

THE SALAMANDERS

Maxwell Grant

Table of Contents

<u>THE SALAMANDERS.....</u>	<u>1</u>
Maxwell Grant.....	1
<u>CHAPTER I. FIRE OF DOOM.....</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>CHAPTER II. THE LONE TRAIL.....</u>	<u>5</u>
<u>CHAPTER III. THE BROKEN TRAIL.....</u>	<u>10</u>
<u>CHAPTER IV. CROOKS AGREE.....</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>CHAPTER V. THE TRAIL REGAINED.....</u>	<u>18</u>
<u>CHAPTER VI. THE VOICE OF DEATH.....</u>	<u>22</u>
<u>CHAPTER VII. FOEMEN OF THE FLAMES.....</u>	<u>25</u>
<u>CHAPTER VIII. THE ODDS FAIL.....</u>	<u>29</u>
<u>CHAPTER IX. THE THIRD CAMPAIGN.....</u>	<u>33</u>
<u>CHAPTER X. THE THIRD CAR.....</u>	<u>37</u>
<u>CHAPTER XI. DEATH IN THE DARK.....</u>	<u>42</u>
<u>CHAPTER XII. THE ORDEAL.....</u>	<u>47</u>
<u>CHAPTER XIII. THE FIERY PIT.....</u>	<u>51</u>
<u>CHAPTER XIV. CRIME'S HOUR.....</u>	<u>56</u>
<u>CHAPTER XV. THE DYNAMITE BOX CAR.....</u>	<u>60</u>
<u>CHAPTER XVI. THE SHADOW'S COURSE.....</u>	<u>64</u>
<u>CHAPTER XVII. DRUNE'S DECREE.....</u>	<u>67</u>
<u>CHAPTER XVIII. FROM THE SKY.....</u>	<u>70</u>
<u>CHAPTER XIX. THE FINAL FRAY.....</u>	<u>72</u>
<u>CHAPTER XX. THE DEPARTURE.....</u>	<u>75</u>

THE SALAMANDERS

Maxwell Grant

This page copyright © 2001 Blackmask Online.

<http://www.blackmask.com>

- [CHAPTER I. FIRE OF DOOM](#)
- [CHAPTER II. THE LONE TRAIL](#)
- [CHAPTER III. THE BROKEN TRAIL](#)
- [CHAPTER IV. CROOKS AGREE](#)
- [CHAPTER V. THE TRAIL REGAINED](#)
- [CHAPTER VI. THE VOICE OF DEATH](#)
- [CHAPTER VII. FOEMEN OF THE FLAMES](#)
- [CHAPTER VIII. THE ODDS FAIL](#)
- [CHAPTER IX. THE THIRD CAMPAIGN](#)
- [CHAPTER X. THE THIRD CAR](#)
- [CHAPTER XI. DEATH IN THE DARK](#)
- [CHAPTER XII. THE ORDEAL](#)
- [CHAPTER XIII. THE FIERY PIT](#)
- [CHAPTER XIV. CRIME'S HOUR](#)
- [CHAPTER XV. THE DYNAMITE BOX CAR](#)
- [CHAPTER XVI. THE SHADOW'S COURSE](#)
- [CHAPTER XVII. DRUNE'S DECREE](#)
- [CHAPTER XVIII. FROM THE SKY](#)
- [CHAPTER XIX. THE FINAL FRAY](#)
- [CHAPTER XX. THE DEPARTURE](#)

CHAPTER I. FIRE OF DOOM

"FIRE! Fire!"

The shouts rose hoarsely on the midnight air. The glare of rising flames showed wild-eyed men as they dashed to spread the alarm.

Madness had gripped the town of Riverport; excitement of a sort that the little Southern city had never before known. The crackling blaze that had come into sudden life was a threat that promised great disaster.

The fire had started in the Capital Hotel – the principal structure that adorned the main street of Riverport. The blaze had arisen like a living monster coming out of hiding.

A burst of flame; smoke pouring bodily through ground-floor windows; then demonish tongues of fire, lapping upward, crackling on to fury.

The Capitol Hotel was a fire trap.

"Fire!"

THE SALAMANDERS

Faces were answering the shouts. White faces peered from upstairs windows. Staring eyes saw the flickering reflections of the flames. Faces disappeared from sight. Occupants of the hotel were hastily preparing for escape.

The wail of a fire siren split the night air. The alarm had been given. The clanging of bells told that Riverport's fire engines were emerging to fight the flames; Those engines were coming to a hopeless task. Nothing could stop that fire. The flimsy, wooden walls of the old frame hotel were perfect fuel for the devouring flames.

Within the burning building, commotion reigned. Men were dashing about, pounding upon doors, shouting through corridors. Their one hope was to arouse their fellow guests, then make a dash for safety. There was no time to linger.

Nevertheless, in all that bedlam, there was one man who acted with calmness. He was the occupant of Room 408. His name was Harry Vincent. Aroused by a hammering upon his door, Harry had shouted his response. Out of bed, he was donning his clothes by the light of the fire that other buildings reflected through his window.

There was a reason for this man's precision, his ability to avoid the panic that had overtaken others. Harry Vincent was an agent of The Shadow. He was a man trained to remain calm in the face of danger.

Though he knew that speed was necessary, Harry had other thoughts than those of escape. He was remembering the mission that had brought him to the city of Riverport, to register at the Capitol Hotel.

Chester Woldorf.

THE name drummed through Harry's brain, more vividly than the clanging of bells, or the wailing of the shrieking siren. Woldorf was the cause of Harry's presence here. Like Harry, Woldorf was a guest at the Capitol Hotel.

Harry had seen Woldorf in the lobby last night. He knew the man's room number: 411, almost across the hall from Harry's own room. Woldorf had retired at eleven o'clock. He had left a call for seven in the morning. Harry had left a call for the same hour.

Harry had guessed that Woldorf would take the eight o'clock train to New York. It had been Harry's plan to do the same. Woldorf, for some reason not yet determined, was a man who feared a threat.

That fact had been learned by The Shadow. Threats indicated crime; The Shadow, always at war with men of evil, had delegated Harry to take up Woldorf's trail.

Bells were clanging from the street below. Water from fire hoses was fizzing uselessly, drowned by the increasing crackle of the flames. The light of the fire had become a ghoulish, crimson glow. The glare outlined Harry Vincent as he yanked open the door of his room.

Dressed, Harry was ready for departure. An overwhelming cloud of blackish smoke greeted him in the corridor. Harry was prepared for it. Burying his face in the bend of his elbow, he groped his way across the hall. His free hand found the knob of Woldorf's door.

Smoke had cleared partially, thanks to the draught created when Harry had opened his own door. The flames had not reached this floor. There was time to make sure that Woldorf had heard the alarm. Harry pounded furiously upon the door of Room 411.

THE SALAMANDERS

There was no response. Smoke thickened as it floated along the corridor. Holding his breath, Harry backed away, then launched himself like a battering-ram against the door of Woldorf's room. Shoulder first, he splintered the rickety barrier. Stumbling, Harry caught himself before he sprawled upon the floor.

Smoke had followed Harry's charge. Clutching like a shroud of doom, it was filling Woldorf's room. The opened window sucked smoke outward. Flickering flame light became dim, but the glow remained enough for Harry to view the room. Steadied by the broken door, The Shadow's agent gazed in horror.

On the floor, beside the bed, lay an upturned figure clad in pajamas. Harry saw a pale face, with lips half opened, fishlike beneath a droopy mustache. Below was a mass of crimson, splotched and streaked across the front of Woldorf's pajama jacket.

That blotted mass of crimson was Chester Woldorf's lifeblood. The man had been stabbed in the heart!

A CRACKLING drilled Harry's numbed brain. Yellowish flicker weaved across the inner walls of the room. From somewhere came the muffled crash of falling beams. Harry turned about toward the corridor.

The fire had reached this floor. Brief minutes would make the room a trap. There was no aid for Woldorf – no time to search for clues. Harry had gained enough. He had learned what some assassin had sought to cover; namely, that Chester Woldorf had been murdered before the fire had begun in the Capitol Hotel.

Springing from the room, Harry chose a direction away from the flames. Smoke had lessened. Though he was choking, Harry knew that he would be safe if he could reach a stairway or a fire escape.

Smoke destroyed the lighting effect of the flames. It was only by pressing his hand along the wall that Harry found the stairway he wanted.

Harry stumbled as he struck the first steps. He caught himself against a rail beside the heated wall. A fist clamped his arm; he heard a gasped voice beside him:

"Steady, friend. Take it easy. We'll get out this way."

Harry coughed his thanks. He turned his head as they descended. The flickering flame light from a stairway window showed the features of the man whom he had encountered. Harry took the fellow for another guest who had blundered toward this path to safety.

The man on the stairway was sallow of countenance. His hair was dark; his eyes, bulging, carried a blackish glitter. Seeing the man's profile, Harry noted a solid, out-thrust jaw.

As the man's face turned and grinned toward him, Harry observed a hardness of the lips that was matched even by the wrinkles of the furrowed forehead.

"We'll make it."

The hard-faced man spoke raspily, as they reached a landing and continued downward.

"Easily," returned Harry. "The smoke has thinned. We are almost to the second floor."

"We're there. Keep your head down. it's going to be smoky the rest of the way."

THE SALAMANDERS

The hard-faced man was right. He and Harry continued their descent blindly, clutching to the rail. Harry took a false step as he reached the bottom. His heel clanked stone. He knew that he had struck a side exit on the ground floor of the hotel.

Blinking in the smoke, he saw his companion. Ruddy light from the interior of the burning hotel showed the hard-faced man stumbling toward another flight of steps.

"Hold it!" coughed Harry. He sprang across to block off his companion. "Don't go any farther! Those steps lead down into the basement!"

The hard-faced man no longer wavered. He straightened. His grin was livid as he saw Harry, arms outstretched, at the very top of the stone steps. A hoarse gasp came from Harry's lips. At that instant, Harry knew who this man must be.

The hard-faced man was the murderer of Chester Woldorf!

Harry's cry told what he knew. It was all that the hard-faced man wanted. Before Harry could bring his arms up, his leering companion swung a tough, swift fist. The punch clipped Harry's jaw.

WITHOUT an outcry, The Shadow's agent tumbled backward. Slugged clear of the top step, he went tumbling, rolling to the bottom of the stone stairs.

Leering, the hard-faced man saw the final crash. Rolling over twice, Harry Vincent lay still and helpless, deep in the basement of the doomed hotel.

Smoke enveloped the prone body. The hard-faced man turned about. As he stumbled toward the exit, it was wrenched open. Rescuers from outside grabbed the murderer and helped him to the outside air. Coughing, two firemen clattered inward and stared through thickening smoke.

"See if there's any others," ordered one. "Maybe down those steps –"

"There's nobody there. That's the basement."

Smoke had totally obscured Harry Vincent's unconscious form. The opening of the outside door had brought the smoke upward. Peering through the dense smoke, the firemen saw nothing. They stood, shouting at the exit. They heard no answering calls. While they waited, the finish came.

Fire crackled wildly from above. Walls trembled. Beams burst with a roar. Downward, a flaming mass, came the whole interior of the old hotel. As the firemen leaped to outside safety, the walls crumbled.

From a blazing framework, the hotel was transformed into a pitlike furnace, where flames rose rampant and sparks soared high into the night.

The bed of that furnace was the basement where Harry Vincent had sprawled. No human being could have lain there and survived.

Crushing timbers, ablaze from end to end; masses of flaming woodwork; an entire ruin that crackled anew like a mammoth bonfire – such was the remains of the old hotel.

Survivors had scattered. Other buildings were ablaze. The fire had reached an office building; it had swept to a garage in back of the hotel. Automobiles were being removed by frenzied owners. Puffs of flame formed

THE SALAMANDERS

twenty-foot torches as gasoline tanks ignited.

Firemen were everywhere, working like madmen to save other buildings. Riverport's small police force was on hand. Tumult reigned as the holocaust continued. Volunteers were joining in the fight against the flames.

The ruins of the Capitol Hotel were forgotten by all men except one. He was the hard-faced murderer, the last to grope his own way out from the interior of the hotel fire, alive. A block away, he was standing beside an automobile. His face showed an evil gloat, his dark eyes surveyed the spreading flames.

The hard-faced man was pleased. He had slain Chester Woldorf. He had removed Harry Vincent – the only man who had learned that Woldorf was murdered. All evidence of crime lay buried in that fire-seethed pit that had once been topped by the old Capitol Hotel.

The murderer's leer showed that he expected no reckoning. In that, the gloating killer was to find himself mistaken.

Crime would soon receive its challenge from The Shadow.

CHAPTER II. THE LONE TRAIL

SMOLDERING ruins marked the business section of Riverport. The spreading hotel fire had not been curbed until dawn. Twelve hours more had passed; at last the fiery pit had cooled sufficiently for searchers to approach it.

Just outside the fire-devastated area was an undertaker's establishment that had been called into service as a morgue. There, searchers were bringing whatever objects appeared to be human remains.

They had made few finds. The principal exhibit at the morgue was a typewritten list of guests who had been at the hotel.

This list had been prepared by a hotel clerk who had a good memory. The hotel register had been lost in the fire. One clerk, who had gone off duty earlier, had perished in the blaze. As near as could be guessed, there had been about a dozen victims. The names of the survivors had been checked with a red pencil. The other names stood barren on the list.

Among the persons who studied the list of names that afternoon was a tall, calm-faced stranger who had arrived at Riverport on the later afternoon train. Though distinctive in appearance, he had attracted but little attention, for his quiet manner rendered him inconspicuous.

This arrival was The Shadow.

In New York, The Shadow had read of the holocaust at Riverport. There had been no word from Harry Vincent. Though the newspapers had classed the fire as accidental, The Shadow was sure that it had been designed.

Two names – unchecked in red – showed on the list to prove The Shadow's belief.

One was the name of Chester Woldorf. Though the public did not know the fact, Woldorf had been a man of considerable wealth – a shrewd speculator who had kept his affairs strictly to himself.

THE SALAMANDERS

Woldorf had moved out of sight some months ago, to bob up at intervals in unexpected places. He had shown by his actions that he feared some menace. That was why The Shadow had decided to learn more about him.

The other name was that of Harry Vincent.

Fire had struck the hotel where Woldorf was located. That, in itself, was significant; yet The Shadow could concede that Woldorf might have perished through an accident. But with Harry also named on the death list, the aspect changed.

Harry, alert and on duty, ready for any emergency that might arise, would have learned of the fire soon enough to leave the doomed hotel.

THERE was only one answer. Something had happened to Woldorf. Harry had investigated. He had met with trouble before he left the hotel.

Walking from the morgue, The Shadow approached the ruins of the hotel. A small group of men were clustered at one corner. Their discussion told that they were officials who had taken charge of the search. The Shadow paused close by the cluster. Unnoticed in the settling dusk, he listened to the conversation.

"Some of the victims may have blundered into the basement," one man was saying. "A couple of firemen told me they found one fellow who nearly stumbled down there."

"That sounds likely," came the comment, "except that there haven't been many human remains picked up."

"There won't be. That fire lasted long enough to burn them to a frazzle. It was hot enough inside that fire to melt that old safe that was in the hotel!"

"Who says that? A safe won't melt!"

"This one must have. There's no sign of it. Nobody could have lugged it away."

"What was in it? Anything important?"

"No. Old Millick, who owns the hotel, says the safe didn't count for much. It wasn't often that folks put things there while stopping at the hotel."

The speakers moved away. The Shadow gained an immediate deduction. One hotel clerk had survived the fire, to give from memory, the names of registered guests. The inclusion of Woldorf's name was proof of that clerk's honesty.

But there had been a second clerk – off duty – who had presumably died in the blaze. It was possible that Woldorf had given the dead clerk valuables for deposit in the hotel safe. To The Shadow, the absence of a safe amid the ruins was a matter of high importance.

Could that safe have been removed during the fire?

The Shadow's answer was yes. His decision, however, was modified to suit the circumstances. The safe could not have been carried away openly. It must have been removed in some secret fashion.

STARING across the ruins of the hotel, The Shadow saw the grayish-white outline of other crumbled walls. They represented the garage that had adjoined the Capitol Hotel. Skirting the smoldering pit, The Shadow

THE SALAMANDERS

reached the site of the garage.

Between the hotel and garage was an elongated pit, half filled with debris. A man in overalls was poking about with a long stick, dislodging chunks of charred wood and stone.

The Shadow approached the man and spoke an affable greeting. When the man looked up, The Shadow made a casual inquiry.

"Was this the storage tank," he questioned, "where they kept the gasoline for the garage?"

The searcher shook his head.

"The storage tank was up there, sir," he replied, pointing to the remains of the garage. "This was the cellar of an old annex that used to run back from the hotel. They tore it down a couple of years ago."

"And left the cellar covered over?"

"Yes, sir. 'Twouldn't have done for gasoline storage. Too close to the hotel. Maybe it wouldn't have mattered much, though. The hotel burnt like a tinder box as it was."

In the dusk, the man noted that The Shadow was well dressed. He looked like a stranger who might have been a guest at the burned hotel. The man questioned:

"You had a car, sir? In the garage?"

The Shadow nodded.

"Maybe it was saved, sir," informed the man in a hopeful tone. "You'd better inquire down at the Southern Garage, just past the depot. That's where they took what cars they could."

The Shadow headed for the Southern Garage. Strolling toward that destination, he checked his new information. The old cellar in back of the Capitol Hotel had existed as an unseen route from the hotel to its garage. Through that underground passage, men could have easily carried the missing safe.

To do so, they would have been forced to dare the flames. A dangerous task; one so formidable that it seemed almost impossible. The hotel had burned with amazing rapidity; and the interval of action had, therefore, been brief. These facts pointed definitely to a scheduled fire. They were bringing The Shadow along a trail that showed crime.

ARRIVING at the Southern Garage, The Shadow entered to find a crowded floor. Cars were jammed into every foot of space. No attendants were about. The Shadow pressed his way between crammed automobiles and found an office.

There, a grimy-faced man was seated at a battered desk, going over account books. He looked up as The Shadow entered.

"Good afternoon," greeted The Shadow, quietly. "You are the manager here?"

"Yes, sir."

"I came for my coupe," remarked The Shadow. "It was brought here from the garage at the Capitol Hotel."

THE SALAMANDERS

"You were in the fire, sir?"

The Shadow made no response to the manager's question. Instead, he merely continued his statement.

"Unfortunately," he said, "I no longer have the owner's card. Of course, I can identify the car. It was a green coupe, with a New York license –"

"I know the car, sir. It's right inside the front door. You can drive it out without any trouble –"

The car in question was Harry Vincent's. It actually belonged to The Shadow; hence his statements were correct. The garage manager took them at their face value. Riverport was a town where most men were accepted at their word.

The manager accompanied The Shadow from the office. As they pressed their way between stored cars, The Shadow made a quiet comment.

"Odd that you have no trucks stored here."

The garage manager turned quickly. He had reached the side of Harry's coupe; an overhead electric bulb showed a troubled look on the man's face.

"Why did you say that, sir?"

"For no special reason," replied The Shadow. "I suppose that few trucks choose the route through Riverport?"

"There was a truck here," declared the manager, biting at his lip. "It came from the burned hotel garage last night. The men who brought it wanted storage here; I told them that there was no space. They kept the truck outdoors until early this morning."

"And then?"

The Shadow's query was impressive. Almost in spite of himself, the garage manager answered. His tone was cautious.

"I overheard one of the truckmen making a telephone call," he stated. "He was in my office, without permission. He was telling some one that he would bring the truck on to Westhampton, about fifty miles from here."

"He was arranging storage at Westhampton, sir. To keep the truck there all day, in a garage. He said something about driving on to New York tonight. It sounded like they didn't want that truck to be seen by day. Right after that, the truck left here. It wasn't daylight; they had time to reach Westhampton before dawn. Maybe I'm suspicious, sir, but –"

With an amazing spring, The Shadow leaped into action. Coming from the front of the coupe, he interrupted the garage man with a wide, swinging left arm, that sent the astonished fellow sprawling to the running board of Harry's car.

His right hand jabbing upward, The Shadow stopped a swinging arm that was coming downward. A huge, sweated thug had sprung from behind a parked car.

THE SALAMANDERS

A MASSIVE monkey wrench in his clutch, the hoodlum had delivered a vicious swing for the garage manager's head. Only The Shadow's swift intervention had prevented the crushing blow. With one stroke, The Shadow had hurled the garage manager from the path of the deadly bludgeon, had caught the thug's arm in the middle of its drive.

The attacker writhed. With a harsh oath, he wrested his sweated arm free and took a sweeping sidewise swing at The Shadow's head. The wrench whisked space. Dropping, The Shadow ducked the sweep by a clear inch.

Bobbing up, he drove a hard fist straight across the thug's arm before the attacker could recover and ward off the punch.

Knuckles landed just beneath the thug's chin. An ugly gargle told how deep The Shadow's fist had driven into the attacker's windpipe. The thug thudded floorward, his head cracking against the coupe's bumper.

The garage manager came to his feet and blinked. The Shadow was stepping aboard the coupe; the thug was lying senseless on the stone floor.

"Inform your local authorities," ordered The Shadow, quietly. "You will have ample time. That fellow will not recover within the next fifteen minutes."

"Yes, sir."

"Say nothing about the truck that went to Westhampton." The Shadow pressed the coupe's starter as he spoke. "I shall investigate the matter."

"I understand."

The garage manager was impressed by the hawk-visaged stranger who had saved him from a murderer. He thought that The Shadow must be a Federal agent, who had trailed the missing truck to Riverport. He saw no connection between the hotel fire and the truck.

The coupe rolled from the garage. It swung toward the road that led to Westhampton. The garage manager scurried forth and dashed toward the local police station, which was less than two blocks away.

AN approaching pedestrian had stopped short when he saw the coupe pull from the garage. Lost in the dusk, this arrival watched the tail-light twinkle as The Shadow turned the corner toward the Westhampton road. Still watching, the pedestrian spied the garage manager's hasty exit.

With a growl, the man from the dusk hurried into the garage. Electric lights showed his features. He was the hard-faced man who had steered Harry Vincent into the flaming basement of the Capitol Hotel.

Dark eyes showed an ugly glint as they saw the thug flattened on the floor. Hard lips uttered a savage curse. Striding to the fallen thug, the hard-faced man raised the fellow's shoulders and growled:

"Broddy! What happened here?"

Questioning Broddy was useless. The thug was senseless. The hard-faced man moved rapidly between the packed cars. He reached the office, seized the telephone and quickly gave a number. He was holding a watch when the response came. In choppy tones, the hard-faced man snapped orders:

"Car due at seven ten. Coupe with New York license. Handle it, then wait."

Smashing the receiver back on its hook, the hard-faced man hurried out into the garage. He shoved an arm under Broddy's shoulders and hoisted the thug into the back seat of a parked touring car. Springing to the wheel, he drove from the garage.

As he took the turn at the corner, the hard-faced man saw figures emerging from the police station. The garage manager was bringing two of Riverport's policemen. They were coming on a vacant quest. They would not find the stunned thug whom The Shadow had left upon the garage floor.

Like Harry Vincent, The Shadow had crossed the path of a dangerous murderer. Driving full speed for Westhampton, hard on the trail of the missing truck, The Shadow was heading into unexpected disaster. The chance arrival of the hard-faced man boded ill for The Shadow.

The lone trail had suited The Shadow for the present. It had promised him a chance to encounter enemies who dealt in crime. But the encounter which The Shadow sought would be gained much sooner than he believed.

