

PARTNERS OF PERIL
by Maxwell Grant

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Partners of Peril play a dangerous game. But it is The Shadow who makes the final move that blasts to bits the plans of the unknown power of evil!

CHAPTER I

BREATH OF DOOM

THE tall gray-haired man who entered the Cobalt Club was badly frightened. He walked through the ornate foyer with almost cringing haste. But when he reached the doorway of the lounge room he stopped and forced himself to act more calmly. He glanced hopefully around, as though searching for some reassuring face that would ease the fear that was flooding his rather spare, well-dressed body.

He was looking for Police Commissioner Weston. At headquarters, they said that Weston had left a few minutes earlier and had probably gone to the Cobalt Club.

The gray-haired man had to see Weston. He was afraid to open his mouth to any one else. To-night he knew he was marked for murder! Death before midnight!

The man walked quickly toward the Cobalt Club's desk and spoke in a low, guarded voice to the attendant. He hid his fear. He even managed a cool smile as he asked for Ralph Weston.

The attendant told him that the police commissioner was not there.

"Perhaps if you tried his home, Mr. Harrington -"

He turned toward a row of discreetly closed phone booths. There was a strained smile on his pale face as he nodded to members of the club who sat idly about in comfortable chairs. He congratulated himself on his control of his nerves. Nobody suspected anything was amiss with the tall Mr. Harrington.

He was wrong. Somebody did suspect. The man who suspected was uttering a barely audible chuckle behind the spread pages of a newspaper. Apparently, he was not even looking at Harrington. But his eyes had noted Harrington's panic the moment the fellow had come in from the foyer.

THE clubman with the newspaper was Lamont Cranston. Tall, well-bred, quiet, his outer appearance gave no hint of his keenness and strength. To Harrington, he had always seemed a wealthy and not very sociable clubman. His hawk nose and burning eyes were screened at the moment by the spread newspaper.

Harrington, in his extremity of fear, would have thought it a waste of time to have asked Lamont Cranston's help against a mysterious murder threat. Yet Lamont Cranston, whom he was passing with a faint nod, was the only man on earth who could have helped him.

Lamont Cranston was The Shadow!

For a week, he had been aware that Reed Harrington's life was in peril from some unknown source. He knew from the reports of his agents that Harrington had changed his residence three times in the course of the last fortnight.

The Shadow had not yet acted on the information he had gathered, because there was no definite clue upon which to base a move. The Shadow never acted without logical reason.

Harrington was already closed in a telephone booth. He was talking in a

low voice. He called the home of Commissioner Weston and swore fretfully when he was told that Weston was still away. He was unaware that Lamont Cranston had

left his chair and was quietly listening in the adjoining booth.

"Tell him that Mr. Reed Harrington telephoned about a matter of the utmost importance," he whispered, shakily. "I - I prefer not to mention my present address. I'll call the commissioner back, later. Please ask him to wait at home until he hears from me."

Cranston's sharp ears heard the whispered words with crystal clarity. His face was turned toward the inner side of the booth, so that his ear rested lightly against the frail connecting panel. Had Harrington noticed him at all, he would have seen merely the dark, inconspicuous back of a fellow club member.

He would have seen the receiver pressed lightly to Cranston's right ear, as though he were waiting patiently for a lazy operator.

But Harrington was not even aware that a man was closeted in the booth alongside his. Fear for his own physical safety drove all other considerations from his tortured mind.

Death! Midnight was the deadline! In Heaven's name, he thought shakily, who was behind this nightmare threat - and why? What could he possibly have done, whom could he have possibly harmed?

He left the Cobalt Club with a quick, anxious stride. The usual row of taxis was in front under the ornate canopy. Harrington hurried to the head of the line and jumped in the cab with fumbling haste.

THE cab had barely left the curb when Lamont Cranston appeared. He quickened his leisurely step as he saw the first cab draw away. Something like a rueful smile passed across his lips, as he hurried to the second cab.

"Was that Mr. Harrington who just left?"

"Yeah."

"Dash it! I wanted to talk to him. That fool attendant told me he was down in the grillroom."

He stepped into the taxi and closed the door with a mildly exasperated gesture. "Follow him, please. I'll have to talk to him at his home, I suppose."

"O.K., Mr. Cranston."

The cab got under way. Harrington's taxi was a dark blur down the avenue and Cranston leaned forward.

"Oh, by the way, you'd better keep that cab of his in sight. I've forgotten where Harrington lives, he's moved to some new address. Just make sure you don't lose track of him, eh?"

He chuckled good-humoredly. "A rather amusing situation. Makes me feel almost like a detective."

The driver laughed at the thought of the tall, immaculately dressed and rather peaceful Mr. Cranston as a detective.

"I don't think crook-chasing would appeal to a gentlemen like you, sir."

"No," Cranston smiled. "I suppose not."

He leaned back, apparently bored at the whole business. But his profile was bent forward so that he could survey the dark avenue ahead and observe the course of the cab he was following. Traffic weaved in and out between pursuer and pursued. But the thought of a generous tip from his swanky fare kept Cranston's chauffeur on the alert.

Suddenly Cranston saw something that stiffened him on his seat and brought

a quick tension into his narrowed eyes. Some one else was interested in the movements of the furtive Mr. Harrington to-night! A small blue sedan seemed to

be keeping rather close to the rear of the speeding cab ahead.

As the cab and the blue sedan passed under a street lamp, Cranston saw that there were two men in the sedan, but it was impossible to distinguish them clearly.

From the fact that Harrington's cab made no effort to increase its pace, Cranston was certain that the fleeing man was unaware of any surveillance. Taxi

and sedan passed a green traffic light - which immediately, to the annoyance of Cranston's chauffeur, changed to red.

"Nerts!" the hacker growled. "We're gonna lose Mr. Harrington, sir."

But his fare smiled softly. "It's all right. You've earned your tip. I notice that the cab has stopped at that tall apartment midway through the next block. You've done excellently."

As Cranston spoke, he was leaning forward, his eyes on the blue sedan. It had slowed up as Harrington's taxi slid to a halt at the curb. Now it increased

its pace and continued down the dark avenue. It turned a corner and vanished.

"I'll get out here," Cranston said, suddenly.

He paid off his driver and added a pleasant tip, a sum expected from him as the wealthy and generous Lamont Cranston. A moment later, he had crossed the street on foot and was approaching the entrance of the tall apartment house into which Reed Harrington had hurried with a quick step.

CRANSTON'S eyes remained on the corner beyond, rather than the entrance of the building itself. He rather expected some one to appear around that corner on foot, nor was he disappointed. It was the man who had ridden beside the driver of the mysterious blue sedan. Cranston had only a vague picture of the blur of the fellow's face, but he had memorized the bulk of the sloped, heavy shoulders encased in a gray-checked suit, and he was quietly certain that this was the same man.

The sedan had evidently pulled up around the corner and let this man out to resume his mysterious surveillance in front of the house in which Harrington lived.

They passed almost in front of the canopied entrance. Cranston observed the fleshy face, the thick, brutish hands. "Thug!" his mind whispered instantly. "Gun-bulge on his hip, too!"

The fellow's face was utterly unknown to him. Perhaps a small fry in the world of crime, or else a gunman imported into New York from the outside. Had he been otherwise, the sharp eyes of The Shadow, possessed of vast and accurate information concerning the vicious personalities that dominated Manhattan's underworld, would have immediately identified this shrewd trailer of a frightened man.

Cranston lounged quietly into the lobby of the apartment house. The switchboard was empty; evidently the man on duty had taken Reed Harrington upstairs in the elevator. In an instant, the sharp eyes of The Shadow were scanning swiftly the open pigeon-holes that contained mail for the tenants. He noted Harrington's name neatly typed on a slip of paper below one of the compartments on the bottom row. The suite number, not the name, was what impressed him.

He could hear the faint whine of the descending elevator and he hurried

noiselessly across the deserted foyer and dashed up the shady stairs. He was perfectly satisfied with the way things were going. He knew exactly where Harrington was - and his own presence in the building was unguessed. He ascended the shadowy stairs to the eleventh floor.

Harrington's door was two removed from the end of the hall. The end itself was closed off by the fire door through which Cranston had just appeared. He returned noiselessly to the staircase and opened a window.

Outside in the darkness was a high-walled stone terrace formed by the setback arrangement of the building. The Shadow laughed quietly. Bent low like a flitting wraith, he crossed under one window without sound, and approached the second.

WITH his eye carefully lifted to the lower corner of the window, The Shadow was able to see inside a large, high-ceilinged room. Reed Harrington was in that room, seated at a low desk. He didn't notice the calm gaze that took in at a single glance every detail of himself and the room in which he sat. Harrington was slumped in abject fear. He groaned and held his head in his hands.

Finally he rose to his feet and walked with jerky haste to a telephone in the far corner of the room. As he turned his back, the alert hand of The Shadow raised the sash of the unlocked window so that it moved a half inch or so upward. The Shadow's sharp ear listened to the trembling voice of Reed Harrington. The man was again calling the home of Ralph Weston, commissioner of police.

The Shadow knew that number as well as his own. As Lamont Cranston, he had often been an honored guest at Weston's home. The two were excellent friends, although never for a moment had Weston ever suspected that this tall, well-groomed clubman with the pleasant smile and rather piercing eyes was, in fact, the grim avenger of crime that police and crooks alike knew only by the grim pseudonym of The Shadow.

Cranston's lean body tensed, as he heard the frightened hiss of Harrington's words on the telephone.

"Commissioner Weston?... Thank God! I've got to see you right away... Murder! Some one has threatened to kill me before midnight to-night. It's ten-thirty now and I have a queer feeling that people are following me... No, I don't know why. I've got to have police protection... Visit you right away? Good...."

As Harrington turned from the phone he stood stock-still for an instant, his face suddenly pale. His eyes had noted the open crack at the bottom of the window.

The window had been closed when he entered the room. Harrington was certain of it. His hand jerked from his pocket with a small automatic pistol. He tiptoed to the window, lifted it, stared at the shadowy expanse of the narrow terrace outside. There was no one there.

Harrington sighed, and replaced the gun in his pocket with a shaking hand. He was letting his nerves get the better of him, he thought. He had no idea at all that The Shadow had listened, had heard all he wanted to know - and was now gone, hurrying like a dark spectre through the blackness of Manhattan toward the home of Ralph Weston, commissioner of police.

CHAPTER II

TWO MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT

RALPH WESTON smiled at the tall, handsome gentleman whom a servant had just conducted into his study.

"How are you, Cranston? Nice of you to drop in."

Lamont Cranston smiled, shook hands with the commissioner and the short, stocky man with whom Weston had been talking. "Hello, Cardona."

Joe Cardona was an ace detective in the police department. Weston depended upon and trusted Joe more than any other man under his command. Both were good friends of this tall clubman who took a sort of amateur interest in police affairs and had occasionally helped Weston with a suggestion or two in past cases into which, seemingly, he had been accidentally drawn. That this affable gentleman with the keen eyes could be The Shadow would have seemed utterly ridiculous to the two men with whom now he was idly conversing.

"Anything new in the way of crime?" Cranston chuckled.

Weston stared, and Cardona said gruffly: "Why do you ask that?"

"Perfectly simple," Cranston murmured. "I find Weston looking worried, glancing at his watch as though he expects another visitor. I find Joe Cardona here -"

"Joe's presence is purely accidental," Weston replied, slowly.

"Nevertheless, there is something queer in the wind. Do you know a man named Reed Harrington, a member of the Cobalt Club?"

"Slightly. Just say hello occasionally and that sort of thing. Why?"

"He's coming here to see me. Called me on the phone a little while ago and seemed frightened to death. Says some one has threatened to kill him to-night. So I asked Cardona to wait here until Harrington arrives, and see if we can't discover just what all this nonsense is -"

THE commissioner broke off short. The front doorbell was ringing. It was a short, nervous peal, repeated instantly as though the man whose finger was on the button could hardly wait for the arrival of the servant.

"That will be Harrington, I expect," Weston remarked, quietly.

Lamont Cranston lighted a cigarette; his whole appearance was that of a man very mildly interested in all this talk of fear and death.

Harrington came abruptly into the room and the servant bowed and withdrew.

"Thank Heaven I've finally located you, commissioner!" Harrington burst out. "I -" He noticed the two other men and stopped talking.

"This is Joe Cardona," Weston said, his eyes studying the countenance of the frightened man. "Cardona is one of my best detectives. I believe you know Mr. Lamont Cranston? A fellow member of yours at the Cobalt Club."

"Oh - yes. Sorry to have come in so abruptly, gentlemen, but the fact is I'm terribly worried! My life has been threatened and I - I -"

"Perhaps you'd rather talk privately with the commissioner and Cardona?" Cranston suggested, politely.

"No. You may be able to help me. Have you ever noticed anybody shadowing me lately to and from the Cobalt Club?"

"Can't say that I have," Cranston replied. "But then I'm not very observant, I fear." He laughed ruefully.

Harrington accepted nervously the cigar that Weston handed him. Under the expert questioning of the commissioner, he began to talk in short jerky sentences. Cardona listened, his face intent. So did Cranston. But the

latter's eyes were veiled, almost closed.

Harrington's story was confused and vague. A harsh and utterly unknown voice had warned him three times over the telephone in the past week that he was doomed to die. No reason, no explanation - nothing except a viciously growled warning and a broken connection. To-night the voice had added a single sentence to the veiled threat. "You will die this evening," it said with ugly clarity over the wire. "Before midnight!"

Instinctively, all three listeners glanced at the ornate clock in Weston's study. The hands pointed to a quarter of eleven.

Weston and Cardona began to ask eager questions, designed to pick out from the fog with which the whole affair seemed to be shrouded, the name of some personal enemy or enemies of Reed Harrington. But the frightened man shook his head. He knew no man who had cause to wish him dead, and he was positive that he had done nothing to set a criminal gang of killers on his trail.

He could think of only three or four people who might have even a remote interest in his activities. One of them was his business partner, a man named Arnold Kling. Another was a chemical manufacturer named Simon Todd. Still others were Thomas Porter and his son Ray. All of them were merely business associates, former partners - things like that.

Harrington explained that his interest lay in joint companies, business mergers and the like. The Porters and Kling and Todd had formerly been associated with him in a chemical manufacturing plant in Millcote, New Jersey.

"I mention the Porters," he said, grimly, "because I have never quite liked or trusted either the father or the son. However, I still can't see why they or any one else, for that matter, should want me killed."

WESTON produced paper and pencil and wrote down the names that Harrington had disclosed. He didn't seem particularly excited, nor did Cardona. Both of them had run into frightened men before; sometimes the fear was justified, more often not.

But Lamont Cranston carefully memorized those names behind the veil of his lazy cigarette smoke. Simon Todd of Millcote, New Jersey, former partner and now complete owner of the Millcote Chemical Corporation. Ray and Thomas Porter. Arnold Kling - who, like Harrington, had sold out his interest in the Millcote firm. The information seemed prosaic, not worth mentioning. But to the ears of The Shadow, nothing was too trivial to be recorded and later investigated.

He rose now, yawning a little. "I'm afraid this problem is too much for me, gentlemen. If you'll excuse me, I'll be moving along."

He bowed, shook hands and withdrew. Outside, he saw a figure who might or might not be watching Commissioner Weston's house, but the tall, imperturbable Cranston did not stop to investigate. He had other things to do - urgent and important matters that concerned the bodily safety of the unfortunate Mr. Harrington.

Fifteen minutes later, Lamont Cranston had vanished from the streets of Manhattan as if he had stepped into another world. It was a world of silence, of blackness that was deep and impenetrable. It was a retreat withdrawn from the distant clamor of the city. A room whose existence no one knew except The Shadow.

A faint peal of laughter was the only evidence that a human being was within that room. The laugh was proof that The Shadow had returned to his sanctum.

Under the faint bluish glow of a single lamp, a black-clad arm reached forward across a polished desk top. A spot of illumination glowed and the

probing hand returned noiselessly, a pair of headphones in its grasp. The phones were placed quickly over the shrouded head.

For an instant, a private wire hummed with faint murmuring. Then - curt, brief, respectful - a voice sounded: "Burbank speaking."

Burbank was The Shadow's trusted contact man. All orders passed through him and were relayed and transmitted to the clever agents who served The Shadow and obeyed his wishes.

"Report," The Shadow whispered.

"Harry Vincent at Hotel Metrolite. Clyde Burke at newspaper office. Both notified to stand by."

"Good," The Shadow said, quietly. "No further orders for Vincent. Burke to go to police headquarters and await possible call from home of Reed Harrington."

"Orders received and understood," the dry voice on the wire replied.

"Repeat Harrington's address."

Burbank repeated it.

"That is all."

The tiny light went out. The headphones were replaced. In the velvet blackness of the room a faint laugh echoed. The Shadow had no idea, as yet, what the mysterious force was that threatened the life of Reed Harrington, but the wheels to stop crime were already turning. Cardona would be able to watch over Harrington until the deadline of midnight had passed. Clyde Burke, an experienced newspaperman, would be on the move to represent The Shadow.

Meantime, there were documents to be studied, names to be investigated in order to find out more definitely where the threat against Harrington had originated. The black-gloved hand of The Shadow drew paper toward him. On the paper he wrote in quick succession the names of four men:

Simon Todd
Thomas Porter
Ray Porter
Arnold Kling

The names were visible in the glow of the blue lamp for only an instant. They faded one by one, beginning with the first name inscribed. Presently they were all gone, faded out into invisibility as the peculiar ink that The Shadow used dried on the paper.

But in the brain of The Shadow those names remained fresh and unfaded.

JOE CARDONA sat in an easy-chair, watching Reed Harrington. He felt grimly annoyed by this assignment. To Joe's matter-of-fact mind, the whole business of the threat and Harrington's terror was so much bunk. He knew that Commissioner Weston felt the same way.

But Weston had sent Cardona and two detectives to guard Harrington for the remainder of the night, in case there might be something more to this strange story than the phobia and worry of a tired and overworked businessman.

Walsh and Garrity, the men whom Cardona had brought with him, were stationed outside in the hall. They commanded a view of the apartment door, the elevator shaft, as well as the fire stairs that connected with the lobby downstairs.

Cardona's glance alternated between the haggard face of Harrington and the window. He had already locked the window. He made sure while he did so that

there was no possible killer lurking outside on the terrace framed by the setback of the tall building wall.

Joe glanced at the clock and saw that it was now five minutes to midnight.

He yawned, lighted a cigar and offered Harrington one with gruff good nature. "Have a smoke on me. You'll feel a lot better in five minutes."

Harrington smiled wanly. "Thanks, I'll smoke one of my own. They're milder." He lighted up and sat alertly watching the telephone on his desk. "I have an uneasy feeling I'll get one last message," he said, shakily, "before - before -"

"Rats!" Cardona snapped. "Don't let this thing get you down. If you ask me, the whole thing is a practical joke. I knew a guy once -"

The abrupt ringing of the telephone cut short Cardona's reassuring murmur.

In an instant, the stocky detective was on his feet, moving toward the instrument. But fast as he was, Harrington was faster. His pale face was ghastly.

"I'll take it. If it's the - same voice, maybe you can skip outside and trace the call on another phone."

He left his cigar at the ash tray beside his chair and picked up the receiver. Cardona, standing closely beside him, could hear the metallic sound of the voice on the wire.

"Hello. Is this Mr. Reed Harrington?"

He glanced toward Cardona. The detective was watching the window like a hawk, his gun in his big hand. Suddenly, Harrington clutched at the detective's sleeve. His hand was clawlike. Cardona whirled, puzzled by the queer look of the man beside him.

Harrington's left hand had dropped the receiver. He was turning slowly on his heel, staggering slightly. He tried to whisper something, but the words stuck in his throat with a horrible gurgling. Suddenly, he pitched forward and slipped through Cardona's grasp to the floor.

His eyes were bulging, glassy. He twitched feebly and stiffened. Then there was no further movement.

CARDONA'S ear pressed against the stilled heart for an instant, then he was up like an arrow and reaching for the dangling receiver. But the line was empty. The unknown caller had hung up at the other end.

Quickly, Joe called the operator, shot her his name with brisk clarity, asked for a tracer on the number.

The thing was done with well oiled police efficiency. The call was traced to a public booth in a drug store not ten blocks away from Harrington's apartment. A policeman rushed from his alarm box to the spot - and found nothing. The man was gone. The clerk in the store hadn't noticed any one, had no idea who might have made the call.

All this took place while Cardona and the two dicks, Walsh and Garrity, were conferring in grim haste over the body of the dead Harrington.

Apparently, nothing had happened except the mysterious phone-call. But how could a mere telephone call kill a man?

Walsh and Garrity had seen nothing suspicious in the hall outside. Cardona

was positive that the mysterious death that had felled Harrington had not reached him by way of the balcony window. Yet Harrington was stone dead, as he had dreaded and expected.

In spite of himself, Cardona shivered a little as he glanced at the clock on Harrington's desk. The killing had occurred before the deadline of midnight had been crossed. The hands of the clock seemed to glisten mockingly as they

pointed to two minutes of midnight!

CHAPTER III

DEEP WATER

THE face of Reed Harrington had undergone a swift and horrible transformation. His skin was wrinkled and faintly blue like the leathery features of an embalmed mummy. His body was twisted and shrunken like a hunchback's.

The stolid Garrity, who had rushed inside at Cardona's summons, uttered an awed exclamation and pointed at the corpse with a tremulous forefinger.

"Golly, Joe - look at him!"

But Cardona was again on the phone, this time calling police headquarters in an even voice. When he hung up, he examined the body with swift energy. Undoubtedly poison. But what swift-dealing agency? And how administered?

He sniffed the still lips and detected a peculiar odor - the queerly clean smell of ozone. Joe was familiar with that odor; he had smelled it in the air after thunderstorms. He knew it came from molecules of oxygen, broken up by the passage of a powerful electric current. But where had the current been in the room? There had been nothing like that at the moment of the phone call. And if not electricity, what had killed Reed Harrington with such startling suddenness?

Joe walked about the room with quick, catlike steps. The burned cigar that Harrington had left in the ash tray interested him, but he could see no connection with murder. Joe himself had been smoking a cigar at the fatal moment.

There was a small safe in the corner. Joe fiddled with gloves hands at the dials, but was unable to open it. He decided to call in a police expert without delay. Perhaps the safe contained a clue to this mysterious crime.

He went back to the body and again sniffed at the man's lips. This time, the result was unexpectedly horrible. Putrefaction had already set in. The odor of decay was overpowering. Whatever had happened to the unfortunate Harrington had already begun to rot his internal organs.

To the matter-of-fact Cardona, the electricity hypothesis seemed farfetched. Poison! But what and how? He was back to the same old helpless questions.

To add to Joe's confusion, there was a canary chirping away in an uncovered cage in the corner. Why had not the bird died and Joe himself? Both had been in the room at the time of the attack. How could a sinister gas death single out one particular victim and fell him without harm to other living beings?

Joe was still frowning when the headquarters men arrived. With them came the medical examiner and a man whom Cardona recognized with a quick smile. This new arrival was a newspaper reporter, one of the best in the city. He was Clyde Burke.

The Shadow's curt summons had brought Clyde hurrying to police headquarters, and he was there when the call from Harrington's apartment had come through. Cardona liked and respected Clyde because he was a square-shooter

and a good reporter. But never for a moment did Cardona suspect the real truth
-
that Clyde was a trusted agent of The Shadow.

THE medical examiner rose from beside the body. He looked unhappy and baffled.

"Well?" Joe snapped. "What was it? Poison?"

"Yes. Look at him! Twisted all together as though he had swallowed some powerful corrosive acid! His insides are already in an advanced state of putrefaction. We'll have to hurry him downtown for the autopsy, or we'll be too late for an analysis of his vital organs."

He stared at the cigar butt in the ash tray and at the dead one in Joe's broad fingers.

"Did you both smoke from the same box?"

"No. I smoked one of my own. I thought of that possibility. But I still can't see how a vaporizing cigar could kill a man like that."

"That's a job for me," the medical examiner said. "I'll take the butt and the rest of the box."

"I don't think it will do much good," Clyde Burke said, quietly. "If he was actually poisoned by that cigar, it's my hunch the rest in the box will turn out perfectly harmless."

He pointed to the square wooden container.

"Harrington smoked the last one in the top row. Looks like a new box. My guess is that the murderer arranged things beforehand, so that Harrington would smoke that and no other."

Cardona's face looked pale for an instant. "He offered me one and I refused. If I had taken it -"

"You, and not Harrington, would be twisted on the floor right now," Clyde said, slowly. "Maybe I'm wrong, but that's my guess."

Two men advanced from the doorway with a wicker basket. The corpse was taken away. The medical examiner followed with a brisk tread. He had been at a thousand such scenes. Harrington was to him just another case to be unraveled in the police laboratory.

Cardona glanced at the finger-print man inquiringly.

"No prints," the man said. "I've taken a lot of photos, but most of them are clever smudges. I don't think the killer left a single trace."

"See if you can open the safe, Garrity."

But the safe remained impregnable. Cardona growled softly in his throat and wished the department safe expert would hurry up. He was itching to get his hands inside and find out what documents or papers the safe contained.

Suddenly, Joe's head lifted sharply. From the hall outside the apartment came a shrill sound. The frightened scream of a woman! Instantly, Cardona sprang toward the partly opened door of the suite. But quick as he was, he was behind Clyde Burke. The reporter was out in the hall before Joe reached the door.

A man was advancing grimly down the dimly lighted hallway from the direction of the fire door at the end of the corridor. Wriggling helplessly in his grasp was a very pretty girl. The man was Walsh, whom Cardona had ordered to search outside for possible clues.

"I found this dame hidin' on the fire stairs," Walsh panted. "She tried to scam when I sneaked up on her."

"Good work. Bring her inside," Cardona said.

His eyes glistened with satisfaction. This was the first definite break since the whole mysterious affair had started.

CLYDE BURKE eyed the girl keenly. She didn't look like a crook or a criminal. Tall, slim, blonde, she was utterly lovely in spite of her obvious fright. She suggested bridle paths, motor boats, fast cars, rather than a grim room where a dead man had lain a few moments before.

"What's your name?" Cardona snapped.

"Molly Harrington."

"Hm-m-m. Any relation to the dead man?"

"Dead?" Her lovely face had been pale, but now it grew whiter than paper. She swayed and Clyde supported her for a moment until she regained her self-possession.

"Thank you," she said, gaspingly.

Clyde looked at Cardona and the latter nodded imperceptibly. The newspaper reporter took up the questioning. Clyde had a sympathetic manner with suspects, that sometimes brought better results than the brusque queries of Cardona.

Molly Harrington shuddered and began to talk. Her explanation of her presence was simple. A niece of the dead man, she had suspected that there was something wrong with her uncle. He had been frightened and worried. She knew he had received threats, because she had had a phone call from him telling her so. She had decided to call on him and beg him to retain a private detective to guard him.

"When I arrived to-night," she said, sobbing, "it was to find a crowd in front of the lobby and police cars at the curb. I was terrified to think that something awful might have happened to Uncle Reed. I sneaked up the fire stairs. I didn't want to be drawn into the case. And I thought that possibly I might - might -"

"Find some hint or clue by yourself," Clyde asked gently, "that might explain what had happened to-night to your uncle?"

"Yes. That's the truth! I ask you to believe it."

"You say your uncle phoned you about this peril to his life?" Cardona muttered. Unlike Clyde, his voice was hard and suspicious. It seemed to him that the girl's story was far too thin to be convincing.

