

HOUSE OF SILENCE
by Maxwell Grant

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Grim and foreboding as death itself, the House of Silence guarded well its impregnable secret. Then from hidden lips of The Shadow came mocking laughter that pierced the stillness, to bring to light the terrible secret that long had remained hidden!

CHAPTER I

HOUSE OF DEATH

THE old house loomed gloomy in the drizzle. Heavy clouds had brought an early dusk; increasing darkness hovered, ready to swallow the squatty mansion that lay beneath its enveloping folds.

An odd house, this one. It formed a conspicuous landmark on the outskirts of Aurora, a small and sleepy Southern city. The house, however, did not differ greatly from other old residences in this vicinity. It was one of those decadent mansions that dated back to the past century.

Two stories high, with an abbreviated third floor rising like a stumpy conning tower from the front portion of the roof. Such was the house itself. Gray walls gave it the appearance of a fortress. Iron shutters made it look as though besieged, for those barriers were closed.

The house was situated on a corner; the grounds about it were girded by a wall of the same gray stone as the house. Though the wall was more than six feet high, it had evidently been regarded insufficient as a barrier; for the bulwark was topped with a squatty, sharp-pointed picket fence. The wall had one gate; this was a heavy door with pickets running across the arch that topped it.

The grounds, though narrow, were deep; and the house stood well back from the front wall, on higher ground. That fact enabled passers to see the shuttered windows of the lower floor. View of the lawn was impossible; but the trunks of magnolia trees were visible, rising above the wall. The whiteness of the magnolia blooms was the one feature that offset the grimness of the squatty house.

Oak trees towered the side street; also from an open lawn on the other side of the fenced-off grounds. Dusk changed these rugged trees into fantastic mammoths, extending their huge, gnarled limbs to encroach upon forbidden preserves. The wall seemed like a stumbling block that staved off the invasion of the oaks.

A fanciful picture, but it was very real to the young man who stood across the front street. He was slender of build, this visitor; his olive-drab raincoat gave his figure sleekness. His face was tanned; his eyes held an eager glisten. There was something reflective in his manner, as he puffed a stubby briar pipe.

DUSK deepened as the young man gazed. At last, the observer turned about and started to stroll away. He paused as he neared the corner across from the old house. There he saw the lights of a small filling station.

A brawny man, clad in a dripping poncho, was staring moodily from the doorway of the two-story shack that had been converted into a service station.

A car rolled in from the front street. The brawny man came out to wait on the customer. The young man with the pipe saw opportunity for conversation. He emptied his briar by tapping it against his heel; then strode into the space that fronted the filling station.

The brawny proprietor was talking to the customer in the car. The automobile had stopped at the nearest gasoline standard, one which was unlighted. The proprietor was motioning the driver farther up the line.

"We've got no Coronet gasoline," he was informing. "That tank's empty. What's that?"

Then, in response to a query from the car, he added:

"Yeah we used to carry Coronet. But they didn't deliver regular. I quit ordering from them. Pure Blue's a good gas... Ten gallons? All right."

The young man with the pipe watched the filling of the gasoline tank. Looking toward the decrepit service station, he saw the name "R. HENGLE" painted on a sign. He decided that the brawny man must be Hengle.

He waited until the car pulled away; then he stepped forward and accosted the husky man before the latter could return to the service station.

"Mr. Hengle?"

The brawny man swung about, stared at his questioner, then snapped:

"How'd you know my name?"

"Saw it on the sign," returned the young man, pocketing his briar pipe.

"I

wanted to ask you a question about the old house across the way."

Hengle looked puzzled.

"How long has it been empty?" queried the young man.

"That house?" returned Hengle, gruffly. "It ain't empty. There's people living in there."

It was the young man's turn to show surprise.

"Been there about five years," added Hengle. "Leastwise, that's what I've heard. I've only owned this station during this past year."

"So people live there," mused the young man. "Who are they?"

"Don't ask me," grunted Hengle. Then, sharply: "But what is it to you, anyway?"

The young man smiled.

"I was born in that house," he remarked, in reminiscent tone. "I lived there, all through boyhood. Then I went away; afterward, the family sold the old place. My name's Hallison. Jack Hallison."

THE young man turned toward Hengle as he spoke. The service station proprietor looked blank.

"I suppose my name means nothing," decided the young man, bitterly. "It's been ten years since our family moved out. Ten years - maybe longer. We used to be well-known in Aurora.

"You know, Mr. Hengle, I've often thought of buying back the old house some day. Particularly with real estate as low as it is. I came into Aurora, this afternoon; left my luggage at the Aurora Hotel and came out this way on the trolley line.

"Just to take a look at the old homestead. I was rather glad when it looked empty. But since there are people living there, I suppose I'd better go in and introduce myself. I'd like to know their name, though."

Hengle delivered a guffaw.

"Not much chance of finding that out," he asserted. "Nor of going in

there, neither. Those folks live to themselves."

Jack Hallison raised his eyebrows, quizzically.

"Some old codger owns the place," added Hengle. "There's an old lady lives there, too; that is, if she ain't dead. Nobody's seen her about the place for the last six months."

"If she were dead," remarked Jack, "there would have been a funeral."

"There was a funeral once, so people tell me. But there was two old ladies living there then. One of 'em died. There's an old servant in the place, besides

the old man and the old lady. Then there's -"

"Others?" queried Jack, as Hengle paused.

"I'm just figgering," returned the brawny man. "The girl - yeah, she was there before I came here. But the young fellow must have showed up later. Yeah.

That's the way it was. Five of 'em now; two old folks, two young ones and the servant. I heard his name from a huckster. It's Beale."

Hengle thumbed toward the gate.

"There's a bell in that wall," he stated "and you could ring it forever without getting any answer. I've seen people try it. They've tried the gate, too. It's always locked."

"But what about the huckster?"

"He went to the back. There's another gate there -"

"Is that gate locked?"

"Not in the daytime, I don't think. Because those people have got to eat. The baker goes in there; the butcher, too. Sometimes the young fellow from the drug store."

"And they meet Beale?"

"At the back door, I reckon. I never bothered much about it, though. If folks wants to live to themselves, let them. That's my motto."

The young man stood staring at the house. Its bulk was almost invisible for darkness was near fulfillment. Hengle stood by moodily. At last, Jack Hallison spoke:

"Good night. Thanks for the information."

HALLISON strode away, leaving Hengle beside the unused gasoline standard. Reaching the street, Jack turned in the direction of the trolley line. He walked fifty yards, crossed over and strolled back toward the old house. When he neared the barred gate, Jack looked across the street.

Hengle was no longer in view. The service station owner had gone back into his shack.

Jack chuckled softly to himself as he passed the gate. He kept on to the corner, turned along the wall and followed it until he came to a little lane in

back. There he found the rear gate.

Jack Hallison lighted a match, cupped the flame in his hands and studied the stout barrier at close range.

Heavy gates, like the picket points above the wall, were innovations that the present owner of the house had introduced. They were warnings to strangers to keep away. Jack Hallison, however, did not regard himself as an entire stranger about these premises.

He used another match to look for the bell beside the gate. He found none.

Jack wondered how delivery men made their arrival known; for raps at this gate could scarcely carry to the house. Perhaps the gate was left unlocked when delivery men were expected.

Jack tried the gate. It gave. Almost mechanically, he stepped into the

grounds and softly closed the gate behind him. His fingers stroked a bolt on the inner side. Probably the servant, Beale, had forgotten to lock the gate. Jack decided that this was a lucky break.

Straight ahead, along a weedy gravel path so soft that it felt like a lawn, then slightly to the right; that would bring Jack to the back door, near the corner of the house.

Jack Hallison had walked this path often in the past. He crossed the rain-soaked space, arrived at the door and felt about for a bell. There was none. About to knock, Jack paused; he felt for the doorknob. Curiosity made him wonder whether this door, like the gate, had been left unlocked.

Slowly, Jack turned the knob. The door creaked inward. Jack felt the dank mustiness of a passage. He recognized this darkened spot. It was an entry that led to the kitchen at the left; to a hallway straight ahead.

Jack found the kitchen door; it was locked. He decided to move forward to the hall. There he would find another door. If unlocked, that barrier would give him access to the front of the house. He could see for himself if there were lights within this ancient mansion; if people actually lived here, as Hengle had declared. Jack had begun to doubt that the house was occupied.

Jack found the door in the darkness. He placed his hand upon the knob; this door, like the one to the kitchen, was locked. As Jack still tried it cautiously, he heard a creak behind him. Then a dull slam. It was the back door, that he had left open.

SUDDEN doubt gripped Jack Hallison. The young man groped back to the door through which he had entered. He seized the knob, rattled it; the door was locked. The trick had been done automatically. Jack was in a trap.

Instinct warned him of imminent danger; but he could not guess from what spot it might strike.

Jack groped forward toward the door of the entry. On his left was the kitchen door; on his right, a smooth wall. The door at the inner end might be the best outlet after all. If he rapped there, someone would surely answer. Jack felt that he could explain matters to the satisfaction of any questioner.

Only five paces further to the door he wanted; yet Jack failed to reach the barrier he wanted. He heard a creak ahead of him. He thought it might be someone who had heard him, someone about to open the hallway door. Then, where floor had been, Jack encountered nothingness.

The creak had been the lowering of a trapdoor in the floor. Jack uttered a sharp gasp as his left foot dropped downward. He groped madly as he lost his balance; then sprawled downward, helplessly, into a pit of total blackness.

The drop ended abruptly, upon concrete eight feet below. Jack rolled sideways as he took the jolt. His head thumped a wall. His momentary groan was stifled. From above came a creak that Jack did not hear. It was the trap-door, closing.

Hush was heavy in that space beneath the floor. Even the sound of breathing seemed absent. Unconscious, Jack Hallison lay a prisoner in a house that held the atmosphere of death.

CHAPTER II

THE GREEN FLARE

VIEWED from outside, the old house gave no token of the event that had occurred within its walls. Solemn and sedate, sphinxlike in its silence, no one would have regarded it as a place of menace. Jack Hallison's misfortune was something that no outsider could suspect.

In fact, the very seclusion of the house was lulling; it gave the impression that complete quiet pervaded this entire district. A stranger, passing the house on his way to the center of Aurora, would have supposed that the town must also be in a state of calmness. Such an opinion, however, would have been incorrect.

Less than a mile south of the old house was a lighted district where excitement ruled. There stood the Aurora Hotel, the tallest building in the town; and in its glittering lobby were groups of buzzing talkers. Their theme was crime; in strained tones they discussed dread events that had struck close to Aurora.

