



CHARG, MONSTER

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I. EYES OF THE NIGHT

"FIVE million dollars."

The man who uttered these words was seated behind a mahogany desk. His square-jawed face was domineering. His words were raspy as they came from curling, puffy lips. His eyes—almost glaring—were focused upon the man before them.

"I am not interested, Mr. Thorne." The reply came in a positive tone. It was voiced by the man in front of the desk—a pale, bespectacled fellow who returned Thorne's glare in owlish fashion. Yet there was a determination in the answer that brought a scowl to Thorne's dark features.

"You are a fool!" The man behind the desk was harsh and outspoken. "You are deliberately destroying the greatest opportunity of your life. Here in this desk"—Thorne's heavy fist clenched and pounded the woodwork—"I hold the contract, ready for your signature. One simple word of agreement—you, Meldon Fallow, will become a millionaire."

"Like Frederick Thorne." There was unveiled scorn in Fallow's reply. His eyes, too, showed a glare. "You want to make me like yourself—another plutocrat. You want me to grind my share of profit from the weary and the oppressed. Unfortunately, Mr. Thorne, you have met the wrong man."

THERE was silence. In this oak-paneled room that served as office in his home, Frederick Thorne, multimillionaire capitalist, was receiving a rebuke from a man whom he considered no better than a pauper. With vast wealth held as a lure, this domineering man could not shake the will of Meldon Fallow.

It was Thorne, however, who ended the pause. The millionaire's fierce glare seemed to fade. His fist unclenched. Thorne settled back into his swivel chair, as a smile formed slowly upon his lips. Fallow watched. He suspected new strategy in the millionaire's act.

"Let us consider this less tensely," suggested Thorne, in a voice that showed smoothness. "You and I, Fallow, should be friends. It is prejudice which places us at odds. Your ideas, it seems, conflict with mine."

"And always will."

"I scarcely think so." Thorne shook his head. "Perhaps, Fallow, our views may be more similar than one might suppose. We are both creatures of an existing economic system. Modern conditions have brought you tribulation and misfortune; to me, they have meant the acquisition of tremendous wealth. I have conformed where you have not - that is all."

There was persuasion in Thorne's tone. It was the same smooth system that had enabled this successful capitalist to gain his millions. Fallow knew that fact, yet he could not avoid the reasoning power of Thorne's argument.

Frederick Thorne was rising from his desk. His height was imposing; it gave him an advantage as he gazed at a downward angle toward Meldon Fallow. Clad in tuxedo, Thorne had the appearance of a dramatic actor as he stood before the velvet curtains that covered the broad window of his paneled office. The electric lamps that illuminated the room showed the deepness of the maroon draperies that hung behind the millionaire.

"Years ago"—Thorne paused reflectively with hands behind his back - "I began a career as a financier. You, Fallow, were then beginning your work as an inventor. I have gained the ultimate in money. You have reached the zenith of creative effort.

"You seem to think that our paths have differed. In a sense, they have; but basically, they have not. Both of us—Frederick Thorne and Meldon Fallow— held the same ambition. We have gained it. Our ambition was success. Remember that, Fallow. Success!"

Thorne paused emphatically. For a moment, Fallow seemed fully swayed by the millionaire's words. Then the bespectacled man swung back to his antagonism.

"Success!" Fallow's exclamation was scoffing. "Call success our mutual ambition. But while I toiled, while I starved, while people hooted me as a crack-brained inventor, you enjoyed luxury. You were the object of envy—a demigod in the minds of those who worshipped wealth."

"Quite so," agreed Thorne. "That, however, does not change the circumstances. We followed different roads, that is all. Mine was smooth and comfortable; yours was hard and trying. Nevertheless, the fact that we meet in private conference here is proof that we have both arrived at a common destination."

Thorne was strolling forward as he spoke. The blackness behind him - the space where his body had cut off the light began to fade as he reached the desk. The maroon curtains again showed their deep red hue.

Yet a patch of darkness still remained. Fixed on the floor was a long streak of black, extending inward from the curtains. Its dark shape ended in a silhouette.

THAT projecting blackness was the token of another presence in this room. It told of hidden eyes, peering from between the junction of the curtains. Frederick Thorne and Meldon Fallow were not alone.

"My success has been wealth." Thorne was speaking suavely as he seated himself at the desk. "Yours has been creation. While I have been gaining millions, you have produced the last word in scientific marvel.

"Your concentrated fuel; the mighty engine which it can drive; these will revolutionize the most vital of all modern utilities: power. Under the existing conditions of society—which we must recognize as real—your invention can be transformed to wealth.

"That is why I sent for you. It is why I insisted upon negotiations. I can offer the maximum of wealth. It is plain business - profitable to us both. I have five million dollars, ready for immediate payment. You cannot do better elsewhere."

Perhaps it was Thorne's tinge of satisfaction; perhaps it was his reference to money as the final basis—whatever the cause, the effect upon Fallow was electric. Instantly, the bespectacled inventor regained his former challenge. The lure of millions lost its final chance.

"Wealth!" Fallow's words came with a sneer. "You judge all by that one term, Thorne. You are the fool—not I. You say that I cannot do better elsewhere. You are wrong. I shall do better—I have already done better."

Fallow paused and his lips formed a triumphant smile. Again, the poor inventor was taunting the man of wealth. Fallow seemed to gloat over his ability to pass up the chance for fortune.

"Why do you want my invention?" jabbed Fallow, bitterly. "I can answer. You see a chance to make more millions. You see new masses of wealth for your bulging coffers. Through my invention you can drive other corporations out of business. Power plants will lie idle. Present machines will become obsolete. Small capitalists will be ruined."

"What of it?" interposed Thorne, with a hard smile. "You do not like capitalists. You will kill a budding crop of them if you sell me your invention."

"Kill them for your benefit!" retorted Fallow. "Turn them into fodder that you may fatten. Let you control a greater aggregate of wealth—you alone—than they all possess together.

"They are not the ones whom I consider. I am thinking of the workers. Thousands upon thousands of men now working in factories will be thrown out of jobs if you gain my invention. That is why you will never have it!"

With that final statement, Meldon Fallow arose. He plucked his shabby hat from the edge of Thorne's desk. He backed away, a queer, bow-legged figure. His eyes, through the thick lenses, were those of a zealot.

"The world must progress." Thorne was rising as he made his last insistence. "The misfortune that the masses suffer cannot be avoided. Economic conditions are adjusting themselves to meet the world's

advance. Why show folly, Fallow? This offer of which you speak—it cannot equal mine—it must also cause temporary misfortune -"

"It will bring happiness!" interrupted Fallow, as he stood with his right hand on the door knob. "A group of honest men have gained the rights to my invention. They will not exploit it. Money!" Fallow's tone showed contempt. "The little that I need will be supplied me. The rest will go to those who deserve it—to the workers, to their superintendents, to salaried officers of honest concerns. Not one penny of profit will be gained by exploiters like yourself!"

Fallow turned the knob. He stepped through the door, regardless of Thorne's angry protest. The barrier slammed shut. Frederick Thorne was alone.

RESENTMENT showed upon the millionaire's sallow face. Pacing across the room, Thorne indulged in furious scowls. Viewed from the slit between the curtains, Thorne's countenance was venomous. A purplish shade had come to the millionaire's forehead; veins swelled as he clenched his fists in fury.

Striding suddenly to his desk, Thorne pressed a button. A few moments later, the door opened. A liveried servant stood in view.

"Mr. Fallow left?" quizzed Thorne.

"Yes, sir," replied the servant. "He seemed in a hurry, sir—and very angry -"

"That will do. Summon Mr. Shelburne. He is in the library."

"At once, sir."

The door closed. Thorne paced more calmly. His course carried him across the path of darkness on the floor. The millionaire, deep in thought, did not notice that motionless sign of an ominous presence. He swung as the door opened.

A smug-faced man had entered. Tall, stoop-shouldered, the visitor had a manner that was half humble, half crafty. Shelburne was of middle age; baldheaded, he made an odd figure as he tilted his pate forward and peered upward toward Thorne.

"You were right, Shelburne." Thorne resumed his seat as the bald-headed man approached. "There is no chance of changing Fallow's decision. The man is a fool."

Shelburne nodded in agreement.

"I was wise enough not to question him at length," resumed Thorne, opening a desk drawer and bringing out a packet of papers, "but what he said substantiates your reports. He talked of the committee and intimated that he had given them full rights to his invention."

Again, Shelburne nodded.

"The committee is our only chance." Thorne was looking through the reports as he spoke. "These men have judgment. They are not fools, like Fallow."

"You will not gain results through them," interposed Shelburne, with a reluctant shake of his head. "I have warned you, sir. You will find that my reports are accurate. They are determined to carry out the arrangements which they have made with Fallow."

"Perhaps," remarked Thorne, dryly. "But when Fallow fades from the picture, it may be possible to deal

with them. I am relying upon you, Shelburne."

"Yes, sir."

Thorne flung the packet back into the drawer. He arose and made a gesture.

"It is time for you to leave," he said to Shelburne. "Return with a new report to-morrow."

Shelburne bowed himself out.

THORNE strolled about the room. At last he went to a corner closet, brought out a hat and light overcoat and donned the garments. Thorne pressed the buzzer; he was at the door when the servant arrived.

"I am going out," he told the man. "Straighten the office; then lock the door. I shall not be back until midnight."

"Yes, sir."

The servant's work was brief. A few minutes later, he, too, had left.

It was then that the maroon curtains moved. From their rustling folds appeared a figure that seemed like the solid counterpart of the silhouette which now shifted on the floor.

It was a form clad in black. Shoulders were concealed by the folds of a sable-hued cloak. The upturned collar hid the features above it; so did the projecting brim of a slouch hat. A soft laugh came from hidden lips.

That sound—a shuddering whisper—was token of the stranger's identity. This mysterious visitant was The Shadow. Supersleuth opposed to crime—a master fighter who warred in behalf of justice—The Shadow had an uncanny ability of prying into crooked schemes.

Black gloved fingers held a thin, curved pick of steel. With this instrument, they opened the lock of Thorne's desk drawer. In the mellow light, the packet of papers came into view. Gloved hands spread the documents while keen eyes, burning from inkiness beneath the hat brim, studied the reports.

His inspection finished, The Shadow replaced the papers. The drawer clicked shut. The Shadow merged with the darkness of the curtains. A window sash raised noiselessly; then lowered.

The side wall of Frederick Thorne's Manhattan residence adjoined an unlighted courtyard. Unseen against the blackened surface, a batlike figure moved downward from the window. Squidgy sounds—lost in the murmur of the street—were indications of the suction cups which The Shadow had placed on hands and feet.

(Note: In describing the remarkable adhesive power of his rubber suction cups, The Shadow mentioned certain facts concerning the history of these pneumatic contrivances. Some forty years ago, an acrobatic act was staged in Paris, wherein the performer walked upside down along a board suspended from the dome of a theater. This feat was accomplished with the aid of suction disks that gripped and released automatically by pressure of the performer's foot.

Each disk measured four and one half inches in diameter, with a thickness of five-eighths of an inch. One disk proved sufficient to sustain the performer's weight while the other was being moved to a new position. Short steps were necessary in the accomplishment of this act.

The Shadow's suction cups are similar in principle to the original devices used by the Parisian acrobats. Though approximately the same in size, they have been improved for use on vertical as well as horizontal surfaces.

In the acrobatic performances, a net was stretched beneath the performer in case of a fall. This is a hazard against which The Shadow has no protection. His improved suction cups have, however, stood the most exacting tests to which he has submitted them. MAXWELL GRANT.)

Off in the distance was the glow of Times Square. The glare of the metropolis did not reach the narrow space beside the building. The Shadow was shrouded in blackness when he reached the courtyard. Only the faint swish of his cloak betokened his departure toward the thoroughfare.

Eyes of the night! Such were the eyes of The Shadow. They had spied to-night, while listening ears had heard the conversations in Frederick Thorne's paneled office.

Meldon Fallow had left; so had Shelburne. Frederick Thorne had departed. Last of all had gone The Shadow. His was the final part in a drama that had opened with the rejecting of a five-million-dollar offer. His would be the final part should the play become a tragedy of crime!

CHAPTER II. A MASTER OF CRIME

IT was precisely nine o'clock when The Shadow made his departure from the home of Frederick Thorne. The mystery of The Shadow's presence; the keenness with which he was investigating the millionaire's affairs—these were indications that the master sleuth suspected evil to be afoot.

Yet The Shadow had gained no evidence that immediate crime was pending. He had seen Fallow leave in indignation; he had seen Shelburne depart to act the part of spy; he had seen Thorne follow with the air of a man who intended to await developments.

The Shadow, therefore, was planning his own efforts along the channel of investigation. Until he saw a move that promised menace, it was his game to watch the factors whom he might uncover.

Fallow—Shelburne—Thorne—three men involved in negotiations that involved five million dollars! The fact that Fallow had spurned Thorne's offer did not alter the value of Fallow's invention. The rejection of millions actually added new worth to the inventor's creation.

Desire for possession, craving for wealth—these were factors that could mean the beginning of crime. Force could gain where other measures might fail. As yet, however, The Shadow had gained but one important fact: namely, that Shelburne was a spy in the employ of Frederick Thorne.

Actual agents of crime—men who could be depended upon for theft and murder—were lacking in the game. The Shadow knew that they might already be on the move; to trace them at present would be impossible. Hence The Shadow, after leaving Thorne's, had no new lead to follow.

IT was half past nine when a stocky man appeared from the obscurity of a side street and began a strolling pace northward on Tenth Avenue. This section of Manhattan was far from Thorne's.

Unwatched, unsuspected, the stroller continued at an easy pace. Street lights showed the hardened features of his face. Blunt-nosed, with protruding jaw, this man carried an expression that seemed both challenging and hostile.

At times there was something almost furtive in his bearing. Quick glances over his shoulder showed that he was on the lookout. When he passed a corner where a uniformed policeman was standing, the man

showed no concern. It was evident that he had no present fear of the law. If a criminal, this stocky stroller was certainly one who had managed to avoid clashes with the police.

Slackening his pace, the stocky man turned a corner. He gave a quick, searching glance. His pace became more brisk. He walked half a block, passed a decrepit garage and entered an old-fashioned apartment building. Here he found a secluded door in a back hallway. He produced a key and unlocked the door.

The man turned on a light switch. Dull illumination showed a poorly furnished room; there was a door at the further wall. It proved to be an entry to a bedroom beyond. The visitor, however, stopped midway. He opened an obscure closet door; he found a hook and twisted it. Then, with methodical precision, he gave three short presses, as one would signal with a button.

There was a short interval. Then came a dull, humming sound. A click; the wall descended like a panel, revealing a small elevator. The man entered. The panel closed of its own accord and the car descended.

The shaft was about a dozen feet in depth. The stocky man arrived at an opening into a small anteroom, with rough stone walls. There was a door straight ahead, revealed by a single light. He advanced and gave three short jabs to a button beside the door. He waited; then came a sharp click.

The barrier moved upward, evidently into a wall of the apartment above. The visitor stepped forward into a strange, subterranean room. The door dropped behind him. He stood in a mellow light, his hard face solemn with awe.

THE room, despite its stone-walled simplicity, was impressive. Its first oddity was its shape. The room was roughly triangular. The door through which the hard-faced man had entered was in the middle of one side of the triangle.

Similar doors showed in each of the other walls. But the visitor's eyes were not turned toward either of these inner barriers. The man was looking straight ahead, toward the apex of the triangle. That corner of the room was occupied by a peculiarly woven screen.

The dull illumination came from shaded lamps—one in each corner of the room. That which occupied the central corner was above the level of the low screen.

As the visitor, hat in hand, approached the screen, there was a click from beyond. Two lamps sent their glow through the fantastic design of the curtained screen.

The visitor stopped short. His manner showed that he did not dare advance closer. Through the screen, he could observe the dim outline of a seated figure. The white folds of a turban were discernible above the head; glittering spots denoted jewels in the Oriental headgear.

The arrival waited. He could sense two steady eyes, fixed in a stare from beyond the screen. He knew that the light of the room, greater than that of the small lamps behind the screen, made his own features plain to any one who might be beyond.

Hence he, the visitor, was fully visible, while the seated being was to him no more than a dim outline. All that the standing man could catch was the motion of an arm, apparently returning from the switch that the hand had pressed.

"Who are you, intruder?" came a steady, raspy voice from behind the screen.

"I am Jerry Laffan," returned the standing man in a subdued tone. "I am the servant of Charg."

"Your token?"

"Three."

This was the number which Laffan had signaled by the pressure of the hook and later with the button. The questions and the replies were routine ones, given as signs of identity...

"Make your report," came the commanding voice.

"The work is done," declared Laffan. "I have seen no changes since the delivery. All is ready for the moving men. They are due to-morrow."

"That is well," came the voice of Charg. "Prepare for orders. Are you ready?"

"Yes," responded Laffan. "I am ready, Charg."

There was a slight pause; then in its harsh, monotonous tone, the voice issued its command.

"You will await the removal of the furniture," were the words from the screen. "Do not be disturbed if circumstances cause delay. Immediately after removal, be prepared to purchase the desk.

"Be prompt in bringing it to the appointed spot. Remember: you, alone, are acquainted with that place. Are my instructions plain?"

"They are," responded Laffan.

There was another pause. The moments seemed tense to the hard-faced man, despite the fact that he had obviously held previous interviews of this sort. He seemed to be expecting ominous words.

"Charg has commanded," came the voice from the screen.

"When Charg commands," returned Laffan, "his servants obey."

"Then go." The words came in a deep monotone. "To linger with Charg means death."

Laffan saw the arm move behind the screen. A hand clicked off the inner lights. The fantastic surface of the screen was no longer transparent. Laffan, however, did not wait for further observation. Those final words had been significant.

Laffan turned. He heard a click; the outer door was rising. With hastening steps, Charg's servant made his prompt exit. The barrier dropped a scant two seconds after he had passed.

ENTERING the elevator, Laffan went up to the apartment. The way to the little passage was open; the wall closed as soon as Laffan was clear of the elevator. The hook turned automatically into place.

Laffan left the apartment. He was cautious when he reached the street. Satisfied that no one was present to witness his departure, Charg's servant walked hastily away. His heavy shoulders shrugged with a nervous twist.

Despite the fact that he was in Charg's service, Jerry Laffan, hard though he was, had undergone a nerve strain during his brief visit to the subterranean abode. Such was the power of Charg over this henchman.

Cold, steady orders: Charg's words had been forerunners of crime. They had been the utterances of a master mind; the statements of a grim personage whose commands meant life or death.

From a strange adobe beneath a secluded apartment, the orders of Charg had been issued in a tone of finality. By to-morrow, the scheme of the plotter would be nearing its fulfillment.

Death. Charg had given the word as a sinister threat to his agent. If Charg ruled through death, it was certain that murder formed the theme of coming crime. Death was in the making. It would be certain death, dealt through the cunning of a crafty brain.

Such was the menace that existed unknown to The Shadow. Charg, strange exponent of evil, had spoken. His hidden hand had already prepared the stroke.

CHAPTER III. THE SHADOW DEPARTS

IT was ten o'clock. A group of three men were assembled in a small but sumptuous conference room. A long mahogany table occupied the center of the chamber. About it were chairs; beyond were bookcases; while a large radio cabinet occupied one corner and a filing cabinet another.

Seated at one end of the mahogany table was Meldon Fallow. The inventor's expression was as owlish as it had been at Thorne's. With his present companions, however, Fallow showed no antagonism. The light in his bespectacled eyes showed kindness and enthusiasm.

One of Fallow's companions—the man midway at the table—was a silent person who seemed preoccupied with his own thoughts. His rumpled coat; his shaggy, unkempt hair, gave him the appearance of a scholar who concerned himself with little other than his own affairs.

The other man—at the end of the table opposite Fallow—was both dignified and keen of manner. His well-molded face showed traces of practical genius. His air of authority made it evident that he was host to his two companions. His nodding head indicated approval as he listened to Fallow's technical discussion of motive power.

A telephone rang. The instrument was on top of the radio cabinet. The dignified man was closest to that spot. With a gesture that stopped Fallow's discourse, he arose to answer the call.

"Hello..." The dignified man spoke in a brisk tone. "Yes. This is Mr. Towson's residence... Yes, I am Bryce Towson... I see... I see... Very well. Thank you for the message..."

Hanging up the receiver, Bryce Towson turned to his companions. His features wore a pleasant smile that signified good news.

"Herbert Whilton is on his way here," stated Towson. "The call was from the Cobalt Club, where he stopped to meet a friend."

"Some one is coming with him?" questioned Fallow, anxiously.

"Apparently," answered Towson. "I can see no objection. Do you, Mr. Dyke?"

The question was put to the preoccupied man who sat at the side of the table. It brought a shake of the shaggy head. Dyke had no objection. Fallow appeared mollified.

As Bryce Towson was resuming his seat, the door of the room opened and a stoop-shouldered figure entered. The newcomer was Shelburne, Frederick Thorne's spy. The man advanced toward the table; then stopped to speak to the seated three.

"How soon will the conference begin, gentlemen?" he questioned. "Shall I have the papers ready?"

"Yes, Shelburne," responded Towson. "Mr. Whilton will arrive shortly. The conference will begin as soon as he is here."

Shelburne nodded. With catlike tread, he advanced to the filing cabinet and opened a drawer. He began to draw papers from the files.

"Let us resume our discussion, Fallow," suggested Towson, with a nod toward the inventor. "You were talking about the improved concentrate when we were interrupted."

"Yes," declared Fallow. His eyes shone with enthusiasm. "I was returning to the theory which first inspired my invention. Internal combustion is the secret of practical power. Therefore, I considered the extremes. First: a gasoline motor, in which much fuel is required; second, a motor utilizing nitroglycerine, in which a minimum of fuel would be needed.

"The motor, itself, was the problem. Modern motors are far beyond the strength required to withstand the combustion of gasoline. But could any motor ever hold against the racking force of nitroglycerine? My answer was no. But I saw the potentialities of a fuel somewhere between the two. I produced such a fuel and built a motor to withstand it. The fuel was M 7."

"Yet M 7 did not prove satisfactory," observed Towson. "It was not until you developed a less powerful concentrate—F-M 5—that you were sure of success."

"That is true," nodded Fallow. "F-M 5 showed its worth. One pint of it could equal ten gallons of gasoline. Yet FM 5 presented a problem which I was wise enough to foresee."

"Distance strain?"

"Exactly. My motor, though strong enough to withstand the explosions of F-M 5 over a distance of ten thousand miles, would begin to crack after that goal had been gained. F-M 5 is excellent for demonstration purposes. For practical results, we must use my newest fuel—Q-M 1."

"What is its power relation to F-M 5?"

"Approximately one half. We may say, roughly, that one quart of Q-M 1 will outperform ten gallons of high grade gasoline."

"Without damage to the motor?"

"Not within a range of one hundred thousand miles."

"This is wonderful!" Towson's exclamation came with enthusiasm. "Do you hear that, Dyke? Q-M 1 will show performance up to one hundred thousand miles! Its advantage over gasoline is forty to one!"

"Fallow is a genius," returned Dyke, in a rumbling tone. "I expected him to produce such a fuel."

"I owe much to your aid, Towson," broke in Fallow. "The use of your equipment—of your laboratory -"

Towson waved his hands to suppress the inventor's thanks. As Fallow reluctantly subsided, the door opened. A servant appeared to announce the arrival of Herbert Whilton. A moment later, two men entered. The servant stepped aside while Towson sprang forward to greet the visitors.

THE first was an elderly man, whose thin lips formed a perpetual smile. He was leaning on a cane; his parchment face and pure white hair were evidences of his advanced years.

With him was a tall, firm-faced companion. The latter was attired in evening clothes. His features were

masklike, yet impressive. Keen, burning eyes, peering from beside a hawklike nose, were steady in their observation of the room and its occupants.

The first man—the elderly one—was Herbert Whilton. He shook hands with Bryce Towson; then turned to introduce his friend.

"This gentleman," explained Whilton, in a crackly, almost whining tone, "is Lamont Cranston. He is wealthy and his great interest is exploration. Mr. Cranston has long been a friend of mine. He is an aviation enthusiast; the very man—I believe—to put our new motor to its first tests in foreign climes."

Advancing with Cranston, Whilton introduced his friend to the others. Lamont Cranston shook hands with Meldon Fallow, the inventor; also with Loring Dyke, the famous consulting chemist. Formalities ended, the two visitors took chairs opposite Loring Dyke.

It was then that Bryce Towson, at his end of the table, made a bow to Herbert Whilton. With a sweep of his hand, Towson indicated that he wished the old gentleman to occupy the head chair.

"No, no!" crackled Whilton. "Remain there, Mr. Towson. You are our host -"

"But you are the chief," interposed Towson, with a smile. "To Herbert Whilton, the philanthropist, we owe the actual formation of this committee which has enabled Meldon Fallow to complete his inventive work."

Rising, Whilton yielded to Towson's insistence and took his place at the head of the table. Beaming upon the others, he spoke in reply to Towson's eulogy.

"I am no more important," declared Whilton, "than any other member of this group. To Meldon Fallow, we owe the invention of the supercombustion motor and its fuel. To Loring Dyke, the famous chemist, we owe the knowledge and advice that Fallow needed to perfect his formula.

"To Bryce Towson, consulting engineer, we owe the use of the laboratory and its equipment; also the right to convene in this conference room -"

Towson was interrupting with a protest. Meldon Fallow broke in to support what Herbert Whilton had said.

"All must take their credit!" asserted the inventor. "My first experiments were crude. I brought them to the attention of Mr. Whilton. Through him, I met you, Towson; and I met you, Dyke. I learned new facts in motor design and in chemical reactions. My work is now complete—and to you three, my friends, I have given full rights to aid me in benefiting mankind through my inventive efforts."

Towson bowed in reluctant acknowledgment. Dyke rumbled a few words of appreciation. The matter settled, Whilton rapped upon the table. Quiet followed. Shelburne came from beside the filing cabinet and took a chair close to Loring Dyke.

"Here is the agreement, sir," said Shelburne. He drew a paper from a small stack and handed it to Whilton. "It is a copy of the signed document."

Whilton nodded. He adjusted a pince-nez to his nose and read the paper. Then, in a methodical tone, he spoke to his companions.

"WE are all familiar with this agreement," said the old man. "We four constitute a committee which holds sole rights to the development of the Fallow Supercombustion Motor. We have agreed that it will not be exploited. Any future decision rests upon unanimous agreement.

"Should any of us, through death or resignation, no longer be a member of the committee, the control of the supermotor will rest with those who remain. Unanimous agreement will always be required in any step that may be taken.

"All this is plain. Our agreement has become a legal document. We are ready, at any time, to proceed with the production of the motor. Are there any remarks?"