Peril lay along The Shadow's lone trail.

CHAPTER III. THE BROKEN TRAIL

THE road from Riverport to Westhampton was a lonely highway. For miles, it followed the river gorge between the two towns. Sharp curves impeded continual speed but the lack of traffic on the highway partly offset that disadvantage.

The Shadow had left Riverport at ten minutes of seven. He was managing an average of fifty miles an hour. Fifteen minutes out of Riverport had carried him slightly more than a dozen miles along his way.

Hands firmly clutching the wheel, his eyes fixed on the road ahead, The Shadow observed the contour of the highway. Every curve was different; yet all bore one point of similarity. To the right were rugged, towering slopes; to the left a guard rail that fringed the river bank.

The rail was one that had been built to stand a severe test. Taut wires ran between stout wooden posts, fixed deep beside the left shoulder of the highway. In all that monotony of posts, the ordinary observer would have seen no change. To The Shadow, however, differences were apparent.

Certain posts had weakened. Though they remained upright, there were tell-tale depressions at the base, sure signs that freshets had washed away supporting soil. Those posts needed strengthening supports. The Shadow made a mental note of that fact. Curiously, his observation was to serve him well before his trip was ended.

Except for those infrequent weaknesses, the guard rail was strong enough to resist the onslaught of a ten-ton truck. It needed to be strong. The river that lay below was deep and blackly sinister.

This gorge was narrow; its waters were slow, for the river was dammed some miles ahead. Fully thirty feet of depth lay below the dark surface of the river.

Mile after mile, The Shadow saw no other cars. He was traveling at the highest speed that any car could maintain along this winding road. At a fifty-mile-an-hour average, there was a chance that he might reach Westhampton soon after the departure of the mysterious truck. Inquiries; new clues; then The Shadow would resume pursuit. He was confident that a trail could be picked up at Westhampton.

THE SALAMANDERS

The clock on the coupe's dashboard showed seven ten. It was the exact minute mentioned in the hard-faced man's telephone call. Timed almost to the second, The Shadow whizzed past an obscure side road that led upward to the right, through the ravine of a little stream.

THOUGH his headlights were pointing ahead, The Shadow was conscious of a small house nestled at the outlet of the dirt road. His momentary glimpse gave him the impression that the house was deserted.

The impression was justified. Supposedly, that house had been vacated a month before. Tonight, however, it was occupied. Peering eyes were stationed at a blackened upstairs window, to note The Shadow's coupe as it whirled past. Observers saw the New York license plate.

The hard-faced man at Riverport had made a perfect estimate of the time interval. He had done better than produce a haphazard guess. He had been familiar with the river road; he knew the maximum speed that its curves allowed. He had assumed that whoever had departed in the coupe would be riding at the fastest possible clip.

Gripping the wheel of the coupe, The Shadow swung hard as he finished a leftward curve. The road swung to the right; then left again, to a jutting point that hung above the river. The turn was one that required brakes. Safety signs showed twisted lines to indicate the sharpness of the turn. The right side of the road was a mass of mixed rocks.

The Shadow's foot moved to the brake pedal. There it halted, momentarily. His ears had caught a muffled boom, dimly heard despite the closed window of the coupe.

It was a blast from the jutting hillside straight above.

Almost coincident with that muffled blast, The Shadow's keen eyes saw a quivering of the rocks to the right side of the road. Stones rocketed to the highway.

Some drivers would have applied their brakes, to stop short of the falling stones. Others might have preferred to run the gantlet, hoping to get past before the hail of stones increased. To The Shadow, both courses were hopeless.

He knew the meaning of that blast. Those stones were the forerunners of a man-made avalanche. A wall of rock had loosened. Already, high above, a stretch of massive stone was dropping to overwhelm the coupe.

There was no escape for any car upon this stretch of road. Neither a halt nor a burst of speed could carry The Shadow free in the brief moments that remained.

Instinctively, The Shadow chose a course entirely his own; one that was based upon previous observation.

A quick foot left the brake pedal. It drove the accelerator to the floorboard. Swinging the wheel hard to the left, The Shadow launched the coupe straight for the nearest guard rail, at the river side of the road.

No time to learn if that rail was held by loosened posts. Chances were that the supports had weakened; for here, the gorge was steepest. Conditions favored The Shadow. Speed, plus luck, should serve him. His hope was that the rail would meet a test that would prove too severe.

CABLES twanged as the coupe struck. They bellied outward like the string of a bow, threatening to resist the strain. One post gave way. Its yield was sufficient.

THE SALAMANDERS

The rear of the coupe lurched upward; as the wires sagged, carrying over a dangling post, The Shadow's car catapulted into a huge somersault toward the river, thirty feet below.

As the car dived toward the gleaming water, a terrific roar sounded from above. Tons of rock crashed upon the highway, shattering the concrete paving as if it had been flimsy pasteboard.

A mammoth cliff had been blasted loose, along a stretch of fully sixty yards. Dynamite, drilled deep into the rock, had accomplished its devastating work in the space of three brief seconds.

As The Shadow's car hit the water, a landslide followed. Rocks buried the ripped guard rail. Scattering stones poured into the river, adding to the splash of the coupe. The downpour lasted for a dozen seconds; then came a sifting trickle of powdered stone and loosened dirt.

A feeble gleam showed dimly from the bottom of the river. The glow came from the lights of the coupe, sunk at a depth of more than twenty feet. The gleam ended. In its overturn, the coupe had nosed in toward the river bank. Stones and mud blanketed the headlights.

The Shadow was still in the coupe.

Water had filled the interior of the car. Gripping the wheel, The Shadow could feel the pressure about him. One deep breath, gained before the plunge, still served him as he waited. Half a minute of this ordeal would mean that the landslide had lessened.

Stones thumped the coupe, but their landings were puny. Slowed by the water, the chunks of rock had no effect. The coupe was intact. It afforded complete protection while The Shadow remained within it. The danger that faced The Shadow was the possibility that the entire car would be buried by debris from the road.

That, however, was unlikely. The Shadow preferred to chance it. Too early a departure from the car might bring him up into a delayed downpour of stone. The Shadow waited a few more seconds, then gripped the handle of the door to his right. The coupe had tilted on its left side. It was imbedded among rocks; but the right door was clear.

BRACING his feet upon the lower door, The Shadow pressed his shoulder upward. The door forced open, against the pressure of the water. The car itself was filled with water; that rendered The Shadow's task possible.

Crawling through the half-opened door, The Shadow gave an upward push. His body shot toward the surface; those final seconds seemed interminable. Suddenly, The Shadow's head bobbed clear.

Propelling himself with hard strokes, he made sure of his self-rescue by swimming away from the bank where overhanging rocks still threatened to plunge upon him.

The Shadow found no current. He swam northward, along toward the portion of the bank which he had followed in the coupe. Clear of the rock-shattered area, he took strong strokes to the shore. Clutching clusters of tough shrubs, The Shadow climbed the bank and reached the guard rail.

As he gripped the lowest cable, The Shadow heard the purr of a motor. He saw a red light turning on the road. A touring car was swinging about; it had come from the direction of Riverport and had stopped when it had reached the fallen mass of rock. The Shadow edged down the embankment completely out of view from the road.

THE SALAMANDERS

A moment later, a powerful searchlight glared above The Shadow's head. It formed a glaring path toward the river. The Shadow watched the beam sweep across the waters.

The searchlight's rays scoured the surface of the river, pausing near the very spot where The Shadow's coupe had performed its plunge.

The searchlight clicked off. The Shadow heard voices at the guard rail. He distinguished words that came in a rasped tone. A voice said:

"That was the fellow we were after, all right. He'll give us no more trouble. Come along back to the house. We'll clear out by the dirt road."

Men boarded their car. Weaponless, The Shadow had no way to deal with these murderers who had sought his life. Beyond the guard rail, he was unable to gain the road in time to board the rear of the departing car.

Rising to the guard rail, The Shadow watched the headlamps of the touring car as they weaved their way back along the road. The lights diminished, then blinked from view.

ON foot, The Shadow followed. He had an objective; that house which had been mentioned. There, even should he find no clues, The Shadow could remain for the night. Crooks would be gone before he arrived.

The Shadow had been balked in his pursuit; nevertheless, he had thwarted criminals in their attempt to eliminate him. He had heard the voice of one man who must certainly be a leader of the crooked band. The Shadow would recognize those rasped tones when he heard them again.

Beneath the towering slopes beside the lonely road, a grim laugh quivered in quiet night air. Fierce, strident, that mirth was heard only by the one who uttered it.

That laugh was The Shadow's new challenge. It boded ill to men of crime.

CHAPTER IV. CROOKS AGREE

WITH his hearing of the voice beside the guard rail, The Shadow had formed a mental picture of the man who had spoken. He had visualized a hardened face with stony lips and sharp, glinting eyes. The image that The Shadow composed was accurate.

The man who had sneered his evil glee was the hard-faced rogue who had steered Harry Vincent into trouble – the same man who had visited the Southern Garage in Riverport. He had followed The Shadow's car after his telephone call ahead to warn the others.

That man of crime had left no trail. When morning came, he was far from the deserted house near Riverport. In faultless attire, a cane beneath his arm, he was riding in an elevator to the fiftieth story of a Manhattan skyscraper. With a cigarette pursed between his sallow lips, he looked like a New York business man en route to his office.

When he stepped from the elevator, the hard-faced man went directly to an office that bore the legend:

GREAT AMERICAN POWER COMPANY

The door was the entrance to a suite. The hard-faced man entered a large reception room and spoke to a girl who was seated at a desk. His lips were eased into a confident smile; his tone held but a slight touch of its

THE SALAMANDERS

harshness as he announced:

"I have come to see Mr. Huxley Drune."

"Your name, please?"

Politely, the hard-faced man tendered an engraved card. The girl read it; then picked up a telephone. She pressed a button and received a response.

"Good morning, Mr. Drune," said the girl. "Mr. Gordon Colgarth is here to see you."

Words came across the wire. The girl hung up and nodded to Colgarth.

"Go right in, sir," she said. "Mr. Drune's office is straight ahead."

HALF a minute later, Colgarth was closing a door behind him. He turned to face a gray-haired man who was seated behind a large, flat-topped desk. Windows beyond showed a panorama of New York's sky line. Withered of face, the gray haired man studied his visitor solemnly. Colgarth delivered a hard smile.

"Hello, Drune," he greeted. "Here's the bacon."

Approaching the desk, the hard-faced man produced a slender stack of papers and planked them in front of Drune. The gray-haired man thumbed the papers slowly. His withered face displayed a satisfied smile. Drune laid the papers aside.

"Good," he asserted, in a cold crackle. "Woldorf was worthwhile. You had trouble, though."

"Not much," returned Colgarth. "There was a chap who looked like he was covering Woldorf. I ran into him while I was leaving the hotel – right in the middle of all the smoke and fire."

"You left him there?"

Drune's crackled query was significant; his face showed an expectant gloat. Colgarth returned a hard grin.

"Better than that," he declared. "I gave him to the Salamander's."

Drune leaned back and chuckled.

"The truck left yesterday morning," continued Colgarth. "I met it at Westhampton and kept it there until night. I went back to Riverport to see how matters were."

"And found them satisfactory?"

"Not quite. Some meddlesome stranger found out about the truck. He slugged Broddy and headed for Westhampton in a car. I was lucky enough to head him off. I telephoned ahead and they gave him the blast. That was your idea, Drune, having that charge set in the hill. It proved useful."

"I read about it," chortled Drune, tapping a newspaper on his desk. "Down in Riverport, they think it was a new disaster. A landslide. No lives lost."

THE SALAMANDERS

"There was one lost," put in Colgarth. "They'll never guess it, though. That car was bowled down into the river underneath twenty tons of rock!"

Drune had swung about in his swivel chair. He was staring through a side window; his face appeared reflective. Colgarth expected a question. Instead Drune turned around. He picked up Woldorf's papers.

"We needed these," clucked Drune. "They are worth the trouble that we took to get them. Woldorf had ambitions. He could never have realized them. This stock gave him full control of one holding company; but that was all."

"Worth a full million," inserted Colgarth. "That's pretty good money."

"Only a trifle. With other securities, with options, this should be worth ten millions. But Woldorf could never have secured the other stocks that he needed."

"While we can."

Drune nodded as he replaced the papers on the desk.

"WE had three objectives," he asserted. "Woldorf's holdings were the first. They have been gained. Next will come our acquisition of the securities held by Lincoln Breel."

"Which will be easy," stated Colgarth. "The Salamanders worked perfectly at Riverport. They can do as well here in New York."

"After that," continued Drune, "we must obtain the securities that belong to the Cruikshank estate, in Sheffield. That means a bank robbery, Colgarth."

"We can handle the Sheffield National Bank. Everything is arranged, Drune. The torches will be ready. The dynamite will be on the railroad siding. We know that we can count on the Salamanders. There can be no trouble interrupting –"

Drune raised his hand in interruption. Solemnly, he shook his head.

"Remember, Colgarth," he asserted, "one job is not enough. We must hold all the securities that we need. We must control every company involved. That accomplished, we shall have a fifty-million-dollar proposition. I can make Great American Power dominant. You say there can be no trouble. There was trouble."

"Only from some dub who found out about the truck. He knows nothing else."

"Why did he suspect the truck at all?"

Drune's query was a sharp one. It made Colgarth wince. The hard-faced man had no answer. His eyes showed alarm.

"I shall tell you why," asserted Drune, his crackly tone harsh. He leaned across the desk and glared at Colgarth. "Because he traced everything, step by step. He knew that Woldorf was in danger. He learned that the safe could have been removed from the hotel. He went to find out about the truck."

Drune leaned back. Colgarth protested.

THE SALAMANDERS

"That can't be!" he exclaimed. "No one could be wise enough to –"

"No one?" queried Drune, with a quick interruption. He chortled an ugly laugh. "Do you call The Shadow no one?"

"The Shadow?"

Colgarth blurted the name. His hard lips quivered, then gained their stony front. Drune watched the man's fists tighten.

"You're right, Drune!" rasped Colgarth. "It was The Shadow! I should have known it, the way he handled Broddy! But I finished him. The Shadow is through!"

"So others have thought," reminded Drune. "They have invariably found themselves mistaken."

Rising, the gray-haired man exhibited hunched shoulders. Tightening a clawlike fist, he pounded hard upon the desk. The words that came from his dry lips were emphatic.

"Be sure of nothing, Colgarth!" pronounced Drune. "Nothing where The Shadow is concerned! Unless you see him dead, an absolute corpse, you can not be sure that he is gone. Even then, he should be cremated; his ashes scattered to the winds."

"You say The Shadow is buried in that river bed? Bah! He is as much alive as you or I! Earth, water, even fire – those are mere elements. The Shadow can conquer them. Those tons of rocks – that – river –"

Drune paused. His eyes showed shrewdness.

"Earth – water –" he repeated the words slowly. "They would not suffice. But fire might. Very well, The Shadow shall have fire. We shall see, if he is still alive, whether or not he can withstand the same ordeal as our Salamanders."

"You're taking too much for granted, Drune," scoffed Colgarth. "I admit that the meddler could have been The Shadow. It was also possible that he escaped death. Nevertheless, we can forget him."

"The truck has reached New York. Every trail has been covered. The Shadow – if he lives – cannot even guess the secret of the Salamanders. They are ready for their next duty, here in New York. Then to Sheffield, where my estate will be our final headquarters. The spoils are ours, Drune. Fifty millions will belong to us."

Drune was smiling sourly; his elbow was on the desk, his chin in his hand.

"We must cash those millions, Colgarth," He reminded. "Do you think we can accomplish it?"

"You yourself have arranged the method, Drune. It will be a simple matter."

"While The Shadow lives?"

New alarm registered on Colgarth's hard face. Drune raised his head. Wagging a forefinger, he drove home his message:

"Sooner or later, Colgarth, The Shadow will divine our game. We accomplished crime in Riverport. We shall succeed here in New York and at your home city of Sheffield. With the Salamanders to aid us, our work is

THE SALAMANDERS

purely mechanical.

"But The Shadow will remain a menace, if we permit him to stay at large. Even if we proceeded too rapidly for him to overtake us, our venture will be threatened later. We have only one logical course, Colgarth."

"And what is that?"

Drune chuckled as he heard Colgarth's question. Tilting back in his chair, the power magnate spoke sagely.

"The Shadow will seek a trail," he predicted. "Very well. He shall gain one – a trail that shall lead him straight to the scene of our next crime."

"To Breel's house?"

"Yes. Where disaster will overwhelm The Shadow. You tried earth and water, Colgarth. I shall use fire."

Colgarth's eyes shone in admiration of his evil partner's scheme. Then a question rasped from his lips:

"How can we bait The Shadow?"

IN answer, Drune opened a drawer of the desk. He produced a letter. Holding it between his hands, he eyed Colgarth and stated:

"Chester Woldorf had an office here in New York?"

"Yes," returned Colgarth. "In the Greystone Building. His name, however, was not listed."

"The Shadow, nevertheless, should find that office."

"Yes, if he is as good as he is supposed to be. But The Shadow will find no clues there. You removed them, Drune."

"I shall replace one clue."

Chuckling, Drune held up the letter. "Chester Woldorf wrote to Lincoln Breel," he reminded. "That is how we learned that Woldorf intended to be at Riverport."

Colgarth nodded.

"Breel replied to Woldorf's letter," continued Drune. "This letter came from Breel. Woldorf never received it. I found the letter, unopened in Woldorf's office at the Greystone Building."

Another nod from Colgarth.

"Very well," concluded Drune, in a precise tone. "I shall replace the letter where I found it. The Shadow, when he discovers the office, will read the letter."

A pause; then Drune added:

"The Shadow will come to Breel's."

THE SALAMANDERS

Colgarth stroked his hard chin; anxiously, he inquired:

"Will that be before or after we make our stroke at Breel's?"

"Neither," returned Drune, with a savage chortle. "We shall hold crime until a definite moment. We shall await a signal; then we can make our thrust."

"And that signal?"

"Will be The Shadow's own arrival. All will be prepared for that occurrence. Our torches will be ready; our watchers posted –"

"And the Salamanders?"

"They will be at their station. Everything will move as scheduled, Colgarth. We shall gain our spoils; and with that gain, The Shadow will be destroyed."

Leering, Colgarth thrust his hand across the desk. Drune received it with an iron grip. The pact was made. Partners in crime had agreed upon their plan.

Colgarth departed. Soon afterward, Drune strolled from his office. Clad in hat and coat, the power magnate paused in the reception room. In a dry tone, he told the girl there that he would return within an hour.

In his pocket, Huxley Drune was carrying the letter that he had shown to Gordon Colgarth. Drune was on his way to plant the missive that would seal the Shadow's doom.

CHAPTER V. THE TRAIL REGAINED

LATE that same afternoon, a pedestrian stepped aboard a taxicab near Times Square. In level tones, he ordered the driver to take him to the Greystone Building. Glancing over his shoulder, the taxi driver caught a glimpse of an impassive, hawk-faced passenger.

The Shadow had returned to New York. Hours of investigation had produced the result that Huxley Drune had expected. The Shadow had learned of Chester Woldorf's office at the Greystone Building.

As he rode along, The Shadow studied report sheets. Aided by competent agents, he had gained some facts concerning Chester Woldorf. The man who had died in the Riverport hotel fire was something of a mystery figure in financial circles.

Wall Street men had known Woldorf. They had guessed that he had money, but had finally classed him as a speculator. Only The Shadow had divined Woldorf's real purpose. The Shadow knew that Woldorf had been acquiring securities that would give him control of important holding companies.

The dead man had posed as a speculator merely to cover his real activities. He had succeeded, in that game, so far as the public was concerned. The Shadow knew, however, that crooks had learned of Woldorf's true capacity.

Men of crime had slain Woldorf to gain his holdings. But of what sort were those holdings? Oil – mines – shipping – manufactures – power?

THE SALAMANDERS

Any one might be the answer. So might a host of others. The Shadow knew only that Woldorf had sought mastery of some specialized field, that the dead man, though shrewd, had been honest in his efforts.

There was a chance that the riddle of Woldorf's purpose could be answered through a visit to the office that had been Woldorf's mailing address in New York.

ARRIVING at the Greystone Building, The Shadow entered the lobby in a leisurely fashion. Apparently, he was unconcerned with persons about him. Actually, he was eyeing every face.

The Shadow noted the man behind the cigar stand. As he made a purchase and paused to light a cigar, he observed the elevator starter; also the operators of all the cars that were waiting with opened doors. Well did The Shadow know that Woldorf's office might prove to be a trap.

Satisfied that no agents of crime were watching, The Shadow entered an elevator and rode to the eighth floor. When he stepped from the car, he waited a few moments, then chose a stairway that led up to the ninth.

Reaching the corridor above, he studied various closed doors. Sure that no lookouts were posted, he approached a door that bore the number 906.

The Shadow produced a ring of skeleton keys. His first choice was the right one. Probing the lock of 906, The Shadow was rewarded by a slight click. He turned the key and entered the office. Closing the door behind him, The Shadow pocketed the keys and produced a heavy automatic pistol. He laid the weapon upon a near-by desk, in case of trouble.

The Shadow doubted that there would be a surprise attack in this well-tenanted office building. Nevertheless, he was prepared for any emergency.

Daylight was fading. The windows, however, still produced sufficient light for The Shadow to make a search without betraying his presence by turning on the electric lights. There were two places that called for inspection. One was the desk; the other, a small filing cabinet.

Five minutes was all that The Shadow required to complete his preliminary search. In that time, he found nothing of consequence. The desk drawers contained pencils, blank stationery and paper clips. The filing cabinet held nothing but steamship circulars and railroad time-tables.

Either Woldorf or some other person had cleared this office of all telltale contents.

The Shadow removed the drawers from the desk. Peering into the hollow, he saw something white. It proved to be an envelope, stamped and postmarked, torn open at the top. The envelope was addressed to Chester Woldorf, at this office.

The Shadow removed the letter from the envelope. He unfolded it and read a brief, scrawled note:

Dear Woldorf:

Sorry, but your plan does not appeal. Do not expect to hear

from me when you reach Riverport. Am leaving tonight for the

Adirondacks. Will be home in about ten days, perhaps sooner.

THE SALAMANDERS

Sincerely,

Lincoln Breel.

Studying the letter, The Shadow promptly gained its full meaning. He had been right. Chester Woldorf must have held control of important companies. To strengthen his position, Woldorf had sought some arrangement with Breel.

A logical procedure. Every one knew of Lincoln Breel, wizard of finance, whose contacts were many and whose methods were devious. Breel had lost millions in a stock market crash.

He had gone into retirement, apparently soured with the world. But those who knew Breel held their doubts. They claimed that despite his losses, he still held wealth.

SOME day, it had been predicted, Lincoln Breel would come out from retirement and begin a new campaign of finance. It was believed that Breel had acquired key stocks that would give him dominance in certain fields of industry.

No one, however, had hazarded a guess as to Breel's particular specialty. When it became known, it would arrive as a bombshell.

From one riddle, The Shadow had arrived at another. He still had no clue regarding Woldorf's plans. He knew only that they must be identical with those that Breel had undertaken. That, however, shifted the mystery from Woldorf to Breel.

What Woldorf, dead, could not answer, Breel, alive, could. At present, however, Breel was still absent from New York. The postmark on the envelope – the date on the letter – both showed the correspondence to be eight days old. Breel had stated that he would be home in about ten.

A soft laugh issued from The Shadow's disguised lips. A super-sleuth, The Shadow had seen another meaning to this letter.