"My uncle not only phoned me," Molly Harrington said, faintly - "he sent me a rather disturbing note."

"You have it with you?"

"Yes. In my hand bag."

She opened the bag and passed a crumpled sheet of paper to the serious-faced detective. Clyde Burke read it over Cardona's shoulder.

"Harrington wrote that," he stated, positively. "I've examined specimens of his handwriting on the desk and this matches his writing exactly. I think Miss Harrington is telling the truth."

"Maybe," Cardona grunted. "Sorry to have to detain you miss. Your story may be O.K.; this note may be on the level, but I've got to do some checking on

you and your presence out in that fire hall. If you're innocent, you've got nothing to worry about."

The note taken from Molly's hand bag read as follows:

DEAR MOLLY:

I feel so horribly alone, hemmed in, helpless. Arnold Kling says he has been threatened, too, but I haven't been able to get in touch with him. If I can't trust Kling, who in God's name can I? Won't you come over please and talk

to me? I've been trying to avoid every one - but I can't go on like this. I'll go mad if I do.

UNCLE REED.

CLYDE BURKE, who had already been notified, through Burbank, of the preliminary list of suspects gathered by The Shadow, turned four names over in his mind while Cardona stared at him. Arnold Kling was one. The others were Simon Todd, and a father and son named Thomas and Ray Porter.

"You know anything definite about this Arnold Kling mentioned in the note?" Clyde asked the trembling girl.

"Not very much. He and my uncle were formerly associated in the Millcote Chemical Corporation, a huge industrial plant in lower New Jersey. They sold out to a man named Todd and went into the rubber business."

"When?"

"A few months ago."

"Why did they sell out to Todd? Didn't they like him?"

"Oh, yes. It wasn't Todd. It was the other two men in the combine. Thomas Porter and his son. My uncle disliked the Porters so much that he sold out to get away from them. He never told me what it was all about. But he did say that

the Porters had started another chemical business of their own and were now competing with Todd."

"I see," Clyde murmured. "Do you happen to know where these Porters live?"

"They have an estate in New Jersey."

"And Arnold Kling?"

"He lives up in Westchester. In Tuckahoe, I think."

"Thank you. You've been very helpful," Clyde said. He turned to Cardona. "Looks like it would be a good bet to get a line on these Porters and this fellow Kling without delay."

"Yeah," Joe replied, curtly. "Especially Kling. He ought to know plenty about this whole mix-up."

There was a sudden ring at the apartment doorbell. There seemed to be a slight scuffle at the door.

Garrity's voice was lifted angrily in argument with some one.

"Hey - you can't push in here, mister! Who are you and what do you want?"

"I want to see Reed Harrington," a shrill, excited voice demanded. "I telephoned him to-night because he told me he was in terrible danger! Before I could say a dozen words, the connection was broken! Is he -"

Cardona's face was staring grimly toward the long hallway. "Bring that man in here, Garrity!" he roared.

The visitor was a smallish man, scared-looking, yet somehow defiant under the gaze of Cardona and Clyde Burke.

"Did you say you telephoned Harrington Reed, about a half hour ago?" Cardona demanded.

Yes."

"What's your name?"

"Arnold Kling," the little man whispered, unsteadily. "I'm Mr. Harrington's friend and partner."

CHAPTER IV

BEHIND THE CURTAIN

FOR an instant, there was utter silence in the room.

Cardona said, very softly, "Kling, eh? You're just the man I want to see."

Kling didn't pay much attention to the detective. He was watching the girl through narrowed eyes.

"Harrington's niece! What's she doing here? Was she here when Harrington

was killed?"

"How do you know he was killed?" Molly Harrington queried, hotly.

He looked at her and his frightened face turned definitely nasty. "Are you accusing me of having something to do with his murder?"

Before she could answer, Clyde Burke interposed a dry remark. "You must have had some good reason for appearing here to-night, Mr. Kling. Did you have an appointment with Molly's uncle?"

Again the little man's eyes narrowed. "Not exactly. You see, I called up to-night on the telephone. Harrington cut off so abruptly that I figured something was wrong and hurried over."

Cardona said, grimly, "Wait a minute, Clyde. There's something fishy about all this. Let me do the talking."

He pushed the suspect toward a chair under a bright light. Kling licked his lips. He had lost his momentary composure. His hands trembled badly.

"Sit down where I can have a good look at you," Cardona growled.

The drapes in the outer room seemed to sway slightly, but no one noticed. All eyes were concentrated on the countenance of Kling, who tightened his trembling lips and stared back at the square-cut face of Cardona.

The swaying curtain in the doorway was now motionless. It was made of heavy velvet and hung in straight vertical folds. Behind those folds was a listening figure. A hawk-nosed figure that was dressed from head to foot in concealing black.

The Shadow was taking a hand in this unsolved tragedy. He had entered the apartment almost on the heels of Arnold Kling. Detective Garrity, upset by the sudden visit of the partner of the dead man, had hustled him into the apartment, forgetting in his excitement to close the outer door.

Through that narrow opening a dark figure had glided. His motions were rapid, yet noiseless. The Shadow had turned sharply into a dim bedroom, crossed the rug in three rapid strides and reached the concealing drapes that separated the bedroom from the study.

The whole thing was accomplished in the short time it took Garrity to hustle his prisoner to the study and to return through the hallway to the outer door.

THE SHADOW'S ears and eyes missed nothing of the scene to which he had made himself an uninvited onlooker. His black slouch hat was drawn low over his forehead, so that only the fierce glow of his deepset eyes showed. A black cloak covered his tall form from head to foot. The hands, too, were gloved, invisible where they rested lightly against the inner fold of the curtain.

The Shadow listened intently. He heard without expression the crisp voice of Joe Cardona:

"You called Mr. Harrington from your home, Mr. Kling?"

"No. I live in Tuckahoe. I came to New York to-night to try and see Harrington. I'm registered at the Greene Hotel."

"And you called him from there?" Cardona asked.

"No. From a public booth in a drug store. You see, I was afraid of tapped wires, so I left my hotel to make the call. My life, too, has been threatened."

"Queer my uncle never mentioned that," Molly Harrington said.

"No queerer," Kling rejoined, shrilly, "than the fact that you seem to have had advance information of his murder!"

"That's a lie!" the girl flashed. Her eyes were wide with anger.

"Wait a minute," Cardona said. "We'll get back to the alleged threats against you in a minute, Mr. Kling. What drug store did you telephone from?"

"A place near Times Square," the little man replied faintly, without hesitation, and then gave its exact location.

Clyde Burke and Cardona looked fleetingly at each other. The statement was true. This was the place where a panting patrolman had rushed to trace the call

only to find the booth empty.

Clyde leaned eagerly forward with a question.

"If you made the call from there, Mr. Kling, what took you so long to reach here? The drug store is only a few blocks away from here."

"I didn't come straight here," Kling admitted. "I - I waited a few minutes, dropped into a bar and bought a drink."

"Why the delay?"

"I - I didn't quite know what to expect when I got here. I thought that perhaps the - the killer -"

"What killer?" Cardona barked.

"I don't know. Stop shouting at me, will you!"

"You suspect any one at all?"

Kling's eyes darted toward Molly Harrington and then moved away again. He wet his lips.

"Maybe the girl might know something about it."

"Any reason for that accusation?" Cardona asked.

He threw up sudden hysterical hands. "How do I know? Let me alone! You're torturing me! Let me out of this place!"

A firm hand pushed him back into the chair. Cardona waited for the frightened man to subside.

BEHIND the concealing drape of the bedroom, the keen eyes of The Shadow watched and marked accurately every move on the white face of Arnold Kling. He was sounding the man to his very soul, reading the emotion and the excitement in the wide eyes.

He was able to do this without stirring a hairbreadth from his concealment

because the position of the chair and the bright light overhead etched the face

of Kling with sharp, revealing brilliance.

The Shadow's concealed scrutiny moved from Kling to the girl. Was Molly Harrington as innocent as her blue eyes and fresh, clear skin proclaimed her to

be? Was Kling's panic real, or merely a clever blind?

To The Shadow, certain facts were beginning to shape themselves out of the

concealing murk of a planned murder. Already he had formed shrewd, accurate opinions about this girl and man - opinions that would be tested later in swift, purposeful action on his part. But for the present, he was content to lurk behind the curtain and let his sharp ears add testimony to his sight.

Joe Cardona was reading two notes aloud. Kling had reached into his wallet

and handed these to Joe as proof of his previous utterances. The first note, if

it were real and not bogus, was an absolute confirmation of Kling's claim that his own life was in deadly danger. It read as follows:

Harrington first. Then you. There is no possible way for you to avoid death to-night.

"I found this in my hotel room to-night," Kling gasped. "It was shoved under my door. It's the third warning I've received. The first two were dropped in the mail box at my home in Tuckahoe. I came here to-night to try and join forces with Harrington. He asked me to come. If you don't believe me, read the second note. Is that Harrington's handwriting, or isn't it?"

Molly Harrington leaned forward eagerly, glanced at it.

"It's uncle's true writing," she admitted, tonelessly. "Mr. Kling is not lying about this note, at least."

Behind the drapes, The Shadow listened to Cardona's gruff voice as he read the message to Clyde:

DEAR ARNOLD:

It's imperative you come to see me. Come secretly to-night. We've got to defend ourselves against this horrible menace to our lives. Do you think "P" is the man behind all this? R. H.

"'P' stands for Porter, I suppose?" Joe Cardona said, grimly.

"That's right. Do you know about him?"

"Harrington visited Commissioner Weston before he was killed. He mentioned you and a man named Todd - Simon Todd. And two men he called the Porters. Father and son. Thomas and Ray Porter."

Kling nodded. "They used to be business associates of Harrington and myself," He admitted in a low voice. "They were -"

CLYDE BURKE, who had moved backward, suddenly became rigid with astonishment. He had heard no sound, felt no motion, but suddenly his cupped hand, that had been resting idly behind him near the folds of a dark velvet curtain, felt something drop lightly into his open palm.

Turning slowly, he beheld a quick, jewellike flash that was shielded from the view of the others in the study by Clyde's own body. He recognized a ring and a jewel on a long, bony finger that was exposed for a brief instant. It was

a girasol, the priceless fire opal that was the hallmark of The Shadow. On the other side of the room, Arnold Kling was still babbling incoherently of his fear of death. No one was watching the reporter. Clyde opened his palm and stared at the tiny scrap of paper that had been placed there. He read, "Description wanted of Todd. Also Thomas and Ray Porter."

Clyde obeyed that silent command. Not by a changing muscle of his voice did he betray his new knowledge that The Shadow had chosen to come personally to the place where Reed Harrington had died. He merely tapped Cardona on the shoulder and said very casually:

"It might be a good idea to have Mr. Kling give us an accurate description of the Porters, and this man Simon Todd of the Millcote Chemical Corporation in New Jersey."

"Good idea," Cardona said.

The Shadow listened, compared Kling's words with the information he had already received, and filled out with new accuracy the vague portraits of these three mysterious figures in the case.

He heard Cardona say abruptly: "Garrity, I want you to take Mr. Kling back to his home in Tuckahoe. Stay in the house with him. Guard him until you hear

from me. If any one tries to attack him - shoot to kill. If Kling tries any tricks - handcuff him. Understand?"

"Yes, sir," Garrity rumbled.

"I'll move along, too," Clyde Burke said. "Got to get back to the office and file my story of the murder."

He followed Garrity and the cringing Kling down the hallway and the front door closed with a bang. A moment later, it opened and closed again - this time without sound.

A tall, black-robed figure glided to the fire door and vanished. The Shadow ascended two flights to the black roof and under the twinkling stars of Manhattan a quick transformation took place.

The robe and the black slouch hat were discarded. From behind a chimney, a small leather bag appeared. Into the bag went the disguise of The Shadow. In place of a shadowy being whose identity was utterly unknown to police and underworld, there appeared a newer and nattier figure. Mr. Lamont Cranston, clubman, wealthy idler, man of the world, stood alone on the roof.

CRANSTON descended the same way he had come. Five floors below the level of the roof, he again entered the corridor of the building and rang for an elevator. He rode the rest of the way to the street and strode quietly out to the sidewalk with the air of a man who had just spent a pleasant evening playing bridge.

The hands of his expensive watch showed a quarter of one. But the work of The Shadow was not yet finished. He was going to follow Garrity and Arnold Kling to Tuckahoe. The Shadow was certain that Kling had told the truth in the apartment upstairs. He was convinced of the man's innocence of the death of his partner, Harrington. More than that, The Shadow was convinced that Kling himself was in desperate danger of death before morning.

Yet the very trim-looking Mr. Lamont Cranston took the necessary time, before he started his trip, to make a quiet-voiced telephone call. In the all-night cafeteria booth where he made his call, a voice rustled crisply on the wire:

"Burbank speaking."

The Shadow issued curt orders concerning the movements of his agents, Clyde Burke and Harry Vincent. He wanted the apartment of Harrington to be well covered. Cardona and Harrington's niece were still there, and so was a certain safe that had not yet been opened. The Shadow's new orders were due to the fact that he expected an unknown visitor to come creeping back to have a look at that still closed and locked safe!

The Shadow wanted that visitor trapped!

CHAPTER V

THE MAN ON THE STEEPLE

ARNOLD KLING paced nervously up and down in the comfortable warmth of his second-floor study in Tuckahoe. It was cool outside in the darkness, but the ruddy coals in the grate of the fireplace made the room pleasant and cozy. Nevertheless, Arnold Kling shivered. He had told Detective Garrity that he was going to bed, but he was fully dressed.

He walked to the unshaded window and peered out. The street below was

moonlit and quiet. Garrity, the detective who had come to protect him, was downstairs, examining the windows of the living room. Kling's trustworthy servant was in the kitchen, guarding the back door.

Across the street the spire of a deserted church was a reassuring blur in the darkness. Arnold Kling drew a deep breath and cursed himself for a nervous old woman. He turned and approached the fireplace to stir up the coals.

As his back turned, unseen eyes were watching him from the chilly darkness. Unknown to Kling, a furtive figure was clinging halfway between heaven and earth, watching every movement of the man in the lighted room. The shade in the room was up because the man outside had deliberately damaged it so

that it could not be drawn down. He had to be sure that Arnold Kling and no one

else was at the fireplace when the death trap was sprung.

No one could see the cunning killer in his aerial vantage point. He was crouched on a small platform on the outside of the steeple of the deserted church across the street. Above his head was a line of high-tension electric wires from the power house at the other end of town.

A new wire carried the pulsing current toward the house across the street.

The wire descended the chimney of Kling's home, was attached by a hooked connection to the rear bar of the grate in Kling's fireplace. All that had to be done was to throw a lineman's portable switch and transfer the current to the murder wire.

The killer's right hand was ready; his left grasped a pair of powerful binoculars through which he observed the movements of his victim in the room.

Unaware of his peril, Kling approached the grate. His hand reaches out to seize the poker.

Cold eyes watched him hungrily from the tiny platform outside the cupola of the church steeple. The killer's right hand closed on the switch he had so carefully arranged with the skill of an electrician.

For a second, nothing happened. Kling poked the fire, and chuckled faintly

as the stirred coals gave out fresh heat.

Suddenly, the poker clicked on the forward bar of the grate. There was a single vivid flash of purple light. The poker flew out of Kling's hand and fell

halfway across the room.

For a second, Kling's body seemed to grow inches taller. Rigidly he stood,

his eyes wide with the blankness of death. Then he crashed backward and lay without motion. The whole episode, from the instant his poker had touched the grate, had occupied barely a second or two.

THE room was deathly quiet. The poker lay where it had fallen. A live coal

that had been jerked out of the grate by the convulsive motion of the dead man's

hand, rested on the bare floor in front of the fireplace. It made the wood smolder with a dark smudge and filled the air with the scorched smell of combustion.

Five minutes went by and the red coal on the floor slowly cooled to gray.

Then a faint click from the grate bars in the fireplace. The wire that had

hung unnoticed in the back of the chimney began to agitate itself. It swung clear of the grate bar to which it had been hooked. Without further sound, it rose slowly up the soot-covered chimney and disappeared.

It had barely vanished when there came a timid knock on the closed door of

the study. The voice of Kling's servant called out faintly.

"Mr. Kling! Would you care for something to drink before you retire, sir? I took the liberty of preparing something, in case you wish it."

No answer. The eyes of the man on the floor remained in a calm, sightless glare on the ceiling.

"Mr. Kling!"

Again no answer. The knob turned hesitantly. The door slowly opened. The worried face of the servant peered doubtfully into the silent room.

His jaw hung open in terror, as he saw the lifeless body of his master. A scream of horror stirred in his throat. But the scream was never uttered.

From the hallway behind the servant a figure appeared. A long, black arm suddenly shot out, snakelike, over the shoulder of the trembling servant. A gloved hand held a sponge to the mouth and nostrils of the man. The sweetish odor of chloroform drifted into the room.

The two figures remained glued together as though carved in wax. Then the servant's eyes closed. He was unconscious. The black-gloved hand relaxed and allowed the senseless victim to slide noiselessly to the floor.

Into the room came a tall figure in a black cloak and a black slouch hat. The brim of the hat was drawn so low that only a hawklike nose and the eyes of the intruder were visible. The eyes seemed to glow with a deep penetration.

The Shadow had arrived! But too late to save Arnold Kling's life. A long delay at a railroad crossing had snatched from The Shadow the precious minutes that might have averted a cold-blooded murder.

But was it too late to discover and capture the killer? Had The Shadow's clever feat of passing unobserved through the upper balcony window of a guarded house been in vain?

SWIFTLY, The Shadow bent over the lifeless body of Arnold Kling. He saw that Kling had been shocked to death by an enormous current of electricity. He observed the peculiar burn on the man's open right palm.

The coal that had fallen from the grate was picked up by The Shadow and placed against the burn on Kling's palm. It matched, but not quite exactly. Nor

was there any reason why it should. It was inconceivable to The Shadow that a coal from a grate could electrocute a man.

The Shadow's laughter was sibilant as he picked up the poker and observed the oval-shaped handle. The handle matched the ugly burn on Kling's palm.

Instantly, The Shadow knew what had occurred. The only electrical connection the poker could possibly have made, was with the grates of the innocent-looking fireplace. He studied the soot-lined wall of the chimney and saw a tiny mark like the tracery that might have been left by a crawling worm.

The Shadow knew a wire had made that mark!

A wire had been drawn very recently up that chimney by some one on the roof. Some one hidden aloft in the darkness had crouched over the chimney opening for the purpose of removing the last trace of a planned crime.

An instant later, The Shadow's gloved hand picked up a note that had been hastily shoved under the edge of a desk blotter. Only the tiniest corner of the paper protruded. Just enough to be barely seen.

The Shadow drew it out from concealment and read it with grim attention. It was a threat to get even with Arnold Kling, from a man who declared that Kling had wronged and cheated him. The note was signed by Thomas Porter.

The Shadow had no way of determining how clever the forgery was. He had a strong suspicion, however, it was a forgery. The note had been placed there for the purpose of being discovered. He carried it to the burning grate and watched it curl into ash and disappear in the heart of the flame.

The Shadow had removed a false clue from the eyes of the police. He had interfered with a murderer's cunning plan. Could he still catch that sly killer? He was certain that the fellow must still be lurking on the roof, disposing of his long length of betraying wire. The body of Kling was still quite warm. The Shadow decided that not more than five minutes had passed since Kling had toppled over dead.

THE SHADOW'S robed figure glided swiftly past the unconscious figure of the drugged servant. He had chloroformed the man with no anger in his heart. The Shadow had to keep his presence a secret. He had disposed of the servant; now he had to be very careful not to alarm the detective, Garrity, who was downstairs in the living room.

Or was he? The house seemed queerly quiet. Perhaps Garrity had heard something, was creeping upstairs.

The Shadow melted slowly down a dark hall and entered another room. A rear window on the top floor of the silent house opened. The driveway below was wrapped in deep darkness. So was the red roof of a small barn in the rear of an

enormous oak tree. The Shadow studied the position of both tree and barn.

A blackness emerged from the open rear window. Up the beamed outer wall of the English timbered house crept a tall batlike figure that clung and climbed like a huge bird etched against a cliff. A black slouch hat emerged cautiously above the edge of the roof. Burning eyes peered at the slope that rose toward the peak and the dark outline of a chimney.

A masked man was crouched on the roof, as The Shadow had suspected. A tall, furtive figure, bent low to avoid being outlined against the sky. The man

was busily untwining something that lay in a tangle at his feet.

It was a circular nest of electric wire. Most of the wire was already wound around the man's waist. As The Shadow watched, the winding was completed and the figure crept toward the rear edge of the roof.

He held what looked like a small ladder in his hand. He leaned over space and his body jerked. With the man's jerk, the tiny ladder spread out and became

a long route that reached to the ground below. It was really a nest of collapsible ladders, each drawn up inside the other. Made of tubular aluminum, it was light, frail - but safe to hold the weight of a man.

The killer's face was masked by a handkerchief. As he approached the ladder, he recoiled. He had seen a dark, eerie shape rise out of nothingness. The Shadow's hands reached grimly for the killer's throat.

As the trapped murderer recoiled, another figure emerged with a grim cry from a roof scuttle behind the chimney. It was Garrity, the detective, who had been sent by Cardona to guard the unfortunate Kling.

Garrity had eyes only for The Shadow. He was convinced now that The Shadow

was the master murderer who had killed Harrington and had just murdered Kling.

He sprang down the slope of the roof at the robed figure like an avenging thunderbolt.

Instantly, the real killer leaped over the edge to the spidery length of the long aluminum ladder. The fugitive slid down like a vanishing ghost.

But before he fled, he threw a wrench at the forehead of The Shadow. It sent The Shadow stumbling back a step, as Garrity struck at him.

There was a quick, deadly struggle. Garrity was strong, lithe, and poised for what he had determined to do. His arms caught The Shadow in a tight grip. His body shifted and whirled toward the edge of the roof. The Shadow was lifted

clear of support for a split-second. Then Garrity's body heaved.

The Shadow allowed himself to be hurled outward. He could have overcome Garrity, but that did not suit his purpose. His purpose was to trap the murderer who had slid down the ladder. Once more, The Shadow was tempting death

to follow out a carefully thought plan.

His sibilant laughter hissed, as he plunged headlong into space.

CHAPTER VI

SPECTRE OF JUSTICE

THE SHADOW fell toward destruction; his mind and his body were already at work. His mind grasped the significance of that thin, spidery ladder that still

rested against the side of the house. His trained body acted instantly to take advantage of that knowledge.

The very second that he began to fall, impelled by the outward thrust of Detective Garrity's vigorous arms, the body of The Shadow twisted like an acrobat in mid-air.

His arms shot out at right angles from his body, his gloved fingers clutched at a rung of the ladder. His grip held. For a second, The Shadow dangled grotesquely over space, while the frail ladder shivered in all its length under the sudden pressure expended by the breaking of his fall.

The ladder toppled outward, away from the house, as The Shadow had known it would. No ladder in the world would have remained upright under such circumstances.

But as it whizzed away from the house with terrific speed, carrying with it the dangling body of The Shadow, there remained a second or two for a calm man to prepare himself to withstand the inevitable crash.

Again the black-cloaked shape of The Shadow twisted. His hands crossed each other on the rung to which he clung, and the new grip turned him like a gymnast, so that his back was toward the falling ladder, not his face.

His burning eyes peered straight ahead at the shaggy outline of the tall oak tree he had noticed from the roof. He saw the stout thickness of a horizontal branch and gauged the distance. His head was whizzing directly toward the branch. The inevitable impact between his skull and that solid branch would drop him helplessly to the ground below, with a broken neck.

A fraction of a second before the crash took place, the head of The Shadow

ducked. His hands left the ladder. There was a crashing impact as the ladder struck and rebounded. It toppled crazily to the ground. But it did not bear with it the broken body of The Shadow.

The Shadow's muscular hands had caught and retained a grip on the limb of the oak tree, and he was hanging at arm's length from his new vantage point.

He was utterly invisible from below. He hung coolly where he had landed, easing the terrific strain on his muscles by flexing his arms slightly to take away the drag of his body.

CRIES from the darkness below told The Shadow that a grim aftermath to the struggle on the roof of Kling's house was now taking place. There was an automobile parked on the gravel road behind the house. The car had no lights. A

man had leaped from the car and was engaged in a desperate battle with the masked figure who had slid down the ladder and was now attempting to escape.

The Shadow recognized the gray mane of hair on the man who had sprung from

the car. From the description he had memorized, he knew it was Thomas Porter. Porter staggered back as the masked murderer fired. The shot missed, but Porter had fallen heavily to the ground. The killer raised his gun to finish the helpless man.

The shot was never fired. From the darkness of the oak tree came a sudden spurt of flame, and The Shadow's bullet dug with a vicious thud into the gravel surface of the path.

The masked man whirled with a cry and fled. With long strides he reached a fence and swarmed over it like a monkey. From the street outside came the sudden zoom of an idling motor.

The Shadow, swinging from his lofty branch, was powerless to stop the fleeing killer. The sound of his shot and the spurt of flame that had spat from the obscurity of dark oak leaves, had drawn attention to the presence of The Shadow.

There were two men down below, now. Garrity had suddenly appeared from a rear door of the house. Thomas Porter started his own car into flight. As it roared away, he snapped on a powerful spotlight at the side of the driver's seat.

The light cast a white, vivid cone that threw every object in its path into dazzling silhouette. Porter twisted the light with a quick gesture. The beam leaped clear of the ground and lifted toward the dense leaves of the oak tree. It illuminated the dangling figure of The Shadow.

A pistol gleamed in Garrity's hand, as he saw the cloaked form in the tree. He fired upward.

From the darkness of the street in front of the Kling home came the sudden sound of shouts. Farther along in the distance, the bleat of a police whistle rose with shuddering clearness on the night air. A patrolman down the street had heard the shooting. In a moment, bluecoats would be rushing to the aid of Garrity with drawn guns.

AS Porter's car fled, a uniformed cop was already rushing around the driveway that surrounded the house. His pistol belched fire at the vanishing car. But no shot came in reply from the fleeing intruder.

Porter did a clever thing, as his car rounded the drive toward the street. His hand turned the brilliant beam of the spotlight, so that it rose backward and again bathed the limb of the oak, to which The Shadow still clung in dazzling outline.

The policeman gazed aloft and uttered a hoarse cry of triumph. He saw the outline of The Shadow's dangling body. He saw the gleam of a gun in black-gloved hands. He fired at the exact instant that the beam left the tree under the impetus of the vanishing car.

The darkness that resulted was doubly dark by reason of the sudden change from bright brilliance. The cop's bullet slashed harmlessly through the leaves that brushed the head of The Shadow.

There were other policemen arriving on the scene. Garrity shouted hoarsely; identified himself with a quick display of his badge. A flashlight jerked out of a blue-clad pocket and its beam was directed at the spot where The Shadow had been hanging.

Bullets ripped through the cloak, piercing it in a dozen places. But no cry of pain came from the figure dangling in the tree. The hat fell, followed an instant later by the cloak.

The cops gasped. The cloak, propped over a limb, had been empty. The man

who had so cleverly hung it in plain sight must be still hiding somewhere up the tree.

While two policemen waited below with drawn guns, Garrity climbed the oak.

The beam of light moved steadily upward above his head, so as not to make a helpless target of the climbing detective. But the maneuver was fruitless. The tree was empty. There was no one hidden from the base of the trunk to its feathery top.

Where had The Shadow gone?