"Yes." The statement came from Meldon Fallow. The inventor had risen from his chair. "To-night, gentlemen, I was offered five million dollars for my invention. I gave a flat refusal."

"The offer came from Frederick Thorne?" questioned Herbert Whilton, in a sharp, crackly tone.

"Yes," responded Fallow.

An ugly challenge showed on Whilton's smiling lips. The old philanthropist turned to Bryce Towson.

"What would be your answer to Thorne's offer?" questioned Whilton.

"An absolute refusal," returned Towson.

"And yours?" Whilton spoke to Dyke.

"The same," stated Dyke. "Refusal."

"My answer would be identical," crackled Whilton. "You see, Fallow, we are all in accord. My wealth cannot equal Thorne's; but the few millions that I possess will always be used for the benefit of mankind - not for exploitation.

"Since the offer came to you, Fallow, after the legal formation of this committee, our vote was necessary. Your dissent automatically rejected the offer; but I know that you will be pleased to know that the rejection was unanimous."

"There may be other offers," stated Fallow, in a worried tone. "Thorpe may try again—perhaps by proxy _"

"And a new rejection will be made," rumbled Dyke.

"My vote will always be refusal," declared Towson, quietly.

Whilton nodded in agreement. Fallow sat down, his owlish face reflecting satisfaction. Whilton awaited new remarks. There were none. The elderly philanthropist stated that adjournment was in order.

THE committeemen arose and Lamont Cranston followed. Only Shelburne remained seated. He was making complete notes of the brief meeting. Cranston's keen eyes watched the stoopshouldered man; then, as Bryce Towson opened a door at the side of the consulting room, Cranston turned to follow the others.

They arrived in a room which evidently adjoined a laboratory. Set upon a platform was a huge motor. Above it were two glass tanks. One contained a greenish liquid; the other a purplish fluid.

"This is the motor, Cranston," explained Whilton. "Those tanks contain the component parts of the explosive agent. They are kept separate until they flow into the chambers of the motor."

"To avoid danger," put in Fallow. "The present fuel is F-M 5. My newer fuel, Q-M 1, is superior. It eliminates overstrain upon the motor."

The inventor pressed a starter. The motor coughed; then began a rhythmic purr. Huge cylinders were at work. The observers watched the liquids tremble in their tanks.

"You may watch it for an hour," asserted Fallow, "yet you will see no appreciable lessening of those liquids. With either fluid—F-M 5 or Q-M 1—I could drive an airplane around the world in a non-stop flight!

"Yet the tanks would be no larger than those required to fuel an airplane with gasoline for a journey of a few hundred miles!

"Moreover"—the inventor's eyes were gleaming—"the tremendous power of F-M 5 will make possible speed beyond all dreams. I have literally concentrated a force like that of dynamite—have harnessed it, in safety—to produce the greatest power that mankind could ever wish!"

HALF an hour later, Bryce Towson's guests passed through the conference room. They were making their departure. Shelburne was no longer there. Lamont Cranston noted the man's absence.

"I shall notify all of you," stated Herbert Whilton, "when it is time for another conference. I think that some time early in the coming week would be most suitable."

"Do you have my new address?" questioned Meldon Fallow. "I am moving to-morrow—that is, selling my furniture and taking a furnished apartment -"

"You mentioned it at our last meeting," interposed Whilton. "Shelburne made a note of your new address. I shall notify you there."

Herbert Whilton and Lamont Cranston departed. They reached the seclusion of the side street, in front of Bryce Towson's home. A large but antiquated structure, Towson's residence loomed like a mammoth relic of old Manhattan. It was a building of nineteenth century pattern that the consulting engineer had converted to serve as laboratory and office as well as residence.

Whilton and Cranston entered the philanthropist's limousine. As they rode downtown, the old man remarked pleasantly concerning their short visit to Towson's.

"A wonderful thing," was Whilton's comment. "A committee formed of men who are willing to forego millions to benefit humanity. We are enthusiasts—all four of us."

"Who was the fifth man?" questioned Cranston. "Shelburne, I believe you called him?"

"Simply a secretary," explained Whilton. "We hired him to attend our conferences and to keep our records. He has access to the conference room, which Towson has now reserved for the exclusive use of our committee."

The limousine reached the Cobalt Club. Lamont Cranston said good-night to Herbert Whilton and alighted. But the calm-faced explorer did not enter the club. He waited until the limousine had rolled away; then he strolled into the darkness.

A soft laugh sounded in whispered tones. It came from the lips of Lamont Cranston. It was the same laugh that had shuddered, earlier this night, through the paneled office of Frederick Thorne.

Lamont Cranston—or the person who played his part—was The Shadow. Through acquaintanceship with Herbert Whilton, he had attended the conference of the four men who owned full rights in Meldon Fallow's invention.

This explained the situation. Cranston had heard the story of the supermotor and its amazing fuel. As The Shadow, he had picked up the trail of Meldon Fallow, the inventor. He had witnessed events at Thorne's; then, again as Cranston, he had observed the other camp.

He had picked Shelburne as the hidden link between Frederick Thorne and the men whose invention Thorne was determined to obtain.

SHORTLY afterward, a light clicked in a darkened room. White hands appeared beneath bluish rays. A glimmering gem—a rare fire opal called a girasol—appeared upon a finger of the left hand.

The hands of The Shadow! They were busy, as they handled clippings upon the polished surface of a table. Newspaper items referred to unsolved crime in San Francisco—mysterious murders in the city on the Pacific Coast.

The Shadow placed the clippings in an envelope. His hand inscribed a coded message; then sealed it. This was to go to a New York agent. It would carry instructions that must be followed during The Shadow's absence.

Crime called. The Shadow had work to do, three thousand miles away. While he was gone, trusted operatives could keep tabs on the doings of Frederick Thorne and his spy, Shelburne. The Shadow, however, did not expect present trouble from that quarter.

The Shadow had learned that further time would elapse before Meldon Fallow's completed inventions would be put to practical use. Intrigue - cross-purposes—menace—these were factors that as yet seemed latent. Further investigation could wait until the next meeting of the committee.

So The Shadow thought. As proof of it, one hour later, a big monoplane took off from the Newark airport. Westward bound, the ship was beginning the first hop of a swift cross-country journey.

The Shadow was on his way to deal with crime in San Francisco. From his study of newspaper reports, he believed that he could pick the men responsible for murder. Like an avenger from the skies, he was traveling to deal surprise and destruction to men of evil.

Yet, while The Shadow was westward bound, crime was striking in New York. Already, the cunning measures loosed by a master of evil were threatening the fate of Meldon Fallow's invention.

The Shadow, believing that all was well, had departed while a stroke was under way. Though he suspected the existence of a menace, The Shadow, as yet, had not gained an inkling of its terrible reality.

Crime was to win in its first endeavor. It was to follow with repeated strokes which The Shadow, alone, could meet. Those blows were to be the work of a master who commanded the efforts of the most amazing enemy whom The Shadow had ever encountered.

Insidious crime—baffling crime—such would be the elements of a coming problem. To uncover them, The Shadow would be forced to solve the methods of Charg.

CHAPTER IV. MURDER UNSOLVED

"A MURDER, Joe."

The speaker was Inspector Timothy Klein. The police official was seated at his desk in headquarters. Red-faced, with hair of iron gray, Klein was grave in expression as he spoke to the man who had just entered his office.

The entrant was a man of stocky build. His face, firm and swarthy, showed keenness and determination. His steady eyes, which stared inquiringly toward Klein, were sharp and observant. This man was Detective Joe Cardona, ace of the New York force.

"The details came over the phone," declared Klein, in answer to Cardona's unspoken query. "The victim is a fellow named Meldon Fallow - an inventor—who lived in an apartment on Fifty-second Street. That's where they found the body. Come along. We're going up there."

Inspector and detective left the office. The gloom of late afternoon was apparent when they reached the street. Entering a police car, they rode northward toward their destination. Their trip ended at the entrance of an old-fashioned apartment building on Fifty-second Street.

A uniformed policeman was at the door of the apartment house. He recognized the arrivals and motioned inward, as he gave them the preliminary information which they required.

"The third floor," he said. "Apartment 3 H. Officer Loftus is up there, inspector."

KLEIN and Cardona entered. The inspector seemed anxious to reach the third-floor apartment. The detective, however, was shrewdly observant as they made their way to the stairway. To Joe Cardona, every detail was important. He was studying the floor plan of the building as they proceeded upward.

They found three men clustered in a hallway, with the policeman—Loftus—standing by. The officer recognized the inspector. He saw Klein look at the group of men. He hastened to explain.

"This fellow"—he pointed to one—"is the janitor. The others are moving men. They came this afternoon to get Fallow's furniture. The janitor brought them up here and unlocked the door of the apartment. That's when they found the body."

Klein turned toward a door marked 3 H. It was closed. Joe Cardona put in a word to the officer.

"You locked the door?" questioned the detective.

"Yes," admitted Loftus. "Maybe I shouldn't have; but it was locked when I got here. These fellows shut it after they saw the body. They were standing here when I came in; here's the key the janitor gave me. After I saw the body—well, I figured it was best to lock the door again. I had to put in a call; and there wasn't any use going back in with the dead man. He isn't good to look at."

There was a peculiar emphasis in the officer's final words. Joe Cardona's eyes narrowed as the detective watched Klein unlock the door with the key given him by Officer Loftus.

Shoulder to shoulder, inspector and detective entered the apartment of death. They stopped a few paces past the threshold. Their impression justified the policeman's statement.

KLEIN and Cardona were standing in a small living room. The place was oddly furnished; chairs of varied pattern, small tables, bookcases and a couch formed the chief items of furniture. There was one object, however, upon which their gaze turned.

This was a desk in the far corner of the room. It was a one-sided affair, with a row of three wide drawers running from top to floor at the left side. Beside the desk were scattered papers, strewn on the floor; in front was the form that commanded full attention.

This was the body of Meldon Fallow. The inventor lay sprawled in a crumpled heap. His body was twisted in curious fashion. From the hips up it had assumed a corkscrew pose that terminated with head turned toward the door.

Neither Klein nor Cardona had ever seen a body more hideously bashed. Fallow's clothing had been half-ripped away. His torso showed terrific bruises and long, bloody gashes. His chest had been caved by a powerful blow.

The man's neck, gripped by some terrible hands, had not only been clutched in strangling fashion; it had been broken into the bargain— hence the crazy tilt of Fallow's head.

In addition, the slayer must have driven sledge-hammer blows to the inventor's face and skull. The dead man's jaw was askew. His features were scarcely recognizable. His forehead showed the mark of a brutal, crushing stroke that could only have been delivered with some instrument of metal.

Inspector Klein, hardened though he was to the sight of death, stood gazing in fascinated horror. It was Joe Cardona who first freed himself from the terrible spell and began the investigation.

The detective went to the windows. He noted that they were locked. He stepped to an inner door and entered a small bedroom. A brief inspection showed no traces of an occupant; Cardona also found the windows locked.

Back in the living room, where Klein was still gazing at Fallow's shattered form, Cardona looked among the papers beside the desk. He saw a letter; its heading bore the name of Morris Jackling, attorney. The text referred to patent royalties due Meldon Fallow.

Cardona went to the telephone. He called Jackling's office. He found that the lawyer had not yet left. Gruffly, Cardona stated that Fallow had been murdered. He asked the lawyer to come at once to the apartment.

KLEIN was looking at the windows which Cardona had examined. When the inspector had finished, the detective nodded. He could see that Klein's examination substantiated his own.

"Not a chance that any one came through there," declared Klein. "Locked and dusty. That's the only way the murderer could have taken."

The inspector pointed to the half-closed door. Cardona walked in that direction. With Klein, he examined the lock and found it untampered.

"Let's hear your story," said Cardona, to the janitor who was standing pale-faced in the hallway. "How and when did you find the body?"

"It was on account of the moving men," stated the janitor, hoarsely. "I was downstairs, sir, when they came and told me they wanted the furniture. I knew it was going out. Mr. Fallow told me about it a couple of days ago.

"When I came up here, of course I knocked. I thought maybe Mr. Fallow might be in. When I didn't hear him answer, I used the pass-key. Then I saw— well, I saw it."

"And you men?"

Cardona's question was put to the two moving men. One, a big fellow, acted as spokesman for the pair. He thrust forward some folded papers.

"This is all we know about it," the man stated. "We do movin' for old Goggins, that runs a second-hand furniture place on Ninth Avenue. He always gives us the dockaments—so's we can move out the stuff that he's bought.

"Here's our orders an' directions; that there paper is signed by this guy that was killed. We showed 'em to the janitor here, so he brought us up. We seen the body along when he did."

Cardona nodded as he made a note of the address on the paper which bore the name of Ephriam Goggins, dealer in furniture. He noted the anxious expression on the moving man's face. He looked toward Klein and nodded.

"Don't you men be worried," stated the inspector. "We'll have to hold you for a while—as material witnesses—but after that you can go about your business."

"You'll let Goggins know what's holdin' us?" questioned the big man.

"Yes," returned Klein. "We'll see Goggins."

"An' what about the furniture?"

Klein smiled. He could see that the moving man had a one-track mind.

"The furniture," stated the inspector, "will stay here for the present. After we have completed our investigation, Goggins can move it to his store— if he can prove that it is actually his property. Maybe he'll have you move it after all. We'll see."

The talk of the furniture had stimulated Cardona. He went back into the apartment and Klein followed him. Joe looked about the room and shook his head. Then he began to open the desk drawers. He noticed that they were short and empty. He shoved them back in place.

LOOKING along the top of the desk, Cardona could find no scratches on the surface. The desk was heavy; its top had a peculiar style of decoration which divided it into six square sections. Stepping away, the detective compared the other furniture with the desk. He noted that no two pieces were similar.

Strolling to the door, Cardona spoke to the janitor. He questioned the man regarding Fallow's habits. He found that the inventor had seldom received visitors; that his life in the apartment had been quiet and secluded.

"How long had he lived here?" Cardona questioned.

"A year," stated the janitor. "His lease was up; that's why he was moving."

"Where to?"

"Some furnished apartment. That's why he was selling the furniture."

"He brought all this junk with him when he moved in here a year ago?"

"Not all, sir. About half of it. He was always buying and selling pieces of furniture. I think some came in a month ago—not less, anyway, because he gave his notice right after the time."

Further questioning ended as a short, puffy man arrived from the stairway. He was accompanied by a policeman. He saw Cardona and put an eager question:

"You're Detective Cardona?"

The sleuth nodded.

"I'm Morris Jackling," stated the puffy man. "Came right over after you called. Terrible, terrible—this

death of Fallow. Murdered, you say?"

Cardona pointed through the open door. Jackling paled and backed away. He stood puffing against the wall. Horror showed on his mild face.

It was fully half a minute before he could regain his composure. Cardona, studying the lawyer with experienced eye, could see that the shock was genuine.

"I called you," said the detective, "because I found a letter of yours, addressed to Fallow. Can you tell me anything about the man?"

"In—in a minute," gasped Jackling. Then, with an effort: "Yes. Fallow was an inventor. Scarcely a successful one. He received small royalties on various patents. I arranged the purchase for a device used in hosiery manufacture. Representing the purchaser, I used to pay Fallow his royalties.

"My method was to write him, telling him that a payment was due. Invariably, he came to my office. The letter that you saw was one which Fallow received yesterday. He promised to come to my office within a few days, to obtain his check."

"He wrote you a reply?"

"No. He came to see me."

"Where? At your office?"

"No. At my hotel—the Glania."

"When?"

"Last night."

An expression of keen interest showed upon Cardona's face, as the detective heard the lawyer's statement. Joe did not speak, however, for he saw that Jackling had more to say.

"It was at eleven o'clock," declared the attorney. "My hotel is not far from here. I had just come in from the theater when the operator called to say that Mr. Fallow was in the lobby.

"I went down to see him. He was in good spirits. He said that his inventions were doing well; but he did not specify which ones. Fallow was always a secretive man, like most inventors.

"He said that he was on the way to his apartment. He added that he expected to move to better quarters. He talked with me about the Glania—asked how I liked the hotel—about its rates. That was all. Then he left."

Cardona turned to Klein.

"Apparently," he said to the inspector, "Mr. Jackling was the last person to see Fallow alive. We know that the murder must have occurred after eleven o'clock last night."

A new arrival appeared. It was the police surgeon.

WHILE the others waited in the hallway, Klein and Cardona accompanied the physician into the apartment. The surgeon chewed his lips and shook his head as he viewed the body. He began his examination; when he finished, he arose with a serious expression on his face.

"The man has been dead for hours," announced the surgeon. "Probably since midnight. His killer must have been a man of tremendous physique.

"Think of it! Hands that could strangle and break a man's neck! Even equipped with an instrument of metal, the hand that smashed that skull must have possessed a fierce driving force.

"The victim was literally pounded to death. I have never before seen evidence of such fiendishness. The killer must be a brute—such a brute that one could not call him human."

Cardona nodded grimly. The surgeon's words were graphic. A strangler—a mangler—such must be the nature of Meldon Fallow's slayer. With his level-headedness, the ace-detective possessed a practical imagination which had often served him well.

He was picturing the slayer now. A huge man, with powerful hands: only such could have handled Meldon Fallow with the fury that was evidenced. Somewhere in New York, a fiend was at large.

Could the killer have had purpose? As yet, Cardona did not know. Prompt investigation was essential. There were threads to follow; facts to be learned. Yet these, Cardona felt, might prove barren.

The ace detective had a hunch that a maniac might be responsible. Such brutality as the killer had shown could have gained nothing. Distinctly, it served to the murderer's disadvantage; for it marked him as a fierce brute who could be singled out from men of lesser strength.

"What about it, Joe?"

Klein's question came to the detective's ears as Cardona was still staring at the body. Joe's reply was slow and steady.

"Let the newspapers have it," stated the detective. "Get the dragnet working. Let's hope that the murderer is still in New York. When we round him up, we'll know him."

So thought Joe Cardona. Yet in his decision, the ace had wandered far from the truth. The answer had been voiced, unwittingly, by the police surgeon. The physician had said that the murderer could not be called human. That statement held a meaning which even its author had not realized.

For the law was dealing with a superplotter—a master whose ways of murder stood unparalleled. The solution to Meldon Fallow's death lay within Cardona's reach; yet the ace detective did not realize it.

Evidence was here; remarkable evidence that Joe Cardona had failed to find. The ace had passed it by; it would remain, uncovered.

Charg had planned well; and the only one who might have burrowed to his secret had traveled far from New York. The truth of Fallow's death was to remain unknown until the return of The Shadow.

Murder unsolved! Such was the death of Meldon Fallow. Such was the beginning of new and unequalled crime—the first stroke from the hand of Charg.

From his abode, Charg had acted. From that same hidden lair, he would launch new murder. The path of evil would lie clear, until The Shadow should demand a reckoning!

CHAPTER V. THE SHADOW HEARS

TWO days later. Joe Cardona was at his desk in headquarters. The detective was staring, grim-faced, at a newspaper which lay before him. Headlines still bellowed the fact that the strangler was at large.

Some one entered the office. Cardona looked up to see a wary-faced young man who carried himself with a confident air. He looked like a gentleman of the press and he was. Cardona knew the visitor: Clyde Burke, reporter on the New York Classic.

"Well?" growled Joe. "What do you want, Burke? If it's anything new on the strangler, I haven't got it."

"You're a good guesser, Joe," returned Burke, with a grin. "That's just what I'm here about—this strangler business. I hear you dragged in a lot of big Tarzans from the tenderloin. What did they have to say?"

"Nothing. We grilled a bunch of suspects. They all had alibis. We're still looking for our man."

"Have you tried the Bronx zoo? From what I've heard about the murder, maybe an orang-utan was responsible."

"Burke," stated Cardona, in a steady tone, "you may think you're funny. But if you want something exclusive for your sheet, I'll tell you that I've done just the very thing you've mentioned. I've called the zoo."

"And the orang-utans?"

"Are still in their cages. Also the chimpanzees, the gibbons, the baboons, the mandrills—all the rest of them. I never knew there were so many kinds of monkeys."

There was a pause. Clyde Burke could see that it was no time to be facetious. Joe Cardona, when troubled, adopted a challenge toward all newspaper men. The reporter became serious.

"Listen, Joe," he said. "What about the scene of the crime? I know you've gone over it—I know you figure that the murderer must have come in there and laid for Fallow. But haven't you picked up some clue? Fallow was strangled—I thought there might be finger prints -"

"There aren't." Cardona spoke glumly. "No sign of them, Burke, and we can't figure out what the killer used to pound Fallow. The facts are no more than you've published."

"Fallow had no enemies. In fact, he had only friends. Morris Jackling was the last man he saw; previous to that, he visited a consulting engineer named Bryce Towson, to talk about a new invention."

"Towson called us; so did Frederick Thorne, the big financier. Fallow was up to see Thorne earlier in the evening. A money offer for an invention—but Thorne says Fallow didn't want to consider it for the present."

"Going back—and we've traced Fallow for a month or more—we can't find a thing. Then, out of nowhere, pops a killer. He murders Fallow and gets nothing."

"What are you doing about the apartment?" questioned Clyde, in a matter-of-fact tone. "Did the furniture belong to Fallow? I understand moving men were going to take it away when they found the body."

"The furniture," responded Cardona, "belongs to a dealer named Ephriam Goggins. He holds the bill of sale. He was the one who sent the moving men; and he wants the furniture. I'm letting it go out this afternoon."

"You're going up to the apartment?"

"Yes."

"Mind if I travel along?"

"No objection. Since you've suggested it, we'll start right now."

THE detective arose and left the office, accompanied by the reporter. When they reached the apartment house on Fifty-second street, they found a light truck outside. Moving men—the ones who had been with the janitor two days before—were waiting. They recognized Joe Cardona.

"All right, boys," announced the detective. "You can pull out the junk. Come along up. You won't find any bodies there to-day."

They reached the apartment. Cardona opened the door with a pass-key. He ordered the men to take out the furniture. They set to work, while Clyde Burke, idling by the window, took note of all they did.

Joe Cardona, though he had made complete search of the apartment, began to inspect the places from which each article was removed. This was apparently a belated effort to find some clue.

All the while, Clyde, besides studying the detail of the apartment, was retaining mental impressions of the furniture. Strolling into the bedroom, the reporter hastily wrote down a list for future reference.

For Clyde Burke's purpose here was other than the one that he had given to Joe Cardona. There was no story for the New York Classic, so far as Clyde could see. The reporter was acting for an employer other than the newspaper.

Clyde Burke was a secret agent of The Shadow. He had received instructions, the day after The Shadow's departure for the Pacific coast. Then had come the news of Meldon Fallow's death.

Word of the murder had gone by coded telegram to The Shadow. In return, Clyde Burke had received instructions to gain every possible detail regarding the scene of the crime.

Though Clyde, like Cardona, considered the removal of the furniture to be a matter of course, The Shadow's agent knew that the arrangement of the room would be an important matter to The Shadow. By his list, Clyde knew that he could make a diagram of the place.

COMING back into the living room, Clyde found Joe Cardona standing in front of the desk. The moving men had gone downstairs with the couch; the desk alone remained. The detective was looking glumly toward the floor. He spoke as Clyde joined him.

"Right here was where Fallow lay," declared Cardona. "Crumpled on the floor—in front of the desk. It's close to the bedroom door—that's where the killer must have come from. Fallow never had a chance."

Clyde looked at the carpet. He could see deep bloodstains in its pattern. While he watched Cardona, expecting the detective to make some new remark, the moving men entered the room. They had come for the desk.

The little man took hold of the side where the drawers were located; the big fellow was opposite. As they raised, the big man's end came up; the other portion of the desk did not rise.

"Say, Steve," protested the little fellow, "you'd better heft this side. Feels like it was made of iron. Grab ahold."

Scoffing, the big man pushed his helper aside. He began to lift in nonchalant fashion; to his surprise, he found that the weight was beyond his expectation.

"You got it right," he admitted to his helper. "This here desk is lopsided. I thought you was stallin', but you wasn't."

With that, the big man hoisted. The drawer end of the desk came up. Struggling with the weight entirely in his direction, the big fellow moved toward the door, with the little man supporting the light end of the burden.

Both Joe Cardona and Clyde Burke had noticed the incident. They thought nothing of it. Remaining in the apartment, they did not observe the trouble that the big man had when he descended the stairs.

When Clyde happened to glance from the window, the moving men had raised the light end of the desk to the back of the truck. Pushing together, they shoved the heavy end up afterward. The action, though it seemed to require more strength than should have been necessary, was natural. Clyde thought nothing of it.

The rest of the moving was soon completed. Joe and Clyde stood in the empty apartment; Cardona, after a brief survey, motioned that it was time to leave. The two departed, locking the door behind them.

On the street, they saw the moving men clambering aboard the truck. Joe Cardona announced that he was going back to headquarters. Clyde decided to remain uptown. The pair separated as the truck moved away.

It was then that a man strolled into view from a doorway across the street. He was stocky of build; a sour smile showed on his roughened face. Reporter and detective had departed. The truck, too, was gone. The man seemed pleased.

There was reason why this observer should evidence pleasure. The stocky man was Jerry Laffan, agent of Charg. In duty to his evil chief, he had come to watch the removal of the furniture. Had anything untoward happened, Laffan would have noticed it.

From Laffan's standpoint, all was well. Strolling from the neighborhood, Charg's minion nodded as he walked along. There was other work to do; it would be done. The danger of discovery was past.

CLYDE BURKE, when he had left Joe Cardona, continued toward Times Square. He reached a massive skyscraper—the Badger Building—and took an elevator. He alighted at the twenty-second floor and came to an office which bore the statement:

RUTLEDGE MANN

INVESTMENTS

A few minutes later, Clyde was seated at the side of a desk in an inner office. He was talking to a chubby-faced, placid individual who nodded and made notes while the reporter spoke.

Clyde gave a complete description of Meldon Fallow's apartment. Referring to his list, he described the articles of furniture and how they had been located. This completed, Clyde Burke left.

Rutledge Mann inscribed a message in ink; then folded the sheet and placed it in an envelope. Turning to a typewriter in the corner, he rattled off the items of Clyde's list and added this sheet to the one in the envelope.

It was nearly five o'clock. Rutledge Mann pocketed his envelope and left the office. On the street, he took a taxi to Twenty-third Street. There he entered a dilapidated building and ascended a flight of stairs.

Mann reached what appeared to be a deserted office. The grimy, glass-paneled door was cobwebbed, Upon the smudged pane was the name:

B. JONAS

Mann deposited the envelope in a mail slot. He left the building. The message was delivered, so far as Mann was concerned. An agent of The Shadow, Mann formed contact for the active workers. Letters deposited in that door would reach The Shadow—so Mann knew from past experience.