Chester Woldorf had never received it!

The deduction was plain. Had Woldorf received the letter, he would certainly not have misplaced it. Nor would he have gone to Riverport, for the letter stated that he would not hear from Breel when he reached that city.

Woldorf had written Breel. Convinced that the financial genius would be interested in his terms, Woldorf had not waited for a reply by mail.

Who, then, had opened the letter?

The Shadow knew the answer. Some man behind the game of crime. There could be only one reason why the rogue had not kept it. He had planted it in this very office as bait for just such an investigator as The Shadow.

Though The Shadow did not know the identity of Huxley Drune, he clearly traced the super-crook's game. He knew exactly what Drune wanted. That was a visit, by The Shadow, to the home of Lincoln Breel.

Pocketing the letter, The Shadow stowed his automatic beneath his coat. He left the office and took an elevator on the same floor. He had no further need to look for spies. He knew that the master crook would

THE SALAMANDERS

have posted none. Watchers might have spoiled the bait.

In the lobby of the Greystone Building, The Shadow entered a telephone booth and put in a call. He gave instructions over the wire. Facts were to be assembled promptly; all available data concerning Lincoln Breel must be gained by agents and sent through to their chief. With such at hand, The Shadow would prepare his next move.

EARLY evening found The Shadow in his sanctum – the hidden abode that served him as headquarters in New York. Beneath a bluish lamp, long-fingered hands opened a six-by-nine mailing envelope. From this, The Shadow produced papers.

Agents had done well. From Mann, an investment broker, The Shadow had gained accurate facts concerning Lincoln Breel. The financial wizard's home was a secluded brownstone mansion in a block on the West Side. Breel, it appeared, had chosen that locality because the houses close to his were untenanted. Breel had no love for neighbors.

It was known generally that Breel had gone to the Adirondacks, but no one could give the location of his obscure hunting lodge. Breel had not returned from his trip to the mountain region; but his arrival was expected. Breel was accustomed to go and come as he chose, with no set announcement of his plans.

There were three servants at Breel's home; all were old retainers who had been in his service for many years. Except for these employees, Breel lived alone.

From Burke, a newspaper reporter, The Shadow had a report that tabbed closely with Mann's. In addition, he found a photograph of Lincoln Breel. It showed a heavy-browed face distinguished by a Vandyke beard. The Shadow studied the flowing hair above the forehead; he noted every detail of the countenance.

The Shadow had seen Breel in the past; he remembered the financier's precise manner of speech in addition to these facial characteristics. The photograph enabled The Shadow to improve his recollection of Breel's appearance. A soft laugh whispered in the darkness above the shaded lamp. The Shadow picked up the photograph, then clicked off the light.

Soon, a light glowed elsewhere in the sanctum. The illumination showed The Shadow's hawkish features reflected in a mirror. Set against the looking-glass was Breel's photograph. The Shadow opened a make-up kit.

Then began a remarkable process.

Dab by dab, feature by feature, The Shadow changed his countenance. Long fingers pressed waxlike substance against the hawklike face. Molding his face, The Shadow built up the contour of his forehead. He added constructive touches to his cheeks, filling them, tapering their shape to resemble the outline of Breel's countenance. The Shadow's nose lost its hawkish aspect.

With spirit gum, The Shadow added a goatee that was a perfect replica of Breel's. His final touch was a wavy wig that resembled the financier's flowing hair.

This required rearrangement; artfully, The Shadow perfected the final feature of his disguise. He lifted the photograph and compared it with his own reflection.

DETAIL for detail, The Shadow's physiognomy matched the distinguished face of Lincoln Breel. Had The Shadow chosen to visit Wall Street in this disguise, Breel's own friends would have passed the word that the

financier had emerged from retirement.

Wall Street, however, was not The Shadow's goal. His destination was to be Breel's own home, where servants, instead of friends, would believe that their master had returned. As Breel, The Shadow saw opportunity for an investigation that might lead him to men of crime.

Schemers would be watching for The Shadow. Unquestionably they were covering Breel's home. Battle with a cordon of crooks would produce no material gain for The Shadow. His desire was to enter the trap while watchers maintained their vigil; to keep them lulled and waiting while he had time to learn all that was possible concerning Breel's affairs.

Through this clever process of deception, The Shadow could arrive at Breel's home openly. By fooling Breel's own servants he would be able to go through the house as he chose. The Shadow was planning craft instead of stealth.

The light clicked off beside the mirror. A final laugh quivered through the sanctum. The Shadow was departing amid total darkness; within the next hour he would be at his goal. The Shadow had prepared a game to out-match the scheme of his unknown foeman, Huxley Drune.

Well had The Shadow planned; but he had not yet learned the full extent of Drune's machinations. Clever though his method was, The Shadow had chosen an unfortunate method.

Due to circumstances unknown to him, The Shadow was adding to the danger that awaited. In using craft instead of stealth, The Shadow was playing straight into the hands of Huxley Drune.

CHAPTER VI. THE VOICE OF DEATH

IT was exactly nine o'clock when a taxicab stopped in front of Breel's old mansion. All was silent on this obscure Manhattan street. One spot alone was free from darkness. That was the top step of the brownstone flight that stood in front of Lincoln Breel's home.

There, servants had turned on a brilliant light. The glare testified that they expected their master hourly. The light was to The Shadow's liking. It offered him an opportunity to display his guise to watchers from the darkness.

As the taxi rolled away, The Shadow ascended the steps. He was carrying a suitcase; he placed it beside the door. Turning half toward the street, he removed a pair of gloves and began to reach in his pockets as if searching for a key.

The glow from above the doorway shone directly upon The Shadow's face. It showed the detailed features of Lincoln Breel. The Vandyke beard was conspicuous in the light.

The Shadow showed annoyance at being unable to find his key. He thrust his gloves into his pocket. He shrugged his shoulders and turned toward the door. With short jabs, he pressed the doorbell, in impatient fashion.

Eyes were watching.

The Shadow had almost felt their presence. With sidelong gaze, he had spotted a vacant house across the street, where shuttered windows tilted outward at a trifling angle. Behind those shutters were men of crime, noting the arrival of the pretended Lincoln Breel.

THE SALAMANDERS

The Shadow gave no inkling of his knowledge. He had chosen to play the part of an unsuspecting man returning to his home.

The front door opened. A servant eyed The Shadow, then bowed in welcome. Entering, The Shadow handed the suitcase to the servant, then turned to another menial who had also arrived at the door. The second servant helped The Shadow take off his coat.

"Carry that suitcase upstairs, Yocum," ordered The Shadow, in a precise, but short-clipped tone. "Place it in my study."

"Certainly, Mr. Breel."

"And you may go, Tobias," added The Shadow, to the second servant. "I shall be in the strong-room, where I do not wish to be disturbed."

The second servant bowed and departed.

THE SHADOW walked to the rear of the hall. Reaching an alcove, he paused before a heavy door. This time, when he reached into his pocket, he produced a set of special picks.

In the report concerning Breel, The Shadow had not only learned the names and descriptions of the financier's servants; he had also gained facts regarding the house.

Breel had a strong-room on the ground floor. It housed a large safe that probably held Breel's private fortune. The second-floor study was a room wherein Breel received occasional callers.

The Shadow expected a task with the strong-room door. The fact that Breel was willing to leave the house in charge of his servants was proof that both the strong-room and its safe would be formidable.

The Shadow had deceived the servants completely with his disguise; but he had dismissed them abruptly because he did not want them to watch his efforts at the door of the strong-room. He knew that they would wonder why he did not unlock the door immediately.

Picks clicked softly within the lock; but the door did not yield. The Shadow had encountered a formidable obstacle. This barrier required patience. Once in the strong-room, The Shadow would have time to dally with the safe. For the present, however, he had to remember the servants. Their possible suspicions could not be disregarded.

Close against the door, The Shadow continued his probe. One pick was working. Deft fingers pressed. The pick failed to hold. Carefully, The Shadow started to repeat his maneuver. He stopped abruptly as he heard a faint sound from upstairs. It was the ringing of a telephone bell.

Stepping from the alcove, The Shadow listened at the foot of the stairs. He heard the voice of the two servants. Yocum had met Tobias in the upstairs hall.

"A call for Mr. Breel –"

"He is in the strong-room, Yocum."

"I shall inform him."

THE SALAMANDERS

"The master does not wish to be disturbed."

"But the call may be important, Tobias."

"I am repeating the order that was given me –"

The Shadow thrust his face past the post at the bottom of the stairs. He called up to the servants.

"Come! What is the trouble?"

It was Tobias who answered: "A telephone call, Mr. Breel."

"Very well." The Shadow spoke testily as he pocketed his picks. "I shall answer it."

THE SHADOW showed no haste as he ascended the stairway. At the top, he saw the open door of a lighted room and knew that it must be the study. In dignified fashion, he walked past the servants. At the doorway, he turned and delivered an impatient gesture. The servants went downstairs.

The study door was open, inward. Its base was blocked tightly by a rug.

Apparently, Breel seldom closed the door; but The Shadow decided to do so. Chances were that this call would be for him.

Burbank, The Shadow's chief contact man, knew that his chief had gone to Breel's. To talk with Burbank, The Shadow needed privacy.

Despite The Shadow's caution as he turned the knob, the latch clicked sharply. The sound did not trouble The Shadow. The two servants had gone downstairs; they could not have heard the sound.

A telephone was resting on a desk beside a curtained window. The receiver was off the hook. The Shadow raised it and spoke in Breel's precise tone.

"Hello."

There was no response. The Shadow spoke again, in testy fashion.

"Hello... This is Mr. Breel..."

A harsh chuckle sounded from the receiver. It carried a gloating tone. That chortle was issued by Huxley Drune.

Though The Shadow did not know the identity of the master foe, he recognized at once that he was in direct contact with the criminal whom he had sought to thwart.

Was this a message for Lincoln Breel?

The Shadow had a way to learn. That was to continue his role of Breel. Impatiently, he demanded:

"Come! Who is on the wire?"

THE SALAMANDERS

Drune's answer was raucous in its glee. Avoiding all mention of his own name, Drune expressed a fiendish challenge that marked him only as the foe that The Shadow sought.

"You found my bait," came Drune's triumphant crackle. "You are The Shadow. You were crafty, to play the part of Lincoln Breel. But therein lay your own folly. You, The Shadow, gave away your game. It was impossible for Lincoln Breel to return to his home.

"Breel is dead. His life was ended three days ago, by my own hand. His body lies buried deep beneath his hunting lodge. When you entered Breel's house tonight, I knew you for The Shadow."

A pause; then with evil emphasis, Drune added: "You have served my purpose well. You came as Lincoln Breel; you shall die as Lincoln Breel. Servants will bear testimony to the fact that Breel returned to New York. You are trapped. I heard the click of the door that locked your prison. Earth and water did not doom you. Fire will!"

A CLICK followed Drune's prophecy. The Shadow was standing with a dead receiver in his hand. He clattered it upon the hook. He swung toward the window and hauled back the curtains. Massive iron shutters showed beyond the glass. The Shadow knew that the master fiend had seen to it that they were clamped on the outside.

The Shadow reached the door. The knob spun uselessly in his hand. Another of Drune's devices. Arranged for Breel but never used. Murder in the Adirondacks had made it unnecessary in Breel's case. The self-locking door had served to snare The Shadow.

The door was massive, heavy-paneled, as formidable as the barrier that blocked Breel's strong-room on the floor below. It was an obstacle that no one man could conquer bare-handed. It stood between The Shadow and the path to safety.

For, already, shouts were proving Drune's prediction that fire would be The Shadow's foe. From below came the frenzied shrieks of Breel's servants. They were giving the loud-lunged alarm in one wailed word:

"Fire!"

The Shadow heard the cry within his prison.

Grimly, he faced the door that blocked escape.

CHAPTER VII. FOEMEN OF THE FLAMES

FRANTIC footsteps pounded on the stairs. The Shadow heard beating fists against the heavy door. Voices of frightened servants shouted in confusion:

"Mr. Breel! The house is ablaze!"

The Shadow waited until the hubbub subsided. Then, in loud, testy tones, he answered:

"The door will not open. Smash it down."

"No time, sir!" It was Yocum who gasped the cry. "The fire is everywhere, Mr. Breel –"

THE SALAMANDERS

There were scudding footsteps. The other two servants were fleeing downstairs. Yocum blurted something about getting aid. The Shadow heard him dash away. With their last chance for escape, the servants had been forced to abandon their supposed master.

A hissing crackle told The Shadow that the servants had not exaggerated the menace. The odor of smoke was heavy through the crack beneath the door. The Shadow realized that incendiaries had been posted in the empty houses that adjoined this one. Paid "torches," they had fed the flames with oil.

Breel's house was doomed. Despite its stone walls, it was a fire trap, with wooden beams, laths that would flame like kindling. Its fate would soon match the destruction that had overwhelmed the hotel in Riverport.

The Shadow had waited in hope that the servants might effect a rescue. He had entered this house as Breel. He had intended to depart in the same guise, to prove his contempt of Drune's prophecy. That chance was ended.

With quick hands, The Shadow plucked away his false beard. He tugged the puttylike mold from his face. He whisked away the wig that topped his head.

THIS room contained no object that could be used as a battering-ram to smash the door. Drune knew it: that was why he had fully depended upon the trap. But The Shadow, himself, had dispatched a useful item to the room.

He turned to the suitcase that the servant had carried upstairs. Deliberately, The Shadow placed the flat bag upon Breel's desk.

From the bag, he produced a black cloak that he immediately slid over his shoulder. He lifted a slouch hat and clamped it to his head. A brace of automatics went beneath his cloak.

The Shadow then picked up thin, black gloves and laid them to one side. From a little pocket at the side of the bag, he removed three small bottles, which were separately packed.

One bottle contained a black powder that resembled graphite. Stepping to the door, The Shadow poured a line of powder along the opening at the bottom of the barrier. From the second bottle, he added a thin stream of grayish powder that formed a weaving line through the black.

The last bottle held a colorless liquid. Uncorking it, The Shadow blobbed the entire contents along the line of mixed powder. Wheeling, he crossed the room. Crouched behind the desk, The Shadow muffled his head in the folds of his cloak and waited. The intermission was brief.

A sudden blast shook the room. The air shivered as it compressed and coughed a puffing echo to the explosion. When The Shadow arose, he sniffed a pungent odor that was stronger than the oily smell of the fire.

The heavy door was loose upon its hinges, half-tilted into the room. It was a barrier no longer. Springing to the door, The Shadow wrenched an opening. He pressed outward into the upstairs hall.

The Shadow had come prepared to blast his way into Breel's strong-room, if all other devices failed and entrance would have proved necessary. Trapped in the study, he had made use of the chemical powders that he had brought for another purpose. The Shadow had offset the snare devised by Drune.

Had he escaped too late?

THE SALAMANDERS

Volumes of smoke were pouring upward from the floor below. His head muffled deep in folds of his black cloak, The Shadow groped his way downward. He was taking the outlet that Breel's servants had utilized; but they had gained a start before the fire had reached its present intensity.

Even through the black cloth of his cloak, The Shadow could see licking tongues of flame, devouring the woodwork on the ground floor, gnawing at the rails of the banister.

Outside, alarms were clanging; sirens had joined with a wail. Manhattan fire engines were arriving; but even efficient firemen would be balked.

The flames were fed by oil.

THE ground floor was an inferno when The Shadow reached it. The whole front of the house was ablaze with fire. Crackling from the other direction told that the rear of the building was a furnace. One spot alone offered temporary security. That was the alcove in the very center of the house, where the door of the strong-room loomed.

The Shadow retreated to that refuge. He placed his hand upon the knob of the strong-room door. He wrenched. The door swung inward. Firelight, vivid everywhere, gave The Shadow a complete view of the strong-room before blackish smoke poured inward.

The strong-room was completely empty.

The Shadow's laugh came strident amid the crackling of devouring flames. His sinister mirth was significant. The Shadow had expected this discovery.

As at Riverport, a safe had been removed under the cover of a terrific fire. The strong-room had been opened while The Shadow was still trapped in the study. Drune's henchmen had come, carrying Breel's own keys. They had opened the strong-room; they had removed the safe bodily.

Outside, clangor told that no criminals would have dared to leave by any door. The Shadow knew their only route. They had come through the cellars, from one house to another, until they had reached Breel's. Their only outlet was the path by which they had arrived.

Beneath the stairway was a door, also protected in this alcove. The Shadow ripped the door open; he saw a stairway to the cellar: He, too, had a route to safety. Through keen deduction, The Shadow had gained his chance for escape. Stumbling through the smoke, he descended, yanking the door shut behind him.

Fierce flames hissed; a burst of fire swept the alcove. A wall tumbled; blazing beams covered the very spot where The Shadow had been, but moments before. Sizzling, crackling, the fire roared like an angry monster deprived of a helpless victim.

Free from the fire's wrath, The Shadow had reached the bottom of the steps. There was smoke in the cellar; from the cloudy mass, flames were rising to consume wooden bins and boxes. The blaze, however, had not reached a high intensity.

The stone floors offered pathways. The Shadow groped through sweeping smoke. He knew that the cold air from some pathway was blowing the smoke in his direction.

His head enveloped in his cloak, The Shadow continued through the smoke. Despite his upraised arm, with its folds of cloth, he could sense the thickness of the oily cloud about him. Suddenly, the atmosphere cleared.

THE SALAMANDERS

The Shadow had passed through the smoke. He was near the outlet that he knew existed. The Shadow dropped his arm; he stopped his progress instantly.

Off to the side of the cellar was an opening in the wall. It was a passage leading to the house next door. Flames, shooting sparks, showed that the adjoining cellar was ablaze. The outlet offered hazard. But it was not that fact that caused The Shadow's halt.

FRAMED against the glow of the passage were enemies, perhaps the strangest that The Shadow had ever encountered. Grotesque foemen stood to block The Shadow's path.

They were men, attired in bulky garments that looked like diving suits. Above their chunky shoulders were round helmets with glass fronts, through which peered glaring faces. In this distorted scene, they had the appearance of demons.

There were eight men in the group. Each was provided with a hose line that came through from the adjoining cellar. Just as divers are equipped to fare to the ocean's bottom, so were these interlopers protected against flames.

Massive gloves formed a portion of each uniform. With clumsy hands, these brawny invaders were setting down a heavy iron box. It was Breel's safe, that they had lugged from the strong-room on the floor above. The fireproof men had heard The Shadow's approach. They had stopped their departure in order to meet the lone pursuer.

They were human Salamanders, these foemen of the flames. Like mythical creatures who could live in fire, they had no fear of the blaze about them. Drune, the master crook had chosen fire as the cover by which he could accomplish robbery. He had also devised equipment that enabled his henchmen to do their work with safety and precision.

The Salamanders had removed the safe from the Riverport hotel. They were carrying off Breel's strong-box in the same bodily fashion. They were capable, however, of a different duty. They were ready to fight any one who tried to block their work.

Odds were with the Salamanders. They could defy the flames. The Shadow, unprotected against the roaring fire, was confronted by a double menace. The blaze was behind him; the Salamanders stood in front. Moreover, they had weapons, a sort more deadly than guns.

With clumsy hands, the human monsters were drawing pipe-like torches from belts at their waists. Thick-gloved thumbs were fumbling with catches that topped the strange weapons. The Shadow could guess that those pipes were designed to issue withering blasts of flame.

FROM above, a crackle told that minutes of safety were few. The ceiling of the cellar was yielding to the fire. Soon beams would topple, blazing. The Shadow would be entombed in a fiery pit.

Already, the stairs from the ground floor were on fire. The Shadow could see bright tongues amid the smoke as he turned for a quick glance over his shoulder.

Venomously, two Salamanders were advancing; another pair were ready for the march. Creatures of doom, they intended to drive back The Shadow at close range; to force him to a corner where either flame or blowtorches would wither him to death.

In coming from the upstairs trap, The Shadow had found another mesh, more desperate than the one that he had left.

CHAPTER VIII. THE ODDS FAIL

EVEN in this moment of complete desperation, The Shadow chose a course. He took the choice that no other would have accepted, a return to the flames. Close-range battle with the Salamanders would have been suicidal. It was better to dare the fire.

Whirling about, The Shadow plunged into the smoke at the front of the cellar. Beams fell, blazing. Flames licked from the stacks of burning boxes. The smoke, itself, was blinding. Yet The Shadow leaped forward, almost to the toppling stairway.

Escape was impossible up the steps. They were a mass of flames. The Shadow, however, had not intended flight. As he reached the front wall of the cellar, he turned. From his cloak, he whipped a pair of automatics.

Smoke obscured the Salamanders; but they gave signs of their deliberate advance. Long jets of flame roared from their blowtorches, jabbing through the smoke, blindly seeking The Shadow as a target. Those singeing blasts did not reach the wall beside the stairs.

The Shadow had understood the reason for the prompt advance that the Salamanders had made. Their blowtorches could work only at close range, within a radius of about twelve feet. The Shadow, through his quick dart, had placed a full twenty feet between himself and the icemen. Through that strategy, he had gained short seconds in which to use weapons of his own.

The Shadow jabbed shots with his automatics, firing toward the fiery jets that sought him as a target. Somehow, his bullets seemed futile. The smoke – the weaving firelight – all distorted The Shadow's vision. Dropping beams made him shift as he fired.

Moreover, only two of The Salamanders had led the advance. Despite their fireproof suits, they did not care to come beneath a mass of falling timbers. Two thrusts of withering fire jets were advancing in the face of The Shadow's shots. A few seconds more, those blasts would sweep The Shadow's wall.

Suddenly, one fire jet stopped. The Shadow had scored a hit. One Salamander clipped, he aimed grimly for the other, pumping bullets through the smoke. The jet ceased; then began again. The second Salamander was retreating.

THE SHADOW ceased his fire. He waited amid terrific heat, close against the wall, one cloaked arm raised to protect his stinging eyes. He realized why his shots had not been accurate. Blinding smoke had handicapped his vision.

Nevertheless, The Shadow had gained hope.

One Salamander down, the other had wavered. When The Shadow had ceased firing, the surviving Salamander had been ready to believe that his torch had found the victim or that The Shadow had succumbed to the flames. That Salamander was returning to the others, to tell them that there was no need to stay.

Huddled in the smoke, The Shadow lingered, undetermined how soon he should proceed in the direction of the Salamanders. His decision was forced by the blaze about him. A roar sounded in the cellar; the entire stairway gave. A huge sheet of fire, the entire mass tumbled sidelong toward The Shadow. With it, beams thundered downward. The whole front ceiling was in collapse.

THE SALAMANDERS

The Shadow took the only possible course. He hurried through the smoke, toward the rear of the cellar, seeking the Salamanders in preference to the hot flames. Spark–shooting woodwork crashed about him.

One burning beam glanced from his shoulder. Half staggering, The Shadow stumbled clear of the smoke and sprawled upon the stone floor. Rolling over, he looked for the Salamanders.

They were through the opening to the next cellar. Five were lugging Breel's safe; two were hauling away the prone Salamander whom The Shadow had dropped with a bullet.

This pair saw The Shadow as he sprawled. They reached for their blowtorches. They were too late. The Shadow had an automatic in his fist.

Dropping their comrade, the two Salamanders leaped beyond the five who carried the safe, showing speed despite their clumsy garb. The Shadow fired twice; again, his smarting eyes handicapped him. The Salamanders had shifted, to present a broad side of the safe toward The Shadow. The bullets from The Shadow's .45 were flattened as they clanged the steel surface.