He had gone to a spot the startled policeman had overlooked - the red roof

of the barn beyond the tree. At the moment the spotlight of the vanishing car had left him unobserved in the pitch darkness, he had squirmed out of his cloak

and hung it where the flashlight of the cop would reveal it in sharp silhouette.

The next instant, The Shadow launched himself to the roof of the barn. The

thud of his impact was covered by the sound of the shooting and the excited yells of the policemen.

Had they thrown their flash beam toward the barn, The Shadow would inevitably have been discovered and trapped. But the seconds of indecision gave

him time to act. His muscular hands hauled him noiselessly to the peak of the roof and over to the opposite slant. He had already slid downward and was crouched close to the dark earth, when the puzzled Garrity began his fruitless search of an empty tree.

There was a tiny pond back of a small hedge and The Shadow picked up a heavy stone and sent it splashing into the water. As he had surmised, the police rushed to the spot, their flashlights quivering everywhere. But they saw

no trace of The Shadow. Screened by a thick hedge, he had noiselessly made his way back to the foot of the tree and recovered his cloak and hat. He was gone like a fleeting shadow in the night.

He made a quick detour of the block, aided by the noise and confusion. Some of the police were still beating the bushes. Others were inside Kling's house. The murder had been discovered. The whole neighborhood was in an uproar.

ACROSS the street went the swift figure of The Shadow. He made straight for the tenantless old church across from Kling's residence. He had noticed the

maze of high-tension wires that ran so closely to the cupola near the top of the

church's steeple. He divined exactly what had happened, and where the death volts that killed Arnold Kling had originated.

No living human being saw The Shadow pass noiselessly through the tiny cemetery of the church. No one saw the rear window lift in the basement of the church.

Through the church's basement The Shadow crept, the tiny beam of his electric torch masked by the tightly shuttered windows of the old structure. The place had been abandoned a year ago. The Shadow had seen the "For Sale" sign outside. He knew he had nothing to fear from watchman or caretaker.

Except for the faint squeak of mice in the basement and the moaning noise of the wind in an exposed knothole above the floor of the dark vestry room, there was no sound whatever. The Shadow moved without noise.

Up the crazy ladders that led through the steeple toward the top, he climbed. Had the escaped killer seen the hawklike profile and the indomitable fire in the eyes of the ascending investigator, he would have known guilty

fear. For The Shadow's eyes never missed a clue. Where clues were lacking, The Shadow's keen brain supplied the omission and told him logically where to seek to find such clues.

That there would be a clue, he didn't doubt for an instant. His knowledge of the underworld told him that no criminal, however smart, could avoid trapping himself. Guilt always made men hurried and careless. Little things on which no man could reckon before hand always conspired to confound murderers, however perfect they thought their crimes had been arranged.

In the past, The Shadow had always found this to be true. He expected to find confirmation of his belief in the belfry overhead.

He was correct. Hanging to the exposed and rotted platform that formed a sort of wooden lip to the cupola near the top of the steeple, The Shadow considered. Over his head wheeled the dark shapes of bats disturbed from their upside-down sleep.

The Shadow knew that this was the second time that night the bats had been

so disturbed. He had, as yet, no idea of the identity of the man who had utilized the presence of high-tension wires passing near the steeple to plan and carry out a crime.

He could see across the street the window of Kling's study. The body was plainly visible through the unshaded pane; so was the flitting figure of Garrity. This, then, was how the murderer had spotted his victim's movements, so as to kill Arnold Kling and no other. For, if by mistake, Kling's servant had been killed, the whole trick of the false clue would have been spoiled, would have betrayed a conspiracy to frame Thomas Porter, instead of hiding it as the murderer intended.

THE SHADOW placed himself mentally inside the body of that murderer. He saw burned matches strewn the outside of the rotted platform. A man, lurking here on such an important job, would be cold and nervous in the sweep of the wind that howled thinly around the tip of the spire. He would also have to wait

for the proper moment to spring his trap. He would smoke cigarettes to keep himself keyed up.

And a murderer would not choose to let the glow of his cigarettes be seen from the street below, The Shadow reasoned. He'd watch through binoculars, with

one hand; the other would be held inside the cupola's doorway, to hide the telltale ruddy tip of the cigarette.

Inside the cupola, The Shadow found the cigarette stubs he had deduced - at least a dozen of them. More than that! He saw where a deliberate attempt had

been made to start a fire. The soft, spongy wood of the cupola floor was blackened and charred.

The Shadow knew instantly that this was by cunning design, not accident. The killer had meant the church to burst into flame a few minutes after he had left. There was a thin trail of orange powder leading toward a rotted hole in one of the boards. The fire had gone out because the line of powder, hastily spilled, had left a gap too great for the tiny flame to leap.

The Shadow knew, before he inserted his long, tapering white fingers in that rotted hole in the board, that he would find what he was seeking.

Out of the hole came The Shadow's sure hand. He was holding a flat paper packet containing an orange-colored powder. The Shadow smelled it. An incendiary chemical! The unmistakable odors of sulphur and phosphorus! Whoever had killed Kling was not only an expert electrician, but a chemist.

The Shadow's burning eyes studied the packet, marked the type of paper.

To

his shrewd brain the color, size and shape of the chemical packet told a clear story. It verified certain facts that The Shadow already knew. He didn't need

"M. C. C." printed on the envelope to tell him that the drama was sifting with sinister speed to the plant of the Millcote Chemical Corporation in New Jersey.

Over the dark outline of The Shadow's body, bats wheeled and squeaked in the lonely steeple. The wind made strange crooning noises. But neither the wind nor the bats could drown the whispered sound of The Shadow's grim mirth.

In a moment the echo of The Shadow's laugh was all that remained in the deserted steeple of the old church. The Shadow himself had gone.

It was now almost morning. The gray pallor of dawn was beginning to tint the sky. Behind the twin beams of powerful headlights, The Shadow started on a grim chase. That chase would end at the country home of Thomas Porter, in New Jersey.

The Shadow had ordered his agent, Harry Vincent, to get on Porter's trail and follow his every movement. The fact that Porter had come alone to Tuckahoe was proof positive that Harry had failed.

There was only one answer to that. Harry had been captured! At this very instant, he was probably a helpless prisoner in the power of Porter's son, Ray!

CHAPTER VII

THE SAFE OPENS

IN the dimly lighted apartment where Reed Harrington had died so mysteriously, there was tension upon the faces of the detective and the girl who stared so intently at each other.

Joe Cardona had abandoned, for the present, his questioning of Molly Harrington, the murdered man's pretty niece. She had replied to everything he asked her with an outward show of candor. Nevertheless, Joe was not satisfied.

He did not share Clyde Burke's assurance of the blue-eyed girl's complete innocence in this affair. He was convinced she had not told him all she knew. He sensed a will power in this slim girl that he knew would be difficult to break down. There had been no talk of arresting her, yet Joe Cardona had already decided to bring her down to police headquarters as a material witness.

Meanwhile, he waited with increasing impatience for the arrival of the police expert who would open the locked safe in the corner of the dead man's study. From the moment of her arrival in the apartment, Molly had not once allowed her glance to move toward that safe. To Cardona, this was a significant fact.

Walsh, who had remained with Cardona after the departure of Garrity and Kling, was inside the bedroom giving the place a more thorough search. Molly's glance remained demurely lowered, but her heart was thudding nervously as she heard the scuffling footsteps of Detective Walsh. She was waiting tensely for Walsh to cry out, to summon Cardona.

Molly had good reason for expecting a sudden discovery. She had arranged for it with consummate skill. A few moments after Kling had left the apartment with the stolid Garrity, the girl had made an excuse and gone to the bathroom.

To reach it, she had to go through the darkened bedroom. In her hand was an object she had palmed without the knowledge of Cardona. It was a small silver paper knife. She wanted it merely for a lure, a false clue.

Molly Harrington clicked on the light in the bathroom and closed the door noisily. But she did not go inside. She remained in the bedroom. In a second, she had tiptoed across to the bed, lifted back the coverlet and shoved the silver paper knife underneath. She replaced the cover with intentional awkwardness, rumpiling it. She waited a moment or two and then reopened the bathroom door, as though she was just emerging.

Timidly, she suggested that it might be a good idea to search the apartment more thoroughly, while they waited for the arrival of the safe expert.

WALSH'S sudden cry from the bedroom brought her stiffly upward in her chair, her eyes wide with pretended fear.

"Hey, Joe!" Walsh shouted, excitedly. "I've found something in the guy's bed! Come here!"

"Sit down," Cardona snapped to the half-rising girl. "Stay right where you are."

He disappeared and Molly could hear him exclaim grimly, "A paper knife, eh? Rip the rest of those covers off the bed!"

Molly was already on silent tiptoe, hurrying to the safe in the corner of the empty study. She knelt before it, and her fingers were like flying blurs as she twirled the dial.

In a twinkling, the safe door opened under her sure touch. She knew the combination. She had been repeating the numbers over and over to herself, while

she sat so demurely, waiting for the opportunity that she herself had created.

Her hand thrust itself inside the unlocked compartment on the bottom. She withdrew a white envelope and hid it quickly inside the bosom of her dress.

The safe door was noiselessly closed and she was retreating swiftly toward the chair she had quitted, when she stopped suddenly with a look of confusion on her pale face.

Joe Cardona was in the doorway of the bedroom, staring at her suspiciously. Turning casually to a table, she picked up a match box and lighted the cigarette she had placed between her lips as an alibi in case she was interrupted.

"Got up for a match, eh?" Cardona said, dryly.

"Yes. Is it - all right to smoke?"

"Sure. You weren't, by any chance, taking a look at your uncle's safe, were you?"

"Of course not."

"You have no idea what the combination is?"

"No." She denied it sweetly, almost smilingly. Conscious that the envelope she had come here to obtain was now safely hidden in the bosom of her dress, she was rapidly regaining her composure.

Suddenly, however, her smiling eyes widened with sudden fear. She screamed. Cardona, suspecting a trick, remained where he was, staring steadily at the girl, his broad back toward the passage leading to the foyer.

The sight of Walsh in the bedroom doorway brought Cardona to a quick realization of peril. Walsh was glaring, reaching for his gun. Before his clawing hand could reach his hip, he toppled forward, blood spurting from his neck. There was a faint, barely audible, plop behind Cardona.

Joe whirled - and stiffened. Two men were standing close together. The cruel tension of the professional gunman was eloquent in both their strained faces. The man on the left had shot down Walsh with a silenced pistol that jutted ominously in his gloved hand. The second had a similar weapon, and it was pointed at Cardona and Molly Harrington.

WALSH'S feeble moan was the only sound in a sinister silence. Then the moaning stopped. Walsh was unconscious.

The thug who seemed to be the leader grinned coldly. "Nice shooting, Andy," he told his pal. "Grab that wounded dick's rod and slide in behind Cardona."

Andy complied with the order like an agile snake. In a moment Joe, too, was disarmed, his hands raised obediently above his head.

Out of the corner of his mouth, he whispered furiously to the girl. "You knew this was coming, didn't you? All set for it, eh?"

Molly didn't reply. She was staring at the two intruders, her face chalk-white. It was impossible to tell whether she knew them or not. Had The Shadow been in the room, he would have recognized the leader. He was the same man who had trailed the murdered Reed Harrington earlier that evening in a blue sedan.

"Got his gun?" the man snapped curtly to Andy.

"Yeah. O.K., Blink."

Cardona, who had been staring intently at the thug's fleshy face, breathed a sudden oath of comprehension. The features clicked in his mind with the memory of a rogues' gallery photo in headquarters.

"Blink, eh? Blink Dorgan! Since when did you leave St. Louis?"

Dorgan chuckled calmly. "You're a good guesser, Cardona - but it ain't gonna do you no good. Take him, Andy!"

The rasp of his snarl was followed by a grinding pain at the back of Joe's skull. The thug behind him had struck him viciously with the butt of his captured gun. Cardona slid to his knees and pitched forward, badly dazed.

He could hear vaguely the crisp snarl of "Blink" Dorgan. "Keep your rod on the girl, Andy. We got about two minutes to prod this safe open and scam."

Dorgan ran to the safe with a meaty pound of his heavy feet. Through dizzy circles of pain, Cardona watched him. So did Molly Harrington, helpless under Andy's grim weapon.

She looked as surprised as Cardona when she saw Dorgan drop to one knee and begin to manipulate the combination dial of the safe with a sure, eager competence. He knew the combination!

The door opened as easily as it had a few minutes before under Molly's own touch. Dorgan, like Molly, reached into the lower compartment. But his hand came away empty. He whirled on his knees, a harsh oath on his lips. Then he got to his feet with the slow, lithe movement of a stalking tiger. He walked toward Molly until only a couple of feet separated them.

"Pretty smart, aren't you, baby?"

"I - I don't know what you mean," Molly faltered.

Cardona, whose head was rapidly clearing, except for a terrific throb of pain, saw that the girl's face was blank with utter terror. He started weakly to rise, but a kick from Andy crashed against his ribs and dropped him again.

"Tie that lug up," Blink Dorgan said, huskily. "He don't count no more. It's this foxy dame I'm interested in."

A LENGTH of light, but strong, twine appeared from Andy's pocket. In a trice, Cardona was trussed hand and foot. A dirty handkerchief was stuffed into his gaping jaws and sealed with adhesive tape.

While this was going on, Molly Harrington never moved. She stood stiffly where she was, staring at the grinning Dorgan like a bird helpless before the lidless gaze of a snake.

Dorgan broke the silence. "O.K., sweetheart. Let's have it!"

"I - I haven't anything."

"I want the envelope you swiped out of that safe."

"I couldn't open the safe if I wanted to," the girl faltered. "I don't know the combination."

Dorgan's chuckle was like the tinkle of ice. "Do you hand it over, baby - or do I rip your clothes off and find it myself?"

His left hand moved toward her, the fingers outstretched.

"Don't!" the girl sobbed. "I - I -" Weeping, she reached inside the neck of her dress and produced the envelope she had gone to such desperate measures to steal.

Dorgan took it with a brief guffaw of triumph. "Smart kid. But I'm workin'

for a guy that's twice as smart. All set, Andy?"

"All set."

"Let's go." His eyes were pin points of murder, as he glared at the weeping girl. "If you make a move to leave this room in the next ten minutes, it'll be just too bad! Andy and me don't like to get caught. We're funny that way."

He backed out into the outside hall. Andy had already reached the elevator

shaft and had pressed the bell button. The arrow of the ascending car spun swiftly around. The moment the door slid open, guns were jammed into the stomach of the terrified operator.

"Down!" Dorgan snapped. "Make it snappy, stupid, or we'll drop you down a lot farther - into a nice grave!"

The door slid shut. The elevator descended.

The moment it dropped below the floor level, the door of Harrington's apartment opened furtively. Into the hallway, like a frightened ghost, flitted Molly Harrington. She made no effort to follow the fleeing thugs who had stolen

the envelope from her uncle's safe. She had made no effort to release Cardona or

to go to the aid of the wounded Walsh.

Straight down the silent hall she ran and turned a corner that led to the service elevator shaft. She did not ring for the service elevator, but hurried noiselessly down the stairs that boxed in the shaft.

AT the street level, Dorgan and his pal Andy stepped out of the elevator with grim haste. The operator was crumpled inside the car, toppled with a pistol butt the moment he had brought the elevator to a halt. Dorgan and Andy ran toward the street entrance.

As they passed the dark alcove where the switchboard was located, a stranger sprang out to intercept them. He was a young man, tall, curly-haired, grim-faced. A gun in his hand jerked level.

Dorgan and Andy, startled by this unlooked-for threat against their escape, fired wildly as they sprang aside. Their silenced guns made no sound, but the roar of the young man's pistol filled the lobby with thunderous echoes.

Cursing, Andy struck at their tall opponent and sent him staggering back on his heels. Both gunmen fled.

Out of the ruin of the switchboard where he had fallen headlong, the young man pulled himself groggily to his feet. In a moment, his long legs were carrying him swiftly out to the street. He hesitated for barely an instant on the sidewalk. The gunmen had leaped into a blue sedan. Already, they were streaking toward the west.

A police whistle blew. Men were shouting, pointing after the fleeing sedan.

The young man turned and ran to a smaller car at the curb. It was his own - parked there before he had entered the apartment house. He stepped on the gas and fled - east! In the opposite direction from that taken by the thugs!

His sudden decision filled with dismay a man who had been sitting midway down the block in still another parked car. This man was Harry Vincent, trusted agent of The Shadow, who had been detailed to trail the mysterious father and son known as the Porters. The young man who had tried to intercept Dorgan and his pal, Andy, was Ray Porter.

Harry Vincent had strict orders from The Shadow to follow him. He obeyed those orders now. In an instant, his own inconspicuous car was heading east, oblivious to the trail of the two thugs who, with drawn guns, had burst into sight from the apartment house. Vincent's car careened wildly around a corner and took up the pursuit of Ray Porter.

He slowed down when he was sure he had located the car ahead. He let traffic weave in and out between him and his quarry. He didn't want Porter to know that he was being tailed.

Straight southward the chase continued, to the entrance of the Holland Tunnel. Porter, it was evident, was returning to the guarded estate of his father in New Jersey; the same spot from which Vincent had originally trailed him.

The dark highroads of New Jersey swallowed pursuer and pursued.

CHAPTER VIII

TREACHERY TRAIL

TWO men were conferring in quiet whispers in the front parlor of a stately old mansion in New Jersey. Outside the house the streak of pale dawn in the sky was definitely giving way to daylight. Nevertheless, it was still quite dark inside the gloomy mansion. The faces of the two men were pale, vaguely defined.

Neither of them, however, made any move to turn on the light.

There was a strong resemblance between these two furtive men. They both had the same strong nose, tight lips, an indomitable expression about the eyes that stamped them as resolute fighters. The younger man was the curly-haired Ray Porter, whom Harry Vincent had followed with grim persistence to this guarded country retreat. The older man was Ray's father.

Thomas Porter had arrived barely a few minutes earlier. He had gained the house unseen by using a method of entrance unknown to any one but the Porters and their trusted servants.

Thomas Porter's wrinkled eyes were heavy with fatigue. He had driven hard and fast from the home of Arnold Kling in Tuckahoe. The murder of Kling was the subject that engrossed both father and son.

Ray was scowling with obvious disappointment at the things his father told him.

"You didn't discover anything?"

"Nothing. As a matter of fact, I was almost caught. I had to race away in a hail of gunfire."

He ran a tremulous hand through his thick gray hair and an oath of weariness escaped his lips.

"You, too, failed at Harrington's apartment, Ray?"

Ray nodded. "There were two thugs there ahead of me. The whole thing went wrong from start to finish. I'm not sure, but I have an uneasy feeling that I

was trailed here."

Thomas Porter growled harshly. "You mean by the thugs?"

"No. That's what puzzles me. They fled before I did. If I was followed, it was by some one entirely new in this business. Could he be a detective, do you think?"

"We'll soon find out," Thomas Porter said, decisively. The weariness seemed to slip like a cloak from his broad shoulders. He leaned toward his son and whispered briefly.

Ray Porter nodded and chuckled. It was a clipped, unpleasant sound. Both men rose and walked outside to the broad, pillared veranda of the mansion where Ray's car was still parked.

RAY descended the steps, got into his car and started the motor. His father remained where he was, watching the traveled driveway where it curved out of the entrance of the grounds. Suddenly, the old man uttered a guarded exclamation.

"I saw him," he whispered. "He was hiding behind a bush just inside the wall. He slipped out to the road the moment he heard you start your motor." His

low whisper hardened. "Do exactly what I told you, Ray. I'll take care of the rest."

He turned and reentered the house. Ray Porter started his car and rolled quietly down the driveway and out into the road. The road was empty, but he was

not deceived. He knew there was a lane a few rods farther on, where a light car

could be easily concealed. He made a leisurely turn and drove off in the opposite direction.

A few minutes later, he smiled as his eyes lifted to his rear-vision mirror. There was a car following him.

Vincent, too, was smiling grimly as again he took up the trail of this elusive Ray Porter. He kept well back in the road, content to keep his man in sight. He didn't want his own presence too obvious. He was unaware that he had already been spotted by the keen glance of a gray-haired man on a shadowy veranda.

The first intimation that Harry Vincent had that anything was wrong was when his quarry made a sudden, unexpected turn and left the main highway. The new road was narrow, dirt-paved, and badly in need of repair. But there was no sign of Ray Porter when Vincent swerved round the curve. Evidently Ray had crammed on speed the moment he had left the main highway.

Vincent dared not go too fast himself. The road wound in and out among wooded hills, with deep gullies here and there where a sideslip meant death. Rains had gnawed at the edge of the road and crumbled a lot of the earth away.

Vincent wondered where such a forlorn road might lead. He was unaware that

he was making a long circle through the hills, returning toward the stone mansion where the chase had started.

A sudden grinding crash somewhere ahead caused Vincent to brake his car hurriedly and listen. He could hear the roar of loosened earth, the sound of stones bouncing and falling into a chasm somewhere ahead. Through the sudden silence that followed he heard the thin echo of a man's cry.

His foot pressed the gas pedal. Carefully he rounded a hairpin turn, another - and still another. As he emerged around the short curve, Harry Vincent gasped. His quarry had skidded on the wet earth and gone crashing to death down the steep side of a rocky ravine!

TWENTY feet below, Harry could see Ray Porter's stark figure lying in a twisted huddle a dozen feet from the wrecked car. The car was upside down, its wheels snapped off, its whole chassis crushed out of shape like an accordion.

In a moment, Harry was out of his own car and descending cautiously. Ray Porter was lying on his face, one arm extended limply, the other bent under his

sprawled body. As Harry turned him over, the man's bent arm straightened suddenly and there was a gun in it.

"Stick 'em up!"

Ray Porter's narrowed eyes were grim. He laughed softly as he got to his feet. He was unhurt. Vincent realized, too late, what had happened. The wily Ray had deliberately sent an empty car crashing into the ravine, had clambered down beside it almost before the echoes of the crash had died, and now held his

pursuer helpless.

Harry's arm shot out suddenly and he closed desperately with his captor. It was a forlorn chance. Porter was taller, heavier than Harry. He took a lithe

step backward, half turning as he did so. The barrel of the gun struck Vincent back of the ear.

Harry toppled from the vicious blow, his muscles paralyzed. His mind realized that he was being picked up like a sack of meal, but his muscles refused to obey. His body hung limply. He was carried up the steep slant of the ravine to the edge of the road.

A harsh voice said triumphantly: "So you trapped the rascal! Good! Did he talk?"

"No. Worse than a clam."

"He'll talk," the voice chuckled. "Throw him into the rumble."

Harry's brain cleared. He recognized the gray mane of Thomas Porter from the description that had been furnished him by The Shadow.

A convertible coupe had been backed out of the bushes that lined the opposite side of the road. Harry instantly divined that the narrow road was a back trail leading circuitously through the hills to the Porter home. The son had sprung the trap, the sly father had been waiting with another car.

Before Vincent could make a move, he was caught up suddenly in the muscular embrace of young Ray Porter. He was thrust, headfirst, into the empty rumble and the cover snapped closed over his head. He heard the sound of a padlock clicking.

He felt horribly weak from the blow that had been dealt him and his temple

was wet with fresh blood. But there was a faint smile on the lips of Harry Vincent as he lay crumpled in the darkness inside the rumble.

He had not forgotten the diamond ring on his left hand. His hand had moved

quickly as Ray Porter shoved him into his prison. Ray, panting with haste and exertion, hadn't noticed Harry's gesture. The gesture brought the stone of Harry's ring into contact with the lacquered surface of the car. He made a quick, ragged "V," like the wavering wings of a gull in flight.

The mark was not noticed by either of the Porters, as Harry was finally hauled out of the rumble and jerked roughly to his feet.

He saw that he had been brought to the Porter estate by a back entrance. He was being led to the doorway of a substantial-looking garage surrounded by trees and shrubbery. He could see the mansion itself, a hundred yards or so away. Only the roof and chimney were visible. The garage itself could not be seen from the house.

IN a moment, Harry's wonder over why he was being taken to a garage was dissipated. He was being taken below the garage! A trapdoor lifted and he was

hurried down stone steps by the stalwart arm of Ray Porter.

Harry gasped, as he realized the nature of the hide-out into which he was being so secretly conducted.

The place was a perfectly equipped chemical laboratory. It was easily thirty feet square, built in the solid earth under the private garage. Glass retorts and test tubes filled shelves along one side of the room. Metal drums of chemicals rested in ordered neatness along another wall, that was built of smooth stone like the floor.

In a far corner, under the feeble ray of a red lamp that looked like a pilot light, was a curious contrivance that seemed to Harry's dazed eyes to be half machine, half table. He could see plates immersed in acid alongside the table and he guessed that it was some sort of electrochemical device.

Harry was to know more about that queer contraption before many minutes had passed. It was fully capable of doing something that no power on earth had yet been able to accomplish. It was capable of forcing a confession from Harry's unwilling lips.

But Vincent forgot the strange machine, as he was quickly tied up and dragged across the floor. His eyes bulged with horror. He was being dragged past the very edge of a sinister tank set flush with the lip of the floor.

The tank was filled with a liquid that was colorless and crystal-clear. But the liquid in the tank was not water. The surface of it seemed to writhe with a queer inner light, as though sunlight was playing upward from the depths

below. Gray haze drifted across the surface.

Harry's horrified brain told him instantly what this hellish pool was.

The

tank was filled with corrosive acid!

Ray Porter laughed harshly, as he saw the direction of Vincent's gaze.

"Don't worry, mister! We've got something here that's far more efficient than an acid vat for making spies talk."

He threw Vincent headlong into a metal chair.

"Do you want to question this man, or shall I?" he asked his father.

"I'll do the questioning," Thomas Porter said, grimly.

CHAPTER IX

THE TRUTH MACHINE

"WHAT'S your name?" Thomas Porter growled. His eyes under bushy-gray brows

bored into the face of his helpless captive.

Harry murmured the first name that came into his mind.

"Richard Rankin," he replied, slowly.

"Who is your employer? Who sent you here to spy on us?"

"I'm afraid I don't know what you mean," Harry said in his most innocent voice.

"Why did you turn into the dirt road that leads back to this house?"

"I became confused and lost my way."

"He's lying!" Ray Porter snapped. "He's in cahoots with that thug who tried to kill me to-night."

"Do you know a crook named Blink Dorgan?" the older man snarled.

"I never heard of him," Harry replied.

More questions were shot at him. Harry locked his lips. Thomas Porter laughed suddenly and the sound of it was curt and unpleasant.

"My friend," he said, grimly, "you're going to talk and you're going to talk truthfully. You're going to tell us every secret that's locked in that brain of yours. You're not up against fools. You're facing men who are justified in taking whatever measure is necessary to protect themselves against

attack and murder!"

His gray mane of hair whirled angrily toward his waiting son.

"Put him on the table, Ray! We'll pry out of him every thought in his brain - including his own name and the name of the man he works for."

IN a trice, Vincent was lifted out of the metal chair and carried across the room in the grasp of Ray. He was brought straight to the peculiar table he had noticed before. It looked like an electrical device of some sort. Its legs were metal. There was an electrode at either end.

At one side was an uncovered tank that seemed to be filled with a brownish-looking chemical. Plates were submerged in the acid. They were attached to the table by wires, and there was a small dial above the tank with a feathery-looking pointer that rested at zero.

Ray Porter turned a switch and the chemical in the tank began to bubble between the two submerged plates of metal. The pilot light above the machine glowed a deep crimson. The needle of the pointer crept steadily from zero to one hundred.