Within the past five days, two banks had been robbed less than thirty miles from Aurora. A watchman had been murdered at one bank. Later, a State policeman had been shot down in cold blood while patrolling a lonely highway. An empty cottage had been marked as a hide-out; but criminals had left it.

Aurora, built upon a series of slopes, was in the center of a hilly region. Towns were few; outlaws could find many spots of refuge. Posses would be useless. The only hope of finding the crooks lay with Federal agents. Rumor had it that Feds were about, working undercover. Such was the opinion of the talkers in the hotel lobby.

Though none in Aurora guessed it, there was another factor upon which the law could depend. From the window of a top-story room in the Aurora Hotel, keen eyes were peering out through the darkness that blanketed the street lights. The watcher was The Shadow, master investigator who hunted men of crime. News of the robberies had brought The Shadow to Aurora.

The Shadow was registered under the name of Henry Arnaud; he wore a countenance that bore a masklike, hawkish appearance. Dressed in dark clothes, he was equipped to foray through the thick darkness offered by a drizzly night like this. For the present, however, The Shadow preferred the gloom of the hotel room; and with good reason.

Stationed in a room numbered 1412, The Shadow had opened a window to listen for sounds that might come from 1410. The room next door was also occupied; its window, too, was open. The Shadow knew that a man was watching from the other window. He had seen the fellow earlier, in the lobby.

The man next door was a crook known as "Blink" Torgue. Blunt of profile, he had changed since The Shadow had last seen him; for Blink had somewhere undergone an operation in plastic surgery that had eliminated heavy jowls and raised overhanging eyebrows. But Blink had not lost the habit that had gained him his nickname.

The Shadow had seen the fellow blink his eyes while in the lobby. Blink was farsighted, which gave him unusual ability with a gun at long range; but he screwed his face when he observed objects close at hand.

Learning that Blink was registered in 1410, under the name of Holley, The Shadow had trailed him upstairs and had entered the room next door. The Shadow had divined that Blink was waiting for something. The Shadow was also on the lookout for whatever might occur.

SOMETHING flickered from the blanketed darkness: a momentary dab of white light. Then, a vivid splash from gloom, came a rising blaze like that of a torch. It was a flare, its color a brilliant green. It wavered like a will-o'-the-wisp. Suddenly, darkness swallowed it.

The light was a signal to Blink Torgue. Its color probably bore significance. A green light; its direction was definite to The Shadow, but its distance something that could not be calculated through rainy darkness. The Shadow could class it only as a signal from a hillside.

The task was to watch Blink Torgue. Stepping to a ledge outside the

window. The Shadow followed a slippery parapet. Slowly, he reached the opened window of 1410; listened, but heard nothing. Entering, The Shadow used a flashlight.

Blink Torgue was gone.

The crook had departed with his luggage, the moment that he had spied the green flare. Further proof that Blink Torgue, ex-racketeer from Manhattan, had been on the lookout for the signal. The Shadow knew that Blink could not have traveled far. The Shadow's course was to follow.

He went out by the door of 1410, rang for an elevator and descended to the lobby. Blink was not there. The Shadow walked to the street.

A man in a waiting coupe saw the face of Henry Arnaud and gave a hand motion. The Shadow entered the coupe. The clean-cut driver was one of his agents, a man named Harry Vincent. The Shadow had stationed him outside to be on the watch for Blink Torgue.

Pointing to a car that had moved from the curb ahead, Harry reported:

"Blink hopped into that sedan. A fellow was waiting for him -"

The Shadow commanded with a single word:

"Follow!"

The sedan swung right, whirling southward, as if its driver was glad to be rid of the city traffic. Harry was half a block behind; he duplicated the maneuver when they reached the corner. The sedan had stretched its advantage to a block. It was swinging left.

The thin suburbs of Aurora offered no delaying traffic. Two cars were roaring forth into the night.

The sedan had gained more distance. Its headlights were bobbing above the uneven surface of an old paved road. It was likely that Blink and his driver realized that they were being followed.

HARRY VINCENT drove the accelerator to the floor board. Taking a slight gradient, the coupe kept pace with the fleeing sedan. Harry darted a quick glance to his right. He saw The Shadow's hand, gripping a .45 automatic. The Shadow had thrust the weapon through the opened window.

Both cars were making seventy. The jouncing was terrific, but Harry handled the wheel grimly. If he could carve a few dozen yards from the intervening space, The Shadow would have opportunity. Shots from that automatic

could find the sedan's rear tires, despite the difficulty of firing from the speeding, jolting coupe.

The sedan whizzed past a slight turn in the road; for the moment, its taillight was lost. Then the glow came into view again, gaining. Blink's driver

knew the tricks of this road and was holding his advantage over Harry.

Another turn; this time, Harry, sped for it. The coupe shrieked as it hit the curve, but Harry managed the twist with precision and the roadworthy car responded. They held to the highway.

One momentary flash of the red taillight; then the sight was gone. The sedan had turned into a side road, nearly one hundred yards ahead. Harry was ready when he neared the spot. He wheeled hard to the right, he struck a muddy gravel road that curved off through the woods.

The sedan was out of sight when they struck a straight stretch. Then came a curve, another short piece of straight road, with a wooden bridge near the end of it. Under Harry's impetus, the coupe leaped to cover the brief stretch to the bridge.

Instantly came The Shadow's voice, with a single word:

"Brakes!"

Instinctively, Harry jammed the brake pedal, though he could see no

menace

in the glare of the brilliant headlights. As the coupe lessened its great speed, it jounced heavily toward the little bridge. The steering wheel was twisted suddenly from Harry's grasp. The Shadow had clutched it; his hard turn threw the car into a skid.

Slipping sideways, the coupe made a final turnabout. Rear wheels first, it slid onto the bridge. Brakes were locked; the coupe had not left the road. But from the bridge came a splintering; beams gave, the car dropped downward and tilted crazily.

Harry Vincent stared straight upward. The headlamps were pointing toward a patch of overhanging treetops. The Shadow had halted the coupe upon the brink of the wide creek. The bridge had collapsed beneath the car's weight, but the coupe itself was unwrecked.

THE reason came suddenly to Harry Vincent. The Shadow had seen a ford that crossed a stream, beside this bridge. The headlights had shown him wide tire tracks; he had instantly foreseen danger.

Blink Torgue's sedan had crossed the creek through the shallow ford, leaving a weakened bridge for the pursuing coupe. Crooks must have previously removed a barrier from across the road.

The Shadow's laugh was grim and sibilant. The chase was off; it would be an hour, perhaps, before he and Harry could lever the coupe up to the solid road. But The Shadow had escaped the trap that men of crime had hoped would doom all followers.

Blink Torgue would not guess the identity of the relentless investigator who had gained and lost his trail.

The Shadow would plan new tactics for tomorrow. The crime that had swamped Aurora was due to give The Shadow a greater struggle than he had anticipated.

CHAPTER III

THE SNARE THAT FAILED

ALTHOUGH The Shadow's trail had been shortened, the master sleuth had escaped a doom which Blink Torgue had certainly intended for any pursuer. A crash at high speed would probably have meant death for both The Shadow and Harry Vincent.

By quick work with the wheel, The Shadow had added to Harry's prompt action with the brakes. Half a dozen miles outside of Aurora, they were faced with no greater problem than that of righting the coupe and returning to the city. But on the outskirts of the town itself, was a man whose life still lay at stake.

That man was Jack Hallison. Stunned by his drop through the floor of the old house, Jack had been slow to regain consciousness. His eyes, when they opened, saw nothing; for Jack lay within complete darkness. His head aching furiously, Jack would have closed his eyes again, except for an odd sound that forced his attention.

Thrumm - thrumm -

The muffled beat was a long, sustained tattoo. A noise that came from beyond some wall. Ominous in its regularity, the sound indicated that a mechanism was at work. Jack sensed it as a threat.

The prisoner tried to rise. His left leg gave. The fall had given him a severe knee sprain. Jack thrust his right hand sideways. His fingers touched a metallic surface. The cold sheet carried a vibration, simultaneous with the demonish thrumming.

There was pressure, barely perceptible at first. A proof that a metal wall was moving inward. Jack stretched his left arm. His hand encountered a similar surface. It, too, was pushing inward. A grim gasp escaped the prisoner's lips.

Seated on the stone floor, Jack fumbled for his match box. He found it, lighted a match; the flame was vivid in these limited confines. Raising the match, Jack saw the extent of his prison.

At one end was a stone wall; at the other, a metal door equipped with a small closed wicket. Above, hidden by fringes of gloom, was the trapdoor through which he had dropped. It was out of Jack's reach.

At either side were the metal walls. They captured full attention, for they were the menace of this prison. The dying match flame showed the trembling as the walls vibrated. Jack groaned. Those massive bulkheads were slowly pressing toward him.

How long they had been at work, Jack did not know. He had not been conscious, to examine the extent of his cell when he had first reached this devilish pit. But from the steady pressure that the walls were receiving, Jack could guess that a dozen minutes more would bring death.

Thrumm - thrumm -

Doom seemed sure. Those walls were heavy. They would crush when they came together. They had been designed to squeeze the life from any unfortunate who might lie within their paths. There was only one hope: the door with the wicket.

JACK crawled toward the metal door. He clawed at its surface, fighting in the darkness. Despite the twinges of his crippled knee, he came upright and clung to the bars of the closed wicket. Frantically, he tried to call for aid. He beat wildly at the wicket itself using one hand while the others clutched the bars.

Half a minute of frenzy. The prisoner lost his hold. As his knee caved, Jack sprawled backward. His right shoulder struck one wall; his left hand pressed the other. The walls of doom had come closer!

Thrumm - thrumm -

The monotony of the mechanism was maddening. It was a beat of death; a power against which there was no chance to strive. Jack's lips were counting, gasping the strokes as if to number the last moments of life that remained to him.

Click!

A new sound arrived unexpectedly, amid the thrums of the machine. With it, a shaft of light. The wicket had opened. Staring, Jack saw a face beyond the bars. The features of a young man, frozen in horror.

Jack panted a call for aid. He knew that this arrival could see his plight.

Click!

The wicket went shut. The face was gone. Jack groaned. His brain was whirring. He wondered whether the face had been an illusion; or whether it had been the countenance of some evil inquisitor, come to eye him at the point of death.

Thrumm - thrumm - thrumm -

With final beat, the jamming walls were pressing hard against both of Jack's shoulders. With a writhe, the prisoner rolled sideways, in a futile effort to avoid that crushing squeeze that seemed sure to come. Then, from beyond the walls, came a last token.