It was dusk when Rutledge Mann left Twenty-third Street; but it was not until three hours later, when Manhattan was aglow with evening light, that the gloom of twilight descended upon the Golden Gate.

Not far from San Francisco, a monoplane was taking off for an eastward hop. It was the same ship that had crossed the continent three nights before.

The Shadow's mission had been accomplished. The master sleuth was returning to New York. One task completed, another awaited his arrival.

The Shadow was coming to seek the unknown criminal who had brought about the death of Meldon Fallow. Soon The Shadow would be on the trail of Charg!

CHAPTER VI. THE BROKEN TRAIL

A LIGHT was burning in The Shadow's sanctum. White hands were at work; their long fingers sorting clippings that lay upon the polished table.

Twenty-four hours had passed since Rutledge Mann's visit to the building on Twenty-third Street. In that time the contact man who posed as an investment broker had sent more packets through the mail chute of the office that bore the name B. Jonas.

The Shadow's clippings had come from Mann. Though cut from New York newspapers, most of them dealt with news from another city. The entire country had been electrified by dispatches from San Francisco.

There, the headquarters of a notorious dope ring had been uncovered on the outskirts of Chinatown. Men, long sought by the government, had been found dead. Some terrific battle—its cause unknown—had ravaged the lair of the evil band.

It was supposed that the conflict had been between members of the crew itself. The laugh that whispered through The Shadow's sanctum came as the master's eyes were reading this report. The Shadow knew the truth; it was he who had tracked the desperate crooks to defeat them in their den.

The Shadow had departed; he was three thousand miles from San Francisco. His efforts had remained unknown. His laugh, alone, was the grim recollection of a swift fray that he had fought and won against odds.

The San Francisco clippings slid aside as The Shadow finished with them. That work was done. Newer and more sinister duty lay ahead. Here, in New York, The Shadow was seeking a foe who struck by stealth. He had taken on a task of vengeance. He must find the man responsible for the murder of Meldon Fallow.

CLIPPINGS told but little. More important was the note that had come from Rutledge Mann. That message lay upon The Shadow's table. It was a blank paper now; for its coded lines had faded after The Shadow had read them. In all correspondence with his agents, The Shadow made use of a special ink

that disappeared shortly after contact with the air.

There was a paper, however, that had not turned blank. This was the typewritten list of the furniture that Clyde Burke had seen at Fallow's. With each item was a brief description of the object itself and its position in the murdered man's apartment.

Through the newspaper reports, The Shadow had gained a thorough knowledge of the circumstances, so far as the police had viewed them. Cardona still held to the theory—obvious in his opinion—that the murderer had entered Fallow's apartment to deliver death.

Lacking knowledge of a motive, the ace detective had inclined to the theory of a maniac.

The Shadow, however, knew more concerning Fallow than did Cardona. The Shadow could see the reason for the inventor's death: namely, Fallow's unyielding decision that his supermotor must never be used for the gain of wealth.

With knowledge of this motive, The Shadow sought subtlety behind the murder. Brutality in the killing of Fallow seemed at odds with the purpose that must exist. Why a killer of vicious strength—a mauler whose clumsiness must certainly mean stupidity?

How could such a man have prowled, unseen, into the apartment house, there picked a strong lock, and later have made a clean departure? How had the dragnet failed to pick up a brute of such description?

The Shadow sought the answer. He was looking for the methods of a schemer. The very fact that the police were looking for a strangler was proof of strategy that had swept the law's endeavor into a hopeless path.

One fact impressed The Shadow. Fallow's death had been coincident with the sale of furniture. Any one concerned with the inventor's affairs could have learned that Fallow intended to move.

One by one, The Shadow eliminated the items in the list. There were objections to all, except the desk. It was the object before which Fallow's body had been found. Could it have formed a hiding place for the killer?

The question produced a paradox. The brutal manner in which Fallow had been mangled suggested the power of a giant—not the limited strength of a midget or a dwarf. Yet paradoxes, to The Shadow, often pointed toward the solution of a crime.

Subtlety again. A slayer of small proportions, depending upon a cramped hiding place, would do well to make his work appear as the efforts of a mighty strangler. Such was the reasoning that brought a new laugh from The Shadow's unseen lips.

The bluish light clicked out. The laugh was repeated. Shuddering echoes died. The Shadow had departed. His sanctum, a room hidden somewhere in Manhattan, was an empty, black-walled chamber that held the stillness of a tomb.

It was dusk in Manhattan. The gloom of night had been approaching while The Shadow had been in his sanctum. Lights were gleaming on Ninth Avenue when a taxicab stopped in front of a decrepit furniture store. Ephriam Goggins, the toothless, bewhiskered proprietor, shambled toward the door of his shop as a tall man entered.

Goggins saw chances for a worth while sale. The stranger looked like a good customer. In the gloom of the dimly lighted shop, his features seemed like the chiseled countenance of a statue. His tall form cast a weirdly shaped shadow along the grimy floor.

"Good evening." The customer spoke in a steady, quiet tone. "I have come to look for furniture."

"Like what?" questioned Goggins, with a pleased grin. "Chairs— tables— anything."

"I require a desk," stated the stranger. "Something substantial, of good quality -"

Goggins stroked his whiskers. He nudged his thumb over his shoulder. Turning, he led the way toward the rear of the shop; then into a side room. An array of desks—from battered relics to modern office equipment—was before the customer's eyes.

Keenly, the tall visitor studied the furniture. Goggins watched him, hoping that he would see the desk he wanted. At last, there was a shake of the firm head.

"I have seen desks," said the stranger, "that have drawers of double width —but at one side only. Desks with ornamental tops divided with patterned lines."

"Such a desk!" exclaimed Goggins. "I had one like it only to-day. It came in here from the truck last night. Today—it is gone."

"Too bad." The potential purchaser shook his head. Then, in a quiet tone, he added: "Who bought it?"

"Some new customer," informed Goggins, with a shoulder shrug. "He came in this morning. He looked around. He saw the desk and took it."

"You delivered it, I suppose?"

"No. He sent a truck of his own. Two men came in and carried it out. He paid cash—gave no name."

The stranger turned and strolled toward the outer door. Old Goggins followed, insisting that a similar desk might be obtained later. Then the customer was gone. Ephriam Goggins blinked as he stared from the door of his shop. The tall visitor had vanished like a specter.

THE disappearance was not so mysterious as it had seemed to Goggins. Leaving the door of the shop, the stranger had paced along the street. In almost instinctive fashion, he had edged toward the inner portion of the sidewalk to merge with the gloom of dark-fronted buildings.

Such was the method of The Shadow. Though he had come to the furniture shop in disguise, posing as an ordinary customer, he made his departure in a fading, inconspicuous fashion. Even without his black-hued cloak and hat, The Shadow's swift leave-taking had been deceiving to the blinking gaze of Ephriam Goggins.

In his brief visit to the old man's shop, The Shadow had substantiated his theory of a concealed killer in Meldon Fallow's apartment. He was convinced, however, that Goggins had been an innocent factor in the affair.

Some one had planted the desk in Fallow's place. Perhaps the inventor had bought it at some shop. Possibly he had received it as a gift; or its purchase might have been suggested by a supposed friend or acquaintance. There was also the possibility that a substitution had been made during the inventor's absence from the apartment.

Fallow, himself, might have been able to tell the story of how he acquired the desk. The inventor, however, was not alive to speak. The important point, to The Shadow, was that the desk had unquestionably figured as a hiding place for some murderous monster.

The brain in back of Fallow's killing had learned that the furniture had been sold to Ephriam Goggins. He had let the old dealer's movers carry away the desk; then he had arranged its prompt purchase. The Shadow had arrived too late to uncover the desk at the furniture shop.

Full night had fallen. Blackness was the shroud beneath which The Shadow could travel cloaked in black. Following his departure from the furniture shop, the singular being was untraceable. It was not until an hour afterward that his phantom form manifested itself. A silent shape moved through the darkness of the courtyard beside the secluded home of Frederick Thorne.

As on his previous visit to the financier's residence, The Shadow scaled the wall with ease and agility. He reached the window of the office. His gloved hand thrust a thin wedge between the portions of the sash. The window yielded.

Gaining the inner ledge, The Shadow peered through the heavy velvet curtains. Clad in his black garments, he formed an invisible figure. His keen eyes saw the lighted room. The place was empty; but everything indicated approaching occupancy.

The Shadow waited. A sinister figure from the night, he was again present to learn the affairs of Frederick Thorne, the man of wealth who had shown such interest in Meldon Fallow's invention.

The Shadow's trail was broken. The removal of the desk from the shop of old Goggins had left no evidence or further trace. Clues might be sought later; for the present, The Shadow could profit best at Thorne's.

Thus he remained, a specter of darkness. The master of the night was seeking shreds of evidence that might enable him to piece the chain of crime.

The Shadow was seeking the unknown.

CHAPTER VII. HENCHMEN MOVE

WHILE The Shadow, lurking behind the folds of the maroon curtains, was awaiting the return of Frederick Thorne, a strange scene was taking place in another portion of Manhattan.

The setting was the lair of Charg. A wiry, shock-headed man was standing before the ornamental screen behind which sat the chief. Like Jerry Laffan, this minion of Charg was awestruck as he viewed the hazy form beyond the semitransparent barrier.

"Who are you, intruder?"

It was the rasp of Charg. The standing man chewed his puffy lips. Hardened of face, with the pug-nose of a prize fighter, he did not look like a man who would yield to fear. Yet his voice gave a quiver as he replied:

"I am Bart Daper. I am the servant of Charg."

"Your token?"

"Two."

"Make your report."

"All is ready." Daper's voice was steady. "I have the truck. I picked up the box. It is loaded."

A pause. Then came Charg's harsh tone.

"You will wait for Laffan. He will meet you at the appointed spot. Follow his instructions. Make your report tomorrow night. Are my instructions plain?"

"They are."

Another pause. Daper waited tensely, expecting words that he knew would come, yet which he seemed to regard as fearful and ominous.

"Charg has commanded."

"When Charg commands, his servants obey."

Bart Daper blurted his reply to Charg's sinister statement. He swung quickly toward the door as he heard the final intonation from behind the screen:

"Then go. To linger with Charg means death."

Daper did not wait to see Charg's arm reach for the light switch. He was already on his way to the door when it raised. He passed the lifted barrier and heard it clang behind him. He shuddered as he departed by the elevator.

Evil was afoot to-night. The fact that two minions had reported to Charg was proof of it. Insidious work was under way, unknown to The Shadow. Had the master sleuth encountered luck in his visit to Ephriam Goggins, he might even now be on the trail of Charg's hard-faced henchmen.

But The Shadow's trail had ended; and at the very time when Bart Daper departed from Charg's lair, The Shadow was engaged in watching another type of henchman—one who served Frederick Thorne.

THE SHADOW was still concealed behind the curtains of the paneled office. Shelburne had entered the room, accompanied by a servant. Apparently, Shelburne had been ushered in here to await Thorne's arrival. This was proof that the man of wealth would soon appear.

Minutes ticked by. Ten—fifteen—twenty. Shelburne busied himself at times by reading over papers that he had placed on Thorne's desk. At intervals, however, the spy became impatient. He arose and paced the floor; a troubled expression showed on his sly, smug face.

Thirty minutes. The door opened and Frederick Thorne entered. The multimillionaire was attired in tuxedo. He nodded curtly to Shelburne and walked to the desk. The smug spy stood aside while Thorne took his swivel chair.

"Sit down," ordered Thorne.

Shelburne took a chair opposite. His face was toward the curtains. The Shadow could watch his change of expression. By this, in a sense, The Shadow could gain a reflected picture of Thorne. The millionaire's back was toward the window; but through Shelburne, The Shadow could divine the indications that Thorne might register.

"I must leave very shortly," announced Shelburne, in a pleading tone. "The committee meeting will take place in half an hour. Towson may question me if I am late."

"I understand," growled Thorne. "I expected to be here sooner. I was delayed in an appointment. A man came to see me—at the club—and he was late. Well, Shelburne, keep your eyes and ears open. That's

all."

"I understand, sir."

"Remember one thing," warned Thorne, in a serious tone. "Meldon Fallow has been mysteriously murdered. So far, the police have found no reason for his death. Actually, there is none so far as I can see."

"Nevertheless, Fallow's affairs have been partly my concern—and, therefore, yours. It behooves both of us to proceed with caution."

"Yes, sir." Shelburne nodded and his face showed worry. "Did the police question you about Fallow being here?"

"They did. I told them that I was negotiating with him for an invention that was as yet undeveloped. That statement was satisfactory. Your reports"—Thorne paused to thumb papers before him—"show that the police also talked with Bryce Towson. No mention was made of my name?"

"None, sir. I was present at the time. You see, Towson called Dyke after he heard of Fallow's death. Dyke advised him to call Whilton. Towson did so; and Whilton said that it would be unwise to give any details concerning the supermotor."

"It belongs to the committee now that Fallow is dead. They intend to discuss it to-night. That is why I must be there —"

"All right," interrupted Thorne. "You can leave in a few minutes. What did Towson say to the police?"

"He simply told them that Fallow had consulted with him. He was quite upset over Fallow's death. He called them voluntarily, you see, to tell them that Fallow had visited his home earlier in the evening."

"You are sure that he said nothing more?"

"Absolutely, sir."

FREDERICK THORNE had arisen. He was pacing back and forth across the room. His face was stern. Suddenly, he wheeled toward Shelburne. The Shadow noting the spy's face, knew that an expression of ferocity must have come over Thorne's countenance, for Shelburne quailed involuntarily.

"Fallow was a fool," stormed Thorne. "I told him so the night that he was here. I offered him five million dollars for his invention. Now he is dead— little better than a pauper."

A harsh laugh came from Thorne's lips. Then, in a fierce tone, the millionaire resumed his discourse:

"I am the only man," he declared, "who could offer that price. I did not tell Fallow why—it would only have increased his insane stubbornness. But you, Shelburne, can understand what is at stake."

"I have gained a grip upon power industries throughout the country. Those interests are too big for one man to control. I can become the greatest of power magnates, should I persist, but never dictator, unless —"

Shelburne nodded. He understood. Thorne, nevertheless, completed his statement.

"Unless," added the millionaire, "I gain control of Fallow's invention. With that one instrument, I can demand my terms."

"Fallow, the fool, thought that I intended to revolutionize all industry. I could not argue with him, for my actual scheme would have incited him fully as much. I would run existing power plants out of business yes—but only those which would not meet my terms.

"With massive motors built from Fallow's plans"—enthusiasm was Thorne's ruling tone—"I can compete with power plants and cut costs to the marrow. They will be forced to sell to me.

"Gradually, perhaps, I can change the industry, introducing supermotors instead of heavy turbines and costly water power plants. All that belongs to the future. I shall have my way. I shall become the greatest of all power magnates!"

Shelburne listened. His face showed the reflection of Thorne's enthusiasm. Too though he was in the millionaire's gigantic plan, Shelburne could see reward for himself. Thorne was coming to that point.

"Shelburne." Thorne leaned upon the desk and wagged a stern finger toward his henchman. "Your part is important. As secretary of the committee which now owns the Fallow motor, you can observe any change which may become evident in their plans.

"I have read your reports. I know that the three men—Dyke, Towson and Whilton—have agreed to keep the invention from control such as mine. But all decision rests with them.

"Fallow is dead. How and why—those factors do not matter. He was the chief obstacle to my plans. Of four, I have only three with whom to deal. The most rabid one of the group has been eliminated."

Thorne paused and eyed Shelburne shrewdly. The power magnate had turned slightly; his profile was toward the window. The Shadow could see the curl of his puffy lips. Thorne's sallow face had become threatening in expression.

"It is unfortunate," rasped the magnate, in sarcastic tones, "that Meldon Fallow should have died. Unfortunate, yes, but not without certain benefit. Throughout my career, Shelburne, I have taken advantage of events as they occur.

"Meldon Fallow was murdered. His death may be the work of some unknown enemy. Perhaps"—Thorne paused reflectively—"the menace which hung over Fallow may strike at some one else. Whatever the case, Fallow's death should have some bearing on the attitude of the committee. So be observant, Shelburne: observant—and silent."

With his final statement, Thorne became rigid as he stared toward his listening spy. There was an insidious glare in the power magnate's eye. The Shadow, like Shelburne, could observe it.

Shelburne arose. He knew that the interview was ended. It was time for his departure. He bowed and left the office. Thorne's servant entered.

"I shall remain here for the evening," announced the power magnate. "I am expecting visitors from Chicago—representatives of an Illinois electric power concern. Usher them in when they arrive."

Maroon curtains trembled slightly as Thorne took his swivel chair behind the desk. The power magnate did not observe the motion. He did not know that another visitor had taken departure.

The Shadow, like Shelburne, had reason to depart. The master sleuth, like Thorne's spy, was interested in the affairs of the committee that had gained full control of Meldon Fallow's remarkable invention.

CHAPTER VIII. THE SHADOW SUSPECTS

BRYCE TOWSON was seated, alone, at the long table in his conference room. The consulting engineer seemed serious as he studied plans that lay before him. Towson had dined early—here at home—and he had been busy with this work from the time his meal had ended.

Completing a survey of his plan, Towson glanced at his watch. His face showed annoyance. The time for the committee meeting had arrived. Herbert Whilton and Loring Dyke were due at any time; yet Shelburne had not put in his appearance.

Towson's impatience came to a sudden end as the door opened and the tardy secretary appeared. Shelburne stared anxiously across the room. Seeing that Towson was alone, the smug man smiled. He was in time for the conference.

Towson, however, made comment upon the fact that Shelburne was late. He spoke to the secretary as the man moved across the room toward the filing cabinet. Towson's tone was severe.

"What's been keeping you, Shelburne?" he demanded. "I expected you to arrive early—not late. I have been working here alone, since dinner, trying to straighten out the details caused by Fallow's death. I wanted you to help me."

"Sorry, sir," protested Shelburne. "I shall do better in the future."

"See that you do," declared Towson. "Our work is increasing in importance. We cannot tolerate an incompetent secretary."

With this, Towson gathered up papers from the table and thrust them into Shelburne's hands. Carrying the documents to the filing cabinet, the secretary laid them on top and began to arrange them.

The door opened a few minutes later. A servant appeared, followed by Herbert Whilton. Towson arose to greet the wheezy, dry-faced philanthropist. They shook hands soberly; then sat down at the table.

"Poor Fallow," remarked Whilton. "How unfortunate that he should die."

Bryce Towson nodded solemnly.

"I thought of him last night," crackled Whilton. "I remember that he was to have given another of his scientific talks over the radio. I used to listen to them."

"Twice a month, weren't they?"

"Yes. Dyke used to broadcast occasionally, also. An odd sensation, Towson, speaking into a microphone. It makes one more nervous than addressing an assemblage. I have been called upon, several times, to introduce important personages at banquets."

"The microphone should not annoy you on such occasions. You had people before you."

"They seemed to be absent," declared Whilton, with a shake of his gray head. "Gone—as soon as that annoying microphone was put in front of me."

"Pure nervousness," laughed Towson. "I have spoken over the radio several times. In fact, I am to deliver a broadcast again next Tuesday night. A talk on suspension bridges, with comparisons. I suppose every one will tune in on some other programs. The American public wants entertainment, not knowledge."

SHELBURNE was approaching with his sorted papers. Towson received them from the bald-headed secretary; then looked toward the door as his servant made a reappearance.

"Mr. Dyke has arrived?" questioned Towson. "Show him in at once."

"Not Mr. Dyke, sir," replied the servant. "It is a friend of Mr. Whilton's —the gentleman who was here the other night -"

"Mr. Cranston?" asked Whilton, eagerly.

"Yes, sir," answered the servant.

"Usher him in at once," ordered Towson.

Lamont Cranston arrived a few minutes later. He was invited to a seat at the table. Turning to Herbert Whilton, he explained the object of his visit.

"I was out of town," stated the firm-faced visitor. "I was much sorrowed to learn of Meldon Fallow's untimely death. I called your home this evening, Whilton."

"I was out," declared the philanthropist, in his senile, whining tone. "I neglected to leave word where I could be found."

"So I learned," said Cranston. "I thought, perhaps, that you might be here. So I waited a while at the club; then decided to make a trip in this direction."

"You should have called me, Mr. Cranston," remarked Bryce Towson. "I have been here all evening. I could have told you that we were holding a conference to-night."

"I thought of it," returned Cranston. "However, I decided to wait and then come in person. I am not here to intrude upon your conference. I merely came to extend my sympathies and to arrange a later appointment with my friend Whilton."

"You are quite welcome here," assured Towson. "We are waiting for Loring Dyke. Call him, will you, Shelburne? Find out if he has started."

"Shall I call his personal number, sir?" asked Shelburne.

"Yes," ordered Towson.

"What is the personal number?" queried Cranston, in an interested tone.

"Dyke has two telephones in his home," explained Herbert Whilton, with a dry chuckle. "One is the private exchange, the other, the personal. He uses the latter when he does not wish to be disturbed by ordinary calls."

"Mr. Dyke does not answer, sir," interposed Shelburne, turning to Towson.

"He must be on his way here, then," decided the engineer.

"Two telephones," mused Cranston, with a slight smile. "One private; one personal. How does Dyke distinguish between them?"

"You explain it, Shelburne," said Towson, to the secretary. "I believe Mr. Dyke made you take down the details at one of our conferences."

"He did, sir," admitted Shelburne. "It was quite confusing when he first mentioned it to you and Mr. Whilton also to Mr. Fallow, sir. He clarified it, however. It became quite simple."

"Mr. Dyke has a small suite of rooms on the second floor of his home. A laboratory, where he can work, undisturbed; a bedroom, should he decide to work late. He locks the door and remains entirely alone.

"His personal telephone is in that suite. The other telephone—the private one—is merely the house telephone. The two are not connected. Only the few persons who know Mr. Dyke's personal number can reach him in his laboratory."

"An odd idea," remarked Cranston. "Does he often remain long in his special suite?"

"I believe so, sir," answered Shelburne. "There is a dumb-waiter that comes up to his laboratory from the kitchen. When meal hours arrive, the servants send up food and signal. I believe that Mr. Dyke stated that he sometimes remains alone for forty-eight hours."

"He did mention that fact," nodded Whilton. "An odd chap, Dyke. He believes in concentration; sometimes he is totally lost in thought at these committee meetings."

"Does Dyke live far from here?"

"No. Shelburne has his address."

"Here it is, sir," said the secretary, passing a typewritten sheet to Cranston. "The fourth name on this list."

"Not more than half an hour," decided Cranston, "if Dyke is coming by cab. Well, gentlemen"—the tall visitor was rising—"I must leave before Mr. Dyke arrives. I have an appointment that will keep me at the Cobalt Club until eleven o'clock."

"You will be free after that?" questioned Whilton, as he shook hands with the visitor.

"Yes," acknowledged Cranston.

"Could you stop back?" questioned the old philanthropist. "Our conference will be ended by that time. You and I can chat; and I can take you back to the club in my limousine."

"Very well," agreed Cranston.

LEAVING the conference room, Lamont Cranston was ushered to the front door by one of Towson's servants. A grim look showed upon the chiseled face as the visitor reached the street.

Cranston entered a trim coupe. He started the car and pulled away from the curb. From then on, his course was swift. Threading through thickening traffic, Cranston took an eastward route. His destination became apparent after he had traveled a dozen blocks.

He was speeding toward the home of Loring Dyke. The trip, calculated as a taxi ride of half an hour, had dwindled to less than twenty minutes. The coupe came to a sharp stop on a secluded street slightly more than a block from Dyke's address.

Cranston's hands opened a briefcase that lay on the seat. An instant later, they were obscured by blackness. The folds of a cloak settled over shoulders. A slouch hat followed.

The door of the coupe opened. A figure emerged, unseen. Fading away from the glimmer of a street lamp, a tall, spectral form merged with the darkness of a silent building.

Lamont Cranston had become The Shadow. The disguised master had gained a sudden impression of a looming menace. Until Shelburne had called Dyke's, without response, The Shadow had considered further murder to be a matter of the future.

His belief had undergone a sudden change. Some impelling thought had warned him that Loring Dyke was in danger. With all speed, The Shadow had come hither in hope of saving a man marked for doom!

CHAPTER IX. THE SECOND CRIME

THE home of Loring Dyke was one of those old-fashioned residences so common in the districts north of Times Square. A narrow, three-story structure, it formed part of the row of houses which occupied the entire block.

Its front was of stone; high steps led to the first floor. Beneath the steps was the entrance to the so-called basement, although this lower section of the house was more a ground floor than a cellar.

The front of the basement was occupied by a dining room; the rear, by pantry and kitchen. The first floor held parlor and library—huge, gloomy rooms that one entered from a long hall.

The front room of the second floor was Loring Dyke's usual bedroom. The other rooms, side and rear, formed his personal suite, of which Shelburne had spoken. The third story served as quarters for servants.

WHILE The Shadow was arriving at his chosen place more than a block from Dyke's, a stoop-shouldered, sour-faced man was standing in the lighted kitchen of the old residence. He was dressed in what appeared to be his best suit; a heavy bag beside him accounted for his other apparel. The man was making ready to leave the house.

The manner of this fellow indicated that he was one of Dyke's servants. Yet there was something about his air that marked him as other than a menial. In the light of the kitchen, his face showed a mingling of craft and nervousness—a peculiar medley of expression that was unaccountable.

As he stooped to pick up his heavy bag, the man made a quick glance toward the side of the room, where the closed shaft of a dumb-waiter was in view. Then came a furtive gaze toward the rear door which was locked and bolted.

Footsteps brought new nervousness. The servant stood waiting. Some one was coming downstairs. Then the arrival appeared from the pantry. An expression of relief showed upon the servant's face. The man who had come was a servant, like himself.

THE newcomer, however, did not wear a shifty look. His face was that of a faithful servant—one who had served a single master for many years. A puzzled expression showed upon his countenance as he addressed the man with the bag.

"Why are you still here, Talbot?" he inquired. "I thought that you had left for your vacation."

"I am going now, Parsons," returned the shifty man. "I came down here just to make sure that everything was locked and in order."

"That was unnecessary," declared Parsons. "The house should have been locked before. Further duty belongs to me, Talbot."

"All right," grunted the man with the bag. "No harm done. I didn't mind staying on duty a while longer, seeing as this is my last night."

He picked up the bag and started for the door to the pantry. Parsons stepped aside to let him pass. Then, just as Talbot had reached the pantry, Parsons stopped him with a question.

"Did the express men come for that box? I don't see it hereabouts."

"They came," assured Talbot. "I let them take it out. It was at six o'clock."

"Six?" Parsons looked puzzled. "The last time I was down here was at half past seven. I am sure I saw the box at that time."