"Once more and for the last time," Thomas Porter growled. "Are you going to talk of your own free will? Or must we drag it out of you?"

"I've told you the truth," Harry insisted. "My name is Richard Rankin. I lost my way on a trip from Trenton to New York. I don't know any man named Dorgan."

Porter laughed gratingly. He glanced toward his son who had been busily working while his father talked.

"All ready, Ray?"

"All ready."

A switch clicked. A faint hum filled the underground laboratory. To Harry's amazement, nothing whatever seemed to happen. His only sensation was a queer drowsiness, that was not at all unpleasant.

"What is your name?" Thomas Porter asked, quietly.

"Harry Vincent."

To Harry's horror, the words issued almost unthinkably from his lips. He was aware of what he had said, filled with a terrorized realization that he had spoken against his own will. But he was powerless to reply with anything but the truth.

Ray Porter was writing the name down in a small notebook. Harry knew what the next question would be - and knew that the lie he had framed would not be uttered. The drowsiness that held him captive seemed to have increased. He was thoroughly conscious, aware of his predicament, but something uncanny had happened to his will power.

He locked his lips and ground his teeth together by a supreme effort of his drugged will.

"Who is your master?" Thomas Porter asked in a silken murmur.

"The Shadow," Harry replied, in a barely intelligible voice. The words came through his clenched teeth. He was unable to hold them back.

"Ah!" Porter growled. He turned toward his son. Ray was staring in bewilderment at the captive.

"The Shadow!" Ray whispered. "You were right. The man on Kling's roof was The Shadow! I've heard of him. I always thought he was a myth."

THOMAS PORTER'S eyes gleamed.

"Tell me," he said, softly. "Who is this man who calls himself The Shadow?"

"I don't know," Harry replied with a groan. There was sweat on his pale face. Again, he had told the absolute truth. No one knew who The Shadow was, not even his most trusted agents.

"Where does The Shadow live?"

"I don't know."

"How do you communicate with him?" the implacable voice of Thomas Porter persisted.

"Through a contact man," Harry gasped. His body stiffened against the leather bands that held him taut against the table. He was fighting to withhold

the name that bubbled behind his clenched lips.

"And what is the name of this contact man?" Porter hissed.

"His name is - is - Bur -"

The rest of the word was pronounced, but it was never heard. It was drowned by a curt peal of laughter.

Porter and his son whirled like cats. They stared at the dark patch of blackness in the stone corner of the underground chamber. There was nothing visible against the darkness of the recess whence the laugh had issued.

With a quick simultaneous gesture, the hands of Ray Porter and his father darted toward their hip pockets.

The weapons they clutched for were never drawn. They froze into frightened

immobility under the leveled guns in the black-gloved hands. A tall, silent figure was gliding out of obscurity to confront them.

"The Shadow!" Porter gasped.

Harry Vincent's heart surged with relief. In a flash, he realized what had

happened. The Shadow had followed the elder Porter from Tuckahoe. He had noticed

the parked car outside the garage, had seen the hastily scratched "V" on the outside of the rumble - and had silently descended to save Vincent's life.

THOMAS PORTER'S gray hair bristled with rage. He seemed on the point of clutching for his gun. But the son restrained his father with a low cry. He knew that any attempt to attack this powerful criminal, as he imagined The Shadow to be, would be met by jets of flame from the twin automatics that jutted from the gloved hands.

Besides, Ray Porter had a more cunning defense in the back of his mind. Help was still possible. He intended to summon such help immediately.

He backed against a low shelf on the wall and his raised left hand brushed

a small switch. The switch operated an alarm bell in the mansion that rose fortress-like two hundred yards away, apparently unconnected with this strange laboratory under the garage.

But there was a connection between house and garage. Harry Vincent was not

aware of it. Neither was The Shadow. Beyond the smooth wall of the underground chamber was a tunnel that ran slantingly through the earth to the cellar of the mansion.

In the mansion, a bell was already ringing its curt summons. Trusted retainers of the Porters had snatched up weapons and were racing silently through the tunnel to the aid of their trapped employers.

The Shadow was bending over the table on which Harry Vincent was still a prisoner. A knife in the black-gloved hand slashed through the leather straps. Harry was free. He rose weakly from the table and seized the weapon that The Shadow thrust at him.

He was watching both Porters, satisfied that they were helpless.

The Shadow, however, had turned his burning eyes toward the blank wall of the room. His sharp ears had caught the sound of racing feet. He divined what had happened, deduced instantly the existence of an unknown tunnel.

He saw the wall suddenly open. Four armed servants appeared. For a

second,

the henchmen of the Porters gazed stupidly, unable to see any intruders in the chamber. The Shadow had backed into the same dark corner from which he had first appeared - his black robe, thrown like a concealing cloud over Vincent.

Ray Porter started to yell a warning. His voice was cut short by the thunderous flame of guns from the stairway that led aloft to the garage.

One of Porter's henchmen reeled and fell, a bullet through his heart. His companions, startled, whirled to face these new enemies.

Ugly-faced men were massed on the stairway, just below the open trapdoor. In the very forefront was the evil visage of Blink Dorgan, the killer who had made such a daring raid on the safe of the murdered Reed Harrington.

Dorgan couldn't see Vincent or The Shadow in the dark corner, but he did see the armed men pouring out of the secret tunnel. It was his gun which had pierced the heart of the first man who had appeared through the opening in the wall.

In a second, the underground chamber was an inferno of flying lead. Both gangs were pumping bullets.

Caught between two perils, The Shadow remained motionless and unseen, his cloaked body shielding his agent.

CHAPTER X

DEATH UNDERGROUND

A YELL of rage from Blink Dorgan rose like a shrill scream above the roar of the exploding guns.

"Kill them all! Don't let one of them escape!"

His gun jerked with the recoil of his shot. At the mouth of the tunnel, another of Porter's men pitched forward. But they were returning the fire, refusing to retreat before the scarlet thunder of the intruder's guns. A bullet

whacked the hat from Dorgan's head. Another struck the man in front of him and tumbled him headlong from the stairs.

The Shadow took no hand in the struggle between Porter's men and the mobsters. He was waiting for the turn he knew would come.

Ray Porter dropped to the floor, dragging his father with him. In the excitement of the battle, his action was not noticed. Screened by the surface of an overturned table, he was crawling by a circuitous route to the yawning black square in the wall.

Thomas Porter followed his son. Under cover of the tumult, both of them hoped to reach the tunnel unobserved.

But The Shadow saw their stratagem and divined what was in their minds.

He

knocked Vincent's gun aside as Harry tried for a shot at the retreating Porters.

The Shadow had no intention of killing either Porter or his son. He wanted

to question them, not to kill them. At his whispered order, Harry Vincent slid downward behind the shielding black cloak of his master and began to worm along

the floor in the same direction the Porters had taken.

He was aided by the terrific havoc that the battle had already caused. Furniture had been overturned; glass retorts had smashed on the stone floor, filling the air with noxious fumes from spilled chemicals. Over the shouts of the combatants came the spiteful roar of exploding weapons. Dorgan's gang had advanced to the bottom of the stairs from the garage above and were pouring a hail of lead into the huddled remnant of Porter's retainers.

Only two of the latter were still standing. They had been driven back almost to the entrance of the tunnel.

Suddenly, Thomas Porter and his son rose from concealment. The fire against the mobsters redoubled, as the Porters emptied their guns into Dorgan and his men. A thug pitched over the low banister of the staircase and fell headlong with a crash. His yell of terror was quenched in a horrible gurgling.

BLINK DORGAN'S bull voice rallied his men. Porter and his son were slipping quietly into the tunnel. Dorgan saw them vanish and screamed a warning. The crack of exploding guns sealed the doom of the two henchmen who were trying to cover their employers' retreat to safety.

One of the two defendants went backward with a bullet in his heart. His companion tried to shield himself behind the dead man's body. But his movement was too late. A bullet from Dorgan ripped through his neck and severed the jugular vein. Blood poured from the wound.

Instantly, Dorgan and his killers pressed forward with triumphant yells. They saw the figure of Harry Vincent dashing into the tunnel opening.

"Get him!" Dorgan screamed.

For a second, it looked as if Harry was caught. His duty was to follow the Porters into the tunnel. He raced for the square black opening - and saw it vanishing before his startled eyes.

The wall was curling down in front of him. Already, the swift descent of the open door had half closed the barrier. It was pliable metal painted to resemble gray stone. It operated on a roller device that was hidden on the inner side of the wall itself. And it was dropping with the speed of lightning.

Harry flung himself at the stone floor. He rolled desperately forward. As the metal clanged toward its slot in the floor, he managed to squirm like a snake through the narrow opening. He vanished a scant second before the barrier fell.

There was a loud click and a sound like the exhaust of compressed air. Vincent was gone. In his place were only the sprawled bodies of the men who had died. Behind the bodies was the bleak grayness of a wall, with no indication that a tunnel had ever existed.

DORGAN and his thugs flung themselves desperately at the spot where the opening had been a moments before. They forgot all caution in the blindness of their rage. They were unaware that The Shadow had moved out of a dark corner alcove and was gliding toward them with guns that never missed when his gloved fingers pressed the triggers.

The Shadow's twin guns did not point at Dorgan. The cloaked visitor had a grim purpose in sparing the gunman's life. He was anxious to take him alive and learn from his lips the name of the man who had ordered him to make this bold attack. The Shadow had means of making gunmen talk, even a vicious killer like Dorgan.

His guns made scarlet streaks in the fume-filled air. His shots were accurately aimed to wound, not to kill. The two crooks on either side of Dorgan pitched forward to the stone paving.

Dorgan whirled to see the ominous figure in black that confronted him. He knew that figure. The Shadow! Other crooks, their faces pale, had muttered tales to Dorgan of the prowess of this man who fought crooks too cunning for the police.

Dorgan's gun whipped level in a flash. The Shadow's guns were no longer pointed at him, but were slanting aloft toward the beamed ceiling of the laboratory.

The Shadow's guns fired first. They made thunderous echoes, as he sent bullets at the vivid cluster of lights over his head. Not a single bulb escaped the accurate flick of The Shadow's wrists.

The room became instantly dark, except for the tiny pilot light that still glowed like a pale red speck above the ruin of the "truth machine" in the corner.

Dorgan's murderous shot was fired in entire darkness. His bullet passed harmlessly through the crown of The Shadow slouch hat.

But The Shadow was trapped! Between him and safety were the unseen figures of Dorgan's gang. He was driven back slowly, step by step. Behind him was the huge open vat of corrosive acid below the rear wall.

He heard the whispered voice of Dorgan. The mobleader had suddenly remembered the vat whose slippery edge was level with the stone floor.

"We've got him cornered! Close in on him! We'll drive him into the acid tank!"

SILENCE descended in the black room. Not a sound was heard except the faint shuffle of feet moving forward toward the spot where The Shadow had been.

Slowly groping hands discovered nothing. The Shadow had moved.

Ten feet away lay the invisible edge of the acid tank. The circle of thugs was closing inward. There was no way for The Shadow to escape, except backward to the death that fumed in the open vat.

Dorgan and his men had dropped prudently to the floor. They fired from prone positions and again began their remorseless advance. A foot, two feet, three feet -

Suddenly, they heard the scrape of a shoe, followed by a heavy splash. It came from the very centre of the tank.

"He slipped!" Dorgan chortled. "We drove him into the vat!"

In the split-second of silence that followed Dorgan's ejaculations, an eerie sound filled the room. It was a deep, bubbling groan. It was the unmistakable voice of The Shadow. It came bubbling up from the depths of the deadly tank where the splash had occurred.

Dorgan sprang to his feet in the darkness. Warily, he struck a match. It sputtered in his trembling hand and cast weird shadows.

The surface of the pool was absolutely placid. There was no sign of any living thing in the sombre depths.

"The stuff has eaten him completely away," Dorgan gasped, awe in his voice. "Flesh, bones, clothing - everything!"

He backed away from the edge. His men moved back with him. In the utter silence, they were unaware of any movement in the chamber. Yet there was movement directly over their heads.

Unseen, unguessed at, The Shadow at that very instant was passing almost directly over their heads, creeping noiselessly on the wide ledge of the foundation upon which the garage was built.

A discarded gun had made that sudden splash. The groan that Dorgan and his men had heard was a ventriloquial effect from the throat of a man who, at that instant, was climbing the black surface of the wall with the uncanny speed of a bat.

He crept rapidly along overhead until he was beyond the grouped killers. Then he dropped.

His feet made a faint thud in the darkness. Dorgan and his men whirled. The sibilant laugh of The Shadow made the hair on their scalps crawl with

superstitious awe. Pistol fire raked the gloom. But again the bullets were wide of the mark.

The Shadow was not standing in the corner where the echo of his laugh had sounded. Dorgan's men were now between The Shadow and the slippery edge of the acid vat. The tables were turned.

THE flame of their spitting guns located the gunmen in the darkness. As The Shadow fired, two groans testified to the accuracy of his aim. He knew there were only three men left, with the exception of Dorgan himself.

He crept forward, braving the bullets that blazed at him. Straight toward the lips of the tank before which his enemies were crouched!

Dorgan fired. His bullet missed The Shadow and struck one of his own men. There was a scream and a splash from the surface of the pool. A mobster had fallen into the depths of the vat, dissolved alive in the trap prepared for The Shadow.

As The Shadow listened, he heard a faint scrape of leather.

He whirled in time to catch a descending arm. A knife slashed down the flesh of his forearm, but the blade was already dropping from dead fingers. The

Shadow had fired in defense of his life. The thug's face melted away.

A rush of feet on the steps leading to the garage showed what had happened

to the sly Dorgan. His body was illuminated for an instant in the light of the open trapdoor as he fled.

But The Shadow did not shoot. His quick ear had caught a sound outside the room itself. It seemed to vibrate straight through the walls. He heard a feeble

groan in a voice that he recognized. The far-away voice was Harry Vincent's.

As The Shadow sprang toward the wall, he knew that Dorgan had reached the garage above and was fleeing desperately for safety. The Shadow did not follow.

Vincent was in peril and must be saved.

From under The Shadow's long, black robe came a tiny electric torch. Its beam made a yellow streak in the darkness and its oval moved swiftly over the deceptive wall where the door of the tunnel had been. The Shadow's fingers were

swifter than the beam of light itself. He had seen the exact spot where the fleeing Thomas Porter had pressed against the wall, to release the hidden mechanism.

There was a click, a hiss of compressed air and the flexible steel door of

the tunnel rolled upward. Down a long corridor stalked the gaunt figure of The Shadow. There were turns and twists in the tunnel, but The Shadow hurried without pause. His hawklike face jutted over the beam of light in his gloved hand. His eyes burned with purpose.

He found Harry Vincent lying alone almost at the very end of the passage. The circular walls of the tunnel had acted like a sounding board and transmitted Harry's feeble groan to the sharp ears of The Shadow.

IN a moment, Harry was lifted to his feet. A stern voice in his dazed ear recalled him to reality.

Together, they rushed through a small arched opening into the cellar of the Porter mansion. The cellar was empty. So was the house itself. The Shadow searched every room like a flitting shape of darkness. There was no trace whatever of either Thomas Porter or his tall, curly-haired son.

Vincent started to talk excitedly of a quick pursuit, but he was checked by the upraised hand of The Shadow. A calm, even voice told Harry what to do. The power in that voice brooked no disobedience. And the logic of it was unanswerable.

The Porters had been driven from their home by a double attack: Blink Dorgan's mob and The Shadow. It was clear that they had felt themselves secure, had not anticipated trouble of any kind. Panic had put them to flight. Reason would bring them stealthily back to this out-of-the-way stronghold of theirs.

The Shadow's curt orders were for Vincent to hide his car in the neighborhood and to remain as a hidden observer himself. Not in the house, but in the grounds. If the Porters sneaked back later, under cover of darkness - and The Shadow was certain they would - Vincent's job was to save them from a renewed attack by Dorgan, or to trail them to their new destination if they escaped unharmed.

The Shadow had reason to believe the Porters would try to reach the near-by railroad that made a direct connection with Millcote. In the Millcote Chemical Corporation was the key to this riddle of murder and terror.

The Shadow laughed briefly. His moving body made no sound. An instant later, Harry Vincent was alone.

CHAPTER XI

CARDONA TAKES A TIP

A DUSTY taxicab climbed the long, gentle grade that curved upward from the Millcote railroad station and turned into a paved boulevard. Joe Cardona, who had arrived a few minutes earlier by train from New York, sat quietly relaxed in the cab's rear seat, his eyes closed.

But Joe was far from asleep. Grimly, he was trying to figure some logical reason for a strange telegram that had brought him hurrying from New York, to this small industrial town in New Jersey. He knew that he was tangled in one of the most baffling cases of his entire career. The murder of Reed Harrington, followed so swiftly by the death of Arnold Kling, had filled the New York papers with screaming headlines.

Cardona had issued a statement declaring the double murder to be the work of Blink Dorgan, a noted gunman who had disappeared from the underworld of St. Louis a month earlier. He declared he had clues that would lead to the arrest of Dorgan within forty-eight hours. But in his heart, Joe knew this was only a device to satisfy newspaper editors and give him time for the real investigation before him.

The autopsy of Harrington's body had disclosed nothing except the obvious fact that he had been poisoned by some unusual and deadly gas. Clyde Burke's suspicion that the cigar Harrington had picked from the box on his desk would prove no help as a clue, was justified.

Apparently, only the tip of the cigar had been impregnated. The test in the police laboratory was entirely negative. Every other cigar in the box was perfectly normal.

Kling's death, too, was shrouded in the same kind of mystery. The statement of the medical examiner disclosed that Kling had been electrocuted; but how, and why, were still to be answered.

Cardona had deliberately kept the two cases separate in the minds of the public. He didn't want to warn the killer - and he was certain that Dorgan was only a tool, not the real brain behind the case.

As the taxicab chugged along, Cardona mentally ticketed four names. Three men and a woman. Thomas Porter and his son, Ray, were the most obvious suspects. Detective Garrity's story placed the elder Porter at the scene of

Kling's murder in Tuckahoe. Investigation by Cardona himself established the fact that young Ray Porter had fled from Harrington's apartment house on the heels of the crooks who had rifled the dead man's safe.

Then there was Simon Todd to be investigated. The name of this quiet owner of the Millcote Chemical Corporation had not yet entered the case, except by the fact that Harrington had mentioned him as a possible suspect to the police commissioner on the night he had rushed, trembling with fear, to ask for protection from some unknown enemy.

The fourth name in Cardona's mind was Molly Harrington, niece of the victim himself. Molly had known the combination of her uncle's safe, but had lied and pretended she didn't. She had stolen an envelope, and only the grim arrival of Blink Dorgan and his pal, Andy, had prevented her from getting away with it.

Obviously, Dorgan was not working in cahoots with the girl. Who then? Were there two sets of crooks entangled in this nightmare of mystery?

The telegram was the final bit of puzzlement. If it was on the level, it meant that Cardona must chalk Molly Harrington off his list of suspects. For Molly, hiding from a police dragnet, had deliberately wired Cardona under an alias, begging him to come secretly to Millcote for the purpose of uncovering the truth and promising to give him a lead to the murderer of her uncle.

THE taxi drew up before the brick facade of a small hotel. Cardona alighted, walked through a small, deserted lobby and approached the desk.

"Have you a guest here by the name of Ellen Jackson?" he asked the clerk.

"Yes, sir. Are you her cousin from New York? I believe she expected you, to-day."

Cardona nodded, engaged a room. In the dog's-eared register he wrote with a quick, careless scrawl "Peter Jackson, New York."

"I'm her cousin," he said, quietly. "Is she in now?"

The clerk picked up the telephone, spoke for a moment or two and then nodded. "She says she'd like to see you right away. Her room is 294, same floor as yours."

He picked up Cardona's bag and the two ascended in a wheezy elevator. Apparently, the clerk was bellboy and manager combined, for Cardona could see no sign of any other employee. He waited until the man had departed, before he walked down the hall to Room 294.

His faint knock on the door was immediately answered. Molly Harrington opened the door, stared at him, motioned him quietly in. Cardona watched her lock the door.

"I'm giving you a break, sister," growled in a low voice. "I could have had you arrested by the local police and tossed into a cell to await extradition for complicity in a murder. Instead, I obeyed your telegram and came down here without publicity to find out exactly what your game is - and what your connection is with Simon Todd."

He watched her to see the effect of his words, but all that happened was a nervous smile on the girl's lips.

"You don't trust me, do you?" she said.

"Why should I? You lied to me and tried to bamboozle me from the very first. Talk up, or back you go with me to New York, in handcuffs, on the first train that pulls out of this town."

His words held more assurance than his look. There was something about this girl's steady gaze that made suspicion of her seem a mistake. Her whispered words held the ring of truth for Cardona, an experienced judge of people.

She admitted she had stolen an envelope from her uncle's safe, for the purpose of keeping it out of the hands of the police. Harrington himself had given her the combination, had begged her to get hold of the paper and read it, in case anything happened to him. He said it contained a clue that might explain his murder.

"Did he say what the clue was?" Cardona asked.

"No. I haven't the faintest idea what was inside that envelope. Perhaps it's something that threatened my uncle with blackmail." Her voice became suddenly hard and eager. "Or, perhaps, it's a clue that connects those two murders directly with the Millcote Chemical Corporation."

CARDONA stared silently at her as she elaborated. Reed Harrington and Arnold Kling had formerly been associated with Simon Todd in the ownership of the chemical works. So had the mysterious Thomas Porter and his son, Ray. This was the one thread, the only thread, that seemed to link the whole case together.

"You suspect Simon Todd?" Cardona said, curtly.

"Not Todd so much as - Merriweather."

"Merriweather? Who the devil is he?"

"He's the plant superintendent. I don't like his looks or his actions. Twice, I've tried to get inside the grounds of the chemical plant and twice Merriweather has refused to let me see Todd. Said he was too busy to be disturbed.

"I don't believe it, Mr. Cardona. He has some guilty reason for trying to keep me away from Simon Todd. Todd was always very fond of me. If he knew I were here, I'm sure he'd see me and talk with me."

Molly's blue eyes filled suddenly with tears. "I telegraphed you because

I

- I thought you, as a detective, might be able to get past this man Merriweather

and find out what Mr. Todd knows about this horrible case. I - I have a feeling

that Todd may be in danger himself, without realizing it."

Cardona nodded. "We'll soon find out. Let's go."

With the girl's arm timidly on his, Joe descended to the street and walked

a block east to the trolley line. The trolley took them out to the edge of town,

where the Millcote Chemical Corporation occupied a dozen sprawling acres inside

high, apparently well-guarded walls.

Cardona asked a watchman at the grilled steel gate for Superintendent Merriweather. He was admitted, although the watchman gave the girl with Cardona

a troubled glance. It was evident he had been ordered by some one to keep her away. He stepped into a small frame shack and telephoned.

After a few minutes a tall, lank and very cold-eyed man approached.

"I'm Mr. Merriweather. What do you want?"

"I want to see Mr. Simon Todd," Cardona said, quietly.

"You can't. He's busy. State your business to me."

Cardona dropped his quiet manner immediately. With a brusque gesture, he showed his police badge. His voice crackled grimly.

"I'm doing the ordering around here, my friend. Take me to Todd's office

-

and do it right now!"

Merriweather hesitated, forced a smile. "A police officer, eh? In that case, I suppose I'll have to obey you."

"You're right!" Cardona grunted.

THEY walked across the wide yard area of the chemical plant, and the detective's eyes scanned everything with interest. A dozen huge factory buildings. A maze of glittering railroad racks where tank cars stood in long lines loaded with chemicals.

In the centre of the walled grounds was the very heart of this busy empire of industry. A two-story metal structure, painted a vivid warning red, rose from inside the protection of a circular moat. The moat was filled with water. A small bridge gave access to this spot, but the bridge was lifted to permit no one to pass.

There was reason for this precaution. The scarlet building inside the moat was crammed to the roof with high explosives. From a light metal tower on the roof ran a shining cable, on which an overhead bucket moved from building to building with its deadly cargo for the mixing vats. The bucket was sheathed with rubber. It would not do for a chance spark to be loosed here.

Merriweather smiled faintly, as he explained to Cardona the meaning of the overhead wire and the building itself. He also pointed out, with the same curious smile, a tall steel tower on which was mounted something that looked like an enormous circular searchlight.

"Why the big light?" Cardona asked, curtly.

"Had a little trouble here recently," the plant superintendent muttered. He gave Cardona a hard, sidelong look. "Mr. Todd doesn't like strangers here."

He said no more, but led Cardona and Molly toward a small brick office building that adjoined the taller shape of a huge mixing plant.

CHAPTER XII

THE THIRD VICTIM

JUST before they reached the door of the office structure, Cardona's eyes veered and he frowned suddenly. An old workman in faded overalls had moved aside from the detective's path. He was sweeping refuse up with a stumpy broom.

There was something about this old man that gave the detective a momentary sense of puzzlement. He had a queer feeling that he had seen that old man somewhere before.

Merriweather kept striding ahead and Cardona didn't stop, but he wondered silently about that workman. The man was big and gaunt, almost decrepit. White hair, a scraggly white mustache, bony hands that trembled as he moved his broom

slowly across the paved path. Cardona shrugged and put him out of his mind.

Had he known the truth about that old workman, he would not have passed him so casually. The old workman was The Shadow. The thing that had made Cardona puzzle momentarily about him was not his dress or his appearance, but his eyes. They were steady, deep-socketed, filled with a serene inner fire. That was the thing that Cardona had noticed subconsciously.

The Shadow was not on the pay roll of the chemical plant, but he had gained his inconspicuous entry without too much trouble. In a plant where thousands of men were employed under dozens of foreman, the presence of an old sweeper was hardly to be noticed.

If a foreman stopped to question him, The Shadow replied vaguely, mentioning some other foreman. He came and went without trouble, protected by

his feeble appearance and his harmless old smile. He was careful to keep his lids lowered over his piercing eyes. The unlooked-for appearance of Cardona and Molly Harrington had betrayed him into a quick, eager glance at the pair, but he was confident that Cardona had not pierced his disguise.

The Shadow was correct. Joe Cardona entered Simon Todd's office without any suspicion of the identity of the old workman outside.

TODD was a chunky middle-aged man with iron-gray hair and a rather pleasant, smiling mouth. He was surprised, and obviously delighted, to see Molly Harrington. He took her hand and held it warmly.

"I'm sorry to hear about the death of your uncle," he said, slowly. "If I can help you in any way, I'll be glad to do so."

"I tried to get in here three times," Molly said, evenly. "Mr. Merriweather told me you were too busy to be bothered."

"What?" He swung toward his plant superintendent and Merriweather cleared his throat and looked suddenly uncomfortable.

"I - er - thought you wouldn't want to be - er - disturbed, so I took the liberty of -"

Todd glared angrily at him. "You've exceeded your authority, Merriweather.

Please don't do that again. I prefer to do the deciding myself about whom I shall see and whom I shan't. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir," Merriweather muttered. He made a brief, cringing bow and stepped back, but Cardona noticed he made no effort to leave the room. He kept watching the detective furtively out of the corner of his lowered eyes.

Again, Cardona had that sharp feeling of mistrust. This Merriweather wasn't half so obedient or cringing as he looked.

Todd turned to Cardona, a questioning smile on his lips. "You say you're a detective, sir? In that case, I presume that you've come as a result of the attack made upon me last week?"

"Attack?" Cardona looked surprised. "What attack?"