Thrumm -

The muffled menace ended. Vibration ceased within the sheets of metal that held their victim like an iron claw. Tense moments of stillness; then another click at the wicket. Looking upward, Jack saw the face again. He heard hands working at a lock.

Jack gasped his thanks. He was saved by this timely rescuer. The streaming light from the wicket showed Jack's face, pale and sweat-streaked. Rusted bolts shrieked. A door swung open, throwing more light into the narrowed cell.

Pressing his hands against the walls, Jack Hallison came almost upright; then faltered and toppled outward into the strong arms of the man who had saved him.

WHEN Jack Hallison fully grasped his new surroundings, he found himself propped against the wall of a large cellar. Beside Jack was the young man who had aided him - a chap whose face was handsome, despite its expression of concern.

Blur ended. Jack studied the well-formed countenance of his rescuer. He saw a young, squarish, light-complexioned visage, with brown eyes that peered from beneath, straight brows. The latter were matched by a trim, pointed mustache above straight lips. Brows and mustache were dark and smooth, like the rescuer's hair.

The man was holding a cup filled with water. He pressed it to Jack's lips.

Jack swallowed eagerly, then let his head sink back against the wall. His rescuer stepped aside and placed the cup upon a broken table.

Jack could see beyond him, to the far wall. There, the door to the cell stood open. Jack could observe the glisten of the metal walls that were motionless within.

Jack's rescuer seated himself in a chair near the wall. He extended a hand in greeting. Jack gripped it, weakly.

"My name," remarked the rescuer, "is Gilbert Eldron. And yours?"

"Jack Hallison," panted Jack. "I - I used to live in this house, years ago. That's why - wh -"

"Why you came here? I understand. But you made a great mistake! What happened? Did you find the back door open?"

Jack nodded. Eldron clenched his fists and stared upward. His expression was one of futile anger, toward someone whom Jack guessed must be on the floor above.

"I thought there was a trap," muttered Eldron. "I tried to question Beale, because he could have told me. But it was no use. Beale is the tool of Peter Langrew!"

He paused; then looked toward Jack.

"Death threatened you," declared Eldron, his tone strained. "I saved you from it. But you are not yet clear. Nor am I. In a sense, we are both helpless.

I have wondered, sometimes, what might happen to me if I tried to leave this house. At last, I have discovered what my fate would be."

He gestured significantly toward the opened cell.

"I came here voluntarily," resumed Eldron, tensely. "I was admitted because I was a distant relative of old Peter Langrew. He welcomed me; then made it plain that I was never to leave without his permission, something that he has not yet granted.

"I felt the menace of this house. I stayed, because of Beth Kindell. I could not leave her in Langrew's power. But I shall tell you more of this later. How I happened to rescue you is the most important matter."

ELDRON paused reflectively. He looked about and pointed out old cellar windows. They were fortified with bulky iron shutters, bolted into place.

"I have free run," stated Eldron, bitterly, "because there is no way out. I have kept on friendly terms with old Langrew. That is why he has allowed me leeway. Tonight, I heard machinery begin to drum.

"I was unwatched. I came down here. I saw the wicket in the bolted door. I managed to open the wicket; then I spied you, Hallison, trapped between those crushing walls. The bolts of the door were rusted. I could not have opened it in time.

"But I saw the wall switch, half hidden by that shelf beside the door."

As

Eldron pointed, Jack noticed the switch. "I chanced it. The machinery stopped. Then I had time to work upon the bolts. It was fortunate that I did not attack them first. Had I done so, I would have been delayed too long to save you."

Jack managed to gasp feeble thanks. His eyes went half shut. Eldron realized Jack's weakened condition. He leaned forward and clapped a hand upon Jack's shoulder.

"You know this house," whispered Eldron. "Of course, you remember the old corner room, past the back stairs?"

"On the second floor," mumbled Jack, "past the back stairs. The corner room; I remember -"

"I can put you there. The room is furnished, but is used only as a storeroom. No one will know that you are there."

Jack nodded feebly.

"I'll help you upstairs," added Eldron. "By the back way, Hallison; brace yourself for the trip. I think that we can dodge Beale. He's the only person who might spy us."

Thanks to Eldron, they made little noise ascending the stairs. They came to a closed door, which Jack knew opened into the kitchen. He mumbled that recollection to Eldron, who whispered for silence. Eldron snapped a light switch. The glow from the cellar was extinguished.

"Steady, old man!"

As he whispered the admonition, Eldron turned the doorknob. He pressed the barrier; he and Jack peered into a kitchen. There they saw a stoop-shouldered man seated at a bare table, reading. The fellow's face was solemn and cadaverous. His head was almost bald; the thin hair that fringed it was mottled black and gray.

Eldron gripped Jack, to hold him on the topmost step. They waited, watching, ready to slide back to cover. Then came a buzzing sound. The cadaverous man arose and stalked through the front door of the kitchen.

"That was Beale," whispered Eldron. "I hoped that Langrew might summon him. The old man calls him about this time every night. This is our chance. Let's go."

JACK was already on the move, thrusting his right foot first. He knew the way to the back stairs that led to the second floor. Warningly, Eldron restrained Jack from too great progress.

They reached the second floor. Jack recognized the old hallway and smiled.

He shifted toward the doorway of the corner room. Then a shrill voice startled him:

"Beale!" The call came from a front room. "Beale!"

"It's Theodora Langrew," whispered Eldron. "Old Peter's half-sister. She's an invalid -"

"Beale!"

Motioning Jack toward the door of the corner room, Eldron responded:

"What is it, Miss Langrew?"

"It's you, hey?" came the shrill voice. "All right, Gilbert. I just wondered who was traipsing about, out there in the hall. Where's Beale?"

"Downstairs, Miss Langrew."

"You'll do, then. Fetch me a pitcher of ice water, please."

"Right away."

Eldron turned about. Jack had made the door of the corner room. Eldron slid over, steadied him while he opened the door and motioned him inside. That done, Eldron whispered:

"I'll pull the door shut. I'll be back after I come up from the kitchen."

FIVE minutes later, Jack Hallison heard Eldron open the door softly. Jack was sprawled upon a comfortable bed, enjoying the darkness despite the pain in his knee and the ache that throbbed through his head. Jack's rescuer closed the barrier softly and turned on a light.

"How's the knee?" queried Eldron. "Any better?"

"It pains badly," returned Jack, "and my head -"

"This will help you," interrupted Eldron. He produced a bottle of pills and a glass of water. "I picked these up when I took the ice water in to Miss Theodora. A couple of these sedative pills are all you need. Will make you sleep."

Jack gobbled the pills and gulped the water. He leaned back on the pillows. Eldron smiled.

"We'll go into a huddle tomorrow," he promised. "I'll have a plan worked out by then, Hallison. Something that will work right for both of us."

Jack's eyes were shut. He heard Eldron move away. The light went out; the door closed. With this new solitude came drowsiness. Pain eased, Jack Hallison felt himself drifting into slumber. His thoughts were comfortable. Jack Hallison had been saved from doom by Gilbert Eldron, a man whom he could call a

friend. The morrow would begin adventure, with an opportunity for Jack to return

the service that Eldron had done him. This was still a house of danger; but, teamed together, Jack and Eldron could offset the menace.

So Jack Hallison believed; but his drowsiness would have left him had he been able to picture the actual future. Coming events within this house would soon require greater aid than any Jack could offer.

Otherwise, doom would strike. This was a house wherein death had long been

plotted. Here, death would claim its toll.

CHAPTER IV

THE LINES MEET

THE next day brought startling news to Aurora. New crime had struck; another bank robbery had been perpetrated in the town of Goshen, not far from Aurora. Again, daring crooks had staged a get away. Their raid had been cleverly managed; not a Fed had been on hand. Nor were the local authorities on the lookout.

The Goshen job indicated that there would be others. Three more towns offered big game for the crooks. The remaining three did not include Aurora; it was a foregone conclusion that Aurora was too well guarded. It was the one place that the outlaws would avoid.

There was other news, that came in later. A young farm hand named Clewis had been found dead near a highway known as the Goodbury Road. His battered skull proved that he had been slugged to death. There was no proof, however, that Clewis was a victim of the bank robbers. The Goodbury Road was some distance from Goshen and ten miles north of Aurora.

There was one person, however, who saw significance in this report. The Shadow remembered a newspaper item, two days ago, which had reported the observation of a meteorite from a place called Cutter's Farm. The farm was located just off the Goodbury Road.

Soon after four o'clock in the afternoon. The Shadow arrived at Cutler's Farm, driving an old sedan. Guised as Arnaud, The Shadow introduced himself to Cutler, telling the farmer that he was a geologist interested in the study of meteorites.

Cutler pointed out a big pine tree, stating that he had seen a purplish flash of light from that direction; that his wife had reported a blue glare. Though they had claimed to see them on different nights, Cutler believed that his wife had been mistaken. His theory was that both had seen the same shooting star.

The direction that Cutler indicated was toward the spot, on the Goodbury Road where Clewis had been found dead. Riding back to Aurora, The Shadow came to the definite conclusion that Cutler and his wife had seen different flares: one purple, the other blue. He was also sure that Clewis had seen a green one, last night; and that the farm hand had been waylaid by watchers who guessed that he had spotted it.

NEAR dusk, The Shadow reached the outskirts of Aurora. Coming in from the north, he neared the old mansion. As yet, that building was of no significance to The Shadow. He stopped across from the house simply because his car needed gasoline and Hengle's filling station afforded the service that he wanted.

The attendant who filled the gas tank remarked that he was going off duty and going into Aurora. It was obvious that he wanted a lift, so The Shadow invited him aboard.

Driving into town, the young fellow mentioned that he lived in South Aurora and generally picked up a ride to the filling station in a bakery truck. The bakery building was near his home.

"I go on the job at eight in the morning," he remarked, "and sometimes I have to work clear through to half past seven at night. I'm fed up on this town. If I had a chance in a big city, I'd take it in a jiffy!"

After dropping his passenger near the Aurora Hotel, The Shadow parked. He went up to a room that he occupied as Arnaud. From a suitcase, he brought large scale topographical maps. Carrying these, The Shadow went up to Room 1412 and entered with a long, thin key. He placed the maps on a writing desk near the window.

Using a small compass, The Shadow overlapped the maps and arranged their direction according to the compass.

