. The driver could see no prospective passenger. Then he heard the door of the cab open.

The fare had stepped up without the taximan seeing him. A head appeared at the partition and a low voice gave the cab driver a destination.

As the cab rolled along the street in front of the apartment house where Rodney Paget lived, a low, mocking laugh came from the interior of the cab. It did not seem to be the laugh of a human being. It was a laugh that seemed to be the shadow of a laugh.

CHAPTER XII. BLAKE TAKES A RIDE

WILBUR BLAKE was seated in the spacious library of his Long Island home. An empty glass was beside him on the table. He pressed a button on the wall. A butler appeared.

"Herbert," said Blake, "tell Otto to come in here before he leaves."

A moment later a uniformed chauffeur entered the room.

"Everything all right, Otto?" asked Blake.

"Yes, sir."

"You're to pick up Mister Paget at the Merrimac Club at ten o'clock and be back before eleven."

"Yes, sir."

THE SILENT SEVEN

"Pick up the night watchman at his house. You can bring him in the rumble seat."

"Yes, sir."

The chauffeur left. Blake went to a table in the corner and started to write.

Paget had been staying with Blake now for about a week, and he enjoyed Paget's company in the huge Long Island house. Blake's vast wealth made friendships of an intimate nature rare. He was rather a lonely young man.

BLAKE had been occupied less than ten minutes before some one entered the room. He turned to see Rodney Paget.

"How did you come in?" questioned Blake, in surprise. "Otto just left to pick you up at the Merrimac Club."

"He did?" exclaimed Paget. "I told them to call up from there. A friend of mine was coming out in this direction, so I came out with him. I didn't have time to phone, myself."

Blake summoned the butler.

"Did they call from the Merrimac Club?" he asked.

"No, sir," replied Herbert.

"I know what they did," said Paget disgustedly. "I told them your chauffeur was coming at ten. They probably thought I wanted them to inform him that I had gone. A fine pickle, isn't it?"

"It makes no difference," replied Blake. "I won't need Otto anyway. I'm glad you arrived early. Bring us drinks, Herbert. Then we'll try a game of billiards."

While the two men sipped their glasses, Wilbur Blake became both loquacious and complimentary.

"You know, Rodney," he said, "you're the best company I've had around this house. Five days, you've been here –"

"Six," corrected Paget.

"Six," confirmed Blake. "That's right."

"And six days is a long stay," said Paget.

"I want you to stay a month, if you can spare the time," said Blake.

Paget handed his glass to the butler.

"I'll consider it," he said. "But you're busy at times, Wilbur. I don't want to annoy you."

"Don't worry about that," laughed Blake. "If you can stand it, I can. You're the one that's put out when I have to discuss business. To-night was the first evening you haven't been here."

Paget nodded.

THE SILENT SEVEN

"Besides," said Blake, "I like to talk some of my affairs over with you. You'd make a good business man, Rodney, if you spared the time."

"Big business interests me," said Paget languidly. "I become bored with trifles and that's why I don't work any more than is necessary."

The butler entered.

"Telephone, sir," he said to Wilbur Blake.

Blake's face was puzzled as he arose.

"Come along, Rodney," he said. "I'll answer the phone on the way to the billiard room."

They entered the large living room, and Blake went to the phone. He held a short conversation; then hung up the receiver and turned to Paget.

"I'll have to run over to see Barton," he explained. "He's all worried about that trust-company proposition. Expects a couple of men in to-night and wants me there."

"Can't you wait for Otto to come back?"

"No. But it won't matter. Otto always drives me, wherever I go, but I can make this short run myself. I'll have to take the sedan, though. Otto has the speedster."

"Want me to come with you?"

"No. I'll go alone. There would be nothing for you to do there. I'll be back inside an hour."

BLAKE went out by the side door, after turning on the outside light. Paget and the butler, standing in the doorway, watched him.

Blake disappeared into the darkness of the garage. Paget closed the door and turned to the butler.

"Another drink, Herbert," he said. "Wait. I'll come along with you."

He went into the dining room and talked to the butler while the man prepared the drink. They heard the sound of the sedan as it rolled along the driveway.

Paget continued to talk to Herbert. Several minutes went by. Then Paget entered the library and began to read a book.

There was a certain calm assurance in Paget's manner as he sat there. Herbert, entering occasionally, saw nothing unusual. Yet Paget was inwardly anxious, waiting expectantly as the minutes ticked by. His only betrayal was in his casual questioning of Herbert.

"Where is the valet?" asked Paget.

"Upstairs, sir," said the butler.

"The other servants?"

THE SILENT SEVEN

"They go out in the evening, sir. But Jarvis and I are always here. So is Otto, except to-night, sir. Then the watchman comes on duty, later."

"At eleven?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good idea," said Paget approvingly. "It keeps the place well protected."

"Yes, sir. Mister Blake is very insistent upon it."

The butler left. Paget continued waiting. He noted Blake's writing at the table, and studied the notations with interest.

Rodney Paget had learned a great deal concerning Wilbur Blake's affairs during the past six days a great deal more than Blake supposed.

A car came up the driveway. Paget left the library and went into the living room, where he found Herbert. The automobile stopped at the side door. Wilbur Blake entered.

Paget stared steadily at the man and noted a slight motion of Blake's right hand. In return, Paget gave a signal with his fingers. Blake turned to the butler.

"I'll leave the car in the driveway, Herbert," he said. "Tell Otto to put it away when he comes in. Tell him I want to see him."

The butler did not reply. He looked at his master, puzzled. Blake stared back; his eyebrows crept together in the characteristic manner when he was annoyed.

Herbert recognized the action and was quick with his response.

"Yes, sir," he said.

Paget turned to Blake. "How about the game of billiards?"

"Good," returned Blake.

Paget turned toward the billiard room, and Blake followed. Paget said something in a low tone, without moving his lips. Blake turned and looked back at Herbert.

"Drinks," he ordered.

"Yes, sir." There was no further hesitation in the butler's manner as he went toward the dining room.

THE two men were playing billiards when Herbert arrived with the glasses. When the butler left the room, Blake whispered to Paget:

"That bird was pretty near wise."

"Only for a minute," replied Paget.

THE SILENT SEVEN

"Otto will be next," commented Blake. "I'll be ready for him. Say, the job was certainly pulled slick. How did you do it?"

"Never mind."

"Oh, all right. I just liked the job, that was all. The sedan came along and stopped in front of the old house where you told me to wait. A fellow got out and walked away, up the road. When I saw the coast was clear, I hopped in and came back here."

The door opened, and Herbert returned for the empty glasses.

"Nice shot, Wilbur," commented Paget, in his usual drawling tone.

"Thanks, Rodney," returned Blake, chalking his cue. "Now watch this one."

The men resumed their buzzing conversation after the butler had gone. At last there was a knock at the door. Otto entered in response to Blake's order.

"Sorry, sir," said Otto. "I didn't know that Mister Paget had gone until I reached the club."

"All right, Otto," said Blake briskly. "Did you bring the watchman?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you put the sedan away?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good night."

At midnight, the men concluded their game of billiards. As they went upstairs together, Blake passed the butler with confidence and assurance. Paget accompanied Blake to his room.

"Remember," said Paget, "you are Wilbur Blake. I've told you much tonight. I have more pointers that you will learn to morrow.

"I'm here for a month and the game is in our hands."

The other man nodded.

"Good night, Rodney," he said.

In his own room, Paget turned out the light before retiring, and stared through the open window. He saw the watchman pass in his patrol of the grounds. Then his eyes were disturbed by the sight of a long shadow that lay across the lawn.

It reminded him of the shadow that he had seen in that squalid room in the house near Lexington Avenue.

Paget watched the shadow intently for several minutes. He shrugged his shoulders and was about to leave the window, when he fancied he saw the shadow move. He continued watching, but detected no further motion.

"A shadow," murmured Paget, as he left the window. "Only a shadow but a shadow may mean some one. Well, there's a cure for everything – including shadows."

He was thinking of the Silent Seven. As yet, he had tested only a portion of their power. Should this strange shadow prove the presence of an enemy, an appeal to Number One would defeat the foe.

What was the power of a shadow compared with that of the Silent Seven!

CHAPTER XIII. VISITOR AT NIGHT

IT was one o'clock in the morning. Two men were sitting in the library of Wilbur Blake's home. One was Rodney Paget; the other was the man who looked like Wilbur Blake.

Paget was deep in thought. He lacked his customary indifference. Blake's double was eyeing him curiously. At length he spoke to Paget.

"About time we called it a night, eh, Rodney?" he asked.

Paget looked up suddenly.

"Not yet, Wilbur," he said, speaking as though to Blake himself. "I want to think a while."

The other man rose and leaned close to Paget.

"Listen," came his voice. "If you're worrying about this business, you're wasting your time. Look at me. Who am I?"

"You look like Wilbur Blake," replied Paget in a low voice.

"You're right," was the answer. "I am Wilbur Blake so far as the world is concerned. We've been playing the game a week, now, and there hasn't been a slip. It's getting better every day.

"Look at me. I'm confident. A few days more, and we're going to swing a sale that will bring in three million. You're fixing the percentage to suit yourself. So why worry?"

Paget shook his head dubiously.

"Look at this." Blake picked up a pen and scrawled a name across a sheet of paper. "Whose signature is that?"

Paget looked at the writing. A trace of admiration appeared on his face.

"It's the duplicate of Blake's," he said.

"You're right," answered the other man. "Practice makes perfect. Remember that phony signature I had the first time you met me? Good enough to fool the average man; but this one will fool the best."

Paget nodded.

"I've played square with you," said the false Blake, in a low tone. "You hold all the trump cards. You've got Blake tucked away somewhere so you can bring him back if you want. I can't make a move without your say—so.

THE SILENT SEVEN

"But I don't object. I'm sitting pretty and I expect to get a decent cut, with all these millions to play with. You're not worried about me, are you?"

"No."

"Then give me the low-down. Something's the matter. Tell me part of it, if you don't want to spill it all. Maybe I can help you out."

PAGET deliberated. Blake took a chair opposite and watched as the clubman gradually regained his composure. When he saw Paget produce a cigarette and the ivory holder, Blake smiled.

"I'm going to let you in on something," said Paget quietly. "It goes back to that night the last night before we pulled the job.

"You remember that I thought some one was looking in the window?"

Blake nodded.

"All I saw," continued Paget, "was a shadow on the floor. It moved away when I approached. Then it disappeared. I forgot about it until a few nights ago; then I saw it again."

"Where?"

"On the lawn outside this house."

"Maybe you were mistaken."

"I thought so myself," admitted Paget. "But I saw it afterward two nights later.

"I had a dream that same night a dream that something was threatening me. I woke up and thought some one was in the room. But I could find no one there.

"The next night I dreamed again. When I awoke and looked toward the window I could see nothing. It seemed as though some great, black shape was looming in front of me. Then it disappeared and was gone.

"Since then every shadow has worried me –"

Paget's voice stopped. He stared at the window of the room as though expecting to see some monstrous shape sweep aside the shade.

"If my enemy is real," said Paget in a tense, hoarse whisper, "I can meet him. But when I have never even seen him –"

"Listen, Rodney," interrupted Blake. "You didn't swing this job alone. I'm Wilbur Blake right now but a week ago I was somebody else. You're working with others. Perhaps they're double-crossing you –"

Paget's lips twitched. His companion had voiced one of his own apprehensions. Rodney Paget had falsely invaded the circle of the Silent Seven. Yet so far they had cooperated with his plans. He had done nothing that would warrant suspicion.

"Suppose that's it," Paget said speculatively. He was wary of the other man's suggestion. "What would you

do?"

"Have a show-down," replied Blake promptly.

"How?"

"Put it up to your pals, whoever they are."

"But suppose some one else is in the game trying to break things up for us –"

Blake laughed.

"Then put your pals on his trail!"

Paget arose and began slowly to pace the floor.

"That's more like it, Wilbur," he said. "But there's nothing real about this menace. Shadows and dreams; then more shadows!" He pronounced the last word in a hollow whisper.

Blake stared hard at the wall and began to twist the point of his moustache. It was a habit he had acquired from practicing the part of the man whose place he had taken.

"Forget it for to-night," said Blake suddenly. "Go get some sleep and don't worry. I'll think this over. Maybe I can help you."

UPSTAIRS in his room, Rodney Paget stared from the window, watching the long, swaying shadows of the trees. He began to feel the calmness of the moonlight. He went to bed and drowsed away.

Half-awakening, he fancied that he heard a noise. He overcame his alarm and became more restful. Then he awakened suddenly.

He felt a strange sensation of some one close by. It seemed as though a person had lifted the pillow upon which his head was resting.

Quickly Paget thrust his hand under the pillow. He gripped a small object. It was the scarab ring which he always kept with him. Then his fingers touched the handle of his automatic.

Holding the weapon, he sat bolt upright.

A soft tapping came from the door.

"Who's there?" exclaimed Paget in a hoarse whisper.

"Wilbur," came the reply.

"Come in," said Paget.

The form of Wilbur Blake appeared. The man closed the door behind him. In the light from the window his face bore a pallor that startled Paget.

"I've seen him," whispered Blake in a gasping voice.

THE SILENT SEVEN

"Who?" questioned Paget.

"The Shadow!"

"The Shadow?" Paget's words expressed bewilderment. Blake sat on the side of the bed.

"The Shadow," he said. "Rodney, we're up against something. You tipped me off to-night without knowing it. You remember how you talked of shadows?"

"Yes."

"Well, I've heard of a shadow The Shadow, they call him. He's a power in the underworld. No one knows who he is or what his game may be.

"Maybe he's a crook maybe he's a detective or perhaps a government man. But he's put a crimp in more than one big shot, I'll tell you that!"

The speaker paused and looked cautiously about him.

"I never knew why they called him The Shadow," he continued. "I thought it was just a name. But you startled me to-night, the way you said that word 'shadow.'

"I've been waiting in the hall, by that little window that looks out on the yard. I saw some shadows moving in the moonlight; but I thought nothing of them. Then I turned and saw The Shadow!"

"Where?" demanded Paget.

"By the door of your room. There was a light burning at the end of the hall away from me. There he was a man in black, standing as still as a statue. He had a cloak around his shoulders, and a big hat hid his face.

"I had my gun in my pocket, with my hand on the butt. That didn't matter. When I saw him, I couldn't budge."

"Where did he go? What did he do?"

"He stood there. I just couldn't believe that he was real, or alive. Then suddenly he moved. He didn't seem to walk. He glided, moving along the wall of the hallway like a shadow.

"I clutched my gun; and he was gone. He must have turned the corner and slipped down the stairs."

"Why didn't you follow him?"