Merriweather spoke up quickly. "It didn't get into the newspapers. I persuaded Mr. Todd that it was better to avoid publicity. You see -"

Cardona interrupted brusquely. "I'd like to hear about it, Mr. Todd. Suppose we excuse Merriweather."

Todd smiled. "That won't be necessary. He knows all the facts. He's a loyal and trusted employee of mine."

"O.K.," Cardona said, but, privately, he wasn't so sure of the smug superintendent. The fellow had a mean mouth and his eyes were altogether too close together to suit the practical Cardona.

Joe listened gravely to Simon Todd's story. It was brief. Two weeks earlier, working late in his office, Todd had heard a noise and had discovered two prowlers on the premises. They had entered the inner office through an unlocked window and were crouched in front of the safe attempting to open it.

As Todd rushed in they had fired at him and fled. Luckily, they had missed their hasty aim and succeeded in wounding him only slightly in the arm. They slugged the watchman at the gate and escaped. No trace of them was found.

CARDONA grunted, produced a photograph of Blink Dorgan from his pocket. "Was this one of the robbers?"

Todd shook his head. "I couldn't say. You see, both the thugs were masked.

I took Merriweather's advice and hushed up the whole affair. I don't want any publicity, because -" His voice lowered for an instant. "It's not generally

known, but Millcote Chemical is under contract to the United States government, producing a new and rather important gas for the chemical warfare service.

"Merriweather and I both think the crooks came here under the impression that the formula for the gas was in my office safe. Which is, of course, ridiculous. The formula is closely guarded in a vault in Washington. Here we merely produce the gas in stated quantities, under the supervision of the war department in Washington."

"You think," Cardona asked, quietly, "that the attack on you had nothing at all to do with the deaths of your former associates, Reed Harrington and Arnold Kling?"

"I've tried to think of some connection, but, frankly, I can't," Todd replies.

"It's the formula that brought the thieves here," Merriweather interrupted, positively, "Any other explanation is silly, it seems to me."

"Thank you," Cardona said, ironically. He studied Simon Todd. "Miss Harrington and myself thought that perhaps you might be able to cast some light

on the motive for the strange deaths of your former partners."

"I'm afraid I can't."

"In each case, the dead man's safe was rifled," Cardona suggested. "Yours was attacked, too."

"Coincidence," Merriweather murmured from the background.

"What is your opinion of Thomas Porter and his son Ray?"

Todd was silent for a moment. He looked definitely embarrassed. "I'd rather not answer that. It brings up personal prejudice."

"You don't trust the Porters?"

"Frankly, no. That was the chief reason why I took over the whole ownership of the plant myself, after Kling and Harrington said they wanted to get out."

"You think the Porters might have learned of this government contract you obtained after they left, and have hired some one to try to steal it to dispose of it to a foreign power?"

Todd shook his head. "I don't think the attack on me had a thing to do with the deaths of Kling and Harrington," he said. "Whether the Porters were responsible for those two murders, I'd rather not say. I know they hated both Kling and Harrington. As for myself, I accuse no one without proof."

He sighed, and his face became grave.

"I hope that first attack on me was the last. But I'm taking no chances. As you may have noticed, I've installed a searchlight on a tall tower, to light

the grounds here at night. I've doubled the number of my private guards. After sundown, the wall that surrounds this area is electrified with a high voltage of current. That's why I've made no complaint to the police. I think I've made myself perfectly safe, now."

FOR no reason at all, Cardona suddenly thought of the old workman with the broom. Perhaps Todd wasn't as safe as he imagined. And what about this sly and smiling Merriweather? Cardona didn't trust him for an instant. Without seeming to do so, Merriweather was apparently directing things at the plant with a high hand, using the guise of humble loyalty as an excuse for actions."

"I'd like to look around the plant, if you don't mind," Cardona said.

"It's rather dirty and not very pleasant," Merriweather objected.

But Todd smiled. "I guess we can manage to keep our guests clean. I'll have Mr. Strunk show them around. Would you like to see the mixing chamber where we compound the chemicals that produce the new government gas?"

"I'd like to very much," Cardona said.

"I'll show them myself," Merriweather offered. He was all smiles now. Almost eager.

Molly Harrington looked at Cardona hurriedly and opened her mouth as though she was about to object, but the detective forestalled her.

"We'd be delighted to have Mr. Merriweather as a guide," he said, smoothly.

Together they passed out the doorway, Molly's hand on Cardona's arm.

"This way," Merriweather murmured. "Down this corridor. Mind your step, please. It's a little dark."

Left alone in his office, Todd shrugged, as if suddenly remembering the press of his interrupted business. He picked up a paper, read it carefully and signed it. He picked up another, his broad body hunched forward over his desk.

He was completely unaware that he was under surveillance. But his every move was being watched. The angle of the wall outside his office formed a deep L with the adjoining building. The angle was filled with deep shadow. There was

no sign of any one lurking in that dimness, but an eye suddenly appeared at the corner of the window.

It was a deep-socketed, burning eye that peered into the room with keen observation of the man at the desk, the door through which Cardona and the girl

had disappeared - and another door that the observer knew opened into a small washroom beyond.

The man outside the window was The Shadow. Gone was his broom, the palsied shake of his hands, the faded blue overalls. The overalls were covered with a long, black cloak. Black gloves were on his hands. Tilted low over his forehead

was a black slouch hat that almost touched the bridge of his hawklike nose.

The Shadow had been lurking near Todd's office because he expected another

attack on the chemical master. He was not wrong in his suspicions.

AS he watched from his veiled hiding place, The Shadow saw that the door of the washroom was stealthily opening. A hand appeared, then a face. It was Blink Dorgan, the mysterious gunman who had stolen a sealed envelope that had come from the safe of Reed Harrington and had made such a murderous attack on the Porters in their garage laboratory.

There was a knife in Dorgan's hand. His eyes gleamed with excitement, as they wavered toward the back of Simon Todd and across from him to the squat safe in the corner.

The Shadow's gun appeared silently in his gloved grasp. Its muzzle approached the lower corner of the window outside of which he was crouched.

At that instant, Simon Todd shivered as though he were suddenly conscious of the murderous presence behind him. He turned and froze like a statue in his chair, his mouth hanging haplessly open.

Blink Dorgan's hand rose swiftly upward and back with a peculiar gesture. In his hand was the knife, palmed snugly, its hilt toward the frozen victim.

The Shadow recognized the gesture. Dorgan was bending forward on his toes to throw the knife.

The murderous quickness of events gave The Shadow no time for accurate aim. His gun thundered. The bullet made a round hole in the pane and whistled past the forward-thrust neck of the killer.

Dorgan dropped the knife and dived at the floor to regain it. Simon Todd, petrified with fear, cowered in his chair behind the desk.

But the snarling Dorgan had no chance to leap forward and kill his helpless victim. As he clutched at the dropped knife, the window with the

round
bullet hole crashed into a thousand jangling fragments and The Shadow was
inside
the room like an avenging thunderbolt.

He clutched at the plunging Dorgan's wrist, diverted the steel point of
the knife from his throat. He swung the butt of his gun toward the skull of
the
mobster, but Dorgan's desperately ducking head avoided the blow and his hands
clamped over the clubbed weapon. The two men fought silently for perhaps ten
seconds, then The Shadow tore himself loose.

He had heard cries of men, the sound of approaching feet. The roar of his
shot had startled every workman within earshot of Todd's office. The Shadow
knew that another thirty seconds would enable him to subdue and capture
Dorgan,
but it would also reveal the unknown presence of The Shadow himself and unmask
him to the eyes of Joe Cardona.

He took the only choice fate offered him. He allowed Dorgan to flee
through the washroom.

TODD, who had regained his feet and some measure of his lost nerve,
attempted to grapple with the tall, black-robed intruder, but The Shadow threw
him off easily and retreated headlong through the window.

As he jumped, he caught a glimpse of Merriweather rushing into the room.
The plant superintendent looked ugly, frightened, suspicious. Distinctly, The
Shadow saw him glance swiftly toward the door of the washroom.

Then The Shadow's body struck the ground outside and he was forced to
cope
with a new, and immediate, emergency. A workman was rushing straight toward
him,
a heavy wrench in his grimy hand. Other men were closing in from all sides.

The Shadow didn't want to hurt the man in his path, but he struck him
down
with a glancing blow and ran like a dark streak toward the shining line of
steel
that marked a railroad siding.

It was his only hope for escape. All other avenues were closed by the mob
of workmen, who ran forward yelling excitedly at the spectacle of a
black-robed
fugitive, rushing, gun in hand, through the pale sunlight of afternoon.

CHAPTER XIII

MAD RIDE

THERE was a sharp spiteful report and a bullet whistled over The Shadow's
slouch hat. The shot came from Merriweather. He had leaped through the broken
window of Todd's office and was pursuing The Shadow with long purposeful
strides.

A grim laugh issued from the lips of the robed fugitive. Merriweather's
first glance had been toward the door of the washroom through which Dorgan had
escaped in the confusion. Yet he had chosen not to chase the killer. He was
trying to trap the man who had just saved Simon Todd's life! To The Shadow,
that fact was as sinister as it was obvious.

Like a flying spectre, The Shadow raced pell-mell down the track of the
railway spur. In his ears was the shrill screaming wail of a huge steam
whistle
on the roof of the cavernous mixing plant. Its sound brought men running from
all parts of the grounds. It was one man against hundreds!

The Shadow saw at once that his hope of reaching the distant loading platform, where he had arranged to disappear and resume his character of a harmless old workman, was now gone.

But not more than fifty yards in the opposite direction was a motionless switch engine and a single tank car. This, The Shadow realized instantly, was his sole hope of escape.

A man was swinging down from the tiny cab of the locomotive, as The Shadow raced forward. He was the engineer and he was pale with resolution, swinging a big steel spanner in his greasy hand.

The Shadow ducked the hasty swing and put the man out of action with a merciful blow of his fist. As the fellow sprawled and rolled out of the path of the cowcatcher, The Shadow was already climbing into the cab of the locomotive, his black-gloved hand reaching for the throttle.

THE switch engine began to move. It gained speed rapidly.

As it roared past the group of workmen ahead, pistols appeared but no shots were fired. The Shadow's head twisted briefly behind, and he knew why. The tank car coupled behind the stolen locomotive was painted a vivid, warning crimson. A red flag, fluttered from its peak. Explosive chemical!

The sound of furious puffing drew The Shadow's attention to the track beyond. Another switch engine was racing forward, trying to creep up alongside the fleeing fugitive. There was a wildly excited engineer behind the throttle.

On the cowcatcher in front, a man was hanging grimly to a steel support by his left hand. In his right was the gleaming barrel of a revolver. The man was Merriweather.

The plant superintendent fired and his bullet whistled over the sleek top of the tank car. The bullet was fired so high that The Shadow didn't even have to duck his head. But a glint came into his burning eyes.

He realized the cargo of liquid death he was carrying behind him on this wild ride. He knew that Merriweather's succeeding shots would drop lower and lower. If a single bullet should pierce the thin steel shell of that tank car behind him, the resulting explosion would send car and locomotive and The Shadow himself into whirling fragments, high in the air.

The engineer of the pursuing train feared that, too. He yelled hoarsely to the man on the cowcatcher, and the pursuing train slackened speed.

The Shadow, on the contrary, increased his. The dark expanse of a wooden loading platform was drawing nearer and nearer with every revolution of the flying wheels.

The Shadow moved to the side of the cab nearest to that approaching platform. He had to take a chance on the zipping bullets from his pursuer.

Merriweather, wildly excited, was recklessly lowering his aim an inch or so with every shot. His last bullet had barely skimmed the circular top of the tank car and whistled an inch above the slouch hat of The Shadow. The only thing in The Shadow's favor was the very sensible terror of the pursuing locomotive engineer, who continued to drop back slightly in the dangerous race.

The engineer knew the potentialities of the liquid contents of that crimson-painted tank. He had a wife and three children. His face was deathly white, and he shook it stubbornly as Merriweather screamed at him to go faster.

THE roof of the loading depot projected over the track like an enormous canopy. It threw a sharp blackness across the waning sunlight. As the switch

engine shot through the murky patch with ever-increasing speed, The Shadow was already squirming through the narrow window of the cab.

His movement was invisible to Merriweather and the pursuing engineer. A black form slid batlike to a narrow ledge above the flashing thunder of the driving rod. It hung there for barely a second, then, as the locomotive neared the end of the platform, The Shadow projected himself headlong toward the flying ground.

The cab he had just abandoned shielded him from observation. He struck, like a swimmer, on his chest and stomach. The impact was frightful, almost driving every ounce of breath from his bruised body. But even as his impetus carried him forward in a swift slide on his face, The Shadow was acting with cool efficiency.

A rapid spurt of bullets from the opposite track testified to the mad anxiety of the superintendent on the roaring cowcatcher. Shots screamed recklessly at the train The Shadow had just quitted. Merriweather had gone mad with the zeal to kill The Shadow. He was aiming straight at the oval steel of the tank that enclosed the explosive chemical.

The man at the throttle behind him was throwing on his brakes in a mighty roar of hissing steam. The escaping train shot ahead with an empty cab. Merriweather was convinced that he had shot down The Shadow. He imagined that the vanished, black-robed fugitive was writhing on the floor of the cab with a bullet deep in his body.

But The Shadow, aching in every muscle of his bruised body, had already gained his objective. He had whirled over and over under the projecting lip of the wooden platform. On hands and knees, he moved like a flitting black shape toward the rear of the broad structure. There was a battered tin lunch pail there, hidden by him for just such an emergency as this.

He reached for the pail and yanked off the lid.

As he did so, the ground itself seemed to rise and lift him. He heard the enormous thunder of an explosion. For an instant, a sheet of yellow flame from the track two hundred yards down the line illuminated everything with dazzling brilliance. The loading platform, the dark earth beneath it, were bright and starkly clear.

But no one could see the hidden figure of The Shadow wrenching the lid off his battered lunch pail.

Again darkness swathed him. Over his head, he could hear the crash of falling timbers from the shaken freight depot. Yells of terrified workmen added an eerie note to the tumult. From all parts of the sprawling grounds of the Millcote Chemical Corporation came racing figures. They were running toward an enormous smoke-blackened crater a few hundred yards from the sagging end of the freight depot.

MERRIWEATHER had been hurled aside like a peanut shell by the wind-blast from that explosion on the track ahead. He had lost his gun, and his face was bleeding from a blast of gravel that had come at him like pellets out of a machine gun.

It took the trembling superintendent a dozen dazed seconds to realize that The Shadow must be dead. He wiped the trickle of blood from his lips and a grim light came into his eye, as he ran forward to the very lip of the crater where, an instant before, a locomotive and a tank car had stood.

The earth was pitted deeply, as though scooped out by the claw of an enormous clamshell digger. There was no trace whatever of the tank car. Chunks of the locomotive were strewn in a wide circle. And from the centre of this

awful holocaust, greasy black smoke rose in a sullen plume like the updrift from the crater of a volcano.

In the midst of the uproar, Joe Cardona suddenly appeared. He pushed through the crowd of workmen, trying to fight his way closer to Merriweather.

Joe was late in arriving at the scene of the explosion. He had a grim suspicion concerning the reason for his delay. He had raced at the first sound of the shooting in Todd's office to a locked passage in the mixing room. Merriweather had pointed the way with an easy finger. Cardona suspected he had done so deliberately to delay him.

The detective pushed angrily through the crowd to question Merriweather, but when he got to the lip of the crater, there was no sign of the crafty superintendent. He was gone, and no one could tell where.

CARDONA flashed his police shield and restored some measure of quiet in the tumult. From excited workmen he heard a strange tale of a black-robed figure blown to atoms by the explosion of a runaway tank car.

Cardona frowned. A voice inside his brain whispered insistently: "The Shadow!"

Joe knew, from past police experience, that The Shadow was not a crook, but a powerful unknown helper of the law. Many times on previous cases, when Joe had been utterly stumped, he had been given help and support by this flitting dark embodiment of justice whose identity had never been pierced by the best brains of either the police or the underworld.

An explanation of Merriweather's queer behavior made the detective's face darken. He had delayed Cardona, not to betray Todd, but to trap and kill The Shadow!

Cardona was unable to understand why The Shadow should have made an attack

on Todd. He was still unaware of the fact that there had been two men in Todd's

office at the time of the attack. However, the excited shouts of a dozen workmen told him that The Shadow was dead, and he knew by that very fact that crime was loose in the grounds of the Millcote Chemical Corporation, was striking ruthlessly under Cardona's very nose.

Joe whirled and ran back toward the office of Simon Todd. As he turned, he

almost fell over a tall young workman who was standing directly behind him. The

workman's face was greasy and dirty. A cap was pulled low over his eyes. A lithe, powerful fellow, dressed in overalls, he attracted little notice from the hurrying Cardona. He apologized in a thick mutter for his clumsiness and moved out of the detective's way.

Had Cardona stopped a moment and raised the visor of the man's cap, he would have been amazed to see the same piercing eyes he had observed on his entrance to the plant. They were the eyes of the palsied, white-haired workman who had been so timidly sweeping a stone path with his broom.

The Shadow, a master of disguise, was not taking any chances with Cardona's memory. He made his way across shining railroad tracks toward the gate of the plant. In his grimy hand dangled a metal lunch pail. The pail contained the black cloak and hat of The Shadow.

The guard at the gate saw the tall young workman pick a time-card out of the rack and push it into the slot of the clock. He placed it back in the rack,

smiled at the guard and walked quietly through the entrance.

The guard, who had no reason to suspect that this workman had merely picked a card at random, nodded and allowed him to go.

THE SHADOW was leaving the plant, his usefulness ended for the moment.

Molly Harrington was still within the ground, but so was Cardona. Cardona could be depended upon to make sure that no harm overcame the niece of the dead Reed Harrington.

Meantime, The Shadow had other work to do, communications to establish, reports to digest in the privacy of the shabby furnished room he had hired. There was a phone in that room and at the other end of the wire - any time The Shadow chose to lift his hand - was the anonymous voice of the shrewd and faithful Burbank.

It was Burbank's duty to report instantly any news from the vanished Porters. Harry Vincent was still on guard within the grounds of their deserted country house, to trail them if again they showed up. The Shadow was convinced that they would soon return to that sinister house of theirs. He expected them both - father and son - to come directly from there to Millcote.

In Millcote, all the twisted strands of this amazing case were rapidly twining together into some semblance of a pattern. That pattern, The Shadow divined, would explain many things and many persons.

Todd and Merriweather, for instance. And Kling and Harrington, the two dead men. And Blink Dorgan, gunman of mystery, who had now, for the third time, appeared with murderous swiftness.

Out of all this haze one fact was clear and shining to the shrewd and logical brain of The Shadow. Unlike Cardona, he had pierced through falsehoods and lies and was close to the truth. He was merely awaiting calmly the arrival of Thomas Porter and his son to make his final grim move against the master mind behind this carnival of death.

CHAPTER XIV

WHERE IS MOLLY?

JOE CARDONA strode into the office of Simon Todd with a hurried step. Except for the trembling chemical master, the room was empty. Todd was slumped in his chair, looking pale and disheveled. Joe's keen eyes took in the signs of struggle with a quick glance. He noted the smashed window, the bullet hole in the wall, the open door to the washroom.

"Where's Molly Harrington?" he snapped.

"She left here just a minute or two ago," Todd said. "Some one said there was an explosion, that a man was badly hurt. Molly hurried out to see if she could help."

"Where's Merriweather?"

Todd looked puzzled. "I thought you were with him."

Cardona turned on his heel, started for the door, then checked himself and came back. His eyes were grimly questioning.

"Who attacked you?"

"I - I hardly know," Todd whispered. His face was still luminous with the fear of death. "It all happened so quickly. You see, there were two men - and one tried to throw a knife at me - then they started fighting -"

"Two men?" Cardona growled.

His eyes gleamed. This was the first intimation he had had of the presence of some one other than The Shadow in the queer attack on the chemical master. Two men! One of them The Shadow! And they had fought together, after one had tried to throw a knife at Todd.

That made sense to Cardona's eager mind. It explained The Shadow's presence, but it didn't explain Merriweather's desperate pursuit of The Shadow or the consequent explosion of a fleeing tank car.

"Tell me exactly what happened," Cardona said, curtly.

TODD lighted a cigarette with a trembling hand. He explained in a low, frightened voice how he had heard a faint creak behind him, had turned from his desk - and had seen a man emerging from the washroom with a glittering knife. In

quick, nervous phrases he described how a bullet had crashed through the window, followed by the plunging figure of a being dressed in black from head to foot.

Crouched behind his desk, Todd had witnessed a swift struggle between the two intruders; then the sound of Merriweather's approaching feet had caused both assailants to flee -

Todd gulped and his voice broke off.

"Did both these men escape together?" Cardona asked.

"No. The cloaked man dashed straight at me. I - I grappled with him, but he threw me off and - and went headfirst out the broken window."

"Why did you grapple with him? Didn't you say that his bullet and his quick jump into the room saved your life?"

"Yes. That's true. But my desk is near the window, and I thought he was coming after me. I was so excited, terrified, that I -"

"Where did the other man run?" Cardona snapped.

"Back into the washroom. There's a small window in there. He must have escaped the same way he got in. There was a terrible commotion outside, men running and yelling -"

Cardona's hand plunged into his pocket, drew something out.

"You say you saw both these men clearly?" He held out a police photograph of Blink Dorgan. "Was this the man who sneaked from the washroom with the knife?"

Simon Todd looked at it and shuddered. His head nodded slowly. "That's the man! What does it all mean?"

"This," Cardona said evenly, "is the same photo I showed you this afternoon when you told me about an earlier attack on you in these grounds. The man in this picture is Blink Dorgan, a notorious underworld gunman from St. Louis."

"He was trying to get at my safe," Todd gasped.

"Exactly! Just what could be in that safe, Mr. Todd, to attract a ruthless gangster like Dorgan?"

"I've already told you my theory," Todd said, in a shaking voice. "Dorgan must have heard about the fact that this company is manufacturing the ingredients for a new and deadly poison gas for the United States government. The formula would bring millions from a foreign power. He thought the formula was in the safe."

"You're sure that it isn't?"

"Of course. The master formula is locked in a vault in Washington."

CARDONA considered for a moment. His square-cut face was heavy with puzzlement and doubt.

"There's a couple of funny things about all this," he muttered.

"How do you mean?"

"Your safe," Cardona said, slowly, "is the third safe that Dorgan has been interested in. He opened Reed Harrington's safe and stole an envelope. We found, too, that some one had opened Arnold Kling's safe in Tuckahoe, when we

examined

his study after the murder. There's no proof that Dorgan was at Kling's house, but who else would be interested in his safe?"

"I don't know," Todd said. He looked baffled.

Joe Cardona took another tack in his questioning. He was satisfied that Todd was giving him straight and honest answers. It was the mysterious figure of Superintendent Merriweather that made his eyes cloud with suspicion.

"Just what happened after Merriweather entered the room?" he asked.

"He jumped out the window after the man in the black cloak."

"Didn't he try to stop Dorgan, who had fled back into the washroom?"

"No. I - I guess he -"

"Didn't you yell to him that he was chasing the wrong man, the man who saved your life?"

"Of course I yelled, pointed toward the washroom, but he paid no attention."

"Do you trust this man Merriweather? Are you sure that he is thoroughly honest?"

Todd laughed. "You're crazy, Mr. Cardona, if you suspect my superintendent. The man has been with me for years. He may have acted thoughtlessly, but he's certainly not a crook."

"Thank you, Mr. Todd," an ironic voice said from the doorway.

CARDONA whirled. Merriweather was smiling faintly, his eyes a mild challenge to the detective from New York.

"Am I to be arrested because I pursued and killed an escaping murderer?" Sarcasm tinged the superintendent's voice.

"You seemed in a tremendous hurry to kill The Shadow," Cardona said quietly, his eyes watchful.

"The Shadow?" said Merriweather, gasping. His astonishment seemed a bit too shrill to be real.

But Todd's surprise sounded more genuine. "You mean -"

"I mean," Cardona said, sternly, "that this man whom Merriweather pursued and killed was not a crook, but a fighter on the side of the law. When he burst

into your office, Mr. Todd, it was to avert a crime. The fact that The Shadow was blown up, while the real criminal escaped, makes me think that there is something very peculiar going on in this chemical plant."

Merriweather scowled. "All that sounds very nice, but the facts tell a different story. When I burst into this office I found Mr. Todd sprawled on the floor and The Shadow escaping from the window with a drawn gun. I was not the only one who tried to stop him. He struck down at least two men who got in his path.

"He stole a tank car loaded with explosive and made a desperate attempt to get away. Naturally, I went after him, tried to capture him. If The Shadow wasn't an escaping murderer, he certainly acted like one."

The superintendent's jaw hardened.

"I admit it was a bullet from my gun that blew the tank car to pieces just beyond the freight depot, but I'm not apologizing for it. And if you think that

arresting me is going to solve this case, you're badly mistaken!"

"I have no intention of arresting you," Cardona said. Unlike the angry superintendent, he was thoroughly calm. "Suppose you leave the conduct of the case to me. All I'm asking from you is straight answers to a couple of simple questions."

"I don't mind your questions. It's your tone I don't like."

Simon Todd murmured a peaceful remark, but neither of the two men paid

any
attention to him.

"Why did you delay me by sending me racing into a blind alley down in the mixing plant, Mr. Merriweather?"

"I didn't," he rejoined. "That was your own fault. I pointed to the entrance corridor. Is it my error if you took a wrong turn and delayed yourself?"

Cardona smiled, let the answer pass. "Where is Molly Harrington? I haven't seen her since the moment the shot sounded."

Merriweather's smile was unpleasant. "You suspect I've done her some harm, perhaps?"

"I merely asked you where she is now."

"She happens to be in the powder shack," the superintendent said.

Simon Todd uttered a quick exclamation of dismay. "What's that? You brought her there? The most dangerous -"

Merriweather lifted his hand for silence. He seemed to be able to overawe his employer at will, Cardona noted.

"The powder shack happens to be the nearest spot where there is an adequate supply of first-aid materials and bandages. Two or three men were injured in that tank car explosion. When Miss Harrington appeared, she asked if

she could be of help and I sent her to the powder shack with the wounded men. She's there now, busily engaged in helping people" - his purring voice deepened

- "instead of wasting time in a lot aimless talk."

"I suppose you have the key to the shack?" Cardona murmured.

"Who else would have it?"

"Really," Todd interrupted in a tired voice. "I don't like the way you keep bullying my superintendent, Mr. Cardona. He's thoroughly reliable, and I resent any such -"

"Perhaps the best thing to do," Merriweather snapped, "would be for Cardona to take personal charge of the girl and satisfy his mind!"

MERRIWEATHER bowed with mock politeness to the detective and walked out the door, followed by the thoughtful Cardona. Straight across the sprawling acreage of the Millcote Chemical Corporation the two men strode, and neither of them uttered a word.

The powder mill was in a central, yet isolated, spot, surrounded by the double protection of a moat filled with water and a raised wooden drawbridge that could be lowered only by unlocking the mechanism.

Merriweather used his key and the bridge bent forward slowly until it spanned the width of the moat. The door of the crimson, two-story powder shack was locked also.

"Regulations," Merriweather explained with a patient smile. "I assure you that Miss Harrington is quite safe."

As he spoke, he opened the door and gestured politely. But Cardona shook his head.

"You go in first," he said.

The superintendent shrugged, and led the way inside. It was a large dim room, filled with boxes and barrels that were piled in tiers alongside the four

walls extending upward to the ceiling. The doors and ceiling seemed to be covered with some rubber combination that took foot falls without sound.