Picking a dot that represented the Aurora Hotel, The Shadow placed a pocket rule along the map and drew a straight line in the direction from which he had seen the green flare. The line covered a space of several miles on the map. Somewhere along that line was the place from which the flare had blazed.

Out at Cutler's, The Shadow had produced his pocket compass when the

farmer had pointed to the pine tree. Cutler had thought the object a watch; he had not known that his visitor was calculating a direction. The map showed a dot that represented Cutler's Farm.

Using it as a new base, The Shadow laid the compass near it and keyed the ruler with it. He drew a line southeast from Cutler's.

That line also gave a clue to the green flare. The spot where the lines crossed was the one that The Shadow wanted. Instead of being distant from the town, it lay less than a mile from the center of Aurora. At the junction of the lines was a printed dot that represented the old house opposite Hengle's filling station.

The Shadow remembered that old house. It had become important through this discovery. The flare that flashed green through last night's darkness could have come from one place only: the tower of the old gray house on the outskirts of Aurora.

A whispered laugh chilled the silence of the hotel room. The Shadow had gained a wanted objective. He, alone of all investigators, knew that the house of silence sheltered someone who had played a part in crime. When the proper time arrived, The Shadow would investigate within the strange old mansion.

DUSK obscured The Shadow's view from the hotel. He had located the silent house through calculation alone, for no trace of it was visible in the darkness. Whenever lights appeared within that mansion, they were obscured by closed shutters. The Shadow recognized that fact.

So did Jack Hallison. At this very hour, Jack was seated in darkness beside the window of the corner room. He had wedged a metal shutter six inches outward. A heavy bar prevented it from going farther. Jack realized that those in the house relied upon electricity for illumination and kept the shutters closed tight whenever they used a light.

Jack had not wakened until noon, when Eldron had smuggled him a meal. He had drowsed all afternoon in the gloomy room. Eldron had promised another visit at dusk. A soft tap told that Eldron had arrived.

The door opened, Eldron stole into view, whispering for Jack to close the shutter while he shut the door. Those actions done, Eldron turned on the light.

"You're looking fit," commented Eldron. "We're going to arrange a stunt that will bluff old Peter Langrew. First, though, you've got to know the situation. It's simple on the surface, but there are complexities beneath."

Smoothing the points of his mustache, Eldron sat down. Reflectively, he lighted a cigarette; then spoke while Jack listened eagerly.

"Several years ago," explained Eldron, "Peter Langrew became a recluse. He

came to this house with his two half-sisters, Matilda and Theodora. Beale was with them. Soon, Matilda died. The only outsider who came to the funeral was Beth Kindell, a distant relative. Theodora Langrew befriended her; persuaded her to live here. Beth became a voluntary prisoner."

"Who forced her to remain here?" queried Jack. "Peter Langrew?"

"Yes," replied Eldron. "The old man has a horror of anyone leaving the house. He holds some secret that makes him fear imaginary enemies. Peter Langrew lost money through the conniving of business associates. He is determined to retain the wealth that he still possesses."

"He has it here?"

"I do not think so. I believe that he has buried it in some secret place. He thinks that strangers are plotters - enemies after his gold. Whether he intends to some day leave and pick up his wealth, whether he is preserving it

for Theodora and Beth, with a share for Beale - I do not know."

ELDRON paused. Jack put a natural question:

"How did you happen to come here?"

"I am like Beth," smiled Eldron. "A distant relative who paid a chance visit. Peter Langrew insisted that I stay. He intimated that I would some day receive a legacy if I remained. Yet there is something beneath the surface. Frankly, Hallison, I doubt old Peter's story of hidden wealth."

"You mean he has no money?"

"He has money, but it may be of a different sort. Suppose that instead of burying a fund, Langrew found a method of accumulating money by keeping under cover. That would explain his eccentric insistence that no one leave here. He may have a game on the outside. If that were the case, he would have every reason to keep persons in here.

"This will interest you, Hallison. After Langrew began to trust me, he asked me to inspect the house and make suggestions. I advised him to put permanent shutters in the cellar. He told me to take it up with Beale. It was Beale who showed me all about the house; but he told me nothing about that fearful trap. He simply showed me an empty room, explaining that its metal walls had been installed to form a vault, that was never used.

"Last night, I heard the throb of a motor. I came to the cellar unnoticed.

That is how I managed to rescue you, Hallison. From the rescue I have learned the truth. Peter Langrew is a fiend! Beale is his tool, although the servant may not recognize the evil of his master. That trap was designed for the ruthless murder of any stranger who might enter. Perhaps" - Eldron's tone was solemn - "the crushing walls have already taken toll."

Jack managed to repress a shudder, as he summed the statements that Eldron had made. They formed a logical sequence, even to the point that Beale might be ignorant of Peter Langrew's full game. If Langrew had bluffed others, he could have handled Beale, too. Langrew, himself, could have installed the cellar trap without Beale's knowledge.

"I have felt the menace," declared Eldron, his words ending Jack's reverie. "Your arrival has given me hope. When I came here, I told Langrew that

a few friends knew where I had gone; that someone might stop off in Aurora to look me up. Langrew said he would be glad to entertain them."

"Under the same conditions?" queried Jack. "Keeping them here?"

"Obviously," returned Eldron. "Langrew is persuasive. Moreover, in a pinch, he can hold any visitor here through his traps. I am convinced that any attempt to leave these premises would mean death. You are already here. If you pose as a friend of mine, Langrew will receive you. But you will not be able to leave."

Jack smiled.

"I must leave," he remarked, "in order to arrive. Otherwise, Langrew will suspect that I am the man who entered his trap, last night."

"We can handle your arrival," decided Eldron. "There are two bells inside the front door. One for the front gate, the other for the door itself. Each has

a corresponding button that electrically controls the latches. They have not been used, simply because Beale ignores all who ring for admittance. He answers

the back doorbell, though, when delivery men arrive.

"There are curtains by the front door. I shall hide you behind one. When

a

ring comes from the back door, I can open the front one. When Beale arrives there, I can claim that you rang and I admitted you. When I introduce you as a friend, Langrew will be lulled. You can use your own name; Langrew does not know who my friends are."

THE plan pleased Jack. He thrust out his hand; Eldron received it warmly. The two exchanged grim smiles. They had made their alliance.

Eldron glanced at his watch; it showed quarter past seven. He motioned hastily, then whispered:

"Come! Dinner is at half past seven. You must arrive before then. I hope the delivery man will show up. If he doesn't, you'll have to sneak back here and hold the game until tomorrow night."

The two stole out through the door, along the hall and carpeted steps made progress silent. They reached the lower hallway, went past closed doors and curtained archways that marked dining room and living room on opposite sides of the hall. All was deserted; they arrived at curtained niches on each side of the front vestibule.

Jack slid behind a curtain. Eldron strolled toward the living room, lighting a fresh cigarette as he went.

Jack Hallison remained tense. Creeping minutes held him breathless. Again, he was on the threshold of adventure. He wondered how he would make out, playing the part of a guest in this house where he once had lived.

This house contained an evil schemer, who might strike instantly if he knew that his ways were suspected. Though he relied upon Eldron to share danger with him, Jack Hallison realized that someone of greater strength might be needed to cope with the menace that involved old Peter Langrew.

Unknown to either Jack Hallison or Gilbert Eldron, the future was to bring another factor to the house of silence. Though The Shadow still lingered in the Aurora Hotel, he had placed his finger upon this very mansion. The Shadow had chosen the house of silence for his future vigil.

CHAPTER V

LANGREW'S WELCOME

LONG minutes passed while Jack Hallison waited in his hiding place. Light from the hallway trickled past the edges of the curtain. It gave Jack an opportunity to study his cramped surroundings. This alcove had been changed since he had lived in the house.

Originally, the alcoves had held small-paned windows. These had been removed. Solid wood had been installed instead. But in this particular alcove was a rounded space of metal, like a miniature porthole. Jack decided that it was a lookout window that would enable Beale to spy upon any visitor, should the servant allow such a person to pass the front gate.

A clock began to chime. It was half past seven. Worried, Jack peered from the edge of the curtain. He saw a stooped figure coming from the dining room. It was Beale; apparently the servant was bound for the living room to announce that dinner was served.

Jack held back a groan. The game was up for tonight. Then came an interruption. Beale stopped short, listened for a moment, then turned about

and

went back through the dining room.

Jack guessed that Beale had heard the ring of the bell at the back door. But had Gilbert Eldron heard it? The sound had not reached Jack; he doubted that Eldron could have caught it from the living room.

While Jack waited in a quandary, Eldron popped suddenly from the living room curtains. Gesturing toward Jack's hiding place, the mustached man headed for the front door.

Jack took the cue. He slid from behind the curtain and quickly joined Eldron in the vestibule. Eldron whispered rapidly, as he opened the front door.

"Beale answered the back. I barely heard the ring. If -"

Eldron broke off. He thumped the front door and shut and turned the latch.

Gripping Jack by the arm, he drew him into the hallway. Shaking hands, he exclaimed:

"Well, well! Jack Hallison! What a surprise! So you stopped off to see us -"

A harsh voice interrupted, its tone severe. Jack swung about to see a tall man who had stepped from a doorway beyond the living room. He knew instantly that this must be Peter Langrew.

UNTIL that moment, the elderly owner of the mansion had been scarcely more than a name to Jack Hallison. Jack had expected to meet a senile personage, who might betray the insane cunning of a fanatic. Peter Langrew did not fill that part.

Though old, Langrew carried himself erect. His build was rugged; his face firm. His features, clean-shaven, were dry, but not droopy. His eyes gleamed from beneath bushy brows.

Those brows, like Langrew's shaggy hair, were the only factors that betrayed Langrew's age. They were pure white.

With its harshness, Langrew's voice was commanding. The words that the old man uttered were a rebuke to Eldron.

"What have you done, Gilbert?" rasped Langrew. "I have told you often that strangers are not admitted to this house!"

"This gentleman is not a stranger," persisted Eldron, mildly. "He is my friend, Jack Hallison."

Langrew stared suspiciously; then jerked the question: "How did you happen to expect his arrival?"

"I didn't," returned Eldron, with an apologetic smile. "I heard the ring at the front gate and I pressed the button so that the visitor could enter."

"Where was Beale?" shouted Langrew. "Where -"

Beale interrupted by appearing from the dining room. The servant stared, puzzled.

"Beale went to answer the back door," explained Eldron, glibly, while Jack

stood silent. "That was why I answered the ring at the front."

Langrew turned to Beale.

"Did you hear the front doorbell ring?"

He shook his head.

