

THE BLACKMAIL RING

by Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I

THE SHADOW ACTS

THE glittering lights of Paris were a glorious sight from the window of Suite 15 in the Hotel Barzonne. But the man who sat beside the window had no interest in the spectacle. He was an American of dignified appearance - a man perhaps forty years of age.

Resting on the table at which the man sat were small piles of newspaper clippings, and neatly tabulated typewritten sheets. The man assembled them deftly.

As he worked, a strange, mysterious gem gleamed upon the third finger of the left hand, its light producing weird, changing colors.

The gem was a girasol - a fire opal of rare value. There was no other like it in the world. The stone was a clew to the identity of the man who owned it; but no one had ever learned that clew.

The gleaming girasol was the property of the mysterious man called "The Shadow!"

Comparing one stack of clippings with a corresponding sheaf of typed papers, the man at the table laughed softly.

The clippings and the data referred to an amazing murder case in Germany. They told of an unsolved mystery. With them was a small item that mentioned the finding of a body in the Seine. It had not been identified.

Neither newspapers nor police had connected that body with the murder in Germany. They did not know that the drowned man and the German murderer were one and the same. Nor did they know that the drowning had not been accidental; that a fiend of crime had encountered just retribution.

These were facts that only The Shadow knew!

The man at the table tore the sheets and the clippings. That case was ended. He referred to another. This was the account of a bank robbery in London - a mystery that had baffled the best sleuths in Scotland Yard.

The stolen money - sixty thousand pounds - had been recovered following a tip from an unknown source. The same night, two men had been discovered dead in a London rooming house; the victims of a gun fray.

There was no apparent connection between these persons - reputed to be criminals - and the restored bank funds. How they had met their end was a mystery.

The Shadow tore these clippings, and with them the typed sheets. That case was closed. Those dead men were the robbers.

How they had stolen and lost the bank notes - how they had died, and why - these, again, were facts that only The Shadow knew!

There was a third pile of clippings. These related to a Parisian affair, the death of Herbert Brockley; the subsequent killing of Parisian criminals who had been responsible for it; and the flight and disappearance of one of the gang.

The American referred closely to this subject. He folded up the papers and inserted them in a secret drawer of a small steamer trunk that was standing in the corner. From another compartment of the trunk, the man produced a package.

TUCKING the bundle under his arm, he left the suite, and descended to the lobby of the hotel. He walked along the street for several blocks; then stopped a taxicab, and spoke to the driver in perfect French. He ordered the man to take him to a certain cafe - the Poisson d'Or.

The driver looked astonished. He could not believe the instructions. The Poisson d'Or was one of the worst dives in all Paris. It was patronized only by criminals of the most notorious type. Unwelcome strangers usually met death there.

He doubted the sanity of this well-dressed American.

The instructions were repeated. They came in a firm, determined voice. The taxi driver shrugged his shoulders.

He would take this fellow to the Poisson d'Or, since he was determined to go; but he resolved that he would notify the nearest gendarme as soon as he had left his passenger.

The taxi reached a squalid, unlighted street. One could not have picked out a more undesirable district than this. No tourists came here. It was the most dangerous portion of the underworld of Paris.

The passenger had alighted from the cab. He was standing close by, and the driver could see only his hand as it extended the fare. The taximan noted that the hand wore a black glove.

He looked around the moment that he had received the money. No one was in sight! Had the American become faint-hearted? Had he stepped back into the cab?

The driver looked into the back seat. All that he saw was the wrapping of a package - a crumpled sheet of heavy paper that his fare had left.

The man had undoubtedly gone into the Poisson d'Or. The driver drove away to find a gendarme.

The interior of the Poisson d'Or contained a series of small rooms, separated by rough partitions. In one of these, two roughly clad men were conversing in the dialect of Parisian ruffians. Their uncouth words, intermingled with oaths, related to the payment of blood money, which one of the men

had received.

"Hubert is dead," said one. "I have his share. They will never find me. Bah! I would kill a dozen Americans for ten thousand francs. Now I have twenty thousand for killing one!"

He drew a wad of bills from his pocket and divided the money into two portions.

"Here is half for you, Andre," he said. "I am going where these cursed police can never find me. I cannot understand how they caught Hubert. There is someone who knows more than the police."

Andre grinned as he took the ten thousand francs. It was a payment in advance, for work that he was to perform while his crony was absent.

"Bah!" he exclaimed. "You can count on me, Louis. You stay away until this affair of the dead American has blown over. Then -"

He raised a glass of cognac, and his companion did the same. They were drinking to their future exploits, these Apache killers. But the glasses stopped before they had reached the lips for which they were intended.

The door of the small room had opened. There, framed in the narrow doorway, stood a man clad in black. His appearance was amazing - even to these men of crime.

A black cloak hung from his shoulders, and his hands were hidden in its folds. A large slouch hat was turned down to cover his features. All that was visible were two glowing eyes!

Those eyes were focused upon the money on the table. That represented a payment for the killing of Herbert Brockley, the American. Andre saw the direction in which the eyes were staring. He reached to grasp the money.

Quick as a flash, the man in black stepped forward. His left hand extended and fell upon the twenty thousand francs. An oath came from Louis, who sat at the left. Rising, he whisked a revolver from his pocket.

The weapon was never used. As Louis sought to level it and press the trigger, a shot came from the folds of the black cloak. The hidden hand had been covering the Apache. Louis toppled from his chair.

Andre leaped forward to seize that hidden hand. He grappled with the stranger, and pressed him back against the wall. There was another muffled shot, and the second Apache fell to the floor.

A soft, weird laugh came from the man in black, as he gathered up the twenty thousand francs and swept through the door, with the money beneath his cloak.

The Shadow - terror to the denizens of New York's underworld - had conquered two of the most murderous men in Paris. In the midst of their stronghold, he had deprived them of the blood money that had been paid for the death of Herbert Brockley!

Those two were not the only Apaches in the Poisson d'Or. Gunshots were a signal to the bloodthirsty crew that frequented the Parisian dive.

As The Shadow stepped into the corridor outside the partition room, half a dozen men appeared from the other end of the passage.

There were two entrances to the corridor - one from the front room, whence these murderers were coming; the other toward an obscure door of the Poisson d'Or - the way by which The Shadow had entered, unseen.

The Apaches were flinging themselves into the attack in an effort to capture the intruder before he could flee to safety. There had been shootings in this dive before; and always the participants had tried to escape by the obscure door.

Two husky cutthroats were leaping forward with flashing knives; behind them were others armed with revolvers. Against such odds, only flight seemed feasible; but had The Shadow turned his back to flee, he would have become a target for six deadly weapons.

Instead, he did the unexpected. Barely a dozen feet lay between him and the surging crew. Two automatics were in The Shadow's hands. The pistols roared into the teeth of the attackers!

A KNIFE slashed the side of the black cloak; the man who held the blade pitched headlong. A revolver shot clipped the slouch hat; the man who fired fell before he could deliver another shot.

The Shadow was among the Apaches now. All but one were sprawled along the corridor. The one fellow had flattened himself against the wall. He had escaped the raking fire, and now his hand swung upward with its automatic.

The Shadow's aim was quicker. His final bullet struck the Apache's wrist.

As the arm fell, The Shadow, with a burst of derisive mirth, reached out and plucked the gun away from its owner. The Shadow's empty automatic dropped at the man's feet.

Sweeping along the corridor, The Shadow reached the front room of the Poisson d'Or. There, a crowd of grinning Apaches were awaiting the return of the killing squad. They were used to these affairs. Always, a gang of cutthroats would rush away and come back with a victim's bullet-riddled body as their trophy.

Into this scene came The Shadow! Before the Apaches realized that the impossible had happened, the cloaked man's automatic was again at work.

As one rising Apache fell wounded, the other mobsters dived for cover. With sweeping strides, The Shadow gained the door, and his sardonic laugh was loud with mockery and menace.

As The Shadow's hand pressed the knob, the door crashed inward, and a squad of gendarmes burst into the place. Coming to rescue a helpless American, they had heard the gunfire.

The Shadow stepped back as the door burst. The gendarmes were hurtling upon him. His right arm swung with terrific force as The Shadow leaped among the officers.

Two gendarmes staggered. Their hands slipped from the black cloak. Diving forward, The Shadow broke loose and sprang to the street.

The Apaches had been quick to meet the double emergency. Their guns were barking as The Shadow swung his way through the gendarmes. They sought to slay the man in black, and to withstand the attack of the law.

Their first purpose failed. The hail of bullets was too late to thwart The Shadow's escape. Gendarmes were falling; but others, dropping to the floor, blazed away at the mobsters. The Apaches were outnumbered. Those who were able, scurried to the corridor and fled.

With the mob subdued, gendarmes rushed to the street and scattered everywhere in search of the man who had baffled them. But in the darkness that reigned over that quarter of Paris, a man in black could make himself invisible.

Darkness shrouded the form of The Shadow. He was nowhere to be found.

WHILE the gendarmes still persisted in their search, the dignified American reappeared in Suite 15 of the Hotel Barzonne.

His face retained its calmness; there was no hurry in his action as he opened the drawer of the steamer trunk and removed the clippings and the typed sheets that referred to Herbert Brockley. In a blank space, the quiet man wrote the name of Louis Bargelle. The last of Brockley's slayers was gone.

Methodically, the American tore the sheets and clippings. He laughed - and his laugh was an echo of those taunting jibes that had sounded within the walls of the Poisson d'Or.

The next morning, two Parisian detectives were going over a report of the battle at the Apache dive. They were discussing the deaths of certain criminals - among them Louis Bargelle - when an attendant entered. He was carrying a tightly wrapped paper.

A detective opened it and gasped in surprise as he saw the contents - a mass of paper money. He counted it. Twenty thousand francs!

The only clew to the sender was an oddly shaped card among the bills; but the card was blank. The detective held the card to the light. It showed no markings whatever.

But upon the wall - unnoticed by the detective - the card cast a strange shadow that bore a grotesque resemblance to the profile of a human being!

CHAPTER II

THE STORM OF DEATH

STUART BRUXTON brought his automobile to a sudden stop in front of a dilapidated building beside the road. The place had been a filling station once - the rusted gasoline standard told that. Now, the house was nothing but a deserted shack - yet it was the only human habitation that Stuart had seen for the past few miles.

Peering through the gloom of the gathering dusk, Stuart Bruxton tried to distinguish objects on the small porch of the battered building. He fancied that he had seen the figure of a man standing beneath that small and rickety roof.

It was impossible to observe anything now; but as Stuart stared toward the house, the whole building was suddenly revealed, in the temporary glare of a distant lightning flash.

During that short, photographic scene, Stuart's first impression was justified. There actually was a man on the porch. He seemed to be hiding behind a battered pillar.

Stuart lowered the window of the coupe. He called out, but his voice was drowned by the long rumble of the thunder. When silence came, he called again; then waited while big drops of rain spattered through the window.

Stuart watched to see if the man would respond, waiting patiently for another flash of lightning. Before it came, someone spoke in reply.

The man had come from the porch through the darkness. He was standing beside the car. Stuart could distinguish his face through the gloom.

"I'm heading for a town called Herkimer," explained Stuart. "How do I get there?"

"I'm going that way," came the reply. "Want to give me a lift? Guess I can show you the road."

"Sure thing," responded Stuart.

THE man clambered into the car. Now, at close range, Stuart saw that he was evidently a man from the city. He was well dressed, even though his overcoat bore signs of long wear. He was about thirty-five years of age, and his face, while pale and drooping, indicated intelligence.

"Herkimer's straight ahead - for a while," the man remarked. "Glad you came along. I was kinda stranded there, on that porch. Waiting for the storm to pass over."

They were entering the storm zone as the man spoke. Stuart could feel the effects of the driving wind as he managed the powerful coupe. Rain was battering against the windshield, and the glare of the bright lights shone into an oncoming torrent.

Stuart pictured the porch where the man had been. It was hardly an enviable spot during a deluge, but it was better than the open.

"Hiking my way," explained the man. "Cut across this road because it was shorter, and figured I could pick up a hitch. But the people seem to be kinda leery of hikers. That's why I was watching, when you came along."

"You know this road?" questioned Stuart.

"Yeah," the man answered. "It's a good road, but it isn't on the map. Lot of them like that, down here in Maryland. They told me all about it, back in the last town. When we get a few miles farther on, I'll show you a short cut."

They drove along in silence for a few minutes; then the man at Stuart's side began a brief and disjointed explanation of his circumstances.

His name, it appeared, was Jefferson - he did not mention his surname. He had gone broke in a town outside of Baltimore and had decided to foot it for New York.

The man said nothing of his business; merely mentioned that he had friends in Manhattan, and was anxious to get there. Stuart asked no questions, so the man's talk ended.

The fury of the storm had increased. The road, although narrow, was well paved, and Stuart handled the car in expert fashion. They were traveling nearly forty miles an hour - a high speed under the conditions.

Stuart's eyes were glued to the road. He wanted to make Herkimer, where he could cut over to a main road, and reach Philadelphia within a few hours. The companionship of the hitchhiker was not disagreeable, so he intended to take the man all the way.

"Must be pretty near there, now," the stranger remarked. "The road splits, and you can save five miles if you stick to the right. We'll see a detour sign, but it won't mean anything."

"How's that?" questioned Stuart.

"They're starting some repair work," explained Jefferson, "so they've closed the road. Going to take down two bridges and put up new ones. But they aren't beginning until next Monday - even though they've had the signs up for a couple of days."

"You're positive about that?" Stuart parried.

"Sure thing," Jefferson continued. "Some of the road gang were talking about it, back in a lunch wagon where I stopped. Stick to the right fork, and

you'll cut off five miles to Herkimer. That's the way I was going to hoof it. Figured one shorter walk, even though there wouldn't be a chance for a lift."

"All right," said Stuart.

THE road was winding now, and Stuart reduced speed slightly. The lightning flashes were blinding; the roar of the thunder was continuous. They were in the thick of the storm. A dazzling glare revealed the road ahead, and Stuart saw the spreading of the fork. Jefferson observed it, too.

"The right," he said.

Both roads looked good. Stuart swerved the big car to the right. Whirling through the storm, they began to descend a constant decline.

"Getting down to a river," observed Jefferson. "That's where the bridges are. Two of them. One on each side of an island. I heard the gang telling about them.

"They haven't even been down there, yet. Just stuck up barriers at each end. Waiting to get the order to go. That's the way they work. Better watch out, because we may hit a block across the road."

The man's suggestion was a timely one. They were passing a dirt road that led off to the right. The headlights shone upon something white. A flash of lightning came, an instant later, and Stuart applied the brakes to keep from running into a broad, whitewashed board that blocked his path.

The car began to skid, but responded to the driver's touch, and came to a jolting, sidewise stop, only a few feet from the barricade.

"No light," muttered Stuart.

"Wouldn't do much good," said Jefferson. "That white board shows about as well as a red light. Wait. I'll lift it so you can go through."

The man clambered from the car and walked in front of the headlights. He swung the board to one side, and Stuart guided the car through. A few moments later, his companion rejoined him. The man's coat and hat were dripping.

"What a storm!" he exclaimed. "Wouldn't like to be out in it long."

THE road lay straight ahead, past the barrier. Stuart speeded up. He remembered what Jefferson had said about the two bridges. There would be no other obstacle until they passed the second bridge.

Stuart was in a hurry, not only because he wanted to reach his destination, but also because he wanted to be off this road, and clear of the storm.

There was a twist; then came a straight downward hill, and at the end of it, the first bridge. Jefferson saw it as soon as the driver, and added another bit of information.

"The bridges are O.K.," he said. "They're taking them down because they're only wide enough for one car."

The headlights were revealing the fact that the bridge was narrow. A flash of lightning showed the complete structure, and the straight road on the island beyond.

Thus assured, Stuart pressed the accelerator, and the roar of the motor vied with the surging sound of the swollen stream that swept beneath the bridge.

The big car reached the bridge, traveling forty miles an hour. Hardly had the crossing begun before a strange vibration seemed to seize the bridge. The firm, level roadway was swaying!

For a brief second, Stuart felt that he was at the helm of a ship at sea. The automobile was in the midst of a skidding course. The bridge was giving way beneath its weight!

Instinctively, Stuart pressed the accelerator to the floor, knowing that his only salvation was to get clear of the collapsing bridge. The response of the car was instantaneous. It shot forward as Stuart passed the center of the bridge. The front wheels struck some obstacle, but kept on. As the rear wheels hit the same spot, there was a terrific crash.

The front of the car was almost to the end of the bridge, as a mighty sound - louder than a thunder roll - told that the bridge had gone down beneath the rear of the car!

Only the momentum of the automobile prevented the car from falling into the engulfing stream. The bridge, collapsing at an angle, threw the rear of the coupe to one side.

The hurtling machine shot on to the solid ground ahead. No longer under control, it swerved to the left of the road. The right side of the car rose like a mountain as Stuart applied the brakes. They were headed for a clump of saplings, and they crashed through the obstacle like an avenging Juggernaut.

All was wild confusion before Stuart's eyes as he felt the car lunge forward and downward. It seemed to spin spirally to the left; then came a crash as the car smashed into a tree. The motion ceased.

STUART recovered from a momentary daze to realize that the car was lying at a precipitous angle to the left. The whole front of the car was a mass of wreckage.

Something weighed heavily upon Stuart's body. He discovered that it was the form of Jefferson. His companion was lying almost over the steering wheel.

"Are you all right?" questioned Stuart.

A groan was the response, but it was satisfying. The man was hurt, but still alive. A flash of lightning showed his face, the right side gashed and bruised.

Amidst the rumble of thunder and the roaring of the stream beside the car, Stuart realized that he must extricate himself; then look to the other's welfare. Cautiously, he opened the door of the car and started to slide free.

There was a depression in the ground below; but the car could not topple farther, for it was wedged against a good-sized tree.

As Stuart slipped downward, he realized that Jefferson's inert form was following him. He managed to stop the helpless man's progress by pushing him forward so that he rested against the steering wheel.

Once out and looking up into the car above, Stuart saw that Jefferson's body was slowly gliding downward. The car would be a better place than the ground, Stuart decided, pushing the door shut.

Jefferson's sagging form stopped as it settled into the driver's seat.

Stuart had lost all sense of direction. The winding course of the stream confused him. He stumbled through dampened underbrush and drew himself upward out of boggy ground. Then, as his senses straightened, he began to take his bearings.

The very elements which had contrived against him now worked in his behalf. The chilling rain aroused his benumbed faculties. The roaring stream told him that the road must be in the opposite direction. The lightning glare revealed the scene and showed the edge of the road, upward and ahead.

Climbing an embankment, Stuart clung to a tree and rested, conscious of a sudden weakness in his left leg.

Before he went farther, it would be wise to note the situation about him. He looked back toward the car. It was invisible. Stuart had turned off the lights after the smash.

Then came a lightning flash - distant, now, for the center of the storm had passed. In the midst of that prolonged glare, Stuart saw a sight that froze his heart with terror.

THE car was some sixty feet away, its right side looming upward. The door was opened, and Stuart saw why.

Poised over the opening was the stocky form of a man clad in cap and sweater. The face of this man was turned upward, and it wore an expression of evil exultation. In a huge, thick fist, this creature of the storm held a thick rod.

One sight of the poised figure told Stuart that whatever the man's errand might be, it would not be one of mercy. Who was this ghoulish being who had so quickly arrived at the scene of the disaster?

Stuart's startled cry was unheard in the roar of the thunder that followed the revealing flash. Helpless, Stuart stood there and waited; then another flash came, and he saw that the door of the car was closed. The evil-visaged man was gone!

Forgetting his injured leg, Stuart fought his way to the car, pushing through underbrush and saplings. He clambered upon the running board and opened the door.

He waited there, tense, his eyes staring downward, unable to view the form of the injured man whom he had left there.

Then came a broad sheet of lightning. Instantly Stuart saw the face of Jefferson, no longer turned downward, as it had been when Stuart left, but staring straight upward with ghastly, unseeing eyes.

The gashes and bruises suffered in the crash still adorned the side of the man's face. But above them was a horrible wound. Jefferson's head had been crushed by a blow from some heavy object!

Helpless and alone, there in the car, Stuart's companion had been slain by the hideous man who had come from the storm!

CHAPTER III

THE HOUSE ON THE ISLAND

A SENSE of overpowering danger gripped Stuart Bruxton as he rested on the running board of the tipped coupe. He had closed the door upon the hideous sight within.

He was groping for an explanation. A helpless man had been done to death while he looked on. What was the meaning of the crime?

It was fear for his own safety that made Stuart act. The monster, lurking in the abating fury of the storm, might return at any moment. The storm itself would be a safer place than this.

Responding to the mental suggestion, Stuart arose and moved wearily toward the road.

He kept to the side of the thoroughfare and began a plodding course across the island. Beyond was another bridge. He could cross it and get away from this locality. Then he might find help - somewhere - and come back to investigate.

What puzzled Stuart was the motive that might lay behind the appearance of the murderer. Perhaps the man was a maniac. No other explanation seemed likely.

Stuart's leg was troubling him again. He stumbled against a stone, and nearly fell; so he stopped and sat upon the stone.

It was then that he remembered something. When he had slid from the car, Jefferson's body had slipped into the driver's seat. His own escape could not have been witnessed, Stuart reasoned.

The murderer, arriving after the accident, had mistaken Jefferson for the driver of the wrecked car. Unless the murderer had stayed in the immediate vicinity, he could not possibly know of Stuart's presence here.

Stuart realized that if he had been alone in that car, he, instead of the hitchhiker, would have been the victim. The thought was amazing!

Half an hour ago, Stuart had been driving for Massachusetts, intending to stop in Philadelphia for the night. He had no enemies; he anticipated no danger.

Now, his car wrecked beyond repair, he was wandering, alone and unarmed, upon a lonely island in a Maryland river, alive only because a chance stranger whom he had picked up had been mistaken for himself!

IN the midst of vague theorizing, Stuart remembered what Jefferson had said about the bridges - that they were not unsafe. The peculiar circumstances of the accident impressed him.

Had that bridge been deliberately weakened? It seemed likely. Ordinarily, a car would have crossed it slowly. Only the speed of the coupe had saved it.

A definite thought now ruled Stuart's mind. The murderer had simply completed work which had been intended, but which had failed.

It must be - it could only be - that some other car had been expected to cross that bridge. Purely through an oddity of circumstances had Stuart been thrust here. Jefferson's advice to follow the short road had led to the disaster, but the hitchhiker had been the one to suffer.

Still, the thought that the slayer was crazed persisted in Stuart Bruxton's brain as he began his labored limping once more. The inhumanness of the deed made it seem incredible that anything else was possible.

Stuart felt sure that he would obtain immediate aid from the first place he encountered - but that might be far away.

His left leg could scarcely support him now, and Stuart felt a greater weariness than before. The ground at the side of the road changed suddenly to soft dirt.

This must be a byroad, leading to some spot on the island. If someone lived near here, this would be the place to call for assistance. Peering in the direction from which the road seemed to come, Stuart fancied that he saw a light through the trees.

The storm was over - only a drizzle now remained - and there were no lightning flashes to indicate the way. But as Stuart moved his head back and forth, he occasionally caught sight of a distant sparkle.

There must be a house somewhere amid the trees!

Stuart started along the side road. The twinkle of the light became more evident. After a while, Stuart reached a clearing and stood before the looming bulk of an old country house, some mansion of a forgotten period.

A single light showed through a glass panel in the heavy front door. Stuart approached it and peered within.

THE room inside the door was a sparsely furnished hallway, lighted by a bright oil lamp. An elderly man was seated beside the table which bore the lamp. The man was quietly reading, and his white hair and benign appearance were reassuring.

Stuart knocked at the door. He saw the old man look up; then rise to answer the knock.

The door opened. Stuart limped into the light. He was looking at the old man, and he saw a puzzled appearance flit over the quiet face. Then the old man smiled and extended a hand in greeting.

"Ah!" he said. "You are here. I have been waiting for you. Where is your car? I did not hear you drive up."

Stuart realized that the old man had mistaken him for someone else. But there was no time to waste in giving his identity.

"I have had an accident," he said quickly. "My car was wrecked, coming over the bridge. The whole bridge collapsed."

"You should have been careful," responded the old man, shaking his head in a solemn manner. "I told you to come over that bridge very slowly. You said you would remember. Very slowly."

The old man's words brought a sudden understanding. Stuart's belief that the bridge had been weakened came back, now, with startling force. With it came the thought that someone else had been expected to cross it.

The old man had been expecting someone. He had warned that person to cross the bridge slowly. Suppose that advice had been followed! The person heeding it would be in the river, now, buried in a submerged automobile!

There was only one answer. The old man was a party to the crime!

Stuart was in a quandary. The old man must suppose him to be intended victim - one who had an appointment at this place.

Stuart was on the point of blurting out that a mistake was evident; then he checked himself. He could reveal his right name at any time. It might be better wait. He sat down wearily upon an old chair.

Then he realized another danger. Jefferson had been murdered, perhaps by the old man's design. Stuart knew that he must feign ignorance of the hitchhiker's death. The old man gave him the opportunity unwittingly.

"You have been hurt," he said, in a kindly tone. "You must rest. My man will be here shortly" - Stuart shuddered at these words, as he thought of the monster in the storm - "and he can look to your car. You have the papers?"

"There's another man in the car," responded Stuart, anxious to avoid answering the question. "I think he is hurt, badly. I am worrying about him. We ought to help him."

"You had someone with you?" The old man's voice was incredulous

"Only a hitchhiker," replied Stuart quickly. "I picked him up out of the storm."

"Yes - but to bring him here?" The man's alarm was evident.

"I - I figured I was a bit early," said Stuart. Groping for an excuse. "I planned to go into Herkimer and return. He was going there, so I took him along. I couldn't leave him out in such a storm."

"I see," acquiesced the old man. "It was not wise, however. Well, we can do nothing until my man appears, which should be any moment now."

AS if in fulfillment of the old man's prediction, the door opened, and Stuart Bruxton looked up to see the monster whom he had observed beside the wrecked car.

The man was a powerful brute, with tremendous shoulders for one of middle stature. His face, although ugly, did not wear that fiendish expression that Stuart had seen by the lightning flash. Instead, it wore a look of puzzlement as its owner viewed the newcomer.

"Grady," said the old man. "this is the man we have been expecting - Mr. Powell. He tells me that he has had an accident.

"He also had a man riding with him - a hitchhiker - who was hurt and is still in the car. Will you go down to the bridge and see what you can do?"

"Yes, sir," growled Grady.

Stuart, watching closely, fancied that he saw a sign pass from the brute to the old man. Stuart gave no sign that he had noticed it. Instead, he adopted new tactics the moment that Grady had gone.

In order to avoid further questioning and to sustain temporarily his identity as that of the unknown Powell, he let his head fall upon his hand and feigned a sudden stupor.

"You must be hurt," said the old man, in an apprehensive voice. "Let me see what I can do for you while we are waiting for Grady to return."

He disappeared, and came back with a bottle, from which he poured a small glass of liquid. He tendered it to Stuart, who pretended great effort in drinking it. It tasted like a brandy.

Stuart showed a slight revival; then sank back into his faked weariness. The old man watched him for a time; then went out of the room into darkness beyond.

To Stuart, only one course seemed logical, even though it might mean increasing danger. Although his mind was working clearly, he was handicapped physically, not only because of his injured leg, but because of other pains that were now racking him.

He might be able to cope with the old man and overpower him, but it would be virtually impossible to escape, for Grady would surely follow him.

Far better, Stuart thought, to rely on ingenuity. The old man had certainly designed death for Powell, whose part Stuart was playing. But now that

Stuart was safely in the house, the old man seemed a bit dumfounded, and was evidently figuring a new plan.

Stuart felt sure that Grady's attack on Jefferson had been made without the old man's knowledge. The servant, seeing that the automobile had not fallen into the river, had taken it upon himself to supply the required death.

Whatever the old man's plan might be, it would not culminate until Grady's return. Perhaps some break might come in Stuart's favor.

THE old man was back, now, and his insistent voice was returning to his previous questioning.

"You have the papers with you?"

The words gave Stuart an inspiration. There was something that the old man wanted as well as Powell's life - namely, papers that Powell was bringing here!

How the old man had intended to get them with Powell's car in the river was beyond Stuart's knowledge. But he did realize, most emphatically, that Powell without the papers would be in a better situation than Powell with them.

The question came again; and Stuart replied, groggily, but truthfully:

"I didn't bring - any papers!"

"You don't have the papers?" The question showed the old man's consternation. "What good is the visit without them? How do you expect me to believe what you may have to say?"

"I thought - thought we could get them - later," was Stuart's evasive answer. "After we had talked together."

Stuart nodded.

"Where are they, then?" questioned the old man.

Stuart pretended a recurrence of his stupor.

"Did you leave them in Baltimore?" came the question. "At the Burnham House?"

Again Stuart nodded.

"You still have your room there - going back tonight. Is that the idea?"

"Yes," answered Stuart.

"Very well," said the old man quietly. "We can get them tomorrow, after we have discussed this matter. You must stay here tonight. You are in no condition to leave."

That ended the conversation for the time, and Stuart, nodding drowsily in his chair, congratulated himself upon the way in which he had turned the conversation.