"I was worried about you. He came from here. Didn't you see any one in the room?"

Paget shook his head.

"Wilbur," he said, "maybe you're the one that's seeing things. I never heard of The Shadow before.

"I thought some one was here in the room; but I decided it was my imagination. If he came in, it must have been by the window –"

THE SILENT SEVEN

Paget broke off his sentence. He left the bed and looked from the window. His eye roved across the expanse of lawn toward a bed of large shrubs. Blake had come over beside him. Suddenly Paget seized the other man's arm.

"Look!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "Look! Over there!"

ON the other side of the lawn stood a motionless figure garbed in black. It fitted exactly with the description of the man whom Blake had seen in the hallway. Tall, slender and erect, the black-clad form seemed to be watching the house.

With a short oath, Blake drew his automatic. Before he could level his weapon, the figure turned suddenly and disappeared behind the shrubs. Paget gripped his companion's wrist.

"Don't fire!" he exclaimed. "You couldn't get him now. We'll have to wait."

Blake pocketed the automatic.

"He's after you, that's certain," Blake said. "I wouldn't have run into him if I hadn't been watching. It's The Shadow, right enough."

Paget did not reply.

"If he's on your trail, he means business," added Blake. "It's just as bad for me as it is for you because we're in the same game."

"Perhaps," replied Paget speculatively.

His mind was reverting to certain incidents that had occurred before his meeting with the Silent Seven. He was thinking of the newspaper reports that had followed the death of Doctor George Lukens – how they had mentioned the presence of a suspected murderer who had eluded the police.

Ideas were forming in his mind, and he voiced them in part.

"Now that I have seen The Shadow," Paget said, "I can deal with him. Whatever his power may be, I can command forces that are more powerful.

"You are safe here, now. If I go away, he will follow me. That will protect you and our plan. I shall leave in the morning back to New York. The Shadow will find a trap awaiting him."

Paget lowered the window. He pulled down the shade and turned on the light. He found his cigarette holder and a package of cigarettes. He sat in a chair and began to smoke.

The other man regarded him with approval. It was the false Wilbur Blake who showed signs of nervousness now not Rodney Paget. For the man who had met the Silent Seven was scheming, and his plans were designed to doom The Shadow.

Neither Paget nor Blake went back to bed. They sat up until dawn, smoking and talking. When daylight came they aroused Herbert and ordered breakfast. An hour later Otto was summoned.

Rodney Paget shook hands with his friend Wilbur Blake on the side porch of the house.

"I won't see you again for some time, Wilbur," he said. "Send my luggage in later on. I'll be staying at the apartment."

He joined Otto in the speedster, and the swift car rolled down the drive.

CHAPTER XIV. THROUGH NUMBER ONE

WHEN Rodney Paget arrived in his apartment, he closed the door and looked carelessly about him. Even when alone, he carried the bored expression which had become second nature with him.

His eyes rested upon a picture that hung at a slight angle. He approached it. He raised the lower corner of the picture the fraction of an inch from the wall, and noted a tiny pencil mark.

He carefully let the picture go back into its first position. A slight smile flickered on his lips.

He had set the picture at that angle and had marked the wall to correspond. Had any one moved it without replacing it exactly, a clew would have remained.

Paget made a similar examination of a large cigarette box. He opened the box and carefully inspected its interior. Then his attention turned to a partly filled bookrack on the table. He produced a ruler and carefully measured the distance between the end book and the end of the rack.

Table drawers were next. Each one had some trivial feature for which Paget looked. Each drawer met with his satisfaction.

If any one had searched the premises during Paget's absence, it seemed almost a surety that some trace would have remained. Still, the clubman's inspection did not cease.

He placed his left hand above a doorway and ran his fingers along until he encountered the projecting corner of an envelope. He drew the envelope from the crack where it was inserted and examined it carefully. The envelope was sealed and bore no signs of having been opened. Paget replaced it with his right hand.

Now, as an afterthought, Paget's attention turned to the most obvious object in the room a pile of folded papers in the far corner of a table. He picked up each paper and opened it.

When he reached the fourth, a tense expression came to his face. The paper had opened easily. Paget looked closely near one corner. There he saw a minute mark so tiny that the keenest eye would not have noticed it without knowing the particular spot.

Paget's actions became more careful. He opened the next paper with studied precision. Upon it he discovered a similar mark.

PAGET became calmly deliberate. Some one had been in the apartment during his absence. A skilled, careful searcher had gone through all his papers.

That person had shown uncanny ability. He had successfully eluded every snare that had been placed in his path with the exception of the innocent folded papers. These had been prepared for the searcher's coming.

Paget had applied a tiny dab of glue near the corners of two papers before he had folded them. The searcher had unwittingly broken the slight adhesion.

THE SILENT SEVEN

Paget lost no time in his next inspection. His footsteps turned to the alcove. There he carefully examined the spring blind of the little window. He ran his left thumb along the rolled-up portion, and a slight smile of satisfaction was his response.

The window shade had not been touched so far as he could see. Nevertheless, he released the catch and lowered the shade. The concealed papers came into view. Paget held them there, and his practiced eye judged their exact position. It met with his approval. He raised the blind and locked it.

He was sure of two facts, now; first, that some one had entered his room; second, that that person had not examined the window shade. Paget peered through the little window. It opened on the blank interior wall of the building. No one could have seen it from the street.

Paget roamed the apartment for a few minutes, checking up to make sure that no one was concealed there. He left the place and walked to a drug store. After a cautious glance that satisfied him no one was near, he called a number which he had evidently committed to memory.

"Faithful," said Paget in response to the answer from the other end of the wire.

"Fifty," came the reply.

"Silence."

"The Seven."

"Five," said Paget, softly but emphatically.

"Request," came the answering word.

"Through Number One." Paget's words were scarcely more than a whisper. The receiver clicked at the other end of the line.

Paget left the drug store and took a cab to the Merrimac Club. Despite his apparent calm, he was inwardly excited.

He had made the first step in a new adventure. He was testing the most subtle secret of the Silent Seven.

IT was not until two o'clock in the afternoon that Paget learned what his next step was to be. The latest edition of the Morning Monitor was placed upon the table in the reading room of the Merrimac Club. With no expression of great interest, Paget picked up the tabloid and began to glance through its lurid pages with a disdainful air.

He dropped the paper once and started to walk away from the table. This gave him an opportunity to observe that no one was in the room. As though inspired by an afterthought, Paget went back to the newspaper and turned to the meager want-ad column. He quickly discovered the item which he sought. It was at the top of the column.

Advertising agency requires man of long experience. Only those with actual qualifications should reply. Report for interview in office to-morrow morning. Applicants not considered by letter or telephone. Acme Advertising Agency, Site 590, Tacoma Building.

The advertisement was an answer to Paget's request. Its identifying clues were that each sentence contained

THE SILENT SEVEN

exactly seven words; and that there were five sentences.

Paget observed these facts; he also noted the address given in the advertisement. But he chose to ignore the stipulation that applicants should appear the next day. He left the club immediately, and in a short while arrived at the Tacoma Building.

He was the only person who left the elevator at the fifth floor. He found suite 590, and after a leisurely glance down the hallway, he entered the reception room. A stenographer was seated there. The girl looked inquiringly at the visitor.

"I came in answer to your advertisement," said Paget.

"To-morrow," replied the girl, turning back to her typewriter.

"I would like to have an interview this afternoon," insisted Paget.

The girl stopped her work and pointed to a door at the right.

"Go in the waiting room, then," she said. "I won't take your name until I have notified Mister Bishop that an applicant is here. He's busy now. You'll have to wait a while."

Paget entered the room. The door closed automatically behind him. He heard a click as though a latch had locked.

The room was small. It had no windows. There was simply a closed door opposite the entrance through which Paget had come.

The room was furnished with a table and several chairs. It was lighted by a large lamp in the corner. Paget noted that several advertising devices were displayed on the table. One attracted his attention. It was a glass frame with gray backing, mounted on a pedestal.

Evidently Paget knew what he was expected to do. He acted immediately. He went to the lamp. He turned out the lights and sat in a chair. After a short pause, he spoke.

"Silence," he said, softly.

A light appeared in the gray frame. There, in gleaming letters, was the word "Seven." It stood as a silent reply to his password.

"Five," said Paget.

The word "seven" disappeared. In its place came the word "one".

Paget, as the fifth member of the secret group, was in communication with the chief of the organization. Every word that the clubman uttered was transmitted to some other place how distant, Paget did not know where a hand controlled the switch that made the answering words appear.

"I require the immediate aid of the Faithful Fifty," said Paget, his low voice disguised and scarcely audible in the darkness.

The word "one" disappeared from the frame. In its place came the word "proceed," which formed letter by

THE SILENT SEVEN

letter.

"One of my agents," said Paget, slowly, "is in danger. He has been of assistance in our work. It was through him that the enterprise began. Some one is seeking to trace his movements."

Paget paused. The word "proceed" remained in the frame.

"My agent's name" Paget smiled in the darkness "is Rodney Paget. He has been staying at Wilbur Blake's home. He reports that some one has been watching him. He believes that this enemy has also entered his apartment. Because he is being watched, he has left Blake's house."

The light went out. Now letters formed in the frame, spelling first one word, then another, to form a complete sentence. Paget watched it closely, until it became entirely blank.

"Who is watching him –" were the words.

"A person called The Shadow," said Paget. "He is a man of mystery. He appears only at night –"

He stopped his sentence as new words began to form in the frame.

"We know of The Shadow –" was the message of Number One.

"Ah!" Paget spoke almost without thinking. "Do you know his identity?"

"No," came the illuminated reply.

"How may he be eliminated?"

"Where is Paget –" came the next words.

"He stays at the Merrimac Club," answered Paget. "He is there during the day and the evening."

"Where does he live –" The illuminated words flashed with weird precision.

Paget gave the location of his apartment, in a low, careful voice.

"He will find orders there –" announced the flashing panel.

Paget could think of nothing else to say. He sat in the darkness, awaiting a further command. None came.

Suddenly the lamp in the corner became illuminated and Paget was momentarily surprised to find himself in the illuminated room. There was a click at the entrance. The door had unlocked.

A few minutes later the stenographer entered.

"Sorry, sir," she said. "Mister Bishop cannot see you to-day. You may come back to-morrow and give your name then."

PAGET left the room. His eyes sparkled with admiration as he rode down the elevator pure admiration of the system employed by the Silent Seven.

THE SILENT SEVEN

There, in a darkened room, he had conversed with Number One a man who might be miles away. He knew that both doors must have been locked during the conference, and that the room was absolutely sound-proof.

It was nearly five o'clock when Paget arrived at his apartment. He had been there only a few minutes when a note was pushed under his door. He opened the envelope. The message read:

Leave the club at ten o'clock to-night. Come to the Perry Warehouse on Sixty-eighth Street near Tenth Avenue. Enter side door and go upstairs. V.

Paget memorized the simple instructions. He tore up the note and tossed the fragments in the wastebasket.

He donned a tuxedo; then sat in an easy-chair and thoughtfully puffed a cigarette through the ivory holder. His hand went to the watch pocket of his trousers, where he had placed the scarab ring.

He was attempting to visualize the plans of Number One. He rejected the theory that he might be under the surveillance of the Silent Seven. As Number Five of that organization, he had been unchallenged at the meeting.

He thoroughly believed that the mysterious man known as The Shadow was a free agent who was threatening his plans.

The note had come from Number One whoever he might be. It assumed, of course, that Paget had been informed to watch for it by Number Five.

The signature, V., was a clever touch, as it showed the author knew that Paget's chief was Number Five, V being the Roman numeral for five. At the same time, any one finding the note would suppose V. to be the initial of the writer.

Paget knew that a trap was in readiness at the Perry Warehouse. He felt confident that it was laid to ensnare The Shadow, should the man in black track him there.

If, by some chance, The Shadow had discovered the note, or might enter the apartment and find it in the wastebasket, he would be lured by his knowledge, without the necessity of trailing Rodney Paget.

It was after six o'clock. The clubman left his apartment. He came suddenly from the front door of the building. He stood there while he lighted a cigarette.

From the corner of his eye, he detected a man lounging across the street. He divined the purpose of the watcher. In his report, he had stated that The Shadow might possibly have entered his apartment. He felt sure that the inconspicuous observer had been stationed there by the Silent Seven.

A chance thought came to Paget's mind as he rode away in a taxicab. It brought a smile to his lips.

There was a certain humor in this situation; that the Seven were giving him their cooperation. For there were facts concerning his connection with the Silent Seven that were known to Rodney Paget alone.

Glancing back, the clubman made sure that no one was following his cab. He was satisfied that The Shadow was not on his trail.

"After dark," murmured Paget, to himself. "After dark then The Shadow. To-night that will mark the end."

Unseen forces were at work. A mighty criminal organization was ready for an emergency. The Silent Seven did not fear the law. The victims that they doomed never escaped their verdict. Soon, another victim would be added to their list of crimes!

CHAPTER XV. THE TRAP

Two men stood across the street from the Merrimac Club. They were holding a low conversation. Their faces were turned toward the building by which they stood, yet they seemed keenly observant of all who passed them.

"Ten o'clock, Harry," said one of the men.

The other nodded.

"We may have to wait until midnight, Clyde," he replied. "He stays late, sometimes."

"Yes," confirmed Clyde, "and then he usually goes home. Still, I'm glad we're on the job again."

"Why?"

"Because The Sha –" Clyde Burke caught his words "because we went off duty the night after we lost Paget in the restaurant. I'm glad to be on again. We're not going to slip this time."

Harry Vincent suddenly gripped his companion's arm.

"There he is, Clyde," he whispered. "But stay back! Remember the orders –"

Rodney Paget had appeared outside the entrance of the Merrimac Club. He stood there, staring up the street in his bored manner.

Harry Vincent, scarcely visible in the dim spot where he was located, was keenly observant. He saw Paget start a stroll toward the corner, swinging his cane as he walked. Harry followed a few seconds later, keeping on his own side of the street. Clyde Burke had slipped unnoticed into a near-by doorway.

Rodney Paget seemed in no hurry. He idled as he walked, stopping every now and then to glance upward at the surrounding skyscrapers. He finally stopped beside a subway entrance. He tapped his cigarette holder, and placed it in his pocket. Then he suddenly went into the subway entrance.

This was an unexpected maneuver. It caused a change in Harry Vincent's plans. He changed his slow pace and hurried in pursuit.

A subway train was entering the local station when Rodney Paget reached the bottom of the steps. He was moving swiftly and had ample time to catch the train. Had he done so, he would have eluded his unseen pursuer.

But the clubman stopped short when he reached the turnstile. He had brought a handful of change from his pocket. There was no nickel among the coins.