"No, sir," he replied. "I was in the kitchen -"

"And I was in the living room," inserted Eldron. "I must admit that I made

a mistake, Mr. Langrew. I heard the ring that meant someone was at the front gate. Thoughtlessly, I pressed the button to open it. Then, realizing my error, I looked from the little observation window in the alcove. I saw Hallison coming along the walk."

Eldron's explanation served.

"You recognized Hallison, eh?" queried the old man. For the first time, his voice had lost its harshness; his eyes were surveying Jack. "You knew him for an old friend?"

"A trusted friend," assured Eldron, clapping Jack upon the shoulder.

"That

is why I forgot your admonition, sir. I opened the front door at once. I felt sure that you would welcome Jack Hallison."

"I extend my welcome." Old Langrew bowed; then held out a friendly hand.

"As a friend of Gilbert Eldron, you are welcome here, Mr. Hallison."

JACK received Langrew's clasp. He was astonished at the firmness of the old man's grip. Jack was beginning to understand why a husky chap like Gilbert Eldron could consider Langrew as a dangerous person.

Fingers numbed when he withdrew his hand, Jack had an added hunch. He believed that Langrew's viselike grip had been intentional - a preliminary effort by Langrew to make the new guest know that he was dealing with one who expected his commands to be obeyed.

"This is Miss Kindell. Beth, I want you to meet Jack Hallison -" It was Eldron who spoke the words. Jack turned to face a girl who had stepped from the

living room. He was impressed instantly by the beauty of Beth Kindell.

The girl was a blonde; her eyes a clear blue. Graceful in manner, friendly

in expression, she bowed her welcome and spoke soft words of greeting. Yet, in Beth's tone, Jack gained an instant knowledge that Eldron had spoken solemn truth. Beth Kindell was forcing herself to be brave. The girl feared some menace within this house. Jack saw her eyes turn toward old Langrew. He spied the shudder that she restrained.

"Dinner is served."

Beale made the announcement and went back into the dining room. Peter Langrew advanced; Beth drew away at his approach. Jack saw Gilbert Eldron go closer to the girl. Beth steadied, knowing that he was by her side. Langrew scarcely noticed Beth's action. His eyes were upon Jack.

"You will dine with us," announced Langrew, cheerily. "Come, Mr. Hallison.

Ah - one moment." He bowed courteously toward Eldron and Beth. "You will precede

us. Gilbert, escort Beth into the dining room."

The old man carried a degree of politeness that was disarming. His first aggressiveness had vanished. Jack was observing the persuasive side of Langrew's nature, the very quality against which Eldron had warned.

The four seated themselves about a table that supported a huge candelabrum. Jack noticed that Beth had taken a chair across from Langrew, to be as far from the old man as possible. Jack was on Langrew's right, Eldron on the left. Eldron began a conversation as Beale served the soup.

"Old friends, eh?" Langrew's tone had turned mild. "Well, Gilbert, I have told you often that your friends are welcome. Particularly so, when they come for long visits."

Langrew looked significantly at Jack. Eldron shot a question.

"You can stay a long while, can't you, Jack?"

"Certainly, Gilbert," returned Jack. "I'm in no hurry to go anywhere. I was on my way South, to look for another job. I can postpone it indefinitely."

"Good!" Langrew clapped a heavy hand upon the table. "Your decision pleases us, Mr. Hallison."

"Call him Jack," suggested Eldron. "I've told you that he is an old friend of mine."

"Very well, Gilbert," chuckled Langrew. "Jack, it will be. Where is your luggage, Jack?"

"At the station, Mr. Langrew. I was not sure that I could stay here, so I intended to check in at the Aurora Hotel."

"You have the checks for your suitcases?"

"Yes, sir. I can go down to the station -"

"No, no. You must stay here. Give the checks to Beale. He will have your luggage here in the morning. I shall tell him to send one of the delivery men for the suitcase."

Gilbert Eldron put in a natural remark.

"We have no telephone here, Jack," explained Gilbert. "Nor have we a car. Mr. Langrew prefers that everyone remain at the house."

"We live quite to ourselves," added Beth, suddenly. "It - it is something of a tradition with Mr. Langrew -"

LANGREW rasped an interruption. For an instant, Jack noted a glare from the eyes beneath the bushy white brows.

"Jack shall know the truth," asserted Langrew, harshly. "There is no reason to conceal it." Then, turning to Jack: "Young man, as a friend of Gilbert's, you are entitled to an explanation. You have become a party to a most important matter."

Beale had removed Langrew's soup plate. The old man leaned across the table and wagged an assertive finger.

"I possess a secret," he informed, his harsh voice reduced almost to a whisper. "A secret that concerns my wealth. I have been forced to measures of self-protection, against persons who have sought to swindle me.

"That is why I have chosen this refuge; why I have sought to detach myself

from the world. When visitors come here, I insist that they remain a long while,

so that we may understand each other better. For their own protection, as well as mine."

"Jack understands," prompted Gilbert. "Mr. Langrew does not want certain persons to know where he is. If any of us left here, we might be blamed if the word leaked out."

"Exactly!" rasped Langrew. He thumped the table a second time. "You have expressed it excellently, Gilbert! Perhaps you and Beth have wearied of your stay here; but do not worry. Your visit will not be prolonged."

The old man smiled; then added:

"I intend to close this house as soon as my sister is ready to travel. Poor Theodora! She has grieved ever since Matilda's death; and it has kept her health low. She is too ill to leave her bed. I know, however, that she will soon recover.

"Then we shall leave. At that time, Gilbert, I may entrust you with my secret. You are reliable; you are capable of protecting my wealth. Ah, those rogues who seek to rob me!" Langrew chuckled. "They will be balked from the day

they find me! Balked when I tell them that my funds have been disbursed, by a man whom I cannot name."

Eyes gleaming, Langrew swung toward Gilbert.

"You have heard me, Gilbert?" he queried. "I shall not name you to those swindlers. You will be free from the burden that I have carried for years. You will have no need to hide from danger -"

"Please!" Beth called the interruption. "Do not talk that way, Mr.

Langrew. You know that your enemies are imaginary. Miss Theodora says that your losses were due only to poor business judgment. The men who made money at your expense are not persons who would threaten you. She has told you often -"

"Enough!" Langrew pounded the table. "I know what Theodora wants. She asks

that I confide in her, that she may share the burden that I carry. Bah! Such a course would weaken my position. No woman can keep a secret!"

"If you trusted your sister -"

"I trust Theodora. But she knows nothing of the persons who seek my gold."

"She has met the men whom you have mentioned."

"Of course. They smirked their way into her good graces. She thought them gentlemen, because they were of high station. But they are wolves! A vicious, snarling pack of wolves! Ready to rob; to murder!"

BETH gasped weakly. Langrew subsided in his chair. His manner became mild.

He waved a hand toward Eldron.

"Gilbert is young," assured Langrew. "He is strong. He is unknown to my enemies. He is the one upon whom I can rely. Tell Theodora that she can never wheedle my secret from me.

"Tell her more than that!" Langrew glared at the girl. "Tell her that I shall wait no longer. Whether or not her health improves, I shall do as I have planned. I shall place my affairs in Gilbert's hands."

A shrill call came from upstairs. Jack recognized it as the voice that he had heard last night. It was Theodora Langrew. She was calling Beth Kindell.

The girl left the table. Gilbert arose and accompanied her to the door. Jack saw him whisper words that must have reassured Beth, for the girl managed to smile before she went past the curtains.

Gilbert returned. The meal progressed; but Beth did not appear from upstairs. It was not until they had finished dessert that Peter Langrew returned to his previous subject.

"Men understand danger," he said to Jack and Gilbert. "Women do not. They are hysterical creatures. They have intuition, though; we must grant them that.

Perhaps Theodora is right at times. My secret has preyed upon me.

"But that was before you came here, Gilbert." Langrew's eyes gleamed shrewdly. "Since then, I have realized that you are the one man I can trust. Soon" - he arose and clapped a firm hand on Gilbert's shoulder - "very soon, I shall entrust you with my secret. All will be in your hands, Gilbert."

With a nod to Jack, Langrew strode from the room. Gilbert motioned toward the hall. Jack followed him across and into the living room. They lighted cigarettes; then Gilbert whispered:

"What's your impression Jack?"

"A different one than I expected," replied Jack. "If he hadn't flared up, against Beth -"

"That's just it. He lets himself go at times. His sister, Theodora, has been after him to spill that secret. She began it before I came here."

"He promised to tell you, soon."

"He's promised that before. I've urged him to talk to Theodora since she wants him to. But he won't. He'll only talk to me, he says; but he's held off."

"Where has he gone now?"

"Up to take a nap. Wait! I forgot something. Come to the doorway."

They went there and listened. Gilbert shook his head.

"It didn't happen tonight," he declared, "but I was positive that he went there last night."

"To talk to Theodora?"

"No. Up the stairs to the tower."

"Why would he go there?"

"I don't know. It puzzles me, Jack. But the old fellow has certainly done a sneak up those steps, out onto the roof above. That's one other point that makes me wonder about his game."

THEY were back in the corner of the living room. Gilbert spoke words that carried a positive emphasis.

"This talk about a secret is a stall," he declared. "Old Langrew's up to some deep game. We've got to learn it, Jack."

Jack nodded his agreement.

"I'd like to press him to a showdown," added Gilbert. "But it wouldn't work. If I tried to force him to tell me the secret that he claims to have, he'd begin to suspect me. I've got to bluff, just like he does."

"But there'll be a showdown eventually."

"I don't think so, Jack. Whatever his real racket, he'll keep it covered until he's through with it. After that, he'll forget all this bluff about some hidden wealth that he wants me to handle for him."

"But you won't forget it."

"What if I don't? In a pinch, Langrew will send me on some wild goose chase. He'll decamp before I come back. I tell you this, Jack: there's something crooked and it concerns Peter Langrew! He's keen enough to be a big-shot, behind a lot of criminals -"

Gilbert broke off. There were footsteps in the hall. The two young men were idling about when Beale entered. The servant began to tidy the room while they sat about and smoked. Beale busied himself for more than half an hour.

Soon afterward, Gilbert suggested that they turn in for the night. He whispered the reason to Jack; Beale was not there to hear it.

"Langrew always comes downstairs again, at ten, to spend a few hours in his study. It will make a hit, Jack, when he finds that we've gone to bed early. You've gained his confidence; I want you to keep it."

They went upstairs. Gilbert pointed out one closed door: Theodora's; then another: Beth's. The girl had retired. They reached the corner room where Jack had slept the night before. Gilbert smiled. This was the guest room; hence Jack

had been assigned to it by Beale.