He felt that he was better off as Powell, under the present circumstances. As Stuart Bruxton, he would be an intruder here; and he had a strong suspicion that intruders as well as expected visitors could find sudden death upon this sinister isle.

The door opened to admit Grady. The man spoke to his master, but loud enough for Stuart to hear.

"I found the car," he said. "It's a bad wreck. But there's nobody in it. I guess that hitchhiker of yours climbed out and started on to Herkimer. It isn't raining anymore, so he'll be all right."

"We can forget about him, then," declared the old man. "Of course, you looked around, didn't you, Grady?"

"All along the road, declared the man. "I saw some footprints going on past our driveway, here, so I reckoned they were his."

"Very well," said the old man

"Mr. Powell is staying here tonight, Grady. He is badly jarred from the accident. He will probably feel better in the morning. Come, we must help him to his room."

STUART repressed a shudder as Grady lifted him upward. Supported by the murderous menial and the old man, Stuart was conducted up pitch-black stairs. He let his body sag limp, but he was ready to spring at any instant.

There proved to be no occasion for alarm, however. Grady turned on his flashlight to blaze the path, and the three entered a room furnished with two old chairs and a small bed. Here, Grady left, and the old man spoke from the darkness.

"You are tired," he said soothingly, "and I advise you to rest. Sleep well, and we can talk together in the morning."

With these words, the host departed, and Stuart, lying as though oblivious, heard the door close behind him.

Instantly, the young man was alert. He rose from the bed and moved stealthily toward the window. He raised the sash and thrust his hand out toward what appeared to be black night. Instead of space, his fist encountered a solid barrier.

The window was barricaded with an iron shutter!

Stuart waited. At last, sure that no one could be listening in the hall, he went to the door and tried it, There was no yielding. The door had been solidly locked from the outside.

Stuart sat upon the bed and thought, amidst impenetrable darkness. He was a prisoner, here in this strange house. The two men who watched him were murderers. Their next crime might be his death, tomorrow!

Tomorrow?

Stuart wondered if he would ever see the dawn of another morning. His life was hanging in the balance. He was alone and helpless, without friends. There was nothing to do but wait.

Would his pretense of false identity prove his salvation? Perhaps, for the time. But the respite could be no more than temporary.

The one vital thought that governed Stuart Bruxton's mind was the recollection of that upturned face - the face of the murdered man in the car.

Stuart was to have been the victim of that crime! His life had been spared, but only for the moment. Death was the lot intended for him now.

With hope struggling against these fearful thoughts, the prisoner stretched himself on the bed and fell into a restless slumber.

CHAPTER IV

AT THE BURNHAM HOUSE

THE Burnham House was one of Baltimore's older hostelries. It still preserved the atmosphere of earlier times when it had reigned among the elite.

Now, although its clientele was largely commercial, it continued to be the Baltimore home of travelers who remembered times of yore.

The famous old decorations still adorned the walls. The commodious lounging rooms were quiet spots frequented by guests who enjoyed the hospitality of the time-honored hotel.

Most of the persons in the gilded lobby were commercial travelers. In fact, they so predominated, that it was not difficult for a shrewd observer to pick out all who did not belong to that class.

Such an observer was watching now, from the vantage point of a tall-backed chair that rested against a marble-faced pillar. He was a young man of clean-cut appearance, who expressed a very general interest in what was going on before him.

A tall, stoop-shouldered individual weaved his way up to the lobby and spoke to the clerk. After a short conversation, this man strolled to a corner and stood in speculation.

The tall man was directly under the observation of the watcher by the pillar, who, glancing from the corners of his eyes, had an excellent opportunity to study the lanky person.

It was evident that the stoop-shouldered one was worrying about something. He seemed impatient and ill at ease.

His long, prying nose showed him to be a talkative type, and one who had a penchant for mingling in the business of others. His furtive eyes gave him a suspicious appearance.

He made a good subject for a character analyst.

Too much concerned with matters pertaining to himself to notice that he was under observation, this man suddenly strode across the lobby to the cigar counter. He purchased a handful of perfectos, and made off in the direction of the smoking room.

There, ensconced in a corner, he lighted a cigar and stared steadily at the mural decorations. So preoccupied was he that he did not notice the arrival of another person - the man who had been watching him in the lobby.

"Have you a match?"

The simple question made the gawkish man start. He fumbled in his pocket and produced a pack of paper matches. He gave them to the one who had asked for them.

"Thank you, Mr. Powell."

THE man raised his stooped shoulders. A hunted expression came over his face. His eyes gleamed with suspicion. He stared at the speaker, who returned his gaze with a frank and friendly air.

"My name isn't Powell," the man declared in a low, tense voice.

"Not on the hotel register," was the young man's reply. "There you have written your name as Wallace Weldon. The first name is correct; the last is not. You should have listed yourself as Wallace Powell, unless -"

"Unless what?" the tall man interrupted.

"- unless you prefer not to be known in Baltimore," the other finished.

Powell sank back in his chair and stared toward the ceiling; but his mind was still on what the stranger had said.

"Suppose," said Powell, "that I do not care to be known in Baltimore. How does it concern you?"

"It does not concern me at all."

"Then why mention it?" Powell persisted.

"Because it concerns you - and your immediate welfare. More so, perhaps, than you suppose." The young man's voice was firm.

Again the hunted eyes flashed. Powell looked about to see if they were alone. Then he spoke in a low, but demanding, tone.

"Why are you watching me?"

"I told you why," came the answer. "For your own good!"

"What are you? A detective?"

"No. I have no concern whatever with the law."

Powell saw that the man's eyes were frank. He believed him. Then he laughed, in a disgruntled manner.

"It wouldn't matter if you were a detective," he said. "I've done nothing wrong. Whatever I do is always legitimate. I've got nothing to worry about."

"No?"

The peculiar accent of the question puzzled Powell. It increased his nervousness. He wanted to know who this man was.

"What is your name?" he demanded bluntly.

"Harry Vincent," was the reply. "The same name in Baltimore as in New York."

"I never heard of you," Powell countered.

"You might have - if I had been in Paris a few weeks ago!"

Powell did not reply. He became restless, and chewed his lips. He wanted to question the stranger further, but seemed unwilling to begin. Harry Vincent saved him the trouble.

"When you were in Paris," said Harry quietly, "you met an old friend - a man much older than yourself, and one who was much wealthier. I refer to Herbert Brockley."

Powell did not reply.

"Brockley died while he was there," continued Harry, in a reminiscent tone. "His death was a sudden one. He was murdered. It was a shock to you."

"It was a shock," admitted Powell.

"Before he died, Brockley gave you something. What, I do not know. I presume, however, that it involved information of a certain sort. It may have explained, to some degree, why Brockley died."

"Of course, the cause of his death has been traced to Parisian criminals - Apaches. But you know something which underlies it all."

"Where did you get that idea?" asked Powell, with a hollow laugh.

"My source of information is my secret," replied Harry, "just as your fund of information is your secret. Perhaps a fair exchange would be to our mutual liking."

"Not to mine," declared Powell. "What I know, I keep to myself. What I have learned" - he caught himself - "what I may have learned was given to me in confidence. That's enough, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Harry calmly. "But sometimes, people learn too much. Herbert Brockley did. He passed the information on to you."

THE amazement that swept over Wallace Powell showed that the remark had struck home. The man began to clench his fists nervously. He started to rise; then sat down.

He looked at Harry Vincent; but his eyes were more than hunted. They were beseeching. Harry detected their expression. He followed it to advantage.

"Powell," he said, "I never met you before. But you may consider me a friend. You can also assume me to be a friend of Herbert Brockley's."

"There are reasons why I wish to learn who caused his death. I believe that you can tell me. You owe that to Brockley, don't you?"

"Perhaps," said Powell slowly. "But that makes you a detective, doesn't it?"

"Not a bit of it," declared Harry emphatically. "Look here, Powell. I know what you're after. Money! You can't be blamed for that."

"I don't happen to need cash" - he pulled a massive roll of bills from his pocket, and Powell stared goggle-eyed at the yellow-backed currency - "and, furthermore, I'm willing to spend some. How does that sound?"

"How much do you want to pay for what I know?" demanded Powell, completely off his guard because of the money.

"How much are you getting for it?" quizzed Harry, thrusting the roll of bills back into his pocket.

The cash out of view, Powell's attitude changed. He became close-mouthed, giving way to a short laugh.

"Think this over, Powell," declared Harry. "I am out to obtain certain information - which I think you have. I intend to get it - although it may take a long while, and cause serious consequences in the meantime. To save myself that trouble, I am willing to pay you a substantial sum."

"I take it that you have already made plans to sell your knowledge. That does not concern me. You are quite welcome to go through with your deal. Whatever I pay you, will be extra."

A sudden light came into Powell's glance. Harry's words had struck a responsive chord.

Avaricious, Powell immediately began to figure excess profits. He was a man who lived by his wits, and this was too good an opportunity to miss.

"Furthermore," continued Harry, "our transaction can take place in the security of this hotel, which is a great advantage to you. I doubt that your other - client, shall I call him? - is offering you that consideration."

"Let me think this over," said Powell. "I'm too much worried about - well, just worried -"

"About the other deal," interposed Harry quietly. "I'll tell you something, Powell. If a man came to you and offered to work this with you, you'd be willing to split fifty-fifty with him. Just because you are worried.

"Well, suppose I make that offer. Only, instead of collecting fifty per cent, I'll pay you that amount! How does that sound?"

Powell's eyes gleamed, but he still hesitated. Harry quickly continued with his offer.

"THE reason I know so much," Harry was saying, "is because I've been well posted regarding you and your methods. You're not a crook, but you have been in some shady deals. Your specialty is gaining information and supplying it to certain interested parties.

"You reason that if a man knows facts and wants to tell them, he can do so and collect money for it. Particularly, when the crime of blackmail does not begin until after his own transaction has ended.

"That sizes you up, doesn't it?"

Powell smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"In the case of Brockley," continued Harry, "you fell into certain information. You have said that you consider it to be yours. It involves a crime committed in France - where you were not molested by the police.

"You came to America, and you reason that you can do what you see fit with what you know. I was waiting for you in New York. I watched you there.

"You held one mysterious phone conversation from a pay station. Because of it, you came to Baltimore. I came also."

"Why didn't you talk to me in New York?" asked Powell.

"Because I wanted to make sure you were going through with the deal," responded Harry. "You came here yesterday. Knowing what I do of you, I realized by your actions that you are springing the deal tonight. Those road maps that you were consulting -"

Harry's voice drifted away. Powell turned to look at the speaker. He saw that Harry Vincent was smiling. Wallace Powell realized that this man had the goods.

"Just one point more," said Harry. "Whatever you are doing must necessarily depend upon what you received from Herbert Brockley.

"If I were a detective, I could arrest you now, and find out all you know. I could have obtained the articles by theft. But I preferred to deal with you direct."

"Why?"

"Because I am anxious to know all about the persons with whom you are dealing!"

"All right," declared Powell suddenly. "I'll think this over. Let's say you're right." He grinned as he spoke. "There's no witnesses here, and I can deny anything later.

"I'm out for dough. Your offer sounds good. I'm going somewhere. I'd like to have a pal. If you'll put up fifty per cent of what I'm getting, I'll consider it."

"How much money?" questioned Harry.

"I'm shooting for ten grand," said Powell. "That means, five thousand simoleons is what you've got to pay."

"That's agreeable to me."

"I'm going up to think it over," declared Powell. "There's two reasons besides cash why I'm willing to work with you. You're wise enough to know what they are, so I'll spill them.

"One is because you've got me more worried than I was. I'm going out on this deal, but I've been hesitating. I can't wait much longer.

"And that gives the second reason. You're wise to me, and if I want to dodge you completely, I'll have to welsh on the other proposition. But I want to be sure that I'll get my five grand from you."

"You'll be as sure of it as you are of the ten thousand you're after."

Powell nodded without thinking. It was evident that Harry Vincent had cleverly contrived to arouse the man's suspicious nature.

"It's ten o'clock now," said Powell thoughtfully. "I'm going to wait another hour. I'll think things over - up in my room. I want to be alone a while."

"Wait a moment," said Harry. "I'll make terms with you first. How about letting me in on everything right now. Taking your five thousand -"

"Nix!" exclaimed Powell. "Spill you the ten-grand lay? That don't work. I'm taking you in with me as partners. You've got work to do - you'll have to earn the dough you're spending."

"You want me to go with you?" Harry asked.

"You bet I do," Powell replied. "That gives you the dope you want firsthand."

"And," added Harry, "also protects you a bit."

"That's just it. When we get to the place, you slip me the cash. Then I'll go in and get the ten grand, leaving what I've got!"

"That works the other way," smiled Harry. "I want to know exactly what you're going to leave. You show me what you're taking in, so I can check up on your story."

"You can take the five thousand dollars with you. I'll be waiting for you. I won't blow."

"You might -"

"Not a bit of it. Because I want to know who you're dickering with, and get some other facts from you. I'll let those wait until you join me."

"All right," agreed Powell.

"Get this straight, Powell!" Harry's voice was emphatic. "We're both taking chances tonight. I'm shooting fair, and I expect you to do the same. It's to your advantage."

"Remember this. You're taking no more chances with me than you are where you're going. I'm sticking with you. Understand?"

"Right," answered Powell, "but I won't be ready for a while. I want to mull this over, and I've got to go up to my room. Where will you be?"

"Here in the lobby."

WALLACE POWELL arose and extended his hand. Harry Vincent accepted it. The gawky man moved forward, and Harry stood aside to let him pass.

They were finishing their handclasp, and Harry was at Powell's side. A number of road maps were extending from Powell's right coat pocket. One of them was on the point of falling.

Instinctively, Harry plucked it with his left hand, and it came free of the pocket. Harry's left hand dropped behind his back as Powell walked away. The man, fortunately, did not turn to look back.

"Perhaps I made a mistake," thought Harry, as he stood alone. "If he finds this missing, he may suspect, and call off the deal. But then" - his chain of thought changed - "if this means anything and Powell knows it's gone, he'll be anxious to work with me quick - because he'll be afraid I'll get there ahead of him!"

Sitting at a smoking table, Harry Vincent unfolded the road map, and a smile came to his lips. The map was marked. Off from a main road extended a thin, penciled line, leading toward the town of Herkimer.

Harry noted at one spot, the beginning of a fork, the line continued to the right. Then, at a spot marked with a cross line, was a tiny road leading off, and the letter "X" at the end of it.

What was the cross line? A bridge? The letter must surely indicate a house.

Harry Vincent had obtained the advance information that he wanted. He was still willing to spend the five thousand dollars to learn all that Wallace Powell knew!

CHAPTER V

A GUEST CHECKS OUT

WHEN Harry Vincent returned to the lobby of the hotel, he resumed his placid waiting in the chair by the pillar. The clock above the desk showed quarter past ten. From Harry's estimate on the road map, the spot near Herkimer could not be more than an hour's ride from Baltimore. Harry knew that Wallace Powell had an automobile available, though Powell did not refer to it in talking; neither did Harry mention his own car, ready for use.

Indeed, there were various facts which Harry had not found it necessary to reveal. The most important concerned Harry's presence here tonight.

Powell had assumed that Harry was working for his own interests. Had the stoop-shouldered man known Harry Vincent's real employer, he would have been utterly dumfounded and - in all probability - terrified.

Harry Vincent was an agent of The Shadow. That fact told a tremendous story, for The Shadow was such a mysterious figure that even his agents seemed cloaked in the veil of darkness which surrounded him.

To the world at large, The Shadow was an enigma. To the police of New York, he was an unknown genius who battled crime more effectually than did the law. To the underworld - in its crime centers in every city - The Shadow was a scourge.

The Shadow's exploits in New York and Chicago had sent hundreds of gangsters scurrying to other cities. Even in their new haunts, the hand of The Shadow did not hesitate to stretch out and pluck those who had incurred his wrath.

Despite the fact that The Shadow was untraceable, the man himself was as audible to the public ear as he was invisible to searching eyes.

Once a week The Shadow's voice could be heard over the radio on a national hook-up. His weird, uncanny laugh thrilled millions of listeners with a tremulous shudder.

The world knew the laugh of The Shadow - and gangdom understood its meaning, for every fiend of the underworld knew that sometime that laugh might ring in his own ears - and that with its sinister merriment would come his doom!

The Shadow seemed everywhere when crime was being done. Through his agents and investigators - none of whom had ever met him face-to-face - he learned of gangdom's doings, and launched his organized force of co-workers, to crush the evil foe.

So constant were The Shadow's efforts in this battle against crime, that in his massive archives appeared only records of his most important conflicts. The skirmishes with minor figures of the underworld passed unnoticed.

It was impossible for anyone to determine the full scope of The Shadow's work; for seldom did his activity enter into the final reckoning. But it was said by a prominent criminologist - whose name cannot be quoted - that The Shadow was the one controlling factor who had prevented the empires of the underworld from gaining overwhelming domination over the forces of the law!

Harry Vincent had served The Shadow often and loyally. He had proved to be one of the most useful men of all the master's agents. Still, he had no idea who The Shadow might be.

One night - long ago - Harry had contemplated suicide. A hand from the darkness had drawn him back from the parapet of a bridge. Instead of plunging to suicide, Harry had obeyed the weird voice of a man clad in black - had become his henchman.

Harry knew well that The Shadow was a master of disguise; that he might meet The Shadow anytime, and not know who he was. On some occasions, the man in black had appeared to aid Harry in his work. But The Shadow had always vanished like a puff of smoke, fading into the nothingness from which he had emerged.

But now, strange events were brewing. Clyde Burke, a newspaper reporter, who was also one of The Shadow's men, had gone to Paris as a correspondent for a New York newspaper. There, Clyde had uncovered a vital fact in the killing of Herbert Brockley.

Burke had reported that Wallace Powell, an American confidence man, had held negotiations with Brockley.

Burke was the only man in Paris who had learned of Powell's departure for America. Whether Burke had discovered it alone - or whether The Shadow had been in Paris at the time - Harry did not know. Harry had been deputized to watch Wallace Powell, on the latter's arrival in this country, and he had done the job well.

The singular fact that impressed Harry Vincent was the matter of money. While awaiting Powell's arrival in New York, Harry had conferred with Rutledge Mann, an investment broker who also served The Shadow. Harry had been supplied with cash, and Mann had told him to buy Powell's information if necessary.

From this, Harry deduced that The Shadow was abroad, probably now returning home, and desirous of having as much as possible accomplished before his arrival. For The Shadow, had he been in New York, could easily have contrived to learn all facts from Powell without the man knowing it.

Powell, cunning and wily, was supplying important information to someone who would buy it, instead of giving it to the authorities. That was Powell's type of game. He had been successful in it.

Tonight, Harry was elated because he had succeeded in gaining Powell's confidence. At the same time, Harry felt a feeling of insecurity. He was alone in Baltimore, coping with this problem single-handed. Should danger threaten, this would be one time that Harry could not depend upon The Shadow's aid! It was evident that Powell had a wide acquaintance with supercrooks - blackmailers. His one telephone call in New York had been to arrange a meeting with some member of the clique. For that purpose, Powell had come to Baltimore.

Harry felt positive that whatever Brockley gave Powell - documents, probably - told certain facts pertaining to some man who could be blackmailed. A knowledge of that material would enable The Shadow to strike at the blackmail ring, particularly if the recipient of Powell's information could be traced.

Harry was eager for the adventure. Sitting in the lobby, he restrained himself from starting ahead to Powell's destination. That would be folly. He also put down the impulse to dash madly up to Powell's room and demand the man's possessions at the point of a gun. Another ridiculous idea!

No. Harry's game was to work with Powell; to go with him and observe all that could be seen; to pay the man, and have him on tap as a useful informant later on.

Powell was disturbed through mistrust of the men with whom he was dealing. Harry wondered how much cause Powell had to worry.

The large hand of the clock pointed downward. Half past ten. No sign yet of Powell.

Harry was not surprised. The man was pondering over an important decision. Acceptance of Harry's offer meant that he must double-cross those with whom he had negotiated.

Still, Harry remembered the eagerness with which Powell had eyed that roll of bills. That temptation must prevail. Powell wanted money.

It was nearing quarter of eleven. Men were coming in and out of the lobby. Harry, although watching the elevators constantly, was able to notice few newcomers. There seemed to be less traveling men than usual.

Most of the chairs in the lobby were filled now, but many heads were turned so that Harry could not view the faces.

Finally, Harry saw Powell come from the elevators and approach the desk.

HARRY promptly arose and stepped close beside the man. Powell seemed more nervous than before. He spoke to the clerk as Harry stood looking in another direction.

"I'm staying another night," said Powell, "but I'm taking my bag out with me now. Suppose I pay you in advance -"

The clerk nodded and indicated the cashier's window. As Powell passed Harry, he spoke in a low voice:

"Back in five minutes."

No one overheard the statement. It was all that Harry wanted to know. He already knew the room number.

Harry strolled back to his chair and watched Powell return to the elevator to get the bag from his room. That bag, Harry thought, must contain the required data. Several men went up on the elevator with Powell.

Powell's room was on the fifth floor - Room 516. In five minutes, he would just have time to get his belongings and return. Evidently he had decided to accept Harry's terms.

The five minutes proved painfully slow. Before the end of the time lapse, Harry had left his chair and was anxiously standing near the desk, from where he could watch both elevator and stairway.

He was determined to lose no time from now on; for Powell's manner had plainly told that all was set.

Five minutes were past. The clock showed that six minutes had transpired. What was keeping Powell? Another minute. Had the man deliberately misled Harry?

At the end of eight minutes, Harry decided to wait no longer. He saw an elevator ready for its upward trip. Harry felt sure that Powell would linger a few minutes if he came into the lobby. So he entered the elevator and rode to the fifth floor. He hurried down the corridor toward 516.

If Powell were gone, it would mean a quick trip back to the lobby. Failing to find the man there, Harry could assume that he had slipped away. Then it would be a race toward Herkimer, with a head start for Powell.

The door of 516 was closed. Harry tapped lightly. No response. Harry spoke softly, leaning close to the door. Still, no reply.

Harry sensed a trap, and his hand tightened on the handle of the automatic which he carried in his pocket. He tried the door. It was unlocked. Harry entered.

The room was dark. Harry turned on the light; the room was empty. He noticed the key lying on the bureau. Strange that Powell had not taken it with him. Harry looked for baggage, but saw none.

Then he spied what appeared to be a shoe, protruding from the foot of the bed. He moved forward to investigate.

There, in the space between the front of the bed and the window, Harry saw the body of Wallace Powell. The man was dead!

He had been barbarously murdered. The collar had been pulled from his throat as strong hands had choked him. His head had been driven forcibly against the radiator in the corner. Powell's features were a ghastly sight.

Harry had seen death often - but seldom death so frightful as this.

The sight dazed Harry. It was the last thing he had anticipated. He had felt sure that Powell would be safe here, in the hotel. But the man was dead, and his precious bag was missing.

Stooping forward, mind clearing, Harry searched the dead man's pockets. Not an article remained in them. The murderer had rifled them. All that Harry had gained was the precious map.

WHO had done this murder? Harry remembered that Powell had feared someone might rob him of his secret and try to sell it in his stead. Had some unknown party entered and accomplished such a deed?

Harry instinctively thought of how Powell must have felt during the brief death struggle. Perhaps he had believed that his antagonist was a hireling of Harry's.

There was not a moment to lose. Harry knew that he must leave the place immediately.

Fortunately, no one had seen him talking with Powell. Harry's own room was, luckily, located on the same floor.

Tense with excitement, Harry stole to the door and extinguished the light. Then he stepped into the empty corridor and closed the door behind him, wiping the knob quickly with his handkerchief to eliminate any telltale marks that might have indicated his entrance.

Wallace Powell was dead. His secret was gone. Harry Vincent's plans had been foiled by an unknown murderer!

With all the cards in his hand, Harry had lost - and the only clew to all this mystery was a road map upon which the dead man had traced a few penciled lines!

A problem, Harry felt, that would have astounded anyone - except The Shadow. But The Shadow was not here!

Wallace Powell had checked out of the Burnham House; checked out, expecting to return. But he had checked out permanently, now.

CHAPTER VI

A FIENDISH CRIME

THE room was pitch-black when Stuart Bruxton awoke. He recalled that he had been sleeping fitfully. Two or three times he had half awakened, fancying that he heard sounds near his door.

The sounds had ceased on each occasion, when Stuart had uttered drowsy growls. Now, for the first time, he began to realize where he was.

A peculiar sensation gripped the back of his head. In the midst of chaotic recollections, Stuart remembered the drink that the old man had given him.

It must have been doped - probably a powder in the glass. The old man had turned his back when he had poured the drink.

The direct cause of Stuart's awakening had been his injured leg. It was twisted beneath him in a painful manner. He tried to stand up, and found that he was barely capable of the effort, due to stiffness.

He felt for his coat, which he had thrown over a chair. He found his watch and a box of matches. He lighted a match and saw that the time was midnight.

The throbbing in his head continued, but Stuart, despite his weakness, felt the need of action. He looked about the room, lighting a few matches, and managed to make a careful inspection of the iron shutter.

No escape from the window he decided. The shutter was barred from the outside.

The door offered no encouragement. It was a huge barrier, that might have belonged in a medieval castle. Stuart found one of the chairs, and realized that its frailness rendered it useless as a battering ram against that door.

He listened, hoping to hear some sound. Even the faint whispers of the storm would have been gladdening, but the storm was evidently ended long ago.

Stuart wondered why his life had been spared until this hour. He remembered those noises outside the door. Perhaps they had been afraid to attack.

The only answer that seemed logical was that the old man might be alone in the house. Perhaps Grady had gone on some errand.

Stuart realized, upon thought, that probably the pair thought he was armed, and were waiting to try some strategy. Whatever their plan might be, he felt that now he would be safe until morning. But there was no surety.

Back on the bed, Stuart continued to listen. He heard an occasional noise, seemingly at some distance from the room. It sounded like a creaking somewhere in the house, but it was repeated too often to be such an ordinary sound.

Stuart rubbed his forehead. It was growing very stuffy in this unventilated room. The house had seemed musty and chilly when he entered; now it was stuffy and warm. Breathing was a difficult task.

Stuart seemed to have caught a cold during the eventful evening. But now his nostrils scented something. Smoke!

He listened in alarm. Now he knew what the noise was - the crackling of fire! A terrible thought swept over Stuart.

The old man had set the house on fire - and he was here to be burned alive!

THERE was no time for lingering, now. Furiously, Stuart battered at the iron shutter, but to no avail. He seized a chair and beat against the door.

He demolished the chair with a few strokes, and he seized the other one. The result was the same. Then Stuart smashed away with the broken pieces, until they were splintered to bits. The barrier still remained unopened.

Wearied, Stuart rested on the side of the bed. It would take a miracle to save him now. The old man's scheme was dastardly.

Stuart knew that the fire must have been kindled directly beneath this room. The old house was a stone-walled structure, but the interior was a mass of wood. Within a few minutes, the place would be a holocaust, and he would be the victim.

The building was in an isolated spot. The flames would only be visible on the side of the hill which Stuart had descended in his car. There, the bridge was down over the river.

Help would be delayed - and the worst thought was that if help did come, it would not start on its way until the flames were first seen. By that time the old building would be a mighty torch, flaming skyward.

Stuart felt the heat greatly now. The crackling had become a furious noise. A lighted match showed him that a mass of smoke was coming in through the slender crack beneath the door. He could smell nothing but the smoke now; still, he was astonished at its volume.

Sounds broke loose in the walls. Timbers were giving way. Once the flames came through the floor, there would be an open way - but the route would be through a roaring furnace! He was trapped, with fire beneath, eating its way up the sides. A hopeless position, to be followed by a terrible death.

The doomed man leaped savagely upon the bed, breaking it apart, seeking to use the pieces in another futile storming of the door.

Nevertheless, it was the only task that could keep Stuart's mind from the death that lay so close. He not only beat upon the door, he shouted at the top of his lungs, seeking to outdo the roaring crackle of the flames.

At last, as he broke a final bed slat upon the door, Stuart sank exhausted, incapable of effort or outcry.

It was then that his fevered mind heard what seemed to be an echo to his pounding. The door reverberated with heavy strokes from the other side. Stuart shouted again and heard an answering word.

"Steady!" came a voice, that seemed choked with smoke. "Back from the door! I've broken the bolts. Here goes the lock."

Stuart heard a muffled revolver shot. Then another report. A third seemed to roar in his ears. It was fired through an opening in the door. The lock was broken. The door swung inward, Stuart crawling away to avoid its path.

The open doorway revealed an amazing scene.

A MAN was standing in the center of a surging swirl of smoke. All about him was a ruddy glow - the reflection of flames that were consuming the old house. The man was stooped forward, his head muffled by a coat, wringing wet.

As Stuart started to rise, he fell back, choked by the incoming smoke. The man stooped quickly and placed his own coat over Stuart's head.

Crawling, the rescuer spied Stuart's coat on the floor and picked it up. He threw this, likewise, over Stuart. Choking, he pressed the two coats together.

Stuart's coat was still somewhat damp from the rain. The added moistness sufficed to make it a good protection against the smoke. The stranger slipped the coat over his own head and tried to help Stuart to his feet.

Progress was slow at first. But Stuart, responding to his rescuer's heroic efforts, used all his strength.