"Six o'clock," insisted Talbot, nervously. "That's when they took it. You must have thought you saw it, Parsons."

"Maybe I was mistaken." Parsons was slow in the admission. "The box has been here since yesterday. Stupid of those express men, to leave it at the wrong house."

Talbot grunted agreement.

"A heavy thing, that box," resumed Parsons, "even though it was so small. What do you suppose was in it?"

"Typewriters, maybe," suggested Talbot. "It was about big enough to have held two of them, Parsons. One stacked up on the other."

"Like as not," agreed Parsons. "Move along, Talbot. Leave the latch closed when you go out. I'm going to my quarters."

Talbot moved into the dining room. There he set down the suitcase. Parsons passed him and ascended the stairs to the first floor. Parsons was already on the steps to the second when Talbot arrived in the first floor hallway.

Alone on the gloomy floor, Talbot again rested his suitcase. He mopped his forehead with a crumpled handkerchief; then lifted his bag and proceeded to the front door. He followed the instructions given him by Parsons. He latched the front door behind him as he left.

A taxi chanced to be passing as Talbot reached the street. The servant hailed the cab and gave a destination—a corner where a subway station was located. The cab made the trip in less than five minutes. Talbot alighted and descended to the subway platform.

There, in the light of the station the servant pulled an envelope from his pocket. He tore it open and nervously unfolded a paper. His face lighted with a hopeful gleam. There was a key with the message; Talbot pocketed it, then tore the paper into pieces and tossed the fragments to the track.

One minute later, a train roared into the platform. Talbot boarded it, with his bag. The train pulled away; the eddying air currents from beneath its wheels whisked up the pieces of Talbot's note and scattered them into hopeless obscurity.

MEANWHILE, new events had begun at the home of Loring Dyke. A strange action was occurring in the room where Parsons had found Talbot—the lighted kitchen in the basement.

The key was turning in the lock. As though twisted by an invisible hand, the back door of the house was yielding to some intruder. Then the key slowly removed itself. It was in the grip of long, thin pincers that had been thrust into the key hole from the outer side. The pincers relaxed. The key dropped dully on the linoleum floor.

The knob of the door turned. The barrier did not yield. It was still bolted. The key, turned by a cunning hand, had released the lock - that was all. The dropping of the key, however, was indication that the

worker on the other side had counted on the presence of the bolt.

A piece of pliable steel came through the key hole. Its visible end was a wire loop. The steel curled upward as it appeared; the loop dragged along the inner surface of the door. Probing, like a living thing, the wire loop neared the knob of the bolt.

There was something snakelike in its movement; the loop was the head of a serpent; the curled steel its body. The loop wavered back and forth; then settled over the knob of the bolt. The steel straightened and twisted. Guided by a pulling hand, it drew the bolt from the socket.

The loop detached itself. The steel coil disappeared. The door opened and a figure appeared within the kitchen. Tall, entirely in black, The Shadow stood within the light. Cloak, gloves and hat completely hid his form, save for the eyes that showed beneath the brim that projected over his forehead.

Those eyes sparkled keenly. They turned from view as The Shadow closed the door and replaced the key. With door locked and bolted, The Shadow's burning gaze centered upon the shaft of the dumb-waiter.

The Shadow advanced. His gloved hand raised the door of the little lift. The car itself showed within; it was furnished with a shelf in the center. Altogether, the dumb-waiter was two feet square and three feet high. Though the shelf was firmly in place, it was plainly detachable.

Not only that; the shelf had obviously been removed. Slivers of wood showed at the end of the groove in which the shelf fitted. Some one had pulled the central slab loose; then set it back in place.

This discovery seemed to impel The Shadow. Moving forward with silent swiftness, his tall shape dwindled with the darkness of the pantry. It was a gloomy, ghostly figure when it appeared in the dull light of the first floor. Phantomlike, it continued upward and reached the stillness of the second story.

A HEAVY door marked the entrance to Loring Dyke's private suit. The door was locked. A pick appeared in The Shadow's fingers. It probed the lock but encountered no key. A muffled click came from within the lock. The door yielded to The Shadow's hand.

Entering a dimly lighted room, The Shadow closed the door behind him. He used an oddly shaped key to relock it. Then he studied the room itself.

This was the small bedroom of which Shelburne had spoken. It contained a day bed in one corner; at present, that object was made up like a couch.

Ahead was the door to the laboratory. This portal was ajar; The Shadow could see a frosted window beyond. The laboratory, brilliantly lighted, was the room directly above the kitchen. There, The Shadow knew he would find Loring Dyke, if the chemist were still at home.

The Shadow advanced. He peered through the opening. His blackened form became rigid. His eyes turned toward the floor. The Shadow had arrived to find that death had preceded him.

Crumpled on the floor was the body of Loring Dyke. Grotesquely twisted, mangled to a hideous degree, the chemist had met the same fate that Meldon Fallow had encountered. The tiled floor of the laboratory was stained with pools of blood. Dyke's head, its brutally hammered face turned upward, had been twisted almost completely about.

The body, despite its contorted position, was downward; but the head was opposite. The jagged beginning of a terrible gash showed at the front of the dead man's shaggy hair. Not only had the killer choked the victim and broken his neck; fierce blows had been used to shatter Dyke's skull.

The Shadow approached the body. With cold, unflinching gaze, he surveyed this murderous work. His eyes turned toward the frosted windows; through them, The Shadow could see the outlines of bars.

The window in the little room was also barred. Loring Dyke's suite, with its locked door, was a stronghold. Yet the killer had found some means of entry and departure.

On the wall, close to the spot where Dyke's body lay, was the opening of the shaft which contained the dumbwaiter. The sliding door of the shaft was raised. Here was proof of The Shadow's keen discovery two floors below. The killer had come and gone by the lift in the dumb-waiter shaft!

To The Shadow, the fact was apparent. He had already discovered that the desk at Meldon Fallow's had been a factor in the inventor's death. The dumb-waiter shaft here at Dyke's could have been used in the same manner as the desk.

Others, however, would be incredulous. Joe Cardona would never believe it possible that a mangling murderer could possess proportions small enough to admit him through the narrow opening at bottom and top of the dumbwaiter shaft.

Even to The Shadow, the situation remained paradoxical. This mode of vicious killing was unparalleled.

LONG minutes passed while The Shadow persisted in his investigation. He examined the body of Loring Dyke. Mangled, torn and beaten, it lacked the marks which The Shadow had hoped to find— prints that would lead to identification of the killer.

The Shadow gazed toward the open shaft. He saw an unlighted bulb beside it; he knew that this lamp must have come as a signal to Loring Dyke, indicating that the little lift was at the top of the shaft.

Assuming the part of Dyke, The Shadow approached the opening. Dyke had raised the sliding door of the shaft; then had come the action of the killer. Murder accomplished, its author had been lowered to the basement.

To what extent had the killer been aided? Had he come alone, or had he been carried here? The Shadow suspected an accomplice within the house; but his keen observation carried further. It told him a definite fact concerning the killer.

Whoever—whatever—had come up this shaft was capable only of one action: namely, the delivery of death. Brutal—totally inhuman—the slayer was completely lacking in brains. The answer was before the eyes of The Shadow. It was the raised door of the opened shaft.

Deceptive though this murder would be to the police, it lacked one obvious touch that would have made it perfect. The killer had slain Loring Dyke without molestation. He had hammered the chemist almost to a pulp—a procedure that was quite unnecessary. Yet the merciless slayer had omitted a simple and final action—the closing of the door which Dyke had raised.

Investigators would wonder about that opened door. It would stand as proof that Dyke had been slain immediately after answering the light on the wall.

Why had the strangler missed this point? Why had he failed to perform the action that would have diverted all speculation from the mode of entry which he had used?

The Shadow had already gained the answer. A brainless killer—a slayer who performed his monstrous deeds with machinelike stubbornness. From this point, The Shadow gained another. He began to picture the type of killer that must have entered here; one upon which the sender could absolutely rely for murder; but nothing else.

A solemn laugh sounded through the tiled laboratory. Its tones were an eerie shudder, confined entirely to the room itself. Grim echoes responded in creepy, fantastic whispers. They were the answer to The Shadow's mirthless mockery.

Silence. The Shadow was moving about the laboratory. His eyes saw a lighted burner; beside it, a beaker, half filled with liquid. Dyke had been ready to begin a chemical experiment when the summons to death had come.

A pounding from the outer room. The Shadow listened. A muffled voice was calling. It was a servant, trying to summon his master.

"Mr. Dyke!" The Shadow, moving to the outer room, could hear the loudness of the tone. "Mr. Dyke! Are you there, Mr. Dyke?"

THE SHADOW made no response. The call was repeated; then came the sound of departing footsteps. The Shadow produced the pick and opened the door. He closed it behind him, silently locked it with his peculiar key, and descended softly to the first floor.

A voice was coming from the library. The servant was using the telephone. The Shadow waited, listening beyond the opened door.

"Headquarters?" The servant's tone was anxious. "Yes?... I am calling from the home of Loring Dyke... Loring Dyke, the chemist. My name is Parsons; I am his servant... I am afraid some harm has befallen him.

"Yes... Let me explain... A friend called him with an urgent message. I thought Mr. Dyke had gone out... Yes... I called the house where he was to be. He was not there... Where?... Unless something happened to him on the way, he is still here. No, I cannot reach him. He may be in his laboratory... Yes, the door is locked. He does not respond to the call..."

The Shadow had reached the outer door. He could tell from the tone of the servant's voice that Parsons was genuinely alarmed. Soon the police would arrive. They would break through the locked door. They would find the mangled body of Loring Dyke.

The outer door closed and latched. A spectral form flitted against the surface of the brownstone steps. It glided past the range of a street light, then faded into darkness.

The Shadow had viewed the scene of the second crime. His task at Dyke's was ended. Two deaths—not one—were to be avenged. The Shadow would find the mysterious murderer before the hand of death could strike again!

CHAPTER X. THE DECISION

"MR. CRANSTON is here, sir."

The speaker was Bryce Towson's servant. The man had entered the conference room, where his master and Herbert Whilton were engaged in conversation at the long table. The announcement brought an expression of surprise from Whilton.

"What!" exclaimed the old financier. "Eleven o'clock already!"

He drew a massive gold watch from his pocket. The timepiece corroborated his conjecture. Meanwhile, Towson was ordering the servant to admit the visitor. Lamont Cranston appeared at the doorway.

"Is the conference ended?" questioned the newcomer, in his quiet tone. "I see that our friend Dyke is not here."

"This is most amazing, Cranston," wheezed Whilton. "Towson and I have been chatting; we had no idea how late it was getting. We held no conference. Dyke did not arrive."

"I cannot understand it," added Towson. "Dyke's man, Parsons, called a while ago. He asked if Dyke had arrived. Apparently, Dyke intended to keep the appointment."

"Shelburne"—Towson turned to the bald-headed secretary—"suppose you call Dyke's home again. Find out if he has returned."

"Shall I call the private phone, sir?" questioned Shelburne. "I can talk to Parsons if I do -"

"Call Dyke's personal number first. He will be in his laboratory if he has arrived."

"Very well, sir."

Lamont Cranston took a seat at the long table. His keen eyes flashed. They were watching Shelburne, as the committee secretary used the telephone upon the radio cabinet.

Whilton and Towson were engaged in quiet conversation. They did not notice that Shelburne obtained the number on this attempt. Only Cranston saw the change that came over the secretary as he began to stammer words to a speaker at the other end.

"One—one minute," gasped Shelburne. He laid the telephone on the radio cabinet and approached the table. "Mr. Towson. Mr. Towson, sir -"

"What is it?" Towson swung in his chair. "Did you get Loring Dyke on the wire?"

"No—no, sir," stuttered Shelburne. "Something—something has happened there. You had better talk, sir—the police are at Mr. Dyke's!"

Towson issued a sharp exclamation. He arose and went to the telephone. Herbert Whilton, his peculiar smile half gone from his lips, stared and listened. Lamont Cranston was seated, silent in the chair.

"Yes..." Towson's tone was precise. "I wanted to speak with Mr. Dyke... I am Bryce Towson... Yes, the consulting engineer... Yes, Parsons called me to learn if Dyke had come here. I'm calling now to learn if he is there..."

"What's that?" Towson stopped abruptly. "Murdered! Loring Dyke! I can't believe it... In his laboratory? Strangled? This is terrible... Yes, he was to have been here to-night... Yes, I have been waiting ever since dinner... Dyke was a friend of Meldon Fallow... Yes... Yes... I knew both of them... Very well... Surely, I shall be glad to see you."

Towson hung up. He turned toward the table. His face was frozen with consternation. The others had learned the news from the talk over the telephone. Towson, however, had more details for them.

"LORING DYKE has been murdered," stated the engineer, as he sat down and gripped the arms of his chair. "The circumstances of his death are identical with those of Meldon Fallow. He has been strangled - horribly disfigured—terribly beaten—by some vicious killer."

"Dreadful!" gasped Herbert Whilton. "Dreadful. This passes belief!"

"How did the police find out about it?" inquired Lamont Cranston, steadily.

"Evidently through Parsons," returned Towson. "The servant must have called them after he found out that Dyke was not here. This is a grave situation, gentlemen. Very grave, Whilton, as it applies to you and me."

The old philanthropist nodded.

"Fallow's death," resumed Towson, in a sober tone, "was a blow. Yet it did not indicate any positive connection with the affairs of this committee. Now, apparently, the same killer who slew Fallow has murdered Dyke. The connection is certain."

"It is," agreed Whilton. "It would seem that some dangerous enemy is threatening our enterprise. Who can it be, Towson? Do you suspect" - the philanthropist paused seriously—"could you suspect Frederick Thorne?"

Cranston's eyes were on Shelburne. The sneaky secretary had paused in his catlike tread, midway between table and filing cabinet. Cranston could see that Shelburne's whole attention was centered on whatever Towson might reply. Relief came over Shelburne's face as the engineer spoke.

"That would be preposterous," decided Towson. "Frederick Thorne offered Meldon Fallow millions for his invention. Thorne is a financier of high repute. He would never associate himself with such evil business."

"Thorpe is a power magnate," reminded Whilton. "Fallow refused to sell him the invention."

"But Dyke did not. If Fallow told Thorne the details of our control of the invention, Thorne's natural action would be to deal with us."

"I think you are right, Towson. Perhaps it was a mistake for me to refer to Thorne."

"Not at all, Whilton. It is a logical connection, despite its improbability. Thorne is the one man who could profit immensely by gaining control of Fallow's supermotor."

Whilton nodded in agreement. Towson looked toward Cranston, as though hoping for some new suggestion. Between them, Towson and Whilton had argued both pro and con; the opinion of a third person seemed a logical solution.

"Any one," decided Cranston, "might profit immensely from control of Fallow's motor. Its possibilities are apparent. Beginning with a reasonable amount of capital, the owner of that device could begin a revolutionary epoch.

"He could dominate the power industry. He could introduce a new era in transportation. With the machinery and formulas which you two men, as survivors of the committee, possess, a shrewd seeker of wealth could acquire a fabulous fortune.

"Therefore, gentlemen, any man who knows of the invention must be considered as a potential grasper. Thorne is the only one who has stated his desire to acquire it. That makes his position debatable.

"You can regard him as an enemy, because he wants something that he does not have. You must also regard him as a friend, because he has made a fair and open offer."

Cranston's eyes were toward Shelburne. He could see that the secretary's nervousness had returned. Each varied trend of Cranston's discourse had brought a rise and fall to Shelburne's hopes.

"Well spoken, Cranston." The commendation came from Bryce Towson. "You have stated the precise

situation. It leave us, however—Whilton and myself— in a difficult place. Without the formality of a regular committee meeting, we must decide at once upon our course."

TOWSON paused impressively to look at Whilton. It was to the philanthropist that the engineer addressed his next remarks.

"Fallow was here several hours before he was murdered," stated Towson. "Dyke should have been here this evening. A detective—a man named Cardona— is coming to see me. I must talk to him.

"I have two courses. First: to tell him about Fallow's invention, despite the fact that it is a sworn secret; to mention Frederick Thorne as a would-be purchaser. Second: to tell him that Fallow and Dyke were both friends of mine; that they were scarcely more than acquaintances of each other; and that they were but a few of many scientific men who visit me here.

"In brief, Whilton, I can tell the entire truth; or I can tell the partial truth. Inasmuch as the matter concerns both of us—as survivors of the committee—I must rest my action upon your decision."

Whilton pondered. Towson had raised a very important question. It was fully two minutes before the old philanthropist gave his slow reply.

"We owe a duty," he crackled, "to Meldon Fallow. He wanted his invention to be preserved a secret for the present. We also owe a duty to Loring Dyke; he made no suggestion of mentioning the invention after Fallow died. My decision, Towson, is that you should follow the second course that you mentioned.

"Tell simple truths without jeopardizing our secret. My friend Cranston, here"—Whilton's smile was steady as the old man stared across the table— "will certainly say nothing of these facts that he has gained in confidence."

"You can rely upon me for secrecy," came Cranston's steady voice. The sharp eyes of the speaker were turned toward Shelburne. "I shall say nothing to the police."

Bryce Towson had caught the direction of Lamont Cranston's gaze. The engineer turned in his chair. He spoke to the bald-headed secretary.

"You have heard this discussion, Shelburne," said Towson, firmly. "Remember: you are to say nothing to any one. You, like the rest of us, will abide by Mr. Whilton's decision."

"I understand, sir."

"Put away the papers. You may go. Call me to-morrow. I intend to be alone to-night when the detective arrives."

Shelburne complied. Packing the papers in the filing cabinet, he stalked, stoop-shouldered, from the room. Herbert Whilton was rising as Shelburne departed.

"It is best that Cranston and I should leave," declared the old philanthropist. "This matter, Towson, rests in your hands. I shall call you later."

Lamont Cranston accompanied the old man from the conference room. They reached the street and entered Whilton's car.

As they rode toward the Cobalt Club, Herbert Whilton raised a new subject.

"Fallow and Dyke are dead," stated the old man, seriously. "I hope that the same danger does not

threaten either myself or Towson. I meant to warn Towson to be careful. He and I now carry a heavy burden between us.

"However"—the old man's tone denoted wheezy assurance—"we are both well protected. Fallow lived alone. Dyke was an absent-minded recluse. Towson's case is different. He has three servants; he is an active man who is seldom alone.

"As for myself"—the old man chuckled—"my Long Island home is a place of absolute safety. It is a citadel, Cranston, with the retinue that I have in my employ. Look at the chauffeur of this car—Halliwell—who has served me for a dozen years. I am safe anywhere while he is with me.

"My servants: Randham, Parker, Hodge—all are reliable men. I fear nothing; but I must remember to warn Towson to be cautious. Yes, I must remember—ah! Here we are, Cranston, at your club!"

Lamont Cranston bade the old man good night. He left the limousine. As before, he did not enter the Cobalt Club, but strolled away along the street.

HALF an hour later, a phantom shape appeared in the neighborhood of Bryce Towson's home. It became a gliding figure that moved stealthily up the steps in front of the gloomy building. Muffled clicks sounded in the darkness; the front door yielded.

The form of The Shadow appeared in the hallway. It faded from view as a servant passed. It reached the corridor outside of the conference room and melted with the darkness of an alcove.

The Shadow had dropped the guise of Lamont Cranston; he had returned in his cloak of black. He was awaiting the arrival of Detective Joe Cardona, that he might gain a double knowledge.

His first purpose was to learn if Bryce Towson could handle the interview in the fashion that Herbert Whilton had ordered. His second purpose was more important.

The Shadow was here to learn the details of the police theory regarding the death of Loring Dyke. Upon the statements that Joe Cardona might make, The Shadow could base his next endeavors in the search of crime.

Herbert Whilton had spoken wisely when he had told Lamont Cranston that danger hung over the two remaining members of the committee. His added remark, that both were well guarded, was also sagacious.

Twice had death struck. It was due to strike again. Yet the brain that planned horrible murder would be too wise to act with undue haste.

An interlude was coming; in that space of time, The Shadow would be active in his efforts to forestall the next deed of doom.

CHAPTER XI. CHARG'S REWARD

MIDNIGHT. Detective Joe Cardona, riding westward in a taxicab, noted the hour by his watch. He settled back in the seat. In a few minutes he would be at Bryce Towson's. Midnight was the time that Joe had set for his appointment with the consulting engineer.

Towson, Joe hoped, might tell him something of Meldon Fallow and Loring Dyke. Two men—both singularly slain—had been friends of Bryce Towson. A connection between Fallow and Dyke might mean much toward the solution of these baffling deaths.

In the conference room at his home, Bryce Towson sat alone, studying minutes of the meeting which he had held with Herbert Whilton. Shelburne had taken these notes; he had left them for Towson to review.

The engineer was also anxious for the interview which he was to have with Joe Cardona. Towson, like the detective, had a purpose in mind. He had chosen to tell the truth to the greatest possible degree, without overemphasizing the importance of the supermotor which Meldon Fallow had devised.

Meanwhile, The Shadow waited. He was to be the unseen listener, the keen investigator who had advanced along the trail. In a sense, his work was just beginning. For The Shadow, as yet, had learned nothing concerning Charg, the unknown master who had launched two fiendish murders.

This hour of midnight, however, was one that had been appointed by Charg himself. While Cardona sped toward Towson's; while Towson awaited in the conference room; while The Shadow lurked unseen, a man was approaching the obscure apartment house that hid Charg's lair within its walls.

This man was Talbot. The false servant of Loring Dyke was pale as he entered the quiet apartment house. From his pocket, he had drawn the key which had come from the envelope opened on the subway platform.

Talbot's hand was fumbling as it unlocked the door of the apartment. Within the poorly furnished living room, Talbot turned on the light and looked about in unfamiliar fashion. He proceeded to the passage, found the closet and twisted the hook. He pressed it five times.

The murmur of the elevator came from below. The wall opened. Talbot entered the lift and descended. He found the entrance to the abode of Charg. He pressed the button five times. The door slid upward; Talbot stepped into the lighted lair.

THE false servant stared hard at the strange surroundings. He shivered as the door dropped behind him. He approached the screen with faltering steps. He heard the tiny lights click; by their shaded illumination, he saw Charg's moving arm.

Then came the grating voice—the ominous tones that brought new quivers:

"Who are you, intruder?"

"Talbot," gasped the standing man. "That is my name. Talbot. I—I am the servant of Charg."

Talbot had repeated instructions gained from the message which he had destroyed. It was plain that this was his first visit to the terrible being whose mandates he had chosen to obey.

"Your token?"

"Five."

"Make your report."

"I—I did as ordered," stated Talbot. "Jerry Laffan was the man who—who told me about you. I—I watched the box that was left yesterday. When Jerry came—with another man—I helped them put the box in the dumbwaiter. They—they took it away afterward."

A pause. To Talbot, passing seconds seemed like intervals. Then came the rasping voice from the screen.

"You have read my message," were the words of Charg. "Have you destroyed it?"

"Yes," stammered Talbot. "I tore it up. The pieces are gone. I—I left nothing."

"You have done well." The statement came after a second's pause. "You have come, at my order, to claim the reward that is your due."

"Face to the right. Advance to the door that you see there. Place your hand upon it. The door will open at your touch. Are my instructions plain?"

"They are. Yes."

"Charg has commanded."

Talbot started to turn toward the door. He faltered, remembering that he had other words to say. Again facing the screen, he spoke.

"When Charg commands," he said, nervously, "his servants obey."

"Then advance," came the grating voice. "Go to the door on the right."

Talbot saw a moving arm; he caught the outline of the turbaned head, with the sparkle of jewels. He turned to the right and stepped forward. As he reached the appointed door he pressed his hand against it.

There was a click. The door shot upward. As Talbot gasped, the light went out. Then came a thudding sound, a hoarse scream from Talbot's throat. A choked gasp sounded in the darkness. Something slumped upon the floor and sprawled there, motionless. A new click marked the dropping of the door.

A rasping chuckle came from behind the screen. It was the knell of death. The abode of Charg lay silent and still. Tragedy had occurred within those roughened walls.

EIGHT minutes after midnight. Silence had pervaded Charg's lair. Elsewhere, a milder appointment was being kept. Detective Joe Cardona was entering Bryce Towson's conference room. The engineer was rising to meet him.

The servant who had ushered in the detective closed the door upon leaving. Cardona lost no time in getting down to business. The first question that he put to Towson was a pointed one.

"You knew both Fallow and Dyke?" asked Joe.

"I did." Towson nodded soberly. "I am a consulting engineer. My income is derived from large corporations. I have always, however, found it good policy to be friendly with men of scientific ability."

"I give advice to such persons. I know many inventors, many chemists—men like Fallow and Dyke. Hence the coincidence which has brought you here. One, Fallow, saw me not long before his death. The other, Dyke, had spoken about coming here to-night."

The door of the conference room was opening. Neither Cardona nor Towson observed the fact. The room was gloomy; for the chief light was at the end of the table near the windows.

The Shadow, peering through a narrow slit, was listening in on the two speakers. He caught the final words that Bryce Towson uttered. He heard Joe Cardona's next question.

"Did Fallow and Dyke know each other?"

"They did." Towson's tone was positive. "But"—the engineer modified his first statement—"their

acquaintanceship was casual. Fallow was an inventor; Dyke a chemist. There was little in common in their work."

"I see. Were they ever here together?"

"Yes. Fallow had developed some chemical preparation in connection with an invention. He asked Dyke's opinion of it. Dyke approved the formula."

"Did you see Dyke after Fallow's death?"

"No."

Cardona was nodding. His last question had received a truthful answer. At the same time, it had turned the trend. It gave Cardona the very impression that Towson was anxious to create. While Cardona paused, Towson took the lead.

"I greatly wish," stated the engineer, in a sincere tone, "that I could aid you in solution of these terrible murders. Both Meldon Fallow and Loring Dyke were men of worth. Their deaths are real tragedies.

"I read the accounts of Fallow's death. I presumed that the newspaper reports were accurate. I only hope that Dyke's unfortunate end has given you some real clue that may be linked to those which you gained after Fallow was killed."

"Thanks," said Cardona, gruffly. "The problem is a tough one. To be frank with you, about all I've got is what you've just told me. The two men knew each other; and it's a cinch the same guy killed them."

"Yes," nodded Towson. "You told me over the telephone that Loring Dyke's body was horribly mangled. That was the case with Meldon Fallow -"

"It was," interposed Cardona. "Believe me, I've seen some bad ones - but never anything like these two. There's only one way the murderer could have got in; that was through the door into the rooms where Dyke had his laboratory."

"Wasn't it locked?"

"Sure it was. What's more, the key was on Dyke. But the windows were barred; and they hadn't been opened. There was only one other way"—Cardona paused and delivered a gruff laugh—"and that was up through the dumb-waiter. But you can't make a midget do a giant's work.