Gilbert's room was one farther front. Jack said good night to his friend, and Gilbert sauntered down the hall. Jack closed the door and turned to bed.

This old house seemed to harbor strange sounds, different from those that Jack had remembered from childhood. After a while, one noise became a creeping.

Jack listened intently. He heard the sound outside his door. Something grated in the lock. Creeping faded.

Sliding from his bed, Jack tried the door. It was locked. Finding his watch, Jack consulted the luminous dial. It showed seven minutes after ten. Jack smiled to himself. He could guess who had turned that outside key: Peter Langrew. He felt sure that the door would be unlocked when he awoke.

Oddly, his tension was relieved. Jack felt safer since he heard the key turn. He was positive, at last, that Peter Langrew did not suspect the part that he was playing as a pretended friend of Gilbert's. Evidently, the old man regarded him safe when locked in for the night.

Fifteen minutes later, Jack Hallison was asleep.

CHAPTER VI

THE SHADOW ENTERS

HALF past ten.

The Shadow was watching from a window of the Aurora Hotel. A new drizzle had disturbed the night; still, the visibility was as good as on the preceding evening.

No flare had come from the darkness.

To The Shadow, that meant definitely that no crime was due. He had picked half past ten as the dead line for a signal.

The Shadow picked up the telephone. He put in a call to Harry Vincent's room. He gave low-toned instructions. That done, he moved from the darkened room. His figure formed a weird shape in the dim light of the hall.

Tonight, The Shadow was garbed in cloak and slouch hat of black. He had planned an expedition; one that required garments that would fit with darkness.

His cloak bulged at one side. Beneath it he was carrying a bulky package.

There was no need to remain at the Aurora Hotel. The Shadow knew that Blink Torgue would not return here. Blink's part in crime was plain. Last night, Blink and a band of crooks had smashed the bank at Goshen. The job had been ordered by that green flare from the night.

Blink knew that he had been trailed. Hence he would not return to Aurora to watch for another signal. That fact did not signify that there would be no more flares. The chase had started on the street outside the Aurora Hotel. Blink would not have guessed that the green flame had been spied and connected with him.

There would be more flares, but Blink would watch for them from some other lookout post. From somewhere outside Aurora. There were many hillsides, farmhouses, or other points that would offer an unobstructed view of the old house on the outskirts of Aurora. Blink could see the flares from a distance as great as a dozen miles.

LEAVING the hotel by an obscure side entrance, The Shadow boarded a waiting coupe. Harry Vincent was the driver. This was the same car in which they had pursued Blink Torgue. Tonight, their course was an easy one. It led past Hengle's filling station.

It was while they swung to the side street skirting the old house that The

Shadow gave brief information to his agent. The words brought a nod from Harry.

The Shadow was passing instructions for the morrow - a task that he expected Harry to complete, should occasion demand.

Harry parked the car on the fringe of a vacant lot. At The Shadow's order, he alighted. A tiny flashlight blinked. Harry followed it through the drizzle. Only those rays, directed toward the ground, enabled him to keep to the course set by his invisible chief.

For darkness was The Shadow's shroud and the master-sleuth intended to use it to full extent.

At the far side of the wall, The Shadow paused. He whispered two words to Harry:

"Seventy-five paces!"

Harry started along the wall, toward the front of the blackened mansion. He was outside the grounds. He stopped when he had covered the required distance. There, he waited.

The Shadow, meanwhile, had made better progress; but in the opposite direction. He had chosen a course along the rear wall, then frontward, by the street which led past the old house. At the end of seventy-five paces, he stopped at a tall tree that almost encroached upon Peter Langrew's preserves.

From his package, The Shadow removed a lineman's hooks and spurs. With these implements, he began an upward course, scaling the tree, which offered no branches for a space of fifty feet. Arrived at the first branch, The Shadow moved along it. He came high above the wall of Langrew's grounds.

The house, itself, was twenty feet beyond. The Shadow was well above the level of the windowless turret that served as an abbreviated third story. Clinging to the branch, The Shadow produced a pointed dart which glowed with luminous paint. Raising one arm, he drove it on a long flight through the air.

The dart whistled high above the tower roof, then blobbed from view beyond the other wall. Feathered for accuracy, it had landed at a spot close to Harry Vincent. The Shadow knew that his aid would find it, thanks to the glow of the luminous paint.

Several minutes passed while The Shadow fingered a fine fish line that had been attached to the dart. At last there came a tug. The line was taut. Harry had climbed an easier tree on the far side of the grounds.

The Shadow responded with a double tug. The line had not been carried high enough. He could tell that by feeling the angle downward from the branch. Soon, another questioning tug came from Harry. Once more, The Shadow gave the signal that meant to carry upward.

At last, Harry had reached the right height. The Shadow gave a single tug to indicate it. He began to pay out the line. It was drawn in from beyond. When

he came to the end of the line, The Shadow uncoiled a heavy wire. He let this slide between his gloved bands as Harry pulled away.

The progress stopped. The Shadow affixed his end of the wire to the heavy tree branch. He waited. A zing sounded along the wire. Harry had made the attachment at the other end. The line was at a slope. The Shadow's altitude was fifty feet; Harry's thirty.

The wire was invisible in the darkness; yet that did not deter The Shadow. He hooked a double-wheeled trolley to the wire; then gripped a bar beneath. Boldly swinging from the tree trunk, he started a trip out through space.

THE cloaked form swished as it passed the roof edge. The Shadow's hands pressed upward against a brake that was level with the wheels. His speedy progress stopped. Hanging from the wire, swaying back and forth, The Shadow clicked a catch in place. Doubling his body slightly, he dropped from the air.

The fall was less than eight feet, and The Shadow took it with the precision of an acrobat. Despite the drizzle, he had picked the exact center of the tower. He was surrounded by a low rail, crouched on a rooftop that measured ten feet square.

The flashlight glimmered. It showed a trapdoor in the roof. The Shadow produced a portable jimmy and began a prying process. It brought speedier results than he had anticipated. The horizontal barrier came upward.

Using his flashlight, The Shadow learned why he had succeeded so easily. The bar that had held the trapdoor shut depended upon a screw to keep it tight.

Under the pressure of the jimmy, the bar had simply slid along.

Evidently the occupants of this house had not expected an invasion from the roof. Their top barrier was trivial, compared to the heavy shutters that protected the windows of the floor below.

The Shadow closed the trapdoor as he dropped to the floor of the windowless tower room. The flashlight showed boxes stacked about. This room was used for storage. A steep stairway gave access to the floor below. The Shadow descended; he came to a tiny landing. Further progress was blocked by a closed door.

This barrier was bolted; but its edges showed light from a hallway beyond.

Though the bolt was on the other side, The Shadow had a way to reach it. He took

a piece of thin wire that had a loop on one end. The wire was springy; it kept bobbing back as The Shadow tried to work it through the crack of the door.

When the wire went through, The Shadow turned it so that the loop pressed against the far side of the door. Probing patiently, he finally gained success.

The loop hooked some outside object. It was the bolt head.

With his first objective gained, The Shadow had another problem. A tug upon the wire would not draw the bolt; instead, it would merely fasten it more firmly. But The Shadow had a way to manage matters.

He had thrust the wire through the crack of the door just beneath the bolt. The wire was long. The Shadow drew it downward to the floor. There, he carried it along the lower crack, until he reached the hinged side of the door.

Then upward, until he encountered the lower hinge.

This brought the wire so that it stretched across the far side of the door; at a downward angle. This was not a handicap; it was a necessity. For the

bolt head was turned upward, in a notch on the other side of the door.

Pulling the wire, The Shadow, exerted double pressure. The first effect was to draw the bolt head downward, for it could not move horizontally. As soon

as it was clear of the notch, it slid, because of the sideways pull.

The Shadow opened the door.

STEPPING out into the dim hall, the cloaked visitant looked about him. He saw that he was in a long passage, the main hall of the second floor. There were several doorways; all were slightly recessed. At the front, only a few paces distant, The Shadow saw a flight of stairs.

Closing the door to the tower room, The Shadow, removed the wire and clamped the bolt. That done, he started down the front stairs. He found the large hall dim; but he heard the sound of voices from a door that stood ajar. Moving there, The Shadow looked into a room that served as library and study.

There was a desk in the center; it was stacked high with papers and loose books that had been taken from the bookshelves lining the wall. At the desk was

a firm-faced old man with a shock of white hair. The Shadow was gaining his first impression of Peter Langrew.

Opposite the old man was Beale, stoop-shouldered and solemn-faced. The Shadow eyed the cadaverous servant.

"I have inspected everywhere, sir," Beale was saying. "The shutters are quite tight. The doors are well bolted."

"Everywhere, Beale?" demanded Langrew, in his raspy tone. "You looked at the door to the tower?"

"Yes, Mr. Langrew."

"Very well. You may go. I shall retire shortly."

The Shadow moved back and gained the curtains of the living room. It was well that he chose that hiding spot, for Beale brushed the curtains of the dining room when he took that course to the kitchen.

Emerging, The Shadow went back to watch Langrew. He saw the old man

mumbling to himself, while he added figures in a big ledger.

There was a keenness about Langrew. The old man began to note the door suspiciously. He saw blackness beyond the few inches of space that marked The Shadow's watchpost. Gripping the edge of the desk, Langrew half arose. Suddenly, he shot his right hand into an opened drawer and whipped out a heavy automatic. His glare increased as he aimed toward the door.

Step by step, Langrew crept forward. He seized the door knob with his left hand and yanked the door triumphantly toward himself. He stared, then scowled. There was no one in sight.

The Shadow had calmly matched the old man's action. Silently, he had glided away. This time, The Shadow had chosen the alcove by the front door. His elbow was against the porthole that Jack Hallison had noted earlier in the evening.

Peering from the curtains, The Shadow saw Langrew move back into the study. He would be on the lookout for observers. The Shadow decided to occupy himself elsewhere.

As yet, he knew nothing about Langrew except the man's name. The Shadow intended to inspect the study; but he expected to do that later after Langrew had retired. With Beale on the ground floor, The Shadow decided to choose the second floor as his present objective.

SILENTLY, The Shadow ascended the stairs. He reached the top and stopped as he spied a door that stood half opened. The Shadow heard slow footsteps. Someone had opened that door and was preparing to move out of the room.

Quickly, The Shadow swung toward the front of the hall and edged into the recessed doorway opposite the tower stairs. Hardly had he merged with that shallow space of blackness before a gaunt figure appeared from the doorway of the opened room.