Two cartridges were all that remained in that gun. The Shadow whipped up his second automatic. He did not use it. As he aimed, a huge beam fell between him and the Salamanders. Blazing sparks formed a curtain; smoke poured downward and completely blocked the scene.

The seven Salamanders were gone. The Shadow was caught in a seething oven. Even the stone floor was scorching. Flames from the adjoining cellar told that the Salamanders had departed through another pit of roaring heat.

RISING, The Shadow followed. He stopped short at the opening in the wall. The Salamanders had gone from sight. The next cellar was an inferno. Prompt death faced The Shadow. For a moment, he stood motionless, ready to accept his doom.

A peculiar hissing hissed steadily at The Shadow's feet. Blinking as he peered downward, The Shadow saw the Salamander whom he had shot with a chance bullet. The man's body was half beneath a burning beam. No longer bulky, the grotesque figure looked pitiful.

Grasping the clothly shoulders, The Shadow dragged the Salamander to one clear spot beside the wall. The rogue was dead; the reason for his deflated uniform was explained. It involved that steady hiss.

The Salamander's suit was of asbestos cloth, much oversized. It was rubber–lined; the air hose, also of asbestos, kept it inflated under ordinary conditions. The Shadow's bullet had punctured asbestos and rubber; the suit had emptied like a broken toy balloon.

Nevertheless, air was still issuing through from the hose. It was cool air, that sizzled from the bullet hole. Off in another house, the Salamanders had a portable air–cooling plant, that provided them with air, not only fresh, but constantly cool. They were protected against heat as well as suffocation.

The helmet was a metal framework, covered with asbestos cloth. It had not lost its bulk. Fumbling at the neck of the helmet, The Shadow found a tiny lever. He pressed it the helmet came open. The Shadow saw a sweat–streaked face that glared, even in death.

Tugging the helmet free, The Shadow pulled at the Salamander's uniform and stripped it from the dead man's body. The fire was encroaching upon this last spot of refuge. The heat was stifling; it was with difficulty that The Shadow managed to don the uniform and fix the helmet in place.

THE SALAMANDERS

His hands were in clumsy gloves. The Shadow found trouble in clasping the spot by the bullet hole. At last he gripped it and twisted asbestos and rubber into one tight mass, which he held firmly with both hands. The fire suit inflated. The air from the hose brought a terrific chill.

Keeping a firm hold on the punctured portion of the suit, The Shadow followed the route of the Salamanders. His eyes could see clearly through the glass. He entered the next cellar and picked his way through a tumbled mass of ceiling that threw up sparks as his asbestos boots encountered it.

The Shadow reached another cellar by following the line of the hose. In this house, the ceiling was still solid; but the cellar itself was filled with oily, burning rubbish.

All seemed secure until The Shadow saw a motion of the hose ahead of him. It was moving forward, rapidly. Doubled coils came snakily from behind The Shadow and passed him with speed.

The Salamanders had reached their base – a cellar free of fire. They were hauling in the loose hose to drag the body of the dead Salamander to them.

THE hose tightened suddenly. As The Shadow groped to another fume-filled cellar, he could feel the steady pull. Suddenly, it stopped. Off ahead, the Salamanders had begun to wonder. The Shadow knew the questions that perplexed them.

Why had the hose pulled so easily, then suddenly offered resistance?

The Salamanders must have guessed the answer. Until this moment, The Shadow had been conscious of a hiss behind his ears, the working of a safety valve that prevented over-pressure from the air that was continuously pumping through. That hiss ceased. The suit dropped loosely from The Shadow's shoulders. The air supply had ended. The Salamanders had kept up pressure in hope that their comrade was still alive. They had known, though, that he could not march through to follow them. That was why they had tugged the hose. The Salamanders at last knew the truth.

The Shadow could not go on to meet them. Entrenched, the Salamanders would be ready with scorching flame, once they had blocked the path. Without the air supply, the asbestos suit would smother its wearer. The Shadow's one chance was to try escape from this house, two doors away from Breel's.

Divesting himself of the Salamander's suit, The Shadow again groped through the smoke. He was looking for a stairway, like the one at Breel's. He found it and gained an unlocked door at the top. His path was lighted by a mass of flames.

Drune's torches had seen to it that there would be fire here. They had made a long route of fire to cover the movements of the Salamanders.

The blaze, though furious, formed a shell about the inner walls. The woodwork had been oiled. The stairs to the second floor were greasy; but the flames had not commenced to lick them. No longer encased in a Salamander's outfit, The Shadow climbed the stairs in agile fashion.

His speedy action was necessary. As he reached the top of the stairs, flames licked the bottom. With a roar, the fire came ripping upward, dashing devastating tongues along The Shadow's trail.

Smoke was everywhere; but The Shadow found a doorway. He pressed into a rear room of the house and saw an outlined window. With sweeping arm and shoulder, The Shadow smashed the glass. Coughing, he crawled through to an outside sill, lowered himself to full length and dropped to a courtyard beneath.

THE SALAMANDERS

The entire block was burning. Fire engines were parked by a rear-street hydrant when The Shadow reached it. Pausing in one sheltered spot that the ruddy glow of flames did not reach, The Shadow looked along the street. He saw a truck pull from an alleyway where there was no blaze.

The Salamanders had gone. There was no chance to overtake them. Creatures of fire had escaped with their spoils.

AN old roadster came along the street. It stopped abruptly near where The Shadow stood. Firemen shouted angrily at the occupants, who growled in return. The firemen maintained that the roadster had no business coming through this thoroughfare; the men in the car argued that they had no other route. The roadster was ordered to turn about, to avoid running over a fire hose.

As the car backed up on the sidewalk, almost at the spot where The Shadow stood, The Shadow sprang forward to the rear bumper. The car had no rumble seat. Its rear section was a large luggage compartment, with a knob at the bottom.

The Shadow opened the luggage compartment, while the driver still argued with a fireman. Twisting forward, The Shadow wriggled into the ample space. He let the container close above him but stopped it before the catch could lock.

The roadster jolted from the curb. The Shadow lay motionless within, puffing the air that came from a crack at the bottom of his hiding place. Even this poor source of air seemed tinged with ozone. It was reviving compared to the smoke-filled atmosphere which The Shadow had just escaped.

The car rode a few dozen blocks, then jounced upward on a ramp and rolled to a standstill. Growling men were climbing from the front seat. The Shadow could hear their muffled voices; but he made no move.

He had weakened from his ordeal. His only course was to rest. When the men had gone, however, The Shadow wedged the top of the container higher, so that he could gain more air.

This scarcely improved The Shadow's condition. He was in an atmosphere tinged with the odor of gasoline. Bare walls, dimly lighted, proved that the two men had left their car in a large public garage. Nevertheless, as he waited, The Shadow experienced a slow return of strength.

AFTER fifteen minutes, The Shadow resolved upon departure. He crawled from the roadster, steadied himself upon the stone floor. He carefully noted the license number of the car; that done, he picked his way through clustered automobiles and found a side door to a darkened alley. Stopping outdoors, The Shadow took deep breaths that gradually eased the burning of his smoke-racked lungs.

At last, a whispered laugh sounded in the darkness beside the silent garage. The Shadow's tone carried a note of triumph. The Shadow had done more than escape Drune's trap and the power of the Salamanders. He had found a trail for the morrow.

One reason only, could have brought that roadster along the street where fire engines were at work. The two men in the car were henchmen of the master crook. Like others, they had been ordered to cover the departure of the truck that carried the Salamanders and the spoils.

The Shadow had ridden with minions of crime. He had marked their car; he would remember this garage. When crooks came here again to get their roadster, The Shadow would be prepared to follow on their trail.

CHAPTER IX. THE THIRD CAMPAIGN

REPORTS Of the fire dominated the next day's headlines. Throughout New York City, eager readers devoured newspapers as hungrily as the flames had consumed the fuel of the night before. The blaze at Lincoln Breel's had been one of the most startling in the history of Manhattan, excepting, perhaps, the burning of the Capitol Hotel.

Only the heroic efforts of competent fire fighters had averted a holocaust. Successive alarms had brought out hordes of fire engines. Roaring flames had almost obliterated the block where Breel's house had stood; the firemen had fought valiantly to prevent the conflagration from spreading throughout the entire neighborhood.

It was obvious that the fire had been of incendiary origin. Flames had begun in half a dozen houses almost simultaneously. Breel's home had simply been the focal point.

What had been the purpose of the fire?

That was the baffling point. Insurance men were puzzled. The houses in Breel's neighborhood belonged to half a dozen different owners; none were heavily insured. The fire was classed as arson; but no one had acquired monetary gain of any consequence.

The only theory that gained support was one which involved Lincoln Breel.

It was known that Breel had suffered financial losses in the past; also that he had counted upon regaining his wealth. Probably, Breel had been working on some scheme that might have brought him back to Wall Street.

ASSUMING that Breel's plans had failed, there was sufficient reason to suppose that the financier was disappointed with life. Men sometimes find curious ways to end a thwarted career.

Breel, always a man with dreams of grandeur, could have decided to imitate the Vikings of old; to consign his own body to a self-made funeral pyre.

Fantastic though this theory was, there were facts to substantiate it.

Breel had been away from home. He had returned unexpectedly to New York. No one knew of his activities just previous to his arrival at his house. Breel, himself, could have been the incendiary who started the blaze throughout the block.

The fire had begun immediately after Breel's arrival home, so the servants said. Moreover, Breel had answered a mysterious telephone call. That pointed to paid helpers; "torches," who might have aided Breel in his insane undertaking.

Most significant was the report that concerned the door of Breel's study. The servants testified that Breel seldom closed that door; they added that it had no key. Yet Breel had shouted that the door was locked; and the servants had found it in such a condition. It seemed that Breel had deliberately cut himself off from aid.

There was mention of a muffled explosion that had come soon after the fire. That episode could well have marked Breel's suicide. It silenced the objectors who claimed that no man would have consigned himself alive to flames. The final theory held belief that Breel was dead, a suicide, before the fire reached his study.

Breel had wanted no rescue. That was why the job had been so thorough. Crazy, the financier had seen to it that no human aid could reach him.

THE SALAMANDERS

Such stories intrigued the public. The morning newspapers began them; the evening journals snatched up the theme and played it up with huge headlines. By mid-afternoon, the later editions had dug up old stories of famous fires in past years. They ran photographs of fire bugs who had previously alarmed New York. Breel's picture was included with the others.

Any one might turn incendiary, so the newspapers claimed. They classed the craze with kleptomania. Any man, thwarted in life, might turn hostile toward the world and use fire to impress his hatred. The burden of the blame belonged to Lincoln Breel.

TWO men were pleased most highly by the rumors that the press had accepted. Fellow conspirators in crime, they were chuckling over a stack of newspapers as they sat in an office high above Manhattan. Those connivers were Gordon Colgarth and Huxley Drune. They had joined in conference at the power magnate's office.

"It worked better than we planned it, Drune," commented Colgarth, in his harsh tone. "Everybody has fallen for this crazy idea that Breel was responsible for the fire."

"Absolutely," agreed Drune, dryly. "We should express our thanks in memory of The Shadow."

"Why thank The Shadow? The idea was yours, Drune."

"To trap The Shadow, yes. But not to have him come there as Breel. That was his own idea."

Drune paused to chuckle. Leaning on the desk, he added: "The Shadow's own idea. A most clever one, to come as Breel. A plan, however, that worked doubly to our advantage. No one will ever look for Breel's body up in the Adirondacks. Nor will concern be expressed when Breel's safe is not discovered in the ruins of his home."

Colgarth arched his furrowed brow in questioning fashion. Drune smiled and spoke an explanation.

"Breel's supposed madness," stated the master crook, "has made every one – the authorities included – believe that he possessed no wealth. Therefore, his safe will not be regarded as important. We, alone, know the value of Breel's holdings. In fact, we know their precise value, for we have them here with Woldorf's securities."

From a desk drawer, Drune produced two bundles and thwacked them upon the desk. Colgarth displayed an ugly grin as he eyed the double spoils.

"We are ready," declared Drune, "for our third campaign. We need the stocks that are in the Sheffield National Bank, held there for the Cruikshank estate. How soon will all be ready in Sheffield, Colgarth?"

"Everything is ready. We can stage the job tonight."

"You have covered every detail?"

"Right to the dot. Give me pencil and paper, Drune. I'll show you how it stands."

RECEIVING paper and pencil, Colgarth drew four squares in a line, numbering them from one to four. He tapped the first square in the row.

THE SALAMANDERS

"This is the old garage," he stated. "It is empty, ready to be torn down. The truck went in there this morning. The air-cooling system is hooked up. The passage is finished, underground, straight to the foundations of the bank building."

Colgarth moved his pencil and tapped the second square.

"This is the Sheffield National Bank," he said. "It is strongly barred; but its interior is old. It will burn like tinder, once the fire starts. It is protected by an elaborate sprinkler system that –"

"Which suits us exactly," interposed Drune, "provided that you have made the right arrangements."

"I have," returned Colgarth, promptly. "The water tank on the roof has been filled with gasoline. We did that job a week ago, at night. All that I have to do is plant a potassium bomb, set to go off at the required hour."

"Its flare will be sufficient to start the sprinklers?"

"Yes. The bomb will be packed in combustible material. I tested one like it. The heat will quickly melt the amalgam in the nearest sprinkler. That will mean gasoline, not water. Every sprinkler in the place will open."

Colgarth had settled the matter of the bank building. He tapped the third square in the row.

"This is the old depot," he remarked. "A sore eye to the citizens of Sheffield. They have petitioned often for its removal; but the railroad has kept on using it as a freight station. You should see that depot, Drune. Low and flat, with wooden walls and platforms. A few sparks will ignite it."

Colgarth moved his pencil to the fourth square.

"A block of stores," he explained, "with cheap apartments on the floors above. Well tenanted, as I should know, for I own the block. I couldn't risk fixing the water tank; some one might smell the gasoline after the fire reaches the apartment house. But Broddy and a crew put all the fire hydrants on the fritz throughout that entire block."

"Won't that excite suspicion?"

"Not in Sheffield. My home city boasts one of the worst fire departments in the State. Pipe lines are never inspected. The public safety department will take the rap after this fire."

SUMMARIZING his statements, Colgarth lifted his pencil. Ignoring the first square, he tapped those that were marked 2, 3 and 4, naming them in order:

"The bank. The depot. The apartment block. All in twenty minutes. Two hundred tenants in those apartments. Picture the confusion, Drune. The bank building will be forgotten. The whole one-horse fire department will be working to rescue the people trapped in the apartments.

"Meanwhile, we can blast the bank's foundations. Our tunnel will carry us straight into the vault. Leave it to me to grab those Cruikshank securities and put a lot of phony stuff in place of the ones we need.

"I am a director in the bank. I have the necessary keys. The only list of the Cruikshank holdings has been destroyed. No one will suspect a robbery has been accomplished. Best of all, I shall not be seen about town while the fire is under way."

THE SALAMANDERS

"You will be leading the Salamanders?"

"Yes. We will bring the truck to my country house, five miles north of Sheffield. You can await us there, Drune."

Drune nodded. He studied Colgarth's diagram. A question came to his mind.

"The dynamite," remarked Drune. "Where is it?"

"On a siding near the old depot," replied Colgarth. "It came in this afternoon, in a steel box car. It won't be near enough to the fire to make trouble."

"There is sufficient reason for its presence?"

"Yes. It is an advance shipment to a local quarrying company. They do not know that it has arrived. The telegram was intercepted."

"Your men have taken dynamite from the car?"

"Broddy will handle that at dusk. He is in charge of the garage. He will lift whatever amount is needed."

Drune considered further. He asked:

"Where are the Salamanders?"

"At the blast furnace," replied Colgarth, "off in the woods to the west of town."

"On the road that leads past the airport?"

"No, that is south of Sheffield."

Drune nodded, as though recalling the terrain. He picked up the securities stolen from Woldorf and Breel. He packed them in a briefcase.

"I shall go to Sheffield with you," decided Drune, looking steadily at Colgarth. "There is one thing that you have forgotten. I had intended to stay here in New York; but I think it best to accompany you and attend to the detail that you omitted."

"What detail?"

"The matter of the prisoner whom the Salamanders brought from Riverport."

"He means nothing, Drune. He is helpless out at the blast furnace."

"Have you forgotten about The Shadow?"

Colgarth looked puzzled, and then snapped a logical question: "Why bring up The Shadow? We finished him last night. How can he figure in this, Drune?"

"The Shadow has an organization."

"Maybe. Maybe not. He was alone when the Salamanders met him."

"True. That was because he was on a one-man job. But he has followers and we must be prepared to handle them if they try something in the future."

"You think our prisoner was working for The Shadow?"

"Yes. You found him at Riverport."

"I have quizzed him. He claims to know nothing."

"More possible proof that he is an agent of The Shadow."

COLGARTH nodded slowly. The idea had not occurred to him.

"I shall quiz the prisoner."

Drune's cluck was harsh and ominous.

"Go to it," accorded Colgarth. "Suppose we meet at six o'clock and start for Sheffield in my car? We can make the trip in two hours easy."

"When will you plant the box?"

"After we reach Sheffield at eight. The bank stays open until nine. I'll stop off and leave it when I make a deposit. Then we can go to the blast furnace."

"Don't forget the cover-up men."

"The ones still here in New York? Don't worry. I'll call them. If they start before seven, they will arrive in time to join us."

Hands stretched across the desk. Men of crime joined hands in an evil clasp. Plans for the third campaign were completed. Drune and Colgarth foresaw a mutual mastery of wealth.

The pair had forgotten The Shadow. They believed that he occupied the fiery grave that the public had conceded to Lincoln Breel. Because of that belief, Drune and Colgarth had formed their plans too well.

Their last detail, regarding the cover-up men, had paved a route by which The Shadow could again oppose them.

CHAPTER X. THE THIRD CAR

IN their frenzied search for details that concerned the fire at Lincoln Breel's, the New York newspapers had failed to gain a most important item. That was not surprising, for the occurrence in question was one that seemed quite detached from the conflagration of the night before.

A new man had taken a job as a car washer at the West Side Garage, which was located near Eighth Avenue.

Car washers work principally at night, particularly in garages that depend chiefly on overnight storage. The West Side Garage handled cars that belonged to hotel guests.

THE SALAMANDERS

Hence the new man, applying for a job early in the morning, had been told to wait around until night. The West Side Garage had happened to need an extra car washer. The manager was willing to give the new man a chance.

Old hands at the garage predicted that the new man would not last long. All through the day, he had lounged about the door of the garage, smoking cigarettes that hung downward from his droopy lips. His face was listless; he seemed to lack the slight amount of ambition that even a car washer should possess.

The regular employees circulated the rumor that the manager had been on a "bender" the night before; that he was so bleary-eyed in the morning, he would have hired any "punk" who had asked him for a job. Certainly, the dull appearance of the new car washer bore out the theory that the manager had made a poor choice.

By seven o'clock in the evening, the new man had become too lazy to even light the cigarette that he had thrust between his pasty lips. He was leaning against the wall beside the door, his shoulders slouched, his eyes half closed, when two men entered and walked toward a roadster that was parked in back of a coupe.

THE new hand gazed lazily about, to make sure that no other employees were watching him. Slowly, he came to life; he shambled through the garage and came close to the roadster. One of the two men was at the wheel of the light car. The other was about to enter the coupe, in order to move it from the roadster's path.

"I'll move that car," drawled the new employee. "Lemme handle it, bud."

"All right, punk," growled the man beside the coupe. "Get a move on. We ain't staying here all night. We're in a hurry."

"You paid for the storage?"

"Sure. Over at the hotel. Here's the receipt."

The man flashed a sheet of paper. The car washer eyed it and nodded. Listlessly, he entered the coupe and pushed aside a small satchel that was lying on the driver's seat. He pressed the starter; the motor thrummed, then stalled. His next trial brought another failure.

"Say," growled the man beside the car, "what do you want us to do? Shove that crate out of the way?"

The starter whined again; this time the motor throbbed steadily. Gears clashed; the coupe went jerking forward, to stall again near the garage door. The man on the floor joined his companion in the roadster.

"What a dumb cluck," growled the man at the wheel. "Did you hear the way he jammed them gears, Jing?"

"Yeah," responded the second man, gruffly. "But don't worry about that goof. Keep an eye peeled to see who else is around."

"Nobody that I can see."

"Then get going. I'll take a squint along the street."

The roadster zipped from the garage. The driver gave a guffaw when he saw the car washer still trying to start the coupe so as to reverse it to the place where it had been. The roadster turned toward Eighth Avenue. Jing, watching the lighted street, delivered an approving grunt.

THE SALAMANDERS

"O.K., Sloopy. Nobody here to spot us."

"Sloopy" grunted in satisfied fashion. He slowed to make the turn into Eighth Avenue.

Back at the garage, the shabby-dressed car washer had changed his tactics with the stalled coupe. The motor thrummed instantly when he pressed the starter. The trim car glided backward, then darted forward without a groan from the changing gears.

Eyes gleamed as a firm hand meshed the gear into high. The coupe swung out into the street. Its driver, no longer listless, spotted the roadster turning left into Eighth Avenue.

There was a whispered laugh within the confines of the coupe; a token of the driver's actual identity. The dull-faced, blundering car washer was The Shadow.

This coupe was The Shadow's own. He had sent it to the garage last night. Today, after talking himself into a job at the garage, he had found an opportunity to move the coupe in front of the roadster. Thereby, The Shadow had been ready at the right time.

He had looked over the two men who had brought him to the garage last night. He had lulled them into thinking that they were unwatched. Finally, The Shadow had taken up the trail of Drune's two minions.

THE trail led northward on Eighth Avenue. The roadster reached Broadway and continued along that thoroughfare. The Shadow recognized that the two crooks were bound for some destination outside of New York.

This was proven finally when the roadster neared One Hundred and Seventy-eighth Street. It headed for the approach of the George Washington Bridge.

Across that massive span, where lights twinkled high above the Hudson. Into New Jersey, then along a main highway. All the while, The Shadow's car continued with the same traffic that carried the roadster. Confident crooks never guessed that the coupe was following them.

As yet, The Shadow had no definite knowledge of the final destination. He believed that the cover-up men were on the way to some new scene of crime. How far their goal might be from New York – how soon they would be needed in new operations – these were matters impossible to guess.

Crime had first begun in Riverport, hundreds of miles south of New York. Crime had then come to the metropolis. It was due to strike somewhere else.

Whether the third crime would be the last was something that did not concern The Shadow. He was banking upon the one possibility that he could find the new scene soon enough to balk the deeds of evil workers.

Twenty miles outside of New York, The Shadow allowed the roadster more leeway. He knew this highway; there were no important side roads within the next ten miles. Traffic had thinned considerably; The Shadow preferred to let the crooks ride on without another car close behind them.

Coming to a small settlement, The Shadow slowed his speed. He observed a gasoline station on the near side of a dirt road. Beyond was a lunch wagon. Its lights showed the roadster parked in front. The crooks had stopped off for a hurried meal.

THE SALAMANDERS

The Shadow pulled into the filling station. In drawled tone, he ordered the attendant to fill the gas tank. Alighting from the coupe, he strolled into the service station.

IN a manner that befitted his shabby garb, The Shadow shambled to a corner where a pay telephone was located. There was no one else in the service station; The Shadow was free to make an important call. He gave the operator a Manhattan number. Half a minute later, a quiet voice responded over the wire.

"Burbank speaking."

The Shadow had reached his contact man. His conversation with Burbank, however, did not concern the crooks whom The Shadow had followed. In whispered tone, The Shadow gave an order:

"Report on shipment."