With a slight exclamation, Paget hurried to the change booth. Before he had received his supply of nickels, the train was pulling from the station. Paget became leisurely again. He glanced about him; then went through the turnstile and walked toward the head of the platform.

THE SILENT SEVEN

When the next local came in, a few minutes later, several passengers boarded it. Among them were two men who had come to the platform after Rodney Paget.

One was Harry Vincent; the other was Clyde Burke. They entered the same car as the clubman. Neither one appeared to notice Rodney Paget; nor did they exchange any sign of recognition between each other.

WHEN the train reached Sixty-sixth Street, Rodney Paget left the car staring straight ahead. He paid no attention whatever to the other passengers. He did not notice the two men who stepped from the car.

Reaching the street, Paget turned his steps westward from Broadway. He moved slowly at first; then quickened his pace after he had turned a corner.

At Sixty-ninth Street and Ninth Avenue, he stopped and lingered near the doorway of a store. He glanced cautiously in all directions. There were a number of people in sight. None of them seemed to arouse the clubman's suspicions.

He turned deliberately and strolled along Sixty-ninth Street, keeping well away from the curb.

He stopped part way down the block. Across the street was the side entrance to a warehouse. It was a spot back from the sidewalk; yet it was somewhat conspicuous because of a light directly above it.

Paget did not seem to mind that fact. The sight of a man in a tuxedo entering a warehouse door on Sixty-ninth Street evidently did not impress him as being outlandish. He stepped across the street and pushed open the door. A dark passageway confronted him.

Paget entered, leaving the door open so that he could see his way.

Hardly had he disappeared before another man crossed the street at a spot much nearer Ninth Avenue. The newcomer was walking briskly. He stopped suddenly after he had passed the entrance of a warehouse.

His purpose was evident. He was about to light a cigarette. The glare of the match revealed the features of Harry Vincent.

The young man made a hasty survey of his surroundings. No one was in sight. The street was virtually deserted. Harry stepped near the wall; then turned and began to walk slowly back toward Ninth Avenue.

As he reached the door of the warehouse, he moved to the side and stood beneath the light above the door.

He was governed momentarily by indecision. His eyes gazed quickly across the street. For an instant he seemed hesitant; then, glancing at the gloomy passage into the warehouse, he entered, following the course which Rodney Paget had taken.

Had Harry's vision penetrated the darkened windows of the house across the street, the young man would have congratulated himself upon his action.

For behind an open window on the second floor stood a man with a rifle. His gun had been trained directly upon Harry's form. When Harry had turned away, the man's finger had been on the trigger; but his decision had changed when Harry had entered the warehouse.

The passage which Harry followed was a gloomy one. His mind was too intent upon what lay ahead to worry about anything that he had left behind.

THE SILENT SEVEN

The door was still part way open, and the street light revealed the way until the passage turned to the right. Here the cement paving was replaced by a flight of wooden steps. Harry went upward through almost total darkness. He felt the wall on his left and his hands reached a corner.

Harry peered cautiously around the corner and saw that a clear passage lay ahead. It led to the next street, and was gloomy but not forbidding. There was no sign of Rodney Paget.

THE fact that his man had outdistanced him spurred Harry to immediate action. He was angry with himself for having been tricked by so simple an artifice. He was determined to gain the street before Paget could get away.

He stepped quickly to the uppermost step; then made a wild clutch in the air. His efforts were too late. The wooden landing opened in the middle and Harry felt himself falling into the depths below.

His left hand was still touching the corner of the passageway; but the bare stone offered no hold. A gasping cry escaped Harry's lips as he dropped.

He landed upon a pile of rags and newspapers. His upturned eyes caught a dim outline of the trap as its two portions closed above him. He heard the click of an automatic lock as he tried to scramble to his feet.

Some one gripped him in the darkness. He went down beneath the onslaught. Strong, active hands bound him firmly, and a gag between his teeth prevented an outcry.

Then he was carried along a dark, smelly passageway, up steps and around corners, until he lost all sense of direction. Once the scent of fresh air reached his nostrils; then he felt himself rising in an automatic elevator.

One of his hands was gradually loosening. As his captors stopped and were about to set him in what seemed to be a pitch-black room, Harry pulled the hand free and swung his fist through the air. A grunt followed as the blow struck one of the captors in the chest. The men fell upon their victim.

In the darkness, they did not know that he was only partially free. They were quick with their attack and a powerful swing threw Harry backward. His head struck a wall and consciousness left him.

BACK in the street, another man was passing the entrance to the warehouse passage. It was the third time that he had passed it, but always on the far side of the street.

Clyde Burke had seen Harry Vincent enter the open door, and had correctly presumed that he had gone after Rodney Paget. Something had prompted Burke not to follow.

He had been instructed to act as Vincent's auxiliary; to take up the pursuit should Harry be suspected. Hence Burke had discreetly kept from view. He had walked by in an indifferent manner, keeping himself inconspicuous.

When three men had appeared at Tenth Avenue, Burke had followed them to Ninth, appearing as a lagging member of their group. This, his third trip, was a brisk one.

Clyde passed directly under the open window where the man with the gun still remained. He escaped the eyes of the concealed observer. The man was watching the entrance to the warehouse.

On Tenth Avenue, Clyde reasoned the matter a while; then walked to the next cross street. Here he walked back toward Ninth Avenue, and saw the other entrance to the passageway. His view was quick and fleeting,

THE SILENT SEVEN

from the opposite side of the street.

Clyde Burke was satisfied that Harry had followed Rodney Paget completely through the passage. He was angry with himself for having lost the trail. Now the pursuit depended upon Harry alone.

Clyde considered the situation in this light as he walked gloomily back toward Broadway.

Just as Clyde Burke left, the man in the window gave up his vigil. He was satisfied that only one person had followed Rodney Paget into the gloomy passageway. And he knew that by this time that person had been captured and could not possibly escape.

CLYDE BURKE was undecided between two courses. Both Vincent and Paget had disappeared. He must try to locate at least one of them.

Harry, he knew, would return eventually to the Metrolite Hotel, where he resided. It would be a simple matter to go there and wait for him. Rodney Paget, likewise, had a logical destination his apartment. By watching that building, Clyde could learn when the clubman returned.

The second plan seemed the better. Suppose, reasoned Clyde, that Harry was still following Paget when the man reached his apartment? He would be glad to find Clyde there.

At least, there would be a report to make regarding the hour of Paget's return. So Clyde proceeded in the direction of Paget's apartment house.

He chose a spot for observations. It was across the street from the building. There, Clyde lurked in the darkness, occasionally taking a short walk up and down the street.

He had spotted Paget's windows on his arrival. The windows were dark. It was unlikely that Paget had had time to return.

An hour passed and Clyde continued his vigil. At last he was rewarded. A taxi coasted up to the entrance of the apartment house and Paget stepped out.

Clyde recognized the man instantly by his lounging gait. Paget was not looking in his direction. Clyde sauntered slowly across the street and passed within a few feet of the clubman as he entered the apartment house.

"Fine passenger you had," Clyde remarked nonchalantly, addressing the taxi driver. "I guess those sporty cane carriers hand out big tips, don't they?"

"Two bits," growled the driver.

"My, my," said Clyde, jokingly, "where did you bring him from? Harlem?"

"Seventy-second and Broadway," returned the driver, climbing into his cab.

Clyde watched the vehicle drive away. He had, at least, discovered the spot where Paget had entered the cab. He walked across the street and looked up at the apartment house. Lights appeared in the window of Paget's apartment.

Clyde drew his watch from his pocket.

THE SILENT SEVEN

"Paget in at eleven forty-five," he remarked, aloud. "Came from Seventy-second and —"

A sound attracted his attention. He turned suddenly to see a man coming from behind him. The fellow had been standing close to a building; Clyde had been too intent to observe him.

The newspaperman warded off a hand that was just about to seize his throat. Dodging, he caught his opponent's arm and gave it a jujutsu twist. He uttered a shout of elation as the man nearly lost his footing.

Then the situation turned suddenly. The men came closer together, and Clyde caught a glimpse of his foe's right hand as it swung toward him. He realized too late that the man had a blackjack. The brutal weapon struck the back of Clyde's head. He crumpled to the sidewalk.

A taxicab stopped as the victor called to the driver.

"Help me get my friend in," said the man on the sidewalk. "He's been drinking too much bum booze —"

As the driver alighted, the man suddenly turned and ran down the street. The taxi driver stood in astonishment until he noticed a policeman approaching from the opposite direction.

The blue-coat drew a revolver and fired two wild shots as the fleeing man turned the corner.

He pocketed his gun with an angry gesture. Another man came running up and pointed to the form of Burke.

"That's one of them," he exclaimed, to the officer. "I saw them across the street. I think the other bird was trying to hold up this guy."

"Grab ahold," ordered the policeman.

They loaded Burke into the taxicab and started for the hospital. A doctor examined the victim upon their arrival.

"Hit with a blackjack," he said. "Possible fracture of the skull. He'll probably come around all right."

It was several hours later when Clyde Burke opened his eyes. He clutched the covers of the hospital cot with weak, helpless fingers. He looked about him in a bewildered way. Then he shut his eyes and tried to forget the throbbing in the back of his head.

"He's doing well," he heard a voice say. "No fracture, but every evidence of a brain concussion. Keep him quiet."

The words made very little impression upon Clyde's mind. He was in a dizzy mental whirl, trying vainly to recall something important that concerned Harry Vincent.

CHAPTER XVI. THE VERDICT

HARRY VINCENT looked about him in amazement. He had just awakened from a deep stupor. He felt very weak when he opened his eyes. He was scarcely able to move his body; but he managed to turn his head as he surveyed his surroundings.

He was propped against the wall of an oddly shaped room. The chamber was scarcely more than a passageway, less than six feet in width. It was twenty feet in length, and at one end Harry saw a tall, upright

THE SILENT SEVEN

frame that extended from the ceiling to the floor. The frame was fronted with a grayish, wire-screened glass.

Electric lights glowed dimly through the glass. They furnished the illumination for the room. Harry could not distinguish the individual bulbs that glowed through the glass. They were blurred by the thick, grayish surface.

At the other end of the room, Harry observed a door. It was an unusual door, without hinges. The cracks which formed its outline were barely discernible.

Harry raised himself with his hands and managed to gain his feet. Leaning against the wall, he managed to grope his way to the door. There was no knob or other projection that might serve as a method of opening the door.

Midway between the sides of the door, about six feet from the floor, was a tightly-fitted square of metal. Harry pressed it with his fingers, but it did not yield.

There was one special peculiarity of this single entrance to the room. The door did not extend to the floor. Its bottom edge was fully a foot above the level on which Harry stood. The top of the door was half way up the wall, which was about fifteen feet in height.

Harry moved back along the wall of the passagelike compartment and discovered several thin slits that ran from floor to ceiling. There were eight of these in all four on each side of the passage. They were about one inch in width. Harry placed his fingers in one crevice but discovered nothing.

He went to the other end of the room and tapped against the thick glass behind which the lights were located. He sat down on the floor and rubbed his head. He felt a lump and recalled that his last experience had been a forceful blow that had ended consciousness.

He felt in his pockets and found them empty. Even his watch had been taken.

Harry was glad that he had carried no identifying papers. Both he and Clyde Burke had adopted that precaution. It was a good policy to use when one went forth on a venture that might result in capture such as this.

Yet Harry had not anticipated this ending to his following of Rodney Paget. The clubman had never impressed him as being dangerous.

A SOUND attracted Harry's attention. The noise came from the door. The tiny square in the middle of the door was sliding upward. Harry fancied that he saw the gleam of two eyes peering in.

Then came another sound and the entire door moved up. It revealed a figure clad in a long gown with hooded cowl.

The strange visitor stepped down from the entrance. The bottom of the gown seemed to slide in front of him, so that no foot was visible. The whole effect was both weird and surprising.

The dread figure advanced slowly and Harry instinctively shifted his position. He did not like the appearance of this unexpected arrival.

The man in the robe stopped a few feet in front of Harry. The cloth front of his cowl had two narrow slits through which he was peering; but Harry could not detect the eyes behind it. He calmly met the gaze of the

THE SILENT SEVEN

unseen eyes, and waited for the visitor to speak.

"Who are you?" came a low voice. The sinister tones were chilling. Harry did not reply.

"Who are you?" The question was repeated.

Harry remained silent.

"Are you The Shadow?"

The question was unexpected. Harry felt a sudden tenseness. He restrained himself and made no response.

"Why did you follow Rodney Paget?"

Harry leaned his head against the glass in back of him and looked boldly at his questioner.

"What do you know about Rodney Paget?"

Harry felt more at ease. His policy of silence was bringing new questions. He was resolved to outwit his inquisitor. By saying nothing, he revealed nothing. He wondered what would happen next.

THE man whose face was hidden by the cowl made no threatening motion. He continued to look at Harry, as though seeking to overpower him by the strength of his invisible eyes.

Harry felt that the game was turning in his favor, for the moment. He smiled and tried to regard his inquisitor with an attitude of ridicule.

"You have heard my questions," said the man in the robe. "Do you choose to answer them?"

Harry shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well." The voice was harsh in the gloom of the room. "You have answered nothing. You have denied nothing. Your identity is suspected. It will soon be learned, despite your efforts to conceal it.

"If you choose to speak, you have a chance for life. If you do not speak, the verdict will surely be –"

The speaker paused. Harry felt a slight shudder as he waited for the next word.

"Death!"

The verdict was uttered in a hideous tone. The word seemed to echo from the walls of the room.

"Death!"

Had Harry heard the word again, or was his imagination at work. As he looked at the form before him, he could think of nothing but that emphatic verdict. Silence filled the room.

Harry felt a strange desire to blurt out answers to the questions. He restrained himself with difficulty. The inquisitor seemed to divine his emotions.

"The choice is yours," came the slow, modulated voice. "At present you have decided to say nothing. Later,

THE SILENT SEVEN

you may change your desire. When you are ready, you may knock upon the door and you will have your opportunity.

"But be sure" the words carried an insidious warning "that you are ready to answer all that may be asked! You will have but one opportunity. Should you resort to deception, your last chance will be lost!"

The words impressed Harry. At the same time, they gave him hope. They increased his determination to maintain silence for the present.

"One last warning," came the voice. "When you decide to speak and you will decide to do so be sure that you do not delay too long. I may not be ready at the moment which you choose. You must allow sufficient time."

The border of the dark gown swept the floor as the inquisitor turned. With stately stride he went to the doorway. His form seemed to heighten as he reached the step. There he turned again, and his solemn voice carried an awe-inspiring tone as it came to Harry's ears.

"Remember," were the words, "you have your choice. You may answer all questions if you choose. Otherwise death!"