Stairs

covered with the same material led aloft to an upper floor.

"We use rubber here exclusively," Merriweather murmured - "for a very

good

reason. It would not do for a chance spark to be loosed here from a nail in a workman's shoe. You can see -"

"Where's the girl? I thought you said she was here."

"Upstairs. If you'll follow me -"

His hand rested lightly on Cardona's arm for a fleeting instant. Cardona was staring at a square rug that seemed to lie in the centre of the floor for no particular reason.

Suddenly, he felt himself shoved swiftly forward. Merriweather had darted behind him and thrown him headlong off balance. The startled Cardona tried to swerve, to leap wildly over the rug to which he had been impelled by his treacherous guide. His leap was inches short.

As he struck the surface of the rug, there was a faint cracking sound from frail crisscross supports underneath. Rug and man disappeared into a square yawning hole.

There was a dull thud below, the sound of a faint moan - then utter silence.

MERRIWEATHER peered into the blackness, his face suddenly vicious with triumph.

"I told you I'd bring you to Miss Harrington," he whispered, "and I've kept my word! There is no possibility for either you or the girl to escape - even if you were conscious!"

Not a sound issued from the dark opening below which Cardona and Molly Harrington were entombed. The faint, hissing murmur of Merriweather's mirth was the only echo to his sardonic words.

"All I need now to make things perfect," the wily superintendent of the Millcote Chemical Corporation whispered to himself, "is to get my fingers on Mr. Thomas Porter and his smart son, Ray. That would make the perfect windup! And this time, The Shadow is dead and unable to interfere!"

The Shadow, however, was far from dead. In a quiet apartment in the town of Millcote, he was adding up facts he had learned, balancing knowledge with theory. He was now almost ready to move.

Like the crafty Merriweather, The Shadow, too, was interested in the lives of Thomas and Ray Porter. Fifty miles to the north of his quiet sanctum in Millcote, the plans of The Shadow were being faithfully obeyed by a trusted agent.

CHAPTER XV

MIXED MOTIVES

RAIN was pouring down with gusty violence on the night-shrouded grounds that surrounded the country home of Thomas Porter. The house itself was dark and silent among the encircling trees and shrubbery. Not a light showed in a single window to the eyes of a dripping observer who was crouched beneath a low bush outside, only partly screened from the slanting fury of the rain.

The solitary man who watched the house so carefully was Harry Vincent. To him, the soaking discomfort of the rain meant nothing. The wishes and orders of The Shadow were put above everything.

Vincent's eyes examined the empty house for the thousandth time. He was certain it was empty, for he had made a careful survey from all sides. His roadster was hidden in a clump of shrubbery halfway up the long driveway that

wound from the distant road.

Suddenly, Harry stiffened into eager immobility. His sharp ears had detected a faint sound. The sound came, not from the house, but from the entrance to the black, rain-swept grounds of the estate.

Harry's face turned. Under the dripping brim of his hat, his eyes were alert and cautious. He had recognized the sound of a carefully throttled automobile motor.

An instant later, Vincent saw the car itself. It was turning in from the road like a furtive shape in the darkness. Only the shadowy bulk of the car was discernible. Its motor was drowned by the roar of the gale and the ceaseless drum of the black rain.

The car halted a few yards in from the entrance of the drive and a man emerged. The man stared toward the house through binoculars. Then he got back into the car and, a moment later, it backed stealthily out of sight among the dense bushes that lined the road.

Vincent shrank farther back in the spot where he had so carefully hidden himself. He was confident that the invisible intruder was already sneaking grimly along the path toward the house.

HARRY was correct. In a moment or two, The Shadow's agent saw a dripping figure pass him, almost invisible against the wind-tossed bushes on the opposite side of the path. The figure paused, as a flick of lightning illuminated earth and sky for an instant. A crashing roll of thunder resounded,

and again the figure began its slow approach toward the dark mansion ahead.

Vincent had seen the man's tense face in that sharply defined instant of light. He recognized him instantly. It was the grim Andy, the thug who had fled

from Reed Harrington's apartment at the heels of Blink Dorgan.

Vincent watched from his hiding place for a sign of Dorgan himself, but apparently Andy was alone. Vincent wondered about that. Unaware of the swift turn of events, he did not know that Dorgan was already in Millcote and had, in

fact, a few hours before, made a vicious attack on Simon Todd.

The thug, Andy, began a stealthy approach toward the house. In the rain-swept darkness, it was impossible for him to see Vincent. He cursed the thunderstorm that had so suddenly drenched the night with gusty fury.

Suddenly, his eyes gleamed. A light had appeared in one of the front windows on the ground floor. Behind a drawn shade was the silhouette of the bulky shoulders and head of old Thomas Porter. It was unmistakable. The stiff mane of gray hair threw a revealing shadow against the yellowed brilliance of the drawn window shade.

An instant later, Andy had flattened himself prudently in the muddy grass that bordered the path. A car was driving around the corner of the mansion from

the rear. Ray Porter was driving the automobile.

The thug in the driveway crept forward, as the door of the mansion opened and Thomas Porter appeared.

Ray Porter alighted from the car and conferred with his father. For an instant, the son's broad-shouldered figure was a perfect target for the murderous pistol of Andy. His gun lifted and pointed steadily at the centre of Ray's soaked back.

The bullet that was aimed so grimly to snuff out Ray's life was fired, but

it slanted crookedly upward toward the black canopy of the stormy sky.

At the very instant that Andy's finger pressed the trigger, a plunging figure crashed into the skulking crook from behind. A smashing fist struck Andy

on the back of the skull, sent him reeling forward to fall on his face.

He was on his knees in a second, whirling about on the slippery mud. His gun was still in his clenched hand. The gun roared as Vincent dove at him. The bullet singed Vincent's shoulder and thudded harmlessly into the wet trunk of a tree.

Again flame belched, but, this time, Harry had closed with his foe and was desperately wrenching the weapon from Andy's hand.

THE whole attack had taken place with appalling suddenness. Ray Porter and his father were stunned by the sudden flame of bullets. They crouched back, uncertain of what was happening, as the two figures battled fiercely in front of them in the driving storm.

It was over almost before either Porter could draw a gun and take a hand in the conflict. The swift explosion of Vincent's pistol saved him from death by a split-second. His bullet thudded into Andy's body. The crook crumpled and fell in a limp huddle on the puddled earth.

Vincent whirled breathlessly to rush toward the Porters. His orders had been to protect them and he had done so at the imminent risk of his life. Now he shouted, as he rushed toward them, fearful that he might be cut down by flying lead before he could explain that he was there by The Shadow's orders - to help them, not to hinder them.

His eager cry was matched by a sterner yell from old Thomas Porter. To the elder Porter, both these mysterious gunmen were enemies. He recognized Vincent as the man he had vainly tried to question in the truth machine. He fired promptly at the onrushing figure of The Shadow's agent.

But Harry had expected just such a move as this. He had seen the ominous gesture and the bright flash from the barrel of the gun. He flung himself headlong to earth as the weapon exploded.

Again and again, Porter fired at the rolling and wriggling figure of Vincent. Bullets thudded into the earth, whipped the wet leaves of bushes with spurting fury. But Vincent was saved by the enveloping darkness and the overeager excitement of the old man.

Ray Porter was already in the car. He shouted a warning to his father, and the old man turned and leaped inside the automobile beside his son.

The car started. It missed the stark body of Andy, but its curving wheels roared straight for the helpless head of Vincent. Chance and the soaked earth was all that saved Harry's head from being ground to a bloody pulp under flying wheels of the escaping car. The rubber tires skidded and ground past, a scant inch from Harry's white face.

Down the winding drive roared the fleeing car. It swung into the distant road with a speed that almost made it turn over in the rain. The sound of its motor accelerated instantly. The Porters had something desperate in mind. They were racing to keep an unknown rendezvous which had been interrupted by the struggle between Vincent and Andy.

VINCENT had already staggered to his feet. He was running down the dark driveway toward where he had hidden his own car. His orders from The Shadow had been strict. He had been told to watch the Porters, to help them if they were attacked, and to find out, if they fled, where their destination was.

Above all, if they took the train for Millcote, Vincent was under orders to report that fact immediately to Burbank, from the nearest telephone.

In a moment or two, Vincent's fast little roadster was backing out from the concealing bushes where he had left it. He sent it racing swiftly down the drive and whirled into the road on two desperate wheels.

He drove in the same direction that Porter and his son had disappeared. He

was certain that they were making for the railroad station. He knew that a train

was due to stop there briefly in the next seven minutes. He had studied the schedule carefully for just such an emergency as this.

The next seven minutes were like a grim kaleidoscope of speed for Harry. He drove without regard for his own life. He knew that the Porters were doing the same. There was no sign of their tail-lights in the sheets of falling rain.

And they had a two-minute start!

The tense-faced agent of The Shadow reached the deserted little railway station a full minute before the train was due. He had made that amazing race along slippery roads in six minutes flat.

He saw a dark car drawn up outside the tiny waiting room. The Porters had already arrived. Harry had one precious minute to find them and to warn them of impending death.

Far down the steel rails of the track, a dazzling white headlight was already boring through the sheets of rain. The train was thundering through the darkness to make its brief stop at the tiny platform.

Vincent ran around the corner of the locked and empty waiting room and dashed down the length of the low wooden platform.

Ray Porter was waiting for him in the gloom. Before Harry could open his mouth to shout the message he had been told to deliver, a heavy fist crashed into his jaw, sending him spinning backward.

DIZZILY, Harry tried to regain his feet. Ray had turned and was watching the swift rush of the train into the station. The lighted windows slowed with a jerk, as the brakes drew the long train to a stop.

Thomas Porter ran toward the vestibule of the last platform. He swung upward to the steps, calling hoarsely to his son, to follow.

Ray was watching the onrushing figure of Vincent. The latter had managed to regain his feet, his head still dizzy from the powerful blow that Ray Porter had delivered. He tried to shout, to warn these headstrong fools who were blindly rushing away to their own deaths.

His shout went unanswered. There was a quick, grim struggle and again the powerful Ray smashed his fist into the face of the man he was convinced was a thug and a killer. The train was already moving. Thomas Porter was yelling hoarsely from the step, holding out a hand to his son.

Ray Porter caught the extended hand and swung himself aboard. The train roared down the wet track.

After it ran the desperate figure of Harry Vincent. He was weak and exhausted from the battle he had had with Andy. Ray's pile-driver blow had almost snapped his head off his shoulders.

Nevertheless, he ran at top speed toward the flying rear platform of the train, desperately intent on swinging aboard.

He missed the handhold as his feet slipped on the wet boards of the station platform. He fell heavily, rolling straight outward toward the grinding wheels.

The speed of the train itself was all that saved Harry. The forward rush of the blurred wheels was faster than his sidelong slip. His body hit the wet

ties directly behind the roaring rear platform of the train. He lay there, semiconscious, and knew that he had failed in his wild attempt.

THE slash of the cold rain on his face roused Harry. He got shakily to his feet. There were still orders to carry out.

He got into his parked car and drove swiftly backward along the darkness of the deserted road. There was an all-night diner not far from where the Porters lived. It was necessary to get in telephone touch immediately with Burbank to report that the Porters were on their way to Millcote, to the plant of the enormous chemical corporation that dominated the industry of the little town.

Vincent made his telephone call from a closed booth in the little all-night diner. He pitched his voice so low that the beady-eyed man behind the counter couldn't hear a word of what he said. To the message about the Porters, he added an accurate description of the dead Andy. The message was received and acknowledged by the crisp voice of Burbank.

Harry went back to his car. He stopped at a filling station and had his tank filled with gas. Burbank's voice had repeated an order of The Shadow. That order was for Vincent to proceed immediately to Millcote and to register at the Grandview Hotel. The moment he arrived, he was to report his presence there to Burbank. Further orders would be given at that time.

The rain was slackening now. Fifty miles separated Vincent from Millcote - and his swift car made them melt away.

CHAPTER XVI

THE COTTAGE CLUE

MIDNIGHT had passed and gone. The hands of the timepiece on the mantel showed almost one o'clock. The room was utterly dark, except for a single electric light that burned like a pale, frosted candle.

The Shadow's long tapering fingers reached without haste for a telephone that rested on a low table. Outside the shaded window, the streets of Millcote were black as ebony under the rays of a wet moon. It had rained hard an hour or so earlier, but the rain had now finished.

Presently, a distant voice whispered over the wire into the listening ears of The Shadow.

"Burbank speaking."

"Report."

"Vincent arrived Grandview Hotel as directed. Reported presence. Your last message to him not delivered."

"Why?"

"Vincent does not answer."

In the darkness, the eyes of The Shadow gleamed suddenly like jewels. His low voice carried a whiplash of authority.

"Number of Vincent's room?"

"Five four nine."

"Stand by."

The Shadow rose from the desk. In the darkness, the motion was scarcely visible. A deeper blackness loomed for an instant, moved toward the door. The door opened and closed without audible sound. The single frosted bulb in the ceiling still burned, but The Shadow had gone.

TEN minutes later, an outside window of the Grandview Hotel opened very softly. The window was on the fifth floor and opened directly onto the rusted fire escape platform that abutted on the rear of the hotel building.

Inside the window was the dark length of a public hall. The Shadow glided down that hall, turned a sharp corner and proceeded toward the curving wall of a dim staircase, his eyes watching the numbers on the doors of the rooms.

He halted in front of the door marked "549." His sensitive ear, pressed against the frail panel, could detect no sound within. The only sounds came from adjoining rooms - the heavy snore of a sleeping man and the faintly querulous wailing of a child.

A bunch of skeleton keys appeared from beneath the black robe of The Shadow. The door opened on the fourth try. It closed on an empty corridor and The Shadow, his pupils dilated, was inside Vincent's darkened room, examining it with a catlike scrutiny.

He was completely satisfied that he was alone, before a muscle of his body moved. Then came a faint click and the lights in the room glowed. The Shadow unscrewed all bulbs except one. One was all he needed to bring into play his keen powers of observation.

Vincent, of course, was not there.

The Shadow's burning eyes noted the signs of a terrific struggle. To an ordinary investigator, the appearance of the room would have immediately suggested that the missing Harry Vincent had been captured and kidnapped after a desperate encounter. But, to The Shadow, the torn-up room told a clear story that was precisely the opposite.

For two reasons. First, any such struggle would inevitably have caused a terrific commotion. People, hearing the sound of tables overturned, pictures ripped from the walls, ink splashed hideously on the rug, would have immediately telephoned in terror to the desk downstairs.

Yet there was no house detective in the room. The guests in the adjoining suites were asleep. No one had been in the hall outside. The struggle, The Shadow knew instantly, was a fake, a deliberate plant. Harry had been captured without warning.

The second reason for the skepticism of The Shadow lay in one of the shattered pictures that sprawled on the floor. The mark in the wall where it had been ripped loose from its nail was too high for a normal-size man to reach. Some one had mounted a chair and yanked the picture down in an effort to add to the realism of a desperate battle.

THE SHADOW walked past the pool of ink on the rug. He moved toward the spot where sly kidnappers had intended him to move. Between the bureau and the corner of the wall was a space of about six inches. There were finger prints on the rug, where Harry had, presumably, fallen under a sudden attack. A pattern of blurred ink marks had been left by a sprawled hand.

The hand had lifted and slid into the space between the wall and the side of the bureau. Kneeling, The Shadow saw further marks on the hidden side of the bureau. A wavering forefinger had written a hasty message in smudged ink on the smooth walnut.

A message from Harry Vincent; that was obviously what The Shadow was intended to deduce. But, again, he came to a conclusion directly opposite, to the evidence of his senses. Vincent had not scrawled that message, as he lay for an instant unwatched by the gangsters who had struck him down. One of the gangsters had written it. It was a trap to lure The Shadow into following the route taken by the sly kidnappers.

The smeared letters read as follows:

POWDER PLANT

The Shadow's low laugh made a barely audible sound in the room. There was only one powder plant in Millcote. That was the crimson-painted building that stood ominously within a moat of water inside the grounds of the Millcote Chemical Corporation. Why should the kidnappers want The Shadow to believe that

Harry had been taken there?

Obviously, to lure The Shadow into a trap and blow him to pieces, as they had failed to do that same afternoon.

The Shadow had been certain that he had fooled Merriweather into believing

he was dead. The fake clue smeared on the hidden side of the hotel bureau would

seem to indicate the opposite. Some one inside the chemical plant knew that The

Shadow was still alive and was using Harry Vincent as a cat's-paw in a clever trick to bring about the death of both Harry and his master.

The Shadow smiled in the dimly-lit room. He knew already the answer - and to-night's events would prove the accuracy of his information.

Meanwhile, The Shadow was searching for a second clue. Having seen through

the implications of the false one, he was now seeking a real and thoroughly truthful lead. Vincent, he knew, was no fool. A clever, courageous and thoroughly loyal agent, he must, undoubtedly, have made a grim effort to communicate the kidnaper's real plans to his chief.

The Shadow's confidence in Harry was justified. On the dusty baseboard, just beyond the woodwork of the window, The Shadow bent over something that gleamed faintly in the small space left by the edge of the rug. It was a small diamond set in a smooth platinum ring.

Harry's ring! The same one with which he had scratched that wavering "V" like the wings of a seagull on the rumble of Ray Porter's car.

THE SHADOW got down on hands and knees and examined the surface of the baseboard. The wavering marks on the dusty wood were barely visible, but to the grim investigator who had expected to find such marks, they told an urgent and coherent story.

It looked like the picture a child might scratch with a pin. An outline drawing of a tiny house, with something under it that looked like a capital letter M. The burning eyes of The Shadow studied it, and read the intent of the message without hesitation.

To The Shadow, the drawing and the symbol underneath meant only one thing:

Merriweather's cottage. Only one cottage existed inside the guarded walls of the

chemical plant. That was the one occupied by the plant superintendent, who lived

within the grounds.

Simon Todd's expensive mansion was in the hills on the other side of

town.

The workmen lived in the neighboring communities, and, after dark, there was nothing inside the walls but the gaunt chemical buildings, the stealthy forms of hired guards and Merriweather's cottage.

The kidnapers were taking Vincent there; not to the isolated powder mill inside the moat filled with water. That was the message Vincent had so cleverly conveyed to his chief.

He had evidently done it with his hands bound behind his back, judging from the erratic outline of the scrawl. The kidnapers, convinced they had fooled The Shadow, must have grimly congratulated themselves and chuckled over the real destination to which they were planning to take Harry.

And Vincent, propped against the dusty baseboard, presenting to be unconscious perhaps, had scrawled his honest clue and dropped the ring in the gap at the edge of the rug as a further identification for The Shadow.

The snores in the adjoining room still echoed rhythmically, as The Shadow passed in ghostly silence down the long corridor to the window that opened on the rear fire escape. He reached the alley in the rear and got into a small coupe that stood there without lights. He was neither noticed nor disturbed.

In

Millcote, people worked hard and retired early, and it was now long past midnight.

THE SHADOW drove without haste along the dark gleam of trolley tracks that

led outward through the sleeping town toward the circling walls of the chemical

plant. He drove alongside the curb, a block or two from the main gate, locked his ignition and left the car.

There was a pleasant coolness in the air, but the sky overhead was still heavily clouded and there was a threat of more rain.

The steel gate of the plant was closed and locked for the night. The workers had long since gone. The only human beings visible were the dimly seen figures of paid guards, who lounged in the doorway of a small sentry shack just inside the gate.

The Shadow, who already had spent considerable time in disguise inside those walls, had never seen any of these guards by daylight. They were all strangers to him. Their faces were stamped with the hard ruthlessness of the paid gunman. It was a picture oddly at variance with the peaceful aspect of the plant as it existed under the warm rays of sunlight.

The Shadow's purpose in examining the main gate was not to pass through it. He knew such a task would be hopeless. The gate itself and the encircling walls were charged with electricity to repel intruders. Todd had taken this precaution after the first attack on him by Blink Dorgan. To touch a bar of that gate, or to attempt to scale the wall, meant instant electrocution.

But The Shadow, knowing this, intended to get over that long circling wall without touching it.

A quarter of a mile away, he found the spot he had mentally marked on a previous tour of inspection. There was a tall elm tree growing across the street from the dark mass of the wall, its ancient branches making a leafy tunnel under which the deserted suburban street passed.

The Shadow climbed the tree and slid his body inch by inch along a gnarled bough. He had found the only spot that offered the slightest chance for a forced entry to the grounds. But it was a spot that would have caused the heart of a

lesser man to quail.

The Shadow eyed the distant metal spikes that topped the long wall. His plan was to launch himself outward from the sagging limb of the elm, across the cruel points of those electrified spikes. He hesitated, muscles tense, eyes calculating to the fraction of an inch the extent of the leap he must make to escape death.

He made the leap, coolly.

Like a swimmer leaving a teetering springboard, he launched himself outward into space in a flat dive. The supple branch acted like a powerful lever. It flung him slightly upward; he plunged headlong from his frail anchorage.

He went over the wall sidewise, with the final extra wriggle of the pole vaulter who dares not touch the horizontal bar or miss his try. But there was no sporting laurels to be lost if The Shadow missed. To miss meant death.

His thighs grazed the tips of the electrified spikes - grazed them, but did not touch. He fell inside the wall to a patch of weeds alongside a rusted railroad siding.

The track ended in a steel bumper, a vague blur in the darkness.

THE SHADOW leaped alertly to his feet and crouched behind the bumper, listening for a distant shout, the rush of hasty feet. But under the dull sky, no sound arose. Evidently the thud of The Shadow's falling body had gone unnoticed at the sentry shack farther along the inner surface of the wall.

He took advantage of the dark line of a string of motionless freight cars and broke into a quick run. He was far enough now from the gate to be less careful of his movements.

But there was an added danger, and The Shadow threw himself suddenly to the ground.

An enormous circular beam of light was approaching with silent speed. It passed over the motionless body of The Shadow. In a second he was up again, heading silently toward the powder shack in the very centre of the grounds.

He watched carefully for the returning sweep of the revealing searchlight.

It was mounted on a tall tower like a lighthouse. Again and again, The Shadow dropped prudently, as the blinding oval swept across his motionless body.

He passed the small island inside the moat that contained the two-storied structure of the powder shack. His mind was not on the shack but on Merriweather's cottage. He was unaware that Joe Cardona and Molly Harrington were helpless prisoners inside that shack, waiting, trussed and gagged, for the moment when a cunning criminal would send them spouting in flaming atoms in the roar of a vast explosion.

But The Shadow cast one quick look at the building before he melted onward

toward the goal he had set for himself. He saw on the roof a rubber-sheathed mooring mast, the spidery lines of cables supporting the overhead buckets that transported explosive material to and from the silent shack.

The buckets, too, were faced with rubber. Any other material would have made it too dangerous to handle the explosive cargoes of liquid death that daily moved through the air from the powder mill to the various mixing buildings.

Diagonally opposite was the main mixing plant, and alongside it the offices of Simon Todd. In Todd's private office a light glowed behind a drawn shade. The Shadow was prepared to find that. It verified his information. He knew that Todd often drove from his home at night to find peace and quiet in his office to tackle problem that had eluded his mind in his busy and constantly interrupted hours by day.

But not a light glowed in Merriweather's cottage, farther along. The building was as dark and silent as a grave. The Shadow approached it with a full knowledge of its outside structure, gained on his innocent rambles with a broom when he had been disguised as a palsied old workman.

He melted behind the black outline of the house and his gloved hands reached upward toward the edge of a timbered support.

He began to climb.

CHAPTER XVII

MEN UNDER GLASS

AT the very instant that The Shadow was climbing noiselessly, Merriweather was laughing deep in his throat. He was in a tiny, windowless room, built under the very eaves of his cottage roof.

At his feet, inert and helpless, lay three men, one of them drugged and unconscious. The drugged man was Harry Vincent. The other two were Thomas Porter and his son, Ray.

The Porters had done just what The Shadow had feared they would do. Eluding Vincent, they had gone straight to Millcote, to Simon Todd's home. From

Todd's servant they learned that Todd had returned to the plant to study contracts that needed quiet, careful attention. The Porters, who now suspected Todd was the man behind the murder of Harrington and of Kling, demanded entrance at the gate. They were met, not by Todd, but by Merriweather.

Before they could utter a word, thugs sprang at them and slugged them down. They were taken through the darkness directly to Merriweather's cottage and thrown in the attic room where, later, the drugged Vincent lay. The guards went silently back to their post at the gate, leaving Merriweather alone with three helpless prisoners.

"This private laboratory," Merriweather whispered, smilingly, to the elder Porter, "is a part of the Millcote Chemical Corporation quite unknown to the general public. I'm sure you'll like it, when you understand what it's used for - or do I have to explain about the white mice to intelligent chemists like you and your son?"

The air was filled with a queer, tiny squeaking. The sound came from dozens of white mice confined in wooden cages on shelves along one of the walls. There were guinea pigs, too, munching disconsolately on bits of tried carrot.

Thomas Porter knew, the moment he saw the cages, the reason for the existence of these unfortunate little beasts. Somewhere near by was the mechanism of the deadly gas that had been used to snuff out the life of Reed Harrington. These guinea pigs and mice were the living proof that ugly experimentation had been going on for a long time in the attic of this sinister cottage of the plant superintendent.

There was a door at the far end of the chamber and Merriweather opened it. His face was twitching. He dragged his trussed prisoners, one by one, inside the second chamber and closed the door. But he failed to lock it. Thomas Porter felt a twinge of desperate hope. He knew now that the unconscious Vincent was not an

enemy, but a friend. Once before, peril to Vincent had brought The Shadow. Would it bring him again?

RAY PORTER blinked as he saw the peculiar contrivance in the centre of the room. It was an enormous circular bowl built entirely of glass. It looked exactly like the glass lids used to cover cheese on a delicatessen counter, except that it was at least six feet in diameter.

The top of this strange contrivance was solid glass. The bottom seemed to be six inches or so below the level of the floor. It formed an air-tight glass bowl that was joined to the ceiling by what appeared to be pipe rising from the centre. There seemed to be no visible method of getting inside the thing.

But there was. A second later, Ray Porter was gasping at the cleverness of the gas chamber. Merriweather had moved to a corner of the room, where there was a double trigger device. One was geared to a huge steel cylinder in a far corner, which Porter immediately guessed contained lethal gas under pressure. The other trigger was geared to a small wheel which operated a narrow steel shaft.

Merriweather's hand caressed the gas lever for a moment. He laughed, his hand moved away and jerked the adjoining mechanism that controlled the glass cage.

Instantly, there was a faint whirring and the entire glass compartment rose slowly upward from the floor along the stout pipe that joined its top with

the ceiling. As it ascended a foot or so; Ray Porter saw the method of entrance

to the trap. An open slot was visible in the lower edge of the cage. It was exposed when the contrivance rose from its circular bed on the floor.

Harry Vincent was still unconscious. He was shoved inside first, then the Porters, who, gagged and bound, could offer no resistance. The cage descended.

Through the circular wall of tough transparent glass, Thomas Porter and his son saw Merriweather leap toward the spot where the open slot had been. He had a tube of plastic paste in his eager hand. Carefully, he spread the paste along the upper edge of the slot where it now joined the concrete floor. The white, puttylike substance made the glass jar utterly air-tight.

MERRIWEATHER stepped back. Surprisingly, every word he uttered was distinct to the two trussed men inside the glass prison. A cleverly concealed amplifier of great volume carried his voice to the doomed men.