The man had dropped a revolver in his work; he picked it up. Together, Stuart and his companion made the stairs. There they began a terrible descent.

It was like a trip into an active volcano. The smoke came upward with blinding thickness. Only by holding their coats tightly over their heads could the men make their way.

Flames were licking up the side of the stairs. Some of the steps were charred. But ahead lay safety. The roaring furnace was directly beneath the room where Stuart had been, and the stairs led in the opposite direction.

Stuart was on the inside. The other man took the dangerous outer portion of the stairs. Once his foot went through a burning step; he caught himself and continued.

The front door was straight ahead. It was partly opened. Before it seethed a ring of hot-tongued flame. Stuart staggered before they reached the bottom step. With a mighty effort, his companion seized him and dragged him roughshod through the fast-increasing blaze.

The rescuer used every ounce of strength to make the passage a rapid one. He virtually flung his helpless burden through the door and came staggering afterward. Then both men lay face downward on the rain-soaked drive, panting and choking.

Stuart felt his breath coming back; but he seemed incapable of motion. Behind him was the surging roar of the fire. A falling piece of wood landed blazing beside him.

But, again, the other man was equal to the task. Recovered from his furious fight through the smoke-filled house, he rose to his feet and lifted Stuart with him.

He lifted off the wet coats. Stuart saw the other man's face for the first time.

Harry Vincent was the rescuer: but Stuart had never met him. He only knew that this brave chap had come in the nick of time. A few more minutes would have meant the doom of Stuart Bruxton.

"Come along," said Harry, "we've got to move!"

The warning was a timely one. The house, with flames sweeping from all corners, had become a menace at this close range. Burning beams were shooting outward and landing about it.

Stuart limped along the driveway, by Harry's side. His companion noticed his difficulty, and gave him support on the left. They reached the road and turned toward the bridge. Stuart, trudging mechanically, never looked for the wreck of his car.

HARRY was carrying the coats. He felt in the pocket of his own and produced a flashlight. It was necessary, here along the ground, although the cloudy sky above was lighted with the glare of the burning house.

The light pointed out the fallen portion of the bridge - a section which extended downward from the nearest pier.

"Somebody got over by a rope, I think," said Harry. "I saw the end of it tied to the bridge. We'll have to scramble for it - the way I came over. It's about twenty-five feet, but the water's hardly over your head here."

With that, he led Stuart to the edge of the swiftly moving stream, and the two plunged into the current above the fallen end of the bridge. Stuart was a good swimmer, but effort was difficult for him now. Harry helped him as they floundered through.

The current carried them downward, but before they were swept too far, they had covered the distance, and their feet were slipping on the fallen

roadway of the broken portion of the bridge. Harry jammed Stuart against the rail and followed him. They made their way upward to the solid pier.

From then on, the bridge was shaky, but safe. Weakened though it was, the center of the structure had not yet succumbed to the swollen branch of the shallow river.

To Stuart, this last stretch was more nerve-racking than all that had gone before. Each step seemed a tremendous ordeal.

They reached the road, and Harry urged his tired companion to a coupe that was parked sidewise off the edge of the road. Stuart entered and sank exhausted beside the driver's seat.

The car spun madly up the hill as Harry shot it into second gear. They were driving away, posthaste, from the scene of the misfortunes that had almost overwhelmed Stuart Bruxton. They passed the barrier across the road. Here, Harry stopped long enough to replace it.

They continued upward, and at one spot Stuart looked to see great flames surging up above the treetops on the island, far below.

The coupe shot onward until it passed the fork that came in from the right. Then Harry, with a sigh of relief, slackened speed.

His mad pace had been a wise one, for they had traveled less than half a mile before they met a rural fire truck. After it followed half a dozen automobiles, at intervals.

Harry glanced over his shoulder. Through the rear window, he could see the dull glare of the horizon.

"They'll think we've come over the open road," was his only comment.

This proved to be correct, for a man hailed them from beside the road. He was standing by a car that had developed motor trouble. The vehicle was loaded with natives. Harry slowed down and looked through the window.

"Where's the fire?" came the question. "Down on the lower road?"

"Guess so," said Harry.

"Could you see it from the upper road, coming from Herkimer?"

"Was just looking at it," answered Harry, stopping the car.

"Must be the old house on the island," said the man.

"Anybody live there?" asked Harry.

"No," was the reply. "The owner died a year ago, and the place has been closed up since. Some old beds in there. Maybe some tramps were living in the place. Those bums often start fires, drat 'em!"

Harry drove on, and as they rode, he spoke to the man beside him.

"My names Harry Vincent," he said. "Yours?"

"Stuart Bruxton. Thanks for pulling me out of that mess."

"Forget that part of it," Harry interposed. "What I want to know is how you got into it."

LEANING his head back against the corner of the coupe, Stuart recited his story. Harry listened intently, while his eyes watched the road.

The fact that Stuart had been mistaken for Powell interested Harry greatly. So did the description of the old man, and the naming of Grady, the murderer.

The whole situation began to clear in Harry's mind. Stuart's bluff that he had left the papers in the hotel was the key.

Unquestionably, the old man had begun to doubt that Stuart was Powell. He had sent Grady to investigate. If Stuart had been Powell, Grady would have tried to get the papers. Meanwhile, chancing it that Powell had not come, the old man was on watch for him, while Grady was searching at the hotel.

Grady must have come in while Harry was waiting. There had been some queer ducks entering the hotel at that time. Harry recalled that Powell's manner was a give-away, when he had come down to the desk.

Harry noted that Stuart Bruxton was tall and somewhat like Powell in appearance, except that he lacked Powell's rather gawkish manner. Assuming that neither the old man nor Grady had ever seen Powell, Stuart would have answered the general description. But in the lobby, Grady must have recognized the man they were really after.

Piece by piece, Harry figured that Grady had dashed back after the murder, carrying the papers. The old man had been waiting at the bridge. He had gone back and set the house on fire. Then Grady had helped him across the breach.

Now, Harry recalled that he had met a single car, a mile before the fork in the road. That might have been the two men of whom Stuart spoke.

Harry had left the Burnham House after he had viewed Wallace Powell's body. But he had felt shaky and uncertain. He had never dreamed that the trail of the murderer would lead directly to that spot where Powell was awaited. Grady, speeding ahead, had increased his lead.

"My car!" said Stuart suddenly. "It's back there on the island - wrecked -"

"And rifled, probably," remarked Harry, thinking of the old man during Grady's absence. "What did you have in it?"

"A suitcase - in back. That lock would be easy to break. I guess they took it and the license plates, too. If they got the bag, they know who I am."

"Where were you bound?" questioned Harry.

"Up to Massachusetts, to see some friends."

"Your family?" Vincent questioned.

"Not many in it. They're all abroad."

"Then if no one knew what became of you -"

"If no one knew!" interrupted Stuart indignantly. "Say, I want everybody to know! I'm going to get those murderers -"

"That's just it," interposed Harry. "I'm out to get them, too. Remember, murderers is what they are. You're the only man who can identify them. You're safe if they think you're dead."

"When we've talked this over, I think you'll agree that you're safer working with me, and that you'll have a better chance of seeing them landed, than if you go to the police."

"You're the boss," replied Stuart quietly. "You hauled me out. I'd be a bum sport if I didn't play the game the way you want it."

Harry Vincent grinned in the dark. He liked this chap. He believed that he would be a good man working for The Shadow. That could be settled after they reached Baltimore.

The night had started well - then had come failure. But that one incident - the purloining of Wallace Powell's road map - had turned disaster into gain. There were two men to be traced. Harry had descriptions of both, and knew the name of one.

More than that, Harry had rescued a man who would prove useful in this campaign. Tonight, a full report would go to Rutledge Mann - a record of events that would reach The Shadow.

That report would state the simple fact that Harry Vincent had foiled one fiendish crime that the enemy had planned. And then, Harry knew, The Shadow would act!

CHAPTER VII

DEATH AFTER DARK

AN old man sat alone in the somber dining room of an ancient house. He was at a table, munching his food methodically. At times, he chuckled to himself. Something evidently amused him.

The old man's expression was deceiving. The changing moods which passed over his features were mingled with signs of doddering senility and traces of uncanny shrewdness. His mutterings were coherent only to himself. They ceased suddenly as a middle-aged woman entered through a swinging door.

"Is there anything else, Mr. Chadwick?" she asked.

"No, Martha," said the old man, in a harsh voice. "I shall be finished with my meal, directly. Then you can go."

"I'll wash the dishes," said the woman. "That will only take me a few minutes. There'll be plenty of time for me to get home and cook dinner for the folks."

"You're a busy lady, Martha," chuckled the old man. "You're a good cook, too. The best I ever had!"

"Thank you, Mr. Chadwick. I'm glad to work for you. It's very convenient, sir, that you always take dinner at five o'clock in the afternoon. It's an early hour, sir, and if it wasn't for that - well, I guess I couldn't get here. My own family has to eat, you know."

"One should dine a few hours before retiring," declared the old man. "It is an excellent habit. There are good habits as well as bad ones. I always retire early. Therefore, I dine early."

"Well, sir," said Martha, "you may be right. But when one has men folks coming home from work, that's when dinner has to be gotten ready. Half past six is our time. That goes on Saturdays, too. Let the others grumble if they want to; my husband works until half after five every weekday. He's the boss."

"He's a hard worker," commented the old man. "Henry Birch was always a hard-working man."

"Yes," replied the woman proudly, "but he likes good times, too. He's taking me to see a picture show, tonight. We're going in to Philadelphia."

"Why to Philadelphia?" queried Chadwick. "Chester is much closer by."

"Yes, but the pictures are much better in Philadelphia. We always go there on a Saturday night, Henry and I. We're always in time for the nine o'clock show."

The old man laughed as he arose from the table and walked slowly from the room. The woman, clearing the dishes from the table, shook her head as she heard him chortling from the stairway.

"A funny sort, Grant Chadwick is," she commented, half aloud. "Fussy, too - but it's not hard to work for him. Clean up house in the morning; cook a meal in the afternoon. Outside of that, he takes care of himself.

"Gets his own breakfast. Then I cook his dinner. He always makes out alone on Sundays, and I'm glad of it. Gives me one day away from this place. Spooky old house, too."

The woman resumed her soliloquy after she had carried the dishes to the pantry. There, engaged in washing the tableware, she added a few remarks to her former ones.

"It wasn't so bad around here when young Mr. Denby used to live in the place. A good sort, young Denby Chadwick. Put up with a lot of nonsense from the old man. Small wonder he moved out.

"He likes his old uncle, though - leastwise I reckon he does. Comes to see him once in a while. I wish he was here more often. He seems to liven the place."

The woman finished her work in a few minutes. She went into the front hall and called a good night up the stairs. There was no response, but she seemed to accept that as a matter of course. She went from the house, closing the front door behind her.

UPSTAIRS, Grant Chadwick was dozing in an armchair. He always took a short nap after his frugal dinner.

Although he was a man of considerable wealth, neither his habitation nor its furnishings betrayed the fact. His house was a decadent building on the outskirts of the city of Chester, in a place called Eddystone, ten miles from Philadelphia. The house was isolated, the nearest buildings being some deserted shacks near the railroad.

Grant Chadwick liked solitude. He had retired from business years ago, and now derived an excellent income from certain holdings which he possessed. Yet he was miserly to the extreme, unwilling to part with anything he owned.

The furnishings of his home were not only cheap, they were inadequate. Only a few of the rooms were fit for occupancy. All of old Chadwick's wealth rested in safe-deposit vaults; and the great percentage of his income was hoarded away with his investments.

The old man awoke from his doze and nodded mechanically. He looked about the room in a solemn manner.

He did not know how long he had been asleep. He did not seem to care. There was no clock in the room. Grant Chadwick paid little attention to the

passage of time.

Besides the bed and a few chairs, the room contained a battered desk, of the antiquated roll-top variety. Grant Chadwick, no longer sleepy, went to the desk and opened it. He began a slow and methodical inspection of the drawers.

Most of them were empty. Others contained an odd assortment of useless articles. But in one drawer, the old man discovered two objects for which he was searching. Both were sheets of paper - one small, the other large.

The old man laid the papers on the desk. Then, with a grunt of satisfaction, he prepared to retire. Soon he was garbed in nightgown and nightcap.

He walked back to the desk, took the papers, and carried them to the bed. There, he lighted an oil lamp that rested upon a crumbling dictionary placed upon a chair. He extinguished the other lights and climbed into the bed.

He slipped his hand beneath the pillow and drew forth an old-fashioned revolver. This weapon was the old man's safeguard against burglars. He had owned the gun for many years, but he had never had occasion to use it. Grant Chadwick's reputation for meagerness was the best protection that he could have asked. A sane robber would have tackled a dog kennel in preference to the decaying home of Grant Chadwick.

The old man began to examine the smaller of the two papers. As he leaned forward to bring it within the range of the low light, his lips began to mutter disdainfully.

Grant Chadwick preferred his own company to that of any other person; hence it was not strange that he should speak aloud when alone, for the only one with whom he conferred was himself.

"Two thousand dollars," he said. "Bah! An old fool - that is what I am. Interest on it, yes" - his eyes gleamed at the thought - "but no security. The principal is as good as lost. Waiting - that's what he's doing. Waiting. I know his game. I'll fix it -"

The old man's lips were moving, but he was not talking now. He laid the small slip of paper upon the dictionary and fumbled along the seat of the chair until he found a lead pencil.

Taking the large sheet of paper, he began to check off words which appeared upon it, in scrawly writing:

I, Ulysses Grant Chadwick, considering the uncertainty of this
mortal life and being of sound mind and memory, do make and publish
this my last will and testament, in manner and form following, that
is to say -

There the old man stopped. He leaned back against the propped pillow, holding the paper in his scrawny hands.

"What will Cromwell say when he reads this!" he laughed. "What will he say! He used to tell me that I was the wisest man who ever came into his law office. Wise, because I have had the same will laying there for these twenty years. Now, what will he say!"

The old man looked at the paper. He could not read the written lines that he had inscribed beneath the opening paragraph, for his hands were in darkness.

Grant Chadwick's penchant for economy had restrained him from the extravagance of a reading table beside his bed. The lamp on the antiquated dictionary served the purpose of a reading light, but it stood too low for convenience. The ring of illumination about the chair was scarcely on a level with the bed.

The old man began to stoop forward to hold the paper in the light; then he leaned back on the pillow and chuckled once more. Evidently, he knew the contents of the document. An actual perusal was unnecessary.

"It's his own doing," he said, aloud. "He's to blame. He's waiting, and he can continue to wait - after this. I, Ulysses Grant Chadwick" - he was repeating the opening paragraph of the will - "I, Ulysses Grant Chadwick, considering the uncertainty of this mortal life -"

He paused and leered vacantly. He seemed to enjoy those words, for after a moment, the old man repeated them as though reciting to an imaginary audience.

"Considering the uncertainty of this mortal life. Ha - ha - ha - ha" - the laugh was convulsive - "the uncertainty of this mortal life! He'll consider it! More than I. Yes, more than -"

The old man stopped, a guttural sound emerging from his lips. Something had attracted his attention. He turned suddenly toward the lamp on the chair beside him. His gaze was turned downward.

There, in the brightness, was a hand, its outstretched fingers reaching for the old revolver!

WITH a snarl, Grant Chadwick clutched for the weapon. His clawing action was too late. The hand was ahead of him. The revolver was drawn in the other direction. The old man was weaponless.

Fuming, he raised himself in the bed and stared into the gloom beyond the light. His shrewd eyes flashed with recognition of the pallid face he saw there.

A scream of rage came from the parched lips of Grant Chadwick. He leaned forward in a frenzy, babbling incoherently. He did not glance toward the metallic flash of the revolver as it gleamed in the light.

His eyes were staring at the face that had aroused his fury. His voice was rising to a cracked scream.

“You - you -” His exclamation was broken and incoherent. “You dare to come here! You’ll pay for this - you’ll -“

A flash shot from the revolver. The old man, poised forward, toppled headlong. His head struck the edge of the chair. His body seemed drawn after it.

The long, skinny arms were spread, one along the floor, the other reaching up to the chair. The tassel of the nightcap lay in a straight line, away from the bed. A pool of blood was forming on the floor.

Silence dominated as a man stooped over the inert form of Grant Chadwick. Satisfied that the old man was dead, the murderer laid the revolver on the floor beside the outstretched hand. The motionless fingers seemed clutching for the weapon - just as they had done in life.

Soft footsteps shuffled toward the door. The murderer left as silently as he had come.

Once more, Grant Chadwick was alone in his solitary room. But the two papers were gone. One had disappeared from the chair; the other from the bed.

The hand that had slain Grant Chadwick had plucked away the old man’s documents!

CHAPTER VIII

THE DEATH UNSOLVED

"THANK you, Mr. Chadwick. We appreciate the cooperation that you have given us."

The speaker was a tall, gaunt man, whose face showed marks of weariness. He formed the central figure of a group assembled in the office of a county courthouse. The corner of a silver badge peered from beneath his coat, proclaiming him a detective.

"I'm glad to help you in any way, Mr. Davidson," replied the young man who had been addressed as Chadwick. "It - it was rather a surprise to have you quiz me the way you did - so soon after the shock of my uncle's death. It was -"

"It was necessary," interrupted Davidson. "It should at least assure you that we intend to use every effort in solving this murder case. I am sorry to have inconvenienced you and these other persons, but it was my duty."

"There's some reporters outside, chief," said a man from the door. "Shall I tell them you'll see them later on?"

"Perhaps you would like to hear me talk to them now," suggested Davidson, turning to Chadwick.

"Well" - the young man spoke uncertainly, then began to nod - "I guess it would be best. Yes, it would be best." The reporters tramped into the room and looked at the group of men and women assembled there. They turned to Davidson for an explanation.

It was forthcoming. The detective spoke in a methodical tone, indicating individuals as he discussed them.

"This is Denby Chadwick," he explained, pointing out the young man. Chadwick, solemn-faced, nodded in corroboration. The reporters noted his neat attire and his weary look. "Chadwick," said Davidson, "is the only relative of the murdered man. Grant Chadwick was his uncle. Denby Chadwick is the branch manager of the Mayo Safe & Lock Co. He has charge of the Philadelphia office.

"After Mrs. Martha Birch discovered the body of Grant Chadwick, at eight o'clock this morning, we questioned her and learned that she was presumably the last person who had seen Grant Chadwick alive.

"The old man was murdered sometime between five-thirty Saturday night and eight o'clock this morning - Monday morning. The physician's report states that Grant Chadwick was probably dead for twenty-four hours before his body was found.

"Mrs. Birch reports latching the door on her departure Saturday, and unlocking it upon her arrival this morning. We have found no traces of forcible entry.

"Eliminating the slim possibility of suicide, we quizzed Mrs. Birch, and found her to be a most useful informant. The only person who ever visited Grant Chadwick was his nephew - this gentleman here.

"A month ago, Denby Chadwick was living with his uncle. According to Mrs. Birch, a disagreement ended that arrangement. Denby Chadwick has been back only occasionally since then. He has a pass key to the house. Here it is."

Davidson displayed the key, which had evidently been given to him by Denby Chadwick.

"I LOCATED Denby Chadwick in his Philadelphia office," continued Davidson, in his methodical manner. "That was at half past ten. He came here with me.

"Due to the fact that he had access to the house; that he had quarreled with his uncle; that he admitted ownership to a pair of gloves which were found on a downstairs table, I was naturally anxious to learn of all his activities between Saturday afternoon and this morning.

"That fact seems to have made an impression upon you newspapermen. While Denby Chadwick and I have been conferring here, you have been busy."

Davidson picked up a newspaper from the desk. It was an edition of a Philadelphia journal which bore the screaming headline:

DENBY CHADWICK GRILLED IN UNCLE'S MURDER

"This has just arrived here," declared the detective. "In the meantime, Denby Chadwick has been phoning many sources. Half an hour ago, the last of his witnesses arrived. These people have testified in his behalf.

"I can now state, positively, that Denby Chadwick knew nothing of his uncle's death. I have the sworn affidavits of the testifiers. You may interview these people in turn; afterward, you may read their statements.

"Now that we have learned the facts, I feel that everything possible should be done to clear young Chadwick of any implied suspicion that may rest upon him."

The detective pointed to a middle-aged man who stood at the side of the room. The individual cleared his throat and spoke to the reporters.

"My name is Charles Washburn," he said. "Office in the Elite Building, Philadelphia. Washburn Finance Co. Denby Chadwick was in my office until

five o'clock Saturday afternoon. My stenographer, Miss Daisy Whitman, was present."

"That is correct," acknowledged a young woman who was seated in a chair by the desk.

"We left the office," resumed Washburn, "and were joined by James Newmann, whose office is also in the Elite Building. We rode in my car and took Denby Chadwick to the station.

"We were both with him while he purchased a ticket for Havre de Grace, Maryland. We were with him when he boarded the five-thirty local."

"That is correct," came another statement. This speaker was a man who stood beside Washburn - evidently James Newmann.

"Next," declared Davidson.

A stoop-shouldered, gray-haired man followed.

"Harold Clinch," he said. "Conductor on Train 37 - local leaving Philadelphia at five-thirty p.m. for Havre de Grace. Denby Chadwick rides my train every Saturday afternoon.

"I collected his ticket last Saturday, going out of Philadelphia station. I saw him playing cards in the smoker, afterward. Helped him off with his bag, and said good night when we reached Havre de Grace at seven-fifty."

Davidson nodded to another man, a young fellow attired in a sheepskin coat.

"Stephen Biggs is my name," said the young man. "I'm a lineman with the telephone company. Got on the train at Wilmington, last Saturday. Was playing cards with a couple of fellows, and this man joined us."

"He was with us when we got to Havre de Grace. We were talking, you know, and I happened to mention where I lived. That's how they got me up here today -"

"All right," interrupted the detective briskly. "That's enough, Biggs. We also have a statement from Elbert Brown" - he indicated a bespectacled man - "who is a regular rider on that train. He knows Denby Chadwick by sight, and got off the train with him, Saturday evening. Now, Mr. Turner."

THE final testifier was a lanky man, who spoke with a slight Southern drawl. He was standing with hat in one hand as he addressed the reporters.

"All I've had to say," he stated, "is that Denby Chadwick is a fine young fellow, and that I'm glad I've been able to settle this matter.

"Ezra Turner is my name - I run a farm down near Havre de Grace, over across the Susquehanna, and Denby here has been coming down to my place regular every week-end. I come over to the station in my car to meet him. That's what I did last Saturday night.

"We was sitting up all night playing poker - him and me and these two fellows here, Jim Blotz and Greg Stephens, who comes down from Carlisle. The whole lot of us was sleeping most of Sunday, except at dinner time, when the women folks woke us up.

"We had another poker session last night - we take the game kind of serious down Maryland way. We didn't quit until five o'clock this morning, and I had to rouse Denby up at eight, so as to drive up to Philadelphia. All of us were coming up this way - except the women folks.

"When Denby got a hold of me, I called them by long-distance and told them to jump up here in a hurry. They've all vouched for it that Denby Chadwick didn't step out of that old farmhouse of mine between the time he got there and eight o'clock this morning.

"He was sitting up most of the time - that's why he looks tired out, with all this grief about his poor uncle coming on top of it -"

Two women were nodding their agreement with the speaker. The reporters were looking at the affidavits. Davidson began to dismiss the gathering, hesitating just long enough to answer a reporter's query about young Chadwick.

"Yes, I suspected Denby Chadwick, until I got the facts," Davidson said. "I'm suspecting anybody that comes along in this case. But these testimonies give this young man a perfect alibi, and that's putting him with us in the work we're doing in this case.

"He's just as anxious as I am to find out who murdered his uncle. We are working on a process of elimination, and we aren't passing up a single clew!"

The visitors filed out of the detective's room, and the reporters made hurried notes in order to catch the late editions of the evening newspapers.

The statements of the persons who had testified were sent in full detail. The fact that Denby Chadwick was entirely cleared of all suspicion in his uncle's death was food for screaming headlines.

THE next morning, Harry Vincent opened a letter in his room at the Burnham House in Baltimore. He was seated at the writing table, where a copy of a Baltimore newspaper was lying.

Harry had been reading of the Chadwick murder. His eyes opened in surprise when he noted that the letter referred to the same matter.

The written letter was in code, inscribed in bright blue ink. The jumbled characters were no puzzle to Harry Vincent. He knew that code by heart. Translated, the letter read:

Go to Philadelphia. Take Bruyton with you. Have work for him.

Check all details in the murder of Grant Chadwick. Observe all

actions of his nephew, Denby Chadwick. Report regularly, in detail.

The written characters began to fade while Harry still held the letter in his hand. That was a peculiarity of all The Shadow's orders. They were written with a secret ink, which disappeared shortly after it had come in open contact with the air.

Harry tore the blank paper in half; then in quarters. He threw the pieces in the wastebasket. Taking the telephone, he called up another hotel. He was connected with Stuart Bruxton's room.

"We're taking a trip, today," said Harry. "Let's get started as soon as possible. It may mean some interesting business. Are you ready?" There was an affirmative answer.

One hour later, a coupe was speeding along the road from Baltimore to Philadelphia. Harry Vincent was the driver. Beside him, Stuart Bruxton was listening intently to what his companion had to say.

The murder of Grant Chadwick was the subject of discussion.

Did this crime have a bearing on the adventures which Stuart had encountered? Was it connected with the murder of Wallace Powell? Could the unsolved death of Grant Chadwick be solved?

Only The Shadow knew!

CHAPTER IX

THE SHADOW AT WORK

RUTLEDGE MANN was busy in his finely furnished investment office. His mind was not on stocks and bonds. Instead, he was studying a mass of newspaper clippings and typewritten reports.

It was after dusk, and the skyline of busy Manhattan formed a glowing spectacle from Mann's window. But the quiet, deliberate investment broker had no time for enjoying such a view. He was centered entirely upon the work before him.

His friends knew Rutledge Mann as a person whose business was securities. Actually, Mann was a most important and dependable agent of the mystery man called The Shadow.

Here, in this comfortable office, he assembled data and compiled reports in a methodical and efficient manner. The material upon which he was now engaged formed a most interesting problem. It had been gained from numerous sources, and important portions of it had been supplied by agents of The Shadow.

Upon one sheet, Mann had compiled notations in reference to Herbert Brockley.

To the police, the death of the wealthy American had become a closed issue. Three Apaches had been implicated in Brockley's murder. Two had been killed while resisting capture. They had died at the hands of Parisian gendarmes. The third was a fugitive in France. But to Rutledge Mann, the matter of Brockley's death was not ended.

The investment broker was marking down facts in reference to Herbert Brockley's history.

Briefly, Brockley had been successful in business in New York, and it had not been difficult to trace his contacts. A list of a dozen names comprised the persons with whom he had, at one time or another, had definite dealings.

Outstanding in that list was the name of Sherwood Mayo, the multimillionaire.

Brockley and Mayo had been associates in certain mining enterprises, some years before. Details were meager, but they showed a definite connection between the two men. Rutledge Mann drew a line under Mayo's name.

There was apparently no reason why he should choose that one particular name from the list, unless he might have been impressed by Mayo's wealth.

The reason became evident, however, when Mann picked up another sheet that was headed with the name of U. Grant Chadwick.

There were only a few names here; and one of them was that of Sherwood Mayo. Mann had made notations. These stated that Grant Chadwick and the multimillionaire had at one time been partners in the manufacture of safes; but that Mayo had branched out on his own.

The company which Mayo now controlled - the Mayo Safe & Lock Co. - was a dominating concern in the industry. The original company - the Holyoke Safe Manufactory - was still in business, and it was assumed that Grant Chadwick had retained a large share of the original stock.

Mann took pains to mention that shares of Holyoke stock were not available, although they had been sought by purchasers. The concern, although small, held rights to important patents, some of recent issue, and did a profitable business on that account.

THE coincidence of Sherwood Mayo's name on both lists made that name conspicuous. The importance of the matter became still more noticeable when Rutledge Mann referred to the data that concerned Denby Chadwick.

Here, the investment broker had a mass of facts, for newspaper clippings were in abundance, and there were also records that had come in that day from Harry Vincent.

From these records, Mann wrote his report.

Denby Chadwick's position with the Mayo Safe & Lock Co. was gained through his connection with Sherwood Mayo. Denby Chadwick has had varied sales experience. He obtained the job as manager of the Philadelphia office of Mayo's company less than a year ago.

He probably used his uncle's name to secure the position.

The fact that Grant Chadwick and Sherwood Mayo were once associated in business is significant. Inquiry has shown that the Mayo Safe & Lock Co. pays large royalties annually to the Holyoke Safe Manufactory for use of patented appliances. This shows an

indirect business relationship still existing between Grant Chadwick and Sherwood Mayo.

Investigation by Harry Vincent (data inclosed) states that Denby Chadwick showed incompetence on previous jobs and that his present position was a great jump over anything he did before. It is assumed that influence had everything to do with his appointment in his present capacity.

As if in corroboration, Mann referred to a report marked by Harry Vincent. He nodded as he read a paragraph:

Denby Chadwick spends very little time in the office. Stuart Bruxton has been in three times, trying to make a business appointment with him. He has been unsuccessful. Charles Brady, the assistant manager, handles practically all of the business.