As the final verdict was uttered, the steel door descended. It obscured the figure of the man in the robe. The inquisitor was gone. Harry Vincent was again alone!

OUTSIDE the room, the man in the dark gown confronted another figure as sinister as himself. His companion was a veritable giant a man whose grim, white face seemed deathlike in the gloom of a dimly-lighted passage.

This man was dressed in black. His features were sullen and determined. His eyes were dull and expressionless. He was a brute type, possessed of tremendous strength, but who seemed governed by a willingness to obey one master.

He was a modern survival of the medieval executioners who dwelt in obscurity, abhorred by the neighbors, and who only faced the public when called upon to wield the ax of death.

"Bron," said the man in the robe, "remain here until the end. Do not leave this post."

The grim-visaged executioner bowed his head in acknowledgment of the instructions.

"Should he signal," continued the man in the robe, "send word to me. If I do not respond, let the death go on."

Again a nod was the answer.

"The death will begin soon," said the man who had questioned Harry Vincent. "Wait ten minutes. Then proceed."

The executioner nodded.

"As for the other," said the man in the robe, "pay no attention to him. We have provided for his wants. I shall visit him when necessary."

The man in the robe extended his hand. Upon one finger was the strangely carved beetle a duplicate of

THE SILENT SEVEN

Rodney Paget's scarab ring. Bron bowed.

"The sign," he said in a sepulchral voice.

The man in the robe formed the number seven the fingers and thumb of the right hand extended; two fingers showing from the left. Bron replied with one open hand and one clenched fist the sign of the Fifty.

The inquisitor turned and walked a few paces. He stopped at a blank wall. He pressed his hands against the sides of the passage. A sheet of metal arose, revealing the faint outline of a spiral stairway.

The man in the robe went through the opening; the barrier closed behind him. He ascended the stairway and came to another barrier. Another sheet of metal rose when he pressed the hidden catch. He stepped into a small room that was lighted by a bright lamp.

There was a table in the center of the room. Upon it rested a peculiar instrument with a large lettered keyboard.

THE man in the robe sat at the table and carefully noted the time on a watch that lay there. He threw back his cowl and revealed a firm, well-featured face.

He was a man past middle age, and his countenance bore an air of judicial sternness. It was intelligent, yet unyielding.

He pressed an unlettered key at the side of the board and waited. Five minutes passed. Then a low voice filled the room. It sounded like a voice over the radio. Its tones were clear and distinct.

"Faithful," came the voice.

Skilled hands pressed the keyboard, spelling the word "fifty."

"B three," said the voice.

The hands spelled the word "one."

"The man in the hospital is not yet identified," came the voice. "He will be followed when discharged."

"What about Blake –" the words were spelled letter by letter as the hands ran over the keyboard.

"We are watching from a distance. The presence of the night watchman makes it difficult. We have looked for an intruder, but have seen none. We have avoided suspicion as ordered."

"Instructions –" spelled the hands.

"Ready," responded the voice.

"Note to Paget telling him to keep hidden –"

"Noted," was the verbal reply.

"Post men of the Fifty in his apartment –"

THE SILENT SEVEN

"Noted."

"Guard both ends of arcade constantly –"

"Noted."

"Insert advertisement –"

"Noted."

The man at the keyboard pressed the same key that had begun the interview. Then he looked at his watch. The hands showed ten o'clock. It was in the morning, yet one would not have known it in that room where no daylight penetrated.

The man listened intently. Then came a faint sound that could have been heard only by the keenest ears. It seemed to come from below the working of muffled machinery. The man smiled and his stern lips formed the words "Bron."

In the passageway below, Bron was standing silent and alone. His hand was on a switch behind an open panel in the wall.

The giant's face gleamed with sordid pleasure. His dull eyes had become filled with a gleam of delight. He was staring at the door that led to the room where Harry Vincent was held prisoner.

The executioner then turned from the switch. He sat on a stool at the side of the passage and leaned his head against the wall.

While the thrum–thrum of muffled mechanism continued, he glanced frequently at the barrier that kept Harry a captive. Occasionally, Bron's eyes turned in another direction to a similar door at the side of the passage. But the one spot that seemed to intrigue him was the door to Harry's prison.

IN his long cell, Harry Vincent became suddenly conscious of the throbbing noise. He looked up and down the room, but could not locate the sound. Finally he chanced to glance toward the ceiling and a look of alarm swept over his haggard face.

The ceiling was moving downward! Its motion would not have been appreciable but for a slight, jerky action that came with each throb of the machinery.

Harry placed his hand against the smooth glass that covered the lights. He detected a motion there. The panel was moving, also!

Harry stared at the floor in fascination. He could see the frame gradually sinking through the floor. It was moving at a snail's pace.

Minutes went by. At the end of an hour as Harry estimated it the frame had descended only a few inches.

He knew now what his fate would be, and he mopped the perspiration from his forehead. He had his choice. He could speak or be crushed to oblivion beneath the pressure of that descending ceiling.

He knew now why the door was raised above the floor. When the ceiling was down, its top formed a new floor of the passageway.

THE SILENT SEVEN

Harry arose and tottered along the passage toward the door. He was tempted to knock; to yield to his inquisitor. Then he remembered the man's warning. There could be no trickery! Unless he told everything he knew, he would go back to this corridor of death.

Harry, for the moment, felt that he would tell willingly. Then he realized that he knew but little. How many questions could he answer? His inquisitor believed him to be The Shadow. Would he believe him when he truthfully denied that identity?

Another glance at the ceiling convinced Harry that it was wise to wait. Hours would elapse before the final doom arrived. It would be best to wait; to stand the strain of hours of horror before he chose the last resort of crying for mercy.

He sat on the floor and tried to occupy his mind with other thoughts. But over all came that feverish threat of annihilation. Harry laughed hopelessly and the mirthless sound seemed hollow.

"Death!"

Through his mind still echoed the terrifying verdict. He had hours to wait for he doubted that the ceiling would be down within a day and a half yet only one thought could dominate his mind through all that time.

It was the warning of his strange inquisitor that morning death! – death to The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVII. BLAKE'S VISITOR

IT was ten o'clock in the evening. Twenty-four hours had elapsed since Harry Vincent had started in pursuit of Rodney Paget. Twelve hours had gone by since the gowned inquisitor had visited his prisoner in the lonely corridor.

These events were unknown to the man who sat contentedly in Wilbur Blake's library.

Herbert entered.

"Otto is ready, sir," he said. "Do you wish him to take the sedan or the speedster to the station?"

"The speedster;" replied the man who looked like Blake. "Only Mister Michaels will be there. Mister Barton is bringing Mister Fanchon with him.

"But there is no hurry yet. The train doesn't come in until eleven. Tell Otto to have the speedster in the drive. When Mister Barton and Mister Fanchon arrive, notify me."

"Yes, sir."

The butler did not go. He stood uneasily as though he wished to say something. His master looked at him. The eyebrows narrowed in the characteristic action of Wilbur Blake.

"What is it, Herbert?"

"Nothing, sir; that is, nothing much, sir. I I was just wondering about last night, sir."

"You spoke to me about that this morning," said Blake. "You asked me if I had come downstairs about two o'clock, and I told you I had. I went into the kitchen to get something to eat."

THE SILENT SEVEN

"Yes, sir. But did you come into this room, sir?"

"No. Why?"

"Do you remember, sir, that you dropped a glass last night? Over there in the corner, sir?"

"Yes. You started to pick up the broken pieces. I told you to let them go until morning. I haven't been in the room until just now. I see that you have obeyed my instructions."

"Yes, sir. But I forgot about it until half an hour ago. Then I remembered, sir. I came in here and I was quite surprised, Mister Blake."

"Why?"

"There was a large piece of glass, sir" Herbert made a motion with one finger and thumb to illustrate "and I was sure about it, sir, because I saw it last night. It was nearly midnight, sir, you will remember and you walked out while I was about to gather up the pieces of glass."

"Well?" questioned Blake impatiently.

"There was no large piece this evening, sir," explained the butler. "Only small fragments."

"Which means –"

"That some one must have stepped upon the large piece, sir, in the dark."

"You're quite a detective, Herbert," laughed Blake. Then suddenly his countenance changed.

"Are you sure that none of the servants came in here?" His demand was accompanied by the motion of his eyebrows.

"I am positive, sir," declared Herbert. "You remember, sir, that you told me not to disturb your important correspondence. So I thought, sir –"

"You are right, Herbert. If some one was in here, I should know about it. You can leave now. I'll look over everything."

ALONE, Blake became suddenly active. His face wore a slightly worried expression as he studied a pile of letters and envelopes that lay upon the desk.

Satisfied that all were there, he went back to the easy-chair. He lighted a cigar and scowled at the smoke as he puffed away.

The butler reappeared.

"Mister Michaels is here, sir," he said.

"Already?" Blake appeared surprised. "He wasn't coming in until eleven o'clock."

"He took an earlier train, sir. I believe he wants to be back in New York by twelve –"

THE SILENT SEVEN

"Tell him to come in, Herbert. Have Otto keep the car ready. Tell him to stay in it. And by the way, Herbert" Blake's tone assumed a feigned indifference "I should have told the watchman to be here before eleven tonight. There may be prowlers around. So tell Otto to be alert."

Herbert ushered a tall man into the room, a few minutes later. The visitor was about fifty years of age. He carried himself with dignity and his eyes were quizzical as they eyed the form of Wilbur Blake.

"Mister Michaels, sir," announced Herbert.

"Ah!" exclaimed Blake, rising to greet the newcomer. "Welcome. The others are not here yet. Sit down. Will you have a drink? Two glasses, Herbert."

"Quite some time since I have seen you," observed Blake as the two men faced each other from comfortable chairs. Herbert had brought the glasses and had left the room.

"Quite a while," commented Michaels.

"Sorry to bring you all the way from Chicago," continued Blake. "But it was necessary, in this matter."

"Necessary, yes," replied the visitor. "But even now, Blake, I am not quite convinced that you are doing wisely."

"Why? Your letter said –"

"My letter was not final. I knew that I would be present here to–night. That would enable me to discuss the matter before it was concluded. I have been thinking about it all the way from Chicago. Your action does not seem in accordance with your usual policy."

"Why not?"

"You are disposing of your interests in the Calcimine Company at a sacrifice."

"A sacrifice?" laughed Blake. "Two and a half millions outright? You call that a sacrifice?"

"It is worth more than that!"

"Potentially, perhaps."

"Actually!" Michaels' voice was serious. "Blake, I can offer you three millions, three months from now. Why don't you hold on?"

"I would rather not delay," replied Blake.

"I can guarantee it!" declared Michaels, emphatically. "You know what that means! You do not need the money now. Hold on!"

Blake shook his head.

"You are foolish, Blake," said Michaels. He stopped as Herbert entered the room. The butler spoke to his master in a peculiar tone.

THE SILENT SEVEN

"Some one on the telephone, sir," he said. "It is important."

"Who is it?" demanded Blake.

"I do not know, sir," stammered the butler. He looked significantly at his master. "You must answer it, sir. It is very important."

BLAKE arose and left the room. He returned three minutes later. There was a slight scowl on his face; his expression changed to a slight smile as he saw his visitor standing in the center of the room. Blake's right hand slipped inside his pocket.

"Mister Michaels," he said, "I have an unusual question to ask you. It has been some time since I saw you. I should remember you well. But I have a bad memory at times. Would you mind telling me this: are you James Michaels of Chicago?"

The visitor looked firmly at his questioner. His eyes were steady and unflinching.

"Let me ask you a question," he said, in a voice that bore a strange, accusing menace. "Are you Wilbur Blake of New York?"

Blake's lips became firm. He stepped forward and placed the knuckles of his left hand upon a table that stood between himself and Michaels. His eyebrows narrowed and he looked sharply at the man who had questioned him.

"I have just received a telephone call," Blake's voice came terse and emphatic. "A man who says he is James Michaels states that he is in New York; that he missed the train arriving here at eleven o'clock, and that he is coming by cab.

"If he is not an impostor, you are! Let me ask you again are you James Michaels?"

"No!"

"I thought not." Blake laughed harshly. "The impostor would be the one who would come first.

"What is your purpose here? Why are you representing yourself to be James Michaels?"

"Why are you pretending to be Wilbur Blake?"

The millionaire ignored the question. He continued to glare at the other man, as though deliberating the best course to follow. Of the two, the false Michaels was more calm, even though he was in the other's home.

"Your name is not Blake," the visitor said coldly. "It happens to be Dodge. Your friend" there was a sarcastic tone "Rodney Paget unwisely let out that fact when he visited you in a house near Lexington Avenue.

"At that time I did not hear enough to form a complete supposition. Later, I met the manager of the Goliath Hotel. He recalled that Wilbur Blake had once asked him to cash a check and that he had called upon Rodney Paget to identify Blake. Paget had gone away with Blake, saying that he would cash the check for him."

The words brought a touch of nervousness to the listener. Blake still kept his right hand in his coat pocket. He raised his left hand and nervously twisted the tip of his waxed moustache.

THE SILENT SEVEN

"While Paget was visiting here," continued the accusing voice, "Wilbur Blake went out one night, alone. He went as far as the garage. There, something happened to him.

"He was overpowered and carried away in his own car. His captors transferred him to another automobile. The man who watched this—namely myself—saw another person enter Blake's car and return to this house.

"The person who took Blake's place was yourself!"

Despite these revelations, the listening man became more calm. He stared at his accuser and said nothing.

"You have one course now," said his visitor. "Refuse to go through with this business transaction. Then leave this place. Now, before your guests arrive, tell me where Wilbur Blake is."

"I do not know," came the sullen reply.

The questioner stared firmly. His sharp eyes, gleaming with a strange light, seemed to detect that Dodge was speaking truly.

"Does Paget know?" he asked.

"Perhaps. I do not know."

THE questioner waited. He watched the false Blake closely, as though expecting the man to betray himself by some action. Then, suddenly, the tenseness was broken.

"You are an impostor!" cried Blake. "You admit it. You have threatened me!"

He leaped forward as he spoke. His hand came from his pocket, carrying an automatic revolver. His finger was on the trigger as he raised the weapon.

Michaels reached forward and caught his wrist in a steel-like grip. Simultaneously, the door burst open and Otto dashed in, carrying a revolver. Behind him came Herbert.

"Shoot him, Otto!" exclaimed Blake. "He's trying to kill me. Shoot! Quick!"

Before the chauffeur could obey, Michaels, with amazing strength, pulled Blake toward him. He was shielded momentarily by the other man's body. They struggled fiercely. Blake's gun fell to the floor.