"Arrived from Texas twenty minutes ago," returned Burbank, in a methodical tone. "Crofton has shipment at Newark Airport. Instructions awaited."

"Instructions," voiced The Shadow. "Transfer shipment to autogiro. Crofton to remain ready for new call."

"Instructions received."

Leaving the service station, The Shadow paid for the gasoline and started his coupe forward. He passed the lunch wagon slowly; as he guided the car with one hand, he used the other to open the satchel beside him.

From it, The Shadow produced cloak and hat. Halting the car beside the highway, he donned the garments. He then proceeded forward, his rate of speed no more than fifteen miles an hour.

Cars were roaring past the slow-moving coupe. The Shadow watched each automobile's approach in the mirror and checked again when the car had swished past. Soon he saw one coming up behind him with the speed of a rocket. He guessed that it was the roadster.

The Shadow was right. He recognized the license number when the light car whizzed past. Jing and Sloopy were making up for the time that they had lost by stopping at the lunch wagon.

The Shadow had turned on the bright lights of the coupe. He waited until the roadster had swept past a bend; then he clicked his lights to dimmers and jabbed the accelerator. The coupe showed an instant pick-up. Seconds later, The Shadow had attained high speed.

He gained sight of the roadster's tail-light within the next two miles. The crooks, had they looked back, could hardly have connected the car behind them with the coupe that had been loitering along the highway.

The expedient of brightening and dimming the headlights, while simple, was sufficient to lull the men ahead. The Shadow knew; for he had used the expedient on other occasions.

It was necessary to stay closer to the roadster while connecting highways were near at hand. The crooks kept to the main road; again, The Shadow gave them leeway.

At intervals, he closed up toward them, sometimes with bright lights, on other occasions with dim ones. The pursuit continued. The coupe's speedometer registered the distance of sixty-one miles from the George Washington Bridge.

THE SALAMANDERS

As The Shadow was closing in on the roadster, he saw its tail-light slacken speed. The Shadow slowed; he watched the light bob from view. Moving ahead, he came to an old highway that cut off at an angle to the right. The coupe's headlights showed a sign that indicated the town of Sheffield as being four miles away.

USING a road map by the glow of the dashlight, The Shadow formed an immediate conclusion. The crooks had certainly headed for Sheffield, for they had taken the direct route to that town. There was another turn off, a mile farther on, not quite as short as this one. The Shadow decided to use the second road.

He gave the coupe the gas. The car developed speed that it had not previously showed. All during this chase, The Shadow could have passed the crooks at any time, even though they had been driving the roadster to its limit.

The Shadow covered the mile to the next road in a space of fifty seconds. Jamming the brakes, he wheeled right; then opened up along a bumpy road.

Few drivers would have dared to travel over forty-five along this battered highway. The Shadow urged the coupe to almost seventy miles an hour.

The lights of Sheffield showed ahead. The Shadow knew the town as a city of more than thirty thousand inhabitants the focal point of a quarrying district. Though a railroad center, Sheffield was isolated from the main highways.

The Shadow's road joined the one that the roadster had taken. As he slackened speed, The Shadow knew that he had beaten the crooks to the town. The road became the main street; The Shadow took time to study the business district of Sheffield.

On his right, The Shadow saw a decrepit building that looked like an old garage. Past the garage was a narrow street; then a pretentious old-fashioned structure that bore the name "Sheffield National Bank" above its wide doorway. A clock indicated a quarter of nine. The bank was open for late business.

The next building beyond the bank was a squatty stone-fronted structure with a wooden superstructure that showed rows of grimy blackened windows.

Looming above the roof was the beginning of a long train shed, chiefly of wood. A sign said "Freight Depot"; The Shadow recognized that this had formerly been a passenger station.

Through an alleyway next to the freight depot, The Shadow saw a line of railroad tracks that ran parallel to the main street. Those were the yards of the railroad that served the city of Sheffield.

Just after the freight depot, The Shadow came to a business block. This consisted of one large building, at least thirty years old. It was constructed of brick and wood. The ground floor showed store fronts, while the three remaining upper stories served as an apartment house.

As he neared the end of the block, The Shadow saw an important cross street. He decided to wait before he reached it, as the roadster was nearly due. There was a vacant space by a fire plug. No policemen were in sight. The Shadow pulled his coupe to the curb, turned out the lights, then watched from the cover of darkness.

THREE minutes ended The Shadow's vigil. The roadster rolled up and passed the coupe. Its occupants did not even glance toward The Shadow's car. As it neared the crossing, the roadster pulled to the center of the main street. A traffic light showed red; the roadster intended a left turn as soon as the light changed.

THE SALAMANDERS

The Shadow eased the coupe from the curb. Another car had moved up in back of the roadster. The Shadow joined the line. The light turned green. The Shadow swung left with the cars ahead.

Though he had gained no inkling of the fact, The Shadow had viewed the scene of contemplated crime. He had studied the very buildings that had appeared as squares on Colgarth's numbered diagram. Drune, the master of crime, had given his approval to a campaign of destruction. The Shadow, alone competent to forestall evil, had unwittingly left the very place where trouble was due to break.

Nevertheless, The Shadow still had his trail. The roadster was heading westward from Sheffield. The Shadow had lessened speed; but he was keeping the car ahead in view. Caution was necessary. The roadster was taking to a highway that lacked traffic. The Shadow let the other car ride ahead.

He still had a way to trail the roadster. The road was hilly, with curves. By watching far ahead, The Shadow could see the tiny lights of the crook-manned car. The gleam bobbed in and out from strips of woods. The Shadow checked each reappearance of the lights.

There came a space of blackness. The lights did not reappear. Rounding a bend, The Shadow saw a dirt road to the right. He caught the glimmer of a tail-light, a path of brightness beyond it. The roadster had turned off to the right.

Extinguishing his own lights, The Shadow made the turn. The wheels of the coupe joggled roughly on the dirt road.

Guided entirely by the red spot ahead, The Shadow sped the coupe through the darkness. His daring brought him close behind the roadster, just before it took a bend in the road. The Shadow had reached a vantage point.

Close behind the roadster, he was able to drive by the glow of the other car's lights. His coupe, however, had become invisible. Like a ghost car, it was trailing the roadster; the blanketing darkness of the woods concealed the coupe perfectly.

ALL was well for half a mile. The two cars crossed another dirt road; forty feet behind the roadster, The Shadow was sure that the soft purr of the coupe's motor had not been heard by the men ahead. When trouble came, it was from an unexpected source.

The two cars had traveled no more than a hundred feet from the crossing when a glare illuminated the road behind them. Brilliant headlights bathed both the coupe and the roadster. The Shadow's machine was caught in the glowing beam.

A third car had suddenly entered the game, moving in from the crossing that the two machines had passed. The Shadow's darkened coupe was trapped between two automobiles.

The unknown presence of The Shadow was revealed!

CHAPTER XI. DEATH IN THE DARK

IN his dealings with dangerous adversaries, The Shadow preferred quick action. Speedy in battle; accurate in marksmanship, The Shadow had frequently conquered heavy odds when events moved swiftly. His greatest tests came when emergency was slow to arrive. Such a condition gave foemen time to think.

The Shadow had entered a snare that troubled him more than the trap at Breel's. Almost at the end of a trail, his plans had gone wrong. The Shadow had counted upon complete stealth tonight; he had been profiting by

THE SALAMANDERS

the fact that crooks believed him dead. Without any warning, his actions had been exposed to the enemy.

The roadster was going to a rendezvous. The men in that car had been summoned to join their evil chiefs. The masters of crime had taken a precaution. They had posted a follow-up car at the borders of their domain. That third car, deliberately set to make sure the roadster was not followed, had found the dark coupe upon the trail.

Given time for deliberation, the men in the third car would guess that The Shadow was the driver of the coupe. Crooks had believed The Shadow dead on other occasions. They were always prompt to recognize his return.

What action would the enemy take?

One course was immediately possible. The Shadow expected to see the third car leap ahead to overtake him. That would mean battle with the trailers; afterward a fight with the crooks in the roadster, who would come back to join the battle. Such a happening would give The Shadow chance to deal with two groups separately.

The third car; however, failed to close in upon The Shadow. It simply matched the coupe's speed.

The Shadow pressed the accelerator more firmly. He began to gain upon the roadster. Instantly, the car ahead increased its speed. So did the machine that was following The Shadow.

Trying other tactics, The Shadow slowed almost to a standstill. The roadster slackened accordingly; the third car also rumbled at a snail-like gait.

The men in the roadster had noted the coupe by simply looking into their mirror. The lights from the third car had given them a chance to see that they were trailed.

Crooks were playing with The Shadow as a cat would play with a mouse. If he sought to overtake the car ahead, the car behind would close in before he could overwhelm the men in the roadster. If he waited for the car in back, it would not come to him. Nor would the roadster flee and open the road ahead.

CALMLY, The Shadow resumed a normal speed. The other two cars matched him with exactitude.

The dirt road was following an upward slope. The Shadow was content to keep along it. He knew that he was being taken closer to his goal. That was well for the present. Later, however, it could mean a definite trap.

Analyzing the situation, The Shadow knew definitely that there had been no communication between the car ahead and the car in back. Nevertheless, the two machines were acting in accord.

That meant one thing only. This precaution was a usual plan. Crooks had their instructions in advance on how to act should followers appear in this terrain.

The trap lay ahead. Where would it be?

There was a chance that it might lie at the rendezvous – the goal that The Shadow sought. There would be other criminals there, to swell the numbers of the band. At the same time, wise crooks would be wary about bringing an enemy straight into their own camp. It was quite as likely that the trap would be encountered before the end of the trail itself.

THE SALAMANDERS

One mile had passed. The three cars were high upon the hillside, continuing on beneath the trees. The Shadow could feel a rising urge for action; one that he repressed. He realized well that the average man in his position would be jittery.

He calculated that the crooks had counted upon that fact. Whatever the trap, a clever schemer had devised it. The Shadow was confident that he would recognize the snare when he encountered it.

HIS first inkling that the spot was close by came when the roadster slightly decreased speed. The slope had lessened; the car ahead would logically have gone faster. As The Shadow slowed slightly, he noted in the mirror that the car behind was doing the same.

The roadster's headlights showed a slight turn to the right. As the car passed it; The Shadow observed a road that went left from the curve. Immediately afterward, the roadster jogged more speedily; the car in back, however, slowed a trifle. A soft laugh escaped The Shadow's lips.

The crooks were giving him a chance to duck away. The roadster was going to the right; if The Shadow went to the left, only the third car could follow. That would mean a single group of enemies. The opportunity was the very sort that would appeal to a man in a dilemma. In fact, the opportunity was too good. The Shadow knew that the crooks wanted him to go to the left.

The Shadow had reached the fork. Deep ruts to the left offered inviting tracks along which to guide his car. Lights were unnecessary. The road to the left was bait. Nevertheless, The Shadow took it.

Had The Shadow stopped to take up double battle, crooks would have been prepared. His policy was to draw them off their guard. By entering the trap, he could accomplish that important act. Wisdom merely told The Shadow not to venture too deep into the snare.

The roadster's lights had given The Shadow a forty-foot glimpse of the rutted road. That was the full distance that he drove. He could feel the ruts pulling the front wheels to the left, through absolute darkness. The Shadow estimated the distance before he halted.

SOFTLY opening the door of the coupe, The Shadow listened. He heard the slight throbbing of a motor. The third car had extinguished its lights. It was creeping into the road that he had taken. There was no sound of the coupe; no flicker of light among the trees. The front car, too, had stopped.

The Shadow knew what crooks expected.

They supposed that he was still in the coupe; that sooner or later, he would turn on the lights. If he did that, enemies would surge upon him in the darkness. Perhaps the trailing car would smash down upon his coupe.

If The Shadow lingered in the dark, crooks, too would have the benefit of the gloom. They could attack, en masse, to overpower their lone prey.

There was a third course: to drive ahead in darkness. The Shadow knew that his foemen must certainly recognize that such was possible. Therefore, he decided that to drive ahead would mean a completion of the snare. Waiting in their darkened car, crooks were hoping that The Shadow would push the coupe onward, without benefit of lights.

Standing on the left running board, The Shadow reached across the wheel and pulled the hand throttle on the dashboard. The coupe's motor quickened its rhythm. The Shadow adjusted it to a moderate purr.

THE SALAMANDERS

Pressing the clutch pedal with his left hand, he used his right to pull the gear shift into low. He shifted his right hand to the clutch pedal. Slowly, precisely, he let the pedal move upward from the floor.

The action brought the car into gear. With a slight jolt, the coupe moved forward. The ground was level; the car reached a speed of five miles an hour. There was no need to handle the steering wheel. The ruts were holding the coupe to the road.

Swinging outward, The Shadow gripped the handle of the door. As the car rode slowly ahead, he clamped the door shut noiselessly. He hung free, ready at any instant to drop to the ground beside him.

He could see nothing; not even the opening of the road ahead, for the sky was clouded, as dark as the overhanging trees. The Shadow had even extinguished the dashlight. The interior of the coupe was a mass of solid blackness.

The road sloped slightly downward. The whining coupe moved faster. The front wheels gave a sudden jounce. Instantly, The Shadow dived sidewise to the ground. He struck sandy soil; his feet slid past an edge. Gripping at rocks, The Shadow checked his rolling. He could feel a swish; he heard a mechanical screech as the rear wheels of the coupe lurched upward into the air.

An instant later, the car was gone. The sound of its motor had vanished. Seconds seemed interminable; at last, from somewhere far below came the thwack of a tremendous splash that brought long echoes from the steep walls of a stony pit. The coupe had plunged a full eighty feet into the deep, stagnant waters of an abandoned quarry.

The Shadow was on the fringe of the cliff. He had acted instantly when he had felt the warning. As he crawled to firmer ground, he could hear the throb of an approaching motor. The men in the third car had heard the splash. They were confident that the coupe's driver had gone with the car into the quarry.

They had moved up behind the coupe, knowing that its fall would tell them when they had reached their limit. They wanted to peer down into the pit; to assure themselves that The Shadow had made no miraculous escape from the submerged coupe.

RISING from hands and knees, The Shadow was drawing an automatic. He expected men to come on foot, with flashlights. He was preparing to give them a surprise. Instead, the driver of the car was the one who unwittingly produced the surprise.

The fellow suddenly switched on the lights, to spot the edge of the quarry. Headlamps and tail-light were sufficient to show the outline of the car, forty feet short of the quarry's edge.

The car was still coasting forward; the glare of its headlights showed The Shadow. Instantly, the cloaked fighter sprang forward, straight for the radiator of the sedan.

The front of the car afforded The Shadow his only possible cover. Shouts were coming from the moving car; guns were bristling from windows. Revolvers spat wildly in the night. Thuggish marksmen were too late. Five in number, they saw The Shadow dropping in front of the moving car; the sedan's advance was giving him better cover.

The unarmed driver snarled an oath. He saw a chance to beat The Shadow's game. He had thirty feet in which to do it. The Shadow was only a few yards away. Gripping the wheel in readiness for a sharp turn, the sedan's driver jabbed the accelerator. The car lurched hard toward The Shadow.

THE SALAMANDERS

Whipping from the path, The Shadow jabbed quick shots from his automatic. He aimed for the steering wheel, to cripple the thug behind it. That crook out, the sedan could not continue.

The Shadow could again use the radiator as his entrenchment. In his close-range aim, The Shadow was accurate; but his leap was delayed too long. As his .45 zipped its third quick shot, the fender of the sedan sideswiped him before he could escape it.

Staggering, The Shadow reeled sidewise. He sprawled and lost his guns. He was clear of the sedan's path; he lay flat on the road, was in darkness off to the side. But bullets were biting the gravel all about him. The moment the car halted, or turned, The Shadow would be a helpless target.

Savage shouts had sounded from the car as crooks stabbed wild shots that were ineffective because of the sedan's motion. As The Shadow rolled to hands and knees, groping to regain a gun, he heard shouts change to shrieks.

The sedan had not stopped; nor had it veered. The driver had slumped without the knowledge of the marksmen who accompanied him. His foot had slipped from the accelerator; but the car was in high-gear. On the slight downgrade, it was rolling straight to the quarry's brink.

The thug beside the driver was grabbing for the steering wheel. He gained it; the car swerved left on the edge of the cliff. A door burst open; one frenzied crook made a dive for the ground. He was the wisest of the lot.

Though its left wheels held to solid ground, the sedan's right tires slipped over the stony edge. The car was broadside to The Shadow; he saw its lights topple away from him.

With a slow, outward motion, the sedan took a sidewise plunge. It was gone from the brink, the lights obliterated. Long shrieks became trailing wails that ended in a splash more violent than the thwack of the coupe.

The sedan had carried four crooks as cargo to the fate that they had sought to bestow upon The Shadow. The fifth thug had escaped. He was crawling from the brink.

Bare-handed, The Shadow surged forward to meet him.

PICKING the exact spot where he had seen the crook fall, The Shadow found his foeman in the darkness. The man quavered hoarsely as The Shadow seized him.

Too jittery to offer resistance after his narrow escape from death, the crook subsided to the turf. His thought of fight was gone. He feared the fate that had overwhelmed the others. Whipping the fellow's belt from his waist, The Shadow rolled the prisoner on his face and doubled his legs upward. With the belt, he formed a figure 8 that bound the thug's wrists and ankles together.

Carrying the prisoner well away from the quarry, The Shadow placed him against a tree. Producing a flashlight, he looked about for his automatics. He found them, extinguished the light, then returned along the rutty road. The Shadow expected to find others back at the fork.

A motor throbbed its presence. The Shadow recognized the jerky sound. Sloopy and Jing were waiting; they had heard only the sounds of gunfire. Sloopy was peering from beside the wheel, growling because he could not see through the dark. The roadster's dashlight offered a small glow within the car.

THE SALAMANDERS

"It was The Shadow," decided Sloopy, in a gruff tone. "Couldn't have been nobody else. Thought they croaked him, though, at Brael's –"

A muffled cry from Jing. Sloopy turned. He saw gloved hands from the dark, over the right door of the roadster, yanking Jing from the car. As Jing sprawled outward, Sloopy caught the gleam of fierce eyes. A hoarse shout was Sloopy's challenge:

"The Shadow!"

Yanking a revolver, Sloopy jabbed shots into the darkness – the darkness where sounds of a scuffle told him that Jing was meeting disaster. Echoes followed Sloopy's three shots. All was quiet beside the car. Leaning to the right, Sloopy called out.

"You all right, Jing?" was his query. "Hope I didn't plug you, while I was getting him. It was The Shadow –"

A dying groan answered from the ground beside the roadster. The tone was Jing's. As Sloopy winced, a sinister laugh sounded at his very elbow, on the left side of the car. Coughing an oath, Sloopy swung about. He was too late to aim his gun.

VISELIKE hands gripped Sloopy's throat. Choking, the crook dropped his gun. He subsided, sidewise, to the seat beside him. The Shadow came aboard the roadster. By the dashlight's glow, he bound and gagged Sloopy and huddled him upon the seat at the right.

Jing was dead. The Shadow had twisted him toward the car. Sloopy's shots had finished his pal. By rounding the back of the roadster, The Shadow had completed his victory. Carrying Sloopy as a prisoner, he started the roadster along the road to the right.

Should this road lead nowhere, The Shadow intended to question the man beside him; to make the prisoner talk, a task that The Shadow could easily accomplish.

One mile farther on, The Shadow skirted the side of a hill. He paused to study a distant glow against the clouded sky. A puff of flame rose suddenly, then disappeared. Darkness replaced the short-lived beacon.

This road led to a blast furnace. The Shadow had recognized the flare from the far-off chimney. The furnace was one that worked at night; most observers would not have given it second thought, for such plants were common in this region.

The Shadow, however, delved more deeply.

He was seeking a supercrook who used fire as the means to cover crime – an evil master of death, who controlled the Salamanders as henchmen. A blast furnace would be useful to those rogues as a proving ground for their devices.

The flare puffed anew. It was from somewhere along this old road. The Shadow drove the roadster forward, toward the goal that living flames had revealed.

CHAPTER XII. THE ORDEAL

THE puffs of flame that guided The Shadow were proof that something was afoot at the blast furnace. Master crooks were at their isolated headquarters. Drune and Colgarth had completed their plans for crime; while they awaited a definite hour, they had found time for preliminary diversion.

THE SALAMANDERS

The two rogues were seated in a small, stone-walled room that looked like a crude office. They occupied battered chairs; near them was a desk, with a telephone. A single incandescent light illuminated the chamber. Beneath the glare, a prisoner lay propped against the wall.

He was bound hand and foot, that captive. Stolidly, he met the glaring gaze of the men who held him helpless. His face showed grimness; his lips remained unopened. He was ready to defeat all efforts that might be used to make him talk.

The prisoner on the floor was Harry Vincent. The Shadow's agent had survived the hotel fire at Riverport. His present plight, however, was as great as when Gordon Colgarth had consigned him to the smoke-filled cellar.

Colgarth, himself, was emphasizing that particular fact. In harsh tones, the hard-faced man was speaking to the prisoner.

"We know your name, Vincent," came Colgarth's rasp. "We know why you were at Riverport, watching Woldorf. You were working for The Shadow."

Colgarth paused to see if he had scored a hit. Harry's expression did not change.

"Why be a fool?" sneered Colgarth.

"The Shadow is dead. Look at these headlines." He picked up a newspaper from the desk and pointed to large-typed words. "They say that Lincoln Breel died in a New York fire. They lie. We rubbed out Breel days ago.

"It was The Shadow who died instead of Breel. He was finished by the same men who carried you from the Riverport hotel. We figured we might make you talk. That's why I shoved you down into the cellar. But The Shadow was different. We took no chances with him."

Harry did not betray the worry that he felt. He had no recollection of how he had been brought from Riverport. His hurtling trip into the hotel cellar had left him senseless. He could recall traveling in a bumpy truck; a final arrival in this stone-walled room. Since then, he had been a prisoner, confined to this one place.

Did Colgarth speak the truth concerning The Shadow?

HARRY feared that the crook's words were correct. Harry knew The Shadow's ability at disguise. He could picture his chief arriving at Breel's, not knowing that the man whom he impersonated had been murdered days before.

"You gain nothing by silence," insisted Colgarth. "We're giving you a chance, Vincent, because we don't want any interference in the future. You worked for The Shadow, so it's a bet that there are others like you. We want to know who they are.

"Maybe you're thinking that we didn't get The Shadow, that we want you to squawk so we can find him. That's not the game. The Shadow is dead, I tell you. He'll stay dead. You can't help him."

Harry remained unimpressed. Colgarth fumed. He was about to rasp new statements when Drone stopped him with a waving hand. It was the gray-haired magnate's time to speak.

Until this moment, Drone had said nothing. He had simply eyed Harry with a cunning gaze. Drone's shrewd look had made Harry feel positive that the older man was the senior partner of the criminal pair, more

THE SALAMANDERS

important – and, therefore, more dangerous – than Colgarth.

When Drune spoke, his tones were a dry crackle, persuasive because of their careful emphasis.

"Perhaps, Mr. Vincent," stated Drune, "we should clarify this situation. We know your name, thanks to papers that were on your person. You, however, have not heard ours. I am Huxley Drune, president of the Great American Power Company, with offices in New York City.

"Possibly you have never heard of my company? That is not astonishing. Great American Power has not as yet come into the limelight. It was founded upon prospects rather than actual assets. Great American Power will be heard from in the future."

There was an insidious touch to Drune's prediction. The master crook paused to indulge in a dry smile.