The excuse is given that Chadwick is busy settling the affairs of his uncle's estate, and that the old man's death has been so great a strain upon him that he has been unable to come to the office.

But this is only a pretext, as the stenographer stated twice that Chadwick never came into the office before noon, and that sometimes he did not come in at all.

The one point that filled Rutledge Mann with perplexity was the situation that existed between Denby Chadwick and his uncle at the time of the old man's death. It was obvious that the two had disagreed about something, although it could not have been extremely serious.

Denby Chadwick had lived at the old house for several years. Grant Chadwick was his only relation. The old man was eccentric, and his frugality must have been annoying to Denby.

The uncle, in turn, had evidently regarded Denby as a ne'er-do-well up until the time when the young man had obtained his position with the Mayo Safe & Lock Co.

It was after that time that Denby Chadwick had abandoned his uncle's home. Perhaps the young man had felt an independence in his new position, and had taken advantage of his new circumstances to depart from an environment that had always been distasteful to him.

Whatever the situation, it could not have been serious, for Denby Chadwick was sole legatee to his uncle's estate. This announcement had been made by Egbert Cromwell, the Philadelphia attorney who managed the affairs of Grant Chadwick.

The estate was now in the course of settlement, and Denby Chadwick had come into considerable wealth - the exact amount unknown.

RUTLEDGE MANN sat back in his swivel chair and smiled languidly as he looked toward the ceiling. It was not his business to deal in theory. His duty was to assemble facts.

At the same time, The Shadow placed no restrictions on his agent's reports. They were allowed to express themselves in any way they chose. Hence, Mann, as a matter of custom, was indulging in speculation on these strange connections.

He was convinced that blackmail was at the bottom of the whole matter. Herbert Brockley had gone abroad to escape some threat or menace.

In Paris, Brockley had been befriended by Wallace Powell. He had given some information - in the form of documents - to Powell. That information may have concerned himself; it probably concerned others also.

Powell had sought to sell the information. He had dealt with a blackmailer in New York, and had made the arrangements for a meeting near Baltimore. There, Powell had been killed - and the slayers had obtained the information without the necessity of paying him ten thousand dollars.

Harry Vincent's rescue of Stuart Bruxton had not only been an excellent deed; it had also gained a new secondary agent for The Shadow - a man who could identify Grady, the killer, and the old man whom Grady served. These persons were active workers for a mythical blackmail ring.

But who were they? Harry Vincent had visited the burned house the day after he had rescued Stuart Bruxton. On that visit, Harry had drawn a complete blank. The house was a stone-walled ruin; its cellar was a mass of debris. Harry presumed, in his report, that the body of Jefferson, the

nitchhiker, had been placed on the ground floor, to be destroyed amidst the flames; but there was no direct evidence of this.

Traces of the murderous pair - Grady and his chief - were totally lacking.

The finding of Stuart Bruxton's car had perplexed the local police. The automobile had been stripped of license plates and luggage; other identifying marks had been obliterated.

The theory was that the car had been stolen; that it had crashed through the bridge; and that the men in it had taken refuge in the old house. There, they had started a fire which had gotten beyond control; then they had fled from the flames.

The police were confident that they had solved the case in its entirety. They saw only accidental incendiarism - not murder - and Harry had made no effort to enlighten them.

The murder of Grant Chadwick, following so closely upon the killing of Wallace Powell, was highly significant to Rutledge Mann.

With Denby Chadwick completely cleared of suspicion, it seemed quite plausible that Grady was the man who had visited the old house near Chester, where Grant Chadwick lived alone. The connection between Herbert Brockley and Sherwood Mayo was similar to the one between Mayo and Grant Chadwick.

Had Grady come to threaten old Chadwick, putting forward a proposition of blackmail on the strength of what had been learned from Powell's documents?

That was Mann's theory, and he considered it a good one. But even more important was the possibility that the future might hold.

Two evil men, agents of some unknown leader, were embarked upon a career of crime. It was logical to suppose that other lives were threatened. Who would be next?

Mann's eyes rested upon the notes before him. One name, alone, seemed to stare at him. That was the name of Sherwood Mayo.

That was where the trail led - to Mayo! Four victims had already fallen prey to monsters of crime; Brockley, Jefferson, Powell, and Grant Chadwick. Rutledge Mann foresaw protective measures. Whatever scheme had caused the death of Grant Chadwick, it was reasonable to suppose that the killers had not obtained full measure.

If the old man had refused to meet their demands, it might be that he had passed on a heritage of danger to his nephew. Denby Chadwick had already been suspected of murdering his uncle. Would his life be safe now?

THE SHADOW'S purpose was clear to Rutledge Mann. With Harry Vincent and Stuart Bruxton on the watch, Denby Chadwick would be assured of some security. But there was another man who must be protected - Sherwood Mayo, the multimillionaire.

Foreseeing this, Mann turned to another report. He referred to a list which he had prepared beneath the name of Sherwood Mayo. This list was entirely of Mann's compilation. It had not been difficult for him, with many influential friends, to obtain reliable data concerning such an important person as Sherwood Mayo.

The investment broker realized that this list might prove entirely useless; but he had prepared it with the view of picking out certain individuals who were inimical to Sherwood Mayo. Somewhere in this list, Mann felt sure, would be found the name of a man who might seek to injure Sherwood Mayo.

Such a man might bear watching - as one who might possess information which could be used by blackmailers.

Finishing this last list, Mann gathered up all the material intended for The Shadow and folded the papers into a long, official-looking envelope. He tucked the envelope in his pocket and left the office, carefully locking the door behind him.

Broadway was aglow as Rutledge Mann rode down the busy thoroughfare. He discharged the cab at Twenty-third Street, and sauntered along until he came to a dilapidated building.

Even at night, this time-worn structure looked miserable and untidy. The rattly door was unlocked. Mann entered and ascended a rickety stairs. He was in one of New York's most antiquated office buildings.

In a gloomy, ill-lighted hallway, Rutledge Mann stopped before a door. The name on the glass pane was barely distinguishable. It simply read:

B. JONAS

Mann's envelope went through a slit in the door. The investment broker shrugged his shoulders and hurried from the gloomy building.

These visits were distasteful to the fastidious businessman, even in the daytime. At night, they were even more repugnant. The dreary atmosphere of the place was miserable.

Yet the visits were necessary, for that mysterious door with the cobwebbed window was a barrier chosen by The Shadow. Letters thrust into its mail chute invariably reached the mysterious man of the dark.

RUTLEDGE MANN was thinking of The Shadow as he rode in a cab along Twenty-third Street. But now, with his work done, and his mind relieved from perplexing matters, the investment broker noticed the things about him.

He heard the deep-throated whistle of an ocean liner as his cab sped westward. Some ship was coming into dock.

Then, the taxi turned up an avenue, and Mann, slightly weary, leaned back to rest during the remainder of his ride to the Cobalt Club, his favorite spot during leisure evening hours.

The whistle which Rutledge Mann had heard carried a significance which the investment broker did not appreciate. It was like a heralding note, announcing the arrival of someone of importance. Various celebrities were landing from the S. S. Gallitania. Reporters were busy seeking interviews. The newspapermen, however, paid no attention to a tall man who wore a dark coat and hat.

This individual strode solemnly down the gangplank, looking neither to right nor left. Small news, this, a silent, cold-faced man leaving an ocean liner without companions.

This arrival brushed against a reporter as he stepped from the gangplank. The news gatherer turned to see a hawk-like countenance and a pair of sharp, gleaming eyes.

He was startled for an instant; then turned back to await the arrival of an expected celebrity.

What a story that reporter missed! He had seen The Shadow, landing from the Gallitania!

A LIGHT clicked in a dark, silent room. Then two white hands appeared beneath it - long, slender hands that seemed like detached creatures of life. Upon the third finger of the left hand gleamed a fire opal, the symbolic jewel of The Shadow!

The hands produced an envelope. They tore open the end. From the packet came the papers which Rutledge Mann had placed in the mail chute of the office marked "B. Jonas."

In a twinkling, the papers were spread. Eyes from the dark were examining the data which The Shadow had received from his trusted agent.

Silence reigned while The Shadow, hidden in darkness, perused the compilations. At last, only two papers remained. One was Mann's own statement; the other was the list that accompanied it.

A long white forefinger rested upon a paragraph in Mann's statement. The words to which it pointed read as follows:

I feel that in all this accumulated data must be the key to the mysterious deaths which have occurred. More than that, I feel sure that other crimes are planned, and clews to them are here. Because of this, I have paid particular attention to the name of Sherwood Mayo, and have prepared a list of men who might be classed as his enemies. Two of Mayo's friends have been killed. Like Denby Chadwick, he, too, should be watched.

A pencil appeared, and across this single paragraph the white hand wrote the word "Correct."

Then the paper was laid aside. The moving finger considered each name in the list of Mayo's antagonists. Each name bore a brief account beneath it.

The pencil was busy. It crossed out name by name until only two remained. The finger checked the first:

Sidney Delmuth. Advertising man and promoter. Has been connected with various businesses competitive with enterprises backed by Sherwood Mayo. Once brought suit against Mayo, but matter was settled out of court. Mayo has threatened lawsuits against Delmuth on several occasions, but has never gone through with them. Delmuth has reputation for shrewd dealings.

The hand moved to the next name:

Paul Hawthorne. Real-estate man of doubtful wealth. Reputed to

be on the verge of bankruptcy; also to have a considerable amount of money. Most of his enterprises have failed. Rumor that he makes his money and lets others lose. Has been sued by many individuals. Only opposition to Mayo is matter of summer resort in Massachusetts, which Hawthorne promoted in opposition to Mayo. Hawthorne not only located resort near Mayo's Massachusetts estate, but managed to buy acres which Mayo had intended to purchase. Hawthorne managed this through Mayo's neglect to exercise option on ground.

In compiling his list, Mann had marked Delmuth as being one of the most likely persons to be opposed to Sherwood Mayo. He had mentioned Hawthorne as mere possibility.

The Shadow, in taking advantage of Mann's suggestion, had apparently agreed with the opinion on Delmuth, but not with the one given on Hawthorne. For these two names had been selected; all others ignored.

NOW, as though inspired by an afterthought of the master brain, the hands drew forth another paper. This was a report sent by Harry Vincent, which Rutledge Mann had seen fit to forward.

The report was detailed to the extreme. It described the house in which Grant Chadwick had been murdered. It gave the exact location of the building, and a diagram marked the position of the deserted shacks near the railroad. These old houses were only a few hundred yards from Grant Chadwick's home.

It also told of Harry's visit to Havre de Grace, Maryland. He had gone there on the train that Denby Chadwick had taken a few nights before. He had visited the farmhouse where Chadwick had stayed. Attached to the report was a copy of the railway timetable.

The Shadow's hands held these two papers momentarily; then laid them aside, beyond the range of the luminous circle that was cast by the shaded lamp. The hands busied themselves with a sheet of paper and a fountain pen.

In neatly formed letters, a code message was inscribed. It was folded and tucked in an envelope. Using another pen, the hand wrote:

Instructions to be given Stuart Bruxton.

This was inclosed in a larger envelope, that already bore the typewritten name and address of Harry Vincent.

A click sounded. The room was plunged in darkness.

The Shadow's work was ended. In a short time, this mysterious man had gone over all of his agent's material. Nothing he had done indicated either a definite solution or an involved campaign. The notation of certain facts - an order concerning Stuart Bruxton - that was all.

But from the midst of the darkness of that little room came a soft, creepy laugh. It was mirthless and foreboding. Echoing weirdly from the walls, the laugh was more expressive than words.

The sinister understanding of that echoed sound indicated a knowledge of unknown matters. It presaged defeat and destruction for those who thrived in crime. Had The Shadow, from his brief perusal of his agent's statements, gained the key to mysterious deaths and looming dangers?

Only The Shadow knew!

CHAPTER X

STUART GOES ON DUTY

STUART BRUXTON was seated in the smoking car of a two-coach train that was wending its curving way through the hills of northern Massachusetts. He was traveling on a branch line, and was alone in the car.

To Stuart, the purpose of this quiet journey was puzzling. He was acting upon instructions given him by Harry Vincent. He was going to a place called Greenhurst.

This hamlet, Stuart had learned, was a budding summer resort that had failed to bloom. In Greenhurst, he was to keep a watchful eye on the affairs of two men; Paul Hawthorne, a real-estate promoter who had not yet managed to put Greenhurst on the map of Massachusetts; and Sherwood Mayo, a multimillionaire of many enterprises.

What had these two to do with strange events that had occurred in Maryland? Could there be any connection between them and the sinister old man who had sought Stuart's life?

Hawthorne was managing the affairs of a summer colony. Mayo dwelt on an estate, resisting the invasion of what he considered to be feudal rights.

From Harry, Stuart had learned that some hostility was supposed to exist between the two men. For some reason, both should be observed, although Harry had been very meager in his information.

Ever since Stuart, anxious to aid in the cause of justice, had agreed to work with Harry, he had felt a positive conviction that some directing hand was in back of his rescuer's activities.

Harry had told Stuart that further instructions would reach him at Greenhurst. He had also indicated the manner in which those instructions would be received. It had made Stuart wonder.

As the train pulled into the little station of Greenhurst, Stuart felt a sudden interest. This was a campaign that called for diplomacy. He must meet two men and win their confidence.

That would be easy with Hawthorne. Mayo might be a different matter. Stuart decided that Paul Hawthorne would be his best approach.

There were no houses near the station. The summer colony was a mile away. Stuart entered a touring car that bore a sign "Taxi." He started for the village. On the way he questioned the driver about Paul Hawthorne.

"You're going to the Inn?" queried the driver. "Well, it's only a little spell up the road to Mr. Hawthorne's. 'Bout a fifteen-minute walk, I should say. The house sets back from the road apiece.

"I reckon he's out running round the township, marking out places for new cottages. There ain't many folks buying them, though. He's always home in the evenings. You can telephone him from the hotel."

STUART registered at the Inn. It was a building left over from a previous attempt to colonize Greenhurst. Stuart was given a room at the end of a wing, on the third floor. The hotel was somewhat modernized, so Stuart was not dissatisfied with the surroundings.

The other guests were typical residents of an obscure resort. Stuart went in the dining room when the bell rang for dinner. After that, he lounged a while in the lobby. Finally, he called Paul Hawthorne's cottage.

A brisk voice answered him. Stuart gave his name and explained that he had come to Greenhurst from New York. He mentioned that he would like to know about real-estate opportunities.

Hawthorne eagerly agreed to meet him. He said he would come to the Inn in his car.

In ten minutes, Hawthorne arrived. He proved to be a pleasant-faced man, some forty-odd years of age. He shook hands warmly and invited Stuart to come up to the cottage.

They left the hotel, and were soon in the living room of Hawthorne's home, chatting as though they were old friends. Hawthorne was interesting to Stuart. The man possessed a lulling glibness; but Stuart felt that his cordiality was something that he adopted with all prospects.

"By the way," said Hawthorne, "you don't happen to know Sherwood Mayo, who lives near here?"

"Mayo, the millionaire?"

"Yes," Hawthorne assented.

"I've heard of him," declared Stuart. "I'd like to meet him sometime."

"I can arrange that," said Hawthorne promptly. "Tonight, if you wish."

The statement surprised Stuart. He had not expected to find Hawthorne and Mayo on good terms. This was a good hit, already, Stuart thought.

"Mayo is a friend of mine," explained Hawthorne. "We had a little unpleasantness, when I first came here. Mayo has a hunting lodge, and he thought that he was lord of all lands that he could view from his watch tower. Since he found he wasn't, he's been more pleasant.

"He's begun to find out that the people who are buying here in Greenhurst are of a selective class. Wait, I'll phone him and see if we can run up there."

Stuart smiled when Hawthorne had gone from the room. He saw the promoter's game. Currying favor with Mayo, Hawthorne probably made it a point to introduce all desirable persons to the millionaire.

It was a system that worked both ways. It enabled Hawthorne to impress his prospects, and also to better his position with Mayo. Stuart wondered if the millionaire was wise to the game.

Hawthorne was smiling when he returned.

"Let's go," he said. "Mayo says he will be glad to see us."

They left the cottage and stepped out into blackness. The night was cloudy, and it was impossible to see a step ahead. As they were feeling their way toward the car, Hawthorne suddenly pressed Stuart's arm.

They stood silent for a moment; then continued their way. When they reached the car, and Hawthorne had turned the lights on, the promoter explained his action.

"It's rather lonely out here," he said. "All right when the family is here, and friends are around. But it's early in the season, and I'm up here alone.

"I've got a man here on the place - a young fellow who helps me in the real-estate business; but he goes home on certain nights, once or twice a week. It gives me the creeps once in a while; just then I thought I heard someone prowling around."

STUART felt no qualms as they were driving through the woods; but Hawthorne's remarks interested him. Stuart decided to take advantage of the turn in conversation.

"I shouldn't think you'd be worried up here," he said. "I guess most of the people are honest farmers -"

"It's not the people up here," interrupted Hawthorne quickly. "They're the best in the world. It's strangers - outsiders, you know.

"Well" - he laughed, a trifle nervously - "I've been around - so much in this promotion work, I guess I'm apt to worry foolishly. But you bump into so many cranks. People who have imaginary grievances -"

He went no further, but Stuart began to understand. He recalled that Harry had said Hawthorne had been engaged in various enterprises which had ended unfortunately. Perhaps the man had reason to fear some menace.

Stuart looked toward his companion and saw the outline of Hawthorne's pale face. He realized that the man had been actually frightened.

They swung up a road and passed between two stone pillars, upon which were mounted electric lights. These were brightly illuminated, and they showed walls running in both directions. The pillars constituted a gateway. The gates were open.

"Mayo is expecting us," declared Hawthorne. "That's why the lights are on. There's the lodge, straight ahead."

The house was set in a level clearing. It was of old English style, and very elaborate for a hunting lodge. They pulled up in front. The door opened, and a tall, genial baldheaded man stood awaiting them. They went in the house, Hawthorne introducing Stuart to Mayo as they entered.

Stuart looked around the living room in admiration. It was sumptuously furnished for a hunting lodge.

An excellent rug lay on the floor. A bright fire crackled in the fireplace. A glass-eyed deer head looked down from above the mantelpiece.

Stuart noted the bookcase, with its array of neatly placed volumes. Each article of furniture was distinctive. All of the chairs were elaborate, and no two were exactly alike.

While Stuart was wondering who kept the place so tidy, the explanation came in the form of a Filipino valet, who entered with a tray of glasses.

The servant was neatly attired in a white coat, and he moved with catlike stealth. Stuart took a sudden dislike to the man. Why, he did not know.

CONVERSATION began. Mayo and Hawthorne became involved in a friendly discussion of affairs at Greenhurst. Stuart was an interested listener. He noted that Mayo was rather indulgent.

"So you're going on with the developing, eh?" asked Mayo. "What if it goes flat?"

Hawthorne shrugged his shoulders.

"Remember the price I offered you?" quizzed Mayo. "It's a lot more than you paid for that acreage!"

"It's not enough," responded Hawthorne.

"Suppose I raised the bid?" Mayo suggested.

"Not for sale. I'm going to make millions out of this deal."

"Maybe you're fooling yourself, Hawthorne."

"Not a bit of it, Mayo!" was Hawthorne's definite answer.

The millionaire laughed.

"Say, Hawthorne," he said, "I'll bet you've cleaned up on some of these propositions of yours."

"I have," returned Hawthorne quietly; "Why shouldn't I?"

"No reason why you shouldn't. More power to you. Of course, clean-ups sometimes bring comebacks - unpleasant ones, from disappointed customers."

Hawthorne shifted the subject immediately.

Stuart made a mental note of the conversation. He sized the men as opposites. Hawthorne, a speculator who was afraid to declare the wealth that he had made through doubtful dealings; Mayo, a magnate who was proud of his possessions.

"Swell," said Mayo pleasantly. "You're a cagey chap, Hawthorne, and I like you in spite of it. Maybe it pays you to be mysterious. Say - by the way - you might like to see this. It ought to fit in your line. A packet of letters that I've been receiving. They're rather mysterious, too."

He went across the room and fished in a pigeonhole of a writing desk. He brought out a key and unlocked a drawer. He started to lift a small white parcel that was girded with a rubber band.

Stuart saw him hesitate; then make a hasty examination of the package.

"This isn't it," declared Mayo. "I guess I left the letters back in New York."

MAYO replaced the packet and put the key in the pigeonhole. Stuart threw a sidelong glance toward Hawthorne. He saw a keen look upon the man's face.

Stuart knew what the promoter was thinking. For some reason, Mayo had decided not to show the letters of which he had spoken. His excuse that he had picked the wrong package was a lame one.

"I'll bring them up when I come from New York," declared Mayo pleasantly. "I'm going down to town tomorrow afternoon. Then back the next day."

"Quick work," observed Stuart. "I thought it was a sleeper jump from here to New York."

"No, just a plane hop for Mayo," laughed Hawthorne.

"Yes," said Mayo, "I use my private plane. Landing field right out in back of the house. The pilot's on my pay roll. He drives my car while I'm here.

"Louie looks after the place when I'm gone. I go back and forth a lot, Bruxton. Anytime you want to travel that way, say the word."

"Thanks," said Stuart. "I'll be here for a while, but I might want to run down to New York, since it's so simple a matter."

"Why don't you come up here to the lodge?" asked Mayo. "After I get back, you know. It's better than that terrible Inn."

Stuart again expressed thanks for the invitation. This was excellent. It would be easy to watch Mayo here, and Hawthorne's cottage was nearer to Mayo's lodge than to the Inn.

The clock on the mantel struck twelve with an odd, chiming note. Hawthorne suggested a departure. Louie, the Filipino, arrived with hats and coats. The guests said good night to Sherwood Mayo.

As they drove slowly between the stone gates, Stuart glanced through the rear window, wondering if the lights of the house would be visible. He noted that they were hidden over a slight rise of ground.

Stuart's interest in that fact quickly faded. For he saw something else that impressed him as much more important.

Beside the wall, a few feet from one post, stood a tall, silent figure. It looked like the form of a man; but Stuart could not be sure that it was other than a creation of his imagination. It was a mammoth shadow, that bore the semblance of a human being.

Before Stuart could speak to Hawthorne, the car had reached a bend in the road. In his last glimpse, Stuart could scarcely see the fantastic form that he had noticed. It had blended with the darkness of the wall. It had vanished, like a specter of the night!

CHAPTER XI

DELMUTH PAYS A VISIT

AT eight o'clock the next evening, a man entered the lobby of the Dradno Building, one of Manhattan's newest skyscrapers. This individual was perfectly attired in a tuxedo, and over his arm he carried a dark-gray coat. He stepped into the waiting elevator.

"Good evening, Mr. Delmuth," said the operator.

The man uttered a slight response. He was not the type of person one would find talking with elevator operators. He possessed a blunt manner and carried himself in military fashion.

Sidney Delmuth impressed all observers as an egotist, not only in attire, but in expression. His face was round and challenging. His eyes were shrewd and cunning. His pointed black mustache bristled above thin, straight-set lips.

The elevator stopped at the thirtieth floor. The man in the tuxedo walked directly to a lighted door which bore the ornate sign:

DELMUTH ADVERTISING AGENCY

A man was sitting at a desk when Delmuth entered. He arose as his employer arrived.

"Waiting for you, Mr. Delmuth," he said.

"All right, Matthews," was the reply.

"Thought you came in a while ago," said Matthews. "I was sitting here, half-asleep, and I could have sworn I heard the door open. Guess I was dreaming."

Delmuth looked up sharply. He looked around the office as though expecting to see someone there. He walked into a small private office, and turned on the light.

After a brief inspection he visited a similar room. Then he came back into the outer office and went to a large safe in the corner.

He appeared satisfied that no one was in the place besides himself and his employee.

Delmuth indulged in a harsh laugh as he opened the safe. He was still laughing as he brought out a heavy manila envelope and thrust it in his inside pocket.

"I have to laugh when I look at this safe," he declared.

"Why?" questioned Matthews.

Delmuth shut the safe and turned the knob. Then he pointed to the name on the safe.

"One of old Mayo's safes," he said, "To think that we've got one of them in here! He'd give plenty to have that safe - with its contents.

"Every time we put one over on him, we keep all the data in a Mayo safe. Funny, isn't it?"

Matthews grinned. "Well," he said, "we've never done any work for his competitors in the safe line."

"Not in that, no," agreed Delmuth. "But that's only one iron in his smoldering fires. What about Sokleene Soap? He had a half a million tied up in that. It's making out all right - just about. But that advertising campaign we put out on Washine just about wiped Sokleene off the map.

"Remember when he was promoting the Princess Products, and we pushed Duchess Beauty Sets? The same thing happened again.

"It's getting so every time the old boy starts something, it comes right down our alley, and we beat him with a competitive idea."

"No question about that," Matthews concurred.

"Well," declared Delmuth, "this time he's wise enough to come to terms before he begins! He has a big interest in Purple Blossom Lotions, and he figures that we are planning something to meet it. He knows we have contacts with other concerns in that line."

"What's he going to do about it?" asked Matthews.

"I'm finding out tonight," Delmuth went on. "He's invited me up to a conference he's having at his apartment. Some of the Purple Blossom men are there.

"They won't offer me the account, I'm sure. Maybe they want to threaten me. Lawyers there, perhaps. Well, I'll soon find out!"

DELMUTH had his hand on the doorknob. While he was talking, he was looking toward Matthews. With his last words, the advertising manager walked out into the hall.

There he stopped, and his lips tightened. He frowned as he glanced back toward the office. For Sidney Delmuth had a sudden recollection of something he had noticed just as he stepped through the door.

Acting impulsively, Delmuth went back into the office. Matthews looked up in surprise at his return. He could not understand the puzzled look on Delmuth's face. The advertising man was looking straight toward the far wall.

"What's the matter, sir?" asked Matthews.

"I've forgotten something," replied Delmuth. "I can't remember what it is."

Actually, Sidney Delmuth was looking for a shadow. He was astonished because he did not see it.

While he had been talking to Matthews, he had observed, in an offhand manner, a tall patch of darkness in the dim far corner. He had come back to look at it again. It was no longer there.

"The Shadow," murmured Delmuth. "The Shadow. I wonder if -"

He strode across the room to that corner. There was nothing there. Unconscious of Matthews' surprised gaze, Delmuth walked about the room; then made an inspection of both inner offices.

He finally stopped at a door that led into a side corridor. He tried the door; it was locked.

"That door is always locked, sir," said Matthews.

"I know it," answered Delmuth. "But where is the key? It's usually in the lock."

"That's so," said Matthews, in surprise. "I guess someone must have taken it out."

"See about it tomorrow," said Delmuth brusquely. "I'm a trifle nervous, Matthews. This unusual appointment is annoying me. Ah! Now I remember what I have forgotten."

With no further words, Delmuth went into the inner office that bore his name on the door.

There, he quietly unlocked a desk drawer and brought out a revolver. He examined the weapon to see that it was fully loaded. He placed it in his pocket and went out through the main office.

Riding uptown in a cab, Sidney Delmuth was restless. He kept feeling for the envelope in his pocket. He was wearing his overcoat now, and he transferred the envelope to it. He looked out of the windows of the cab, and occasionally glanced through the rear window in a suspicious manner.

He was still anxious when he left the cab in front of Mayo's apartment house. There, he rested his hand against the inside pocket of his overcoat as he walked into the building.

Sidney Delmuth was still looking for shadows. There were many of them here, and the fact annoyed him.

In Mayo's apartment, an attendant took the visitor's overcoat. Delmuth saw the garment go into a closet; then he stepped there as soon as the servant had gone down the hall to announce his presence.

For a moment, Delmuth fingered the envelope. Then he left it where it was. He also put his revolver in the pocket of the coat.

SHERWOOD MAYO was not present in the room which Sidney Delmuth entered. The advertising man saw two persons whom he knew, and was introduced all around.

He observed the coldness in the attitude of those who were meeting him, even though they pretended cordiality. This was even more evident when Sherwood Mayo entered.

The millionaire, usually genial, had a frown upon his face. He nodded curtly to Delmuth, who returned the greeting with a slight smile. The men sat down, and Mayo came quickly to the point.

"You know why we've asked you here tonight, Delmuth," he said. "We're starting a big campaign with Purple Blossom Lotions, and we don't want it copied by a competitor. Do you understand?"

"What have I to do with that?" asked Delmuth.

"You know well enough!" retorted Mayo. "You've spoiled business for me in other ways. There's been too much of it!"

"I don't understand you," said Delmuth coldly.

Sherwood Mayo sat back and folded his arms. He looked about the group, as though expecting some other person to take up the cudgels. One of the other men spoke.

"We can't give you this account, Delmuth," said a sharp-faced individual. "There's two reasons why. One is, Mayo won't let us. The other is, the account's already placed.

"But I have a proposition to make. I have interests in the Grandoso Cigar Co. I'll swing you that account if you will keep away from concerns who are in the lotion business."

"When do I get the Grandoso account?" asked Delmuth.

"This week," was the reply.

"Fair enough," said Delmuth, rising and staring from one person to another. "I'll wait to the end of the week!"

"All right," said the man who had spoken before. "That settles it. You get the Grandoso account. I'll see you in your office, and we can go over the details. We'll line it up so that if you sign with any lotion concern, that will be the end of the Grandoso job."