"Help me!" called Blake, as his head turned toward the two servants. "This is the thief who entered this house last night—"

His sentence was interrupted by the overpowering grasp of his foe. Blake saw Otto holding his revolver in readiness. Herbert was standing open-mouthed, wondering what to do.

Michaels had divined Blake's purpose. There was only one safe course for Blake to follow. He had precipitated the attack with the definite goal of killing Michaels.

Both Otto and Herbert would be witnesses in Blake's behalf. The accidental killing of a self-confessed impostor could be explained to the police. The false Michaels, dead, would be a lesser menace than alive.

Otto's arrival had been most opportune for the masquerading Blake. Otto was ready to do his bidding. Only

THE SILENT SEVEN

the ingenuity of Blake's antagonist thwarted him.

Blake's foe allowed no opportunity for the chauffeur to fire. Realizing this, Otto took advantage of the struggle to approach the fighting men. At close range he could shoot Blake's foe. It was then that Michaels suddenly changed his tactics.

With a mighty swing, he hurled Blake across the room. The millionaire crumpled as he crashed against the wall. Whirling, Michaels fell upon Otto before the man could bring his automatic into play.

The brawny chauffeur was thrown back by the attack, but he wrested his right hand free and tried to cover Michaels with the gun.

His wrist was turned aside by an iron grip. For several tense seconds, neither man seemed to move; yet both were exerting every effort.

"Hold him, Otto!"

It was Blake who spoke. The millionaire had risen to his feet. He was reaching for his automatic that lay on the floor behind Michaels. If Otto could withhold his foe a few seconds longer, Blake could deliver the fatal shot into the back of Michaels.

THE chauffeur lurched forward as Michaels drew him back. Fighting desperately, Michaels tried to kick the gun away from Blake's hand. He failed.

The millionaire seized the automatic and lifted it with a cry of triumph. Simultaneously, Otto gained his desired opportunity. The grip on his wrist relaxed. He shoved the muzzle of his gun against Michael's side. He pressed the trigger, holding it to discharge the entire volley of ten shots.

As the chauffeur acted, Michaels hunched his body to the side. The muzzle of the automatic slipped so that the side of the barrel lay against his body. The bullets ripped his coat as they emerged.

Continuing his swing, Michaels revolved Otto in a semicircle. The muzzle of the bullet-spitting automatic swung across the room. Blake was covered by its turning path.

The millionaire's triumphant cry became a horrible gasp. He fell to the floor.

Otto's eyes, staring over Michaels' shoulder, saw what had happened. A look of horror appeared upon the chauffeur's face. His strength gave out. Michaels flung him away and made a dash for the door.

Only Herbert blocked his path. The butler had picked up a heavy cane belonging to his master. He had no chance to use it. Michaels landed a punch upon Herbert's jaw and the butler collapsed.

The departing man crossed the living room and reached the door. Blake's speedster was standing in the driveway.

With a mocking laugh, Michaels leaped into the waiting car. He sped down the driveway and turned into the street. He went by two cars that had pulled up beside the curb.

"Stop him!" came cries. The shots had been heard. The witnesses knew that the man in the speedster was escaping.

THE SILENT SEVEN

A sedan shot from a side street and took up the chase. The man at the wheel of the speedster saw it in the mirror. He increased the speed of his car and whirled toward the highway that led to New York.

He had gained on his pursuers before he reached the open road. A clear path lay ahead of him. His escape seemed certain.

THE mirror in the speedster revealed the face of the driver. The elderly face of Blake's visitor had undergone a change. It seemed governed by a grim pleasure.

The lips carried a thin, determined smile. The keen eyes glanced toward the mirror and sparkled. The lights of the sedan were far behind.

The speedster turned a curve. The eyes that showed in the mirror became suddenly alert. They were staring straight down the road.

In the speedster's path was an open drawbridge! A boat was coming through a channel from the Sound.

Brakes screamed. The speedster lurched as firm hands swung the wheel to the left. Still traveling at high speed, the driver turned the car into a side road that led from the highway.

The front wheels struck a deep ditch in the road. The car swerved and crashed through a fence. Two tires exploded as the speedster turned on its side and hung precariously above the edge of the channel.

The sedan arrived less than a minute later. It skidded as the driver turned it across the road, narrowly escaping the fate of the roadster. It halted a few feet from the overturned car.

Then came the sharp rat-tat-tat of a machine gun as steel-jacketed bullets sprayed the body of the wrecked speedster.

A man started to leap from the front seat of the sedan. An exclamation from the back of the car caused him to return.

Men were rushing from the drawbridge. There was no time to delay. The sedan shot backward. It turned and whirled up the road down which it had come.

The rescuers reached the speedster. They looked inside, expecting to find a bullet-riddled body. Instead, they were amazed to find the car empty.

A police motor cycle and sidecar arrived when the drawbridge closed. The uniformed officers made a quick inspection of the wrecked car. They heard the excited descriptions of those who had seen the accident. One policeman remained on duty while the other rode away to report.

Other policemen arrived later. They seemed to have taken an unusual interest in the overturned car.

They remained on the scene until two o'clock, when Inspector Timothy Klein arrived. The official made a careful survey. When he left, half an hour later, he left two policemen on duty.

"Watch every one who comes or goes," were the inspector's instructions.

CHAPTER XVIII. THE SHADOW ACTS

IT was late the next afternoon. Two men were in a small boat near the drawbridge. They were dragging a channel. A policeman, on shore, watched their work.

The wrecked speedster had been removed. Still, the police vigil was maintained. The dragging had begun in the morning, when the first watchers had been relieved.

It was a gloomy, cloudy day. Darkness was arriving prematurely. A damp fog was settling above the channel. The opposite shore was invisible in the haze.

Two hands appeared between the pilings that supported the inner edge of the bridge. They were long, thin hands that appeared white and weak.

A haggard face came through the opening. Two sharp eyes glanced along the bank of the channel. They saw the broad back of the man in uniform.

A figure emerged from the pilings. A man swam slowly toward the far side of the bridge. Coming noiselessly, he reached the bank and dropped out of sight.

The man's hiding place had totally escaped the search of the police. He had reached it through the water, picking a spot where the bank sloped behind the pilings and formed an artificial cave beneath the approach to the bridge.

The man climbed the bank beyond the bridge. He was scarcely visible in the thickening fog. He dragged himself wearily toward the highway, then turned and moved slowly along the bank away from the bridge.

He found a small, leaky rowboat. After a quick glance in all directions, he entered the boat and began to row it noiselessly across the channel. He passed by an anchored barge, silently and almost invisibly. There was no sound not even the dripping of his oars.

The rower rested; then resumed his progress. He reached the opposite shore. He turned back to the highway and came to a cigar store. A sign on the door said "Telephone Booth."

The man peered into the store. The one clerk was busy with a customer. The man slipped through the door and entered the telephone booth unobserved. The clerk did not notice his presence until he noticed the closed door of the booth.

NEITHER Herbert nor Otto would have recognized the man who was telephoning. He bore but little resemblance to the visitor who had pretended to be James Michaels of Chicago.

Pale, wet, and bedraggled, his air of dignity was gone. He seemed a weary, furtive man; yet, despite his condition, he looked younger than the elderly personage who had visited the home of Wilbur Blake.

The man called a taxicab office. He summoned a cab, giving the address of the cigar store. He learned that a cab would arrive in ten minutes.

He waited in the booth until he saw the clerk step to the rear of the store. Then he slipped silently to the street, dropping a coin for a copy of the Morning Monitor as he went out.

The cab arrived and the driver entered the store. He was surprised to find no passenger. Returning to his cab

THE SILENT SEVEN

he saw a face at the window. It was partly obscured by an opened newspaper.

"I was waiting outside," said a quiet voice. "Drive me into the city. I shall give you the address later."

The taximan obeyed. He sped along the highway and crossed one of the mammoth bridges that connect Manhattan with Long Island.

"Turn left," came the word from the back of the car, as the cab reached an avenue. The driver obeyed.

Twenty blocks on, the cab was stopped by a traffic light. The driver thought this was the time to learn his passenger's destination. He put his head through the partition, but saw no one. With an exclamation of anger, he leaped from the cab and opened the back door.

His passenger had gone. The car was empty. A flat object was visible on the rear seat. The cab man picked it up. It was a damp, flabby ten-dollar bill.

Ten blocks back, the man came out of a dilapidated house situated on a side street. He seemed entirely different from the water-soaked individual who had taken the taxi near the drawbridge.

He was clad in a dark suit. Upon his shoulders rested a loose black cloak. His face was lost beneath the brim of a large, black felt hat. He turned and walked along the street, scarcely noticed by those who passed. A soft, chuckling laugh escaped his lips and echoed from a doorway as he passed.

It was the laugh of The Shadow!

THE man in the black cloak had undergone a remarkable transformation. He was no longer weary. Only a slight limp remained as a token of his crash in the speedster. The effects of his long, cramped hiding had disappeared.

He made a startling figure as he passed the lights of the avenue, his great, grotesque shadow forming an uncanny blot upon the pavement.

A short while later, the same man in black appeared in front of Rodney Paget's apartment house. The Shadow entered the building unobserved, and rode up in the automatic elevator.

He stopped at the door of Paget's apartment and silently inserted an oddly shaped key. He opened the door noiselessly and stepped into total darkness. The door closed behind him.

Then there was silence. Alert, The Shadow was listening. He seemed to sense the presence of some living being. He moved across the room, so noiselessly that no ear could have heard him.

There was a slight click as his hand pulled the cord of a lamp. The light revealed a man against the opposite wall a grim-faced man whose eyes were intent upon the door. The fellow turned in amazement to stare into the muzzle of The Shadow's automatic.

A soft laugh came from beneath the hat. The man by the door sullenly raised his hands. The Shadow moved toward him; then turned quickly as another man leaped from the corner of the room and fell upon him.

"Get him, Fritz," hissed the man at the door, as he leaped toward the strugglers. "No gun! No noise!"

"I've got him, Bart," came the triumphant answer. The attacker's hands were gripping The Shadow's throat.

THE SILENT SEVEN

Then came an astounding change. Slender white hands came from the cloak. The Shadow caught his opponent's wrists. Dropping toward the floor, The Shadow swung Fritz headforemost. He used the man's wiry body as a giant club.

The human weapon descended with terrific force against the fellow called Bart. The Shadow arose and laughed softly. His two antagonists lay on the floor before him.

Fritz was completely dazed. Bart was only partly stunned. The Shadow removed the man's belt and bound his hands behind him, firmly and with amazing speed. He used a handkerchief to gag the man's mouth.

Then he turned his attention to Fritz. The man wore no belt, so The Shadow used his suspenders.

Leaving his helpless victims, The Shadow commenced a quick search through the room.

He acted with the air of one who was familiar with the place. Papers, drawers, books, and other articles were quickly inspected. The Shadow seemed to be checking a previous search.

He left the room and turned on lights throughout the apartment. His eyes were looking everywhere. He stopped suddenly in the little alcove. Something caught his eye.

He stepped to the window shade. There were blotchy marks at the left side of the rolled-up blind. There were similar marks at the bottom of the shade. Visible only to a keen eye, they had attracted The Shadow's notice.

THE white hands were at work. Within a few seconds, the left hand found the secret catch and the right hand drew down the shade. As the papers which Paget had hidden fell toward the floor, The Shadow plucked them from the air. He began a quick perusal of the document.

The dust-covered fingers of Rodney Paget had left the marks that had betrayed his ingenious hiding place. The Shadow's previous search had failed, but, firm in his belief that Paget still possessed the document he wanted, The Shadow had succeeded through the aid of a trifling clue!

The figure in black stood firm and motionless. The Shadow was completely absorbed in the revelations which he was now gaining. His perusal was rapid but careful. He finished the reading. His hands slipped the papers beneath his cloak. Then he raised the empty blind and locked it in place.

His hand produced a watch. He turned and left the alcove.

In the outer room, The Shadow stood above his bound victims. He appeared as a man of destiny. He was lost in deep, concentrated thought.

The men on the floor wondered. They feared the presence of this mysterious being; they dreaded what might happen.

To their astonishment, The Shadow ignored them. The strange man in black came suddenly to life. He moved rapidly through the apartment, extinguishing lights behind him. The living room was plunged in darkness.

Leaving his victims to their own uncomfortable thoughts, The Shadow opened the door of the apartment and disappeared from view. The only memento of his presence was the sound of a mocking laugh that came through the closing door.

It was a long, taunting laugh that echoed after he was gone. It chilled the hearts of the men who lay bound

upon the floor. For the laugh did not bring back thoughts of the events that had just transpired. It seemed to presage events that were yet to be!

CHAPTER XIX. OVER THE WIRES

THE telephone rang in a booth in the Grand Central Station. An attendant at the lunch counter opposite heard the ring. He finished serving a customer and went to the rear of the counter.

Alone and undisturbed, he dialed a number. He heard a voice at the other end.

"Burbank," he said softly.

"Good," came the reply. "Any report?"

"None."

"Where is Vincent?"

"Gone."

"Burke?"

"Gone."

There was a momentary silence. Then the voice issued a brief order.

"Be ready," it said. "Act instantly on any double call. Report news here at once."

The receiver clicked. The lunch counter attendant hung up the phone and went back to give the waiting customer his check.

At police headquarters, Inspector Timothy Klein was chewing the end of a fat, unlighted cigar as he stared sullenly at Detective Joe Cardona.

"You see the connection, don't you?" he demanded.

Cardona nodded.

"This whole thing is your fault, then. If you had got your man the first time, this new mess wouldn't have come along. It's time you woke up, Joe."

"Woke up!" exclaimed the detective. "I've been trying to trail that mug that was at Marchand's house.

"Whether he did the murder or not, we've got the goods on him! He was carrying guns. He resisted arrest and assaulted me. But even at that, I believe his story –"

"Blah!" interjected the inspector. "Don't be a kid, Joe. Wise up." He thrust a copy of the Morning Monitor before the detective's eyes and pointed to the glaring headlines.

"Look at the ride they're giving us. Another murderer slips the police. Where is the man that was in the car? Look over here" he turned to a back page "they even point out the similarity to the Lukens murder.

THE SILENT SEVEN

"They want to know where the man is who was found beside the doctor's body. There's the connection right there!"

He threw the paper in front of Cardona. The detective did not seem to notice it. Klein became sarcastic. He turned to the want-ad section.

"Maybe this will interest you more," he sneered. "You're liable to be looking for a job pretty soon. Humph!" the inspector grunted "you'd better put in an ad like this one. A big executive. Wants a job with minimum salary of ninety-seven hundred and fifty bucks a year.

"That's a tip for you, Joe. Ex-detective wants a job. Fifteen thousand or up. Especially willing to shadow The Shadow –"

CARDONA angrily snatched the newspaper from the inspector's hands. He opened it to the front page and pointed to a small heading.