The prowler was an elderly lady, attired in slippers and heavy dressing gown. Her face, though pale, bore the same firmness that distinguished Peter Langrew. The Shadow was not far wrong when he conjectured that this woman was the old man's sister.

Theodora Langrew craned her head forward and brushed back straggly locks of gray hair. She gazed suspiciously at doors along the hallway; but she ignored the one where The Shadow stood. The Shadow guessed the reason.

He knew that he must be outside of Peter Langrew's room. Evidently, Theodora knew that her brother was downstairs.

Creeping cautiously, Theodora Langrew went from door to door, listening outside each one. She returned toward her own room, stopped by the stairs and listened for voices from below. She heard none. Turning, the woman was about to reenter her own room when she chanced to glance at the door where The Shadow stood.

Blackness made the woman stare, perplexed. She could make out no shape; she could hear no sound; but she suspected that some being was present. Theodora's face took on a shrewd look. Turning about, she stepped into her own room.

"Beale! Beale!"

Theodora's shrill cry was like an alarm. Repeated, it brought results. A call came from Peter Langrew's study: the raspy voice of Langrew himself. There

was a clatter from the back stairs. Beale was coming up from the kitchen.

Then two doors swung open. Gilbert Eldron appeared at one attired in trousers, shirt and slippers. Beth Kindell stepped from the other door. The girl was wearing her dressing gown.

"Beale!"

With the last call, The Shadow heard the creak of a bed. Theodora Langrew

was again playing her part of invalid. She was no longer ready to continue the prowling that had given her an inkling of The Shadow's presence.

But in place of one, there were now four. Peter Langrew had arrived from the front stairs, Beale from the back. They were joining Gilbert and Beth outside the door of Theodora's room. Soon there would be a hunt - one that could eventually reach The Shadow, boxed in the front end of the hall.

Yet The Shadow waited, silent. Much though he wanted his visit to remain unobserved, he knew that any attempt at hasty motion would betray his presence.

Watching the persons who would soon be on his trail, The Shadow saw one who might prove to be an ally.

Circumstances told him that the break might be in his favor. Calmly, The Shadow stood his ground, counting upon an opportunity that would enable him to depart without damaging the secrecy that he had hoped to maintain.

CHAPTER VII

THE SHADOW'S ALLY

"WHAT has happened, Theodora? Why did you call for Beale?"

Peter Langrew was demanding the explanation of the wild screams that the old lady had given.

"Because I heard a prowler!" was the shrill answer. "Someone is hiding about this house!"

"Whereabouts?"

"How can I tell you? I'm unable to move from this bed. I heard someone in the hall. That was all."

The expected break had come. The Shadow had supposed that Theodora Langrew

was posing as an invalid, from the cautious manner of her prowling and the haste with which she had returned to her room. The Shadow had believed that she would

not betray the game that she herself was playing.

"Some part of the hall," came the shrill repetition. "I heard footsteps; that was all. Look at the door, too. It's open. Who opened it, I ask?"

Theodora Langrew had heard no footsteps. As for the door, she herself had opened it and had forgotten to close it. To The Shadow, her new statements were double proof of her duplicity.

At the same time, it was apparent that the old lady was anxious to have any intruder trapped. She believed she could do so by instigating a search. Hence she was crafty enough not to specify the exact spot where she believed the lurker could be found.

"What about Jack Hallison?" queried Langrew, harshly, turning toward Gilbert Eldron. "Is your friend in his room, Gilbert?"

"I suppose so," returned Gilbert. His face looked troubled. "I'll go and see."

He went to the rear of the hall and tapped on Jack's door, while the others watched. There was no response; Gilbert rapped more sharply. A muffled voice responded in a sleepy tone.

"It's all right, Jack," Gilbert informed. "We just wanted to know if you had been awakened. There was some disturbance around the house. Stay where you are. We'll attend to it."

Theodora was voicing new information from the depths of the bedroom.

"It can't have been that young man," she claimed. "The footsteps stopped near the front stairs. I would have heard our guest stealing to his room."

"I told Miss Theodora about Jack Hallison," explained Beth. "She knew that he was in the house."

Peter Langrew had turned toward the front of the hall. He was looking directly toward the spot where The Shadow was standing, but he failed to see the cloaked figure. Theodora had given him the right direction, but had dared not specify the exact spot that she suspected.

"I shall go down to the front hall," decided Langrew, producing the automatic from his coat pocket. "Come with me, Beale. You shall search the dining room and kitchen. Return by way of the back stairs."

"And I?" queried Gilbert. "Where do you want me to search?"

"Cover this entire hall," ordered Langrew. Then, to his sister: "Good night, Theodora."

ANGRILY, Langrew slammed the door of the room, cutting the pretended invalid off from the scene.

"She was dreaming," he scoffed. "Nevertheless, we shall search the house. There is always the chance that my enemies may find a way to enter."

The very words that he spoke seemed to impress the old man. The Shadow saw

Langrew's face take on a strained expression. Then Langrew's hand tightened its

firm grip upon the gun. The Shadow watched the white-haired man descend the stairs.

Gilbert and Beth alone remained; Beale had started to the back stairs. The

Shadow saw Eldron nudge his thumb toward Theodora's door.

"Has she been acting oddly?" queried the young man. "You saw her this evening, Beth."

"I cannot tell, Gilbert," responded the girl, her tone a worried one. "Miss Theodora becomes moody at times. Sometimes she seems to be a very suspicious person."

"Like her brother," decided Gilbert. "They are both Langrews. Eccentricity

must run in the family. I hope it does not carry to such distant relations as ourselves."

He shrugged his shoulders; then turned toward the back of the hall.

"Old Peter wants me to search up here," he declared, "so I'll start at the

back and work forward. Stay here, Beth, in case Miss Theodora starts a howl. She's your charge."

Beth watched Gilbert stroll toward the back of the hall and take a side passage at the extreme end. The girl looked toward the door of Theodora's room.

The Shadow saw Beth wince, then shudder.

She was afraid of this house; terrified by Peter Langrew's presence. It was plain, moreover, that she felt a reflection of that dread when she considered Beale and Miss Theodora.

There was one person whom she trusted: Gilbert Eldron. Nevertheless, she feared; and from that fact, The Shadow recognized that the girl counted Eldron as a person like herself. One who also had a right to fear, and, therefore, one

who might fail should danger strike.

Something made Beth turn about. Perhaps it was the feeling that she was being watched intently. Possibly it was some slight sound that she had sensed. For The Shadow had moved forward from his hiding place.

When Beth gazed in his direction, she saw the cloaked form straight before

her. She looked into burning eyes that gazed from beneath The Shadow's hat brim.

Beth repressed a gasp. She was sensing the power of The Shadow's eyes: those stern optics which made men of evil quail. To the girl, however, The

Shadow's gaze brought confidence.

Her first fright ended, she acted as obediently as if under a hypnotic spell. Steadily, almost mechanically, Beth stepped toward the black-cloaked visitor.

"You have feared," spoke The Shadow, his tone a soft whisper. "You need fear no longer."

Beth nodded.

"Tell me of the danger that lies here."

Beth found her voice. She whispered a reply.

"I cannot define it," she informed. "Actually, I am safe. And yet -"

"You fear Peter Langrew?"

"Yes."

"You mistrust the others, with the exception of Gilbert Eldron."

"That is true. I can trust Gilbert only. But I - I cannot tell him -"

"That Miss Theodora mistrusts him."

The girl opened her eyes wide. The Shadow had spoken the very thought that

was in her mind. Before she could speak, The Shadow hissed a low command for silence.

Beth followed The Shadow's gaze. Gilbert had stepped into view. He was moving toward the door of his own room. He saw Beth looking in his direction, but he did not spy The Shadow. The girl obscured any view of the tall, cloaked shape that was dark against the wall.

"I'm taking a look in my own room," laughed Gilbert. "That ought to please

Langrew. Maybe I'll find the prowler hiding under my bed. I'll search your room

next, Beth."

Chuckling Gilbert stepped into the room. The girl turned about to face The Shadow.

"Who are you?" she began. "You know - you understand - perhaps you can solve these riddles. Peter Langrew claims to have a secret of hidden wealth. Yet we believe, Gilbert and I, that it is a false story. Miss Theodora seems to be deceived -"

"When I return," interposed The Shadow, "I shall bring an end to this mystery. You are safe here, for the present."

"Yes," nodded Beth. "I have been here quite a long while. I am safe, unless -"

"Unless you speak unwisely?"

The girl nodded.

"Preserve silence," ordered The Shadow. "If danger threatens, signal with a flashlight from the lookout window in the alcove by the front stairs. Your signal will be seen. It will bring me to your aid."

Another pause. While Beth stood wondering how The Shadow had learned of the porthole in the alcove, Gilbert came from his own room and entered Beth's. He was going through with his promise of a thorough search.

"There is another person in this house," remarked The Shadow. "His name is Jack Hallison."

"He came tonight," explained Beth. "Gilbert promised to tell me something about him. He is a likable chap; I know that he would aid me if trouble comes. I mean that he would try to aid me; but I doubt that I could depend upon him."

THE SHADOW had stepped across the hall. His gloved fingers were drawing the bolt of the door that led up to the tower. Already, footsteps were sounding on the front stairs. Peter Langrew had finished his search below.

"Bolt this door when I have passed," said The Shadow, quietly. "Depend upon my return. Remember this token; it will announce me, no matter what my guise may be."

He drew the glove from his left hand. Beth saw the sparkle of a magnificent gem. It was a fire opal, The Shadow's girasol, an unmistakable stone. Beth stared into depths of ever-changing color. Deep crimson became a vivid blue. The girasol sparkled like a snapping fire. Then the hand withdrew.

The Shadow had stepped past the tower door. Beth saw the barrier close silently.

Langrew's footsteps were almost at the top of the stairs. Quickly, Beth shot the bolt, then drew back with a happy gasp. She was sure that she had covered the departure of The Shadow.

Then came a shout from the far end of the hall - one that made Beth realize that she was mistaken.

It was Beale. The servant had come up by the back stairs, arriving in the hall ahead of Langrew. Seeing the girl by the door to the tower, Beale came dashing forward. Langrew popped into view and joined him. Beth saw Gilbert bob out into the hall.

"Who was it?" demanded Langrew, angrily pushing Beth aside. "What did you hear?"

"Nothing," stammered Beth. "I - I was afraid that -"

"That someone might be beyond this door? You are right! Perhaps those were

the sounds that Theodora heard. Come Beale! Follow me with your flashlight."