Delmuth bowed and left the room.

"Now," said Mayo ironically, "we have finished with bribery. We can attend to business."

"I think he'll play fair on that basis," said the sharp-faced man.

"Delmuth is not likely to play fair on any basis," declared Mayo quietly. "You don't know him, Rawlings. If you did, you would not negotiate with him. However, I warned you.

"We can do with this makeshift arrangement. He will want to hold the Grandoso account, and that will give us a head start. But if he gets a good offer from a rival lotion concern, I warn you, he will drop the cigar advertising in a moment!"

THE door was closed during this discussion. Delmuth, in the hallway, was putting on his overcoat while the servant held it.

Going down in the elevator, the advertising man felt in both inside and outside pockets. He smiled as he felt the envelope and the revolver.

In the taxicab, Delmuth drew the envelope from his pocket. He held it between his hands as he smiled, and speculated on what had transpired.

"The fools!" he exclaimed in a low voice. "Handing me that soft proposition. They're stalling for time, and they don't think I know it - none except Mayo.

"They can have six months start for all I care - the way Mayo keeps bidding back on all his propositions. Then I can break out with another lotion, and it will be the same story over again.

"As for that Grandoso account, they'll find out that their contract will be a hard one to break, without paying plenty. Fools!" He laughed softly. "If they only knew what was in this envelope!

"Well, that's over, and I didn't have to say more than a few words. Easy money and no work!"

Delmuth opened the envelope as he spoke. He removed a paper which it contained, and unfolded the document.

The cab was stopped near a traffic light. Leaning forward. Sidney Delmuth quickly scanned the written lines that appeared on the paper, checking all with care. Looking from the windows, he made sure that no one was observing him from a near-by vehicle.

Then, leaning back in his seat, Delmuth tore the paper to pieces. The tiny fragments fluttered from the window as the cab rolled along.

Sidney Delmuth was bound for the Cobalt Club. He had given that address to the driver when he had entered the cab. The vehicle stopped at its destination and Delmuth alighted. He entered the club and gave his hat and overcoat to an attendant. In the smoking room, Sidney Delmuth sat in a corner chair and noted the various members who were there. Among them was Rutledge Mann.

Meanwhile, Delmuth's overcoat was hanging in the check room, near the counter. The attendant was reading a newspaper. Had he glanced up, he would have witnessed a startling sight.

A hand, apparently coming from nowhere, was approaching the pocket of a dark-gray overcoat. The hand paused and went away, carrying a manila envelope. Half a minute passed. The hand returned and replaced the envelope as it had found it.

The attendant, had he witnessed the event, would have been astonished. Sidney Delmuth, had he been present to see, would have been pleased. For he had anticipated the occurrence, and had prepared for it.

The hand of The Shadow had stretched forth to grasp a prize. It had gained only an empty envelope!

CHAPTER XII

STUART ENCOUNTERS TROUBLE

It was the second night of Stuart Bruxton's sojourn in Greenhurst. So far, nothing had occurred to disturb the tranquillity.

Of all places, this peaceful summer resort seemed a most unlikely one for strife. It was for that very reason that Stuart was now alone in his room at the hotel, making his plans for this night.

Stuart had been sent here to Massachusetts to conduct an investigation. He had been advised not to act decisively without first reporting to Harry Vincent.

His duty was one of observation. But Stuart felt that observation and action would go very well together; and on this occasion, he intended to try it out.

He had come here to watch two men, without interfering in their normal plans. Luck had broken his way. Paul Hawthorne and Sherwood Mayo had proved to be on friendly terms.

Sizing the two up, Stuart was well convinced that Hawthorne held a very minor position in the mind of Mayo. On the contrary, the multimillionaire loomed as a large factor in Hawthorne's limited world.

Sherwood Mayo was a man of large affairs. Paul Hawthorne was a speculator, and something of an adventurer. Mayo appeared care free. Hawthorne seemed to dread some danger.

These facts were significant. If a menace really existed for Hawthorne - outside of the man's own imagination - it must come from an outside source. The promoter gave indications of fearing secret enemies.

On the other hand, Mayo's position, which seemed so secure, might be threatened without the millionaire realizing it. Mayo did not impress Stuart as a type of man who would bother with trivialities. Some scheme might be on foot without the millionaire suspecting the existence of a plot.

Mayo was out of the picture tonight. That morning, his speedy monoplane had zoomed over the hotel, headed south for New York. That lightened Stuart's appointed task by half. He had only Hawthorne to consider at present.

But Stuart had a feeling that there might be a third man in this drama. He could not forget that tall, shadowy figure that he had seen outside the gate of Mayo's estate!

Tonight, Stuart intended to play the part of an active observer. From a package on his bed, he removed a suit of dark clothing - rough, ill-fitting garments that he had purchased in the village.

Attired in these, he would not be recognized. There was a side door to the hotel, and it was no task to slip in and out without being observed.

Dressed, Stuart grinned as he viewed himself in the mirror. He looked like a farmhand ready for a night out. The dark, long-visored cap came over his eyes. That would do for the present. He could hide his features more effectively, later on.

Stuart slipped a businesslike revolver into his coat pocket. It was a short, snub-nosed .32 that made no bulge. He stole downstairs and left by the side door.

ONCE again the night was pitch black. Hovering clouds obscured the starlight. It was an ideal time for a secret prowl.

Striding up the road to Hawthorne's, Stuart found his thoughts reverting to the mysterious person whom he had seen beside the pillar of Mayo's wall.

Was that being at large tonight? The thought caused Stuart's hand to creep to his coat pocket. Perhaps the man had some connection with those fiends in Maryland! If so, an encounter here would be enjoyable. Stuart felt that he would like to meet both the old man with the smiling face and the monster, Grady.

Cautiously nearing Hawthorne's, Stuart saw a light in the window. He made a sweeping circuit through the woods, and crawled toward the house.

Beneath the window, Stuart crouched as he looked about him. Positive that no one was near, Stuart rose and peered through the window.

Hawthorne, at his table, was going over accounts. In a corner was a dull-faced young man - probably the promoter's assistant. Hawthorne had mentioned that such a man lived here.

Stuart dropped away from the window and prowled about the house. Satisfied that there was no one in the vicinity, he turned toward Mayo's. Stuart knew that there was no one but the Filipino servant at the millionaire's lodge. With Mayo away, what were the chances of the strange, shadowy person being present? None, Stuart decided.

He felt sure that the man - if it were actually a living being and not an imaginary figure that Stuart had seen - would be more concerned with Mayo than with his home. With Mayo away, Stuart decided that the premises about the lodge would be deserted. It was an ideal time to investigate that neighborhood.

Stuart reached the approach to the house, and noted that the lamps on top of the pillars were not lighted. So he went directly through the gateway, and soon saw a light in the lowly second floor of Mayo's lodge. That, Stuart decided, must be Louie's room.

There was also a light downstairs - a single lamp in Mayo's living room. Stuart again adopted his circuitous tactics and peered into the downstairs room. No one there.

He went in back of the house, and reached a large level area - Mayo's landing field. From here he could see the Filipino's quarters.

Stuart watched the man's window a short while, and just about the time he had again decided to approach the house, he saw the light go out. Then came the noise of a window being raised. Evidently Louie had retired.

To make sure, Stuart moved silently back to the house, and again looked in the living-room window. The place was still deserted.

Stuart felt sure that the light had either been forgotten or that it was customary to leave it on all night. With that decision, Stuart Bruxton smiled quietly to himself.

Now, he could go back to Hawthorne's house, make another inspection, and return to his room at the Inn. But that was not Stuart's intention. He was going to introduce the element of action into this prowl.

In that room was a desk. In a pigeonhole of the desk was a key. The key unlocked a drawer. Within the drawer was a package of envelopes that Sherwood Mayo had started to unbind - and then had changed his mind.

It was Stuart's plan to take advantage of the millionaire's absence and inspect that package. He wanted to know whether or not Sherwood Mayo had been bluffing when he had said that he had forgotten to bring the proper package from New York.

SOFTLY, Stuart tried the living-room window, it was looser than he had anticipated. It had evidently been locked, but the fastening was not a firm one.

Stuart pushed the sash inward; then upward. It gave under pressure. With only a slight rattle, the window opened.

Stuart waited a full minute; then drew his body through the opening and into Mayo's living room.

He stole to the doorway, crouching low as he moved. He listened.

Satisfied that Louie could not have heard his entry, Stuart went back to the desk and fished in the pigeonhole. He found the key. Then, with a slight smile on his lips, Stuart bethought himself of two precautions.

He removed the revolver from his right coat pocket and set it softly on the table. From his left coat pocket, he produced a blue bandanna handkerchief, and tied it about his face. Two eyeholes which Stuart had cut that afternoon served to transform the bandanna into a perfect mask.

There was a remote chance that he might encounter someone here - either Louie or some unknown person. In either case, Stuart intended that his identity should remain wholly unknown.

With revolver close at hand, Stuart unlocked the desk drawer. He opened it and found a cardboard box. This, he believed, was the object that contained the package of envelopes.

Opening the box, Stuart discovered a packet that looked very much like the one which Mayo had exhibited. He raised the loose flap of the first envelope and drew out a sheet of paper. It was entirely blank.

Replacing the paper, Stuart tried the second envelope with the same result. Each succeeding envelope had similar contents. All blank!

Was this the packet that Sherwood Mayo had shown? If so, the millionaire's statement had been correct. It must be the wrong packet.

It was also possible that the original packet had been taken away, and this one left instead. Why?

The envelopes were in Stuart's left hand. His right hand, resting on the desk, touched the handle of the revolver. Stuart's eyes were staring at the green blotter on the desk, his mind completely centered on the puzzling problem that confronted him.

It was instinct that told Stuart someone was approaching. In a flash, his hand seized the gun, and he whirled to ward off approaching disaster.

Even before his masked eyes could observe the menace - before he could level his gun, Stuart received the full attack of an antagonist.

A white-clad form sprang from a few feet away. An arm twisted itself about Stuart's neck. A quick, sweeping hand clutched the revolver and flung it across the room.

GRIMLY, Stuart locked himself in the struggle. He knew almost immediately that he had to contend with Louie, the Filipino. The servant must have heard him downstairs, and made a stealthy approach.

This fight at close quarters was to Stuart's liking. He gripped the man's body with his strong hands, and sought to obtain a dominating hold.

But, to Stuart's astonishment, his foe was too formidable to conquer. Louie had gained the advantage by his surprise attack. Stuart, with his superior physique, should have offset that advantage. But he could not.

Stuart was a capable wrestler, but the Filipino was a master of jujutsu. They struggled back and forth, Stuart's teeth grating and his breath coming fiercely. Louie's wiry arms were controlling him, twisting him sidewise, despite Stuart's most strenuous efforts.

Stuart realized that he was being drawn into some hold that would give the Filipino the advantage. To prevent this, he wrestled one arm free, and tried to swing his opponent to the floor.

That proved to be the very thing that Louie had desired. Twisting suddenly, the Filipino raised Stuart's body upward, and flung him headlong.

Stuart lost his hold as he somersaulted through the air. He felt a terrific impact against the back of his neck. For a moment he lay prone, his arms

sprawled helplessly. Then he shot his hands upward and seized Louie's body.

The lithe Filipino countered the attack. He was twisting again, and under his expert efforts, Stuart's arms were pinioned beneath his own back. Staring straight upward through the eyeholes of his tight bandanna mask, Stuart saw the gleam of a knife blade in the Filipino's hand.

The blow which Stuart had received had weakened him for the instant; now, with death close at hand, he broke loose with his right hand, and clutched at the descending wrist. The action stopped the downward stroke.

Then Louie's left hand struck Stuart's arm, and the Filipino's left knee settled the defense. Stuart was pinioned again, helpless, despite his writhing.

The Filipino's left hand was planted firmly against Stuart's mask. The fingers dug through the eyeholes.

Stuart could see nothing now - but he knew that the murderous blade was aiming for his throat.

No action of his own could have saved Stuart at that instant. He was utterly at Louie's mercy. A second was all that the Filipino needed to drive the knife blade home and end the life of this intrepid man.

Stuart was closer to death than he had ever been - even when he had been trapped in the fiery house in Maryland!

It was the unexpected that brought the rescue. The knife stroke never fell. The brutal, boring fingers were suddenly withdrawn from Stuart's eyes.

Before the helpless man's blurred vision, the gleaming blade flashed sidewise and downward.

A BLACK-GLOVED fist had materialized from nowhere. It had landed against the face of the Filipino! As Louie toppled sidewise, Stuart was freed. He rolled over in an effort to regain his feet.

As he turned, Stuart saw the white-coated Filipino rising before him. The murderous man was dodging the new antagonist. Once more, the gleaming knife flashed; then a mass of blackness blotted out the form of the Filipino.

The mask obscured Stuart's vision. As he pulled the handkerchief down to his neck, he saw Louie's form rise upward toward the ceiling, as though elevated by an invisible force! It was an amazing blur to Stuart's blinking eyes.

Then the Filipino hurtled headlong. The gleaming knife clattered to the floor.

Bewildered, Stuart saw Louie lying stunned. Looking back at the spot where the Filipino had been, he saw the answer.

In the center of the room stood a man in black - a tall figure clad in a flowing cloak. His face was obscured by the brim of a hat. From beneath, glowed keen eyes that viewed Stuart. The folds of the man's black cloak were swaying; and Stuart caught a glimpse of a bright, crimson lining.

It was the mysterious man whom he had seen the night before! Here, in this mellow-lighted room, the tall figure seemed more mysterious than before. It was a shadow that had come to life - a solid being materialized from nothingness. Stuart's eyes were staring; his ears received the next weird impression.

From that tall, sinister form came a mocking laugh. It was a cry of victory - the sardonic mirth of an avenger! Those burning eyes were staring toward the unconscious form of the murderous Filipino. The hidden lips were voicing the swift triumph!

This man had rescued Stuart; but was he friend or foe? Had he stopped the death thrust of the knife to deliver death of his own choosing?

Seized by a sudden fear, Stuart could think of but one course; to protect himself in case this being of the night should prove to be an enemy!

Across the room, he saw his revolver, lying beneath a chair. Stuart acted on impulse. He leaped for the spot where his gun lay, intending to gain the weapon as a protection.

He stumbled as he reached his objective. On his knees, Stuart clutched the .32 and threw himself around to cover the stranger. Then came amazement.

The man in black was gone! Stuart was alone, with the sprawled form of the helpless Filipino!

Was it all a dream? Could the rescue have been a thing of fancy? Even as Stuart wondered, his ears caught a sound that seemed to echo from outside the house. It was a long, eerie laugh - that same triumphant laugh of the man in black!

Stuart pocketed his revolver and dashed from the house. He stood in the thick darkness. He could see nothing he could hear nothing. The weird rescuer was swallowed by the night.

Retracing his steps toward the road, Stuart wondered. He had found the front door unlocked when he had rushed from the lodge. It was through that door the stranger had entered. The man must have unlocked it - for it seemed likely that Louie would have barred the door at night.

On a chance, Stuart wended his way to Hawthorne's. He crept to the house and peered into the window. Both men were at their places. It was obvious that neither had been out of the cottage.

Slowly, Stuart went back toward the Inn. His body was bruised and lame. He took his time; and stopped frequently to listen.

As he neared the hotel, he heard a distant sound. It was the faint humming of an airplane motor. Was Mayo returning? Stuart waited. The black sky gave no sign of the plane. The purring sound faded.

Stuart recalled that there was a landing field a few miles from Greenhurst. Had the plane taken off from there? The plane was departing, not arriving; so it could not be Mayo's ship.

Stuart was wondering as he went into the hotel; wondering about the man; wondering about the plane. Somehow, there seemed to be a connection.

In this, Stuart was correct. Heading southward, The Shadow was flying to New York!

CHAPTER XIII

THE MIDNIGHT MEETING

ONE night after Stuart Bruxton's experience in Greenhurst, Harry Vincent encountered developments in Philadelphia.

From the darkened window of a small apartment, he was peering across a narrow courtyard to a lighted room in a wing of the same building. The window of that room was open. Harry was watching Denby Chadwick.

A sound came across the court. It was the ringing of a telephone. Harry was awaiting it as eagerly as Chadwick. He looked at the luminous dial of his wrist watch. It registered twenty minutes of eleven.

Chadwick was answering the telephone.

"Yes - yes" - were his words - "I understand. I've been waiting to hear from you. I don't like it, though... I'm afraid I'll lose everything... You're demanding too much... No - no" - the voice had a pathetic note - "don't say that... Wait... Wait a moment."

Chadwick left the phone and came to the window. He stared out into the court with haggard eyes. His hands moved restlessly, clasping and unclasping. He drew down the sash.

Unable to hear more, Harry left his apartment and hastened through the hall. It was a considerable distance to the door of Chadwick's apartment.

Arriving there, Harry found himself in luck. The transom of Chadwick's door was slightly open. Harry could hear the voice within, although the words were not so plain as they had been in the room across the court.

Harry realized that he had missed an important part of Chadwick's conversation, and he chided himself for not having come here the moment that the phone call had commenced. It was too late for such regrets, however.

"I understand," Harry heard Chadwick say. "I've got to come through" - the voice was glum - "and you're letting me off easy, after all. I want to be sure that this is all of it, though."

A pause followed, indicating that Chadwick was listening from the other end. Then came these words:

"I'll be there, then. But I want to be sure that I'll be safe. You know I'm taking a chance, going alone. I can't do anything else, but -" The voice stopped, as though the speaker might be listening to an interruption from the other end.

When Chadwick spoke again, it was with the tone of a man who has been somewhat reassured.

"You're protecting me positively, then. Well, I'll be there. I know the way. Midnight."

The conversation ended. Harry Vincent hurried back toward his own apartment. He waited behind a corner until he saw young Chadwick appear and start for the elevator. Then Harry descended by the stairway.

Chadwick was leaving the lobby when Harry reached the ground floor. Harry knew his immediate destination. Chadwick's car was outside the apartment.

The man was driving away when Harry reached the street and clambered into his own coupe. He saw the taillight of Chadwick's car as it turned a corner. Harry followed in pursuit. Chadwick's car reached a trafficked street. It was not difficult to trail it.

HARRY was thinking deeply as he kept pace behind the car in front. He knew something of Chadwick's troubles, but not enough.

So far as his uncle's death was concerned, Chadwick had a perfect alibi. But the fact that he had been quizzed so closely by the county detective made it appear as though there might be a plot against him.

Blackmail was afoot, Harry decided. Perhaps old Grant Chadwick had been killed because he would not meet demands. Perhaps the heritage which Denby Chadwick had received was putting him in hot water also.

Harry remembered the fiendish plan that had operated against Stuart Bruxton. If the same men were after Denby Chadwick, there would certainly be danger.

Chadwick was going to a meeting. Harry, armed, was following him. The meeting was to be at midnight. It must be some distance away.

Harry's surmise was justified when Chadwick headed along the boulevard toward New York; then turned off to the right.

This gave his plan away. Chadwick was evidently aiming for the Palmyra bridge, a long span that connected Pennsylvania with New Jersey.

They reached the bridge, and after following Chadwick to the other side, Harry allowed the man to increase the space that separated the two cars. There was a straight road ahead; it would not do to be too close.

Far out in the country, Chadwick speeded his machine and drew out of sight around a long bend. When Harry reached the straight stretch that followed the curve, he could see no sign of his quarry.

But his headlights showed a crossroads. There had been a heavy rain, and a smeared tire track indicated that a car had turned to the left.

Harry swung in that direction. He was piqued at his failure to follow effectively; but now he had a hunch that he believed must be correct.

They had been traveling for nearly an hour. Chadwick had shown only a few bursts of speed. The destination must be close, otherwise the man would have traveled more rapidly.

Harry knew this road, now that he was upon it. Three miles ahead was located a roadhouse called the Green Mill - a spot where beer runners sometimes gathered. Harry was convinced that the lonely roadhouse was Denby Chadwick's destination.

At ten minutes of twelve, Harry neared the Green Mill. He piloted his coupe up a side road; then ran it into an unfenced field beneath a clump of trees. The tires wallowed in mud, but the car slid through to a dry spot.

There was no time to waste. Harry could see the lights of the roadhouse. He opened the back of his coupe. He lifted an inner lid to disclose a complete and compact wireless sending set. Harry strung an aerial between two trees. He worked with speed and precision.

The sending key clicked when he had completed operations. Harry's fingers were at work. With the special equipment provided him by The Shadow, Harry was reporting.

Somewhere, not far from New York, The Shadow had a sending station which enabled him to keep in direct touch by wireless. Harry had used this method of communication in the past.

So far as he knew, the man at the other end was Burbank, The Shadow's most trusted agent. Harry had often communicated with him.

HARRY did not wait for a response. Satisfied that the set was working, he hurried toward the roadhouse, and did not slacken his pace until he was close by the building. There, he crouched in darkness and wormed his way toward a lighted window.

The shade was drawn, but there was a slight space at the bottom. Peering through, Harry saw Denby Chadwick, seated at a table.

Chadwick was waiting for someone who had not yet arrived. While Harry watched and waited, he heard a car pull in from the pike, bound toward a parking space at the side of the roadhouse.

A few minutes later, a door opened within the room. A man entered. Harry stared. The man was heavy and powerfully built. His face was an ugly one.

Stuart Bruxton's description of Grady flashed through Harry's mind. He felt positive this man was the killer who had slain both Jefferson and Powell!

Harry's hand tightened on his automatic. If Grady attempted murder here, he would fail. Harry was ready to send a bullet through the man's brain if he attacked Denby Chadwick.

But it became evident that Grady was here for no such purpose. His face was ugly and leering; but it carried no fiendish look.

The men were conversing, but Harry could not catch their words. Chadwick drew forth a small portfolio, and gave it to Grady. The evil-faced man opened it and peered in at the contents. He spoke a few words to Chadwick; then arose and went to the door.

For a moment Harry thought he was leaving; instead, he reappeared with a waiter. The man had bottles and glasses. Drinks were poured.

Grady, grinning, imbibed deeply. Chadwick, morose, did not touch his glass.

This was an opportunity. Harry felt that nothing would occur for several minutes at least. He hurried back to the spot where he had rigged his aerial.

He had removed the sending apparatus about thirty feet from the car. Opening communication, he tapped a code message, telling all that he had observed, and giving his exact location.

He received a prompt response. He was to watch what happened, and to wait until the men left; then to follow Grady in preference to Chadwick.

Most important, Harry was to send a quick signal by wireless before he left, leaving the equipment set up, if necessary, to make a hasty departure.

Gauging the distance from the spot to the roadhouse, Harry figured he could make a quick trip back and forth. He tapped word to stand by; that he would signal again within five minutes. Leaving the key, he went back to the Green Mill.

Chadwick and Grady were still at their table. Harry watched them a few minutes. Chadwick swallowed his drink and rose to leave. Harry slid away from the window, and headed toward the coupe. He knew that if Chadwick should be going home, he would pass by the little road that led in from the Pike.

At his car, Harry stood listening. Hearing no sound of an automobile, he decided to send word to Burbank. He turned to go to the sending set.

As he stepped away from the coupe, a man leaped upon him!

HARRY had no opportunity to seize his automatic. The gun was in his pocket, for he had expected no trouble back here at the car.

He realized, now, that he had been followed from the roadhouse on this last trip. He was resolved to defeat this enemy.

Fighting furiously, Harry broke free and dealt the man a powerful punch on the jaw. The fellow staggered, and Harry leaned forward to deliver another telling blow.

At that instant, another figure rose from beside him. Harry saw a descending arm. He turned quickly to ward off the falling blow.

A solid object struck the side of Harry's head. The Shadow's operative sank with a groan. Half stunned, he was incapable of motion as he felt himself gripped by both antagonists.

Expert hands bound him. A handkerchief was thrust in his mouth and its ends tied behind his head. Harry was lifted bodily and thrust in the front seat of his own car.

In a daze, he heard an automobile starting from the roadhouse. A few minutes later, the sound was repeated. Harry's mind barely managed to grasp the fact that both Chadwick and Grady were now gone from the Green Mill.

Who, then, were these men who had captured him?

More minutes dragged by. The door on the other side of the car opened. One of the captors entered the coupe and took the wheel. The starter buzzed and the car moved slowly backward, sloughing; through the mud toward the side road.

Harry Vincent, a helpless victim, was being taken to an unknown destination - and the only clew to his capture was the silent key upon the sending apparatus that he had left amid the trees!

Unseen danger had come to Harry - before he had been able to signal that he expected trouble!

CHAPTER XIV

DELMUTH SEES A SHADOW

AN elderly man was seated in the living room of an apartment. His armchair was drawn back from the open window. Below sparkled the lights of Riverside Drive; beyond them, the blackness of the Hudson River.

The gray-haired titan gazed thoughtfully into the night and smiled benignly. A deceiving smile! For this was the same man whom Stuart Bruxton had met in Maryland!

The door opened and another man entered quickly, closing the door behind him. The newcomer turned to face the old man. The person was Sidney Delmuth.

The old man seemed keenly interested in Delmuth's arrival. His eyes lit up with a weird gleam as he detected a tense look upon the face of the advertising man.

The old man was looking for an explanation. It was forthcoming. Delmuth sat down in a chair opposite the old man and began to speak in a low, guarded voice.

"Everything is fixed," he said. "You would have heard from me if there had been a hitch. I couldn't talk when you called me about Grady. Something was happening - that's why I told you to wait. I knew I could explain better when I came here."

"What is the matter?" questioned the old man.

"I'm being followed," declared Delmuth. "Followed by a man whom I cannot see!"

The old man smiled at the paradoxical statement. He was wondering how Delmuth knew he was being followed, if he could not observe the follower. The smile turned to a serious look, however, for the old man could tell that Delmuth was in earnest.

"So far, Benson," said the advertising man, "I've slipped it over on this fellow. I suspected he was on my trail when I came into my apartment this evening. I made that call to Philadelphia by using the phone the moment that I came in.

"When I talked to Chadwick, I was lucky enough to put through a quick call. Even at that, I'm not sure that I was not overheard. I took the precaution of carrying the telephone into the hall closet."

"You think the man who was trailing you was that close?" Benson asked.

"If he's who I think he is, he might have been at my elbow without my seeing him!"

"Who do you think he is?"

"The Shadow!"

DELMUTH'S revealing words were uttered in a low whisper. They were startling, even to the cagey old man. Benson was solemn for a moment; then he smiled wanly.

"The Shadow," he said, with a slight laugh. "I've heard of him, but I have always doubted his existence. A superman who fights with crooks. I have been active for years, Delmuth; yet I have never encountered The Shadow!"

"That does not signify that The Shadow is nonexistent," answered Delmuth. "I have never run up against him before; but this time, I think we're dealing with him.

"We have been active, lately - and we are just beginning. If The Shadow is mixing in our affairs, there's only one thing to do - get him!"

If you are so sure that The Shadow is following you," said Benson quietly, "why did you come here?"

"I took precautions," was the response. "I called Shamlin and gave him the tip-off. You know my gag."

"He came up in a taxi, and it stopped outside of my apartment. I stepped in it, as if it were a vacant cab; then Shamlin got out later, paid the driver, and walked away. In the dark, he easily passes for me.

"If The Shadow is still on the trail, he's following Shamlin. Probably on his way to take in a midnight movie. That's where Shamlin said he was going."

"Who was driving the cab?"

"Harmon. He works with Shamlin. I've used those fellows plenty. Two good men - but not in a class with you and Grady."

Old Benson smiled at the compliment.

"Grady called me from Trenton," he said. "Told me he would come directly here, after he meets Chadwick. He can make it in two hours - he drives rapidly at night."

"Good," said Delmuth.

"One more job," said Benson speculatively. "Then the way will be clear. There's only one mistake - letting young Chadwick out."

"He will be safe!" said Delmuth emphatically. "He knows nothing!"

"He knows that you are playing some phony game."

"Yes; but he doesn't see the real connection. He is scared, because he knows that I know all about his affairs. He will never squeal."

"You and I," said Benson thoughtfully. "You and I and -" He smiled instead of pronouncing a name. "Even Grady does not know. As for Shamlin and Harmon -"

"They know nothing," Delmuth interposed.

"Then The Shadow, if he is interested, cannot know," Benson concluded.

"I think he followed me last night," said Delmuth seriously. "That was when I had my first suspicion. But I played the game the way I always play it. I tore up the dope sheet and left an empty envelope in my pocket. If The Shadow found it, he will have a lot of guessing to do!"

"You look worried, Delmuth," said Benson quietly. "That is a mistake. You may be worrying over nothing. On the contrary, if it is not your imagination - if you are really being followed -"

DELMUTH stopped the speaker with a raised hand. As they sat in silence, the suave advertising man listened keenly. Then, he arose from his chair and tiptoed to the door.

He opened it cautiously and stepped quickly out into the hallway. He came back, shrugging his shoulders.

"Thought I heard a noise," he declared. "I am worried, Benson, but I have cause to be. It gives me the creeps, and I've never had them before."

"I tell you, again, we must be careful!"

The old man nodded thoughtfully. He did not appear to be worried, but he began to adopt shrewd tactics.

He looked about the room as though forming a plan. He peered from the window; then went to the door and made a brief inspection. After that, he traveled to an inner room and returned.