"Our prospects," continued Drune, watching Harry steadily as he spoke, "depended upon three acquisitions. First" – he tapped his left thumb with his right forefinger – "important securities held by Chester Woldorf. We gained those by removing the safe from the Capitol Hotel in Riverport."

HARRY stared. He had guessed why Woldorf had been murdered; but he could not understand how the hotel safe had been lifted. He tried to connect it with his own peculiar delivery from the fire. He wondered how any human being could have braved the flame.

"Second" – Drune was tapping his left forefinger – "we needed securities owned by Lincoln Breel. I, personally, saw to Breel's death at his lonely lodge in the Adirondacks. Later, we set his home ablaze. We removed the safe that was in his New York residence. We now possess Breel's holdings."

In satisfied fashion, Drune tapped his next finger.

"Our third and final acquisition," he stated, "will be securities that belong to the Cruikshank estate. Those stocks are in the Sheffield National Bank. We shall remove them tonight. I might remark that we shall encounter no difficulty whatever."

Leaning back, Drune waved a hand toward his partner.

"This gentleman," he remarked, "is Gordon Colgarth. He is highly esteemed in the town of Sheffield. He owns property in the city. He is a director of the Sheffield National Bank. His residence is a country estate, with a delightful old colonial mansion. It is located several miles north of Sheffield."

Drune's persuasive tone had become almost gentle. Colgarth blinked, then showed a hard smile. Puzzled at first, he realized that Drune was using the best tactics. By telling all, the master crook was making an impression upon Harry.

Drune leaned toward the prisoner. Steadily, each word emphatic, he came to the climax that he wanted.

"We have killed," announced Drune, "whenever necessity compelled us. We have been ruthless, purely through policy. Tonight, one hundred or more persons may perish. Useless persons, who will die only because their plight will divert attention from our place of operations.

"The Shadow was a threat. Therefore, we slew him. Previously we had permitted you to live, because we thought you might prove useful. Colgarth has already expressed that fact. I need not dwell further on the past.

THE SALAMANDERS

"The future concerns the three of us. Whether you live or die depends entirely upon your own choice. Tonight, Colgarth and I shall possess all the holdings that we need. Our wealth, through proper manipulation, will bring us fifty million dollars.

"There will be a stir in Wall Street. One, however, that will excite no suspicion there. The only person who might link our gain with crime are others like yourself. Men who once served The Shadow. We are willing to grant you life because we know that you can offset the efforts of such persons."

Tilting his head in a speculative fashion, Drune spoke pleasantly of the future.

"You will live in comfort, Vincent," he declared. "Let us say in luxury. You will be a prisoner, yes, but good behavior will grant you privileges. You will, of course, provide us with the names of all persons who might make us trouble.

"We shall watch such persons. If they do nothing against us, we shall ignore them. If they trouble us, we shall let you warn them. Unless they persist despite your warnings, we shall not harm them.

"They are your friends, Vincent." Drune lowered his gaze and smiled benignly toward the prisoner. "You can be their benefactor, by keeping them out of trouble. Your work accomplished, you shall have wealth – our gift, in return for your cooperation."

DRUNE stopped. His withered face tilted to one side. His eyes beamed; his lips showed a mild smile. Harry remained stolid. Colgarth showed impatience.

"What about it, Vincent?" queried the junior partner. "You've heard Drune's terms. They're fair –"

Drune extended a restraining hand.

"Come, Colgarth," he suggested. "Let Vincent deliberate alone. We may grant him a few minutes to make his decision."

Colgarth nodded. He followed Drune toward a door at the front of the room. The two stepped through into a passage. Drune closed the door. He chuckled softly as he and Colgarth stood in the darkness of the passage.

"That talk," remarked the master crook in a tone that was complimentary to himself, "can be classed as the proper style of persuasion to be used with a man of intelligence."

"You handled it great," whispered Colgarth. "There's only one question, though."

"What is it?"

"Is Vincent going to be worth all that you promised him?"

Drune's reply was an insidious croak. To Colgarth, it signified more than words. Drune was denoting evil pleasure. Colgarth awaited an explanation.

"So you fell for it?" chuckled Drune. "Well, Colgarth, if you swallowed my story, Vincent probably will."

"You bluffed him?"

"Of course. Of what use is Vincent? Only to tell us the names of others."

THE SALAMANDERS

"You mentioned that to him –"

"Certainly. All the while, however, I covered the most important fact."

"What was that?"

"The fact that Vincent and those others all come into the class that I mentioned mildly – persons whom we must necessarily eliminate. Once Vincent has told us the names of all who served The Shadow, we shall do away with them, one by one."

"And Vincent?"

"He will be our final victim. Come, Colgarth; we have given him sufficient time to consider my false offer. Let us enter and hear his reply."

Drune opened the door and stepped into the lighted office. He approached Harry and smiled in kindly manner. Pleasantly, he put a question:

"You have considered?"

FOR the first time, Harry showed an expression. Looking up at Drune, he delivered a contemptuous smile. Words were unnecessary on Harry's part. His disdainful look showed that he had seen through Drune's false promise.

Instantly, Drune's manner altered. His smile changed to a demonish leer.

His eyes bulged from their sockets. His teeth showed fang-like, yellow and ugly against the duller hue of his parchment face. Clenching his fists, Drune turned to Colgarth, whose hard face showed harsh anger. Drune's game had failed. He was ready to vent his spite upon the prisoner who had defied him.

"We shall do without Vincent's knowledge," snarled Drune. "His death will mean one more meddler gone. We can meet the others as they come."

"Right," rasped Colgarth. He hauled forth a revolver and jabbed the muzzle toward Harry. "I'll give him what's coming to him."

"Wait!" Drune's firm hand gripped Colgarth's arm. "This prisoner does not deserve so comfortable a fate."

With a leer, he added: "The Salamanders saved him from death by fire. We shall consign him back into the flames."

Bravely, Harry Vincent heard the promised fate. He was ready for his ordeal, although he had no hope of aid. Harry believed The Shadow dead; his chief, so he thought, had perished in a tomb of fire.

Despite the horror of such death, Harry felt triumph in the thought that he was to end life like The Shadow, fighting against evil.

CHAPTER XIII. THE FIERY PIT

DRUNE snapped a command to Colgarth. The latter yanked open the door and shouted a summons that echoed along the stony corridor. Harry heard the pace of approaching feet. Two brawny, rough-clad men

THE SALAMANDERS

arrived. Colgarth indicated the prisoner.

"Take him to the test room."

The men nodded. Harry was hoisted upon husky shoulders. Helplessly bound, he felt himself being carried through the darkened passage. The men made a turn at a corner. They came to a large door; one carrier kicked it open.

A fierce glow struck Harry's eyes; with it came a crackling roar. A blast of heat swept from the doorway. As the men descended steps, Harry sniffed fumes amid the burning temperature. His captors strode twelve paces forward, then dropped Harry to the floor against a wall. His eyes were straight toward the glow.

Directly in front of Harry was a pit thirty feet wide. It extended fifteen feet to a wall. That pit was a bed of fire, an open furnace that matched all descriptions of hellish depths. Coals were banked high, almost to the level of a concrete curb that fronted the pit.

Looming from the wall at the left was a huge tube that evidently led to a chimney. Harry heard a whirring sound; flames roared as a suction pump drew them crackling toward the tube. Fumes and smoke were sucked upward; with them went a terrific surge of flame.

Harry recognized that this must be a converted blast furnace. He guessed that the sudden suction had carried a sweep of flames up through a tall chimney.

Such was necessary in order to free the room from fumes that no human being could survive.

HARRY'S two captors had gone. Despite the pressure of the heat, Harry glanced to the right. He saw that the right end of the pit ended a few yards short of the wall. Harry saw grimy hands and bare, sweaty shoulders.

Stripped to the waist, three stokers were at work in a shallow pit. They were hauling out ashes from beneath the fire.

Large cans of ashes were stacked at the right wall, on a level with the path where Harry lay. It required tons of coal to feed the fiery pit. Harry was puzzled as to the purpose of so large a bed of flame. He was to learn the reason for it; but before the answer came, he was suddenly impelled to watch a happening at the wall beyond the pit.

A short section of the wall was rising upward, like a curtain. Harry had taken it for stone; he realized that it must be thin steel, fronted with asbestos that matched the dullish color of the solid wall.

The raised curtain revealed a ledge of six-foot width. The ledge was some four feet deep; behind it was a wall topped by a rail. Leaning over the rail was Huxley Drune.

High above the flaming pit, Drune stood like a gloating sentinel. His glare focused upon Harry; the prisoner saw the evil smirk that adorned the master villain's lips.

Wavering fumes from the pit added distortion to Harry's view. He saw Drune as a demon, the controller of the torrid depths where fire held its sway.

Drune's arms were waving in command. Stokers swung huge shovels, to hurl streams of coal across the fire. Flames roared their welcome to the fuel. Hungrily, they turned the coals into an added blaze. The suction outlet whirled.

THE SALAMANDERS

Again, Harry saw a mass of fire shoot up through the chimney. Fumes cleared and gave a better view of Drune. The fire master was delivering a new signal.

Harry looked to the left. Coming through a door was Gordon Colgarth, flanked by two of the strangest creatures whom Harry had ever seen. They looked like undersea divers, clad in bulky suits with glass-fronted helmets. Each of these underlings was trailing a long hose.

It was Harry's first sight of the Salamanders. He understood, at last, how he had been carried from the toppling, fire-swept structure of the old hotel in Riverport. These asbestos-suited workers were the servitors who made crime possible for Drune and Colgarth. Harry guessed correctly that there must be other Salamanders in the crew.

More than that, he understood the reason for the huge bed of fire that lay before him. That pit was the practice ground wherein the Salamanders tested their ability. The flames of the open furnace made as hot a fire as any that the Salamanders might encounter when they marched forth to crime.

The Salamanders moved onward. Colgarth stopped. Reaching the spot where Harry lay, the monstrous henchmen stooped and picked up the prisoner. Hoisting him high between them, they turned toward the fire. Drune's hand was raised to halt them. The Salamanders waited, holding Harry, stretched face upward. They had raised him to arm's length.

Harry could see nothing but the high stone ceiling. He could feel the heat of the furnace; he could smell its sulphurous fumes. He heard a whirred puff as the suction pipe operated. For a moment, the heat lessened; the fumes were gone. Turning his head, Harry, saw Drune's arm drop.

The Salamanders stepped squarely into the blazing pit.

THE crackle beneath Harry's back was ominous. Tongued flames were sweltering, though their upward lick did not reach the prisoner, who was borne seven feet above. Step by step, finding solid footing upon the live coals, the Salamanders strode to the inner wall.

Lowering their arms, they placed Harry, face upward, upon a ledge. Six feet above the fire, Harry lay like a victim upon the altar of a Moloch. Drune, glaring down, represented the fiend who was prepared to deliver sacrifice to the fire god.

Increasing fumes cleared as another blast roared up into the chimney. Turning, the Salamanders marched out through the fire. They joined Colgarth at the door, as he waved for them to hurry.

Harry saw the Salamanders removing their helmets. He guessed that they were leaving with Colgarth upon their expedition of crime.

Stokers hurled new coals upon the fire. Flames licked the wall below the ledge. The fire was ready for its victim. Drune reached to a niche beside him and drew slowly upon a long, stout, wooden lever that was fitted into a steel ring.

There was a grating sound by Harry's shoulder. Looking inward, the prisoner saw the wall inch forward below the rail. It pressed slowly outward. It encountered Harry's shoulder. Harry felt himself move toward the pit, while hidden machinery clattered in response to Drune's slow, steady pull upon the lever.

The fire master was gloating. Stokers showed leers upon their sweaty faces as they watched Harry's slow approach to the flames. They were proper henchmen for a fiend like Drune. The stokers took it that they were

THE SALAMANDERS

to have their reward for long efforts with the fire.

Within the coming minutes, Harry Vincent was destined to lose his balance; to plunge downward toward the white-hot coals. The fire was sufficient to burn any unprotected human to a crisp within the time space of a dozen seconds.

Harry tried to buck the moving wall. The attempt was useless. He was at the edge. One bound elbow was hanging over the fire. Strength left him as he turned his face to the wall.

The fumes were bringing spasmodic gasps from Harry's lips. He managed barely to turn upon his left side facing the wall. The move prevented him from falling; but it meant only a short postponement of the final plunge.

Drune paused a moment with the lever to gloat at Harry's plight. The stokers shouted glee that was drowned out by the fire's roar. Drune's hand tightened on the wooden rod.

Triumphantly, he looked toward the stokers. Two of them were gesticulating their mad joy. The third suddenly became rigid.

With a wild, unheard shout, the third stoker pointed across the fire. His companions stopped their gestures to stare. Drune, his hand stilled upon the lever, looked also.

At the door by which Colgarth and the Salamanders had departed stood a figure of vengeance. The lurid, red-orange light of the fire showed The Shadow. His black-clad form was weird against the reflected crimson that tinged the wall. His eyes were burning with a glow that matched the fire's coals.

Gloved fists held automatics. One weapon was directed toward Drune's balcony; the other covered the stokers at the end of the pit.

DRUNE snarled. The stokers dived away. Automatics spat bullets before a crook could gain a gun. Slugs clanged the wide posts of Drune's protecting rail. Other bullets sizzled the wall where the stokers had been. The three underlings were taking to a doorway below, to get out of range from The Shadow's covering guns.

Drune was alone. Twisting backward into a narrow outlet, he had found luck with him. He had escaped The Shadow's first bullets. He was under cover in his exit, except for his extended right arm, which bent from around a corner and gripped the top of the long, wooden lever.

The Shadow could not aim for Drune's clutching hand. It was protected by the steel rail of the balcony. As his last deed before flight, Drune intended to give the final tug that would thrust the wall six inches farther forward and roll Harry Vincent into the fiery pit.

The Shadow aimed between the rails of the balcony. He took the only target possible, the wooden lever that projected upward in full view. Bullets whistled in a swift barrage. They splintered the wooden rod, just as Drune gave his last pull. The weakened lever failed. It snapped off in Drune's fist.

Promptly, The Shadow sidled to the left. He gained a new position – one that gave him an angle from which he could pump bullets into the exit where Drune had taken cover.

The master crook foresaw the maneuver. Too late to pull a gun of his own, he took another course. He made a hasty scramble off through his outlet, just as The Shadow gained the aim he wanted. A .45 spoke half a second too late. Drune had gone to overtake the fleeing stokers; to make a dash for distant safety.

THE SALAMANDERS

The Shadow looked toward Harry Vincent. He saw his agent prone and motionless, on the very outward portion of the ledge. Though the pressing wall had stopped, Harry was in a forced position.

The slightest waver of his body would cause him to lose his balance. Groggy from the fumes, Harry was holding on to life through sheer instinct. At any moment, he might lose his slender balance.

Rescue was imperative; yet between The Shadow and his agent lay fifteen feet of roaring, fresh-coaled flames!

The Shadow saw the ash containers at the end of the short passage that fronted the fire bed. Swiftly, he dashed toward the containers.

One of those ash-filled cylinders was almost a two-man burden; yet The Shadow hoisted it as easily as if it had been empty. He swung to the center of the low front that ran along the pit. With a lunging motion, he tossed thick ashes upon the fire.

Flames wavered; they lashed the sides of the ashy path and fought to lick up through the surface. The Shadow hurled more ashes; these went farther than the first. They spread halfway across the gap separating The Shadow from Harry Vincent.

Another heave sent chunky ashes to a distance of twelve feet. The Shadow gave a final toss and sprayed the last contents to the far wall.

The chimney roared. Flames swept across the ashy path and formed a flare as they roared through the suction tube. Again, the ashy path lay clear and gray. Fumes had departed. The Shadow sprang across the low barrier and stepped upon the path of ashes.

SLOWLY, each step steady, he found his footing in the furnace. Haste would have spelled his doom. So would delay. The Shadow was using the process of the Oriental fire walkers, who tread bare-footed through beds of flame. Their secret was a burnt charcoal surface, with feet toughened by an alum solution.

The Shadow had chosen ordinary ashes, with leather underfoot. His protection was greater; but he was daring flames that no fire walker would have been willing to engage.

Five steady paces. Eyes ahead. The Shadow saw Harry's body waver. Almost pausing, The Shadow made three short strides, timing his steps to the minimum, counting upon Harry's fall. Forward went The Shadow's hands.

As Harry, gasping, toppled from the ledge, strong arms were there to snare him just below the brink. Gauging his approach to perfection, The Shadow had gained advantage through Harry's sudden relax. He had no need to pause.

He had caught his falling agent tightly; turning, The Shadow swung Harry across his shoulders. Stooped forward, he gazed toward the ashes as he retraced his path to safety. .

The return was doubly dangerous. Fire had licked up through the ashes. Certain spots were unsafe. The Shadow's strides were zigzagging ones. With the burden of double weight, he needed absolute surety in footing. Any one of his eight steps could mean doom for himself and the man he rescued.

Steady steps served The Shadow; but his deliberate progress produced another sort of danger. At any moment, the suction tube was due to draw another withering blast of fire across the failing path of ashes. The

THE SALAMANDERS

Salamanders had not feared such puffs of flame; but The Shadow was not equipped to withstand one. Each step made a blast more imminent.

THE SHADOW reached the front edge of the pit. He stamped a scorched shoe upon the low stone barrier. With an upward, forward spring he swung his other foot past the edge, down to the stone path beyond.

Quickly, he leaped entirely clear from the fire's edge and rolled Harry to the solid floor beside the wall. Leaning back, The Shadow drew a lungful of fresh breath. He had been forced to breathe with caution amid the scorching fumes.

A tremendous roar came from the defeated fire. It was the expected suction of the automatic chimney, four seconds too late to ensnare The Shadow. Flames rose and ripped in one wild sheet that lashed across the path of ashes. The chimney howled as it delivered a puff like those that had served The Shadow as his beacon.

That surge of fire obliterated the ashy path; but its destroying force found nothingness. The Shadow had rescued Harry Vincent. He had won his duel with the flaming pit.

CHAPTER XIV. CRIME'S HOUR

NEW vigilance was The Shadow's move immediately after his rescue of Harry Vincent. He had witnessed the full evil of Huxley Drune. He knew that the supercrook might return once he had rallied his scattered squad of henchmen.

Standing above Harry Vincent, The Shadow drew the automatics that he had replaced beneath his cloak. He looked toward the high-railed balcony, then to the stoker's pit.

Satisfied that crooks were not returning, The Shadow put away one gun. While he held the other, he raised Harry from the floor and started a journey through the outer door. The furnace blasted a puffy roar as its conqueror departed.

Cool air seemed frigid in the passage. The contrast was so staggering that The Shadow was forced to ease Harry to the floor. Two minutes passed, while The Shadow watched the brilliant doorway, ready in case enemies should appear. The air became reviving. The Shadow stooped beside Harry.

There was no need to cut Harry's bonds. The Shadow broke them with hard tugs; for the cords had become scorched. Harry's hands showed blisters; so did his neck; but his face had been away from the fire. His clothing, though singed, had protected his body.

Harry's ordeal had been a long one; but he was showing signs of slow recuperation. Producing a handkerchief, The Shadow ripped it in half and used the portions to bandage Harry's hands. Slowly, Harry moved; finding himself free, he tried to rise. The Shadow prevented him. He eased Harry against the wall.

Whispered words reached Harry's ears. Tones of encouragement that came like a voice within a dream. Harry realized that he had been rescued; he recognized the tones as The Shadow's. It was unbelievable; so much so that it stirred Harry to vague mutterings. His words became coherent.

"Drune," spoke Harry. "Huxley Drune – the man above the pit – he runs the game. Gordon Colgarth – he met me in Riverport – he commands the Salamanders –"

Harry mumbled. The Shadow urged him to continue. In response to the commanding whisper, Harry spoke again.

THE SALAMANDERS

"Woldorf – Breel – both murdered" – Harry paused; his breath came in a choke – "there will be other crime tonight. Sheffield – the bank – a hundred people may die –"

HARRY'S tone subsided. He was sinking back with a tired sigh. The Shadow roused him violently. With a start, Harry tried to connect events.

"I was a prisoner," he recalled. "They kept me in a room like an office. Chairs there – a desk – a telephone. They took me through a passage, to a pit of fire –"

Harry gulped as he leaned forward. He could see the vivid glow from the furnace room. He heard a puffing roar from beyond that door. His nerves began to buckle. Harry sagged backward. The Shadow gripped him. The strength of that clasp restored Harry's fading confidence. He rallied as The Shadow drew him to his feet.

The Shadow led the way along the passage. He reached the end away from the furnace room. He guided Harry to the right; there was reason for the move.

The Shadow had entered from the other direction, through a doorway that he had found when he reached the building that housed the blast furnace. He knew, therefore, that Harry must have been brought from the opposite end of the passage. The Shadow wanted to locate the office that Harry had mentioned.

Using a flashlight, The Shadow found the door. He opened it, discovered the hanging light and turned it on. He saw the desk; placing Harry in a chair, he picked up the telephone. A few clicks of the receiver hook brought a response from the operator. In careful tones, The Shadow gave a New York number.

Harry had told The Shadow where crime was due. It would strike in Sheffield, with the Sheffield National Bank as its goal. The Shadow knew that crooks would again use fire as their main weapon. Given time, he could offset their stroke.

Burbank's voice came across the wire. The Shadow gave an order.

"Autogiro to leave at once," he instructed. "Make landing at the airport near Sheffield, New Jersey. Await contact."

"Instructions received."

The Shadow had made plans for the mysterious shipment that had come from Texas. Crofton had by this time transferred it to the autogiro at the Newark Airport. He would have the autogiro at the Sheffield Airport within the next hour.

There was a chance that crime would strike before the ship arrived. The Shadow must warn the authorities in Sheffield. He clicked the receiver to recall the Sheffield operator. There was a half-minute delay; then the girl's voice sounded.

"Hello..."

The line was dead. The Shadow clicked the receiver hook twice, then jounced the telephone upon the desk. Drune's work. The master crook had rallied his men somewhere outside. They had cut the telephone wire.

The Shadow turned to Harry for more facts. Revived, the rescued agent gave them.

THE SALAMANDERS

"Colgarth left with two Salamanders," stated Harry. "The rest are probably in Sheffield. Colgarth has a country house, several miles north of the town."

THE SHADOW nodded. He could picture the country estate as the new headquarters. A stronghold to which Drune had probably headed, leaving crime to Colgarth in Sheffield.

The Shadow had not encountered Colgarth and the Salamanders; but he had heard a car pulling away from one side of the blast furnace while he had been stowing the roadster in the woods beyond the building.

It was time for quick action. First, to make sure that Drune was not still about; after that, to reach Sheffield with the utmost speed. The Shadow had formed an instantaneous picture of the situation. The old garage as headquarters for the Salamanders; the Sheffield National Bank as the building to be burned.

More than that, he recognized what Harry had meant by a hundred lives in danger. The Shadow remembered the old freight depot; the apartment house beyond it. As clearly as if he had Colgarth's diagram in front of him, The Shadow could see the route by which the fire would progress.

The call to Burbank had been important; but it would be useless if the blaze began too soon. The warning to the Sheffield authorities had been The Shadow's alternate move; Drune had tidily balked it. The Shadow's deduction was that crime would not be long delayed.

The Shadow paused long enough to add new cartridges to his half-emptied automatics. Producing an additional weapon, he handed it to Harry. With a sharp order, The Shadow clicked off the light, then used his flashlight to lead the way outside.