"Look at that," he said. "I told the reporter to put it in."

"Detective Nonplused," read Klein. "The disappearance of man from the wrecked car is a mystery to Detective Cardona. He seems to be facing the same failure that he encountered in the Lukens murder. He openly admitted that unless he finds a new clew –"

Klein dropped the paper and stared.

"You told the reporter to put that in!" he said, in astonished tones. "What in blazes made you do that?"

"I wanted The Shadow to read it," replied Cardona. "That bloke, wherever he is, may have the key to Blake's death as well as the Lukens case. He promised me –"

"Promised you!" blared the inspector. "You're crazy, Joe. He may be the guy in back of it all!"

Cardona shook his head.

"Listen, Joe," said Klein seriously. "I've told you that you're all wrong. You find a guy on the scene of the murder. He gets away. He comes back

"You recognize him as The Shadow. You were wise enough to simply call him an unidentified man. The newspapers would razz you if you pulled The Shadow stuff. But you know, and I know, that he's a clever guy.

"Now a fellow comes to see Wilbur Blake. He pretends to be some one else. He gets away when he is discovered.

"Blake is killed in the fracas. The guy disappears from a wrecked car with people all about him. It's The Shadow! Who else could do it?

"Okay. He was responsible for Blake's death. It's likely that he killed Lukens."

"You're wrong, chief," replied Cardona. "This thing is beyond me. But there's a lot more to it than you think.

"We got The Shadow's guns, that night Lukens was killed. It wasn't his rods that bumped off the old doctor.

THE SILENT SEVEN

Now he gets into a fight with Blake. He may have been responsible for Blake's death, but it was the chauffeur who fired the wild shots. Somebody else was in back of it.

"What about the mystery car that chased The Shadow? They peppered machine-gun bullets all through the wrecked car. Who were they? I'll tell you!

"They were hooked up in some way to the Lukens murder! They were out to get The Shadow!"

Klein was slightly impressed by Cardona's statements. He became thoughtful.

"We've heard about The Shadow before," he said. "That guy may be all right he may be crooked. I don't know. But one thing is sure he don't work with the police."

"Listen, chief," insisted Cardona. "The Shadow has handled some pretty bad boys in his time. They say that when he tells a crook something is going to happen to him, it happens."

"I've heard that."

"All right. Argue it the other way, then. He told me he'd put me wise when he got the dope on who killed Lukens. They say The Shadow means what he says. That's why I'm counting on him."

"You're counting wrong, then," grunted Klein.

A phone rang beside him. He answered it and handed the instrument to Cardona. "For you, Joe," he added.

"Hello," said Cardona wearily.

THEN his eyes began to stare. They were looking directly at Inspector Klein, but Cardona was unseeing. His companion looked at him in alarm. The detective seemed gripped by some overpowering astonishment.

"Yes! Yes!" exclaimed Cardona.

"Who is it?" demanded Klein.

The detective made a grimace. He signaled his superior not to interrupt. Fumbling on the table before him, he found a pad and pencil.

"The Lukens murderer?" he questioned. "You'll have him for me? With the evidence?"

There was a pause as the detective listened intently. Then his voice spoke in more startled tones.

"The Blake case? You'll have that, too? The murderer... Oh, you'll clear it, you say... What's that?... Yes, yes _"

He began to write hurriedly. Klein leaned over, but could not decipher his shaky scrawl. Occasionally Cardona exclaimed the word "Yes." Then, finished with his notes, he slumped into a chair. Klein grabbed the phone.

"Hello!" he demanded.

The receiver clicked at the other end.

THE SILENT SEVEN

"Who was it?" exclaimed the inspector.

"The Shadow!" replied Cardona.

"The Shadow! What did he say? Were you sure it was him?"

"I'd know that voice any time," declared Cardona. He steadied himself and began to copy his scrawled notes.

"To-night at nine thirty," read the inspector. "Be ready with a dozen men. Wait until the exact minute. Then proceed to –"

The inspector grunted. "What's that," he exclaimed angrily. "A note under the seat of a telephone booth in the cigar store at Broadway and – What is this, Joe, a hoax?"

"It's a good one if it is," replied the detective.

"Get up there now and nab the guy that leaves it," ordered Klein.

"No, chief," answered Cardona. "We've got to play the game. The Shadow has given me his answer. A false step, and he will drop us like a hot penny. Let me handle it the way he wants."

"All right," agreed Klein testily, throwing away his chewed cigar and pulling a fresh one from his pocket. "I'm leaving it up to you! Hop to it!"

CHAPTER XX. THE EIGHTH MAN

RODNEY PAGET alighted from a cab on a side street near Broadway. He quietly entered a little restaurant and ordered apple pie and coffee. After he finished his eating, he went to the telephone booth in the obscure corner.

He removed the receiver and turned the dial to the figure seven. Holding it there, he pressed the side of the booth. Something clicked. Paget replaced the receiver and slipped through a door that opened beside him.

It was an ingenious device, the whole side of the booth turning through the wall. The opening closed behind him.

Paget walked through a storeroom and arrived in the deserted lobby of the old apartment. He took the elevator to the secret floor and entered the passage where he had gone before.

Confident, he donned a robe and hood from the pile that lay in the anteroom, and gave the signal of seven taps. He received the answer and gave his five taps. He was admitted to the weird room where he joined the silent, standing figures.

A feeling of new confidence inspired Paget to-night. With the exception of the leader of the Seven, he alone, of that silent band, knew the vital importance of this meeting.

He knew that some one had been captured while trailing him; and that the meeting had been arranged that all might know of it. Furthermore, the startling news of Wilbur Blake's death had made the meeting doubly imperative. That, also, Paget knew.

He had stayed at an uptown hotel the previous night, obeying instructions which he had found in his

THE SILENT SEVEN

apartment He had looked at the Morning Monitor shortly before noon, and had been astonished to learn of the affair at Blake's.

Still, he had not forgotten to consult the want-ad columns. There he had found the item that signified a meeting.

What would be the outcome of this meeting? That, Paget could not foresee. He felt sure that the mysterious leader of this band would have some scheme to offer.

Paget's original plan, to drain Blake's millions through the actions of an impostor, had certainly been thwarted.

The Sixth member of the group arrived while Paget was still thinking of the situation. Number Seven made his appearance a few minutes later. The members of the group went through their ceremony. Then came the period of silence.

"TO-NIGHT," said the leader, "we are confronted by an important matter. The plan proposed by Number Five has been temporarily thwarted. We have been attacked by an enemy who calls himself The Shadow.

"The existence of this enemy was revealed to me by Number Five. Through the Faithful Fifty, we captured a man whom we suspected. He would not reveal his identity. I have given him his choice. He must speak or die. His opportunity is nearly ended.

"Now I believe that our enemy The Shadow is still at large. Our captive is probably his agent. We must use every power that we possess to eliminate our enemy. What is your expression?"

"Death to The Shadow!"

The words came from one of the hooded figures.

"Death! Death!" echoed the others. Paget joined the chorus.

"Death to The Shadow," said the leader calmly.

Before he could speak again, the members of the group became suddenly rigid as they heard a startling sound.

From the door opposite the leader came seven taps.

An eighth man was seeking admittance to the sanctum of the Silent Seven!

There was a pause. Paget wondered what the leader would do. He could not imagine whom the intruder might be.

"Some one desires admittance," declared the leader, in a calm, solemn voice. "Before we reply to his request, let us identify ourselves. I am Number One--"

"Two." A robed figure called the number and stepped across the room beside the leader.

"Three." Another man took his place in line.

THE SILENT SEVEN

"Four." As the speaker moved to the front of the room, Paget awaited the proper instant to give his number. As he was about to speak, the man beside him stepped to the center of the room and said "Five."

Paget was too astounded to move. He could not understand the man's purpose. Five was his number not that of the one who had spoken. Some mistake had been made; it would not be wise to protest at this critical moment.

"Six." Paget heard the word, as another robed man called the number. He was now alone, standing before the line of silent men. His mind was in a state of utter confusion. He looked at his cowed companions. Every hood seemed turned so that invisible eyes were peering at him.

"Your number?"

The question was addressed to Paget by the leader. Now was no time to hesitate.

"Seven," said Paget, taking his place in line.

The leader walked to the door. There he turned and faced the solemn line.

"Keep your places," he said. "An impostor is present either here or in the outer room. Let us learn the number that he gives."

The leader tapped seven times upon the door. There were seven taps in return. A terrible realization came over Rodney Paget.

The real Number Seven was outside the room! The impostor was the man who had already entered as Number Seven!

WHEN the leader had called for numbers, the false member of the group had declared himself as five. By not protesting, Paget had been forced to declare himself as Seven. Now suspicion would be directed upon him!

He clenched his hands beneath the folds of the robe and felt the scarab ring. It reassured him. At least he had the mystic token that had served him before.

The man outside had been admitted. His responses met with the approval of the leader. Now the master of the group returned and singled out Paget, at the end of the line.

"Go with him!" ordered the leader.

Paget obeyed. He joined the new-comer.

"Your rings," demanded the leader.

Each member, beginning with Two, removed his scarab ring and passed it for the leader's inspection. Number One came to Paget and the man who had just entered. He examined their rings. Suddenly he pointed to Paget.

"Seize him!" he cried.

Paget was overpowered before he could resist. His arms were bound, and he was forced to a sitting position in the center of the room. The members of the group moved to the walls. The leader stood at the head.

THE SILENT SEVEN

"Before we reveal the prisoner's identity," he said, "we will ascertain if any member of the Seven has an accusation against this unknown man."

A figure stepped from the group and took his position at the door. He made the sign of the Seven. The leader responded.

"Number Five," came the declaration.

Paget was amazed. It was the impostor who was about to accuse him! The man who had declared himself as Number Five pointed an accusing finger toward Paget!

"How did you discover him?" he questioned.

"By his ring," replied the leader. "Each ring has a secret mark. I alone can identify each one by number. The only false ring is the one worn by our prisoner."

"I shall tell you how he obtained it," said the accuser. The other members of the group listened intently. "One of the Seven was murdered." The weirdness of his tone made Paget shudder. "Murdered by this prisoner."

"Why?" demanded the leader.

"This impostor desired to learn the secrets of the Seven," came the reply.

"The secrets are not written," declared the leader. "They are engraved only in the minds of our members."

The accuser ignored the objection.

"Originally," he went on, "the Silent Seven did not deal in open crime. But in recent years it has become a desperate organization that will stop at nothing.

"One of our group an old man abhorred our actions. He wanted to expose the Seven, but he hesitated through fear. He did, however, write a full confession in which he revealed the secrets of this group.

"He placed the confession in a secret drawer of his desk. He placed his scarab ring in the hands of a friend. He guarded that confession and hoped some day to make it public.

"A young man whom he had benefited, once saw him closing the secret drawer. The young man entered the house and stole the confession. He learned the secrets of the Seven.

"He came again and laid a trap to kill the old man. He succeeded. He also murdered the friend who wore the scarab ring. Then he joined the Seven as an impostor."

"If what you say is true –" began the leader.

"It is true," declared the man at the door. "I knew certain facts. I have discovered others. My case is complete. The thief did not destroy the confession. He kept it hidden that he might betray the Seven, if he needed to protect himself."

"Who is the man?"

The accuser pointed to Paget.

THE SILENT SEVEN

"Tell me, then," said the leader, "since this man possessed the secrets and the genuine ring, how did we discover him to-night?"

"Because another man intervened. He took the ring from the thief, but did not keep it at the time. He had a ring made to resemble it. He took the genuine ring and left the other in its place." The truth dawned upon Paget. He knew who was masked as Number Five. The Shadow!

That was why his room had been visited at Blake's home, on different nights. He understood the purpose of the silent figure on the lawn. He wanted to cry out his thoughts, but he was too alarmed to speak.

"Tell me," came the voice of the leader, "who was our member who was murdered? Since he is dead, he cannot be among us."

There was a threatening significance in his tone. Yet it did not phase the man who stood by the door.

"His name," said Paget's accuser, "was Henry Marchand."

"And his number –"

"Five."

"Then you are the man who took the ring from the thief," came the menacing voice of Number One. "You are not Number Five –" He stepped toward the speaker, and the members of the group began to move with him. "You are –"

"The Shadow!"

As the man at the door announced his identity, he placed his hand against the wall beside the door. A loud peal of mocking laughter came from beneath his hood. The door slid open. The Shadow stepped aside.

The gleam of flashlights startled the members of the Seven. The shot of a revolver sounded cannonlike in the secret chamber as Joe Cardona and his men invaded the sanctum of the Silent Seven!

The detective had fired the first shot as a warning. Now came his cry of "Hands up" as he entered the room, his men ranging beside him.

The leader of the Seven had stopped short; now he retreated slowly, his hands above his head. He was directly in front of the hidden niche at the far end of the room. The other members of the Seven were motionless, their hands raised above their heads in token of surrender.

A low chuckle came from the leader of the Silent Seven. The sound was ominous. It presaged danger. Cardona's hand tightened on his automatic as he covered his enemy.

"Stand where you are!" ordered the leader of the Seven. "You have tried to thwart the power of the Silent Seven. Not one of you shall live to tell what you have learned!"

He pressed his hand against the wall. There was a flash. Jets of blinding light shot from the sides of the room. The brilliance of lightning filled the room.

The invaders were completely dazzled by the terrific glare. Instinctively they buried their heads in their arms, to protect their eyes from the danger.

THE SILENT SEVEN

But the members of the Seven had understood their leader's action. They had closed their eyes beneath their dark hoods. The detectives were blinded and incapable of action.

Swiftly, as though in obedience to an implied command, the members of the desperate gang leaped across the room to join their leader.

The leader's hand reached to the top of the niche. It grasped a lever that extended from the wall. But before the clutching hand could draw the projecting rod, a pistol shot resounded.

One robed figure still stood among the dazed detectives The Shadow! He, like the members of the Seven, had anticipated the leader's move. The shot of his automatic was well aimed. His bullet grazed the raised fingers. The leader's hand fell to his side.

Five desperate men leaped to their leader's aid. Hands sought the lever that he had lost.

The merciless shots continued from The Shadow's automatic. Two robed men staggered and fell. But one grasping hand succeeded in its mission. Down came the lever. With its release, a metal curtain fell suddenly from the ceiling. A steel barrier was between the members of the Silent Seven and their enemies.

As the curtain descended, another blinding flash filled the room. The blinking detectives were completely overcome.

In the dim light that remained, The Shadow stooped to the floor. He peeled his robe from his body. Now he was clad in an inconspicuous dark-gray suit, a badge upon his vest. He appeared as one of the plain-clothes men who were with Joe Cardona. Now he was among the detectives, acting with amazing speed.