"The guy that killed Dyke came in by the door and went out the same way. He must have had a key—that's all—and there's a bird that could have given it to him."

"You don't mean Parsons? The servant who telephoned me here?"

"Not Parsons. He's on the level. But there was another fellow working for Dyke—a guy named Talbot. He left on a vacation. Went to-night. Parsons saw him go out. Leastwise, Parsons went upstairs, just before Talbot went out."

"Was that prior to the murder?"

"Yes. So we're looking for Talbot. We want to find out what he knows. Maybe he had a key to Dyke's rooms. Maybe he gave it to some one; maybe it was swiped from him. Anyway, we're going to find him."

"Could he be the murderer?"

"No. I checked on that. He isn't very husky; but that's not the point. I figured it this way: the guy that killed Dyke was the one who murdered Fallow. So I quizzed Parsons and found out that Talbot was at Dyke's, on the job, the night that Fallow was killed. Parsons is sure about it."

"I hope that Parsons is to be relied upon. He might have been in league with Talbot."

"Not a chance. One guy wouldn't hold the bag if the other scrambled. Maybe Talbot is phony; but Parsons isn't. That's settled."

TOWSON pondered. Cardona's words had apparently started a thread of recollection in the engineer's mind. Cardona waited for a statement.

"Loring Dyke came here but seldom," remarked Towson. "He spent most of his waking hours, so I understand, in his laboratory. On one visit, I remember that he mentioned his servants—Parsons and Talbot—and he spoke highly of their loyalty."

"Dyke was a man of sound judgment. Your impression of Parsons is doubtless correct. It fits in with Dyke's belief. It is possible, of course, that Dyke was mistaken regarding Talbot."

"Once we've found the fellow," persisted Cardona, "we'll know. There's another angle to it, Mr. Towson. The police surgeon thinks that Loring Dyke was killed just about the time when Talbot left the house."

"Maybe the killer was waiting until he got out. That would have been good business; it would have meant only one servant to fight. It happened that Parsons was on the third floor; so there's no reason why the murderer— assuming he had a key—couldn't have gone in and out right after Talbot left."

The trend of conversation had changed. Joe Cardona had been stating his own theories. His questioning had ceased at an early stage. Bryce Towson was adhering to the plan which Herbert Whilton had ordered. He had diverted the talk to a point where there could be no mention of the supermotor.

Joe Cardona was rising. The door closed without a semblance of a jar. The Shadow merged with darkness. Then the door reopened; Cardona stepped into the hall, accompanied by Bryce Towson. The detective shook hands with the engineer; then left.

The Shadow waited until Bryce Towson had returned to the conference room. The engineer left the door partly opened; The Shadow, passing, saw Towson busied with his papers. Then the gliding shape reached the front door. The Shadow made his silent, unseen way out into the night.

Joe Cardona had been at Bryce Towson's slightly more than twenty minutes. In the period between twelve-eight and twelve-thirty, he had discussed the theory upon which the police were working. Joe Cardona was returning to headquarters; The Shadow was faring forth on new investigation. Cardona had learned nothing that The Shadow knew; The Shadow had learned Cardona's theories.

Yet neither had learned of the reward of Charg. The death of Talbot, delivered in a hidden lair, was yet unknown. Only those whom Charg had chosen could find the body of Talbot at the spot where it now lay!

CHAPTER XII. CHARG ORDERS

HALF past twelve. While Cardona and The Shadow were leaving Bryce Towson's, a new visitor was at the lair of Charg. Jerry Laffan had descended to the lair. He had given his three rings. He was waiting for the door to open.

Laffan was perplexed. On all previous visits, he had been admitted with promptitude. A minute passed;

Laffan heard a noise behind him. He turned to see the elevator rising. The wall was coming downward from the closet above.

Laffan trembled. Had he arrived ahead of Charg? Was he to meet his terrible master face to face? The elevator stopped at the top; it began a descent while the wall arose. Laffan saw a man in the dropping lift; then, of a sudden, he recognized the arrival.

It was Bart Daper. Charg's second minion was surprised to see Laffan waiting. Stepping from the elevator, Daper stood perplexed; then, in customary fashion, he advanced and pressed the button twice.

The door responded. It moved upward with a click. The reason for Laffan's waiting was explained. Charg had been within his lair all the while; tonight, however, he apparently desired to interview both minions at the same time.

The eyes of both men were on the screen ahead. Laffan and Daper had new confidence. Charg's abode seemed less dreadful when visited with a companion. A light clicked behind the screen. Then the voice:

"Who are you, intruders?"

"I am Jerry Laffan. I am the servant of Charg."

"I am Bart Daper. I am the servant of Charg."

"Your numbers?"

"Three."

"Two."

A pause. Then the voice of Charg rasped insidious words. Laffan and Daper, staring, could see the turbaned head inclining forward, its jewels glittering through the dimness of the screen.

"When Charg commands," was the announcement, "his servants obey. To linger with Charg means death. Look to your right. You will see Charg's answer to a traitor."

Laffan and Daper swung toward the direction indicated. For the first time since entering the room, they viewed a gruesome object. It was the body of Talbot. Crumpled on the dim floor by the door on the right, Loring Dyke's servant was a horrible sight.

He had suffered terrific death. Beaten, twisted, mangled, his body was no pleasant sight. Yet Charg's repeated tones carried new orders which forced Laffan and Daper toward the spot where Talbot lay.

"Remove him," came the grating tone. "Carry him far from here. Act at once."

STOOPING, Laffan and Daper gathered up the hulk that had once been a living human. They carried the battered corpse to the door through which they had entered. They paused there, while Charg declared:

"Charg has commanded."

"When Charg commands," gasped the two men, in unison, "his servants obey."

"Then go. To linger with Charg means death."

As the raspy words ended, the door moved upward. Daper and Laffan lugged their burden through the portal; the barrier descended.

Charg had planned well. Both Daper and Laffan believed—from the position of Talbot's body—that Charg had delivered death because his orders had been disobeyed. They did not suspect for an instant that Charg's own words had ordered Talbot to the trap.

Thus had Charg disposed of a new and undesirable aid. Talbot's usefulness had ended with his betrayal of Loring Dyke. He was needed no longer; so his death had been arranged. It served, also, as an example which Jerry Laffan and Bart Daper would not forget.

Charg's power over his real minions had been increased doubly by the death of Talbot. Passing through the doorway, the two carriers of Talbot's body had caught the tones of an insidious chuckle from behind Charg's screen. Well did they know the merciless, murderous power of their exacting master.

ONE o'clock. Half an hour had passed since Charg's minions had held rendezvous with their evil chief. Silence lay within the abode of Charg. There was silence, also, within the confines of a lighted room which the eyes of The Shadow were observing.

The Shadow was peering from the maroon curtains in Frederick Thorne's paneled office. The Shadow had arrived here after his departure from Bryce Towson's. He had expected to find Thorne at home.

More minutes passed. At last, the door opened. Thorne, attired in tuxedo, entered, with a servant following. The power magnate took his seat in the swivel chair.

"You say that Shelburne called?" Thorne's voice was harsh as he addressed the servant.

"He called twice, sir," replied the servant. "Twice, since eleven o'clock."

"What did you tell him?"

"That you had gone out, unexpectedly, early in the evening. He said you spoke of an appointment with some visitors; I told him that it had been postponed."

"And the second time Shelburne called?"

"I told him that I was sure you would return within an hour. He said that he would come here."

"Very well. Usher him in when he arrives."

The servant left. Thorne arose from his swivel chair. He stroked his chin as he paced back and forth across the room. He had evidently expected to find Shelburne here when he returned.

Five minutes passed. The servant returned. He announced Shelburne; a moment later, the bald-headed man came cringing into the room. The servant departed, leaving Shelburne alone with the power magnate.

"What is it, Shelburne?" questioned Thorne, in a harsh tone. "You look worried, man. What has happened?"

"Loring Dyke is dead," responded Shelburne, in a feeble tone. "We heard the news at the committee meeting. Dyke is dead—murdered—like Meldon Fallow."

Thorne stood stock-still. He eyed Shelburne steadily. The Shadow could see a peculiar expression upon Thorne's countenance. It showed a trace of worryment, mingled with odd satisfaction.

"Why didn't you come here at once?" demanded Thorne.

"I—I thought it best to call, sir," whined Shelburne. "Towson dismissed me for the night. A detective was coming to talk with him. He wanted no one else there."

"A detective?" Thorne's question was harsh. "Does Towson intend to tell him about Fallow's motor?"

"No, sir. Mr. Whilton forestalled that. Towson intends to say but little. Your name will not be mentioned."

"So you were worried, eh?"

Thorne chuckled coarsely, as he put the question. Shelburne, cringing pitifully; nodded.

"About me?" demanded Thorne, coldly. "Or about yourself?"

"Both," admitted Shelburne. "I was afraid—afraid to come here immediately. I—I called twice. When your servant was sure you would return, I decided it would be safe to come."

"All right." Thorne's tone showed approval. "Sometimes, Shelburne, worry is good for people. It makes them refrain from too much talk. That applies to you. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"You can go. Call me to-morrow."

Thorne watched the spy's departure. Shelburne slunk from the room in cowardly fashion. When the door had closed behind him, Thorne emitted a meditative laugh.

THE power magnate seemed pleased to know that Loring Dyke had died. He picked up papers that Shelburne had brought; he studied them and placed them in the desk drawer. He summoned his servant.

"Put the room in order," instructed Thorne. "I am turning in for the night."

The power magnate went out by the door. While the servant remained, arranging the room for the morrow, a patch of blackness glided along the floor and disappeared at the front of the velvet curtains.

A weird shape appeared upon the outer wall. The Shadow, too, had departed. His investigation was ended for the night. New work would begin upon the morrow.

Well might The Shadow prepare for other tasks. For his observations, varied though they had been, had not been conducted at the most vital spot of all—the hidden lair of Charg.

To-morrow, The Shadow was to learn a fact as yet unknown. He, like the law, was to be confronted with another unsolved crime: the death of Talbot.

Charg had rewarded. Derisive of the law as well as of The Shadow, Charg's minions—Laffan and Daper—had carried Talbot's body from their master's lair.

That mangled corpse would be discovered on the morrow. Like the bodies of Fallow and Dyke, it would lie as new evidence of the terrible murder which Charg, alone, could order!

CHAPTER XIII. THE SHADOW CHOOSES

"UXTRY! Uxtry!"

The newsboy was shouting his cry near Times Square. Passers in the afternoon throng paused to eye the

evening journals that he was waving at them.

"Uxtry! Third strangler victim found! Read all about it! Uxtry!"

The cry was echoed from a hundred feet away. Beyond that, another paper peddler bellowed forth the news. All the while, Broadway strollers, looking upward, were viewing the corroboration of this new sensation.

Lights that formed moving letters were running along the electric signs girding the Times Building. These were telling the populace that another mangled corpse had been discovered. The morning sensation had been the death of Loring Dyke. The afternoon news was a follow-up of that event.

Glaring globes of lights spelled traveling words for the throngs about Times Square. Like an illuminated headline, they spelled a message similar to the streamers of type that adorned front pages of the evening newspapers:

SERVANT OF LORING DYKE FOUND MURDERED.

POLICE BLAME STRANGLER FOR NEW DEATH.

A tall passer tendered a coin to a newsboy. He received a newspaper in return and paused to eye the headlines. Folding the paper for the moment, this individual hailed a taxi. He gave a destination to the driver. Entering the cab, he opened the journal to read the details of this new death.

It was half past four in the afternoon. According to the newspaper, boys, playing in a vacant lot in the Bronx, had discovered a mangled body. This had occurred shortly before one o'clock, during the period between school sessions.

The boys had told a policeman. The body had been taken to the morgue. There, Parsons, a servant of Loring Dyke, had identified the shattered hulk as the body of his fellow servant, Talbot.

"Uxtry! Uxtry!"

The cry was ringing beneath the structure of the Sixth Avenue elevated as the cab rolled beneath. It was heard near Fifth Avenue. But when the cab pulled up on an obscure side street, the only token that remained of this new crime was the newspaper which still lay before the tall passenger.

Leaving the taxi, the rider became a pedestrian. His path became strangely obscure as he threaded his way along the narrow street. Though it was still daylight, he seemed to fade beneath the shadowy fronts of old buildings. At last, his course was lost.

A FIGURE showed in the dinginess of a gloomy courtyard. A door opened; the form entered a darkened corridor. Footsteps echoed; paused; ascended. Shrouding darkness—then the dim light of an empty office.

The hazy form was stooping at an outer door. Upon a grimy pane of glass above his shoulders were these letters:

B. JONAS

The Shadow was on the inside of the door through which Rutledge Mann was accustomed to thrust his reports. An envelope crinkled between long-fingered hands. A sibilant laugh whispered through the decrepit room. Then the tall form arose, stepped toward the inner gloom of the office, and moved from view.

Again the figure in the courtyard; it seemed to glide from the spot. Once more, The Shadow's course was untraceable. Though clad as a chance stroller in Manhattan; though traveling in the light of afternoon, this amazing personage still possessed his uncanny ability of fading into nothingness.

Half past five. A click in a darkened room. Bluish light appeared; beneath it, long white hands. The girasol sparkled its resplendence. The Shadow was in his sanctum. He opened the envelope from Mann.

Though the news of new murder had been on the street no longer than an hour, Rutledge Mann had already received a detailed report from Clyde Burke. The Classic reporter had been in Joe Cardona's office when word had come in concerning a body at the morgue.

Joe had summoned Parsons. Clyde had accompanied the detective and the servant. He had been present at the identification. Clyde had made a report to Mann; then he had gone back to headquarters with Joe Cardona.

DURING the day, Rutledge Mann served as The Shadow's contact with such agents as Clyde Burke. Hence there were other reports in the envelope. One was from an agent named Harry Vincent; another from Cliff Marsland.

These active workers had been scouring the underworld. They had found no traces of crime that could be connected with the strangler's deaths. They were awaiting further instructions from The Shadow.

Mann's work was finished for the day. Beginning with six o'clock, The Shadow could reach his agents through another contact man: Burbank.

Hands stretched across the table. They drew a pair of earphones from the wall. The instruments moved into the nearer darkness. A voice clicked across the wire:

"Burbank speaking."

"Report," came The Shadow's eerie whisper.

"Further report from Burke," responded Burbank, in a quiet, methodical monotone. "Cardona has established a definite theory upon which he intends to act."

"Details."

"Talbot killed while leaving Dyke's. Strangler overpowered him at front door. After murdering Dyke, the strangler carried Talbot's body away."

"Report received."

A pause. Then came Burbank's incoming voice:

"No further reports. All agents awaiting instructions."

"Instructions will be given at six o'clock."

The earphones clattered to the wall. A tiny bulb that had shown there went out automatically. A whispered laugh sounded through the sanctum.

The Shadow had already digested Cardona's theory. He knew that the ace detective was far wide of the truth. The Shadow had established the mode of entry to Dyke's laboratory—namely, by the dumb-waiter—and he knew that Talbot must have been an accomplice in the killing.

But The Shadow could divine much more. He knew that there were brains behind these crimes, intelligence that belonged to a master plotter, not to the actual murderer. The unknown schemer had scored another triumph.

Cleverly, the fiend had led Joe Cardona on a false track. Talbot had last been seen at Dyke's. Found dead, far from the scene of the chemist's murder, Talbot's body had given Joe Cardona the chance to form a quick, but erroneous conclusion.

A master mind had ordered; his trick had deceived the law. Not only had he established Talbot as an innocent victim; he had made Joe Cardona credit the actual murderer with intelligence. The police would persist in a more drastic search for some powerful, brainy strangler. They would not look for a murderer who worked with merely mechanical promptitude—the type of killer that The Shadow sought.

Until the present—ever since last night—The Shadow had considered that a lull was due. He had picked Talbot as a problem in the hidden schemer's plans. He had decided that new murder might be delayed until the master plotter had made sure that Talbot would not betray him as he had betrayed Loring Dyke.

But in the death of Talbot, The Shadow sensed new action. The way was clear for further crime. The fiend who had delivered murder was dependent only upon those who had served him well. Since his goal appeared to be the elimination of men who controlled the future of the supermotor, why should he wait too long to attain his final desire?

A SOFT laugh—grim, despite its ease of utterance. Such was The Shadow's answer to the coming challenge. Paper and pen appeared upon the table. In tabulated form, The Shadow inscribed four names:

Shelburne

Thorne

Towson

Whilton

These were the four most vitally concerned. Shelburne, the go-between, Thorne, the magnate who was determined to gain the invention which he valued at five millions; Towson and Whilton, the surviving members of the committee which controlled the secret device.

One by one, the names faded; they had been written in The Shadow's special ink. Then the hand rewrote the name of Shelburne; a soft laugh sounded as it faded. Side by side, The Shadow inscribed:

Frederick Thorne Bryce Towson

The space between the two was significant. It stood for Shelburne. He was between Thorne and Towson. The hand stretched forward and produced the earphones. The prompt voice sounded on the wire:

"Burbank speaking."

"Instructions to Marsland," ordered The Shadow, in a whispered, hissing tone. "He is to watch the home of Frederick Thorne. Report all activities there. Also"—a pause gave emphasis—"he is to keep exact tabulations on the arrival and departure of Shelburne."

"Instructions received."

"Instructions to Vincent. He is to watch the home of Bryce Towson. Report all activities there. Also"—again the pause—"he is to keep exact tabulations on the arrival and departure of Shelburne."

"Instructions received."

"Instructions to Burke. He is to remain in close touch with detective headquarters."

"Instructions received."

The earphones clattered as The Shadow replaced them on the wall. The hand picked up the pen. The sheet of paper lay blank. The names of Frederick Thorne and Bryce Towson had vanished.

Again, The Shadow wrote. The final name showed in vivid blue upon the white sheet:

Herbert Whilton

In a sense, the old philanthropist stood isolated. Bryce Towson was custodian of the invention; Frederick Thorne, the man who sought it. While Shelburne still played his dual role as secretary for Towson and spy for Thorne, matters would remain the same so far as those three were concerned.

But Whilton was in the position which both Meldon Fallow and Loring Dyke had occupied in turn. To the world, he would be a man of greater consequence than either the slain inventor or the murdered chemist. But from the standpoint of a schemer seeking to eliminate those who controlled the supermotor, Herbert Whilton could well be regarded as the next in line.

Whilton must be watched. His future was important to The Shadow. Therefore, the master of darkness had taken that work as his own choice.

Herbert Whilton would be well guarded against the schemes of the unknown brain. The Shadow, himself, was to be protector of the old philanthropist!

A laugh sounded as the blue light clicked into nothingness. Weird, whispered mirth was the token of The Shadow's choice!

CHAPTER XIV. AT WHILTON'S

IT was half past eight in the evening. Lights were burning in the lair of Charg. Bart Daper was standing in front of the ornamental screen. His pug-nosed face was tense.

"Who are you, intruder?"

The voice of Charg seemed venomous in its grating tones. Daper, recalling the fate of Talbot, trembled as he replied:

"I am Bart Daper. I am the servant of Charg."

"Your token?"

"Two."

"Make your report."

"All is ready. I have picked up the box at the express office. It is on the truck."

A pause. Then Charg's words:

"You will wait for Laffan. Also for another whom you have not met. His name is Quinton. He will meet you at the appointed spot. Follow his instructions. Make your report to-morrow night. Are my instructions plain?"

"They are."

"Quinton has one as his token. Question him when he introduces himself. He will answer by naming his number. Is that plain also?"

"It is."

The ominous pause; then came Charg's dismissal:

"Charg has commanded."

"When Charg commands," answered Daper, quickly, "his servants obey."

From behind the screen came the final tones:

"Then go. To linger with Charg means death."

The visible arm was reaching for the switch. Daper swung quickly. He gained the door at a fast pace, just as it was rising. He stepped through the portal and moved toward the elevator, while the barrier dropped behind him.

Daper's fear of Charg had been highly magnified since last night's episode. The removal of Talbot's crushed and mutilated body had been a gruesome task. Laffan, too, had shown tremors.

Daper knew—from words that Laffan had dropped—that it was Jerry who had sworn in Talbot to Charg's service. Laffan, however, had said nothing about any other minion. To-night Daper had gained new information.

Daper's own number was two; Laffan's, three. There might be more—how many, Daper did not know. Both he and Laffan had been gained as agents through mysterious calls from Charg himself. Daper had often wondered if there was a number one. To-night, he had learned that there was such a man; and that the agent's name was Quinton.

As far as Daper could determine, Quinton, like Laffan, had paved the way to another crime. A box was to be delivered. Quinton was going along. Perhaps they would find another inside man, a counterpart of Talbot.

WHILE Daper was leaving Charg's crypt, a visitor of a different sort was arriving at a massive mansion on Long Island. A gentleman in evening clothes was ringing the doorbell of Herbert Whilton's home. A solemn-faced servant answered.

"Good evening," stated the visitor, in a quiet tone. "I am Mr. Cranston—Lamont Cranston. I have come to see Mr. Whilton."

"Step in, sir," said the solemn servant, with a bow. "Mr. Whilton is not yet back from town. I expect him shortly. Would you care to wait?"

"Yes."

"Very well, sir. This way, please. I shall conduct you to Mr. Whilton's smoking room."

They entered a small room where a fire was burning in the fireplace. The servant bowed as he pointed to a comfortable armchair. Lamont Cranston took the seat and reclined before the fireplace. The servant departed.

The flickering flames of the fire threw an uncanny light upon the visitor's masklike-face. There was something sardonic in the smile that showed on Cranston's lips. From the side of the chair projected a splotch of black; a silhouette that wavered in the changing illumination of the fire seemed to signify the visitor's true identity. That spread of darkness was the shadow of The Shadow!

An old-fashioned clock on the mantel was ticking away the minutes. Five— ten—twenty—the hands were approaching nine o'clock. A keen light showed in the eyes of the seated visitor. Lamont Cranston's tall form arose and stalked to the door.

Peering through a narrow, vertical crack, the visitor eyed the outer hall. No one was in sight. Turning, he stepped to a telephone table in the corner of the smoking room. He picked up the receiver and listened intently, to make sure that no other wire was open. Then came the operator's request for a number.

Cranston's quiet tone responded. There was a short interval; then came the connection. A voice announced:

"Burbank speaking."

"Report." The word, though it came from Cranston's lips, was issued in the shuddering whisper of The Shadow.

"Report from Marsland," informed Burbank. "Frederick Thorne went out more than one hour ago. He has not returned. Shelburne has not been at the house to-night."

"Report received."

"Report from Vincent. Bryce Towson has been at home since five o'clock this afternoon. He is there now. Vincent has seen him through the window of the front dining room and through a window of his upstairs study."

"Shelburne?" hissed The Shadow, as Burbank paused.

"Shelburne has not been at Towson's," responded Burbank. "Vincent has seen no sign of him."

"Report received."

"No report from Burke."

The Shadow clicked receiver on hook. This ended the conversation. Thus, while he awaited Herbert Whilton, the master sleuth had checked upon the other parties concerned. Frederick Thorne was free from observation. Bryce Towson was at home. Shelburne was not accounted for; it was possible that he had called either Towson or Thorne or both—by telephone.

Ten minutes after nine. It was obvious that Whilton must have been detained in the city; for his home was less than a half an hour's ride from Manhattan. At quarter past nine, Lamont Cranston was still seated in the chair; but his eyes were no longer toward the fire. They were focused on the door.

At precisely nine-seventeen, the door opened. Herbert Whilton, wheezy in his apologetic tone, came in with outstretched hand.

"Sorry, Cranston!" he exclaimed. "Sorry to have kept you waiting. I was dining at the Ritz—alone as usual—and I fell asleep over my coffee. I must be getting old; indeed, I must."

The old philanthropist took a chair and warmed his hands before the fire. No statement came from Lamont Cranston; it was Herbert Whilton, himself, who took up the all important subject.

"About this invention of Fallow's," remarked the philanthropist, in a serious tone. "It worries me. I have been thinking—since last night—that there is further danger ahead.

"Did you read this afternoon's paper? About the death of Talbot? I read a final report, at dinner, and I see that the detective on the case believes that Talbot was slain protecting Dyke.

"Terrible! Terrible! A sad end for a faithful servant. I should hate to think of such a horrible death coming to any of my trusted servitors. Particularly Randham. He was the man who admitted you to-night. He would fight to the last, if my life were at stake—as Talbot fought for Loring Dyke."

Whilton's fixed smile had faded with the old man's seriousness. In contrast, a faint smile had appeared upon the lips of Lamont Cranston. Well did the visitor know that Talbot had been a traitor—not a faithful servant.

"Come, Cranston," suggested Whilton, seeking to turn to a more cheerful subject. "Let me show you my library. It has been entirely redecorated. I intend to begin placing the books tonight."

The old man led the way from the smoking room. They crossed the hall and came to an open door; beyond it, a room some forty feet in length, the walls lined with heavy oak bookcases. Although the large racks were solid, the first shelf did not appear until nearly two feet above the floor. Whilton commented on that fact.

"Stooping is troublesome," he remarked. "So these bookcases have solid basis. These boxes"—he pointed to opened crates upon the floor - "contain the books which are to be placed. I intend to begin the work to-night."

Randham entered while Whilton was speaking. The old man turned to the servant and made a gesture toward the floor.

"Are these all the boxes?" he demanded, in a querulous tone. "It seems to me that half of them are lacking."

"Others are being brought, sir," explained Randham. "Two more loads, from the storage house. I suppose they will come in to-morrow. Then there are those odd boxes -"

"Ah, yes. The ones that are coming by express. You see, Cranston"—Randham turned to his guest—"I stored all of my volumes before I went to Florida. I did not have them brought back until these bookcases were completed."

"I see." Cranston's gaze was on the bookcases. "Those shelves are quite deep, are they not? And high?"

"To accommodate the larger volumes, sir," interposed Randham. "Some of Mr. Whilton's books have huge bindings."

"Randham thinks of everything," acknowledged Whilton. "It was his idea to raise the bottom shelves. I rely greatly upon Randham. You always remember, don't you, Randham?"

"I try to, sir," responded the servant, solemnly. "I nearly forgot something to-night though. Your

appointment with Doctor Ayres. You are to go to his office at ten o'clock, Mr. Whilton."

"Ah, yes!" The old man nodded. "Call Halliwell at once. Tell him to have the car here promptly. I am sorry, Cranston, I must go out for fully an hour. I shall be back at eleven, if you care to wait."

Randham's solemn face displayed traces of nervousness. Cranston's eyes observed the fact. It was plain that the servant hoped the guest would go.