When they reached the chilly outdoors, The Shadow extinguished his torch. Clutching Harry's arm, he drew his companion through the darkness. They groped past trees; The Shadow found the roadster. He turned on the dashlight. Harry saw Sloopy bound and gagged inside the car.

Without ceremony, The Shadow hauled the crook to the ground and rolled him close beside a tree. He motioned Harry into the car, then took the wheel. The motor hummed as The Shadow pressed the starter. The car swung toward the road.

"Prepare for Drune."

Harry gripped his automatic as he heard The Shadow's order. The Shadow was driving with one hand, gripping a .45 with the other. He turned on the lights; they showed the road ahead. Harry realized that if they encountered an ambush, The Shadow's plan would be to run it rather than delay the dash to Sheffield.

HARRY'S guess was right. Nevertheless, he had by no means pictured the full extent of The Shadow's deductions. The Shadow was considering facts unknown to Harry.

The Shadow knew that Drune had remained with three henchmen; but they were probably the poorest fighters in his band. Otherwise, they would not have been delegated to their job as stokers. Furthermore, they had scattered when The Shadow opened fire.

Knowing The Shadow's prowess, doubtlessly amazed by the fact that he had reappeared, Drune would be too wary to attempt a hurried ambush with three inferior underlings as his only backers. There were others upon whom Drune would depend.

THE SALAMANDERS

Drune and his minions, driving away in a car, would keep on until they reached the crossing of the two dirt roads. There, they would expect to find a sedan manned by five sure marksmen. Drune, knowing The Shadow's skill at stealth, would naturally suppose that he had maneuvered past the sedan. The master crook would not jump to the incredible belief that the sedan was at the bottom of the old abandoned quarry.

Not finding the sedan, Drune's only move would be to deploy his three stokers. The ambush would be a forced one, not at all to Drune's liking. Much as he wanted to hold back The Shadow, he would be thinking of the security that Colgarth's stronghold offered.

The roadster roared along the road. Harry gripped the braces of the raised top. He could foresee a quick, sure ride through any early ambush. He did not know that The Shadow was accomplishing another purpose. By his terrific speed, The Shadow was lessening the space of time that Drune would have for preparations at the crossroads.

They whizzed past the rutted road to the quarry. Down the long hill; then The Shadow pressed the clutch pedal and turned off the ignition. He turned the key on again, a few moments later, but the motor did not engage, for The Shadow still held the clutch pedal to the floorboard.

The lights went off; the roadster coasted silently in darkness. The last glimpse along the road had shown The Shadow that they were past the bend, rolling on a straight stretch to the crossing. Only the creak of the car's springs gave token of the approach. Even that sound ceased as the roadster struck a smoother piece of road, close to the crossing.

"Ready," whispered The Shadow. "Aim to the right. Thirty degrees forward. Three shots –"

A pause. The Shadow was aiming similarly to the left. The roadster creaked slowly onward.

The Shadow gave the command:

"Fire!"

Simultaneously, The Shadow and Harry each discharged three rounds. The shots ripped from each side of the roadster, just before it reached the crossroad.

YELLS sounded from the left. A motor roared as its driver jabbed the starter. Lights clicked into view. A tail-light formed a target less than fifty feet away. The Shadow gave Harry a quick command:

"Join fire!"

Leaning across the wheel, Harry used his right hand; The Shadow fired with his left. They were at the center of the crossroad, pumping bullets at the car that had revealed itself.

The other machine had been waiting, headed away from the crossing. It shot forward with terrific speed, darting madly toward a bend. There was not a single answering bullet. The occupants of the car had chosen flight instead of battle.

The Shadow did not halt. Instead, he threw in the clutch. The motor throbbed; The Shadow drove the roadster ahead; increasing speed as he made for the road to Sheffield.

The Shadow had cracked Drune's ambush.

THE SALAMANDERS

The master of crime had lain in wait, his minions ready with their guns. Had they scented the roadster's approach, they would have spread among the trees, to begin a desperate fire.

The Shadow had decided that Drune's car would be headed away, ready for flight if the ambush failed. He had called for fire to both sides, so the enemy's car would surely be a possible target, on whichever road Drune had chosen.

The shots from the night had totally surprised the crooks. Drune had instantly supposed that his location was known. He had jumped to his other plan; a speedy trip to Colgarth's. The absence of the cover-up crew in the sedan had made Drune qualmish. He wanted a bigger band before he dared The Shadow's power again.

The Shadow had let Drune go. Quick shots had not been sufficient to stop the master schemer's departure. Moreover, The Shadow had seen a double purpose in Drune's flight. Drune wanted to draw The Shadow on a futile chase toward the stronghold, so as to keep him away from Sheffield.

Drune knew that The Shadow alone could halt the progress of scheduled crime.

The roadster was at the highway. The Shadow gave full speed along the paved road. Roaring, quivering at every jolt, the light car was riding at its limit. The steering gear was old; the wheel gave a warning shimmy click at every heavy jolt; but The Shadow never slackened speed.

BOUNCING over a final hill, the roadster came in sight of Sheffield. Neither The Shadow nor Harry noted the outspread twinkle of the city's lights. Their eyes were captured by a greater glow.

A mammoth torch glared red against the sky. The light showed a mass of billowy black smoke. It made a brilliant outline of the building from which the fire issued. The hour of crime had arrived.

The Sheffield National Bank was ablaze. Sprinkled gasoline had done its work. Flames were raging from the roof, licking the water tank that contained gallons more of gasoline. Fanning winds were sweeping the flames toward the freight depot. Even the breeze had favored schemes of crime.

The center of the little city lay full in the fire's path. Destruction had begun despite The Shadow.

CHAPTER XV. THE DYNAMITE BOX CAR

IT was a five-minutes ride to Sheffield. Five mad minutes, at The Shadow's furious clip. Not one second could be lost, for The Shadow knew the horror that threatened.

The flames from the bank building had appeared with such suddenness that the origin of the fire could not be held in doubt. Here was a holocaust more terrible than that which had destroyed the hotel in Riverport; a blaze far swifter than the fire in Manhattan.

It was nearly eleven o'clock, a late hour for Sheffield. The fire had begun without a warning; its swift sweep was the sort that would produce chaos. Panic was due in the doomed city. Only quick and efficient work could avert it. The Shadow intended to do his utmost, although he knew that the evil had struck too soon.

His one preparation against this new thrust by fire depended upon his autogiro's arrival. It was less than half an hour since The Shadow had called Burbank. Crofton would not reach Sheffield within the next twenty minutes; he would halt at the airport, a few miles south of town. By the time The Shadow could gain his ship, disaster would be completed in Sheffield.

THE SALAMANDERS

Hence The Shadow swung straight into town, trusting to the bare hope that he might gain some opportunity to organize whatever firemen he found. Sirens were screeching when he arrived; two fire engines were clanging up beside the burning bank. The Shadow sped to join them.

The only chance was to convince the fire fighters that their task was useless; to send them scurrying to warn the people in the apartment house beyond the depot. Soon the scorching flames would be there. Scores of lives were at stake.

As The Shadow swung to the curb beside the fire engines, a horn squawked from the corner. A red automobile skidded into view and rolled past the roadster. A brawny, beefy-faced man jumped to the curb. He was Sheffield's only fire chief, prompt on the job.

The fire chief turned to view the high-flung fire, which was licking the posts of the squatty water-tank atop the bank. He was ready to stride to the fire engines when a uniformed man came dashing toward him, waving and shouting.

The fire chief met the newcomer; The Shadow recognized that the second man must be the chief of police. The two stopped right beside the roadster.

QUICKLY, The Shadow grabbed Harry's arm. He had been about to order his agent from the car. On the point of discarding his cloak and hat, The Shadow, too, intended to join the crowd that was gathering near the uniformed men.

Despite the shabby clothes that he wore beneath his cloak, The Shadow had a persuasive power that would rally men to proper action. This meeting on the sidewalk, however, promised some important consequences. The police chief evidently had a message.

"Will the water tank stop it," he bawled, to the fire chief, "or is it going to spread?"

"Chances are the tank is empty," shouted back the fire chief, above the hideous noise of the flames. The sprinkler system can't be working! That may mean the tank's empty!"

The fire chief had not guessed that the water tank was filled with gasoline. Nevertheless, the man had spoken sense. The Shadow waited, despite the loss of valuable seconds. He was sure that more news was due.

"If it spreads," put in the police chief, "it'll get the depot anyway."

"Sure it will," returned the fire chief. "What're you driving at?"

Neither had thought of consequences after the depot caught fire. They did not realize the fate that was due the business block with its many apartments. Nevertheless, the police chief had brought a real idea.

"We can clear away that depot for you," he shouted. "We'll do it while you're fighting the bank-fire!"

"Go to it!" barked the fire chief. "Only you won't have more than half an hour! How're you going to manage it?"

"Dynamite!" snapped back the police chief. "There's a carload of it back of the depot! Inspected it this afternoon! We can use some of it to blast the depot –"

"Get going! Thirty minutes is all you've got, chief!"

THE SALAMANDERS

Harry Vincent pointed suddenly. The crowd was shifting; men were darting suddenly across the street. The fire chief was turning toward the engines, which were spraying futile streams of water against the bank building; the police chief had dashed away to summon men. Neither saw the stir that Harry indicated; but The Shadow had spied it.

The identity of the running men was positive. They were crooks who belonged to Drune and Colgarth. Dodging out of sight, they were on their way to block the police chief's plan. They would be the first to reach the dynamite car. Their cunning chief had figured out a possible move like this.

The Shadow urged Harry from the roadster, with quick instructions.

"Cover the garage," he ordered "Watch for Colgarth and the Salamanders, with their swag. Use caution."

As Harry leaped out and slammed the car's door, The Shadow swung the roadster roundabout. He whizzed across the street, jouncing over a fire hose while firemen shouted angrily.

As The Shadow reached the corner, he heard a clanging of bells; he gave his car the gas; it shot forward, straight across the path of Sheffield's hook and ladder truck. The front fender of the truck skimmed the rear bumper of the roadster.

More shouts, as the hook and ladder swerved to a stop. The Shadow did not pause. He swung his car straight through the alleyway between the bank building and the freight depot.

Above the car roared a mass of flames; chunks of masonry crashed from burning walls. Running the gantlet safely, The Shadow reached the far end of the old train shed, in back of the depot.

As he sprang from the roadster, The Shadow heard a terrific roar above. Glancing up, he saw the water tank topple. It burst into immediate blaze; fire jetted to twice the previous height.

Still partly filled with gasoline, the tank had given the flames a tremendous impetus. As a breeze swept across the burning bank building, the fire became a tidal wave. A broad, crackling sheet, it swept downward to envelop the old depot in its maw.

The flames had begun their spread. The fire chief's half an hour had become a scant five minutes. The police would never have a chance to plant the dynamite in time.

The Shadow had reached the gleaming railroad tracks behind the depot. The fire showed three policemen hurrying from the other side. Gunshots barked suddenly from freight cars on a siding. The police stopped, stupefied, then scattered for cover.

The Shadow saw the dynamite box car. It was alone on a siding that led into the old depot; but it was fifty yards away. The Shadow recognized the car by the activity about it. A shifting locomotive had chugged up to the farther end. Men were making a coupling.

They were crooks, who had boarded the shifter, to put it to quick use. Word that the police were seeking dynamite had pushed the criminals to their present task.

Men were leaping back, waving their arms; others were aboard the box car, ready with guns should the police approach. The wheels of the shifting locomotive were moving. The engine was ready for a swift trip from the yards, with the dynamite box car attached.

THE SALAMANDERS

Abandoning all cover, The Shadow sprang forward, an automatic in his right fist. The crooks on the freight car did not see him coming; they were looking in the direction of the scattered police squad. The first thug who saw The Shadow was one who stood beside the moving box car. He chanced to spy the cloaked figure bearing down upon him.

THE thug whipped out a revolver; he started an outcry. He never used his weapon; nor did his shout materialize. With a mammoth leap, The Shadow was upon him. A cloaked arm drove a downward blow. The Shadow's automatic thudded on the thug's skull.

As the crook fell, another challenger leaped toward The Shadow; this second crook was quicker with his gun. The Shadow beat him by a split-second, again without delivering a telltale shot.

He snapped a backhand sideswing that clipped the crook behind the right ear. The thug slumped, his trigger finger nerveless.

Leaping across ties and rails, The Shadow reached the front of the moving engine. The locomotive was increasing its reverse speed; it jounced, twisted, as it clicked across switches. The Shadow grabbed the pilot rail as it jolted toward him. He boarded the engine with a leap.

Back against the locomotive's boiler, The Shadow clattered along the runway and reached the open cab. Without any attempt at stealth, he sprang into view, to be met by two men who had heard his sudden arrival.

One was the crook at the throttle. He snarled as he saw The Shadow. The thug was holding a revolver ready in case policemen should try to board the train. He aimed quickly at the cloaked invader. This time The Shadow fired. His own aim beat the crook's. The man sprawled to the floor of the cab. The Shadow whirled to meet the other thug, who was acting as fireman.

This brawny rogue was armed with a big shovel that he had used to stoke the fire box of the switching engine. The shovel was descending with a terrific, vicious stroke as The Shadow turned. The Shadow's left fist shot upward, forward.

A shot could not have stopped that swing; but The Shadow's jabbing arm accomplished the deed. Like a trip hammer, his fist swerved the crook's brawny arm and clamped it to a standstill.

The thug snarled as he grappled for The Shadow's gun. Dropping the automatic against the jouncing floor, The Shadow gave the crook a fast jujutsu hold.

The struggle ended. The thug twisted upward, outward, lost his grasp, then pitched headlong to the track beside the clattering locomotive. As the crook thudded on the ties, The Shadow snatched up the .45 before it could bounce away. He dived into the cab and pulled the air-brake lever.

The engine and the dynamite car came to a sudden halt out in the yards.

From the cab's window, The Shadow could see the flames that had caught the freight depot, on the side nearest the bank. The fire was rising; once it reached the top of the structure all would be over. The wind would sweep the flames into the business block. Brief minutes were all that remained.

Firemen and police had just realized the danger, for The Shadow could see tiny figures dashing toward the apartment building. The warning was belated.

THE SALAMANDERS

Tenants would not know about the menace before the fire struck. The whole block seemed doomed to immediate destruction, for the fire's intensity had trebled.

The Shadow tugged the throttle. The switching engine started forward.

RABID shouts came from the box car. Crooks upon it had supposed that their pals had stopped the locomotive, figuring it far enough out in the yard.

This sudden start, that promised a return to the siding into the freight depot was something they could not understand. Shouts were closer. As the locomotive gathered speed, a crook appeared on the ladder steps of the dynamite car.

He saw The Shadow at the window of the cab. The crook aimed; The Shadow fired first. The thug lost his hold and toppled sidelong from the ladder.

New shouts were raised. Revolvers tongued shots; automatics roared from within the cab. Battle had begun amid this mad return. Shots were almost useless, for the thugs were flattened on the car, and The Shadow's head was bobbing at the locomotive cab. To The Shadow, the fray was mere by-play, to keep the crooks from swarming to the locomotive.

The real result would come when The Shadow completed the bold, swift course that he had undertaken. Every increased gain of the clattering locomotive was to his liking, for it led to the new outcome.

The Shadow was driving the dynamite car ahead of him, squarely into the depths of the blazing depot!

CHAPTER XVI. THE SHADOW'S COURSE

CROOKS controlled the yards outside the old depot. Deployed over a wide area, they had driven back Sheffield's few policemen. A dozen or more – all men like Sloop and Jing – these thugs were gloating as they watched the flames surge up to the top of the depot. Roof and train shed were both ablaze.

It was the loud rattle of the shifting locomotive that made those outspread thugs turn about. By the lurid glare of the fire, they saw the dynamite car coming toward them, shoved by the fast-moving wheels of the little engine.

The Shadow had yanked the throttle wide. The shifter was driving its one-car train forward at nearly a thirty-miles-an-hour clip.

The fire's vivid light showed the men who fired from atop the box car. Other crooks leaped into action. Some vainly tried to throw switches before the dynamite car arrived. Others, guessing that a foe had captured the locomotive, were prepared to open fire from the tracks.

As the dynamite car ran the last lap into the station, a figure swung outward from the cab. A black shape struck the ground, staggered forward, rolled, then came to a halt. Rising, The Shadow was ready with his guns.

No crooks offered fire. All were ducking to cover. Eyes were riveted by the sight ahead.

THE dynamite car had reached the blazing train shed. The shifting engine was hurling it onward. Crooks were leaping from the car, all except one. He clung in terror, fearful of the drop at such high speed. That thug was doomed to quick destruction.

THE SALAMANDERS

Locomotive and car covered the length of the train shed in three seconds. Outlined by the fire above, the dynamite car hit a wooden bumper at the end of the track. The bumper was too frail to stop the impetus. The locomotive drove the car straight onward; the bumper was pushed from the track.

The next obstacle was a thick brick wall, the buttressed inner end of the old depot.

A sweep of fire had risen over the top of the depot, all along the roof and train shed. A cataract of flame, it was ready to descend; to clear the roof and swallow the whole depot in its clutches. Once that surge struck, the fire would roar onward, unrestricted. The moment of the fire's triumph had arrived.

Full speed, the dynamite car crashed the thick brick wall. It smashed the buttress; halted; then telescoped as the shifting locomotive drove squarely through it.

All happened in a quarter of a second; yet The Shadow, watching, could sense a distinct instant that formed an ominous lull.

A TERRIFIC explosion made the fire's roar seem puny. The fire that thundered from the doomed box car was more vivid than the holocaust above.

Splitting to fragments, the steel car vanished. With it, the shifting engine was shattered, twisted, broken into chunks of hot and jagged metal. The concussion carried instantaneously. The ground trembled as the terrific blast hurled the whole depot into fragments. Walls, roof and train shed went scattering in every direction.

All portions were hoisted outward. The front of the depot hurtled to the street. The rear of the train shed was blown into bits that scattered all over the tracks in the yard. The unburned side of the depot was rocketed against the walls of the business block; chunks of superstructure clattered the roofs of the apartments.

The whole flaming side of the depot was lifted backward, as if swept aside by a giant hand. The tidal wave of fire was carried with it, thrown against the breeze, back upon the flames that rose from the Sheffield National Bank.

The huge roar of the mammoth blast was answered by the echoes of clattering windows and shattering plate-glass from the business block. For seconds, there was no other sound.

There was a sight, however, that held eyes amazed. Space had replaced the old freight depot. Low fragments of masonry, a flattened surface of settled debris were all that marked the spot where the structure had been.

Flames writhed, a mammoth, windswept torch above the bank building. Caught anew by the breeze, they took their old direction. Gobbling downward, they reached to the site of the old depot, hungrily seeking fuel which they could no longer find.

The Shadow's blast had isolated the fire. Nothingness lay in its path. The flames could never reach the business block, where startled apartment dwellers had awakened, to show their staring faces at every broken window.

One task accomplished, The Shadow had another. Darkness had blanketed the spot where he stood, for the flames had suddenly exhausted after their last surge. They had almost totally consumed the bank building; its ruins afforded no additional fuel. Darkness served The Shadow.

Skirting wide through the freight yard, he circled hurriedly to reach the old garage beyond the Sheffield National Bank. The Shadow knew that Colgarth and the Salamanders must have timed their underground

THE SALAMANDERS

entry at the very outset of the fire, for they had expected a complete holocaust that would divert attention from them.

Harry was watching. Had he already seen the Salamanders emerge?

PAST the bank building, The Shadow cut straight toward the garage. He had a hundred yards to go. Crooks from the freight yards had taken a shorter course. The Shadow saw the cover-up men scurrying to give the alarm. He had no time to battle with those underlings. His task was to stop the Salamanders first.

Before The Shadow had covered thirty feet, the far door of the battered garage burst open. A truck rocketed into view; it cut toward the main street. The range was too great for The Shadow to halt the big machine; moreover, it was driving off at full speed in the opposite direction.

The Shadow saw a man spring out from beside a building and stab futile shots at the escaping truck. It was Harry Vincent; he had thrown aside all thoughts of caution. He was due for trouble before The Shadow could reach him.

Two thugs jumped into sight. They were cover-up men, the ones who had been nearest to the garage and, therefore, the first to reach it. They grabbed Harry; The Shadow saw them drag him, struggling, off beyond the garage.

The Shadow dashed onward. His cloaked shape was outlined by the waning fire in the bank building. Crooks spotted their deadly foe and opened fire. The Shadow gave them no regard. He intended to save Harry first.

An automobile flashed past an opening between two buildings. Thirty yards distant; it was gone before The Shadow could aim to stop it. Covering crooks were making a speedy getaway. Harry was again a prisoner; there was no chance to overtake the men who held him captive.

The Shadow twisted to a halt. He heard the whines of bullets dispatched by the crooks who had tried to pepper him at long range. They had failed to find their swift-moving target. They had opportunity for better aim when The Shadow stopped his dash; but they gained no chance to press their new advantage.

Close to the subsiding bank fire, the crouched crooks were visible to a man. The Shadow had whipped out both automatics. He jabbed quick-spurts shots as he turned in turret fashion. Each gun pumped alternately. As one arm drove down, the other recoiled.

Three thugs sprawled in quick succession, while their pals fired wildly toward The Shadow. Weaving, fading, he was an impossible target in that brief fray. Surviving crooks dashed for cover.

The Shadow followed.

He knew that they were heading for a car. The roadster had been crumpled by the explosion. The Shadow needed another machine.

ROUNDING a building beyond the abandoned garage, The Shadow overtook three crooks who were boarding a touring car. Two men dove away and fled past a close corner when they saw The Shadow. The other tried to start the car; at the same time, he peered wildly, gripping a revolver as he looked for his black-clad adversary.

The Shadow came in from the other side of the front seat. Dropping his automatics, he pitched upon the thug. He caught the crook's throat with one hand, the fellow's gun wrist with the other.

The thug choked as his hand lost its hold upon the weapon. Snapping the man up from behind the wheel, The Shadow chucked him headlong over the door beside the driver's seat. The rogue thudded against the paving and lay stunned.

Colgarth and the Salamanders had driven north in their truck; underlings had taken the same direction in their car, with Harry as their prisoner. Instead of following, The Shadow wheeled the captured touring car across the street and swung southward.

Again, The Shadow was beginning a swift ride. He was bound for the airport south of Sheffield. By this time, the autogiro had arrived.

The Shadow preferred his autogiro for new pursuit.

CHAPTER XVII. DRUNE'S DECREE

HARRY VINCENT'S struggles had ceased as soon as he had been placed aboard the crook-manned automobile. The thugs who had trapped him threw him into the back seat, into the arms of another waiting pair.

Threats of slugging guns had quieted Harry. Discretion was preferable to useless fighting. So long as he remained conscious, Harry would have double opportunity; to seek a chance for escape and to learn facts for The Shadow.

The crooks were snarling as they drove along. With harsh epithets, they promised tough times for Harry. The Shadow's agent maintained his composure. He knew that these rogues would not harm him unless he made trouble. They wanted to deliver him intact to Drune.

The car scaled a hill. It rode between brick gate posts and pulled around in back of a sprawly mansion. In the darkness, Harry glimpsed white pillars as they passed the front. He knew that this must be Colgarth's colonial residence.

The crooks jabbed revolvers into Harry's back. They forced their prisoner from the car and marched him to the rear door of the house. One thug rapped with the butt of a revolver. The door opened; an ugly-faced servant admitted the group and conducted them to the front of the house.

HARRY saw Drune and Colgarth rising, startled, from a table in a large living room. The pair had been sorting the securities taken in the bank raid. Colgarth emitted a harsh exclamation to his henchmen:

"What brought you here?"