"There are four gas vents scattered over the ceiling in this death room. To-night, only one will be used - the aperture in the hollow pipe that leads into your prison. When I release the second trigger, poison gas will flow steadily into your amusing little cheese jar - and you'll know exactly how your friend Reed Harrington died!"

He skipped nimbly backward like a monkey. His hand rested on the death trigger. Neither Thomas Porter nor his son could move an inch in their taut bonds. They stared hopelessly at the orifice of the hollow pipe that opened inside the smooth glass top of the circular cage.

Vincent was slowly coming out of his drugged sleep. He groaned, his eyes vacant.

Merriweather pretended to jerk the lever and then stopped.

"Perhaps," he jeered, "I should inform you just what is in store for you. The gas which you are about to inhale is the most deadly war vapor yet devised by the brain of a chemist. It will be visible to you as it spurts from the

pipe

over your heads. Its color is a pale-brown, almost like dried blood. In consistency it is barely heavier than air; you'll see it spread out like blood oozing in water."

His laughter echoed in the closed room.

"You'll notice the clean sharp smell of ozone when the vapor emerges into your prison. That's because the gas is so powerful it breaks up the molecules of the air and liberates free oxygen for a few seconds. You'll have to watch closely and smell quickly, because your deaths will occur almost simultaneous with the release of the poison gas."

Merriweather's face was haggard, muddy-looking.

"You won't see the final dispersion of the poison, because all three of you will be dead. But this is what will actually happen. The gas will solidify in thirty seconds or so into brownish flakes in the air. It will descend slowly, like dust settling in a room. The dust will powder your dead bodies faintly, will lie on the floor of the chamber in tiny brown crystals. Then it will evaporate.

"The air will clear. There will be no trace of gas or the resultant dust. It will be perfectly safe to raise the cage and enter to remove your bodies. The cage will be empty of clues as to how you died or what killed you. And your

internal organs will decompose so rapidly from the death you've inhaled that an

inquest will disclose nothing - the same as in the case of the very unfortunate

Reed Harrington."

MERRIWEATHER'S back was toward the door of the adjoining room where the experimental white mice were kept in their wooden cages. In his eagerness to play with the lives of men, the superintendent had forgotten something. The door behind him, which he had failed to lock, was slowly opening.

Not by a muscle of their faces did the bound and gagged men in the glass prison betray the fact that some one was slyly entering the room.

Thomas Porter thought desperately: "The Shadow!"

But it wasn't The Shadow. It was a shorter man, with thickset shoulders and a white, strained face. Blink Dorgan was peering through the slowly widening crack.

There was a gun in Dorgan's hand. He raised it so that its muzzle pointed toward the centre of Merriweather's inattentive back. The latter, apparently unconscious of peril, was staring at the lever mechanism that controlled the inflow of gas.

Actually, his body was screening a sly movement his left hand was making. His hand was lifting something out of the pocket of his vest. He hadn't heard a

sound from the opening door; yet Dorgan had already betrayed his presence. The squeaking of the mice in the adjoining room was the tiny note of warning that had sent Merriweather's hidden hand groping in his pocket. The fact that his ears had caught that faint squeaking murmur that should have been inaudible, warned him that some one was quietly opening the door.

He became very quiet as he heard the sudden snarl of a triumphant voice. "Stick 'em up, Merriweather!"

His hands went up above his head. He turned slowly about, his eyes wide with simulated fright and surprise. But it was just play-acting on the part of a man whose ruthless mind was taut with the lust to kill. The backs of his upraised hands, not the palms, were toward his enemy.

"Dorgan!" he whispered. "Blink Dorgan!"

"Yeah. One move outta you and I'll let you have a .38 slug right in the middle of the belly!"

The face of the gunman twisted in a greedy grin.

"I came for that new war gas formula, pal. Let's have it."

"I - I don't know what you mean."

"Oh, yes, you do! Pretty smart, ain't you? Sent me chasing after Harrington and Kling and these two dopey Porters - and you had it all the time!"

"You're mistaken. What formula are you talking about?"

"The formula for that government war gas. You know all about it. I heard that little spiel you gave these guys you've got in the glass cage. I don't give a damn about them or the gas. All I want is the paper that tells how the stuff is made. You got ten seconds, pal, to tell me where the paper is hidden -
-
or get gunned by an expert!"

THERE was a brief silence. Merriweather's face was like chalk. Dorgan began to count softly.

"One - two - three -"

"All right," the superintendent gasped. "You win! Don't shoot!"

"Where's the formula?"

"In my vest pocket. I'll - I'll give it to you!"

"Keep them hands up!" Dorgan snapped.

He advanced with a slow, catlike motion toward the hapless superintendent, who stood with upraised hands. Dorgan failed to note that the backs of the hands were toward him, that the left hand was partly closed and the thumb bent inward out of sight. With his own gun level, he reached into Merriweather's vest pocket.

As he did so, the tense superintendent acted with the speed of lightning. Both upraised hands darted downward. The right clamped on Dorgan's shoulder and sent him spinning partly around. At the same instant, Merriweather's left hand pressed the muzzle of a tiny derringer into Dorgan's back between the shoulder blades and fired.

As Dorgan staggered, his own pistol exploded with a loud roar in the enclosed chamber. But Merriweather had whirled nimbly aside and the heavy slug roared under his armpit. The bullet from the tiny derringer he had palmed pierced Dorgan's lungs. With a whistling gasp, the thug sank to the floor, his gun falling from his grasp.

Merriweather dived for it, swung it toward the fallen gunman. Again the chamber echoed hollowly with its explosion. The bullet tore into Dorgan's chest. Bloody froth appeared on the thug's twitching lips. He rolled on his back, clawing feebly.

Merriweather kicked him until he stopped moving. He swung for an instant toward the helpless men inside the glass cage, and there was merciless murder in his distended eyes. He laughed as he saw that Harry Vincent had recovered from his drugged swoon and was staring through the glass with a face as terrified as the Porters.

To Merriweather, Vincent typified the power of The Shadow. He couldn't resist one last jeering challenge to the trapped agent.

"Give my compliments to The Shadow, when you meet him in hell! Tell him I'm sending him six little playmates to-night! Do you get that - six! Four here, including Mr. Blink Dorgan. Two more in the powder mill."

The hidden amplifier brought the snarling words clearly to the dulled ears of Harry Vincent. Without a gag on his lips like the Porters, he was able to gasp, unbelievably, "You're bluffing! That's a lie!"

"Is it? Joe Cardona doesn't think so. Nor does the lovely little Molly Harrington. They're both in the powder mill, waiting for the big explosion."

You

won't hear it because you'll be dead. But you can take my word for it, that there's a photoelectric cell imbedded in the casing above the door of the powder shack. All it needs to send Cardona and the girl skyward is a beam of light to play on it for a fraction of a second.

"The light is in the tower circling the ground right now. And as soon as you're dead - and I can get across the grounds and climb to the top of that tower -"

MERRIWEATHER'S laughter seemed to rip viciously through his lips. He leaped across Dorgan's moaning form and his hand reached for the wooden trigger of the gas mechanism. Inch by inch, the handle of the trigger approached the hook at the end.

A muffled roar sounded from the corner of the dimly lighted room, where the huge gas tank stood in semidarkness. A spurt of flame appeared from behind the outline of the metal drum that contained the imprisoned poison gas. The gun flash and a portion of a black-robed arm was all that was visible.

For an instant, Merriweather stood rooted with surprise and terror. A bullet had shattered the wooden handle of the release mechanism. The trigger rebounded in its groove to where it had been before Merriweather moved it forward. No gas issued from the hollow pipe in the top of the circular glass cage.

From behind the dark gas tank in the corner rose a strange figure in black. Twin guns jutted from black-gloved hands. A sibilant laugh echoed.

"It's The Shadow!" Merriweather screamed, hoarsely.

CHAPTER XVIII

TEST OF COURAGE

INSTANTLY, Merriweather sprang past the circular glass cage that contained Vincent and the Porters. Terror moved him with galvanic speed. The curved glass was between him and the almost instant flare of The Shadow's gun.

The Shadow's bullet rebounded from the glass wall of the cage. Before he could take a leaping step forward, Merriweather had pulled up a trapdoor in the floor and was leaping to unseen steps below.

As he vanished, a second bullet creased his scalp with scarlet. But the trapdoor fell with a bang. A bolt clicked underneath. The Shadow's outthrust fingers clutched at the barely visible crack in the floor a fraction of a second too late.

Desperately, The Shadow tried to force the trap open. It was impossible. He abandoned his efforts immediately.

He knew exactly the fate in store for him. He remembered Merriweather's talk about the extra gas orifices that fed directly into the chamber itself, as well as the glass prison in the centre of the room. He remembered another trigger device in the outer room that contained the white mice. He sprang toward the door.

Just before he reached it, he heard the click of the lock. The door was immovable. Either Merriweather, or some one else, had sealed the last remaining exit to the trap. In a few seconds, gas would be pouring from every vent in the

room.

A bloodless smile twisted the thin lips of The Shadow. He had already decided upon a strange method - the only possible method - to escape the creeping death of the poison gas. He was going to escape death by exposing himself to its fullest fury!

Already his hand was clutching the mechanism that raised and lowered the enormous glass bell jar in the centre of the room. As the transparent circular walls of the cage rose from the floor the slotted opening through which the Porters and Vincent had been shoved was again exposed.

The Shadow snatched up the tube of plastic paste which Merriweather had dropped in his hurried flight. He reversed the mechanism of the glass cage. It began to return toward the floor.

The Shadow reached the diminishing opening with a lithe bound. He flung himself headlong forward. He was barely in time. The descending top of the slot almost pinned his cloak as he wriggled through.

On the floor outside, the haggard face of the wounded Blink Dorgan glared through the glass with glazed incredulous eyes. The Shadow was in the death chamber! He had deliberately, by his own free choice, entombed himself with Vincent and the Porters!

BUT there was method in The Shadow's seeming madness. In an instant, he had whirled on his knees and was applying a thick coat of the slimy cement to the upper crack of the entrance lot that rested flush with the floor.

The glass cage was now air-tight, insulated completely from the rest of the room, except for the hollow pipe in the top through which the deadly gas would presently issue.

The Shadow leaped like a silent hurricane at Harry Vincent. Quickly the sharp blade of a knife slashed through the cords that held his agent helpless. A moment later Thomas Porter and his son were also freed.

Vincent groaned and swayed weakly to his knees. The strong hand of The Shadow assisted him to his feet.

Into the ears of Harry a voice whispered a command like a whiplash. Harry's drugged stupor vanished. The scheme of The Shadow had the simplicity of genius.

Vincent's feet were planted apart bracing his trembling body to bear an added burden. Ray Porter steadied him. The Shadow clambered to his agents shoulders. He knew that any instant would mark the deadly inflow of gas from the pipe.

His handkerchief was stuffed into the orifice of the hollow pipe. He balled it and jammed it so that it fitted as tightly as possible. Around the edges and over the handkerchief plug he smeared reckless handfuls of the sticky cement until he was satisfied that not the tiniest pinhole remained.

He had barely finished when Vincent's weakened muscles collapsed. The Shadow was thrown heavily to the floor. But he landed catlike on his feet. He turned to watch the room beyond the circular walls of what was now not a death trap but a carefully insulated escape from death.

A CRY from Vincent told that he was watching the orifices in the room itself. They were four in number. Through the vents in the ceiling came a queer faint haze that began to spread downward in long lazy wreaths like the curl of brown cigarette smoke.

Blink Dorgan was staring upward with a hideous expression of terror on his ratlike face. His jaw hung open. He realized in that dreadful instant that the

gas death was upon him. In his extremity of terror, the wounded mobster managed to drag himself to his knees.

The gesture was only momentary. He collapsed suddenly, as though he had been struck by a club. His body writhed, seemed to shrivel hideously and then lay starkly still.

Porter and his son watched the ghastly appearance of the gunman with horror. His face was bluish and shriveled like a mummy's. His body was bent as though he had suddenly become a hunchback. The same horrible transformation that had come to Reed Harrington, had now happened to Blink.

But The Shadow's eyes paid no attention to the dead thug. He kept his gaze riveted on the gas vents in the ceiling and in the glass top of the chamber in which he was imprisoned.

His nose sniffed for the telltale odor of ozone. He could smell nothing. The air within the glass cage was still pure. No violent reaction of poison gas with the air had released nascent oxygen by breaking up the molecules of the imprisoned atmosphere.

The plug in the overhead pipe was holding!

But in the chamber outside, it was a different story. The brown gas in the air already had changed to an impalpable dust that was settling slowly to the floor. Specks appeared everywhere; they coated the dead body of Dorgan like a faint film of brown snow. Now they began to evaporate into nothingness.

Merriweather's boast had been correct. There was no clue left, no sign that would indicate how the dead gunman had been so swiftly asphyxiated. In an instant, all traces of the gas and the resultant dust were gone.

The Shadow jerked the concealing black gloves from his long, tapering fingers. On his left hand gleamed the crimson flame of the girasol, the priceless gem that was the hallmark of The Shadow.

As he approached the inner side of the glass tomb that still enclosed him and his companions, the girasol's eerie glow changed from crimson to mauve and again to a deep flashing yellow.

He made a large circular mark on the glass with the sharp cutting edge of the girasol.

It became apparent to Thomas Porter what this strange personage was preparing to do. The old man's voice rose in a shrill cry of alarm.

"Be careful! Don't break the glass! The room may still be filled with that filthy poison!"

Ray Porter said nothing. He found to his amazement that he trusted this black-robed personage with a deep and sincere loyalty. Once he had thought this man to be a criminal. Now he knew otherwise.

"Be quiet," he told his gray-haired father gently. "This man is good - not evil. Obey him."

THE chuckle that came from the lips of The Shadow was reassuring. As he laughed, he pressed lightly with the white fingers of his right hand against the large circle he had cut in the glass with his girasol. Under his evenly applied pressure, the circle of glass fell outward and smashed on the floor.

Through the opening glided the cloaked figure of The Shadow, followed by his companions.

It was utterly silent in the room, yet The Shadow laid a warning finger athwart his lips. He had heard something that was not audible to the less sensitive ears of either Thomas Porter or his son. He wanted no betraying noise

to warn men outside the room that living victims still breathed unhurt in that chamber of horror.

An instant later, Ray Porter heard the sound that had already been registered in the keener ears of The Shadow. The shuffle of feet beneath the trapdoor in the floor grew louder. Breathing of men became audible. A bolt clicked and the trap slowly lifted.

An ugly face appeared: one of the thugs who had been on guard at the electrified gate of the chemical plant. He stared incredulously at the empty cage and his mouth opened in a cry of wonder.

The cry was never uttered. The Shadow's gunfire sent the thug tumbling out of sight.

Instantly The Shadow was crouched above the square opening sending a hail of lead into the startled men below. He heard yells groans and the echo of racing feet. Step by step The Shadow descended firing like a nerveless automaton. Bullets whistled past him, pierced his loose cloak in a dozen places. He felt a sharp pain in his shoulder.

He had flung himself behind the sprawled bodies of two wounded gunmen. With a thud Vincent was beside him firing swiftly from Blink Dorgan's gun. The two remaining assailants in the doorway whirled and fled. The four who remained

were either dead or too badly wounded to lift a weapon.

There was no sign of the crafty Merriweather. He had apparently fled the instant he realized The Shadow was free.

Down two flights of stairs The Shadow raced, followed by Vincent and the Porters. The front door of the cottage was wide open.

It was pitch dark outside and for an instant nothing was visible. Then there was a shout and a man appeared - an unarmed man who ran sobbing toward the little group in front of Merriweather's house.

CHAPTER XIX

THE TOWER OF LIGHT

THE man who shouted was Simon Todd, owner of the chemical plant. But it was a Todd who would have been difficult to recognize as the same man.

His nose was bleeding, his face white with excitement and terror. He came plunging forward eagerly and stopped short as he saw the grim faces of Harry Vincent and of Thomas Porter and his son.

The Shadow was no longer visible. He had retreated quickly backward into the darkness, his tall figure shrouded by the dark edge of Merriweather's cottage.

Todd's jaw dropped with surprise as he recognized the pale faces of his two former partners.

"What - what are you doing here?" he gasped.

"The same to you," Ray Porter snapped. His gun menaced the disheveled figure of the staring chemical master.

But Vincent shouldered young Ray Porter aside. The Shadow had whispered certain commands in Harry's ear. He took over the questioning.

"Where's Merriweather? Did you see him?"

Todd didn't answer the question directly. Dazed by the brusque query of this man whom he had never seen before, he swung accusingly toward the Porters.

"What have you two devils done to Merriweather? What has happened to him?"

Vincent clutched grimly at Simon Todd's arm, swung him around.

"What do you know about all this?"

Todd gulped, regained a little of his self-possession. But his voice trembled with fright as he talked.

"I was working in my office. I heard shots in the direction of Merriweather's house. I rushed out and ran across the grounds as fast as I could, thinking it was another attack by Dorgan. And - and then I - I saw Merriweather. I ran squarely into him."

"Where?" Vincent rapped out.

"Halfway across the grounds. Between the powder mill and the searchlight tower. I shouted to him, caught at his arm to find out what was wrong - and he attacked me.

"In Heaven's name, what has happened here to-night? My own superintendent behaved like a madman, an escaping criminal. He struck at me, threw me to the ground and fled before I could utter another word."

"Where did he go?" Thomas Porter snarled.

The sound of his voice, the sight of his suspicious old eyes seemed to infuriate Todd.

"He ran toward the searchlight tower, but what's that to you? Why are you and your son hiding like thieves on my private property? Damn you, you've killed Harrington and Kling - and now you're bringing your paid spies here to do the same thing to Merriweather and me, eh? Throw up your hands - all of you!"

A GUN appeared suddenly from beneath Simon Todd's coat. He stood there glaring, the weapon trembling in his grasp. Vincent took a slow step forward, but the elder Porter restrained him with a slight touch on his arm.

"Wait a minute, Simon," the old man said. His anger was gone, he sounded earnest, almost friendly. "You've got the wrong idea about everything. Ray and I didn't sneak in here to attack any one. We were captured at the gate and brought here to be murdered."

"You lie! Stand back! I'll shoot if you make a move!"

"I'm not lying, Simon," Porter said, slowly. "Merriweather is the man back

of all this killing; he tried to escape from you because he knew we had the goods on him. Have you ever been up in the secret attic of his cottage?"

Simon Todd's gun remained menacing, but there was trouble in his voice as he replied shakily, "No, I haven't. What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about murder, Simon. I don't know what Merriweather's game is, but he killed Kling and Harrington. I didn't know it before to-night, but now I'm sure. He boasted about it. He tried to murder us with poison gas in that secret attic of his. Right now, he has Cardona and Molly Harrington prisoners in the powder mill.

"Are you sure?" Todd gasped.

"How many keys are there to that place inside the moat?" Vincent asked, quietly.

"Two," Todd admitted in a low voice. "Mine and Merriweather's."

"Quick!" Vincent cried to Ray Porter. "We've got to get to that tower before Merriweather climbs it and tampers with the searchlight!"

Todd said grimly: "Wait! You're not moving a step until I find out the truth. If you're telling the truth, why haven't you telephoned for the police, Stand still, all of you, or I'll shoot!"

NO sound came from the place where The Shadow had silently retreated. Vincent waited for a sharp command, the glint of a gun; but nothing happened. He and the Porters were backed toward the open door of Merriweather's cottage under the menace of the chemical master's gun.

Harry's brain whirled with a fierce importance. The Shadow had already vanished, after a hasty whisper in the ear of his agent. That whisper was a stern command to get to the tower and capture the searchlight.

Vincent divined that The Shadow was hurrying to enter that sinister shack inside the dark moat of water. On his speed and Vincent's obedience to orders,

rested the lives of Cardona and the girl. And at this very moment, Vincent and the Porters were being forced into Merriweather's house, so that a misguided Todd could telephone the police while the precious minutes passed and three lives hung in the balance.

Vincent stiffened himself. Without warning, he sprang sidewise. A bullet from the watchful Todd's gun made a sharp report. Harry threw himself in a desperate dive at the manufacturer's knees and sent him sprawling. The gun flew from Todd's hand.

The dark figure of Ray Porter joined the attack. So did his father. For an instant, there was a whirling mass of arms and legs on the dark earth. When Vincent staggered to his feet, he found he was clutching the throat of the overeager Ray.

The frightened Todd was gone. He had taken advantage of the darkness to slip away. A torn fragment of his coat in Ray's clenched fingers was all that remained of the fugitive.

Vincent stilled the babble of the excited Porters. They were still unaware of the extent of the peril to which the vanished Shadow was now deliberately exposing himself. Vincent explained in a terse sentence or two what the situation was.

"Forget Todd!" he gasped. "Merriweather is the man we want. We've got to cut him off before he reaches the searchlight and explodes the shack inside the moat!"

He turned and ran through the darkness, followed by his two panting companions. Todd's hysterical gun attack had delayed Vincent five precious minutes. As he ran, he watched the slow sweep of the light that kept so monotonously circling the area of the grounds. While that light moved in its regular orbit, there was no danger to The Shadow or the victims he was racing to save. But the moment it stopped -

It stopped when Vincent was not more than twenty feet from the foot of the steel ladder that led aloft to the top of the tower. It moved erratically across the grounds in a straight line toward the water of the distant moat.

Harry covered the last few feet to the bottom of the ladder like a panting madman. He flung himself to the steel rungs and began to climb. He had barely ascended half a dozen metal rungs when he heard a faint yell of rage above him.

A leaning figure at the top of the tower fired downward at the climbing agent of The Shadow. The bullet pierced Harry's extended arm and dropped him in a huddle to the ground.

Ray Porter caught the fallen man and dragged him under the shadow of the tower, where no shots could reach. Vincent tried weakly to rise, to throw off his well-meant savior.

"Climb!" he gasped. "You've got to stop him! Don't give Merriweather a chance to move that light. Even if he kills all of us, we've got to keep him firing at us!"

Ray nodded. He saw the point instantly. He sprang into the open and started upward. His father lifted a gun muzzle in an effort to cover Ray's desperate ascent.

Again the top of the tower roared with sound. Ray clung to the ladder where he was, made no effort to climb higher. He didn't want to commit suicide by exposing himself to the aim of the man on the top. He was working grimly to keep the attention of the man above occupied, so that he couldn't touch the swivel mechanism of the searchlight whose beam now rested almost at the edge

of
the moat like a motionless white circle of death.

Thomas Porter's weapon roared upward for the same desperate reason. He knew he had no chance to hit the vague shape high up under the stars, but he had to protect his son.

A cry from the old man showed that he was hit. The gun dropped from his hands. But Vincent, crawling out from under the tower, seized it and fired another slug upward. From his precarious hold on the slippery iron rungs of the ladder, Ray, too, sent scarlet flashes spitting toward the tower top.

Suddenly, his gun clicked. It was empty.

He heard a hoarse laugh high over his head. Vincent turned with a groan. His heart froze, as he saw the oval of the searchlight move swiftly across the moat, approach the door above which was a sensitive electric mechanism designed

to react with the quick perception of a human eye.

Suddenly, there was a terrific concussion that rocked the ground like an earthquake. From the centre of the distant moat a vast plume of scarlet rose to the sky. The roar was deafening.

Harry shouted fiercely at his companions, and pointed. His shout went unheard in the tumult, but the Porters saw his gesture and hobbled after him. Ray supported his wounded father.

Vincent took the lead. Unmindful of the blood that dripped from his shattered wrist, he ran toward the flame-filled crater ahead, hopeless fear for The Shadow clutching at his heart.

CHAPTER XX

EYE OF DOOM

WHEN The Shadow vanished like a wraith from the sight of Harry Vincent and the Porters, he had moved with infinite caution. Things not obvious to Vincent were clearly known to The Shadow. He knew he faced a double danger. Nevertheless, he advanced carefully through the darkness to the scarlet-painted powder mill.

The Shadow approached the moat from the side opposite the steel searchlight tower. He had to get inside that explosive-filled trap without betraying his presence to a killer atop the tower. The beam would leap to the door at the first sign of a man attempting to enter.

The Shadow lowered his black-clad body into the cold waters of the moat. He made no sound whatever. The shack itself shielded his progress from the tower.

Yet, even had there been no concealment, The Shadow's careful swimming would have gone unnoticed. A few swirling bubbles, a faint frothing on the dark surface of the moat - and The Shadow had reached the shore of the tiny man-made island.

He lifted himself from the water and glided like a dripping black patch of darkness to the protection of the wall of the shack. The shadowy wall seemed to reach out and take him into its embrace. Around the corner he crept, and straight to the door.

His gloved hands moved toward the lock of the door. There was a shining

steel implement in his grasp, a pick, a device that had opened the locks of barriers far stronger than the one that now confronted him. It was merely a test of his skill and patience. In less than sixty seconds, the lock tumblers fell into place.

The black robe of The Shadow filled the narrow space of the door jamb for a swift heart-thudding instant. Now he was inside, water dripping from his soaked limbs.

A tiny beam of light from a pocket torch, no thicker than a lead pencil, cut the darkness of the windowless powder shack. It played for a second on a light switch and instantly vanished. A click sounded as the switch was pressed.

The Shadow, aware that no light within could be detected from the outside, had turned on the electric bulb in the ceiling in order to facilitate his search for Joe Cardona and Molly.

A FLAT rug in the centre of the floor attracted The Shadow's keen gaze. He

knew there was something queer about that rug, before his cautious fingers examined it. It did not lie exactly as flat as it should, were it resting innocently on the floor. It sagged slightly. Moreover, there were faint, but definitely marked, ridges in the material.

The Shadow saw why, when he bent and lifted the rug. Under it was a square, yawning hole bridged over with a crisscross of light sticks of wood. The crisscross was to support the rug and give it a fake appearance of solidity. Had The Shadow stepped with his full weight on that deceptive covering, the frail sticks would have snapped and sent him hurtling headlong below through the opening.

Lying flat on the floor, he sent the beam of his torch flicking downward into the silent darkness. He satisfied himself instantly that Joe Cardona and the girl had been down there fairly recently, but were now gone.

On the dusty floor beyond the trap opening were the unmistakable marks where two bodies had been dragged across the cellar pavement. A ladder, lying on its side, showed how the man who had trapped the pair had removed the bodies.

But directly under his gaze, like an ugly relic from a medieval torture chamber, was the thing that made The Shadow's thin lips tighten. He saw, now, why the agile Cardona had put up no fight when he had plunged headlong down with the treacherous rug that had crumpled under his feet.

A steel box of gridded metal, large enough to hold a man, was directly under the taut eyes of The Shadow. He could see the cruel spiked circlet of metal that must have gripped Cardona's body like a rat in a trap the instant the impact of his falling body released the mechanism.

If the headlong fall hadn't stunned the startled detective, the bone-crushing embrace of that spiked collar of steel would have stifled any cry he might have uttered before losing consciousness.

There was a dull, reddish stain on the metal. The Shadow knew it was not rust, but dried blood. With a quick motion, he regained his feet, staring about

the room above that ugly cellar. He suspected that none of the honest workmen who had occasion to enter this powder shack under the watchful eyes of Merriweather, had any knowledge that there was a cellar below.

The opened trapdoor and the cunningly spread rug were for investigating intruders like Cardona and the girl - and The Shadow.

LIKE Cardona before him, The Shadow observed with narrowed eyes the tiers

of piled boxes and barrels that extended upward along the four walls to the ceiling. Those barrels contained gelatins, powders, sensitive chemical compounds, which, if ignited by a chance spark, would convert the spot on which

he stood into a spouting volcano of roaring flame.