"Through the door!" he commanded. "This way!"

He forced the men from the room. They were staggering, helpless, not knowing which way to go. They could see nothing but the dazzling glare which still dominated their eyes.

The Shadow was the last to leave. He lifted the bound form of Rodney Paget as if it had been a figure of straw.

THE detectives were groping their way to the elevator. The first group filled the car and descended. Cardona, recovering his vision, turned to go back to the room where the Silent Seven had been. His path was blocked by the man who held the form of Rodney Paget.

"Stay here!" came the voice of The Shadow. "Hold this prisoner. Get him on the elevator when it comes up. There is not a moment to lose. Out! All of you!"

Cardona obeyed the command. The car was coming up again. He turned and ordered the rest of his men to enter. He felt himself pushed from behind as he staggered into the elevator with his prisoner. The car descended.

As the door opened at the first floor, a terrific explosion came from above. The whole building shook. Masses of stone and mortar crashed upon the top of the elevator. The detectives staggered from the car and made their way to the street.

They had escaped the doom intended for them by the leader of the Silent Seven. From somewhere in the depths of the building, that murderous criminal had set off a charge that had blown the meeting room to

pieces.

Had the dazed detectives been left to their own resources, they would have been unable to escape before the explosion. They had been saved because of the presence of one man The Shadow!

CHAPTER XXI. DEATH IS DELIVERED

UPPER Broadway was in a turmoil. Police whistles sounded. The sirens of fire trucks cleaved the air. Thousands of persons had been startled by the explosion that had wrecked the interior of the old apartment house. Police cordons were forming to keep back the excited crowd.

Joe Cardona was at work. He had recovered from the dazzling flares which had temporarily blinded him.

Inspector Timothy Klein was on the scene. He had followed the detective, and had arrived just after the explosion. Now he was commenting on the situation.

"It's lucky you got out, Joe," he said. "Otherwise, we'd never have got the dope on this. Seven of them you say –"

"Six," corrected Cardona. "We got one, you know."

"One's not enough!"

"Our men are in the streets."

A fire ladder had been raised against the side of the old apartment house. Smoke was pouring through the doors and windows. Cardona, awaiting the report of his men, paused to watch a fireman who was ascending the ladder. The task was a perilous one.

The wall was in danger of cracking, yet the man appeared unperturbed. He reached the top of the ladder and peered into the ruins beneath, as one would look into the crater of a smoldering volcano.

Then he gazed downward to the street. Other firemen were following him. The man at the top of the ladder laughed softly as he stepped from the ladder and stood upon the dizzy parapet.

Strangely enough, his eyes were not focused upon the ruins of the inner building. He was staring toward the roofs of the houses in the surrounding blocks.

His comrades were arriving. He made a last careful survey. His eye detected a small, dark trapdoor in the roof of a house across the street. Then his gaze followed along an entire block to a spot at the most distant corner.

The firemen were training a hose upon the blaze in the depths of the burning building. The man who had led the way suddenly stepped back upon the ladder and descended to the street. He became one of the many firemen who were working about the engines. Then he disappeared.

A moment later, some one tapped Detective Cardona upon the shoulder. Both the detective and the inspector turned to see a fireman in uniform. They did not recognize him as the man whom they had seen upon the ladder.

"You're looking for the guys that started this, aren't you?" asked the fireman.

THE SILENT SEVEN

"Yeah," said Cardona. "What about it?"

"Across the street," said the fireman, making a gesture with his thumb. "There's a trapdoor in the roof. Right over the hock shop. Looked to me like it moved. Maybe –"

"Get your men!" exclaimed Klein to Cardona.

As the detective and the inspector left, the fireman laughed softly to himself. He ignored his apparent duty as he walked away from the crowd and disappeared around the corner.

THE pawnshop designated by the fireman was closed. There was a locked door beside it that led to a flight of stairs. Cardona ordered three of his men to smash it.

Uniformed policemen pushed back the curious persons who were invading the side street, wondering what this new activity might mean.

The detectives broke down the door. They found a passageway beside the steps. As Cardona was urging his men to preserve quiet, one of his assistants approached him. The man had gone down the passage.

"Looks like there's a way downstairs here," he said.

"A passage under the street!" exclaimed Cardona. "Maybe that's it!"

He looked quickly about him and picked out three detectives.

"Find the way back!" he ordered. "Maybe some of them are trapped. But the rest of us are going up!"

The intrepid detective led the way. He and his men stole softly up the stairs. They paused to listen after they had gone three flights.

Cardona, his flashlight turned to the floor, hissed a command for silence. He fancied that he had heard a slight sound from above. Then he was sure of it. There was a distinct thump of a trapdoor being dropped.

"Come on, men!" exclaimed Cardona. "After them!"

The detectives rushed up the last flight. Cardona's light revealed a trapdoor which was moving. Some one was trying to force it into place.

The detective did not hesitate. He fired his automatic through the barrier. The trapdoor no longer moved. Lifted by two of his men, Cardona pushed it up and peered out upon the roof. The huddled form of a man lay in front of him.

Then came a revolver shot. A bullet splintered the trapdoor. Joe Cardona ducked. Then he put his hand through the opening and fired in the direction of the shots. There was no volley in return.

The detective and his men emerged upon the roof. Crouching in the darkness, they gazed in all directions. They could see no one.

Then came a shout from the building across the street. Firemen on top of the burning apartment house had heard the shots. They were signaling. One of them pointed in the distance.

THE SILENT SEVEN

"Come on!"

It was Cardona's command. He started the pursuit over the irregular roofs, leaving one of his men to search the victim who had been killed by the shots through the trapdoor.

Clambering over a small wall between two buildings, Cardona sighted his quarry. Five men were making their way across the roofs. Two of them were leaning upon the others.

CARDONA'S revolver spoke. His shots went wide. The five men scattered. Each one dropped to the roof. They seemed to be seeking safety.

With a shout of triumph, Cardona leaped from the wall, and his men followed.

Then came the answering fire. The members of the Silent Seven shot with deadly aim. Two of Cardona's men fell.

"Behind the wall!" screamed Cardona. His cry was too late. There were five men with him; all had come forward. Two were out of the fight. The others fired with their automatics.

Answering shots came from the enemy. Another of Cardona's men gasped and collapsed.

Cardona raised himself to fire. A shot came from across the roof. The detective's arm dropped helplessly as a bullet struck his wrist.

The odds were against the detectives. Cardona realized that. The merciless survivors of the Silent Seven were about to exterminate the detectives. There was no hope.

Cardona saw a hooded figure rise boldly, by the edge of the roof. He knew that he was the man's target; and he was helpless. His eyes were staring. Then he heard the report of a revolver.

He thought the hooded man had fired. To his amazement, the man toppled and plunged headlong from the roof of the building!

Then Cardona saw who had fired. Another man had appeared, through an opening close by the spot where the last of the Seven were grouped. Standing like an avenging specter, this newcomer had shot the man whose gun was trained upon the helpless detective!

"The Shadow!" exclaimed Cardona. "The Shadow!"

Four hooded men arose as one. They were the last of the Silent Seven. With one accord, they hurled themselves at the man who blocked their path to safety. The Shadow's gun spoke again and again and again. His enemies went down all but one.

The last man flung himself upon The Shadow. For a moment they grappled. Then Cardona saw The Shadow fall, perilously near the edge of the roof. Neither he nor his opponent fired.

The last man of the Silent Seven threw himself once more against The Shadow, who seemed to topple over the edge. Without waiting, the robed man dashed to the opening in the roof, to make his escape.

Vengeance filled Cardona's mind. He was helpless. He could only cry out in anger. One of his detectives responded.

THE SILENT SEVEN

The sound of shots came close beside Cardona. He fancied that he saw the robed figure tremble and sway as it went swiftly through the opening in the roof.

Cardona arose. Forgetful of his own wound, he hurried forward to the spot where he had last seen The Shadow. There was a wall straight down to the street. It was studded with windows. There was no sign of The Shadow.

A limousine started along the street and turned the corner. Cardona realized that it was taking the escaping man to safety; that it contained the grim fighter who had overcome The Shadow!

His conjecture was correct. In the limousine speeding toward Broadway, a stern-faced man sat muttering in the darkness of the back seat. He had thrown his robe from his shoulders. Each passing street light revealed the features of a middle-aged man whose face bore a long, narrow scar.

A VOICE spoke in the darkness. Its tones were a low, harsh whisper, that were heard only by the man in back. The chauffeur could not hear the voice. The glass partition between him and the back barred the sound.

The man with the scarred face turned in amazement to see a stranger whose black cloak and broad-brimmed hat made him almost invisible.

"So," said the voice. "I have the pleasure of being with Professor Marvin Jukes. You, I take it, are the leader of the Silent Seven."

The grim-faced man tightened his lips.

"A man of high standing to the public," came the ironical tones of the sinister voice. "But at heart a criminal the leader of a gang of criminals!"

There was no reply.

"The Silent Seven," repeated the voice, hissing the words. "Each member kept a reminder of his duty. Like Marchand's dice. Always the number seven. There were seven. Now there is only one the last of the Seven!"

"Who are you?" demanded the man with the scarred face.

"They call me The Shadow," came the reply. "You thought that I no longer existed after our struggle on the roof. But I am used to walls, professor. When I go down them, I do not fall. You left me too soon. I came down and found your limousine awaiting you."

"What do you want of me?"

"You know my purpose." The Shadow's voice was significant. "You have captured one of my men. He is in danger. You alone know where he is. I offer you your life in exchange for his. Tell me where he is!"

The leader of the Seven did not reply. He was staring straight ahead, as though he did not hear The Shadow's words.

"Will you answer me?" came the whispered voice.

"Yes," replied Jukes slowly. "This is my answer."

THE SILENT SEVEN

His hand had crept to a pocket in the side of the car. Now he swung his body around and thrust an automatic toward The Shadow.

But Jukes had not reckoned on the alertness of that strange man in black. A viselike grip caught his wrist. Try as he might, Jukes could not carry the few inches that were necessary to aim it toward The Shadow.

The men locked in a grim struggle. Jukes was determined to kill this enemy the only man who had ever thwarted the machinations of the Silent Seven. With a quick twist he wrenched free.

Before he could swing the gun into play, a sudden expression of anguish appeared upon his face. He slumped back into the corner of the car. He pressed his hand against his side.

The parting shots fired by Cardona's plain-clothes man had not been in vain. The wounds which Jukes had received had spelled his doom, although he had at first been almost oblivious to them.

His urge to kill The Shadow had sustained him despite his serious condition. Now, his strength was sagging. The Shadow plucked the gun from his hand and held it before his eyes.

"Answer me!" hissed The Shadow. "Answer me or die!"

An ugly leering smile came over the features of Professor Jukes. Even in this last moment, the evil leader of the Silent Seven gloated in triumph.

He did not fear The Shadow. A new enemy was conquering him, and that enemy was death. His head dropped forward. A sighing gasp came from his lips. His hands fell to his side.

The Shadow leaned over the leader of the Silent Seven. He placed his hand against the man's forehead. The car stopped before a traffic light.

The Shadow opened the door and slipped silently to the street. The limousine moved onward, carrying the dead body of Professor Jukes, and The Shadow's hope of rescuing Harry Vincent!

CHAPTER XXII. THE POWER OF THE SEVEN

CLYDE BURKE rubbed his eyes and looked about him. He was dressed and sitting in a reclining chair. His head no longer throbbed; all images of objects about him were clear and well defined.

He began to remember the events which had passed. He recalled various awakenings, and clearly recollected the last visit of the physician.

The doctor had said that he was virtually well; but had insisted that he rest a while longer. Clyde had dressed, and had been placed in this chair. A few scattered thoughts had worried him at the time, but he had yielded to the doctor's orders to forget his worries.

His mind reverted to the encounter in front of Paget's apartment. How long ago was it? A day? A week? Time seemed strangely vague.

Suddenly a terrifying thought dominated the young man. What had become of Harry Vincent? Clyde closed his eyes and pictured the entrance to a warehouse on Sixty-ninth Street. That was the spot where Harry had disappeared and he, Clyde Burke, had not reported it!

THE SILENT SEVEN

Good fortune favored his desire for duty. Clyde was alone in a lounge room. He remembered walking here from the ward, with a nurse supporting him. He rose unsteadily and entered the corridor.

There was no one in view. He walked along and passed a desk where a nurse was writing a report. He managed to go by unseen. He found a stairway and went down. A door at the right attracted him. He pushed it open, and found himself in a short corridor on the first floor. There was an open door that led to the ambulance driveway.

Without a moment's hesitation, Clyde Burke left the hospital.

He was weak when he reached a taxi stand. He entered a cab and gave an address to the driver. He closed his eyes and rested.

After interminable moments, the cab stopped. Clyde entered the lobby of an antiquated hotel, where he made his way to a public phone booth that was virtually out of sight in a secluded corner.

He dropped a nickel in the slot and dialed a number. When he heard the ringing of the bell at the other end, he hung up the receiver. His nickel tumbled into the coin return.

Clyde used it again and called the same number. After a few rings, he again hung up and retrieved his coin. Then he waited.

At the lunch counter in the Grand Central Station, the silent attendant had noticed a ringing of the phone in the booth opposite. He heard its sudden termination, and kept on serving a customer until it rang again.

Then he left the counter and entered the back room. He dialed a number on the telephone.

Clyde Burke's weary voice answered the call.

"Burbank," said the attendant.

"Burke," came the reply.

"Report. Where is V.?"

Burke's voice was unintelligible for a moment. Then it became suddenly coherent. He poured out the story of Vincent's pursuit of Rodney Paget.

"You're hurt?" questioned Burbank tersely.

"Just out of the hospital and they don't know it," came Burke's reply.

"Can you get to the Metrolite Hotel?"

"Yes. I'm feeling better now."

"Go there, then. Stay in V's room."

Burbank hung up the phone. He dialed another number. There was no response. He went back to the counter and returned a few minutes later. He dialed again. This time there was an answer.

THE SILENT SEVEN

"Burbank," he said.

"Report," came the voice.

Burbank made sure that no one was near by. Then he gave the information that he had received from Clyde Burke. He condensed it into terse, essential details.

"Good!" came the voice. "Be ready!" The receiver clicked at the other end.

TWELVE minutes later, a cab pulled up at the corner of Sixty-ninth Street and Ninth Avenue. The passenger paid the driver before he left.

He hurried from the cab and strode rapidly westward. He crossed the street and stopped in the shadow of the warehouse. He became strangely obscure as he approached the entrance. He seemed to be avoiding any watchful eyes.