"If The Shadow is spying here," he said, "you can be sure that he is a man of miracles. The hallway is empty. There is no one in the inner room. As for the window - we are on the fifth floor."

"There are other windows below," asserted Delmuth. "It would be possible -"

"Possible," agreed Benson. "Possible for a man to scale the wall, but highly improbable that he would risk it. Should we suspect The Shadow was outside our window, we could easily discover him."

"How?" Delmuth asked.

"I shall show you."

The old man went to a table and returned with a flashlight. He leaned deliberately from the window, and turned on the instrument. He focused its rays upon the wall below. When he again turned toward Delmuth, Benson wore a serious expression.

"Did you see anything?" questioned Delmuth.

"Yes and no," answered Benson softly. "I understand your qualms now, Delmuth."

"Why?"

"The entrance to the fire tower is twenty feet from this window." Benson's voice was little more than a whisper. "I observed a peculiar blackness there. It seemed to disappear as I turned the light directly toward it."

"That's the way it has been," said Delmuth hoarsely. "I have never seen a man - but I have observed signs of one. Always that way. What are we going to do about it, Benson?"

"Put on your hat," replied the old man, with a smile. "We are going out, together."

While Delmuth was following the old man's instructions, Benson strolled about the room. He stopped at a corner near the doorway. There, he stared keenly at a screen with three panels. He stretched out his hands as though to touch this article of furniture; then desisted. Instead, he pressed a switch on the wall. This illuminated a series of wall brackets about the room.

The old man glanced toward the screen and smiled. He turned off the switch and nodded to Delmuth.

"Come along," he said.

THE two men left the apartment. Benson was talking loudly as they walked along the hall, away from the entrance to the fire tower. They waited for the elevator; then descended to the lobby.

Within two minutes after the men had made their departure, a slight motion occurred at the window of Benson's living room. It seemed at first as though a chunk of darkness had assumed a solid form, projecting itself into that deserted room. Then, the form took on the semblance of a human being.

A tall man stood revealed in the glare of the single table lamp that illuminated the room. The visitor from the outer darkness was garbed entirely in black. About his shoulders rested the folds of a sable-hued cloak. A black slouch hat obscured his face. Only two burning eyes were visible.

The Shadow, man of mystery, had scaled the wall from the fire tower! He stood alone in the room which the men had left!

Stepping away from the window, he seemed to merge with the darkness of the wall. His step was cautious as he moved about the room.

Dark eyes sparkled as they observed the screen in the corner. The Shadow moved in that direction. He stopped. His black-gloved hand rested on the wall, close by the switch that controlled the wall brackets.

Studying the screen, The Shadow laughed. The sound that came from his lips was a low, weird utterance.

The man in black carefully swung the end panel of the screen open. Then he began to move about the room.

His inspection was brief and thorough; but it yielded no tangible results. A letter lay upon a table, addressed to Jeremiah Benson. Its contents were of no importance.

The Shadow spied a telephone. He slipped quickly to the door, opened it, and peered into the hallway. Back he went, to the phone. His black-garbed finger dialed a number. A voice responded over the wire.

"Report," came The Shadow's order.

"Communication begun," came a quiet tone - the voice of Burbank. "Instructions given. Awaiting regular report."

"Signal if necessary," said The Shadow. "Call this number" - he read from the mouthpiece of the phone - "and use the false-number system."

"In emergency only?" came Burbank's voice.

"Emergency only," was The Shadow's low response.

The telephone was replaced and set exactly as it had been before. Then, the man in black performed a surprising action. He picked up a newspaper that lay beside a table, and quickly removed half a dozen of the inner sheets. Carrying them with him, he moved behind the screen.

He was out of sight for fully two minutes; then he reappeared from the other side of the screen. He seated himself in Jeremiah Benson's chair, just back from the window. There he waited, a silent, motionless figure, gazing toward the screen and the door beyond.

A KEY clicked at the door. The Shadow was on his feet, moving with incredible quickness. So rapid was his motion that when Benson entered, the man in black was no longer in view.

Benson was accompanied by Delmuth. The two were engaged in conversation.

Benson took the chair by the window. Delmuth sat opposite him. They talked in an abstract fashion for a while.

"Have a cigar?" questioned the old man.

"Sure thing," replied Delmuth. "I would enjoy one."

Benson arose and obtained a box of cigars from a table drawer. He paused, reached to the wall, and turned on the switch that controlled the wall brackets. This illuminated the portion of the room where he was standing, and he glanced at the box in his hands.

"These are the right ones," affirmed Benson. "I want you to try these Havanas, Delmuth."

He sat down in his accustomed chair and proffered the box of cigars. There was nothing in the old man's action to indicate that he might have noticed anything unusual.

But when he took a cigar himself, he lifted two, and then dropped one. It was a prearranged signal. Delmuth gave an imperceptible nod.

As the old man laid the box aside, the telephone bell rang. Benson answered it, spoke a few words, and hung up the receiver.

"Someone calling the wrong number," was his comment. "I thought maybe it was the call that I expected."

Delmuth, sitting by the window, was listening to the old man's comment. His ears failed to detect a slight noise that came from near by.

"Well," said Delmuth, "I think I must be going. Glad to have seen you again, Benson."

"Wait a moment!" exclaimed the old man. "I haven't given you those addresses I promised. Here. I'll write them out for you."

Taking paper and pencil, the old man began to write. Sidney Delmuth was watching him, feigning careless interest.

Actually he was intently keyed upon the words that the old man's hand was forming:

He is behind the screen. We will trap him. Remember the plan.

Close the door softly when you leave. I expected this. I noticed that

the screen had been moved - saw it the moment I entered.

Delmuth folded the sheet of paper and placed it in his pocket. As he turned toward the door, his eyes glanced sidelong at the screen.

Jeremiah Benson's ruse had worked. The turning on of the wall lights had caused a dull glow to shine through the thin cloth screen, from the wall brackets behind.

Dimly visible in that filtered light was the crouching silhouette of a human figure!

Sidney Delmuth closed the door as he went out. It did not latch. Delmuth had wedged a wad of paper into the latch socket when he had come in with Benson.

In the deserted hall, Delmuth drew a revolver from his pocket. He placed his hand upon the knob of the door.

In the apartment, Jeremiah Benson stepped through the door that led to his bedroom. There, in darkness, the old man drew an automatic.

With marked agility, he crept to the edge of the door and pointed his gun directly toward the screen in the corner of the living room. The muzzle covered the crouching shape.

Watching, Benson saw the door move open. Delmuth's hand came along the wall. It swept suddenly forward and toppled the screen toward the floor.

Benson was springing forward, his finger on the trigger of the gun that covered the area behind the screen. Simultaneously, Delmuth was coming through the door.

They were sweeping toward their prey - the man whom they believed was hiding in the corner of the room. Both were headed toward the same objective - death to The Shadow!

THEY stopped as suddenly as they had sprung. The silhouetted form had fallen forward with the screen. There was no one there!

Fastened flat against the inside of the center panel of the screen was a mass of newspaper, cunningly fashioned to resemble the silhouette of a man. The shadow that the plotters had fancied was the form of a living being was nothing more than a paper shape, designed to deceive them!

All that was needed to cap the climax of this artful deception was the sound of jibing laugh from without the window through which The Shadow had departed. That was The Shadow's way - to mock those whom he tricked. But the laugh was not forthcoming.

For The Shadow had departed the instant that he had heard the telephone conversation that Jeremiah Benson had held with the party who had called the wrong number. That had been Burbank's emergency signal!

Even now, The Shadow was talking on a telephone, half a block from the apartment house where Jeremiah Benson dwelt. He was receiving a report from Burbank; a report that told of interrupted plans - of a wireless communication that had not been resumed as ordered.

The Shadow swung out into the night. A swift, flitting figure, he moved unseen into the darkness and disappeared. No trace of him remained.

A few minutes later, a sleek, high-powered roadster was whirling southward along one of Manhattan's avenues. The muffled purr beneath the hood signified the terrific speed that lay in that powerful motor.

As the car sped through the Holland Tunnel, a low, solemn laugh came from the driver. The man at the wheel was invisible in the darkness of the deep-seated car. The lighted dial of a dashboard clock showed half past twelve.

At quarter of one, the car was on the broad highway, sweeping onward at a pace that would have defied pursuit by the fastest motor-cycle patrolman. The giant motor roared in ceaseless rhythm. The speeding automobile shot along the road with bulletlike pace. Other cars, scenting its approach, swung to the side to let it pass.

The hands that held the wheel were steady and firm. The minute hand of the dashboard clock was creeping slowly upward. The pointer on the speedometer was wavering as it indicated a speed of one hundred and ten miles an hour. Yet the huge car, built to stand such a pace, held to the road unceasingly.

The Shadow had work to do that night. He had sixty-five miles to go, and every moment was precious. A human life lay in the balance. Could he save it?

The Shadow never fails!

CHAPTER XV

THE DROP OF DEATH

A COUPE was traveling along a lonely road. Its speed decreased as it reached a sharp hill. Halfway up the incline, the driver shifted into second gear, and turned the car to the left.

The rear wheels wallowed through a film of thin mud, then went along over a dirt road. The car kept climbing, and finally came to a stop on the summit of the wooded hill.

The lights went out. The car was in darkness. On the right, all was impenetrable; on the left, a slight trace of the cloudy sky indicated a clearing.

The coupe remained where it had stopped. The driver was waiting. The faint sound of an approaching car came from below the hill. The noise increased, and soon the glare of headlights appeared, tilting up along the dirt road.

A touring car pulled up alongside the coupe. Its lights went out. A man stepped from the vehicle, and approached the other car. He spoke through the darkness.

"All O.K., Whitey?"

"O.K., Jake. Come around the other side."

The man followed instructions. He opened the door on the far side of the coupe. A flashlight shone in his hand. Its rays showed the bound form of Harry Vincent.

Harry's form was toppling outward as the door opened. Jake thrust the body back with a rough motion.

"Lucky the door didn't come open, Whitey," he said. "This bimbo would have landed in the road."

"What if he had?" was the retort. "You was comin' along, wasn't you? You coulda picked him up!"

"Well, you got 'im here easy enough," said Jake. "This is a nifty spot for a bump-off. Kinda close to the Green Mill, though. Think it's a good idea to give him the works here?"

"There's never been a comeback from a job pulled here," replied "Whitey." "There won't be, neither - not for twenty or thirty years, anyway."

There was a peculiar significance in the man's voice that impressed his companion. Jake satisfied himself that Harry was too securely bound to effect an escape. Then he emerged from his side of the car, and walked around to join the other man.

He plucked Whitey by the sleeve, and drew him to the front of the coupe. There he began a low conversation.

"There's only two guys besides myself that ever knew this lay," he said. "One was Biff Snider. He was bumped off a month ago, and he never said nothin'. The other is Whitey Shane. That's you. And you're keepin' mum. Savvy?"

"Sure thing, Jake," replied Whitey. "Spill the lay. I'm with you."

"REMEMBER you're workin' with Jake Michener, then, and don't forget it. This is between us an' nobody else. It's only been worked once before, an' this may be the last time it's pulled here.

"When we're through, nobody's goin' to be wise - an' nobody would be wise even if they did find out."

"O.K.," agreed Whitey.

"I don't know who this guy is; and I don't care. We caught him snoopin' around the Green Mill, an' we were put there tonight to nab any snooper! We're gettin' paid for it - leastwise I am - an' I'm splittin' with you, fifty-fifty. That's enough, ain't it?"

"Suits me, Jake."

"All right. Come along, then. Stick close to me. I'm goin' to show you the lay. Wait. We'll go around the car here, so we can see that this bimbo is still tied up tight."

After a quick glance at the prisoner, Jake led Whitey across the road and off to the left. The ground was level and gravelly.

"Easy now, Whitey," said Jake. "Stop here. Now, listen."

Jake stopped, found a stone, and tossed it ahead of him. The bit of rock did not strike ground. Whitey Shane listened in astonishment. Seconds seemed to pass; then came a soft splash from interminable depths.

"What's out there?" asked Whitey.

"A straight drop," declared Jake Michener. "Eighty feet down - and a hundred feet of water after that. A hundred feet if it's an inch."

"A hundred feet of water!"

"Sure. We're at the top of an old quarry. You can see it in the daytime, comin' up the road. A straight edge of rock, stickin' straight up in the air."

"The quarry ain't been worked for years. It's loaded with water, and the water's there to stay."

"I get you. We'll chuck this guy over -"

"Chuck him over? Say, Whitey, don't you get the lay yet? We're not goin' to heave him. We're goin' to let him slide in - car an' all! That's the way we're workin' it!"

Whitey whistled in admiration at his companion's scheme. This was murder simplified. A car, toppling from the top of an unguarded cliff in the dark. An accident encountered by a person who had lost his way.

No evidence to tell the story. Even should the car be discovered by a probing of the depths, there would be no proof that a crime had been committed.

"This is a big job tonight, Whitey," declared Jake. "What's in back of it is something I don't know. I've got the dough, that's all.

"You know the instructions I got. Watch the Green Mill an' see that two guys came an' went without running into trouble. Grab any fellow that looks suspicious. That's what we did."

"An' bump him off our own way," added Whitey

"Which is what we're doin'," declared Jake.

"All right, let's get goin'."

"Take your time, Whitey. Nobody ain't goin' to bother us out here. We're goin' to pull this job perfect, just for practice. Let's suppose that somethin' might go wrong - somebody figure that a car had gone down here. What would be the likely way?"

"Well, it's dark along here. The road ends where we've got the cars -"

"An' if you came up here by mistake, you'd turn around, wouldn't you?" Jake suggested.

"Sure. I'd have to," admitted Whitey.

"Well, supposin' you were backin' your buggy an' you went too far back."

"That's the ticket, Jake!" exclaimed Whitey, with enthusiasm. "We'll swing the car with this guy in it."

"Right. Come along."

THE gangsters began their preparations. They were toughened characters, both. Often before, they had fought side-by-side.

Jake Michener was widely known in gangdom. He and his pal, "Biff" Snider, had made a specialty of taking victims on one-way rides.

Since Biff's death, which came as a result of a gunfight with New York detectives, Jake had teamed regularly with Whitey Shane, and the new sidekick had proved a capable successor to the lamented Biff.

This was Jake's job, and he was the leader. At his order, Whitey stood by the side of the coupe, while Jake turned the touring car with great care.

Backing the old vehicle to the end of the road, Jake again extinguished its lights; then joined Whitey and glowered at the helpless man in the coupe.

Harry Vincent's form was slumped almost to the floor. Jake clambered into the driver's seat and moved the coupe to the right. He jockeyed the car back and forth in short stages until its rear was across the road, turned directly toward the edge of the quarry.

"The wheel's set straight," declared Jake, in a satisfied voice. "It don't hurt if this buggy turns while it's rollin'. It can't miss where it's goin'. That edge runs along straight for a hundred feet."

"Funny they don't have no fence there," observed Whitey.

"This ain't a regular road," explained Jake. "It was used as a work road for a while - that's why it's the way it is."

He glanced at the victim. He saw Harry Vincent's eyes turned upward. Jake laughed ruthlessly.

He could see an alarmed expression in those eyes, as they glittered beneath the rays of Whitey's torch. At the same time, he knew that the prisoner had no exact idea of what was to occur.

This snoopers would be due for a real surprise, thought Jake.

"Ready now?" questioned Whitey.

"No!" exclaimed Jake. "Wait till I get these windows up. Hoist the one on your side. Then shove this bird over here in the driver's seat. Wait - I'll give you a hand."

Harry Vincent was hoisted to the seat which Jake was vacating. The gangster arranged him directly behind the wheel.

Whitey Shane extinguished his flashlight and reached in the car to release the emergency brake. Jake Michener pushed him to one side.

"I told you there wasn't goin' to be no comeback on this job," he said. "It would look fine, wouldn't it, if somebody fished up this buggy and found a guy

trussed up!"

"It would be just as bad if they found him pumped full of lead," retorted Whitey. "There's no use plugging' him if he's goin' down with the car."

"Who said anythin' about usin' a gat?" questioned Jake, in the darkness. "What do you think I brought along that bottle for? An' those rags? Wait here till I get em'."

JAKE MICHENER went to the touring car and returned quietly. He instructed Whitey Shane to turn on the flashlight.

In expert fashion, Jake applied a saturated rag to Harry Vincent's nostrils. Harry's head toppled back against the seat.

A knife gleamed in Jake's hand. He cut the bonds that held the victim, and severed the gag that had prevented him from raising an outcry.

"All set," he declared. "Now we're ready to let go. We frisked this bozo back at the Green Mill. I left a little money on him, and the licenses for the car are in his pocket."

"That dope I just gave him will hold 'im. Maybe he'll wake up at the bottom of the quarry. Maybe. Maybe not."

"Let's go," urged Whitey, "we've been spendin' enough time. We didn't do nothin' to cover up our trail when we came here. Don't forget that."

"There wasn't any need for it," said Jake. "Don't worry, Whitey. As soon as I get in our car, let the brake loose on this buggy. There's a gradual slant to the edge of that pit, and it'll go right over. Then come over and we'll chase out of here."

Whitey waited as ordered. Jake hurried to the touring car and started the motor. It roared as he pressed the accelerator.

Whitey, taking the signal, reached forward to release the emergency brake. He grinned as he thought of one detail that Jake had overlooked. Whitey turned on the headlights of the coupe.

A good touch of detail, he thought. The lights would soon cease glowing under water.

The handle of the emergency brake clicked. Whitey stepped back and closed the door with a slam. The coupe commenced to move slowly backward. Whitey gave it the impetus of a push.

He hurried over to the touring car and clambered in beside Jake Michener. Both gangsters looked forward at the rolling coupe. Its front wheels joggled as they lifted over the left edge of the road.

It was thirty feet to the top of the quarry. Jake's car was turned so the two men could witness the fatal plunge.

Only seconds remained in the life of Harry Vincent. Two hardened gangsters were looking on in enjoyment - the sole witnesses of the certain doom to which the unconscious man was traveling.

The motor of the touring car was roaring as Jake Michener prepared to drive away as soon as the coupe had disappeared.

Then, with amazing suddenness, the coasting car was revealed in every detail beneath the glare of a powerful searchlight! A huge automobile was whirling up the dirt road that came from the highway!

The gangsters had not heard the purring whir of its powerful motor, because of the roaring motor of their own car. The mighty monarch of the road was approaching with the speed of a meteor!

"Look!" cried Whitey Shane.

THE great car was turning to the left. Its driver, guided by a strange intuition, had sensed the situation in an instant. For a moment the gangsters thought the big car was out of control. It was heading directly toward the edge of the quarry!

Then the powerful car swerved to the right. Its wheels skirted the edge of the threatening pit.

The huge roadster was leaning to the left, almost toppling toward the depths below! It righted itself and shot directly into the path of the rolling coupe.

Brakes screamed as the two cars met. The superman who drove the huge car brought his machine to an instant stop within a dozen feet. The rear of the coupe crashed against the front of the great roadster.

The impact was a sharp one. The rescue car was on the brink of the precipice. The force of the coupe would have driven an ordinary car over the edge. But this monster machine withstood the blow.

For the fraction of a second it began to rise and shift toward the danger zone. Then it became motionless, blocking the coupe from destruction.

Jake realized that this was no chance occurrence. This huge automobile had come from nowhere. Its driver had accomplished the seemingly impossible. The helpless man was saved!

"Give him the works," exclaimed Jake to Whitey, "Give him the works. Quick!"

As he uttered the order, Jake Michener headed the touring car directly toward the locked automobiles.

Whitey Shane was leaning from the side, his automatic drawn. His first bullet spat against the side of the anchored roadster. The next whirred through the top.

Whitey Shane was timing his third shot. Jake Michener, grimly driving the touring car in second gear, was swinging the wheel with one intent - to crash the side of the rescuer's car, and to do what the slow-moving coupe had not done - hurl the big car to its destruction!

At that instant, the quick staccato of revolver fire replied to Whitey Shane's shots. A bullet struck the aiming gangster in the arm. Another crashed solidly through the windshield and found its mark in Jake Michener's chest.

The driver of the touring car slumped behind the wheel. The turning motion of the car ceased. Instead of striking the big roadster in the middle, the gangster's car sped toward the rear of it. Wounded, Jake Michener had lost control.

The rear fender of the touring car clicked the bumper of the roadster. A piercing scream of terror came from Whitey Shane, as he felt the touring car hurtle forward into space. The long scream faded as the car shot downward into the depths.

A dull, distant splash marked the doom of the killers. Jake Michener and Whitey Shane had plunged to the fate that they had planned for others.

Silence followed. Upon the brink of that pit stood a man in black - a figure invisible in the darkness. From the verge of doom came a long, mirthless laugh - a laugh more terrifying than the scream that had come from the lips of Whitey Shane.

The Shadow, dread man of vengeance, had traced the path of the gangsters. He had arrived at the moment when the plan of the evil-doers seemed impossible of failure. Sweeping from the darkness, The Shadow had saved Harry Vincent from destruction.

Once more The Shadow laughed!

CHAPTER XVI

PLOTTERS UNHEARD

"IT'S three o'clock. Grady ought to be here soon."

The speaker was Jeremiah Benson. He sat facing Sidney Delmuth. Between them was a plain wooden table, upon which rested a bottle and glasses. They were in the back room of a small cafe.

"You're sure he will come here?" questioned Delmuth anxiously.

"Don't you worry about Grady," said the gray-haired man. "He was to call me before he came up to the apartment. He won't get any reply on the phone. So he'll come here. This is our regular hangout."

Delmuth poured himself a large drink and swallowed the liquid hurriedly. He was glum as he studied Benson.

"I don't like this business," declared Delmuth. "Everything was going well - but with The Shadow mixing in it, we have to be careful."

As he finished speaking, Delmuth turned and glanced about the room. He seemed to feel that he was being watched. The memory of The Shadow still hung over him.

Benson laughed.

"Forget The Shadow for a while," he said. "That's why I brought you here - so you could be sure he wasn't on your trail."

"Suppose he has followed us?" Delmuth still doubted.

"He hasn't. I'm old in the game, Delmuth. The way we changed cabs coming here would fool the best of 'em."

"He followed me to your apartment!"

"Yes. That was because you weren't foxy enough. He probably suspected that Shamlin wasn't you when he got out of the cab. Maybe he saw Shamlin hiding in the cab in the first place!"

"I thought I fooled him, anyway," said Delmuth. "Now you think you've put one over on him. I missed out; maybe you've done the same -"

"What if I have?" interrupted Benson. "There's only one way to get in here, isn't there? That's though the door from the street. You've put Shamlin and Harmon out there watching, haven't you?"

Delmuth nodded. He seemed reassured. At Benson's suggestion, he had summoned his gangster aides to protect this place.

The old man was right. They had found a spot where The Shadow could not penetrate, and the way was closed. Only Grady could join them here. Shamlin and Harmon had been instructed to let him pass.

"I GUESS you're right," agreed Delmuth. "It's safe here. I'm thinking about the future, though. Unless we eliminate The Shadow, it's going to be tough for our plans."

"Why?" demanded Benson. "I don't fear him! Once I'm away from New York, he can never find me."

"You will have to watch out. I agree with you on that. Because your job is getting hot tips that Grady and I can follow."

"But don't forget that we only deal in murder when it's necessary. That's Grady's work. We knocked off three men down in Maryland, and there's been no comeback."

"We have two more jobs ahead of us. Then the blackmail game is ready to go, with no one to interfere. With my backing, there's millions in it."

"Yes," agreed Delmuth, "I don't see what can stop us. Of course, Herbert Brockley and Grant Chadwick were killed -"

"Brockley because he knew too much," Benson interrupted, "Chadwick because it was the easiest way to work it. Grady and I had nothing to do with either of those jobs."

"I'm glad young Chadwick is coming clean," observed Delmuth. "The old man was a menace. Like Brockley, he knew more than he should have. That was one reason for getting rid of him."

"But those stock certificates were the big reason. It was easy to get them from young Chadwick. The old man would never have delivered them."

"I'm not so sure about that," objected Benson. "If I had taken the job, I could have persuaded him. I have a persuasive way when it comes to getting what I want. But the other plan was too simple to pass up."

As Benson finished speaking, the door opened, and a man entered. It was Grady.

The stocky, broad-shouldered man was leering as he entered. In his hand he held the portfolio which he had received from Denby Chadwick. Without a word he tendered it to Benson, who passed it over to Delmuth.

Eagerly, the advertising man opened the portfolio. From it he drew a mass of papers. Chief among these was a stack of green stock certificates.

Delmuth's eyes gleamed. His lips moved excitedly as he unfolded the certificates.

"These fix it!" he exclaimed. "Mayo offered plenty for these, but could never get them. Wait until he finds out that I have them! Here's the whole controlling interest of the Holyoke Safe Manufactory! It dominates the entire industry!"

"Grant Chadwick was foxy enough to hang on to them, but he was too slow to use them. He knew what he could do, but he was holding back. He could have crimped Mayo completely.

"That's why Denby Chadwick is sick - he knows that Mayo wants them, and he knows he's double-crossing Mayo. That's why he tried to beg off, but he's afraid of me. If he only had sense enough to know -"

Benson was holding his hand to interrupt. Delmuth stopped his sentence. He realized that Grady was simply an ignorant underling who served Jeremiah Benson, and that the old man did not want these details discussed too freely while Grady was present.

"Did you have any trouble, Grady?" asked Benson quietly.

"No," said the stocky man, in a gruff voice. "That guy Chadwick handed it all over without any argument."

DELMUTH, smiling knowingly, handed a paper to Benson. The gray-haired man read it. His eyes gleamed with malicious pleasure. He gave the paper back to Delmuth.

"You're taking charge of it?" asked Benson.

"Sure," replied Delmuth. "That sinks young Chadwick. I'm the man to hold it over him."

"No trouble, Grady?" questioned Benson. "No one outside the Green Mill?"

"If there was," declared Grady, "they didn't bother us any. I wasn't watching much. You told me that would be taken care of."

"When will you hear from those men you sent there?" Benson questioned Delmuth.

"Shamlin got them for me," said the advertising man. "They're going to report back to him. They don't know anything about what was going on. Their job was to nab all prowlers. That was all."

"You met Chadwick at midnight?" Benson asked Grady.

"That's when I met him," was the reply.

"Then," declared Benson. "I don't think there was any person watching the Green Mill."

"Why?" asked Delmuth.

"Because," said Benson calmly, "the trouble maker was watching us at that time. He could not have been at the Green Mill when Grady and Chadwick were there."

Delmuth nodded in agreement. He knew that by "trouble maker," Benson meant The Shadow.

The thought of the mysterious man, who came and went unseen, was annoying to Delmuth. It brought up a most important matter. Delmuth made a sign to Benson. The old man, in turn, motioned to Grady.

The hard-faced killer went out of the room, leaving the two plotters alone.

"Benson," declared Delmuth seriously, "we've got to watch out for The Shadow. How he has found out our game is something that puzzles me. The great question is how much he knows. There are some things that I am sure he cannot know."

"About Mayo, for instance?" Benson suggested.

"I don't think he knows that. I don't see how he could. But he may figure there's somebody else in this racket - somebody that's laying low. If he gets up to Greenhurst -"

"He may find out what Hawthorne knows, eh?"

"Exactly. That's why I want you to get up there, right away, with Grady," Delmuth said.

"Well," nodded Benson, "the sooner we pull the last job, the better. Leave it to me and Grady. We'll start tonight - now that everything else is out of the way."

"No," dissented Delmuth. "Don't do a thing until you hear from me, unless you find that The Shadow is mixing in it. Stay near Greenhurst, but not too close. I'll tip you off when to pull the job."

"I'm going to send Shamlin and Harmon up to work with you."

"Why?"

"Because this has got to look like a disappearance. No murder on the premises. There's ill feeling supposed to exist between Hawthorne and Mayo. If anything should happen to either one of them, the other will be blamed."

"I understand," responded Benson. "Still, Grady and I can pull it without any help."

"Not if The Shadow shows up. That's why I want four of you on the job," Delmuth insisted.

"That leaves you alone, here in New York."

"Which is just right," declared Delmuth shrewdly. "I'm through now. Nothing to worry about. I'll attend to business and forget Greenhurst.

"I'm going to fool The Shadow. I'll let him think I'm up to something. I'll keep him busy, here in New York!"

JEREMIAH BENSON smiled gently. When such an expression appeared upon the old man's lips, it meant evil, although Benson's countenance was benign.

"That will work," he declared. "It's a good plan. Send your two men up. Tell them to be wary. If they're followed, they can take care of the follower.

"I've been in this game for years. I failed only once. Then I met a man who was my match. Instead of that proving my undoing, it led to greater opportunity. He and I are working together, with you, Delmuth."

"You're right, Benson. You're going to put this job across. You'll have no worry in Greenhurst. There's just one fellow up there who looks phony - and he'll be taken care of, very neatly. He's due for a surprise."

"Don't worry about me," said the old man. "When this is done, there will be great things in the future. Working with Grady, I shall begin a reign of terror, striking fear into those who cannot combat us. When death is necessary, it will strike.

"There will be millions. We shall all have our share. You and I, Delmuth. You and I and -"

He went no further. Sidney Delmuth's eyes were glowing. This picture of grand success intrigued him. Benson arose and waved his hand toward the door.