"Sorry," came Cranston's quiet rejoinder. "I must be going back to the city. My car is outside. Suppose I see you to-morrow, Whilton. We shall have more time to talk together."

"Very well," agreed the old philanthropist. Then, to Randham, he added: "I shall be back at eleven. Do not wait up for me. I can place the books alone."

"Yes, sir," said the servant, as he turned to leave the room. "Be sure to begin with the first box—at the corner shelf. The books are in their proper order, sir."

Randham left. A few minutes later, he returned to announce that the car was ready. Whilton donned hat and coat; Cranston did likewise. Together, they left the house. Halliwell was waiting with Whilton's limousine. Cranston stepped into his own machine.

THE cars rolled from the drive. Whilton's turned east; Cranston's west. Through the speaking tube that led to the chauffeur, Cranston's quiet voice ordered:

"Cobalt Club, Stanley."

The limousine rolled onward. In the darkness of the back seat, Cranston's hands opened a bag that lay on the floor. Garments of black came forth; cloak slipped over the passenger's shoulders; a slouch hat settled on his head. Automatics clicked as they slid beneath the cloak.

The limousine stopped at the spot where the side lane met the through highway. The door opened. Stanley did not hear it, nor did he see the phantom form that glided from the car. The door shut softly, just as the chauffeur pressed the accelerator.

Lamont Cranston had become The Shadow. A blackened form, beneath the darkness of a hedge beside the lane, he stood until the limousine had swung from view. Turning, he began to retrace the course to Whilton's house, a quarter mile away.

Herbert Whilton would be absent from ten to eleven. After his return, he intended to be alone in his library. The Shadow could see the positive approach of a waiting menace.

A trap for Whilton? Such could be laid in the interval between now and eleven o'clock. The stage was set for a perfect arrangement; for a clever snare like those that had enmeshed Meldon Fallow and Loring Dyke.

The Shadow was seeking to beat the brain that dealt in murder. He was looking for an opportunity to forestall doom before it fell. The chance, apparently, had arrived. The Shadow was responding.

If the master sleuth had divined the plot correctly, he would meet and frustrate crime to-night. While the law followed false trails, The Shadow was prepared to deal with the minions of Charg!

CHAPTER XV. CRIME FORESTALLED

RANDHAM was alone in Herbert Whilton's library. Ten minutes had elapsed since the departure of

Whilton and Cranston. The servant, listening, became suddenly alert. He tiptoed into the hall and peered up a flight of stairs.

Satisfied that no other servants were about, Randham returned. He opened a door at the back of the living room. It led into a short hall. Randham followed the corridor to an entry. He unlocked a door that led to a walk. Beyond was a rear driveway—a service entrance.

Randham peered into darkness; then shut the door but left it unlocked. He returned to the living room, leaving the door from the corridor ajar. Restlessly, he paced back and forth. He studied the shades to make sure that all were drawn. Then, his breath coming in nervous hisses, Randham went to the corner bookcase.

The bottom shelf looked solid; but as Randham pressed the woodwork, a portion opened in hinged fashion. Two sections came upward, leaving a space beneath. Satisfied, Randham closed the opening.

Among the boxes on the floor were a few that had been unpacked. Randham stacked these; placed them in the corner; then began to unpack more books. Suddenly he stopped. He stared toward the side of the room. He fancied that he had heard the crackle of a window shade.

A minute passed. Randham laughed, in nervous fashion. Almost involuntarily, he returned to the bookcase. Worried, he placed his hands upon the special shelf, but did not open it. He waited there, chewing his lips.

The window toward which Randham had peered was no longer visible because of the projecting end of a bookcase. The shade moved upward; keen eyes, peering from the bottom, had seen that Randham was not in view.

A figure emerged from outer darkness. Like a spectral shape it edged into the mellow light of the living room. It blended with the darkness at the end of the bookcase, near the window.

The Shadow was here.

The brim of the slouch hat showed at the end of the bookcase. A keen gaze spotted Randham, stooping in the corner. As the servant looked up suddenly, the projecting hat brim disappeared.

RANDHAM'S nervous eyes went to the floor. There they stopped, transfixed, upon a streak of blackness. Before him, the nervous servant saw a fattened shade that ended in a strange silhouette. The brim of a hat; the profile of a hawklike visage; these were plain upon the floor.

A frightened gasp came from Randham's lips. The servant tried to suppress the scream which he uttered afterward. He clambered to his feet, too late. Though he had spied The Shadow's presence, Randham had lost the benefit of the discovery by uttering his startled cry.

Swinging into view, The Shadow looked like a specter conjured up from nothingness. His keen eyes flashed upon the cowering servant. An automatic, gripped in a black-gloved hand, was aimed straight for Randham's forehead. Backing from the bookcase, the servant raised his hands in token of submission.

With gun leveled; with burning eyes above the barrel, The Shadow advanced until he reached the corner. He had seen Randham at work there. He remembered the servant's statement to Herbert Whilton regarding the placement of the books. The Shadow knew that the corner was the spot set for a murderous trap.

While Randham trembled, hopelessly at bay, The Shadow's free hand probed the shelf in the corner. It found the cunningly designed trap. Up came the portions of the shelf, while The Shadow's form swung

from the corner. Not for an instant did the automatic fail to cover Randham.

In his motion, The Shadow had found the trap; he was ready for what might lie within. His searching eyes, glancing quickly toward the opened shelf, saw emptiness. A space had been provided; it was unoccupied.

The Shadow laughed. His sibilant mockery made Randham quake. It was a grim laugh; one that bespoke an upset in The Shadow's plans, yet one that was foreboding.

The Shadow had arrived too soon. Randham's nervousness had given him the inference that the trap was set. But, though he had found no ready evidence of coming murder, The Shadow had uncovered treachery. Randham, cowering before the figure in black, could speak and tell.

Eyes burned upon the cringing servant. The Shadow saw that this man who had betrayed his master would willingly squeal all that he knew. Through Randham, The Shadow could learn when the real minions of crime were due. He could gain a further knowledge of the death plot.

"Speak!" The Shadow's order came in a weird hiss. "Tell me the meaning of your treachery. Confess!"

THERE was a sibilant horror in the tone. Randham quailed. His fingers trembled; his lips twitched as he yielded to The Shadow's will.

"I—I'll talk," gasped the false servant. "I—I'll tell all that I know. I was afraid—afraid—that's why I promised—why I said that I would work for —for -"

"For whom."

The Shadow's words were a command; not a question. The muzzle of the automatic loomed before Randham like a tunnel that led to death. In face of this terror—unreal in its swift arrival, real in its present menace Randham sought to save his cowardly hide.

"For Charg!" blurted Randham. "For Charg—the one who must be obeyed."

"Who is Charg."

Again the words were an order rather than a question. The hiss of The Shadow's voice; a menacing thrust of the automatic; the glare of the blazing eyes—all were timed in unison. Randham dropped almost to his knees. His words were pleading.

"I don't know," confessed the servant. "I was told of Charg—told of him by a man who made me fear. I—I was false to Mr. Whilton. I— I stole without his knowledge. This man knew what I had done."

"Name the man."

"His name is Quinton. He came to me. He told me that unless I served Charg, all would be exposed. He said that I had stolen from Mr. Whilton. He said that if I would steal, I would do more. He swore that I would suffer if I did not obey Charg. He said that if I did obey, I would gain a great reward."

"This trap. Tell me who planned it."

"Charg. But it was Quinton who came here—with the workmen. He fixed the bookcase. It is ready for the box. He is bringing it to-night—he and other men. I am to help them place it here."

"And after that -"

"I am to go to Charg. I am to meet him. He will give me my reward."

A whispered laugh shuddered through the room. It carried no mirth; only a hollow token of foreboding. Well did The Shadow understand the reward that Randham could expect. Talbot, false servant of Loring Dyke, had been rewarded by death. Such was the prize that Randham, false servant of Herbert Whilton, was slated to receive.

The Shadow's laugh made Randham shudder. The servant did not understand its meaning. Fearing some stroke upon The Shadow's part, Randham hastened to explain his own position. He was fearful of The Shadow's wrath.

"I have never seen Charg," gasped Randham. "I have told the truth. I do not know where he is—or who he is. I am to learn to-night. Quinton will bring me a message. Through it, I can flee to Charge. I shall never return here. Charg will send me—send me where I can be free of pursuit."

Again the laugh. The Shadow could see the truth of Charg's promise, which Randham had evidently received through Quinton. Death. Such was the way in which Charg would free Randham from pursuit.

As he studied the quailing servant, The Shadow had gained a complete structure of Charg's methods. From some hidden lair, this unknown master must be sending forth trusted men, of Quinton's ilk. They, in turn, were making tools of such cowards as Talbot and Randham.

Opportunity lay before The Shadow. By filling Randham's heart with fear, he could make this traitorous servant go through with his scheduled part. Quinton could come; with him, Randham could place the trap. The Shadow could deal with Charg's planted killer.

Then he could force the message from Randham. Through it, The Shadow could find the lair of Charg. In two swift steps, the work of the fiend would be uncovered. In preparation for this plan, The Shadow stepped slowly toward Randham.

Backing, the servant reached the further wall. There, he faltered. He could go no further. He was on the point of collapse. He was facing the hypnotic glare of The Shadow's eyes. All that he could see were two burning orbs of light.

The Shadow's cloak wavered slightly. The motion was caused by a faint, fluttering breeze. Randham, staring into the focused eyes, did not notice it. But The Shadow, alert despite his concentration, caught the ripple of the air. He wheeled, straight toward the door at the rear of the living room.

THE SHADOW had acted just in time. Randham had left the door ajar. A hand had pushed it open. There, framed in the portal was Quinton; close behind him, two other men: Laffan and Daper.

Charg's agents had arrived. They had entered to see that all was clear before they brought the box. Quinton, in the lead, had swung the door. Revolver in hand, Charg's agent was face to face with The Shadow!

Quinton's revolver flashed in upward swing. The Shadow's automatic swept to counteract it. Two shots burst through the room, with the roar of one. A bullet whistled past The Shadow's form as the black-clad warrior dropped sidewise, toward Randham.

The Shadow's aim, however, was answered by a choking cry. Quinton slumped in the doorway. In this match of speed and skill, The Shadow had won. His bullet had found its mark in Quinton's body.

Guns were coming up—weapons in the hands of Laffan and Daper. The Shadow's unyielding finger was on the trigger of the automatic, about to loose steady shots before these other foemen could fire. Then

came a cry; Randham, freed from The Shadow's gaze, threw himself upon the figure that had swerved toward him.

Randham's assault was desperate. The Shadow seemed to crumple beneath his leap. The servant's body fell across the muzzle of The Shadow's gun; then it was caught in a viselike grip. Twisted like a puppet figure, Randham turned involuntarily toward the door as Laffan and Daper fired.

Swift and sure, The Shadow had transformed Randham's body into a shield. A wild scream came from the false servant's lips. Then, from beneath Randham's armpit, The Shadow's automatic blazed its sudden answer to the enemy shots.

Fortune gave favor to Laffan and Daper. The slumping of Randham's body deviated The Shadow's aim. Bullets splintered the door frame and ricocheted to the wall of the hallway as Laffan and Daper made a dive for cover.

They had fired quick shots, hoping to stop The Shadow. The answering reports told them that they had failed. Paying no heed to Quinton's crumpled form, they dashed away in flight.

Up came The Shadow's tall form. A sweeping arm sent Randham's bullet-riddled body to the floor. With swift, gliding stride, The Shadow gained the back door of the room. He cleared Quinton's motionless figure. He hurried in pursuit of Charg's other agents.

Laffan had slammed the outer door in passing. The Shadow wrenched it open. From beyond a corner of the house, he heard the roar of a departing truck. Charg's men had gained their machine; they had left the motor running. As The Shadow reached the wall and opened fire, the light truck had reached a curve amid a clump of trees.

A clipping shot found a tree trunk. It was The Shadow's only chance. The humming motor faded. Laffan and Daper, quick in flight, had made their get-away, carrying the box which they had brought to place for murder.

The Shadow moved back into the house. He reached the living room. One glance told him that both Randham and Quinton were dead. Calls were coming from upstairs; scurrying footsteps told that other servants were rushing down to find the cause of strife. Nothing could be learned from dead men; The Shadow had no reason to meet Whilton's other servants.

Turning, the black figure took to the corridor. The Shadow passed through the outer door, closing it behind him. Merging with the blackened shelter of the house, he became an invisible form that moved swiftly across the lawn to the front lane.

Lights were glimmering in Herbert Whilton's. Excited voices were raising an outcry. The dead bodies had been found. The Shadow's laugh sounded weirdly as it shuddered through the night air.

The Shadow had forestalled crime. He had prevented the planting of a death trap. He had felled one of Charg's agents; a dupe had fallen in the fray; two more had taken to flight. The Shadow had scored a victory.

To offset this, two men had escaped. They had seen The Shadow. They would bear word to Charg that a new menace had arisen; that the master foe of crime had arrived ahead of murder. Charg would be warned; Charg could act to thwart The Shadow.

Yet, in the final summary, The Shadow had gained through his encounter. He had learned the name of the master whom these minions had served. He had heard of Charg; soon he would find the monster himself!

CHAPTER XVI. THE SHADOW SCHEMES

THREE men were seated in Bryce Towson's conference room. Herbert Whilton and his friend Lamont Cranston were talking with the consulting engineer. The time was the evening following the affray at Whilton's home.

"Poor Randham." Whilton's crackly voice was sorrowful. "He died fighting enemies who came to kill me. He killed one of them, however."

"Have the police identified the man?" questioned Towson.

"Not yet," stated Whilton. "However, one point is most fortunate. Although you and I, Towson—and you, too, Cranston—know that I must certainly have been marked for murder, the police are holding to the theory that robbery was intended.

"They have seen no connection with Fallow and Dyke?" asked Towson.

"None at all," asserted Whilton, emphatically. "Since there was no strangler involved, they evidently did not suspect a relationship. So the secret of our motor is still to be kept."

Towson nodded. This point was satisfactory. But the engineer's face showed worry. Both Whilton and Cranston noticed it as Towson spoke.

"Unquestionably," decided the engineer, "your life was at stake, Whilton. That means that you are still in danger."

"And so are you," observed Whilton.

"Perhaps," admitted Towson, "but as yet no thrust has been made against me. My position is better than yours, Whilton. I am in Manhattan; not in a secluded portion of Long Island. I have a compact house, with servants ready. Your most trustworthy man has been killed. Do you have another as dependable as Randham?"

"No," replied Whilton, in a serious tone. "I have not. I have discussed that fact with Cranston; we dined together before we came here. I must admit that I am apprehensive. Therefore, I suggested a plan, which Cranston thinks is a good one."

Bryce Towson nodded with interest. The three men were prepared for a close discussion. But all the while, there was an unobtrusive listener; one whom Lamont Cranston silently noticed while the other men ignored him.

THAT listener was Shelburne. The bald-headed secretary was stooped before the filing cabinet. He was arranging papers and making notes on a sheet of paper. To Cranston's keen eyes, Shelburne's real actions were plain. The secretary was jotting down each point of information that he overheard.

"I am going away," declared Whilton. "While I am gone, the affairs of our committee will rest entirely in your hands, Towson. I shall give you full power to act while I am absent.

"Of course, there is a proviso. You must not depart from the agreements which we established without first notifying me. You will send all communications to my home. They will be forwarded to me."

"Is that wise?" questioned Towson, in surprise. "If your servants know where you are -"

"They will not know." It was Cranston who put the interruption. "I, alone, will hear from Mr. Whilton. He has given me full power to obtain his mail; to open it if I so choose; to forward it upon learning where he is."

"Such is my plan," added Whilton. "I chose Cranston for the duty and he accepted. He is not in danger. I did not wish to place the burden upon you, Towson."

"I think you are wise," decided the engineer. "Let me get this situation right. Cranston is to serve as your proxy?"

"More than that." The assertion came in Cranston's quiet tones. "Mr. Whilton is no longer a young man. It is not right that a menace should hang over him. During his absence, I shall act in his stead. He will not return to New York for months to come."

"Exactly so," corroborated Whilton. "I made a mild suggestion. Cranston decided to carry it to the limit. In fact, should any harm befall me -"

"Your affairs," came Cranston's interposition, "will be transferred to me. This will be arranged legally before Mr. Whilton leaves."

"It seems a very good idea," declared Towson, nodding. "So far as it concerns this committee, Whilton, I am in accord. That makes a unanimous voice."

Whilton arose when Towson finished. He extended his hand to both the other men. There was weariness in his tone as he spoke in parting.

"I am tired." The old philanthropist's words came with a quaver. "I feel that I must leave. You can remain, Cranston. Perhaps you would like to talk with Towson. Good-night, gentlemen."

THE old man departed. Cranston and Towson resumed their seats. Cranston's masklike face wore a steady, serious expression which Towson was quick to notice. The engineer raised his eyebrows in an inquiring fashion.

"Towson," came Cranston's steady tone, "there was more to that affair last night than Whilton supposes. I was at his house before the trouble started. I noted something that he did not observe; something that the police have not discovered."

"What was that?"

"The attitude of his servant, Randham. Whilton thinks the man was trustworthy. I am sure that he was not. Randham was planning something - I could tell it."

"But Randham fought the burglars!"

"So it is supposed." A quiet smile showed on Cranston's lips. "Yet if you will read the newspapers, you will find that Randham's revolver was discovered in his pocket. Not a single shot was missing."

"I read that. The police theory is that Randham grappled with one man and wrested away his gun. He shot and killed the second burglar; then the first slew Randham and took the weapon."

"An attempt at reconstruction of the scene. A very absurd theory, unwarranted by fact. It was dependent purely upon Whilton's firm insistence that Randham was reliable."

"You have another theory?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

There was a pause. Lamont Cranston's smile persisted. His face, in the table light, took on a hawklike expression that made Towson stare. Shelburne, returning to the table for some papers, noted it also.

"Did you ever hear of The Shadow?" questioned Cranston, slowly.

"The Shadow?" Towson looked puzzled. "Yes. I have heard his voice over the air. He broadcasts, I believe, on a mystery program. But I never knew that The Shadow -"

"The Shadow," came Cranston's quiet statement, "is a figure dreaded by men of crime. He ferrets out the schemes of crooks. He meets steel with steel. It is my belief"—the smile was steady—"that The Shadow, not Randham, disposed of the would-be murderers at Whilton's.

"I have not mentioned my idea to Whilton. I thought it best that he should leave town without further worry. But I am sure of one fact. Whoever the murderer may be, he will have to deal with The Shadow before his evil schemes are consummated.

"To you, Towson, this belief should be encouraging. It would have heartened Whilton also, if I could have advanced it without shattering his faith in his dead servant, Randham. Remember what I have told you. If you wish to reach Whilton, address him as before. The communications, however, will go through me."

With this, Lamont Cranston arose. He shook hands with the engineer. He left Bryce Towson seated in deep thought. The engineer was pondering over Cranston's statements.

It was Shelburne who brought Towson to attention. The secretary finished with his notes and filing. He thrust some papers slyly in his pocket; then approached the table.

"Is all finished for to-night, sir?" he questioned.

"Yes," nodded Towson. "You may go, Shelburne. One minute! Remember: whatever you have heard here tonight must be kept in strict confidence."

"Yes, sir."

SHELBURNE departed. Half an hour later, he appeared at Frederick Thorne's. He was admitted to the office of the overbearing power magnate. Standing before Thorne's desk, he produced the papers that he had brought from Towson's.

"This is what I learned to-night, sir," he reported.

"Hm-m." Thorne pondered as he read the penciled notes. "So Whilton is going away, eh? Well"—Thorne laughed harshly—"a trip will do the old man good. That mess at his house last night—bah!—it was nothing but a burglary."

"They thought differently down at Towson's, sir."

"Maybe they did. Fallow and Dyke were murdered, but there was no strangler at Whilton's. Why should any one want to kill that doddering old fool? He's dying on his feet."

Thorne resumed his reading of the notes. He settled back in his swivel chair and delivered a raucous laugh.

"The Shadow!" Thorne's voice was contemptuous. "This is a real laugh, Shelburne. Of all the crazy theories! The Shadow talks over the air—once a week. These people think that he spends his spare time hunting trouble!"

Thorne's laugh continued. The magnate shoved the papers in the desk drawer. He waved his hand toward the door.

"Good-night, Shelburne," he snorted. "Good-night. Be on your way. Don't dream about The Shadow."

Shelburne left. Thorne settled back in his chair. His face became serious. He yanked open the drawer and removed the papers. He read his spy's notes more carefully.

"The Shadow." Thorne uttered the name aloud. His lips moved, in an unintelligible mumble. He put the papers away; then arose and paced the room. He summoned his servant.

"I am going out," declared Thorne. "If there are any calls, simply say that I am not at home. I don't know when I shall be back—possibly in less than an hour; perhaps not until some time after midnight."

With that, the power magnate walked from the room.

The curtains at the window trembled. A shadow shape moved from the floor and blended with the maroon hangings.

Outside, a batlike figure began its descent of the wall. As The Shadow reached the courtyard, the sound of a purring motor came from the street. It was Thorne's car, departing.

A soft laugh faded in the courtyard. A distant clock chimed the hour of ten. Then all was silent. There was no token of The Shadow's presence until an hour later, when an announcer, at a broadcasting station, recited these words:

"The voice of The Shadow. Listen. You shall hear it."

The microphone was switched off. The next announcement was to come from a small room, set apart within the studio. That room, to which no one was admitted, had a secret, undiscovered entrance in its black-masked walls. It was the hidden spot from which The Shadow spoke over the air.

A WEIRD laugh sounded. The tones of that eerie mockery was broadcasted throughout the land. The words which followed came in sneering, sepulchral tones. The voice of The Shadow!

Listeners shuddered. Crooks in the underworld snapped off their radios as they heard the reminder of the enemy they feared. The voice of The Shadow! Many knew it; yet none had encountered its author, face to face!

But in one spot in Manhattan, a strange event was under way. A dim light showed beside a radio set. In front of the loud speaker was the revolving disk of a phonograph record. As The Shadow's voice came over the air; as the sinister tones ended with a creepy, sardonic laugh, every note was caught and transcribed to the record.

The radio snapped off. The task was ended. A fiendish chuckle sounded as hands stopped the phonograph and removed the disk. An insidious task was done.

The Shadow had predicted that Charg would be forced to deal with him. The prophecy was on its way to a completion.

That disk which had caught the tones of The Shadow's laugh was to play a part in the next attempt at murder—which would come from the lair of Charg!

CHAPTER XVII. HANDS OF DEATH

"WHO are you, intruder?"

"I am Jerry Laffan. I am the servant of Charg."

"Your token?"

"Three."

A pause. Jerry Laffan stood silent as he eyed the screen and the seated figure beyond. He could detect a motion of the jeweled turban.

"You will join Daper," came Charg's grating tone. "Together, you will go to the apartment where you laid the trap so long ago. Arrive there at eleven o'clock. Are my instructions plain?"

"They are."

"Together," resumed Charg's, asp, "you will remove the taboret. After that, you will return alone. Make sure the victim will not be discovered. If necessary, remove the body. Are my instructions plain?"

"Yes."

"Charg has commanded." The words seemed ominous.

"When Charg commands," repeated Laffan, "his servants obey."

The shady arm was stretching behind the screen. It was moving to the switch that operated the outer door. Laffan swung away as he heard the final words:

"Then go. To linger with Charg means death."

It was early evening in Manhattan; Jerry Laffan had the shelter of darkness when he emerged from the building that housed Charg's lair. The stocky man knew that there was no need for hurry. A few hours remained before his meeting with Bart Daper.

Evil was afoot. Laffan knew it from Charg's instructions. These were emergency orders, to-night. Some one was being lured to a trap that had long since been planted. Laffan's face showed tensely in the light of Tenth Avenue.

This was the third night since the affray at Whilton's. Both Laffan and Daper had reported to Charg since that battle. Both had told him of The Shadow. Present plans—as Laffan saw them—could mean but one thing. A lure had been laid by Charg. The Shadow was to be enmeshed.

JERRY LAFFAN was no ordinary criminal. Dangerous though he was, he had been recruited from outside the underworld. That was one important reason why he had been useful to Charg. Jerry Laffan had no record, so far as the police were concerned. The same applied to Daper; it had also applied to Quinton.

Yet Jerry Laffan knew the menace of The Shadow. Moreover, he and Daper had encountered The Shadow, only three nights ago. Had he been on his own resources, Laffan would have fled Manhattan; but there was a staying force that kept him here: the power of Charg.

Laffan had confidence in the master whom he dreaded. Though The Shadow had gained success three nights ago, it had been in conflict with mere agents of Charg's; not with one of the monster's murderers. The thought gave Laffan new confidence. His lips showed a grin.

To-night, The Shadow would encounter a killing force. He would be met by a strangling, mangling battler—the same sort of foe that had dealt with Fallow, Dyke and Talbot. There was to be no placing of a trap—as at Whilton's. The snare was already set.

How was The Shadow to be lured? Jerry Laffan pondered vainly over the question. He did not know that the answer was already in the making. A visitor had arrived at Herbert Whilton's Long Island home. Lamont Cranston, proxy for the absent philanthropist, had come to obtain Whilton's mail.

A servant ushered Cranston into the smoking room. Alone, the visitor picked up a small stack of envelopes that lay upon a table by the telephone. One letter, its address a crude scrawl, caught the keen eyes of The Shadow. Fingers ripped open the envelope.

The note within was scrawled, in the same handwriting as the address. The Shadow read the message:

DEAR MR. WHILTON: You are in danger. I am a friend. I can tell you who seeks your life. Come to the old house on East Seventy-seventh Street which is now called the Aurilla Apartment.

You will find me in the rear apartment on the third floor. If I am late, a note will be there for you. Come alone. I can speak only in private. Be there at exactly 10:30.

A FRIEND.

A soft laugh crept from Cranston's firm lips. The note was definitely a lure. Its vague terms added to its crudity. An old man, like Herbert Whilton, would balk if he received such a communication.

But The Shadow knew that the note was not for Herbert Whilton. It was intended for its present reader: Lamont Cranston. It was the outgrowth of the affray between The Shadow and the agents of Charg.

The Shadow had declared himself three nights ago. On the succeeding evening, he had made his part even more apparent. He had talked to Bryce Towson of The Shadow. Shelburne had overheard. Frederick Thorne had learned of Lamont Cranston's statements.

The sender of this note had issued a challenge to The Shadow. It was a declaration that a death trap existed; an invitation for The Shadow to come and uncover it. Charg, master of murder, was prepared for The Shadow, lone fighter against crime.

Lamont Cranston's tall form settled in a chair beside the table. His hands raised the telephone. Lips phrased a number. A voice responded:

"Burbank speaking."