Delivered in minute quantities by the overhead cable to the various mixing rooms, they were harmless when combined with other reagents in the mixing vats;

but here, they were like the hushed breath of destruction.

The burning eyes of The Shadow observed with quick accuracy a peculiar-looking tarpaulin that covered a barrel in a corner of the room. The barrel had been moved recently. The mark in the dust where it had been shoved forward was plainly visible. And there was a slight hump underneath the surface

of the spread tarpaulin, that looked very much like the pressure exerted by the

head of a human being stuffed upright into the barrel.

A clutch of The Shadow's hand sent the tarpaulin flying. He saw the helpless body of Molly Harrington, stuffed like a waxen dummy in the barrel. Her eyes were closed. There was a deathly pallor on her cheeks. Blood was caked

on a cheek bone, where some one had struck her a vicious blow.

But she was not dead. The Shadow listened to the even beat of her heart and realized that the girl was merely unconscious.

He lifted her slim form gently from concealment and laid her on the dusty floor. He knew he had no time to lose. Nor for an instant had he forgotten the desperate nature of the place into which he had so calmly penetrated. But he continued his search to find where Cardona was hidden.

Even at the risk of sacrificing the girl's life along with his, The Shadow

had no intention of abandoning Joe Cardona to imminent destruction.

Cool deductive reasoning made his search for the New York detective a swift and simple affair. The tarpaulin that had covered Molly Harrington's body

was the only one visible in the shack. The rest of the boxes, casks and metal drums were sealed and stamped with the names of the manufacturers. None of them

were opened.

Therefore, the tarpaulin had been brought in from the outside for the direct purpose of concealment. There must be another empty barrel somewhere, covered, like the one in which The Shadow had found Molly, with another tarpaulin.

He found it, after a quick search. It was shoved under the slant of the rubber-covered staircase. The upright face of Joe Cardona stared at The Shadow out of glazed, bloodshot eyes.

JOE was conscious and in pain, but he hadn't groaned because his jaws were plugged with a gag.

The effects of his torture in the cellar below had left him almost paralyzed. The gag in his throat and the tight cocoon of cords that had been wrapped so tightly about his limbs made him look like a bloodstained mummy.

He fell heavily, as The Shadow lifted him from the barrel. Even when the gag was withdrawn and the cords slashed away, Joe Cardona was barely able to talk or to move. He tried to gasp out a word or two. The Shadow shook his head and laid a warning hand on Joe's bleeding lips.

He knew why both victims had been brought upstairs. The killer had reasoned correctly that the full force of the explosion would be upward and

outward, not down. With grim efficiency, he had left Cardona and the girl in a spot where they would be blown to atoms, leaving no trace whatever to explain their strange disappearance.

A barely audible sound made itself apparent to the sharp ears of The Shadow. He had heard the sound of a splash from the moat outside.

Instantly, he carried Joe Cardona to the foot of the stairs that led aloft to the second story. He laid him alongside Molly Harrington. His gloved hand put out the light in the ceiling. The door of the powder shack opened a bare crack under the cautious pressure of The Shadow's hand.

He was just in time to see a head crossing the surface of the moat. The pale face that glared from the frothing water was the face of Merriweather.

The Shadow closed the door and locked it. He had barely accomplished his purpose and wedged the back of a chair under the knob on the inside, when the tripping figure of the plant superintendent came racing toward the door.

Merriweather heard the noise made by the back of the chair as it was forced into position on the inside. He mistook the significance of the sound. Utterly unaware that The Shadow was inside the building, he assumed that the noise had been made by Joe Cardona trying to escape from his prison.

He flung himself at the lock. From the distant searchlight tower came the sudden echo of pistol fire. For a second, Merriweather hesitated, his ugly eyes

narrowed. He didn't understand the shooting, but he knew that it screened his activity and gave him the chance he wanted to get inside unobserved.

The lock opened easily enough under the turn of his key. It was the chair, wedged under the inside knob, that was holding him impotently back.

He heaved and shoved with all his strength. Bit by bit, the chair was forced away. The sound of running feet inside gave added rigor to his efforts to break in.

With a crunch of rending wood, the chair gave way. Merriweather's fist sent the door crashing open. As he sprang inside, the blinding white oval of the searchlight crossed the moat and lifted in a quick jerk to the casing of the powder shack's doorway.

It flashed directly into the sensitive mechanism of the tiny photoelectric eye.

CHAPTER XXI

MIRACLE IN MID-AIR

THE SHADOW had foreseen what would happen. He realized the frightful consequences that hinged upon the entrance of Merriweather into the powder shack.

Courage and speed were the twin hopes on which The Shadow's life now depended.

Particularly speed! The Shadow's planned movements were faster than the instinct of an ordinary man. He had barely recognized the pale, bobbing face of

Merriweather cleaving the bubbly surface of the dark moat, before he had noiselessly closed the door of the shack and locked it. With almost the same notion, he swung the chair under the knob on the inner side and wedged it, so that the door would resist for a minute or so the frenzied efforts of the superintendent to burst it inward.

The sound of racing footsteps that Merriweather heard dimly as he turned his key in the lock, was not Cardona but the flying footsteps of The Shadow.

Cardona was swaying upright at the foot of the stairs, dazed, but able to

take care of himself. Weakly, he tried to lift the unconscious body of Molly, but the girl's slight weight was too much for his weakened muscles.

With a sweep of his strong hands, The Shadow scooped Molly into his arms and breathed a quick command.

"Upstairs - for your life!"

He leaped up the rubber-cased treads of the staircase on the heels of Joe.

The top floor was as dark as the maw of an underground cave. No windows of any kind cut the walls of the building. The lack of windows was no hindrance to The Shadow. He was depending, not on windows, but on the roof of the doomed structure.

His pencil-like torch cut a narrow swath of brilliance in the gloom. The ray that darted from his tiny lens focused upward along the rear wall of the chamber toward the ceiling. Instantly, the beam went out, plunging the room again into blackness.

But The Shadow had seen the spindly outline of a vertical ladder and he was approaching it with surefooted speed. Up the cushioned rungs he ran, supporting the dead weight of Molly Harrington with his left arm and shoulder. Cardona followed as fast as he could climb, and the strong arm of The Shadow reached downward and helped him to the roof.

From below came a fierce banging on the door. Merriweather, having turned his key in the lock, had now discovered that the door was wedged on the inside and was immovable. A sturdy chair was all that kept him out.

THE SHADOW, however had now gained the flat roof. The girl lay crumpled where he had gently laid her. Cardona, crouched low, was almost invisible under the black sky. So was The Shadow, whose gaunt form was leaping with purposeful silence toward the stubby mast that controlled the passage of the transportation buckets along the dark thread of overhead cable.

The bucket in which The Shadow hoped to escape the full brunt of the imminent explosion, was at the other end of the cable on the roof of the mixing chamber.

The Shadow jerked a lever and brought that bucket winging swiftly back through the air. Its motion was unobserved. The searchlight, no longer circling rhythmically around the sprawling area of the grounds, did not bathe the whizzing bucket in revealing brilliance, as it slid soundlessly to the roof of the powder shack.

A faint click of the braking mechanism was the only betraying sound. The sound went unheard by Merriweather, who was straining fiercely below in his mad efforts to force inward the refractory door.

But the door was already creaking and wrenching. In a moment or more, it would burst inward.

Into the rubber-sheathed bucket that was used to transport dangerous chemical gelatin by air, leaped the figure of Joe Cardona. The limp body of Molly was passed to him by The Shadow. So fast did The Shadow move that he was like a formless blur.

His hand released the cable mechanism. The bucket began to spring away from the mooring mast, increasing its speed as it went. The hard rubber wheels on the overhead cable made no sound except a faint whirring.

As it skimmed away, suspended between the dark earth and the darker sky, The Shadow's legs appeared over the rear edge of the flying bucket. He was sitting precariously on the overbalanced edge, the body of Molly lying slack in

his flexed arms. Cardona hung his weight over the opposite edge, his feet dangling.

The Shadow's eyes were like burning stars. They were fixed grimly behind him on the door of the powder shack and the bright oval of the searchlight that bathed the outside edge of the moat.

He saw the door of the shack burst open under the furious attack of Merriweather. The superintendent vanished inside. For an instant the searchlight quivered, then it moved swiftly forward and its brilliance jerked upward to the photoelectric eye in the casing of the doorway.

BUT The Shadow had not waited for that final movement of the death ray. He hissed warningly to Cardona, and the two men flung themselves outward from the speeding bucket.

The Shadow's legs straightened as he fell. Molly was still hanging limply in his arms, but The Shadow, by a supreme effort of muscles that were as hard as tempered steel, stiffened his body into a vertical fall.

He struck the ground feet-first. The impact wrenched his ankles with stabbing pain and threw him sidewise on his face. Molly was catapulted from his grasp. The Shadow dived toward her like a dark arrow. Cardona, too, had flung himself flat.

As he fell headforemost, the earth seemed to writhe and leap up to meet him. A roar like the crack of doom thundered to the sky. There was a hot sheet of flame from the spot where the powder shack had stood. Burning gas from the explosion spread out in long blazing streamers, like the tail of an enormous comet. The ground boomed in the eardrums of The Shadow with a force that almost destroyed his hearing.

But he was flat on the ground, his body lying athwart the unconscious form of Molly Harrington. The debris from the hellish blast that had so suddenly filled the night with ruddy brilliance, spewed over his flattened head. Chunks of blasted metal screamed with the harsh buzz of shrapnel. They were shrapnel

ugly, irregular chunks of steel that could rip a man into bloody tatters.

A falling chunk of debris pitted the earth near The Shadow's head with a deep, ugly crater. Something smaller struck his extended body and he felt the warm flow of his blood. But he had saved Molly and Cardona, too.

The Shadow sprang to his feet, reeling from the pain of his lacerated ribs. He shook his gaunt, hawk-nosed face to clear his aching brain. His ears still buzzed with the echo of that stupendous explosion.

Suddenly, he heard a sharper sound that pierced through the pulsating roar in his ears. He recognized that sound with a grim tightening of his lips. The thin shouting of men! It came from the direction of the steel searchlight tower!

CARDONA, swaying weakly on his feet, heard a harsh laugh from his companion like the thin call of a trumpet. A pistol was thrust into his hand. The two waited, with the body of the girl on the ground behind them.

Molly was coming out of her swoon. She was moaning faintly.

The earth was like the pitted craters of a battlefield. Past the yawning holes came the figure of a man, running with erratic, zigzag terror. He was stumbling, falling, rushing toward Cardona and The Shadow, uttering shrill, babbling sounds.

Cardona's gun lifted, but The Shadow's gloved hand shoved the barrel

aside

with a brusque, wordless gesture.

As the onrushing stranger saw the motionless figure blocking his path, he halted dazedly, his wide eyes peering.

Cardona uttered a quick exclamation of surprise and horror. "Good Heavens, it's Simon Todd - and he's gone stark mad!"

Todd's face was masklike with fear. Uncouth sounds bubbled from his lips. Suddenly, a look of awed wonder drove the fixed vacancy from his eyes and he ran straight toward the New York detective with a gasp of shrill, unbelieving joy.

"Cardona!" he gasped. "Thank God, you've come! I tried to telephone the police. The phone wires in my office have been cut. Save me! Don't let them -"

For the first time, Todd seemed to realize that there were other figures staring at him besides Cardona. He shrank back from The Shadow, from the pale countenance of Molly Harrington, who was now swaying on trembling feet, supported by the left arm of The Shadow.

"I - I thought you were dead," Todd whispered.

The Shadow's lips curved in a mirthless smile. He said nothing.

"Merriweather tried twice to kill him," Cardona growled. "But he didn't succeed. Maybe you'll believe now, what kind of a devil that superintendent of yours was!"

"Was?" Todd gasped. "Is he - dead?"

"I'll say!" Cardona snapped. "He was blown -"

THE rush of feet through the darkness cut short the detective's curt words. The shapes of three men were racing forward through the gloom. Foremost of the trio was Harry Vincent. Behind him, clinging weakly to each other, were Ray Porter and his wounded father.

Vincent tried to shout, but his voice made only a hoarse croaking in his panting throat. He stared unbelievably at The Shadow, as though he had seen him miraculously spewed upward from a grave.

"You're not - killed?"

Vincent's left wrist was dripping blood from a bullet wound that had shattered the bone. There was blood, too, on the drooping shoulder of Thomas Porter. He leaned heavily against his son Ray, breathing in thin gasps. The swift tides of events had dazed the old man.

But Ray Porter was still grimly alert. "Merriweather?" he snarled at The Shadow.

"Dead."

"He went sky-high in the explosion of the powder mill," Cardona said, dryly. "Tried to kill us and killed himself."

"But -"

Todd's terrified whisper interrupted Ray. He made a trembling, submissive gesture toward the black-clad figure of The Shadow and Cardona.

"You were right and I was wrong," he admitted, brokenly. "I trusted Merriweather. Cardona warned me, but I - I couldn't believe that Merriweather was anything but a loyal -"

Ray Porter, who had been staring wordlessly as though wrestling with a puzzling idea, again found his harsh voice.

"You say Merriweather was blown up inside the powder shack?" he asked Cardona.

"Correct."

"But - but who was up on that searchlight tower?"

"What do you mean?"

"We followed Merriweather to the tower. It was he who kept us from climbing, by wounding Vincent and my father. It was he who moved the light to the photoelectric eye in the door of the powder mill."

The Shadow shook his head. "No," he said.

"I don't understand," Todd whispered. "I thought Merriweather was the cunning killer behind all this - horror."

Again, the voice of The Shadow interrupted with calm clarity. "Merriweather died by his own folly. But he didn't blow himself up. He was murdered."

"Murdered?" Todd asked. "You mean he was innocent?"

"Guilty, not innocent. The foolish tool of a clever criminal."

"But who -"

"You!" The Shadow's voice said crisply. "Simon Todd!"

THE chemical master shrank back. Suddenly, the dull look wiped from his face like magic as The Shadow closed in on him, cutting off his escape. Into his eyes came a bright flame of fury. His hand whipped to his pocket. A gun flashed into view. Squalling an oath of rage, Todd tried to whip the barrel upward and fire at The Shadow.

But The Shadow had caught that moving hand. Gloved fingers forced hand and forearm behind the chemical master's back. The gun exploded harmlessly toward the dark sky. An instant later, it had been wrenched loose and tossed to the ground.

Ray Porter pinioned the other thrashing arm and Cardona leaned inward with a deft, practiced gesture. A pair of steel handcuffs snapped tightly around the wrists of Simon Todd.

The chemical master fought like a madman, trying to smash out the brains of his captors with his fettered fists. But he was subdued after a brief, desperate struggle. His breath came in harsh gasps.

"You've got no proof!" he screamed, fiercely. "You'll pay for this! You can't saddle me with Merriweather's guilt! Call the police! I demand that you call the police!"

The laugh of The Shadow froze the words in Todd's throat. There was assurance in that laugh, a sound of absolute satisfaction.

His finger lifted and pointed toward the direction of the unseen gate of the electrified wall.

"Come!" he ordered.

Far off in the darkness could be heard the shrill wail of a police siren. The roar of the explosion had been heard in Millcote. In a few minutes, police cars would be racing to the scene. The sound seemed to add wings to the swift striding feet of The Shadow.

He reached the sentry shack inside the gate and disappeared for an instant. His gloved hand pulled the switch that fed the pulsing electric current to the grim walls. The gate swung open under his quick jerk. Behind him came the girl and Thomas Porter. Ray and Cardona hustled the fettered Todd along.

The Shadow's small coupe was still at the dark curb where he had left it parked. The hood that covered the motor was unusually long for so small a car. But Harry Vincent knew that under that hood was a racing engine that could outdistance any ordinary pursuer.

The hand of The Shadow reached inside the car and withdrew a bulky briefcase from a side pocket of the automobile. He handed it to Cardona.

"Complete proof for conviction," his clipped voice said.

He sprang behind the wheel of the car. A nod brought Harry Vincent to the seat beside him. Down the dark street came the white boring brilliance of police headlights.

BUT The Shadow and Vincent were gone. Like a dark blot, the car without

lights had jerked away from the curb and had sped off into concealing darkness.

The Shadow had accomplished his purpose. He had handed over to the law a master criminal and the proof to convict him. He had suspected that Todd, not Merriweather, was the real brains behind the murder plot, almost from the moment he had first entered the plant. He had allowed the bloody conspiracy to work itself out under his watchful eyes. Now, his work finished, he roared off through the night to protect his anonymous identity.

He was not followed. Cardona, bathed in the headlights of a police car, sprang forward and halted the pursuit. He held his detective shield high in his open palm. In his eyes shone a grim exultation.

But Simon Todd, fettered and helpless, had closed his eyes. He knew his cunning masquerade was finished. All the power and arrogance had drained out of him. Behind closed eyelids he saw clearly the grim spectre of the electric chair.

He whimpered.

CHAPTER XXII

MR. CRANSTON SMILES

"THIS," said Joe Cardona, in a vibrant voice, "is the document that explains the heart of the mystery. Without this, Reed Harrington would still be alive. So would Arnold Kling. There would have been no murderous assault on the Porters. Nor would Molly Harrington have been so innocently drawn into the case."

A strong white light threw Cardona's tired face into vivid brilliance. He was seated at a desk in the Millcote police station. Beside him was the chief of police. Thomas Porter and his son, Ray, sat on a couch alongside the wall, listening intently. The younger Porter's arm supported Molly, nor did she seem to find the touch disagreeable.

"You say there were two sets of criminals involved in this case?" the chief of police asked Cardona, quietly.

"Yes. But, first, I want you to look at this agreement that was taken from

the safe of Simon Todd. Not from the safe in his office which was vainly attacked by Blink Dorgan. This document came from Todd's strong box in his mansion out in the hills. It was found by - by the man who solved this case."

He ignored the chief's eager question. From the desk in front of him, piled high with papers strewn alongside an opened briefcase, he selected a typewritten sheet of legal cap and handed it to the police official.

The latter read it with absorbed interest. It was a cleverly worded agreement drawn up by Simon Todd, and signed by himself and his former partners

in the chemical corporation. It read as follows:

1. At the request of my three associates in the ownership of the Millcote Chemical Corporation, who wish to withdraw from said ownership because of executive differences in policy, the following agreement is signed, witnessed and executed.

2. I, Simon Todd, agree to buy sole ownership of the business; and Reed Harrington, Thomas Porter, and Arnold Kling agree to sell such ownership for the stipulated price of three million dollars.

3. I, Simon Todd, agree to pay annually to each of my former associates the sum of \$100,000 for a term of ten years. At the end of ten years the

ownership of the Millcote Chemical Corporation is to be mine and mine alone.

4. The heirs of Harrington, Porter and Kling are specifically barred from this agreement. In case of the death of one of the above mentioned associates, his share will be divided equally among the other two survivors. In no event shall less than three million dollars be paid by me.

5. This will constitute acceptance of this contract and a receipt for the first annual payment of \$300,000 divided equally among the associates above mentioned.

The document was signed by four names: Reed Harrington, Arnold Kling, Thomas Porter and Simon Todd. Below was the name of the witness, Claude Merriweather.

The chief of police uttered a quick exclamation. "In other words, Todd had obligated himself to the extent of three million dollars and would not have complete control of the company for at least ten years."

"That is correct," Cardona assented.

JOE explained further. Todd had no intention of discharging his debt. His aim was to seize control of the valuable corporation by killing his associates.

That was why he had excluded their heirs from the contract of sale, and had worded it in such a way that, apparently, he had nothing to gain from a sudden death among the doomed men.

If Todd still had to pay the identical sum to the survivors, there was no motive to connect him with the murder. On the contrary. It would immediately seem evident to the police that one of the beneficiaries to the agreement had resorted to murder to increase his own share.

Todd counted on this to help his plans and he had been correct. When Harrington had died from a poisoned cigar, the Porters, knowing the term of the agreement, immediately suspected Kling. Kling, on the other hand, was certain that the Porters had killed Harrington to gain his share of the money. In reality, the two killings were engineered by Merriweather, under the orders of the cunning Todd.

None of the remaining partners dared to show his agreement with Todd to the police, for fear of implicating themselves as suspects. So they suppressed the fact that there was such an agreement - which was exactly that the wily Todd wanted.

"The next step," Cardona explained, "was for Todd to get hold of those contracts himself. Merriweather managed to steal Kling's copy and he also got hold of Porter's - but he failed to get Harrington's. His scheme was frustrated, because I happened to be in Harrington's apartment when he fell dead. Which brings me to the other set of criminals in this case, and explains the activity of Blink Dorgan and his pal, Andy."

There was a sigh of excitement from the men in the tiny police station. Cardona took another document from the papers in front of him.

"This is the lure that brought Blink Dorgan into the case. It's the master formula for the new war gas that was being manufactured under government contract at the Millcote plant. The nation that owns this secret will be impregnable in the next war. That country happens to be the United States. But a certain foreign nation discovered the existence of this secret and its agents hired Dorgan and Andy to steal the formula for them."

CARDONA'S voice continued evenly. Dorgan had searched the safe in the chemical plant and was convinced that the formula was not there, but in the

possession of one of the former partners. That was why he made his raid at Harrington's apartment and stole the envelope from Molly, who had already managed to get it from the safe herself.

"Did you know what was in that envelope you stole, Molly?" Cardona asked the white-faced girl, gently.

"No. My uncle didn't tell me what he was hiding. He said that it was terribly important, told me to get hold of it if anything happened to him. I know, now, that he meant me to turn it over to the police; but, at the time, I thought uncle was mixed up in some scandal and I wanted to protect his good name. I intended to read it, destroy it if necessary. If not, to show it to the police."

"It was merely your uncle's copy of Todd's clever agreement," Cardona said. "You thought it was blackmail. Dorgan thought it was the gas formula. Only Todd knew the truth."

Joe's quiet voice ripped away the veil that had covered the grim events of the last few days and nights. Merriweather had killed Harrington by poisoning one of his cigars. He also killed Kling by electrocuting him from the steeple of the church opposite the doomed man's home in Tuckahoe.

Todd remained always in the background, directing the evil activity of his lieutenant. It was easy for Todd to manipulate Merriweather, for the superintendent had been promised a half share in the chemical corporation as his reward. He was a man insane for power and wealth, and Todd used him as a willing tool.

In the end, Todd planned to murder Merriweather and remove the last clue to his own duplicity. The fact that he succeeded was proof how narrowly Todd had missed complete success. His whole scheme was ruined because of the presence of an opponent stronger than he, infinitely shrewd in judging criminals and their motives.

"You've mentioned this mysterious helper of the law before," the chief of police said, curtly. "Who is he? Where is he now?"

"Those are questions I can't answer," Cardona replied. "His real name and his identity are unknown to me. Perhaps you heard of him. He calls himself The Shadow."

There was a quick stir of interest among the policemen who thronged the back of the tiny room. Joe Cardona halted further questions by resuming his explanation of how Todd had been trapped.

"AFTER Merriweather had failed to kill the Porters in his gas chamber," Cardona said, "he rushed from his cottage and disappeared. It was at this moment that Simon Todd appeared. He had met Merriweather rushing away and he knew now how badly things had gone wrong. He decided on a bold stroke to fool The Shadow and to seal the doom of his superintendent. He rushed up with his nose bleeding and a lying tale about the flight of Merriweather."

Ray Porter's eyes widened. His father nodded grimly as he listened. Todd had not been assaulted by Merriweather. Instead, he had heard from the lips of his confederate that The Shadow was again on the scene and the Porters free. He

knew that Cardona and Molly were still prisoners in the powder shack, where they had been lured by the superintendent, under Todd's own orders. Here was a chance to get rid of them - and Merriweather, too! For, in that instant of terror, Todd

realized that his own safety depended on the death of his bungling helper.

He told Merriweather that the gas formula was hidden in the powder shack, gave him lying directions how to find it. Then he struck himself savagely

until

his face was streaming blood, and rushed to where The Shadow and his companions

waited just outside the cottage of Merriweather.

He lied and said Merriweather had rushed off toward the searchlight tower.

He delayed the pursuit of Merriweather by drawing a gun and pretending to doubt

the honesty of the Porters. In the resultant scuffle he vanished again, apparently terrified out of his wits.

But Todd was not frightened. He was cool with the cunning of despair. He himself ran with the speed of an antelope to the searchlight tower. He was at the top when the Porters arrived at the foot of the steel ladder. It was Todd's

bullets that wounded them.

Were it not for The Shadow, the trick would never have been discovered. The explosion that sent the powder mill flaming aloft like a volcano would have

destroyed the bodies of Cardona, of Molly and Merriweather.

Todd meant to descend unseen from the tower, join the dazed Porters and phone for the police. The whole blame would have been placed on Merriweather, and the police would have scoured the surrounding countryside for a man who had

been blown to atoms.

But The Shadow had raced to the powder mill and saved Molly and Cardona. He, alone, knew that Merriweather was not on the searchlight tower, but in the death trap. Only one possible man could have operated the light. That man was Todd. And in the briefcase in The Shadow's car was documentary proof, taken by The Shadow from Todd's own mansion.

Cardona's voice faltered. Again he seemed very tired. Some one handed him a glass of water and he gulped it greedily.

In the tiny police station, men sighed noisily. This was the biggest murder case that had ever come to Millcote. The chief seemed dazed by the magnitude of it. And the culprit and the solution had been handed to him by a famous guardian of the law - a super being who lived like a wraith in the darkness of the night, without identity or name.

The chief drew a deep breath. "I wish I could meet this man who calls himself The Shadow," he said, huskily. "I'd like to shake his hand and thank him in the name of the law."

"That," said Cardona, smiling wanly, "is something easier said than done. I've had his help on dozens of cases. I've never been able to find out his identity. He remains anonymous, by his own wishes. But whoever he is, I say he's the cleverest and most daring detective in America!"

IN the Cobalt Club, Mr. Lamont Cranston sat idly in a deep leather chair, staring at the quiet comings and goings of the wealthy members. Among these prominent men, Cranston was counted as one of the wealthiest.

He smiled, as a man stopped by his chair with a nod of greeting.

"How are you, Cranston? Haven't seen you for the last week or so. Been away?"

Cranston nodded.

The member pointed to the newspaper on the arm of Cranston's comfortable chair. "Been reading about the Todd case, I see. Amazing, isn't it, how that man Cardona trailed the murderer of Harrington and Kling all the way to south Jersey and nailed him with the evidence! I swear, it makes me wish sometimes I were a detective. These chaps get all the excitement, while you and I -"

Cranston smiled. "Just gentlemen of leisure," he murmured.

He picked up his paper and yawned. But behind the spread pages his eyes lost their dreamy good humor. They became keen, grim, with little flecks of

flame in their depths.

The name of The Shadow did not appear among the news stories of the reporters who had rushed by train and airplane to Millcote. The Shadow had accomplished his purpose and vanished unseen, unheralded. Not until some new crime occurred to puzzle and baffle the police would the dread black-clad figure of The Shadow appear.

And that new crime was soon to come. An epidemic of strange, purple death was to hit the city. Detectives picked up clues - and then they disappeared. One after another of the city detectives went that way before the commissioner assigned Joe Cardona to the case - and then Cardona disappeared, even while

The Shadow watched! It is amazing, this "Strange Disappearance of Joe Cardona," for

the master crook calls The Shadow's move at every turn, and holds him stalemated with the life of Joe Cardona as the prize!

The Shadow chuckled gently behind the spread newspaper - the same newspaper that would, shortly, scream forth new crime to embroil The Shadow.

THE END