"Grady and I are ready," said the old man. "We are leaving in the car. You know where we will be. Communicate with us in the secret method."

Delmuth nodded.

"I'll go first," he said. "I'll talk to Shamlin and Harmon - make sure that all is well. They'll go with me when I leave. If I don't come back, the path is clear."

He left the room. A few moments later, Delmuth reappeared on the street outside the little restaurant. Two men approached him. A voice spoke low.

"Nobody been around," one of the two men was saying. "It's O.K.."

"Is the cab near by?" Delmuth asked.

"Right around the corner."

The group moved away. A few minutes later, a taxi rolled down the street. Harmon was at the wheel. In the back seat sat Sidney Delmuth and his underling, Shamlin. Delmuth was talking to Shamlin.

"Have you heard from the men you sent to the Green Mill?" he asked.

"No," answered Shamlin. "They were coming back to Gorky's place, if anything happened. That's my regular hangout, you know. I told Gorky I was going to be up here."

"You shouldn't have said anything about it," Delmuth reprimanded him.

"Gorky's O.K."

As the cab disappeared down the street, Benson and Grady came from the entrance of the little restaurant. The old man and his companion walked toward the corner.

As they proceeded on their path, a figure emerged from the darkness on the other side of the street. Neither man saw it. They did not notice that strange shape which kept pace with them, moving like a living shadow.

The two men reached Grady's car. The figure flitted toward them and merged with the wall of a building, not more than a dozen feet away.

"Let's go, Grady," said the old man. "We have a long ride ahead of us - to Massachusetts."

Grady grunted in response. The men entered the car. The vehicle moved along the street. Then, from the darkness beside the building, came a soft, taunting laugh.

Plans had been made. One plotter and his underling were on the way. The plans had been unheard. But the plotters were not leaving unseen.

The Shadow, man of swift action, had returned to New York from his rescue. With Shamlin as his clew, he had gone to Gorky's, and had learned the gangster's station. There, in the dark, he stood watching two murderous men depart.

What was their work to be? Whether The Shadow knew or did not know, his purpose would be the same. He alone could thwart the scheme that had brewed tonight.

CHAPTER XVII

WORD BY RADIO

It was late in the afternoon. A gloom was settling about Paul Hawthorne's cottage. Hawthorne and Stuart were seated on the porch, smoking their pipes.

Stuart had dropped in on Hawthorne with a purpose. It was the night before last that he had had his adventure at Mayo's lodge. The next afternoon, he had seen Mayo's plane return from New York.

Stuart had decided it would be inadvisable to call on Sherwood Mayo that evening. He had decided to wait another day. Now he was sounding out Hawthorne, to tell whether or not a visit would be wise.

"Have you seen Mayo since he returned?" asked Stuart.

"No," said Hawthorne. "I might run up there tonight. Would you like to come along?"

"Sure," said Stuart.

"I'll stop for you at the Inn," said Hawthorne. "I'll be there in my car after dinner."

Strolling down the road, Stuart found himself anticipating tonight's visit. He felt sure that the Filipino had not recognized him during the combat, two nights ago. After all, a visit to Mayo's was a bold way in which to avoid suspicion.

THERE was a letter for Stuart at the Inn. He looked at the envelope, and decided it must be from Harry Vincent.

Stuart had been expecting such a letter. Harry had instructed him to watch for one, and to be sure that no one saw him read it, for it might contain important instructions.

Opening the letter in a corner of the lobby, Stuart eagerly devoured its contents. It contained both information and orders; one as surprising as the other.

There will be danger at Greenhurst, soon. Stay with Sherwood

Mayo constantly. The old man who works with Grady is named Jeremiah

Benson. Inform me immediately if you hear any reference to that name.

If Mayo leaves Greenhurst, try to accompany him.

Be near a radio at either six o'clock or nine o'clock. The

announcement from WNX will have a message for you. Listen for any

words that are emphasized. They will be the message. This is a test

for future use.

Stuart reread the letter. It was clear on every point, but he wanted to be sure that he understood all its contents well enough to remember the data, for he intended to destroy the note immediately.

Looking across the lobby, he repeated certain facts; "Jeremiah Benson - stay with Mayo - WNX at six or nine -"

Nodding, Stuart again glanced at the letter. His eyes stared in bewilderment. While he had been looking away, the writing had completely disappeared!

Stuart turned the paper over, and found the other side blank. He crumpled the sheet and tossed it in the wastebasket.

"Clever idea," thought Stuart, as he entered the dining room.

It was after six o'clock when he had reached the hotel. He would have to wait for the nine-o'clock broadcast. He could hear it at Mayo's. Stuart had been out all afternoon; otherwise he would have received the letter a few hours before.

Hawthorne arrived after dinner. He and Stuart rode up to Mayo's home. Stuart noticed that Hawthorne was moody and thoughtful.

"What's the matter?" Stuart inquired.

"I'm just wondering," returned Hawthorne, "wondering about that last time we were up to Mayo's place. Do you remember that package of envelopes Mayo brought out of the desk drawer?"

Stuart did remember them, and he felt a bit uneasy at the reference. He decided, however, that it would be best to draw Hawthorne out.

"Yes," he replied. "As I remember it, he said that they would be of interest to you."

"But he found out they were the wrong ones." Hawthorne was irritated.

"I recall that."

"Well," said Hawthorne, "I'll bet that he hasn't brought the right ones with him from New York!"

"Why?"

"Because he's bluffing me."

"What for?"

"Listen, Bruxton," said Hawthorne confidentially, "Mayo asked you to stay up here at the lodge, didn't he? Would you like to accept his invitation?"

"Yes," said Stuart, secretly alert. This was working in with his plans. "It's a much nicer place than the Inn."

"We'll try to fix it tonight, then," said Hawthorne, "and I want you to do a favor for me, Bruxton."

"How?"

"Size up Mayo while you're there. Get a good idea of what he's like. I want to know."

"Why?"

"Well," explained Hawthorne, "Mayo and I haven't always hit it up so well. I know some things about him; he knows some about me.

"So far as I'm concerned, all the unpleasantness is ended. Mayo appears to have forgotten it, too. But maybe he hasn't. That's what I want to find out."

"I understand," said Stuart. "That's fair enough."

"There's a chance," said Hawthorne, "that Mayo has still got it in for me. That stunt of his the other night made me wonder.

"I don't like to be suspicious of the man, Bruxton, but he might have been trying to coax me up there while he was away - so I'd break into the place, just to find those envelopes."

"What then?" questioned Stuart, keenly interested in Hawthorne's theory.

"Well," said Hawthorne, "if I got nabbed, it would be bad for me. I'd be discredited up here in Greenhurst. My real-estate boom would go dead. Mayo would be the kingpin again."

THERE was more truth than theory in what Hawthorne said. Stuart remembered that battle with the Filipino. Had the man meant murder because he had thought Stuart to be Hawthorne?

Then came the recollection of the man in black who had been Stuart's rescuer. It made the mystery all the more perplexing. Stuart wisely said nothing to let Hawthorne know that he had gone to Mayo's in Hawthorne's stead. He began to feel a suspicion of Hawthorne.

Perhaps the real-estate man was doing the bluffing. Harry Vincent's note had said to stay with Mayo, if possible. Stuart realized that Hawthorne might be trying to involve him in a plot against Mayo.

"You're a good fellow, Bruxton," said Hawthorne. "I think you're a square-shooter. That's why I said what I did. I want to know if I stand all right with Mayo. That's all that I have in mind."

"All right," said Stuart; "if Mayo invites me, I'll stay."

They were passing the stone pillars, and Stuart glanced from the window of the car. He saw no sign of the man in black tonight.

Nevertheless, he could not be sure that the man was not there. The strange being in the cloak seemed to have power to melt away before observant eyes.

Sherwood Mayo seemed pleased by the arrival of his visitors. He received them in his living room, and smiled when Stuart asked him about his trip to New York.

"That's just commuting, in my ship," he said. "We hit two hundred miles an hour all the way. The trip only takes an hour and a half."

"You must have a great pilot," said Stuart.

"I have," declared Mayo. "George Fleming is one of the best men in the business. He's been with me four years.

"I'm going down to New York come morning. I'll take you along. We'll come back in the evening."

"How do you find this place at night?" asked Stuart.

"Easily. The course is well marked. I have a big searchlight on the lodge, and Louie always has it set to show the landing field. There's plenty of space here. Better than the Brookdale landing field, a couple of miles from here."

The mention of the Brookdale field brought another recollection to Stuart. He remembered the distant hum of a motor that he had heard two nights ago.

"I'll make a suggestion, Bruxton," declared Mayo, "why don't you come up here and stay a few days. I invited you the last time you were here."

"Yes," interposed Hawthorne, "why don't you, Bruxton?"

"I'd be glad to," said Stuart.

"Louie," ordered the millionaire, turning to the Filipino, "ask Fleming to run down to the Inn and bring Mr. Bruxton's luggage up here."

THE matter settled, Mayo glanced toward his radio set and turned the dials. A note chimed, and the announcer stated that it was exactly forty-five minutes past eight o'clock. Mayo pointed to the clock on his mantel.

"Look at that," he said. "The clock's on the dot. It's always right. The best clock I ever had!"

"What's coming over the air from WNX?" questioned Stuart, in a casual tone.

"I'll see," Mayo turned the dial and tuned in on a soft musical program. "That's WNX. I'll leave it there."

He settled back in his chair; then looked suddenly back and forth from Stuart to Hawthorne, as he uttered a sudden exclamation and snapped his fingers.

"What do you think happened here two nights ago?" he asked. "We had burglars!"

"Burglars?" echoed Hawthorne uneasily.

"Absolutely," declared Mayo. "Two of them. Both masked. Louie came down and found them."

"Did he chase them out?" asked Stuart.

"Yes and no," answered Mayo. "He nabbed one of them, but before he could overpower the fellow, the other showed up and spoiled it all. He knocked Louie unconscious.

"When Louie woke up, the pair of them were gone. They didn't get away with anything."

"That's fortunate," said Stuart. He glanced at Hawthorne as he spoke. He saw that the real-estate man doubted Mayo's story. It made Stuart feel, more than before, that Hawthorne's disbelief in Mayo's statements was unfounded.

Comparing Mayo with Hawthorne - the former a successful man, the latter a man of doubtful business practices - Stuart felt that in case of controversy, he would prefer to side with Sherwood Mayo.

The millionaire gave more details of the attempted burglary. They did not include an exact description of Louie's actions with the knife. Mayo mentioned that the Filipino had used his knowledge of jujutsu in disposing of the first invader; but he went no further with the details.

It seemed evident to Stuart that Louie must have soft-pedaled that part of the story when he related his adventure to his employer.

The clock on the mantel began to chime nine. Stuart listened intently as the voice of an announcer cut in on the radio program.

"You have listened to a FEW melodies from "DAYS of Long Ago."

Times are changing; and time is TOO precious to waste. Why WAIT? The

watch you buy should KEEP perfect time. It should be ON time all the

time. Remember, THE Paragon WATCH is the only watch -"

The rest of the announcement carried no emphasized words. Stuart was surprised at the ease with which he had picked up the secret message. Through his mind was flashing the sentence.

"Few days to wait. Keep on the watch."

It was the message that Harry Vincent had written him to expect. Stuart knew that it came from someone more important than Harry. In that he was right.

Without knowing its source, Stuart Bruxton had received a message from The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVIII

THE STAGE IS SET

It was Saturday noon. Sidney Delmuth, seated at the desk in his private office, was gazing thoughtfully from the window. There was an odd expression upon his suave face. The advertising man was both puzzled and pleased.

The cause of his mingled emotions was a single fact. For three days, Delmuth had been playing a tricky game with an invisible foe. Day or night, he could not loose himself from the impression that he was being watched.

Delmuth was perplexed because he had been unable to glimpse his mysterious enemy - the man whom he believed was The Shadow. He was pleased because he was sure that The Shadow's vigil was unending. For it was Sidney Delmuth's game to keep The Shadow occupied.

Although Delmuth was playing an important part in a game that was on the way, he had managed to arrange matters so that he had not spoken a single word that might have been informative to a concealed listener.

He had received certain telephone calls - at appointed places. He had let the people talk from the other end. These calls had always come to phones that had no extensions. Delmuth had given instructions by the simple formula of answering "yes" or "no" to the inquiries which came over the wire.

"The Shadow," murmured Delmuth softly, as he sat by the window. "He's watching me. He knows I'm in this. But he'll find out nothing. Tonight, of all nights!"

Matthews entered the office. "Everyone has left, sir," he said. "I am ready to leave. Are there any things you want done?"

"Nothing, Matthews," replied Delmuth. "You may go. I intend to remain here a short while."

A few minutes after the departure of Matthews, Delmuth arose and went into the other office. He looked all around.

He tried the closed door that led to the side corridor. He inspected the other inner office. Satisfied that he was absolutely alone, he sat down and waited.

As minutes ticked by, Delmuth continued to have the feeling that he was being watched. He felt sure that it must be his own imagination. It annoyed him, yet he smiled.

If his intuition should be correct, it meant that The Shadow was close at hand. That could be turned to Delmuth's purpose.

The telephone rang. Sidney Delmuth answered it. His words were simply replies to statements.

"Yes," he said. "Yes... Good... Yes... A good idea... You'll call then... Fine."

Delmuth hung up the receiver. He turned suddenly and faced the door that led to the side corridor.

Had that door opened softly while his back was turned? Delmuth tried the door. It was still locked.

Yet it was possible that The Shadow might have entered unseen, and the thought made Delmuth cautious. He repressed the desire to make another survey of the premises. He realized that if The Shadow had actually entered this place, there might be danger.

Delmuth, cagey as well as daring, was sure that The Shadow would not reveal himself unless compelled to do so. But should the issue be forced, the man of the dark would have to strike.

IN that brief telephone conversation, Sidney Delmuth had learned that Shamlin and Harmon were well on their way to Massachusetts. They were traveling a circuitous route, to mislead all followers. They had just informed Delmuth that they were on the watch, and would be prepared if they encountered interference.

The telephone rang again. Once more Delmuth answered. Again, his words were simply responses to statements from another party.

But this time, a thin smile played beneath the waxed mustache. Delmuth was learning something very much to his liking.

When the call was ended, Delmuth paced the office. He was thinking deeply, and his scheme was clever.

Within ten minutes, another call was scheduled. It would have no significance whatever. It would be from the party who had just called.

But on this occasion, Delmuth intended to make a pretense of betraying himself - all for the benefit of the man who he believed was hidden in this room.

As the ten minutes passed, Delmuth fought against his previous desire to begin a search.

There were half a dozen places where The Shadow could be hidden. Behind the typewriter desk in the corner. In one of the inner offices. On the far side of the huge filing cabinet - Delmuth's ponderings ended with the ringing of the telephone. He hurried to the switchboard and made an eager answer. Then, in a low voice, he began to talk.

"At my apartment tonight," he said. "That's when we'll close the deal. Everything depends upon it. We'll get him there, and if he don't talk - well, you know what will happen.

"No. I don't know what time. I'll be there at eight, and I'll call you after I hear from him. I may have to wait until midnight; but there's no chance of

anything going wrong. You get the idea? He will come there - I'm sure of it!"

After the telephone call, Delmuth picked up a sheet of paper and thoughtfully prepared a message. He went directly to the filing case, took out a file, and went over the details of an advertising account.

He made a correction in his message, and went back to the telephone. He called a telegraph office.

"Take a telegram," he said. "Benefacto Co., Hartford, Connecticut. Ready? Here's the message:

"Your booklet ready for printer. Must have remaining pages. Send at least twelve tonight. Strike out all unnecessary data. Booklet must be greatly condensed to meet specifications."

After giving his name and telephone number, Delmuth returned to the filing cabinet and deposited the folder pertaining to the Benefacto account. He went into the private office and obtained his hat. He strode briskly from the place, locking the outer door behind him.

GOING down in the elevator, Delmuth was congratulating himself. He had handled the situation cleverly.

He had not only received important messages without the possibility of anyone having learned them, but he had also made it appear that he had an important scheme brewing for that evening - a scheme important enough to attract The Shadow.

Most of all, Delmuth was pleased at the telegram he had dispatched. Apparently a mere detail of the advertising business, it was actually a message to Jeremiah Benson!

The Benefacto Co. was the place where messages were received by Benson. This telegram would be received by a man who would not understand its full import.

Later, that man would receive a call - presumably from Delmuth's office - stating that the telegram should have gone to another account. The message would be read to him. That caller would be Benson!

There were just three words in the message that had significance. Those were the middle words of the telegram.

"Twelve tonight. Strike."

Midnight was the time set for Benson and Grady to do their work. Shamlin and Harmon were to join them near Greenhurst.

Delmuth's destination was the Cobalt Club. He was going there because he was sure that it was one spot where he had been watched by The Shadow.

Every Saturday afternoon, certain of Sherwood Mayo's business acquaintances appeared at the Cobalt Club. Delmuth wanted to speak to one of them. He wanted to be overheard when he spoke.

His plan worked while he was lunching in the grill room. He waved in greeting to George Masters, one of the men who was associated with Mayo in the Purple Blossom enterprise.

Masters smiled sourly, but he stopped at Delmuth's table. Knowing Mayo's antagonism toward Delmuth, Masters wanted to avoid lengthy conversation.

"Your boss in town?" quizzed Delmuth.

"Yes," replied Masters. "He came in at noon. He's going back to the country this evening."

"Ah! A quick business trip."

"No. He just brought a couple of friends down with him. They're going back for the week-end. There wasn't any reason for Mayo being here."

"Glad to know that," said Delmuth testily. "Give him my regards when you see him."

There were many club members in the grill room when Delmuth spoke. He talked loud enough to be overheard, and hoped that the right party had listened to his words.

What Masters had said was not news to Delmuth. He knew where Sherwood Mayo was - he had learned it with the second call that he had received in the office.

But he felt sure he knew more about Mayo's intended plans than did Masters - in fact, more about them than anyone, with the single exception of Mayo himself.

Delmuth kept looking about him as he ate. He wanted to spot any member of the club who might be a possible agent of The Shadow, or The Shadow himself. There were none who excited Delmuth's suspicions.

Rutledge Mann was there, but, of all persons, the leisurely investment broker was the last one to be considered as in league with such an individual as The Shadow.

RUTLEDGE MANN had a reputation for being an indifferent worker. It was surprising, then, that he should decide to leave the comfortable club later in the afternoon, and wend his way to the Badger Building. He ascended to the ninth floor, and went to his office - Suite 909.

There, Mann waited with the air of a person who expected a visitor. The clock on a neighboring building showed half past three.

There was a sealed envelope on Mann's desk. He opened it and read a paper that was inside.

Five minutes later, a man entered the outer office. Rutledge Mann heard the noise of the door. He appeared and viewed the visitor.

"Are you Mr. Mann?" came the inquiry.

"Yes.

"I am Stuart Bruxton."

"Good! I was waiting for you."

Mann led the way into the inner office, and closed the door. He faced Stuart across the desk.

"Mr. Vincent informed me that you were coming to town with Sherwood Mayo," said Mann. "He said that you would be here today."

Yes," replied Stuart. "I came in Mayo's plane. I received Vincent's letter, telling me to stop in to see you, this afternoon."

"You are going back with Mayo?"

"At eight o'clock tonight."

"Bruxton," said Mann, in a confiding tone, "I know all about this affair that concerns you and Vincent. Like Vincent, I get my orders from a higher source, which I am not free to mention at this time.

"I can only tell you that the trouble which you encountered at Mayo's one night" - Stuart's eyes opened at the statement - "was turned to your advantage by - by this person for whom Vincent and I are working."

Mann's words served as an explanation to Stuart Bruxton, even though details were lacking. He understood, now, that the man in black had been at Mayo's for the definite purpose of watching developments in Greenhurst.

"I have received instructions," continued Mann, "and they concern you, Bruxton. Something is due to happen in Greenhurst - tonight."

"Shortly before midnight, four men will appear at Hawthorne's cottage. Two of them will be men whom you have encountered before - Jeremiah Benson and his man, Grady."

Stuart's eyes flashed at the mention of the fiends who had sought to kill him, that night in Maryland. Mann noted his expression and smiled slightly.

"Vincent will be in Greenhurst, also," he said. "He is following the other two men - who, we feel certain, will join Benson and Grady. At any event, Vincent will arrange to reach the Greenhurst Inn shortly after eleven o'clock."

"Therefore, you will terminate your stay at Mayo's lodge at eleven o'clock, so you can meet Vincent. Leaving New York at eight, you will reach Greenhurst - when?"

"Before ten."

"Excellent. Stay at Mayo's until eleven. You will receive a message at that hour - coming in an announcement from station WNX. It will tell you whether to go to the Inn - as we have planned - or to stay with Mayo, at the lodge. You can arrange that?"

"Easily," replied Stuart. "But if Mayo is in danger -"

"Do not worry about that," said Mann emphatically. "Vincent will explain all to you."

"But there may be trouble at Mayo's lodge -"

"Nothing will happen there while you are with Vincent," declared Mann cryptically.

Stuart Bruxton departed. Rutledge Mann waited. Four o'clock arrived. The telephone rang.

"Hello," said Mann. "Oh, yes, Vincent. All well?"

There was a brief response. Mann appeared satisfied. He hung up the receiver and waited again. Fifteen minutes passed. The telephone rang once more.

Mann's eyes gleamed as he responded.

"BRUXTON leaving at eight with Mayo," he said. "Vincent reports that he is following. The others have stopped to eat a late lunch. Vincent will continue. They are near Springfield."

A low voice came over the wire. Rutledge Mann had given his report. He was receiving instructions from The Shadow. The words that he heard surprised him; but the phlegmatic investment broker gave no visible sign.

"Instructions understood," was his brief comment.

Mann hung up the telephone and performed the same action that Sidney Delmuth had, a few hours before.

Instead of writing on a blank sheet of paper, however, Mann used a telegraph blank. He turned a knob on the wall, and waited until a messenger appeared.

"Thirty-five cents to Philadelphia," said the boy.

Rutledge Mann paid the bill, and the boy departed with the telegram. The investment broker stroked his chin thoughtfully. Although he had written the telegram, he could not understand The Shadow's purpose.

He was wondering why The Shadow had sent a telegram to Denby Chadwick - a telegram signed with the name of Sidney Delmuth!

CHAPTER XIX

WHAT THE SHADOW KNEW

It was nine o'clock the same evening. Sidney Delmuth sat alone in his apartment. An ash tray filled with cigarette butts lay on the table beside him.

Delmuth was playing host to an invisible audience of one man. Ever since that night at Benson's, he had been convinced that The Shadow could be anywhere. He had lived in apprehension; but he had fought to conceal his fears.

Tonight, he was doing the opposite. Delmuth was calm at heart, but playing the part of a man afraid.

Crime was taking place tonight - far from New York. Delmuth's hands were free from it, but he was as important in the scheme as were the men who had set forth to murder.

Delmuth, pretending that he, too, meant to commit crime, was luring The Shadow away from the danger zone.

It was a waiting game - a stall until midnight, when all would be ended at Greenhurst. Delmuth's apartment, with its many rooms, was a spot where The Shadow could lurk with ease. Delmuth was sure that he was being watched, and he sought to make it more evident.

With seeming nervousness, the man lighted another cigarette. He walked across the room to the telephone.

With an uncertain laugh, Delmuth put down the phone and strode to the window. He stood looking through the pane as though in deep thought.

Actually, his shrewd eyes were watching the reflection of the room behind him. He was seeking to observe some sign of The Shadow.

Doors seemed to move. Curtains appeared to rustle. Was The Shadow here? Or were these mere imaginings of Delmuth's troubled brain?

The door of the apartment was unlocked, and Delmuth listened intently for its click. He realized that his fancies might be caused by anticipation. Perhaps The Shadow had not yet arrived.

Delmuth was ready to face the mystery man. He knew The Shadow's ways. He had heard that The Shadow never killed except when attacked, or when it was necessary to save a life.

Therefore, Delmuth was ready. Let The Shadow hide in the dark; let him come into the light. So long as he remained here, he could not combat the fiends of crime who were forth on Delmuth's work tonight!

A slight sound came to Delmuth's ears. He listened intently. It was the latch of the door! Someone was entering the apartment. Delmuth could hear the sound of soft footsteps.

He turned quickly from the window, and stood beside his chair. The man was in the hall of the apartment, and the foot steps were coming onward!

The door was ajar. It began to open. Delmuth, his hands in the pockets of his dinner jacket, waited tensely. He saw a figure in the darkness beyond the door. It hesitated there, then entered.

Denby Chadwick stepped into the room!

SIDNEY DELMUTH stepped forward. His eyes sparkled angrily. His apprehensions were gone.

What was this fellow doing here tonight? Delmuth had thought that he was in Philadelphia. He had never expected this visitor.

"Chadwick!" exclaimed Delmuth.

Chadwick was within the door. He slipped to one side and stood with his back against the wall, his hands opening and closing nervously.

"You wanted to see me," he said. "Here I am!"

"I wanted to see you?" quizzed Delmuth, incredulously.

"Yes, I received your telegram, telling me to be here - telling me that you had changed your mind - that you would let me have that paper I gave you -"

"I never sent you a telegram," Delmuth denied.

"Here it is."

Chadwick extended a sheet of yellow paper. Delmuth seized it angrily. He read it aloud.

COME TO MY APARTMENT THIS EVENING STOP

IMPORTANT STOP

WILL MAKE AGREEMENT YOU WISH STOP

DO NOT REPLY STOP COME STOP

Delmuth was actually puzzled. His own name appeared at the bottom of the telegram, and the message had been sent from New York that afternoon.

What hoax was this? Why?

"You're going to play fair, aren't you?" pleaded Chadwick. "That telegram came from you. I played square with you. I gave you those certificates. I don't want them back. All I want is -"

"Your confession," interrupted Delmuth.

"Don't call it that!" protested Chadwick. "I want the paper I gave you. Then I'm safe, Delmuth. Even if I do get in wrong with Mayo.

"Let him fire me - I've got money now. But that, paper! I must have it!"

Sidney Delmuth was swelling with rage. He had not expected an interruption of this sort. It was interfering with his plans.

"Get out!" he ordered. "Get out! If you bother me again, I'll make the whole thing public!"

"You can't," said Chadwick plaintively. "It would ruin you as well as myself -"

"You fool!" growled Delmuth. "It was all your work. I took no part in it. I've got that confession of yours so as to keep you quiet. You listened to my plans. You tried what I said.

"Now the consequences are yours!"

Chadwick made no reply. His face was pale and drawn. He stared as though in a trance. He made no effort to move, and his presence continued to annoy Delmuth.

"You want that paper, eh?" quizzed Delmuth. "I'll let you have it!"

HE strode to a table and opened the drawer. He brought out a metal box, which he unlocked. From it, Delmuth produced a folded sheet of paper. He opened the paper, glanced at it, and approached Chadwick.

Delmuth held out the paper, and Chadwick seized it eagerly. His eyes gleamed as he recognized the document he wanted.

"You're giving it to me!" he exclaimed.

"No!" retorted Delmuth.

With an angry motion, the advertising man snatched the paper from Chadwick's grasp. Delmuth stepped back and his leered maliciously.

"I'm not giving it to you," he said. "I'm showing it to you - that's all! Showing it to you, so you'll remember it!"

"Now go! Stay away from here. You're yellow, and you know it!"

Denby Chadwick quailed at the denunciation. He drew back when Delmuth threatened, and his form turned toward the door. Delmuth stood, sneering.

"Get along!" he ordered. "Move fast!"

He approached Chadwick, who was halting in his departure. Delmuth's pose was threatening. He felt that Chadwick feared him, and his contempt was great. He reached out his right hand to thrust the young man through the door.

With wild, excited eyes, Denby Chadwick wheeled. His hand had been resting on the edge of his pocket. Now it came into view, carrying an automatic.

Sidney Delmuth saw the gun. Like a flash, he leaped forward, gripping Chadwick's arm. The men grappled; then came a muffled report.

Sidney Delmuth fell away. He half staggered, half slumped; then sprawled upon the floor. Denby Chadwick had pressed the muzzle of his gun against the villain's body. A single bullet had done the work. Sidney Delmuth was dead.

Denby Chadwick stood motionless as a statue. The smoking automatic was hanging from his hand.

Then the killer's self-control returned. He crept forward and knelt beside the body of Delmuth. He plucked the sheet of paper from the dead hand. He tore it into bits.

Holding the pieces, he went to the window and slowly raised the sash.

With a wild fling, Chadwick tossed the fragments to the wind. Turning, Chadwick lay the automatic upon the floor beside Delmuth's body. He studied the scene uncertainly, wondering how he could cover up this trail. Chadwick's lips were twitching nervously. He looked about the room hurriedly.

In an instant, he stood petrified.

A tall, black figure had appeared from nowhere. Like a monster of the night, it had come into this room of death.

A choking gasp came from Chadwick as he saw the sinister form - a man clad in black cloak and hat, whose face was invisible.

"You - you" - Chadwick was stammering - "who are you?"

"I am The Shadow," came the whispered reply.

THE sound of that eerie voice brought tremors to Denby Chadwick. He stared at the man in black; then looked toward the body on the floor.