The window across the street was open; and the man on duty was alert. He raised his gun as he saw a shadow appear on the pavement beneath the light at the warehouse entrance. He lowered the weapon when he saw that he had been deceived by a mere shadow which disappeared as suddenly as it had come.

A man was in the passageway, moving silently along toward the turn. It was The Shadow, feeling his way through the darkness, a creature of the night garbed in his cloak of sinister black.

The Shadow reached the wooden steps. He stopped short as his foot touched the boards. He tapped the wood with the toe of his shoe. He seemed to wonder why wooden steps had been inserted in this cement passageway.

Up he went, step by step. As he reached the top, he sank downward and clutched one of the steps as he placed his weight upon the landing. The boards sagged beneath him. The Shadow laughed softly.

He let the trap open and his flashlight came into play. It revealed the space into which Harry Vincent had fallen, two nights before. The Shadow slipped into the pit and landed with catlike skill. He turned his flashlight upward to observe the trap as it closed above him.

He turned off the light and stood in the darkness, waiting. He expected an attack, and he was not disappointed. A doorway opened and two men came in. They expected to find a half-stunned victim. Instead, they were met by a powerful onslaught that came from the darkness.

One man gasped as he was struck by the butt of an automatic. The other sank beneath a driving fist. The Shadow laughed as he turned on his light and surveyed the men he had defeated.

He drew a pair of handcuffs from his pocket and locked them on the man who had passed into oblivion from the blow of the automatic. The other was groggy, but not unconscious. The Shadow prodded him with his revolver.

The fellow opened his eyes and raised his hands at sight of the automatic.

"Up!" ordered The Shadow. "Lead the way. Take me where you took the last man who came here two nights ago."

The man obeyed. He walked ahead and opened an artfully concealed door. This revealed a dim passage.

THE SILENT SEVEN

With The Shadow's automatic reminding him of his helplessness, the prisoner was sullenly obedient. He knew that his captor would brook no trickery. He turned through various passages, up steps, until, by an air shaft, he arrived at an automatic elevator.

The man entered, and The Shadow followed. They ascended, The Shadow's torch filling the car with light. The elevator stopped. The man walked into a small, barren room that had no outlet. He stopped.

"Go on!" ordered The Shadow.

"This is the end," replied his prisoner.

"The end?"

"So help me. It is where we left him. I don't know what happened to him after that."

"Turn around!" The Shadow threw his light into the man's face. He saw that the fellow had spoken the truth.

"Does the elevator go up higher?" questioned The Shadow.

"This is the top," was the reply.

The Shadow stepped in the elevator and threw his light upward. Not for one instant did he lower the gun that covered the other man. Yet in that brief inspection he detected a space above the elevator.

"Come in," ordered The Shadow.

WHILE his victim cowered in the corner of the car, the man in the black cloak ran his hands about the interior of the elevator. He found an ornamental molding. His keen fingers detected a concealed button. He pressed it. The car moved upward.

It stopped in another small compartment. The Shadow forced his prisoner out. This room had a steel door on the opposite side. The Shadow pressed about it and found a catch that moved the frame of the steel doorway to one side.

A keyhole was revealed. The Shadow produced a slender, pointed steel instrument. In less than a minute he picked the lock. The door slid into the wall.

The Shadow's light revealed the headquarters from which the leader of the Silent Seven had sent his orders.

The appearance of the mystery room might have been puzzling to some other person. The Shadow, however, wasted no time in surprised inspection. He found the light in the corner and turned it on.

He noted a crack in the wall, and saw that it was a door faced with tiny holes. The Shadow probed these openings with his pick. He sprang a catch and opened the door. It was an empty closet.

"In," commanded The Shadow. He forced his prisoner into the closet and closed the door upon him. Then he looked around the room.

There were no other entrances. The Shadow tapped the walls. He heard hollow sounds at spots. When he came to a solid place he paused and smiled. He was conversant with the ingenuity of the master of the Silent Seven. The opening that he suspected would probably be at the place where the wall was solid.

THE SILENT SEVEN

The Shadow stopped, suddenly intent. Until now, he had not been noiseless in his actions. He paused to listen. He heard the faint throbbing of some mechanism below the room.

Thrusting his automatic beneath his cloak, The Shadow began to act with great rapidity, as though realizing that time was precious. His sensitive fingers groped along the wall. Time and again, they covered every inch, until finally an invisible catch yielded. A solid sheet of metal slid upward. It revealed a spiral stairway.

The throbbing sound became more distinct.

The Shadow descended. At the bottom he found another barrier. This time his fingers were more familiar with the trick. They found the catch and another sheet of metal rose into the wall. The Shadow stopped abruptly. He realized now that he had come in the wrong garb.

This was unquestionably a haunt of the master of the Silent Seven. The Shadow had expected to find this place empty. Had he suspected a person here, he would have donned a hooded robe instead of the cloak and black hat which he now wore.

For directly before him, with hands alert and face leering with ferocity, stood a giant of a man. So close was the monster that The Shadow was virtually in his power. The man in the black cloak seemed a pygmy in front of this huge bulk.

HAD the light of the passage been more bright, and had Bron's wits been keener, The Shadow's quest would have come to a sad ending. But in the doorway, with darkness behind him, The Shadow's cloak and hat bore a resemblance to the hood and cowl of the master of the Silent Seven. The similarity was enough to make Bron doubtful.

The giant hesitated momentarily as his hands approached The Shadow's throat, and his gaze turned downward. The Shadow divined his thought. His left hand came from beneath his robe, and Bron observed the scarab ring which he was wearing. The giant stepped back a pace and bowed.

"The sign," he said.

The Shadow had virtually memorized the instructions that he had read in Henry Marchand's confession. He knew that this huge man must be a member of the Faithful Fifty. He did not know what method Number One might use in speaking to him; but he assumed that the usual countersign was employed.

"Faithful," he said.

His hand clutched his automatic as he spoke, and he was none too soon. The giant had leaped forward the moment that the word was uttered.

Bron's arm struck The Shadow's wrist as the man in black was pressing his finger to the trigger. For once, The Shadow's finger slipped and the gun nearly fell from his hand.

Recovering it, he swung the automatic to the right, and its heavy barrel struck the giant's jaw.

The blow did not stop Bron; but it turned his attention. With a sudden grasp, he plucked the revolver from The Shadow's hand and flung it across the passage. He caught The Shadow's arms and sought to hurl the man against the stone side of the corridor.

Then began a terrible conflict. The Shadow, with all his amazing power, was no match for the giant. He

THE SILENT SEVEN

managed only to keep his antagonist from hurling him against the wall. He tried to wrest himself free from that mammoth clutch, and in the effort was forced to the other end of the corridor.

Bron had gripped The Shadow's arms and was forcing them back over the shoulders. The Shadow's hands were free, but helpless. As Bron ground them against the wall, they encountered a master switch.

A gleam of quick understanding came to the flashing eyes that were peering from beneath the broad-brimmed hat. With his right hand, The Shadow pulled the switch.

The muffled sound of machinery ended abruptly. Bron's ferocity was suddenly curbed by the occurrence. He released his hold upon the right arm of The Shadow and reached for the switch. At the same time, he showed his brute strength to the fullest as he used his right arm to whirl The Shadow sidewise across the passage.

The Shadow's hat protected his head as he crashed against the wall. In that moment of half-stunned defeat, his weakened arm stretched out, and his hand struck against the leg of the stool which was Bron's customary resting place.

The Shadow had dropped to one knee. He rose from the floor, starting a mighty swing. Bron, turning to finish his enemy, saw it coming, but too late.

The stool was a terrible weapon. It knocked aside the giant's upraised arm. The legs of the stool broke into fragments as they struck the monster's head. The Shadow's formidable foe collapsed in a huge heap.

THE SHADOW was weak and breathless. Then he realized that the throbbing of the machinery had begun again when Bron had pressed the switch.

Above the sound he heard another noise. A weak tapping at the end of the corridor. He drew back the switch. He went to the door and found the hidden catch. The door arose and showed a most amazing sight.

Harry Vincent was prone on the floor, below the level of the door. His hands were reaching through a space scarcely more than a foot in width. Above him was a long, dark platform, like the level of a huge elevator. From beneath came a weird light the last illumination furnished by the frame at the opposite end of the corridor of death!

The Shadow gripped Harry's hands and pulled him through the narrow opening. It was a tight, close squeeze. For a moment it seemed as though the man's body could not get through the space. Then Harry was free.

He lay motionless upon the floor of the passage, faint from the ordeal he had undergone.

"Were you alone?" came The Shadow's whispered question.

Harry nodded weakly. The Shadow let the door drop and pulled the switch to complete the descent of the platform.

While the mechanism thrummed, he looked at Bron. The giant eyes were glassy. The Shadow's mighty blow had killed him.

The man in the black cloak turned silently to the door at the side of the corridor. Here, again, his fingers sought the secret switch. The door arose. A lighted room lay beyond.

A man was sitting in a chair, his head buried against his arm. The Shadow approached and tapped him. The

THE SILENT SEVEN

man looked up hopelessly toward the figure in black. It was Wilbur Blake, haggard and unshaven!

With Blake's aid, The Shadow carried Vincent up the spiral stairway. He released the man in the closet and made him conduct the party from the building. They made their exit near the air shaft through which they had passed on their journey.

Headquarters received another mysterious phone call that night. It resulted in the dispatch of a patrol to Tenth Avenue.

The police found a man bound and gagged in an air shaft beside a warehouse. They also discovered another man in a pit beneath an ingenious trapdoor.

They investigated a labyrinth of passages beneath the warehouse. Making a round-up of the neighborhood, they captured one suspicious character, and uncovered a room in the house across the way from the side entrance of the building.

A man had fled from the room just prior to their arrival. He had left behind him an automatic fitted with silencer.

But they did not penetrate to the sanctum which had once belonged to the commander of the Silent Seven. Nor did they reach the corridor below, where the body of a giant man lay at the end of the passage. Bron's watch post had become his tomb.

CHAPTER XXIII. THE RETURN

THE end of the Silent Seven was a tremendous newspaper story. To Detective Joe Cardona went the credit for the extermination of the most amazing gang of criminals that New York had known in years! Rodney Paget collapsed under grilling, after confessing to the murders of Henry Marchand and Doctor George Lukens.

The identities of the dead members of the Silent Seven created a tremendous stir.

One was a prominent lawyer; another a well-known politician. Two were figures in the underworld, reputed gang leaders, who had constantly eluded the law. One was a prominent banker.

But the discovery of the body of Professor Jukes, deserted in his limousine just beyond the city limits, created the greatest surprise. This man had been a noted scholar. Now he proved to be the master mind of a powerful organization whose existence the police had scarcely suspected!

Detectives were rounding up members of the Faithful Fifty. Every hour was bringing new disclosures. The Silent Seven had already been linked with half a dozen unsolved crimes.

Investigators were hard at work, tracing the checkered career of this desperate gang that had worked for years in silence, spreading their crimes at intervals, never even leaving a tangible clew.

It was during the lull that followed the first feverish efforts of the police that Inspector Timothy Klein and Detective Joe Cardona arrived at the home of Wilbur Blake.

They sat in the living room of the millionaire's big house. The inspector looked approvingly toward the detective. Cardona's face bore signs of tremendous strain. His arm was in a sling.

THE SILENT SEVEN

"Great work, Joe," said Klein. "Great work."

"We're tying up the Seven with that Bradstreet Bank hold-up," said Cardona wearily. "Their fifty men were at work that time. They killed two bank guards –"

The inspector nodded. Then he waved his hand.

"But what about here, Joe?" he questioned. "How do the Seven figure in this? Who killed Blake? Have you quizzed Paget?"

"Yes. But he couldn't answer. He was all busted up when I flashed that paper that we found on him.

"It was Marchand's confession, you know. It told all about the Silent Seven. Paget blabbed after he saw that. Told us how he had seen Marchand opening the secret drawer; how he had stolen the confession.

"He murdered Marchand, and he murdered Lukens to get the ring that the doctor wore. He used a gun with a silencer. Threw it into the river, over one of the bridges, while he was riding with a drunken friend."

"I can't figure out why Blake was killed," said Klein slowly. "It looks like the Seven did it, right enough. He was about to pull a business deal that's all we know. Some stranger mixed himself in it. If we had the motive for –"

"We've got to get it."

"From whom? The only man who could tell us is Blake himself."

The inspector paused. He looked at Herbert. The butler was staring at the side door with wild eyes. He looked like a man who had seen a ghost.

There, in the doorway, stood Wilbur Blake. The lips beneath the waxed moustache held a faint smile.

Cardona gasped. Had Blake been brought back to life by that amazing man they called The Shadow?

"You thought I was dead," said Wilbur Blake.

"We did!" said Inspector Klein.

"I saw you dead!" cried Cardona. "Dead in the room next to this! Dead in the morgue –"

"It was another man," explained Blake.

"Another man!" exclaimed Cardona.

"Yes," said the millionaire quietly. "I was merely abducted. Taken away by order of the Silent Seven. They kept me alive, because they thought they might need me later. I was rescued last night."

"By whom?"

"By a man in a black cloak. I didn't see his face, beneath his hat brim. He took me to a hotel, and on the way he told me the facts. Then he disappeared."

THE SILENT SEVEN

"The Shadow!" cried Cardona.

"After my abduction," said Blake, "another man was put here in my place. His name was Dodge. This chap you call The Shadow knows a bit about him. Says that if you get his finger prints in the morgue, you will find that he did a term in Sing Sing.

"My friend" the words were sarcastic "my friend Paget found this fellow Dodge. The Silent Seven put him in here to raise havoc with my possessions. The Shadow came out here to expose him. In the fracas, Dodge was killed!"

"That lets Otto out," said Cardona. "Dodge was committing a crime when he took your place. It won't take us long to trace his criminal record. You'll have your chauffeur back double-quick, Mister Blake."

Some one knocked at the door. Herbert admitted Clyde Burke. The ex-reporter grinned at Cardona.

"Hot stuff, Joe," he said. "I've just taken a job with the Evening Classic. I want first crack at this story. I got a tip-off that Wilbur Blake wasn't dead, after all."

BURKE'S story of Wilbur Blake's return was a masterpiece of tabloid news. The caption, "Back from the Dead," appeared beneath Wilbur Blake's picture.

It was a sensational conclusion to the story of the Silent Seven. Following it came the identification of the dead man, Dodge; and after that, the conviction of Rodney Paget as a murderer.

But nothing was ever said about the grueling ordeal undergone by Harry Vincent. No mention was made about the part which Blake had played.

The identity of the man who had visited Dodge, and who had later escaped from the overturned speedster, remained a mystery. The battle between the man in the black cloak and the giant Bron was unrecorded by the press.

Those facts were written only in the private annals of The Shadow!

THE END