"Instructions to Marsland and Vincent," whispered The Shadow. "On watch at the Aurilla Apartment, East Seventy-seventh Street, beginning at ten o'clock. Watch all arrivals. Follow any suspicious persons who depart."

"Instructions received."

The telephone clattered. The Shadow arose. His laugh was sibilant, confined within the smoking room. He was ready to accept Charg's challenge. He had also planned a counterthrust. Should agents of Charg escape to-night, they would be tracked by competent men who worked in The Shadow's behalf.

HOURS passed. At exactly ten o'clock, a light clicked in The Shadow's sanctum. White hands obtained the earphones. The bulb glimmered as Burbank responded to this new call.

"Burbank speaking."

"Report."

"Report from Vincent. He has been watching Bryce Towson's home. Towson has been there since five o'clock. Vincent has left. He started for the Aurilla Apartment at nine thirty."

"Report received."

"Report from Marsland. He was watching Thorne's. He saw Thorne go out before dinner. Thorne did not return until half an hour ago. Marsland has left for the Aurilla."

"Word on Shelburne?"

"None. Neither Vincent nor Marsland have seen him. No report from Burke."

"Report received."

The earphones clattered. The light went out. A parting laugh sounded through the sanctum. From Stygian blackness, The Shadow was faring forth to new adventure.

Half past ten. The old building now called the Aurilla Apartment loomed in top-heavy style above the sidewalk of Seventy-seventh Street. To Cliff Marsland and Harry Vincent, viewing the gloomy house from across the street, two entrances were visible.

One was the front door, above a flight of brownstone steps. The other was a side portal which showed at a narrow passage beside the old house. Apparently, the apartment building—if it could be entitled to such distinction—was practically untenanted.

Blackness showed upon the brownstone steps. To Harry and Cliff, one hundred feet away, the forming shape was invisible. A cloaked figure reached the blackened door of the house. The barrier yielded to The Shadow's touch. Easing inward, the entering visitant avoided the issuance of light from the gloomy hall. His tall form filling the opened space of the door, The Shadow succeeded in this purpose.

Ghostlike, The Shadow climbed a flight of stairs. He reached the third floor, after passing silent doors. He found the entrance to the specified apartment. The door yielded to his touch. He stepped into a living room—crudely furnished—that was lighted by a single floor lamp.

In spectral fashion, The Shadow peered into the other rooms. The apartment was deserted. The Shadow knew that no one could have observed his arrival. He closed the door to the outer hall. He looked toward a corner of the living room.

An envelope was lying on a tall, clumsy taboret. The Shadow approached the spot and stopped. He knew that this was a trap. He made no effort to touch the taboret. Instead, he bent slowly forward. His hand, coming from beneath his cloak, drew an automatic.

A whispered laugh came from The Shadow's lips. It was sneering challenge of contempt. It was a token of The Shadow's sinister mockery to any hiding foe. Such was the purpose of The Shadow's laugh; the result that it produced was unexpected.

The top of the taboret snapped open, in two portions. As the envelope fluttered to the floor, steel

cylinders shot upward, like an opening spyglass. A rounded object, like a head of metal; a larger cylinder that served as body; then, in a twinkling, four armlike rods snapped forward.

Before The Shadow could swing clear, metal hands had caught his form in a viselike clutch. Pounding rods were swinging from the mechanical creature that had popped into view. The Shadow was fighting with a man of steel—a form that had no legs, for its body was anchored in the taboret.

Battling against four arms that plunged like pistons; double-acted bars that swung like hammers also, The Shadow was in the clutch of a mechanical killer.

A murderer placed here by order of Charg! A robot that could fight with ten times the power of a human. Such was the monstrous enemy that had caught The Shadow in its toils!

CHAPTER XVIII. AGENT VERSUS AGENT

IN a time space of one second, The Shadow had learned the power of Charg. The master sleuth had divined that Charg's killers were creatures of small size but excessive weight. He had not, however, counted upon their expansive qualities.

Meldon Fallow had been crushed by beating arms of steel when a robot killer had popped from the rear portion of his desk. Herbert Whilton had been slain by a device which must have acted in a forward fashion, issuing from the box on the dumb-waiter lift.

The robot which The Shadow now fought was one of the type that had slain Fallow. It had been placed here in an apartment which was a trap. The taboret was anchored to the floor.

To The Shadow's quick brain, all was apparent; moreover, another factor was explained. The starter of the robot was the vibration of a voice. Fallow's slayer had been tuned to the inventor's mumble; Dyke's to the chemist's basso; this slaying machine to The Shadow's laugh!

Recorded sounds had been arranged to put machinery in motion, each for the particular victim whom the robot was set to kill. The robot would not respond to other sounds. This mechanical creature which The Shadow fought was here to encounter him alone!

Though such thoughts flashed through The Shadow's brain, his physical form was busy with a desperate task. Fighting furiously, The Shadow was trying to break loose from this mangler that held him. His automatic, descending, clicked against a plunging arm. The weapon clattered to the floor.

Two viselike rods encircled The Shadow's body. Crushing, they gripped against his ribs while the other pair of metal plungers swung downward toward his head. With superhuman strength, The Shadow warded off the beating blows; with one arm dropping, he jolted a rod that gripped his body.

Metal hands, clawlike and sharp, clutched for The Shadow's throat. The black form twisted in the lower grip. The hands ripped away the collar of The Shadow's cloak. Then, as The Shadow vainly sought to catch a rising arm, a steel rod pounded downward toward his skull.

A fling of The Shadow's arm; the fabric of the felt hat; these were all that stopped the full force of the robot's blow. The stroke that fell upon The Shadow's head was stunning, but no more. Groggily, The Shadow balked another swing. Writhing, he tried to offset the force of lower pistons that were aiming for his ribs.

OTHERS had succumbed rapidly to the robot method of attack. Only a fierce fight—action as rapid as that of the mechanical killer itself - could save The Shadow from terrible death. Battling with all his might,

The Shadow was holding his own, despite the pounding that he had received.

But bone and flesh could not stay steel indefinitely. Though The Shadow put the fight on even terms, he could not harm the robot. Moreover, The Shadow's strength was due to weaken; the mechanical killer could keep on indefinitely.

Twisting in the grip of the lower rods, The Shadow surged upward. He jammed a knee against a mechanical arm. He caught the smashing upper pistons with his powerful fists. It seemed a hopeless effort; yet it was a tribute to The Shadow's unyielding spirit.

Ready for death, grimly battling against an irresistible force, The Shadow sought a last triumph. He would, at least, hold Charg's killer at bay if only for a fleeting instant.

Plunges shortened. Gripping rods were stayed. Pounds were caught by The Shadow's gloved fists. With slouch hat tilted over his eyes, with cloak half ripped from his body, The Shadow forced a temporary stale-mate.

Like a man of iron, he gripped this killer of steel. With head bent forward, he became a living statue. The lamplight showed a strange, unbelievable tableau; a figure, in tattered black, rigid in the grip of a four-armed thing of steel.

Motion ceased as The Shadow flung his last ounce of strength into this hopeless contest. He had gained the only victory that he might have—a triumph that could last for seconds only, against the pounding, battering fury of those metal arms.

Then, of a sudden, came the strangest feature of the conflict. Steel arms shot inward from The Shadow's grasp. The black form lost its hold and tumbled to the floor as the steel cylinders dropped downward. The robot's head clicked into its body. The open portions of the taboret fell into place.

The mechanical killer had disappeared. It had given up the fight. Only The Shadow remained in view, a crumpled form upon the floor. His strength was spent. His final effort had left him half-unconscious, battered and bruised, yet released from the relentless arms which had encircled him!

Through sheer endeavor, The Shadow had gained a result which no other had ever obtained against Charg's killers. The robot had been designed to spring forth at the sound of the proper voice vibration. It had been set to pummel and smash its victim to death. But also, it possessed a third mechanical action—a simple device that the designer thought was perfect.

These robots were made to fight only so long as they encountered motion. With Fallow and Dyke, mechanical killers had battered their victims to death; when the bodies had stilled, the robots had automatically released and dropped into their cramped hiding places.

Such would have happened with The Shadow, had he merely kept on struggling. But through his strength; through his mad desire to show that he could stay those pounding arms, though only for mere seconds, The Shadow had brought a temporary cessation of action.

The designer had believed that this could only happen when the victim's death had been gained. The Shadow had proven otherwise. He had held the robot stationary long enough for the final mechanism to respond. Charg's killer had gone back into its box. The Shadow, though bruised and helpless, was alive and safe!

MINUTES passed. The Shadow did not move. Crumpled face downward on the floor, his body sprawled in twisted fashion, he lay huddled beneath the spread folds of the torn cloak. The effect of the

pounding blows was showing at this belated period.

More minutes passed. The Shadow did not stir. To all appearances he was dead. The door of the apartment opened. Two men entered. Laffan and Daper, servants of Charg, had come as their master had bidden. It was eleven o'clock.

Laffan eyed the crumpled body on the floor. Daper, pulling a revolver from his pocket, made as though to aim. Laffan stopped him.

"He's dead," declared the stocky man. "Why try to shoot him?"

"Might as well make sure," snarled Daper. "You know who it is—The Shadow!"

"Make sure, eh?" quizzed Laffan. "While this is still here?" He pointed to the taboret. "Come along. Let's lug it out."

"You're coming back?"

"Sure. That's the orders. If shots are needed, I'll fire them then - when I can scam without carting a ton of iron along with me."

Daper nodded. It was good logic. It was his job to get the taboret away. Motioning to Laffan, Daper moved to one side and wrenched away the fastenings that held the taboret upon the floor. Laffan did the same at the other side. Together, they carted the heavy taboret from the room.

Few people lived in the Aurilla Apartments. Had any seen Laffan and Daper, they would have decided that the pair were moving men, taking out furniture for another departing tenant. However, no one observed the agents of Charg until they reached the street.

There, they put the taboret aboard a light truck. They had chosen the side door as their exit. There were no passers to see the loading. But there were eyes across the street. Harry Vincent whispered to Cliff Marsland. The latter mumbled a reply.

As Daper climbed aboard the truck, Harry sidled from his hiding spot and did a sneak to the corner. There, he entered a coupe. The truck pulled away from the Aurilla Apartments. As Laffan stood near the passage to the side door, Harry's coupe appeared upon the street.

For a moment, Laffan stared suspiciously. He wondered why the coupe had appeared so promptly; then he decided that it could only be a chance car that had turned in from the avenue. Laffan looked across the street. Seeing no one in plain view, he turned and entered the side door of the apartment building. He was cautious as he ascended the stairs.

A FEW minutes later, Laffan was viewing The Shadow's huddled form. An evil smile showed on the lips of Charg's henchman. To all appearances, The Shadow was dead, but Laffan intended to make sure. He stooped to roll the body on its back. As he succeeded, The Shadow's shoulder hunched. Laffan leaped away, toward the wall.

The Shadow's cloak was wound about his throat and face. His slouch hat had been pounded firm upon his head. The brim was ripped; through the crevice, Laffan saw a pair of burning eyes. A hand moved upward. It was drawing an automatic!

Laffan yanked his gun from pocket. At that instant, The Shadow's fist relaxed. The automatic fell heavily to the floor. The eyes closed. The Shadow sank and lay gasping. His last effort had failed.

Laffan's lips were gloating. His finger found the trigger of his gun. Ready to make a get-away, Charg's agent desired to be sparing with his shots. He took careful aim for The Shadow's heart.

A creaking sound, accompanied by a whirl of air. Laffan swung toward the outer door—almost a complete turn from where he stood. He was face to face with a man who had swept the barrier open—a firm-faced intruder whose hand clutched an automatic.

As Laffan's hand came to aim, as his finger sought to yank the trigger, the automatic boomed. Laffan's finger faltered. His arm sagged; his trembling hand loosed the revolver; the weapon clattered to the floor.

Gasping, Laffan clutched both hands to his breast. With a convulsive shudder, he floundered forward and rolled upon the floor, still clasping his body in mortal agony.

Agents had met. Jerry Laffan, servant of Charg, had encountered Cliff Marsland, henchman of The Shadow. Harry Vincent had taken up the trail of Daper; Cliff Marsland had decided to see what Laffan was about.

Noted as a steady gunner, experienced in the service of The Shadow, Cliff Marsland had served his master well. He had gained the draw on Laffan. He had drilled the man with one well-aimed shot.

A feeble laugh from the floor. The Shadow's form was moving. Keen eyes were upon Cliff Marsland; flashing eyes that told their commendation. Half rising, his strength returning, The Shadow crawled to the spot where Laffan lay.

THE blazing eyes of the fighter who had come from the realm of death were staring into the glassy gaze of the rat who was going to his doom. The Shadow was recovering, Laffan was dying.

"Speak." The Shadow's tone was sinister. "Tell me of Charg—of Charg, who could not save you."

Laffan was moaning. In the throes of death, he yielded to these forceful words. He began to gulp short, sinking phrases.

"To-morrow—Charg." Laffan's eyes were yellowed. "Eight—eight o'clock. Charg."

"You will be with Charg," came The Shadow's hiss. "Speak as you will speak to Charg."

"Charg. I—I am the servant—of Charg," choked Laffan. "My token - is three—always three. When Charg—Charg commands—his servants obey."

The speech stopped. Laffan's lips wavered. The Shadow's whisper sounded in the dying ear.

"Obey," responded Laffan. "Obey. To—to linger with—with Charg means— means death!"

With the final gasping word, Jerry Laffan expired. The Shadow's laugh came as a weird echo of the last uttered breath. The Shadow knew that Laffan had been repeating a set formula. The servant had been talking as he would have talked with Charg.

The Shadow arose. His tall form wavered. Cliff Marsland caught The Shadow before he could weaken. Moving toward the door, gripping the shoulders of his trusted agent, The Shadow was leaving this spot where death had at last gained a victim.

KEYS came forth in The Shadow's hand. They dropped into Cliff's grasp. While The Shadow leaned against the wall, his agent locked the door of the apartment.

Then the descent. Cliff's shot had evidently not been heard. Aided by his agent, The Shadow reached the

street. They gained the corner; when they reached a coupe that Cliff had parked there, The Shadow was the first to enter.

The black-clad fighter's grogginess was gone. Bruised though he was, he had regained sufficient strength. His voice came in tones that were a steady whisper from the gloom inside Cliff's car.

"The car will be returned to-morrow," announced The Shadow. "Report to Burbank to-night. Await new instructions."

Cliff nodded. The coupe moved away from the curb. The Shadow's agent stood amazed at the recovery of his chief; then, with a grim smile of satisfaction, Cliff turned and strode along the avenue.

A laugh sounded within the rolling coupe. The Shadow—with Cliff's aid— had scored a double victory. Laffan's body would remain undiscovered. Charg would not know that his agent had been lost.

A new opportunity lay ahead. Tomorrow night, at eight o'clock, The Shadow might meet Charg himself! Cliff Marsland had performed real duty. If Harry Vincent should report success, the way would be paved.

One o'clock. A bulb glowed on the wall of The Shadow's sanctum. Earphones clattered. A voice came over the wire:

"Burbank speaking."

"Report." The shuddering whisper of The Shadow spoke.

"Report from Vincent."

"Report."

"Vincent trailed the truck. He followed the man who drove it. The man went to an apartment house just off Tenth Avenue -"

Burbank's tones continued while The Shadow listened. The final step was complete. The Shadow knew that the other minion—Harry had not gained Daper's name—had reported to Charg.

With what The Shadow had learned from Laffan, the stage was set. The meeting was assured. A laugh came strident through the sanctum as the bluish light clicked off.

To-morrow night, at eight o'clock, The Shadow would be face to face with Charg. In the confines of a hidden lair, The Shadow would encounter the fiendish chief whose orders were those of murder.

CHAPTER XIX. THE MEETING

DAWN and day had passed. The jarring imitation chimes of an advertising clock were booming the hour of seven above the incessant roar at Times Square. Darkness was again settling upon Manhattan.

Darkness! It existed in total form within the shrouded walls of The Shadow's sanctum. That hidden room—windowless—seemed like a tomb. A click brought bluish light to a solitary corner; but beyond that sphere, the darkness still persisted.

With a single hour remaining before his proxy appointment with Charg, The Shadow had come here to receive new reports from his agents. Burbank's voice clicked as The Shadow used the earphones.

The Shadow's hands were inscribing notes as they came over the wire. It was a report from Harry

Vincent—an important message at this late hour. Harry, watching at Towson's, had seen Daper arrive with a truck. The man had carried a radio cabinet into Towson's house.

Here was evidence of another planted killer! The Shadow's laugh was solemn as the writing faded from the paper. Daper had reported to Charg last night. In all probability, he had received new instructions! Presumably, The Shadow had been eliminated. Was Charg proceeding with another murder?

The Shadow's hand paused. Two duties lay ahead; the first was to go promptly to Towson's; the second to keep Laffan's appointment with Charg. The decision came as The Shadow, inscribing his thoughts, wrote these words:

Timing device.

The Shadow had struck an important point. He knew that a robot had been planted at Meldon Fallow's long before the inventor's death. Why had the machine not acted before the night that it had killed? Only because Charg's murderers must be controlled—if necessary—by some simple clockwork like an alarm.

Here was evidence, from Vincent, that a killer was concealed at Towson's. That would mean removal. Daper had brought the cabinet alone; he would need Laffan to remove it. Hence the hidden robot must be under a control that would not let it act too soon.

Certainly, Charg would have instructions for Laffan. That eight o'clock appointment was the important duty for The Shadow. The hands reached for the earphones. The Shadow gained final reports.

Bryce Towson was at home; Harry Vincent had mentioned that fact. Cliff Marsland's report told that Frederick Thorne had gone out at half past six. Neither Harry nor Cliff had word of Shelburne.

The light clicked out. The Shadow departed from his sanctum. His presence, when next manifested, appeared within a room of death. The Shadow, with cloak and hat, was in the apartment where Laffan's body lay.

STOOPING above the crook's dead form, The Shadow seemed a monster of the night. Cloak dropped; hat fell back. The glow of the floor lamp revealed two faces. One was the dead visage of Laffan; the other, the countenance of The Shadow.

It was a weird sight. The Shadow's face, above Laffan's, looked like the mirrored reflection of the dead man's countenance! An expert at the art of disguise, The Shadow had made himself resemble Laffan.

He had worked from memory; here, in this silent room, he was adding the finishing touches. Five minutes passed. The Shadow's bared fingers were through with their task. Cloak slid upward; hat tilted forward. With a soft laugh, The Shadow glided out into the hall.

Ten minutes of eight. A figure stepped from a coupe on a side street near Tenth Avenue. The Shadow, doubling for Jerry Laffan, took up a striding pace along the block. He reached the front of the old apartment house. He entered. A key appeared in his hand. The Shadow had found this key to-night, in Laffan's pocket.

Shrewdly, The Shadow picked the correct apartment. This was guesswork, for Harry Vincent had followed Daper only to the outer door. The key fitted; The Shadow knew his choice was right. He entered the living room.

A flashlight was at work. It showed the short passage. The Shadow reached that spot. His light showed grimy marks upon the closet door. The Shadow opened the barrier. Again—this time by closer study—he observed traces of fingers by a hook upon the wall.

The Shadow worked with the hook. It twisted. He found it loose. A soft laugh; then The Shadow pressed the hook three times. "Always three -" such were the words that Laffan had spoken.

The elevator rumbled. The wall dropped away. The Shadow entered the lift and descended. At the bottom, he found the door with the button beside it. There was no utterance of a laugh. The Shadow was playing the part of Jerry Laffan.

Three times, his hand pressed the button. The door slid upward. The Shadow entered the lair of Charg. He saw the screen ahead and advanced. The light clicked on; The Shadow glimpsed the vague outline of the hidden master.

"WHO are you, intruder?" came the rasp.

"I am Jerry Laffan," responded The Shadow, in a perfect imitation of the dead man's voice. "I am the servant of Charg."

"Your token?"

"Three."

"Report."

"The enemy is dead. I left his body where it lay."

In the pause which followed, The Shadow stood steady. He was ready for any emergency; part of his readiness lay in his apparent unpreparedness.

"To-night," came Charg's harsh voice, "you will meet Bart Daper at the appointed spot. The hour is ten. That is all; further word will come from him. Are my instructions plain?"

"Yes."

"Charg has commanded."

"When Charg commands," The Shadow repeated, from memory, "his servants obey."

"Then go," came the words of Charg. "To linger with Charg means death."

The Shadow's eyes saw the hand move to the switch. A momentary pause, while the false Jerry Laffan caught the gleam of the jeweled turban. Then The Shadow turned.

The door was moving upward. There was just time to leave. But The Shadow made no forward leap. His hand had gone beneath the coat that he was wearing. As the door paused at its peak, The Shadow made a quick, amazing whirl. With a mighty spring, he seized the screen and sent it clattering across the floor, just as the outer door dropped into place.

In The Shadow's hand was an automatic, aimed squarely between the eyes of a seated figure—Charg. Dark-skinned as a Hindu, with arms close in front of his body, the master of murder glared from beneath his jeweled turban. His brown eyes, sparkling in the light, were staring straight at the false Jerry Laffan.

Charg was motionless. There was not a flicker of his eyelids. Enthroned upon a heavy platform beneath a niche in the wall, this controller of death seemed transfixed by The Shadow's gaze. He was cross-legged on his pedestal; his quaint Oriental costume hung unmoving from his shoulders.

The Shadow's hand relaxed. An odd laugh sounded from the lips that looked like Jerry Laffan's. The

Shadow stepped forward. He placed his hands upon Charg; with a thrust, he sent the figure sprawling backward behind the pedestal. Yanking open the top of the big box that had served Charg as a throne, The Shadow stared at what he saw within.

Phonograph disks, arranged on separate stacks. Machinery; a telephonic hook-up. These were the contents of the bulky pedestal. Staring beyond, The Shadow again surveyed the form that he had cast from its pedestal. The arms of Charg had swung at an odd angle. Wires were running from the figure to the box.

The Shadow had uncovered an amazing fact. Charg's killers had been robots —mechanical men that did unrelenting work. But they had needed human agents: Daper, Laffan, Quinton, to place them where they could kill.

Those humans had taken orders from Charg. They had brought him their reports. They had feared him as their terrible master. But they had never suspected the strange truth.

Charg, the fiend, was a mechanical hook-up. The master of humans was no more alive than were the metal killers whom his minions placed. Charg, whom The Shadow alone had dared to face, was himself a robot!

The Shadow had gained his meeting with Charg, only to learn this incredible fact. Instead of a living foe to face, The Shadow had found a waxwork figure.

And now The Shadow stood within the lair of Charg. A living being in the den of a mechanical monster, he must face the fate that awaited those who lingered with Charg!

CHAPTER XX. TITANS OF STEEL

STILLNESS reigned in the abode of Charg. The Shadow, viewing the strange scene, was waiting for some stroke to occur. Nothing happened. A laugh came from the lips that resembled those of Jerry Laffan; it was incongruous, that laugh, as it shivered through the triangular room.

Jerry Laffan could never have uttered it. Hence the laugh proved that The Shadow no longer saw the need for hiding his identity. Minutes passed. To an ordinary person, the suspense would have been fearful. To The Shadow, it was welcome.

This lair was a trap. That was evident. The trap, to be in keeping with the robot figure of Charg, must be a mechanical device. If it had been timed to spring, its action would have come. These fleeting minutes proved that there was no stroke that would act of its own accord.

Until The Shadow sought to escape, there would be no danger. Once he tried to leave this tomblike room, some force would act to obstruct him. Knowing the strength of Charg's killers, The Shadow realized that the test would be severe.

Two hours remained before Jerry Laffan was due to meet Bart Daper. Whether or not The Shadow might seek to keep the appointment, there at least was time for cautious procedure. If murder lay in the offing, it was not due to strike immediately. The Shadow had complete chance to study his own position.

The intruder who had disguised himself as Laffan moved toward the overturned screen. There, he examined the interior of the big box upon which the dummy figure had rested. Through brief, but active inspection, The Shadow made prompt discoveries.

The records that were in the massive pedestal were labeled. They were set in separate racks; each had

its own peculiar operating mechanism. The Shadow could see that certain ones would slide into position, according to the rings of the outer bell.

This was why Charg gave his minions numbers. The brain behind Charg - the living person who had arranged this strange den—had never been compelled to visit the lair after his records had been set.

There was one complete set for Quinton, arranged for number one. A second for Daper; a third for Laffan. Another, with a single record, used, was labeled Talbot; while a fourth was marked for Randham.

Besides these were special records; also emergency levers which served a cunning purpose. They formed connections with a telephone receiver. This had been converted from an extension in the apartment above. It meant that any time Charg might wish to change arrangements, he could do so by calling the apartment number on the telephone!

The Shadow saw how clicks across the wire could put the mechanism in operation. This was the way that Charg had used to dispatch his agents on their quest for The Shadow. All the apparatus in the big box was simple; the only complicated phase was the involved scheming that some master mind had used in working out his campaigns.

From anywhere in the country, simply by calling over the telephone, that insidious master crook could put his machinery to work. Charg, the figure whom the minions dreaded, had always been within this room. His moving arms; his turning head; these were mechanical actions.

THE voice of Charg? His conversations with his henchmen? That was the simplest, yet the most subtle part. When a visitor like Laffan came here, the ring of the bell at the outer door set the figure of Charg in motion. A record shifted to the turntable in the box. The mechanical arm of Charg pressed the switch that raised the door.

The record, started, was ready with the raspy words that greeted the intruder. Then the record stopped, automatically. The factor that started it again was the voice of the intruder himself!

Even The Shadow had believed that he had talked with Charg. Actually, he had talked with a revolving disk. Charg's coming statements had awaited The Shadow's portion of the conversation. A microphone, at the front of the big box, showed how voice vibrations actuated the delicate mechanism.

Such was The Shadow's finding. His problem now, was to leave the lair of Charg. Free from this place, he could seek the master crook who had designed the strange den; the real brain in back of murder.

The Shadow calculated. He knew that he must face great danger. He was confident, however, that Charg's den would not be slated for destruction. It was too valuable an adjunct to its maker.

The Shadow found the switch that controlled the door. He pressed it. There was no response. His attack upon the screen had broken the electrical contact that made the mechanism work. The Shadow approached the outer door.

The barrier had settled in grooves of metal. It would not yield to ordinary attack. The Shadow had a measure that might settle the barrier; but before he attempted it, he looked about for some less difficult measure of escape.

Drawing an automatic from beneath his coat, he approached the door on the right side. This was the door to which Talbot had gone, at Charg's bidding. It was behind that barrier that a mechanical killer lurked. Talbot had met a speedy death and the door had dropped when he had fallen. Did The Shadow

suspect the lurking menace?

His actions showed it as he neared the door. The Shadow paused, five feet away. He uttered no sound as he moved slowly closer to the portal. It was still beyond his reach.