"I - I - it was self-defense," he said. "I didn't want to kill him -"

"You will never be accused of this crime," declared The Shadow. "You may remain assured of that."

The sinister tone of the words brought new fear to Chadwick. He looked at the figure before him. He saw the glare of The Shadow's eyes, beneath the brim of that turned-down hat. "You - you" - he stammered - "you will not tell -"

"You slew a murderer," declared The Shadow. "This was no evil deed. But you have killed before, Denby Chadwick.

"Once - not long ago - you entered a house and murdered a defenseless old man. Your old uncle -"

"It cannot be proved!" screamed Chadwick. "You cannot prove it! I had an alibi! I was not accused! Only Delmuth knew. Only Delmuth - and he" - Chadwick paused to survey his handiwork - "he is dead!"

"You are wrong," said The Shadow, in a sinister whisper. "I have learned your crime!"

"What if you have?" challenged Chadwick suddenly. "What if I did kill the old man? He was a beast - even if he was my uncle. I owed him money and he hounded me.

"I met Delmuth. He wanted me to get those certificates that Mayo was after. He told me how to get them. So I did.

"He was the only one that knew - Delmuth. He had my confession. But it's gone, now. Gone - in a thousand pieces -"

"Your confession is not needed," declared The Shadow. "What use is a confession, when one has proof? You are depending on your alibi. One word would shatter it.

"You think that you have destroyed the paper that told your guilt. There are thousands of papers that declare it. Here is one!"

The black-gloved hand reached forward and held a sheet of paper before Chadwick's eyes. It was simply a copy of the timetable that showed the schedule of the train which Denby Chadwick had taken on the night of his uncle's death.

"There is the proof," declared The Shadow. "Your story was accepted because no one thought to question it. You were seen leaving on the local train you were seen arriving. It seemed impossible that you could have killed your uncle.

"But this table tells its story. Thirty-five minutes after your train left Philadelphia, it arrived at the station near your uncle's house. There you left it - a little over a mile from Chester. You went to your uncle's home and killed him.

"It was the work of ten minutes. You hurried on to Chester - five minutes more - in time to catch the express that stopped there. The express reached the town of Newark three minutes before the local. You left the express and boarded the local again, as it was leaving the station."

Denby Chadwick stood aghast. The Shadow's words were true. There, in his hand, was the evidence. The timetable showed the local and the express, scheduled side by side.

"A perfect alibi!" declared The Shadow. "But not one of your testifiers stated that he had seen you while the train was between Essington and Newark.

"You were at work then. At five thirty, you took the local. At six five, you left it at Essington. At six thirty-five, you boarded the express at Chester. You walked a little more than a mile in twenty-five minutes, and committed murder on the way!

"At seven three, the express reached Newark. You took the local again at seven six. That was when you went to the smoker and joined the men there. You were with them when the train reached Havre de Grace at seven forty-five.

"This sheet of paper ends your alibi. You are a murderer - even though it was Delmuth who urged you to the crime. You will pay the penalty for that murder, Denby Chadwick.

"Tonight, a marked copy of this timetable goes in the mail to the authorities. It was I who sent you the telegram, bringing you here tonight, that you might learn that your crime was known!"

Frenzied, Chadwick started to reach for his gun. The sight of an automatic in a black-gloved hand withheld him. He stood, trembling, while The Shadow swept across the room and stood before the door.

"You have committed murder," came the accusing voice. "Your crime is known. The penalty for such a crime is death!"

The man in black was gone, vanished in an instant. The Shadow had other work to do tonight. Denby Chadwick stood beside the body of Sidney Delmuth. The Shadow's last words echoed in his ears.

"The penalty for such a crime is death."

SLOWLY, mechanically, the young man stooped and picked up his gun. He stood like a man in a trance. His next action was deliberate. He pointed

the gun toward himself, and stared into the muzzle.

A second shot sounded in Delmuth's apartment. Denby Chadwick lay on the floor, beside the body of the man he had killed.

The Shadow's words were true. The penalty was death. Denby Chadwick had avenged his uncle's death by slaying the murderer. He had killed himself!

CHAPTER XX

AT MAYO'S LODGE

A MIGHTY plane roared through the night. Its passengers were patiently awaiting the end of the journey. The speedometer dial showed one hundred and eight miles an hour. The altitude was slowly decreasing from five thousand feet.

Sherwood Mayo brought out a watch and pointed to its hands. The time was half past nine.

The millionaire nodded, signifying that they were reaching their destination at the time he had anticipated. Stuart Bruxton nodded in return.

The plane was descending rapidly. Fleming, the pilot, had spotted the landing field. The ship swooped downward and swept along the ground. The cabin jolted as the speed diminished and the plane came to a stop. Fleming taxied back toward the lodge.

The three men entered the building to find Louie awaiting them. The Filipino had prepared coffee and sandwiches. Mayo and his guests sat down to discuss the trip.

"I said we'd be here at nine-thirty," declared Mayo. "Remember, I called up Greenhurst at six o'clock - before we had dinner?"

"Yes," answered Stuart. "You mean I called up for you, and you talked to Louie. What a time I had getting that Greenhurst operator!"

"Telephone was out of order, sir," said the Filipino.

"When I called?" questioned Mayo.

"Making trouble then, sir. Now it is no good, sir."

Mayo snorted angrily. He picked up the phone and jiggled the hook. There was no response.

"Well," said Mayo. "we won't have to use it tonight. I'll inform the telephone company in the morning. This rural service is terrible."

"That was a great trip," declared Stuart. "Fleming is a great pilot. This night flight was interesting. But I was lost the minute we got away from the field."

"I couldn't place myself, either," Mayo said. "Saw the lights of some cities, but that was all. I was sleepy. Nice trip, but I'm glad it wasn't longer. I prefer the day ride."

The clock above the fireplace chimed ten. Stuart glanced at his watch.

"The clock's fast, isn't it?" he asked.

Mayo looked at his own watch.

"So it is," he said. "Never fast before. I can't understand that. Were you tinkering with it, Louie?"

"Clock stopped," said the Filipino. "I set it and start it again."

"That explains it," said Mayo.

LOOKING at the clock, Stuart observed the deer head above it. His eyes roved about the room, and he took in all the familiar furniture. The place was like home to Stuart, for he had been living at the lodge until today.

Louie was serving more coffee. Stuart had never forgotten the menace of the Filipino. Perhaps it was the recollection of that murderous knife. Tonight, however, the man did not seem as repulsive as before. Stuart could not tell why.

A pleasant half hour passed. Fleming came in and joined the others with their coffee. Stuart strolled over and tuned in the radio on station WNX. He settled back in a comfortable chair, and listened to the program.

The clock on the mantel chimed eleven. Mayo had not changed its hands. That meant five minutes to wait. Five interminable minutes, thought Stuart.

Benson and Grady - murderers both - were in this neighborhood! Tonight, he and Harry Vincent would have a chance to settle scores with the fiends!

Eleven o'clock at last! The voice of the announcer:

Before we PROCEED with our next number, AS previously announced,

let me remind you that the makers of Neapolitan Spaghetti have

PLANNED an unusual treat for you -

There was the secret message!

"Proceed as planned."

Stuart became suddenly alert.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "I must drop down to the Inn, Mayo. I've been expecting some mail -"

"Get it tomorrow," suggested the millionaire.

"No," said Stuart, "I'll have to pick it up now. I can get it before midnight. I'll run down there and see you later."

"How about the car, Fleming?" questioned Mayo.

"Flat tire, sir," said Fleming. "I can fix it -"

"I'll walk down," interposed Stuart. "I'll see you later, Mayo. Don't wait up if I'm a bit late for you."

"I'd go along with you," said Mayo, "but I am a trifle tired. I don't know why - we only came two hundred and forty miles, from New York."

Walking from the lodge, Stuart hurried his steps and passed the stone pillars. He happened to glance back, and was surprised to note that he could see the lights. The rise of ground between the house and the gate was not so great as he had supposed.

He walked along the road to the Inn. His mind was working rapidly.

The presence of Benson and Grady in Greenhurst must be a threat. Knowing that the two malefactors were close by, Stuart gripped his .32.

It would be wise to be on the alert, tonight. He felt sure that he and Harry Vincent would have important work to do.

Stuart did not like the idea of leaving Sherwood Mayo. He had conceived a real friendship for the millionaire, and he realized that Mayo might be the man whom Benson and Grady menaced.

Harry would give him the details; after all, there would be no danger until midnight. They would have time to get back to Mayo's - especially as Harry would probably be there in his coupe.

There were four enemies to be encountered: Benson, Grady, and two others. There would have to be a surprise attack to conquer them. Stuart and Harry were only two -

Then came the thought of the man in black - that mysterious person who appeared by night, who had rescued Stuart during the fight with the Filipino, who sent his secret messages by radio. If he were here tonight!

The thought gave Stuart keen satisfaction.

SO engrossed was Stuart in his thoughts that he did not realize how far he had gone along the road. He stopped, a bit puzzled, at a crossroads. He could not recall that crossing.

There was a signpost. He struck a match and looked at it curiously. It indicated a town called Dalewood. That was odd. Stuart had not heard of such a place in the vicinity of Greenhurst.

He started along the road again; then realized that he was unfamiliar with his surroundings. The road was entirely new to him; yet between the Inn and Mayo's lodge, the road was easy to follow, with no chance of going astray.

A man was coming toward the crossroads, swinging a lantern. Stuart was impatient as he awaited the man's arrival. The stranger appeared to be a farm hand.

"Hello," greeted Stuart. "I've lost my way coming down from the lodge. Can you tell me how to get to the Greenhurst Inn?"

"Greenhurst?" The man spoke the name with a puzzled drawl. "There ain't no place round here by that name, I don't reckon -"

"I started from Mr. Mayo's lodge just -"

"Sure. I know where that is. Did you come in that airship of his?"

"Yes," said Stuart patiently, "I came in the plane. I started out to the hotel - the Greenhurst Inn - at Greenhurst -"

"I never heard of Greenhurst," objected the man. "There ain't no place named Greenhurst in this part of Virginia -"

"Virginia!" exclaimed Stuart. "Is this Virginia?"

It was the other man's turn to be astonished. He looked at Stuart as one would look at a crazy man.

Slowly, the explanation dawned on Stuart. It was so incredible that at first he could not believe it!

Sherwood Mayo had decoyed him here. For some reason, he had suspected his new-found friend. The shrewd millionaire had two lodges that were identical - even to the furnishings - even to the Filipino valet!

It was not Louie at the lodge - that was why the murderous look was missing. It must be the Filipinos brother - perhaps his twin.

Stuart remembered the clock on the mantel - the clock that was never wrong! The lights of the house, visible from the gate! The flat tire on the car!

The plane had headed south after having New York. At night, Stuart had not known the direction was wrong. Mayo had spoken the truth when he said they were two hundred and forty miles from New York; but it was two hundred and forty miles in the wrong direction!

THE call to the real Louie in the afternoon had been misleading. The fake Louie had said that the phone at the Virginia lodge was out of order. A prearranged plan - to prevent Stuart from calling the Inn!

It suddenly dawned upon Stuart that he was nearly five hundred miles from where he was supposed to be! Up in Massachusetts, Harry Vincent would be waiting for him.

Benson and Grady were there, too, planning some outrage. Who was to be their victim?

The answer came to Stuart.

Paul Hawthorne!

The man's fears of Sherwood Mayo were well grounded. The millionaire was in league with the assassins!

That was why Louie, the Filipino, had sought to kill Stuart! He had thought him to be Hawthorne. Mayo wanted the real-estate man to die a sudden death. It would have been explainable, with Mayo absent, and Hawthorne caught in the act of burglary!

Stuart realized he could do nothing. He had been decoyed. He was merely the victim of a practical joke - so far as Mayo's action was concerned.

Stuart could not help Harry; he could not even serve as a witness if Harry should be killed along with Hawthorne!

There was only one course. It came to Stuart in a flash. Dashing away from the astounded man with the lantern, Stuart started toward the lodge, drawing his revolver as he ran.

He would settle this with Sherwood Mayo! Settle it at the point of a gun!

Stuart stopped suddenly. Perhaps that was what Mayo wanted! Would it be wise to go back there now?

As Stuart hesitated, he heard the roar of an airplane motor. A bright light rose above the trees. The speed plane whirred overhead, northward bound. Its brilliant light and its droning zoom were mighty mockeries to the frustrated man who stood below!

CHAPTER XXI

FOUR MEN OF MURDER

It was nearly midnight. The clearing in front of Paul Hawthorne's cottage was black and still. There was nothing to indicate the presence of hidden enemies.

Yet they were here tonight. In the fringe of the woods directly in front of the house, two men were crouched, waiting.

An automobile swung in from the road. It pulled up before the house. A man alighted and walked into the glare of the headlights. His face showed plainly as he turned. The pallid features of Paul Hawthorne were revealed to the men who watched.

"He's back," whispered one.

It was Jeremiah Benson who spoke. Grady was his silent comrade.

The lights on the car went out. The man entered the house. A dim lamp showed through a screened window.

"Ready?" questioned Grady.

"No," replied Benson. "Harmon and Shamlin are coming. We shall wait for them."

Scarcely a minute elapsed after the old man's remark before there was a slight sound from the woods close by. A low whistle followed. Benson replied. Shamlin and Harmon came creeping through the darkness. The four men of crime were together.

"All set?" questioned Shamlin.

"Yes," returned Benson. "He's in the house now. He went out nearly an hour ago. Someone called him up from the station. Grady was listening by the window. He came back, alone. We were waiting for you men. What kept you?"

Shamlin laughed.

"A wise guy, following us," he said. "We caught on to his game this afternoon. He was on our trail, in a coupe. So we fixed things for him.

"Instead of getting here early, we headed for a town ten miles away. At eleven o'clock, I spotted a curve in the road. That's where we gave it to him!"

"You bumped him off?"

"Tried to. We stopped past the turn and turned out the lights. When he came around, Harmon was ready for him, and opened up with a smoke wagon.

"The guy was headed right into the bullets, but he used his noodle. There was an open fence on the other side of the road, and he shot right through it, into a field."

"He wound up against a stone wall. Smashed his car. We didn't wait. We shoved off and came here, straight."

"You should have bumped him off!" Benson said.

"Why take a chance? If we'd gone after him, he might have been waiting for us with a gat. We picked a road way off in the country. It will take him a couple of hours to get out of that mess. Then how is he going to trail us?"

Benson grunted an agreement. He knew that the gangsters had come directly to Greenhurst, and had left their car in the woods. The pursuer - whoever he might be - would at least be delayed, even if he had escaped serious injury.

It was midnight. Hawthorne, in his cottage, was at the mercy of the invaders. It was time to act. Benson quickly stated his campaign.

"You go to the window, Grady," he ordered. "Pull away that loose screen, if you see Hawthorne sitting in the chair near the window. Nail him from in back. I'll be watching at the door.

"You, Shamlin, come along with me. You take the back door, Harmon. It's unlocked, and it leads to a hall that goes into the living room. If he tries to make a get-away, you'll be waiting for him.

"Have your gats, but no shooting unless he puts up a battle. Work quick, though, if there's any trouble.

"We've got to get this guy Hawthorne and get him for rights. Take him alive is best - dead if we have to go the limit!"

The men moved silently through the dark. They reached their appointed positions.

It was gloomy in the room. A single light burned in the corner. There, half facing the door, sat Paul Hawthorne, a book spread before him. He was reading by the light of the lamp.

Benson watched through the screen door. Veiled by darkness, the old man could see all that was taking place.

The screen moved in the window behind Hawthorne's shoulder. The reading man did not appear to notice the slight noise that it caused. Grady had done the job neatly.

Now, Grady was in view. With livid, leering face, the killer was coming silently through the window.

Benson watched closely, while Shamlin, close beside him, was keeping an eye toward the clearing.

In Grady's right hand was a short piece of iron pipe. Grady knew how to handle that implement with effectiveness. It was poised above Hawthorne's head as the killer leaned through the window.

Benson was watching for the blow. He had ordered Grady to deliver a neat stroke that would stun the victim. That, to Grady, was a simple matter.

Hawthorne's head was inclined forward. The back of his skull made a perfect target for Grady's blow. It was only a matter of seconds now, Benson thought. But at that instant, there came an unexpected interruption.

The book toppled from Paul Hawthorne's lap. Simultaneously, the man shot out his left hand and pulled the cord of the lamp.

As the room was plunged in darkness, a pistol shot blazed from the chair. Hawthorne's right hand, beneath the book, had discharged an automatic.

With leveled revolver, Benson dashed into the dark room, Shamlin at his heels. The shot had been directed at Grady; Benson did not know whether or not it had found its mark.

The old man's gun spat bullets toward the chair where Hawthorne had been. Shamlin joined in the fire.

Then came a flash from another corner of the room! Both attackers aimed in that direction.

Answering shots responded. There was a cry as Shamlin fell. With an oath, Jeremiah Benson emptied his revolver toward the corner, shooting straight at the last flash of flame.

ALL became silent. Benson reached the lamp. He pulled the cord. He looked about the room.

On the floor, in opposite corners of the room, lay the bodies of Shamlin and Harmon. It was Harmon who had fired from the corner. His shots had clipped his crony, Shamlin!

Benson, in return, had fatally injured Harmon. Only now did the old man realize his mistake.

Where was Grady? There was no sign of him at the window.

Where was Hawthorne? He had disappeared.

As Benson stood, bewildered, a figure arose from behind a chair. The man bore the features of Paul Hawthorne; but he acted with a precision that Hawthorne had never shown.

Long arms shot forward and caught Jeremiah Benson by the throat. With a twist, the clutching hands hurled the old man to the floor. Benson's gun fell from his helpless fingers. The scoundrel lay stunned.

From the lips of Paul Hawthorne came a low, mocking laugh. It was the laugh of The Shadow. He was the man whom the killers had sought to capture.

The Shadow, master of disguise, had played the part of Paul Hawthorne. Waiting the closing of the trap, he had trapped the trappers!

With a contemptuous look at the form of Jeremiah Benson, The Shadow strode from the cottage. He returned, garbed in cloak and hat that he had brought from Hawthorne's car.

Jeremiah Benson, unarmed and bewildered, was sitting up when he saw the strange figure enter. There was a low, whispered command.

With hands raised; with the muzzle of an automatic pressing between his shoulders, Jeremiah Benson was forced out into the night.

Several minutes later, a car arrived in front of the cottage. Hawthorne clambered from it and uttered an exclamation of surprise when he recognized his own automobile parked in front.

"Here's my car!" he cried. "I wonder how it got here? Who could have taken it from the station?"

He rushed into the cottage, followed by the man who had come with him. At the entrance, Hawthorne stopped. His voice became a stammer. His face blanched as he saw the bodies of Harmon and Shamlin lying on the floor.

Who were these men? Why had they come here? How had they been killed?

Noting the open window, Hawthorne managed to get that far. Peering out, he saw another body on the ground. It was the dead form of Grady. The Shadow's perfect shot had reached the killer's heart!

Hawthorne could not understand. There had been slaughter here, in his home, and three dead men remained. It all seemed unexplainable, yet Hawthorne realized that this spot had not been accidentally chosen for a gun fray.

He knew that he had been picked as a victim for tonight; that the dread he had felt of Mayo had been warranted!

Three murderous men had come to slay him, Hawthorne knew. Somehow, someone had intervened. The would-be killers had paid the price of their misdeeds!

Hawthorne's nerve began to fail. He stumbled from the house. He wanted to be away from this scene of carnage. Whatever had happened here was a total mystery.

Only two men could have told the story; but Hawthorne did not know of their existence.

Plodding along the road to Sherwood Mayo's lodge, Jeremiah Benson was still obeying the orders of his captor. The fiendish old man was cursing beneath his breath. For his ears were ringing with the sound of a soft, taunting laugh.

The laugh of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XXII

THE LAST FLIGHT

THE clock on Sherwood Mayo's mantel was nearing two o'clock. It brought no comfort to two bound men who rested on the floor. One was Jeremiah Benson. The other was Louie, the Filipino.

The Shadow had surprised Mayo's servant. He had clicked handcuffs on the wrists of both his captives.

Standing above the prisoners, The Shadow was a tall figure of black. Jeremiah Benson, staring upward, could barely detect the gleam of two burning eyes beneath the masking hat. A laugh came from the hidden lips.

"Your crimes are at an end!" came a sinister, jibing voice. "You have lived too long, Jeremiah Benson. You are waiting now - waiting the arrival of the only man to whose instructions you have ever submitted. Sherwood Mayo will be here soon!"

"I don't know Mayo," snarled Benson.

The Shadow ignored the protest.

"I divined your game long ago," said The Shadow. "I have heard of your past doings, Benson. You were a man who specialized in blackmail and in murder - you and your evil henchman, Grady. Blackmail was preferable. Murder was useful - when necessary.

"You finally encountered one man who thwarted your schemes - Sherwood Mayo. But he offered you a greater field.

"Backed by his millions, you were to embark upon a greater career. But first, Mayo had work for you to do. His hands were not clean. There were persons who knew too much about him.

"One was Herbert Brockley. He eluded you. So his murder was arranged in France, through hired assassins. But Brockley, fearing his end, gave important papers to a man named Wallace Powell.

"Those papers were dangerous for Mayo. Powell knew Sidney Delmuth - a newcomer in the blackmail ring - an agent whom Mayo himself had provided. Through Delmuth, a meeting was arranged between you and Powell.

"Ten thousand dollars for his information. But Powell never received his money. He knew too much. Grady killed him.

"By mistake, Grady murdered an innocent victim. There was another man, who escaped your weakened bridge. You left him in a burning house. He was rescued. That is news to you!

"Grant Chadwick knew facts concerning Mayo. He also possessed interests which Mayo coveted. Grant Chadwick's death was cleverly contrived by Delmuth. The old man's nephew was the killer. Like Delmuth, Denby Chadwick has paid the penalty.

"One more remained. Paul Hawthorne. He knew less than the others regarding Mayo's ways. But he knew too much. So a killing was arranged here tonight.

"The cleverest part of all the scheming was the arrangement between Mayo and Delmuth. I discovered that one night when Delmuth went to Mayo's home. He took an envelope with him.

"After leaving Mayo's home, he removed a paper from the envelope and destroyed it. There was just one inference; Delmuth took a message to Mayo and brought away another; Mayo removed the first and put the second in its place. I saw through that scheme."

Benson was still glaring, but the amazed look in the old man's eyes showed that The Shadow's statements were correct.

"Delmuth and Mayo!" said The Shadow. "Pretended enemies! Actually, the brains of a blackmail ring, beginning operations on a tremendous scale. Eliminating those who might interfere.

"You, Benson" - the voice was ironical - "were but a tool in their hands. A tool, for them; just as Grady was a tool for you."

Half rising, Jeremiah Benson spat curses at the man in black. The Shadow laughed. The clock on the mantel chimed twice.

Turning, The Shadow strode toward the door. Benson wondered at the action. The Shadow had performed it before. Returning, The Shadow spoke final words.

"Mayo will be here tonight," he said. "He, too, is playing some clever game. But he will come. Let him come."

AN automobile was driving up to the door of the lodge. The Shadow went to the hall and was obscured in the darkness.

A man was approaching. The door opened. Harry Vincent stopped short as he heard a low, weird whisper.

To Harry, it was a voice that he had heard before. It was a voice that he obeyed - the voice of The Shadow.

Harry listened while he heard instructions. Then he walked inside, alone.

He saw no one as he passed through the hall, but as he entered the living room, he heard a sound from outside. Someone was driving away in the car.

The Shadow had gone. His agent was in charge, awaiting the arrival of Sherwood Mayo.

Harry had met with temporary disaster that night. The wrecking of the car had delayed him, but he had managed to obtain another automobile. He had arrived late - but in time to be of service to The Shadow.

Harry could not understand The Shadow's presence here, for he knew that The Shadow had been in New York that evening. He did not know of the flying field near Brookdale, where an automobile had been waiting. The Shadow had come by air.

Sherwood Mayo had managed to mislead The Shadow by flying to Virginia. But Mayo could not know that The Shadow was here at Greenhurst. Soon - if The Shadow divined correctly - Mayo would return, to find a trap.

Harry continued his vigil. Then, from far away, came the thrumming of an airplane motor.

Harry drew an automatic from his pocket. He went to the side door of the lodge, and looked out over the landing space, where the searchlight glared.

THE roaring became terrific. A plane swooped down from the sky and rolled along the ground. It taxied back toward the lodge.

Two men clambered from the ship. Sherwood Mayo and Fleming were approaching.

Harry waited. He was ready for a double capture. But he had not reckoned with the cunning of Sherwood Mayo.

The millionaire had one unalterable rule. Whenever the plane arrived, Louie awaited in the doorway, clad in his white coat. This was a detail that had escaped Stuart Bruxton's observation.

Sherwood Mayo was wily, and he sensed danger. He saw the opened door, but did not see the man hidden in the darkness. Harry was awaiting his close approach.

Mayo, acting upon a sudden hunch, slipped his hand into his coat pocket. As he neared the door, he dropped to the ground and fired a shot at the open door. Fleming duplicated his action.

The shot was a lucky one. It struck Harry in the shoulder.

Gamely, Harry tried to return the fire. His shots went wide. He staggered back from the door as Mayo launched a volley of shots.

Harry stumbled through the hall, instinctively clutching his left shoulder. Mayo's lucky shot had wounded him. Crippled, Harry knew that retreat was the only course. He gained the front door and staggered out just as Mayo and Fleming arrived.

More bullets spattered the door. It was Fleming who was shooting. Sherwood Mayo had gone to the aid of Benson and Louie.

Knowing that an attack would be useless, Harry crept along the side of the house, determined to prevent the escape of the enemy before the arrival of The Shadow. He was grimly determined to do his utmost, despite the painfulness of his wound.

Reaching the back of the house, Harry laid low. Then, gazing out toward the landing field, he saw the four men appear from the other side of the lodge.

Benson and the Filipino were being rushed to safety by their rescuers. Raising his right hand, Harry fired. He saw the handcuffed Filipino stumble and fall.

Harry fired again. Mayo turned and shot at the corner of the house. A bullet whistled by Harry's head.

Fleming was helping Louie on toward the plane. Mayo was Harry's target now. The millionaire seemed to possess a charm against bullets. Every shot that Harry fired went wide. Mayo's bullets were nicking the corner of the house, too close for safety.

Harry dropped flat and waited. Mayo turned and hurried toward the plane. Harry pointed his gun and coolly pressed the trigger. The calculated aim proved to be of no avail. The gun was empty!

There was no chance now to stop the fleeing men. They had reached the plane. Fleming was helping Benson and Louie into the cabin from the other side. Sherwood Mayo had reached the safety spot.

Desperately, Harry tried to reload his gun; but his left arm was numb and helpless. While he attempted his painful task, he heard the roar of the airplane motor. The big propeller was whirling, and the ship was moving along the ground, away from the house.

It took off in the glare of the searchlight, carrying its passengers away from the danger spot. Harry chided himself for his inability to prevent the escape. The return of The Shadow would be useless, now!

IN the cabin of the fleeing plane, Sherwood Mayo was examining the wound that Louie had received. Harry's shot had clipped the man's hip.

The plane was high above the ground, rising away from Greenhurst. It swerved suddenly; Mayo, glancing from the window of the cabin, saw the cause.

Coming at an angle was another plane, heading directly for the fleeing ship!

Fleming, up ahead, had seen the menace. A skilled pilot, he recognized the danger.

He thought, at first, that there would be a crash of planes. Then, as the other ship approached, bullets from a machine gun whirred through the

fuselage of Sherwood Mayo's plane.

It was The Shadow who had opened the attack!

Fleming saw one method of escape. The Shadow was approaching from the right. Fleming went into a steep left bank to avoid the attacking plane.

Above the roar of his ship's motor, Mayo, horrified, heard a peculiar snap. Then came a sound like the rending of cloth.

The left wing fell from the millionaire's plane. The right wing swung straight upward in the air.

Whirling like a broken toy, the escaping plane hurtled downward!

It crashed amid the trees. The passengers and the pilot were buried in the wreckage. Not one survived the crash. Sherwood Mayo and his evil crew had met their doom!

HARRY VINCENT, propped in bed with a bandaged shoulder, read the newspaper accounts the next day. There were three front-page stories in the New York journals.

One told of the murder of Sidney Delmuth, whose killer, Denby Chadwick, had committed suicide. No motive for the tragedy had been discovered.

Another account told of a strange attack of gunmen who had invaded a cottage in Massachusetts, only to lose their lives at the hands of an unknown protector who had disappeared from the scene.

The third described the crash of Sherwood Mayo's plane. It had been heard by farmers, who had investigated.

An old man - as yet unidentified - and Mayo's Filipino servant were in the plane, handcuffed. It was supposed that they had attempted a robbery at Mayo's home, and that the millionaire had captured them.

Why he had been taking the malefactors away in his plane, however, was a mystery.

That was all. The important links were missing. Nothing was said of Stuart Bruxton, stranded in Virginia. No word appeared to tell how Harry Vincent, wounded, was brought to New York in the cabin of a plane.

For that plane was a mystery ship. It had come from nowhere; and had disappeared as mysteriously as the man who had piloted it.

The Shadow had stepped from the dark to destroy the blackmail ring - and to the dark he had returned!

THE END