"Things went sour," growled a thug. "The Shadow blew up the freight station and stopped the fire."

"So that was the explosion that we heard!" ejaculated Colgarth. "We thought it was the gasoline in the water tank!"

"That burned first. Then The Shadow grabbed the dynamite car. After that, he clipped about half of the cover-up crew —"

"So you fools came here! You gave him a sure trail —"

THE SALAMANDERS

Drune waved an interruption. His eyes gleaming, the master crook had spied Harry in the background. Drune turned to Colgarth.

"They were quite wise to come here," said Drune, dryly. "Look, Colgarth; they have brought us an old friend."

Colgarth craned his neck. He saw Harry. His hard lips showed a vicious grin. He snapped, "You frisked him?"

Nods indicated that the henchmen had deprived Harry of his gun. Colgarth rasped an order:

"Leave him here with us."

Harry's captors departed. Colgarth drew a revolver and motioned Harry to a chair. The Shadow's agent seated himself calmly. Drune and Colgarth buzzed in conference beside the table; all the while, Colgarth kept watch on Harry. Nods proved that the crooked partners were reaching a quick agreement.

The pair arose. Drune gathered up the stacks of securities, while Colgarth waited. Then Colgarth covered Harry and ordered him toward the door. Harry walked out into the hall, where the four thugs were waiting.

Colgarth buzzed orders to the leader of the four-man squad. The men hurried off in different directions. Colgarth marched Harry to a kitchen. He opened a door and pointed to a cellar stairs.

"Go down," ordered Colgarth.

As Harry descended, Drune turned on a light at the head of the stairs. At the bottom, Harry found himself in a square-walled room, empty except for boxes along the wall. While Colgarth kept Harry covered, Drune went ahead and entered another section of the cellar. A light gleamed when Drune found the switch. Colgarth moved Harry forward.

Drune was waiting for them. With a polite bow, he pointed to a lone chair in the corner. It was an invitation for Harry to be seated. Harry accepted, while Drune and Colgarth remained standing.

Drune's actions were more insidious because of the rogue's mock courtesy. Harry remembered the previous fate to which the master crook had consigned him. He expected something equally as undesirable as the fiery pit.

"We congratulate you, Mr. Vincent," crackled Drune, with smiling lips. "Your escape from death was quite miraculous. We assume, of course, that your chief, The Shadow, was responsible for your rescue. I presume that you were with him when he so neatly uncovered my ambush at the crossroads.

"We have learned that The Shadow spoiled our plans for the complete destruction of Sheffield. That, however, does not cause us concern. Our one purpose was to divert attention while Colgarth and the Salamanders completed their foray in the bank. They were quite successful.

"Even the subterranean blast, by which they shattered the foundation, remained unheard during the roar of the fire. It was an expert job. Colgarth completed in less than the estimated time. We have gained the final spoils that we require. Our need for crime is ended."

DRUNE'S smirk showed satisfaction with the past. His eyes glared suddenly as he began to speak of the future.

THE SALAMANDERS

"We hold the wealth we want," declared Drune, "but we must protect it. Since The Shadow lives, we shall be forced to evade him. Doubtlessly, you have told him why we delivered death to Woldorf and Breel; also why we raided the Sheffield National Bank to gain the holdings of the Cruikshank estate? The Shadow has us at a stalemate. We cannot cash our wealth until we have settled him.

"To do that, Colgarth and I shall disappear. We possess sufficient funds to wage a relentless campaign against The Shadow. We shall fight from every hiding place. Only The Shadow will know our identities; and no one will believe him if he declares that Huxley Drune and Gordon Colgarth are criminals.

"For the world will class us as unfortunates. As unhappy victims, like Chester Woldorf and Lincoln Breel. Colgarth, as owner of this mansion; I, as his guest, shall presumably perish. For you, Vincent, I decree the fate that you previously escaped: death by fire!"

In a trice, the whole cunning scheme flashed itself through Harry's brain. He knew why Drune and Colgarth had buzzed in conference; why whispered orders had been given to thugs. The underlings had been told to act as torches; to set fire to the mansion.

Other fires had been attributed to incendiaries. The same would be the case here. By this time, the authorities in Sheffield had guessed that the bank fire was intentional. When Colgarth's home broke out in flames, common belief would have it that criminals had done the work.

No one would ever suspect Colgarth of having any connection with crime. Nor would Drune, a chance guest from New York, be considered a party to the deed.

As an answer to Harry's thoughts, a crackling noise came from above. It was the sound of fire, heard from the kitchen stairway. Crooks had started blazes throughout the mansion. By this time they were taking to their car, along with servants who were crooks like themselves.

The situation matched the one in Riverport. It was like the fire at Breel's. Any person held here would be trapped. There was to be one victim in this new conflagration. Harry was to be the man.

A wild impulse seized Harry. He tightened, ready to spring upon Colgarth, on a chance that he could down the rogue and then battle Drune. If Harry died by gunfire, it would be better than the flames. In another second, Harry's attack would have begun.

Then came a sight that stopped him.

DRUNE had shrilled a crackly order. A door swung open in the far wall. Two by two, a squad of men were entering. Six in all, they were garbed in puffy suits of asbestos, with grimy faces glaring through the fronts of their helmets.

They were the Salamanders. They had been given word. They had come from a passage, to take charge of Harry and hold him here while Drune and Colgarth preceded them through a tunnel that led to safety.

Harry saw formidable, gun-like tubes, projecting from clumsy, thick-gloved fists. They were the fire guns that The Shadow had encountered. Though Harry had never seen them in use, he recognized that they were weapons. Rising from his chair, he stood powerless.

Drune and Colgarth withdrew from the space between Harry and the Salamanders. They stood close to the door of the tunnel. A terrific roaring was apparent. By this time, the mansion must be entirely in flames. Soon the flooring would collapse; blazing beams would drop. Then the Salamanders would depart, leaving Harry to

his doom.

Drune's chuckle sounded amid the fire's roar. Colgarth held his hard-lipped leer. They were waiting, that pair, to enjoy Harry's plight. They were secure, here in the cellar of the flaming house.

Master rogues believed that they occupied a spot where even The Shadow could not reach them!

CHAPTER XVIII. FROM THE SKY

COLGARTH'S mansion had burst into a complete blaze.

Viewed from the ground below the hillside, the fire produced the same torch-like effect as the flames at the Sheffield National Bank.

Incendiaries had done a thorough job. They had spattered kerosene all about the house. The men had started blazes on every floor.

As the fire roared away, a carload of crooks were looking back with glee. Billows of smoke were reflecting the brilliance of fire tongues that lapped from every section of the roof.

The fleeing men took a side road to avoid persons coming to the hill. They knew that the fire must have been seen in Sheffield. A distant clanging, dimly heard in the night air, told that fire equipment was coming toward the burning mansion. Flames had practically ended at the Sheffield National Bank. Engines were no longer needed there.

Colgarth's house was isolated. No witnesses were present to eye the early stages of the fire at close range. Long wings that ran from the main portion of the house were being rapidly consumed; for they were all of frame construction.

The center of the house still stood; but the fire raged most furiously in that portion. Only the fact that the central walls were brick had kept them from toppling as soon as the wings.

The ground floor was solid, well constructed, directly above the portion of the cellar where Drune and Colgarth held Harry prisoner. The flames had risen upward, consuming the upper stories with rapidity.

The wooden-shingled roof was dropping into the interior of the mansion; but it was too light to complete the devastation. The ground floor would not sag until the walls came inward. They were due to crumble when the upper structure was completely gone.

Once the mansion became a shell, complete disaster would follow rapidly. That time would be soon. The Sheffield fire engines would never reach the hill in time to fight the flames.

Roads to the hill were roundabout. They handicapped all who sought speed on the ground. There was another route, however, that offered direct course to the burning mansion.

That route was the air.

A THRUMMING was audible, off above the town of Sheffield. The drone was becoming louder, significant of rapid approach. It neared the lighted zone above the burning house. Flames, enlarging, hurling their bright light upward, showed the source of the zooming sound.

THE SALAMANDERS

An autogiro was outlined in the sky above the mansion. It was The Shadow's ship, arriving from the airport, its master at the controls. The autogiro seemed to poise, motionless in the air, except for the whizz of the long-armed blades that rotated atop the ship.

Slowly, the autogiro descended straight downward. It was temporarily obscured by smoke that had risen hundreds of feet above the house.

The Shadow had divined Drune's plan. He knew that both Drune and Colgarth would want the world to think that they had died within their fire. There was a chance that they might still be close at hand.

There was a greater chance that Harry had been left to perish in the flames. That, more than thought of the supercrooks, inspired The Shadow to his dangerous descent.

Witnesses, had there been any to view the scene, would have thought the pilot of the autogiro mad. Seemingly, The Shadow was dropping himself into the midst of destruction.

Smoke, twisted by the wind, uncoiled to show the autogiro hovering directly above the flaming house. Less than a hundred feet intervened between the dropping ship and the high tongues of the devastating flames.

Red light showed a peculiar feature of the autogiro.

Rounded objects were dangling below the ship's wheels. One loosened; like a bomb, it descended toward the flames. At fifty feet, the bomb exploded with a silent puff. A volume of powdery substance rained upon the flames. The effect was instant. Blazing tongues succumbed; when they reappeared, their extent had diminished by half.

The Shadow released a second bomb. Again, the powder burst and scattered, this time at a closer range. Flames withered. Only a few licks of fire lashed in a final effort. From forty feet above the roofless mansion, The Shadow released a third bomb. Its effect was final.

The bomb puffed within the house itself. Powder blanketed every remaining vestige of the fire. Smothered flames were gone. Brick walls stayed upright; The Shadow had arrived in time to prevent their fall.

FROM Texas, The Shadow had ordered these bombs of dust powder – the latest and best devices invented for fighting the merciless oil-well fires. He had foreseen battles with Drune and Colgarth, wherein fire would be used to cover the evil work of the Salamanders.

The shipment had come promptly; but The Shadow had been forced to let it wait in Newark while he located the scene of coming crime. Fire had struck in Sheffield while Crofton was still flying out from Newark.

But the autogiro had reached the airport soon afterward. It had been waiting for The Shadow, its bombs all prepared, when he had arrived to take over the ship.

With smothering dust, The Shadow had conquered the new fire, the last thrust in the schemes of Drune and Colgarth. Attacking from the air, he had found the center of the flames. To insure success, he had dropped the autogiro to the very level of the roofless walls.

There was no chance for the autogiro to soar upward. Dust had banished heated air, to create a vacuum within the house walls. The space sucked fresh air downward, through the open roof. The autogiro was caught in the vortex.

THE SALAMANDERS

Like the pull of a magnet, the air itself drew the ship to its descent. Blades spun madly, bending as they resisted the pull. Despite them, the autogiro dropped within the flame-scarred walls of the ruined mansion.

The Shadow had expected this descent; he had known that he could not prevent it. He was working only to avert a total crash. He managed that task well. Air had settled like a cushion within the walls.

The space was ample; the way was clear, for the upper stories had completely fallen. The ground floor had not yet weakened; its only fault was its irregularity, for it was heaped with masses of debris.

The autogiro quivered through the last twenty feet of the descent. It struck at an angle; one wheel bounced upon a smoldering beam. For a moment, the ship was toppling; as it rolled forward, it righted. Braking it, The Shadow halted the giro against the farther wall.

WITH a command for Crofton to remain with the ship, The Shadow leaped to the baked house floor. Dust was everywhere; only a few patches of smoking wood remained. There was light from the burning wings of the house. By the fading glare, The Shadow saw the remains of doorways. At one spot, he saw a vacancy in the floor itself.

Hurrying there, The Shadow spied a flight of steps; below, he saw the glimmer of a light. The top steps were burned. The Shadow cleared them with a leap. Stopping short, he saw a square-walled room, that was darkened.

The wiring for that first chamber came from upstairs; and the fire had obliterated it. The Shadow could distinguish the shape of the room only by a light from the opening beyond.

The Shadow heard the buzz of voices. He had reached his goal. Drawing a brace of automatics, he crept forward. Nearing the door in darkness, he saw shapes in the other room. He recognized the baggy figures of the Salamanders. Formed in a semicircle, they were holding their fire guns to cover a corner that The Shadow could not see.

A crackly voice sounded. The ranks of the Salamanders opened. From between the grotesque creatures stepped a gray-haired man whose withered face glared its malicious triumph. He, too, was looking toward the corner.

Edging across to the other side of the door, The Shadow saw Harry Vincent, facing the evil gaze of Huxley Drune.

The master crook had stopped. Easing back, The Shadow covered Drune. He waited, unseen; for the Salamanders were staring in the same direction as their chief.

The time for departure had arrived. Drune had stepped forward to crackle the words that would sound his prisoner's doom. He was ready to fulfill his decree of doom.

While Drune spoke, The Shadow watched.

CHAPTER XIX. THE FINAL FRAY

"THE fire has lessened," snarled Drune to Harry. "The walls have not fallen as we had hoped. That last crash was not sufficient."

THE SALAMANDERS

Drune was referring to the thump of the autogiro. He had heard it on the floor above. He had mistaken it for an inward fall of bricks and masonry.

"Nevertheless," sneered Drune, "fire shall be your mode of death. My decree stands. Blackened to a crisp, your body will be found. You will be identified as Colgarth or myself."

Backing, Drune motioned to the Salamanders. The asbestos-clad henchmen raised their fire guns. They opened ranks, that Drune might pass. Once he was behind them, they would be ready for the order to blast withering flame upon Harry Vincent.

The Shadow started forward. He wanted the Salamanders to see him when he attacked. They would remember that fight at Breel's. His presence would confuse them, better than shots from the dark. An instant more would have brought The Shadow's surprise attack.

A harsh cry intervened.

The shout came from Colgarth. Standing beyond the Salamanders, Colgarth was holding a well-padded briefcase beneath his arm. It was the precious bag that contained the stolen securities.

Colgarth, looking through the space between the Salamanders, had chanced to glance toward the outer door. He saw The Shadow springing forward.

The Salamanders turned. They swung their heavy fire guns. Six in number, they sought to use their ungainly weapons before The Shadow could down them with his automatics. The Shadow opened fire as the Salamanders aimed.

THE SHADOW'S shots were speedy. The nearest Salamanders fell, like toppling puppet figures. Slugs scarcely staggered them, because of their heavy garb; but each one tumbled as his punctured suit lost its air. Every hit was marked by the same phenomenon.

A suit withered, shriveled. Air hissed from the interior. Overloaded by a heavy helmet, each stricken Salamander wavered back and forth, to fall with a crash.

The Shadow bagged three Salamanders in a row. Two made clumsy leaps for the farther doorway. One of the six, however, held his ground. His thumb was on the trigger of the fire gun. He had his chance to drive a blast of fire before the next shot came.

It was Harry Vincent who stopped the Salamander's stroke. Unbound, Harry had seized his chair from the corner. He was driving forward as the Salamander thumbed the lever. Harry swung the chair downward, with terrific force, upon the Salamander's helmeted head.

It was the force of the blow, not the result, that staggered the Salamander. His helmet was sufficient protection to save his skull. Harry's stroke, however, was terrific. It shattered the chair and sent the Salamander reeling.

The fire gun puffed; a blast of flame seared forth. The Salamander's aim was altered. The scorching fire lashed the wall, instead of The Shadow's doorway.

As the Salamander rallied, The Shadow fired again. The Salamander's baggy suit deflated. His clumsy thumb slipped from the lever. The weapon clattered from his fists and struck the floor.

THE SALAMANDERS

Drune was diving through the far door, barking to Colgarth to follow. Colgarth obeyed; the last two Salamanders joined the flight. They knew that the range was long for their fire guns. With their leaders in rout, the Salamanders did not care to stay.

The Shadow delivered one quick, stabbing shot, directly between the Salamanders. He had aimed for the darting form of Colgarth, who was a few steps nearer than Drune. A cry told that The Shadow had clipped the man with the brief case; but Colgarth staggered onward.

Harry was leaping forward. The Shadow thrust forth an arm to hold him back. One chance blast from a fire gun would have spelled Harry's finish. The Salamanders must be met at long range.

By his action, The Shadow had saved his agent from a false move; but the Salamanders profited. They were gone, following Drune and Colgarth, when The Shadow turned in their direction.

"The tunnel!" cried Harry. "They're making a get-away –"

The Shadow sprang forward, knowing well that crooks had fled for safety. At the door, he halted, to rip quick shots along a gloomy passage. Those shots would spur the flight of the Salamanders. The Shadow paused for a short interval, then leaped through the doorway.

THE SHADOW saw a low, lighted tunnel, leading down through the slope. It was a route that offered outlet somewhere down the hillside. The passage turned, a hundred feet away. Drune was at the bend. He stood beneath a ceiling light; The Shadow saw his hand upon a massive switch.

Drune was ready to inject a current that would dynamite the tunnel. It was a piece of evidence, that passage, that crooks did not want the law to find. Drune was waiting for the Salamanders. In clumsy flight, they were halfway down the passage.

Colgarth had stumbled when the Salamanders passed him. He was closest to The Shadow; less than thirty feet into the tunnel. He had lost the briefcase in his fall; he was groping for it as he rose. The Shadow dashed toward Colgarth. The crook saw him coming.

Colgarth's right arm was dangling. He did not have a gun. Instead of offering fight, he turned and scurried after the Salamanders, who had formed a two-man file, still dashing clumsily, handicapped in their asbestos suits.

Drune saw The Shadow gain the briefcase from the floor where Colgarth had dropped it. With a savage snarl the crime master tightened his hold upon the switch.

In this moment, Drune cared nothing for Colgarth and the Salamanders. Nor did he care about the rescue of his wealth. He had one incentive only; to destroy The Shadow.

Within the dangerous sector of the tunnel, The Shadow chose the quickest course. He had emptied one automatic; he had three shots remaining in the other. Aiming the .45, he pumped three rounds above the shoulders of the Salamanders. Every bullet found its lodgement in the stooped form of Huxley Drune.

Reeling, clawing blindly at the wall, the chief of crime still sought to pull the switch. Though mortally wounded, he held to life, seeking by one evil effort to doom The Shadow with him. There was no time to linger; no way to deal further with Drune.

THE SALAMANDERS

Gripping the briefcase, The Shadow made long strides back along the passage. As he reached the cellar, he flung the briefcase ahead of him; with a dive, The Shadow rolled out into the room where Harry stood. Twisting to his hands and knees, he stared through the tunnel.

The Salamanders, like The Shadow, had thirty feet to go, in order to reach the other end. They had covered less than twenty. Colgarth, faltering, had failed to overtake them. Drune, clawing blindly, collapsed against the wall.

As he sagged in a death throe, Drune found the switch and pulled it with him. His gasped cackle sounded along the tunnel. Drune thought that he was completing The Shadow's doom.

WITH a muffled roar, the walls and ceiling of the tunnel broke inward. Mined for its entire length, the passage collapsed with a single blast. The Shadow caught one fleeting glimpse of Drune, sprawling headlong. He saw Colgarth and the Salamanders, still within the tunnel.

There were shrieks as the stony walls obliterated the view of the men. Lights were gone; not only in the tunnel, but in the cellar room as well. Pungent fumes stench from the tunnel. Groping away, The Shadow clicked a flashlight and opened the path for himself and Harry to reach the stairs.

Huxley Drune, master of crime, had failed in his final effort. Clutched by death, he had done his best to finish The Shadow. All that he had accomplished was the doom of his partner, Gordon Colgarth.

Both supercrooks had perished. With them had died the last of the Salamanders.

The Shadow had triumphed over fiends who fought by fire. He had conquered murderers and their well-trained henchmen who could dare the wrath of devastating flames. Through smothering their own element, fire, The Shadow had shattered crime's last bulwark.

The Shadow had forced the final battle. The menace of the Salamanders was ended.

CHAPTER XX. THE DEPARTURE

WHEN The Shadow and Harry Vincent reached the floor above, they saw the autogiro against a dimly flickering background. The burning wings of the house were almost entirely consumed. spurts of flame were only occasional, places which the dust had hit lightly.

Harry saw Miles Crofton by the autogiro. He heard his fellow agent report. Crofton had cleared a path across the ground floor. It was a rough one; but the distance was great. It offered the ship a fifty-foot path to the farther wall.

The Shadow and his agents boarded the autogiro. Crofton had rolled the ship a dozen feet back from the nearer wall. The Shadow started the motor; he waited while the propeller and blades gained top speed.

Outside, shouts told that people had arrived from Sheffield. A loud clanging marked the progress of fire engines up the hill. Soon the burned mansion would be entered. The Shadow did not care to remain.

BRAKING one wheel, he started the autogiro forward. It spun about because of the unequal pressure. It gathered speed by the turn, swung clear about, the ship rolling toward the wall at the other end of the house. It rolled freely, its wheels jouncing hard, then left the roughened floor.

THE SALAMANDERS

Ordinarily, the autogiro would have risen rapidly. Surrounding walls impeded its lift. For a moment, Harry feared that the ship would crash the wall ahead. The air within the pitlike building was too restricted for the last few feet of rise.

Suddenly, the autogiro jolted upward. Its horizontal blades had cleared the level of the roofless walls. The blades had clutched the outer air. They hoisted the ship's wheels over the blackened surface of the threatening end wall. The autogiro circled upward, to avoid tall, surrounding trees.

Astonished burghers from Sheffield stood gazing at the sight. Brief flames from the wings of Colgarth's house gave them a view of the mysterious ship. They were totally amazed, unready to believe their senses.

To them, the autogiro might have been a phoenix – that fabulous bird that ancients claimed could rise from its own ashes, to soar away to a new existence. They gaped as the ship vanished suddenly into the night.

Staring vainly, they heard its motor hum off into the distance. The clanging fire engines arrived, to rouse the few witnesses from their stupor. They began their tale, to listeners who scoffed their disbelief.

Firemen entered to search the ruins. They found the open path to the cellar. Descending, they made a discovery that proved as amazing as the story of the autogiro. They found the bodies of the four dead Salamanders, still clad in their asbestos suits.

The fallen tunnel did not gain the attention of searchers. Its wreckage had been complete. The tunnel's mouth looked like a side room of the cellar, where debris had fallen. The foundations had failed to withstand the pressure of the floor above.

The autogiro was forgotten in the surprise at the discovery of the Salamanders. There would be no new facts uncovered regarding the ship's presence in the vicinity of Sheffield. Crofton had landed at a deserted airport which had long been no better than an emergency landing field. No witnesses had seen the autogiro prior to its take-off from the ruins of the mansion.

Only The Shadow and his trusted agents knew the full story of the conquest. Flying the darkened autogiro back toward Newark, The Shadow was silent at the controls. On the floor beside him lay the briefcase that he had risked his life to gain.

Later, he would examine its contents. The heirs of Woldorf and Breel; the administrators of the Cruikshank estate – all would gain their rightful property.

The Shadow's agents heard a grim laugh from their chief. The tone was the summary of the episodes that The Shadow had undergone. He had striven for final conflict with the Salamanders. He had gained. Monstrous men who marched through fire had perished with their evil leaders.

The Shadow's laugh was an aftermath of talk that had once passed between Huxley Drune and Gordon Colgarth.

The supercrooks had talked of three elements – earth, water and fire. They had agreed that The Shadow could have survived the first two on the list. They had applied the third. Fire had failed to doom The Shadow.

Yet the crooks had still believed that fire could protect them. They had forgotten another element: air.

From the air had The Shadow come to gain his victory. To the air had he returned. THE END