Click!

The door shot upward. Some mechanical device had been put in operation at the time The Shadow had smashed Charg's screen. The Shadow's approach—nothing more—had loosed the mechanism. The lights of the room remained illuminated. The Shadow stopped short as he viewed the figure which stood revealed in the alcove.

THIS was no collapsible robot. It was a gigantic murder machine, a device that stood eight feet high. It was equipped with rounded legs of steel, set upon massive feet. Its body was a heavy cylinder; its head, a smaller one. As with the killer that The Shadow had met before, this huge robot possessed four arms.

But in comparison, this new menace had fully thrice the power of the other. It had slain Talbot without moving from its placement. Actuated to meet the present emergency, its attack upon The Shadow differed. Something clicked within the central cylinder. A Goliath of solid steel, the massive robot lumbered forward.

The Shadow fired. Quick shots burst from his automatic as he emptied the powerful .45, backing as he loosed the volley. Bullets flattened themselves against the cylinders that formed the robot's body and head. The machine of death came pounding forward.

The Shadow stopped short. The robot still approached. The huge machine would keep coming until it clutched its victim. Then only would it be ready to cease action after motion had stopped. Wheeling as the steel monster increased its forward drive, The Shadow headed toward the central door.

The robot turned its course. The Shadow's motion was the force that drew it. Motion—motion—the robot kept responding like a living creature. All the while its terrible arms, jointed pistons four feet in length, were clutching crablike for its human foe.

The machine was more terrible than a living enemy. Its mechanical precision guided it with unerring faculty. When The Shadow whirled to escape its course, the robot acted in turn. Quick, weaving measures on The Shadow's part seemed to bring him loss, not gain.

The Shadow was whirling toward the spot where Charg's screen lay. There, against the wall, he stood a scant yard from the sweeping arms of the big robot. Diving away, he barely missed capture. An iron claw caught his coat and ripped the entire side of the garment. Only a rapid whirl saved The Shadow from the robot's clutch.

Spinning as he reached the wall at the right, The Shadow found himself facing the machine as it pounded forward. He sped along the wall; the robot's course described a parabola that brought it closer. Had The Shadow tried a quick reverse, he would have been trapped by those deadly arms. Wisely, he again made for the open center of the room.

All the while, The Shadow held his emptied automatic, His left hand, sliding beneath the coat, brought out a second gun. While he kept up his spinning flight, The Shadow fired; his bullets were aimed at the moving arms. He was hoping to shatter some connecting pivot.

Bullets were flattened. The joints, encased in steel tubes, withstood The Shadow's shots. The chase continued; The Shadow, backing, springing, whirling, was engaged in trapped flight from an untiring foe.

A FLINGING rod shot straight toward The Shadow's face. To ward the blow, The Shadow swung his left hand. The automatic made the steel arm waver. The Shadow ducked to temporary safety.

Steel against steel. This was the only advantage that The Shadow had gained. Again an automatic clicked as The Shadow delivered a smashing blow. The stroke deviated the robot for an instant; but it did no damage.

The use of the automatics was merely prolonging the inevitable finish. By crashing with his emptied weapons, The Shadow could let his arms do work that would give his legs a chance to ease their speed. His confidence in this procedure almost became his undoing.

Backed against the central door, The Shadow delivered two quick and powerful crashes toward the approaching arms. They stayed the upper portion of the lumbering robot. The lower arms, however, shot to clutch their prey. Another smash, with all The Shadow's fury; the robot turned slightly from the blow and The Shadow, diving sidewise, managed to elude the clutch of the lower rods.

The stroke, however, had turned the robot toward him. The murderous machine gained impetus. The Shadow, leaping away with all speed, came to a portion of the room which he had hitherto avoided; the zone close by the unopened door on the left.

Click!

The door shot upward. From it loomed a second Titan of steel—a robot that was the twin of the first! The new machine started forward. The Shadow swept by it. He leaped over the fallen screen. Whirling, he saw the approach of death.

Fatigued by his maddening flight, The Shadow was faced by a double menace. As he staggered backward toward the wall, two man-killing machines were bearing down upon him. One was piling forward from straight ahead. The other was coming from his right.

It was then that The Shadow acted with sudden impulse. His dive had gained him three yards' leeway. The only free space lay to his left. Instead of taking it, The Shadow hurtled forward, squarely between the converging robots!

The steel figures swung in response. Huge arms shot forward with their piston drive. Eight massive rods of metal; The Shadow felt the clutch of iron claws as he whisked through the closing space and flung himself headlong in an acrobatic dive.

The lumbering robots turned as The Shadow sprawled in the open center of the room. They were still pounding forward as they swung. Then came the clash that The Shadow, quick in his decision, had foreseen.

The robots locked as they swung together. Colossal figures of steel came head-on together. The Shadow, rolling to the wall, lay motionless. Panting, he became the sole witness of the most amazing struggle that eyes had ever seen.

Charg's metal murderers were impelled by search of motion. They were designed to smash and drive at whatever came within their clutch. Giants of steel, these brainless robots had found a battle worthy of their mechanical power.

Eight armlike pistons drove in fury. Like hammers, they arose and descended, with ringing blows as metal pounded metal. Steel claws slipped from steel cylinders. Closing like mallets, they delivered blows that would have killed a human being in the fraction of a minute.

Steel dented steel. Sweeping rods cracked protecting joint tubes. One robot's cylindrical head went clattering to the floor and rolled to The Shadow's feet. The decapitated body kept on with its unrelenting struggle, swinging its arms with damaging force.

The second robot's head was dented. It wavered; it went bouncing from the cylindrical body. A crash; a huge arm was knocked from its mooring. It bounced upon the stone floor and clattered useless while the robot that had owned it began to describe a swinging, lopsided course against its foe. Another arm went flying; this from the second robot.

Cylindrical bodies were cracking. The struggle was nearing its end. Another arm smashed upon the floor, a fourth. Then a body crashed open wide. A plunging arm came driving through to shatter the machinery within. The ruined robot broke apart; another blow sent its top-heavy body skidding to the floor.

The victor did not stop. Pounding downward, it smashed new blows with its two remaining arms. Then the motion of its adversary ceased. The winner, headless, lay like a useless hulk upon the vanquished.

As the struggle ceased, The Shadow lay loading an automatic. He arose. He moved toward the center of the debris. Responding to new motion, the battered winner of the mechanical duel came swinging crazily to its massive feet. Tilted at a sidewise angle, its cylindrical body broken near the side, it swung toward the living being who challenged it.

Flames spat from The Shadow's automatic. The hand that held the weapon directed the shots for the gap in the robot's side. Bullets, unstopped, shattered the machinery. The winning robot toppled and clattered on the loser.

The Shadow had dealt the last stroke. He had disposed of Charg's second slayer. He stood safe in the center of this lair. He had turned a hopeless defeat into victory. By escaping the first formidable foe, he had managed to throw the second against it. Titans of steel had battled to a finish.

From separate pockets of his tattered coat, The Shadow produced two bags. A black powder issued from one; a gray powder from the other. The Shadow spread the mixture along the base of the central door.

He produced a vial. Encased in thick leather, this tiny bottle was unbroken. The Shadow poured its liquid along the line of powder. He sprang across the room, as speedily as he had dodged the robot, to gain the shelter of the niche where Charg's dummy figure lay.

An explosion followed. Pungent fumes pervaded the room. The smoke settled. The Shadow arose. His explosive had loosed the heavy outer door. The muffled blast, confined to this lair, could not have been located by any outside hearers.

The door still formed a barrier, though force could break it down. Seizing a huge arm that had come from one of the robots, The Shadow wedged it through a crevice and used it as a heavy lever.

The road to escape would soon be open. Minutes only detained The Shadow. The genius of his brain had gained the triumph over Charg's men of steel!

CHAPTER XXI. THE BRAIN BEHIND

FREDERICK THORNE was seated in his paneled office. He was at the telephone. His face was harsh, his words came in tones that commanded; then argued.

"You are a fool, Shelburne," he rasped. "A fool, I tell you... There can be no danger... Come here with

your report after you have talked with Towson...

"Yes... I shall be here. It is nine o'clock now. Call me from Towson's in half an hour. Yes... Remember, Shelburne, unless I hear from you..."

Thorne hung up. He arose and paced the room. The power magnate's face was furious. He summoned his servant and called for hat and coat.

"Leave those here," he ordered. "Do not disturb me from now on. I am going out at half past nine. I do not know when I shall return."

WHILE Thorne was pacing his office, a taxicab pulled up at Towson's. Shelburne stepped from the cab. Harry Vincent saw him from across the street. It was the second time that The Shadow's agent had spied Shelburne. The bald-headed man had come in at eight o'clock and had left shortly afterward.

What Harry did not know was why Shelburne had gone out. The man had left Towson's to put in a report call to Thorne. He was returning, now that he had performed that duty.

Shelburne was admitted by a silent servant. The stoop-shouldered secretary said nothing. It was Shelburne's custom to come and go as suited him. There was something in his slinking manner, however, that indicated that he did not wish Bryce Towson to know that he had gone out.

Shelburne entered the conference room. He leered as he saw that the place was empty. Cautiously, Shelburne crossed the room and entered the laboratory where Meldon Fallow's huge supermotor stood idle beneath a canvas covering.

Passing the machine, Shelburne approached a further door. He paused; then turned the knob. The door was locked. Evidently, Shelburne had expected to find it open. A sour expression came over the secretary's face.

Shelburne moved catlike back to the conference room. He sidled to the filing cabinet; there, he began to arrange papers. While he worked, he listened. At times, Shelburne stepped away from the filing cabinet. Once he laid his papers upon the radio cabinet that stood near the window.

IT was nearing half past nine. Shelburne picked up the papers, arranged them neatly and went across the room. He peered from the outer door; he saw a servant walking to the front hall. Then he heard Bryce Towson's voice. The engineer was giving some instructions to his servant.

Clenching and unclenching his hands, Shelburne stood perplexed. He had intended to make another departure from the house to put in a new call to Frederick Thorne. It was obvious that Bryce Towson had come downstairs; Shelburne doubted that the engineer would again go up. Shelburne did not want Towson to see him leave.

The secretary made a sudden decision. Closing the door of the conference room, he moved hurriedly to the radio cabinet. He plucked up a telephone that lay there. He dialed a number.

"Hello..." Shelburne was disguising his voice. He was trying to talk like Bryce Towson. "Hello... Detective headquarters? This is Mr. Towson... Bryce Towson... I must talk at once with Detective Joe Cardona..."

There was a pause. Shelburne fidgeted. At last a voice responded with the information that Cardona was out. The speaker offered to take a message.

"Tell him to come to my house at once..." Shelburne was emphatic as he imitated Towson's tones. "Yes..."

Bryce Towson... The consulting engineer... Hello... Hello..."

The speaker at headquarters had hung up before Shelburne was finished. Shelburne was annoyed. He had wanted to impress the man more fully with the importance of this call. As he clicked the receiver hook, Shelburne leaned close to the radio cabinet.

"Hello..." Shelburne spoke as he heard another voice on the wire. It was an operator. Shelburne relaxed. There was no further need for pretense. A girl was merely asking if he had been cut off.

"Never mind," assured Shelburne. "I'll dial again -"

A click came from the radio cabinet. The top of the box split and popped upward on hinges. A cylinder, rising upward, smashed against the telephone. The instrument went clattering from Shelburne's hands.

A gargling cry came from the secretary's throat. Before the sound could rise to the frantic scream that Shelburne intended, the man was in the clutches of a murderous robot. As Shelburne stared wild-eyed at the faceless, cylindrical head, four arms shot like pistons from the rounded body. Clamping claws gripped Shelburne's throat.

The struggle was a brief one. While the upper arms were strangling, the lowers gave a crushing grip. Shelburne toppled forward as the upper arms pulled away. Half strangled, the doomed man could make no outcry. Pistons rose and descended like hammers against Shelburne's unprotected skull. As the secretary sagged, the upper arms again shot to his throat. This time their murderous twist was followed by a snap; the breaking of Shelburne's neck.

The lower rods had swung away. They delivered crushing blows as Shelburne, as good as dead, rolled in the robot's power. Then came the swings and clangings of the mangling rods. Shelburne's body swayed and plopped against the robot's metal body.

Smashing arms stopped. A click of mechanism; the robot's arms clamped to its sides. The cylinders collapsed; the robot dropped downward and the top of the cabinet fell while Shelburne's dead form was slumping to the floor.

TEN minutes passed. The door of the conference room opened. Bryce Towson entered. The engineer stopped short at sight of Shelburne's body. Then he advanced and stood silent, his eyes upon the mangled corpse.

Towson saw the telephone. Stepping away from Shelburne's body, the engineer picked up the instrument and spoke in a tense voice.

"Hello... Hello..."

There was no response. Towson hung up. He placed the telephone upon the radio cabinet and moved hastily toward the door of the conference room. He stepped into the hallway. As he reached to close the door behind him, he heard a gruff voice speaking to a servant.

"I'm here to see Mr. Towson. Right away. I don't want any argument. I'm from headquarters."

It was Joe Cardona. Pushing past the servant, the detective spied Towson and came striding to the spot where the engineer was rooted.

"I called in to headquarters right after you did," greeted the ace detective. "They told me to hop over here in a hurry, Mr. Towson. I called in from over on Sixth Avenue—only five minutes from here by cab. Here I am, giving you quick service. What's the trouble?"

A perplexed expression was plain on Towson's face. The unexpected arrival of Joe Cardona, the detective's statement that he was coming in response to Towson's call: both were confusing. Cardona stared.

"What's the matter, man?" demanded the ace. "What's happened? You look like something had hit you! Did something happen in here?"

As Towson was steadying to reply, Cardona, prompt in action, pushed the engineer's hand from the knob of the door. Thrusting the barrier open, Cardona strode into the conference room. He stopped as he reached the long table. He stared, fixedly, at the shattered corpse of Shelburne.

"What's this?" quizzed Cardona. "Who killed this fellow? How did he die?"

The detective pumped the questions as he swung to Towson, who had followed him into the room. Towson, his face solemn, slowly shook his head.

"I didn't call you, Cardona," he declared. "It was this man— Shelburne— my secretary—who must have called. I found him here. The phone was off the hook beside him. I was coming out to call the servants when you arrived."

CARDONA was beside the body. His face was grim as he saw this new evidence of the strangler's murderous power. He was thinking quickly. If Towson's belief was correct, namely, that Shelburne had called headquarters, this murder must have happened within the last quarter hour.

"Who has been in here?" demanded Cardona, quickly. "Who, beside this dead man?"

"No one," assured Towson. "No one, except the man who brought the new radio set. That was several hours ago."

The statement was a simple one. Ordinarily, it would have caused Joe Cardona to start a quiz regarding the identity of the man who had visited the room. But Cardona, at times, had hunches that marked him as a genius. Acting upon sudden impulse, he leaped to the radio cabinet and tried to raise it. The detective was surprised at the cabinet's weight. Failing to budge it, he heaved and sent the bulky object falling on its side. The jolt did the trick. The top mechanism yielded; the top sprang open. The cylindrical body and head of the robot killer came springing into view!

The arms did not act. But Cardona, as he saw the plungers, knew the truth of murder. He remembered the heavy desk at Fallow's. He recalled the dumbwaiter at Dyke's; also some talk, on Parson's part, about a box that had been shipped to the chemist's home.

Bryce Towson had advanced. As Cardona turned, he saw the engineer staring with fixed gaze upon the glittering mechanism of the motionless robot. Towson phrased gasping words.

"That—that was meant for me!" he exclaimed. "The cabinet came this afternoon. My servants helped to carry it in here. It trapped Shelburne in my place!"

Cardona started to speak. He stopped and looked toward the door as a servant entered. The menial stood gazing at the form of Shelburne and toward the robot beyond. Towson wheeled and spoke to the man.

"What is it?" demanded the engineer.

"A man has come to see you," stammered the servant. "He—he is outside now. A Mr. Thorne—Frederick Thorne -"

"Steady yourself," ordered Towson. The servant became rigid. "Go back to Mr. Thorne"—Towson's voice had taken on a firm tone—"and usher him in here. Then summon the other servants."

"Yes, sir."

As the servant departed, Towson turned quickly to Cardona. The engineer's face was gleaming with sudden inspiration. His words were plain but hasty, as he spoke this order:

"Your revolver," instructed Towson. "Have it ready. Cover this man when he comes in. He has walked into a trap. You are to meet the brain behind these murders!"

CHAPTER XXII. DOOM TO THE BRAIN

WHEN Frederick Thorne walked into Bryce Towson's conference room, he stopped short on the threshold. Before him, the harsh-faced power magnate saw Towson, stern and steady. Beyond was Shelburne's body; past that, the shining cylinders of the robot which projected from the overturned radio cabinet.

Thorne's eyes opened. They remained that way as a man swung into view from behind the door. Joe Cardona was holding a leveled revolver. Thorne's arms went upward. He backed from the threat.

"Sit down," growled Cardona. "We want to talk to you."

"One minute," interposed Bryce Towson, tersely. He stepped over and frisked Thorne's pockets. He produced a loaded revolver. "I think our visitor can do without this."

"Concealed weapons, eh?" questioned Joe. "We'll make a note of that. All right, Mr. Towson. Let's hear what you've got to say about this fellow."

"I shall be brief," declared Towson. "Cardona, I am the custodian of an invention designed by Meldon Fallow. It is because of that invention that Fallow was murdered. Loring Dyke was also interested. He, too, was killed.

"A third man, Herbert Whilton, left town because he feared attempts upon his life. I have been cautious. That is why"—he waved his hand toward the door, where three servants had appeared—"I have kept this retinue."

Towson paused. Holding Thorne's gun by the barrel, he used the handle to indicate Shelburne's body. Then he strode to the filing cabinet and produced a bundle of papers. He laid them on the table; from his pocket, he produced a sheaf of additional documents.

"This man," declared Towson, pointing to Thorne, "wanted Fallow's invention. Fallow would not sell it. So Thorne resorted to crime to gain control. He kept his murderous methods covered; but he made one slip.

"That"—Towson paused emphatically—"was in his hiring of a spy. He gained my secretary, Shelburne, as his secret agent. These papers"—Towson was tapping the big bundle—"relate to the invention. They are minutes of our meetings, which Shelburne copied and took to Thorne.

"These"—Towson stopped and indicated the smaller packet—"are actual letters from Thorne to Shelburne. Shelburne made the mistake of carrying them about with him. He made the error of laying them aside— here in this room early this evening. I found them.

"I had been suspicious of Shelburne. That was why I watched him. Now I have the proof of his perfidy;

and I have the evidence on the man behind it. I want you to arrest Frederick Thorne for murder."

CARDONA nodded. He looked straight toward Thorne. Towson was eyeing the magnate also. The consulting engineer was confident in bearing. Thorne chewed his lips. For a few moments, he looked like a guilty man, as he stared into the muzzle of Cardona's revolver. Then, suddenly, he blurted this challenge.

"You're a detective," he snapped to Cardona. "You represent the law. I'm relying upon you—now—before it may prove too late. Towson thinks he has me cornered. He thinks that Shelburne called me to-night to tell me that he lost my letters. That is true; but it's not all."

Towson was standing idle; but his gaze was focused steadily upon Thorne. The power magnate shifted; then spoke emphatically to Cardona.

"Towson thinks that I came here to demand those letters. He is trying to make out that I came to murder; that I was responsible for the deaths of Fallow and Dyke. That is a lie. I can prove it.

"Shelburne did tell me about the letters; but he told me more. That's why I came here, armed, to demand a showdown. Shelburne, when he found the letters gone, began to look around. He went into the laboratory that adjoins this room. He found an opened door. It led to a little office. He went in—and there he found lists and records that proved murder—and beyond it he found a room with machines like that mechanical killer on the floor -"

A hiss came from Bryce Towson. Joe Cardona turned. The engineer was covering him with Thorne's revolver. Helpless, Cardona let his own weapon fall. The mask was off. Bryce Towson showed the countenance of a fiend.

At his hissed order, the servants produced revolvers. They entered; they covered Cardona and Thorne. A fourth man suddenly shouldered his way in behind them. It was Daper, also armed. The agent of Charg had come to remove Shelburne's body; he had walked into an amazing scene. He had recognized that Towson must be his actual master.

TOWSON sneered as he pocketed Thorne's revolver. While his henchmen covered Cardona and Thorne, the revealed murderer spoke in sarcastic tones.

"Thorpe is right," he emphasized. "I wanted Fallow's invention for my own. I created robot killers. I constructed a hidden lair from which I gave agents orders through mechanical means. I am the brain behind the killers. I am the brains of the murder master, Charg.

"I planted killers for Fallow and Dyke. I had one for Whilton; there, alone, I failed. Whilton has left town. The old dotard, trusting me, sent a letter that I received yesterday, stating that he is in Florida.

"This radio cabinet was ready to be shipped to him. But I decided, first, to try it here. All my killers were shipped out long ago—the ones that Shelburne saw were merely experimental models. So I had the cabinet brought here by my agent, Daper. He picked it up at the storehouse. Tonight, he will take it away and see that it goes to old Whilton.

"Shelburne? Why did I kill him?" Towson snorted. "Because I feared that he might know too much. No one would have missed him—no one but Thorne—and Thorne would think that his spy had merely deserted his service."

Towson paused. His eyes were gleaming. His lips were scoffing. He eyed the tense faces of Joe Cardona and Frederick Thorne. He snarled his derision.

"I had no quarrel with either of you," he stated. "You have walked into trouble that you might have avoided. For that, the pair of you will die. Fools —both of you—fools. You should have realized that I, with my knowledge of engineering, would be the logical constructor of this robot killer that you see upon the floor.

"That was where you erred, Cardona. Your mistake, Thorne, was to think that you could gain a showdown by coming here. Fallow, Dyke, Whilton—all fools. You two are fools also. You deserve to die, like Fallow and Dyke died, like Whilton will die.

"There is only one who had the brain to give me trouble. But he is dead also. He ran into the power of a robot killer. With that enemy eliminated"— Towson paused as he thought of The Shadow—"no one could balk my plan to gain control of Fallow's motor and the millions that I shall harvest!"

Still scoffing, Bryce Towson stepped back. He looked toward his servants. They were villains, all, ready to serve this evil master in any bidding. From them, Towson singled Daper.

"I am killing these two fools," rasped Towson, in a voice that made Daper shudder, for it was the tone of Charg. "You and Laffan will be deputed to carry away their bodies. Where is Laffan?"

"He did not come," responded Daper, in a troubled voice. "I waited for him at the meeting place."

"Laffan is not here?" snarled Towson. "How can you reach him?"

"Only by returning to the meeting place."

Towson's face clouded. All the work of Charg's agents had been conducted from the lair. The robots had been planted at warehouses and express offices. Until now, Daper had not known that Bryce Towson was his true master. Laffan would not know until he met Daper.

Towson, suddenly perplexed by Laffan's failure to join Daper, turned instinctively toward the door that led to the hall. It was then that his evil leer began to fade as his body took on a rigid posture.

STANDING in the doorway was The Shadow. Automatics bulged from gloved hands. Burning eyes peered from between the collar of the cloak and the brim of the slouch hat. The master of vengeance whom Towson believed dead had arrived to deal with the fiend of crime!

A gasp came from Towson; a shuddering laugh broke from The Shadow's hidden lips. Towson's servants, swinging as they saw their master's stare, were face to face with the dread enemy. Though they were four against one, The Shadow had the sure advantage.

Had any man sought to fire, death would have been his fate. It was Daper, closest to The Shadow, who performed the unexpected action that turned The Shadow's advantage into a desperate conflict.

With a wild cry, Charg's minion leaped upon the figure in black. His hurtling body blocked the automatics. Daper aimed to fire as he sprang. He was too late. The Shadow, thrusting forward, pressed the trigger of an automatic. He sank as Daper's body lunged upon him; but his action was intended.

That shot had found Daper's heart. Catching Daper's crumpling form, The Shadow was using it as a shield against the mass attack which came in quick response to Daper's lead.

Towson's servants were leaping for the door, firing as they sprang. The Shadow, swinging to a corner, had Daper's form in front of him. A single automatic spoke. One servant sprawled. The others gained the door.

The Shadow could have stopped them; but he had other work to do. Joe Cardona and Frederick Thorne had sprung upon Bryce Towson as the engineer was drawing his revolver from his pocket.

Towson's left went to Cardona's chin. His right hand dealt Thorne a glancing blow with the revolver. With both opponents staggering, Towson swung to fire at The Shadow. All that he saw was blackness in back of Daper's body; as Towson edged savagely to take aim, the corpse of his minion came hurtling through the air directly toward him.

Towson dodged the body as it plunged upon him. Swinging wide, he fired hastily. His shot missed its mark. No man, avoiding a plunging form, could have gained a proper aim. That futile shot was Towson's last endeavor.

Before the unmasked fiend could catch new aim, a blast came from The Shadow's automatic. Bryce Towson staggered. His revolver clattered. His hands doubled beneath him as he crashed head foremost to the floor.

WEIRDLY, The Shadow delivered a triumphant laugh. For a moment, his spectral form stood poised. Then, with a sweeping motion, he whisked toward the door through which Towson's two servants had fled.

Shots were sounding in the hall. The Shadow reached the door. He saw one of Towson's servants sprawled upon the floor. The other collapsed as The Shadow swept into view. The smoke of pistols showed in curling wreaths from the front entry.

Harry Vincent and Cliff Marsland—the latter had followed Thorpe here—had been prompt to deal with the escaping villains. The Shadow had known that his agents were in readiness. He had been free to deal with Bryce Towson alone.

The Shadow's agents saw their master. They caught the signaling sweep of his arms. The front door closed as Harry and Cliff headed for the outer darkness. Slowly, with calm choice, The Shadow turned to leave by a rear exit. His tall form stood momentarily still.

It was then that Joe Cardona, rising with hand to chin, heard the token of The Shadow's triumph. The detective saw Bryce Towson lying dead. He observed Frederick Thorne, exonerated from charges of crime, slowly raising himself against the wall.

Victims marked for death had been delivered. The master of murderers—the brain who had backed Charg, the robot lord of minions - was dead. The Shadow had conquered; to Cardona's ears came the shuddering cry of victory.

A weird laugh, a strange outlandish laugh: taunting, it echoed from the outside hall. Its tones of sardonic mirth brought eerie reverberations from the conference room, as though lingering, hidden ghouls had answered the call of a supernatural master.

The echoes faded into sinister whispers. With the passing of the last sound, stillness reigned. The Shadow, triumphant, had returned to his habitat of darkness.

The Shadow had brought doom to a superfiend. Justice had prevailed; and to the law would go the fruits of The Shadow's victory.

THE END