Langrew yanked the bolt and swung the door. Automatic ready, he started up

the steep stairs, with Beale three feet behind him. The servant was toting an old horse pistol; he flashed a light ahead of his master.

Gilbert Eldron had arrived. He looked toward Beth. The girl smiled wanly and shook her head.

"It was nothing, Gilbert," she affirmed. "Nothing - no one - just my imagination. I tried to explain -"

"You couldn't, to Langrew," interposed Gilbert. "He is too jittery. But this tells me something, Beth. He is worried about that tower. He has been up there."

"You saw him?"

"Yes. Last night; and once before. I wonder -"

Gilbert paused and shook his head speculatively. Beth stood tense. She could only hope that The Shadow had managed to gain an outer hiding place. She remembered that jet blackness of his cloak. It might suffice to conceal him against the darkness, so she believed.

UP in the storeroom above, The Shadow had raised the trapdoor by standing upon two stacked boxes. In the darkness, he could hear the clambering of Langrew and Beale. He saw the arriving glow of the flashlight.

As he raised his body, The Shadow used one foot to give the upper box an easy, sideways shove. It tumbled noiselessly upon an old mattress. Out through the trap, The Shadow pushed the barrier downward. He had not loosened the screw

that clamped the bar. His forcible pressure closed the trapdoor and left it almost as he had found it.

Reaching the rail beside the square tower roof, The Shadow raised himself to the new level. His tiny flashlight blinked. It showed the carrier upon the wire. Extinguishing the light, The Shadow made a half leap and gripped the carrier. The wire swung wide; The Shadow's form swayed with it, like a figure hanging from a trapeze.

As the wire steadied, The Shadow released the brake. Still swaying, he whizzed downward at an angle through the drizzle, resuming his course toward Harry's tree. The wire sang his departure; the tone ended just as the trapdoor

came jouncing upward.

Langrew and Beale had reached the roof. Agile as a cat, the old man had followed The Shadow's plan of stacking boxes; but he had delayed long enough to unscrew the bar beneath the trapdoor. Flashlights blinked. Langrew had produced one of his own, to join Beale in the search. They were looking everywhere about the roof; they were throwing rays upon the level below, where the rear of the house had a flat roof of its own.

Everywhere but upward. Neither thought to hunt for a clue above their heads. The wire remained unseen. The two men returned through the trapdoor and clamped it behind them. Langrew descended to announce that there had been no intruder.

The news was welcome to Beth Kindell, yet it amazed her more than ever. Returned to her own room, the girl wondered what had become of that incredible being who had spoken to her in the hallway.

A car was moving slowly from the rear street behind the old house. Within it was a passenger who delivered a whispered laugh that came like a tone from some invisible sphere. The Shadow had cut short his search; but he had learned enough facts for tonight.

He knew the names of those who occupied the old house. He knew that the occupants would be there when he called again. From this night on, that mansion would be watched.

Unknown to anyone except Beth Kindell, The Shadow had departed. The girl would not speak her knowledge. She had become The Shadow's ally. Theodora Langrew would be satisfied by the search. Peter Langrew and Beale were convinced that there had been no prowler in the house. As for Gilbert Eldron, that young man had been completely deceived. Jack Hallison, whoever he was, had not even entered the picture. All this was to The Shadow's liking. He wanted his visit to remain an unknown factor.

There was work to be done, outside the old house. Crime to be thwarted, by The Shadow. It was the mastersleuth's plan to leave matters as they stood, until he had closed in upon the trail of Blink Torgue and the outside band.

The Shadow had already determined that outside events were linked with those within the old barred house. Tonight, he had seen the person who controlled the outer band.

The Shadow's laugh was prophetic. It told that when he returned, he would be prepared for final action.

CHAPTER VIII

HARRY FINDS A JOB

SHORTLY before eight o'clock the next morning, Harry Vincent, under orders from The Shadow, was driving toward Hengle's filling station. Harry's car was an old sedan purchased for him by The Shadow.

Following The Shadow's instructions, Harry had, at seven o'clock, been near the bakery where the lad who worked at Hengle's filling station picked up his morning ride. Shrewdly, Harry offered him a lift and started pumping him. The lad said his name was Joe Ditson, that he was dissatisfied with his present

job because it had no future.

That was Harry's opening. Still following The Shadow's instructions, Harry said that through a friend he could offer Joe a job in the city with a chain of gas stations, but that he would have to take it immediately, as the man who could give him the job needed men right away.

Joe snapped up the offer. Harry took him to the hotel, where The Shadow, posing as the chain filling station representative, gave Joe money and instructions to go to New York on the eight o'clock train.

Joe wanted to get in touch with a friend of his - Bill Detty, who worked at a cross-roads filling station about four miles from town - and have him notify Hengle that Joe was quitting. Harry said he would give Detty the message.

When Ditson had left, The Shadow talked with Harry. Soon afterward, Harry had departed from the hotel and driven his coupe to a parking lot. There he stepped aboard the old sedan that The Shadow had purchased in Aurora.

The sedan fitted better with the part that Harry intended to play. For The Shadow had opened a plan that offered excellent possibilities, since Joe Ditson would soon be on his way to New York.

DRIVING northward, Harry arrived at Hengle's filling station. The brawny proprietor came from the little office. He nodded thinking that Harry was a customer. Harry alighted.

"My name's Bill Detty," he said. "Came to bring you a message from Joe Ditson."

"Yeah?" queried Hengle, gruffly. "What's he want? A day off?"

Harry noted a scowl upon Hengle's face. The fellow was sour-featured and rough of manner. Harry could not blame Ditson for being glad of another job.

"Joe's had to go to New York," explained Harry. "Got an offer from there, the lucky kid. But he was worried about leaving you short of a helper. That's why he called me up."

"You know somebody who wants to take his job?"

"Yes. I'd like it."

Hengle stared. Though Harry's car was old, his clothes were new. He looked too prosperous to be jumping at a job in an obscure service station.

"I've worked out at the cross-roads," explained Harry. "Tended the gas tank there. There's been no pay coming, so I came into town to see what I could

get. Put on my store clothes" - he tugged proudly at the coat that he was wearing - "and thought I might land some kind of a job.

"Went around to see Joe Ditson. When he showed me the letter he'd got in the morning mail, I asked him if he thought you'd take me on. He said he thought so. I'm willing to work for what Joe was getting."

Hengle stroked his heavy chin. At last, he nodded.

"You'll do," he decided. "Got any overalls?"

"I can buy some, downtown," returned Harry. "I have a little money. Nowhere to bunk, though. They've sold the old house out at the cross-roads. This old car doesn't belong to me, either. I've got to take it back tonight."

Hengle calculated.

"I was paying Ditson fifteen dollars a week," he declared. "If you'll work for twelve, you can bunk upstairs in the service station. There's two rooms up there."

Harry looked toward the decrepit building; then nodded.

"It's a go."

"All right, Detty." Hengle waved his hand toward the street. "Go downtown and get the overalls. You'll need two sets. Try to be back here inside half an hour."

TWENTY minutes later, a bell hop paged Mr. Arnaud in the lobby of the Aurora Hotel. It was a phone call. The Shadow answered. He received a report from Harry. The game had worked. His agent would soon be on duty.

By day, when he tended the gasoline tanks; by night, when he bunked in the service station, Harry would keep constant watch on the old house across the way. With his agent assigned to that duty, The Shadow would be free to move elsewhere.

Two hours later, The Shadow was seated in his room at the hotel. Joe Ditson had left for New York. His job would be awaiting him. The Shadow had arranged that detail through a telegram to an investment broker named Rutledge Mann, who served The Shadow as a contact agent.

Calm in his guise of Henry Arnaud, The Shadow studied maps of the surrounding territory. His finger moved between two towns: Brookdale and Northbridge. The Shadow had chosen these places that lay north of Aurora. There

was a larger town to the south - a place called Solway. The Shadow had eliminated it.

New crime was due. Crooks had been successful in their raid at Goshen. They would logically pick Solway for their next foray. At the same time, Solway, largest of the three towns, would be the spot where Feds would be on duty.

To The Shadow, it seemed likely that the crooks would cross the dope. Blink Torgue and his thugs would venture from some hide-out; but they would avoid Solway and pick one of the northern towns in preference. The Shadow's task was to decide between Brookdale and Northbridge.

He inscribed the names of the towns upon a pad. Beneath Brookdale, he wrote "Marsland"; under Northbridge, "Burke." Those were the names of two agents whom The Shadow had ordered to this vicinity. The Shadow would contact them today. One man would remain in each town.

From his contour map, The Shadow found a steep hillside that lay six miles north of Aurora, near a road that ran from Brookdale to Northbridge. That hill would serve as his lookout post. From it, he could watch for a signal flare from the old house.

Today, clouds were scattering. The night would be clear. Perhaps mobsters would delay their next raid; if so, The Shadow could wait. One point seemed certain: Blink Torgue would again wait for a flash of colored light before he ventured.

For crooks were depending upon a mastermind. They had gained results because they had followed the crafty orders of a hidden leader. The masterschemer, safe within the old gray house, had shown his ability to outguess the law.

Only The Shadow had divined the game. He, alone, knew the source from which criminal orders came. He, like Blink, would be ready when the signal flare occurred. Tonight, or any future night.

THE SHADOW folded his maps. He packed a suitcase, strolled downstairs and checked out of the Aurora Hotel. He entered Vincent's coupe and drove northward. His first stop was at Hengle's filling station.

He pulled up in front of the first standard. Harry Vincent, attired in overalls, came jogging out from the station.

"Sorry, mister. No Coronet gas. How about Pure Blue?"

The Shadow nodded; he pulled the car to the next standard. Harry filled

the tank and received the money without comment. There was nothing further to report.

"Instructions!"

The Shadow whispered brief words to his agent, then drove away. Harry, watching, saw the coupe turn the corner. He strolled back into the service station, where Hengle nodded his approval and arose from a rickety chair.

"You know the job, Bill," growled the proprietor. "Guess I can trust you with the place. I'm driving downtown in my roadster. Keep on the job while I'm gone."

Later, alone, Harry Vincent indulged in a grin. He was getting by with his role of Bill Detty. In that capacity, he could serve The Shadow well. Much though Harry craved action elsewhere, he realized that his job here was important.

More important even than Harry had guessed. While he watched the gray walls of the old house across the way, Harry stood closer to crime than he supposed.

CHAPTER IX

THE SHADOW LEARNS

DARKNESS had arrived. Upon a rocky hillside, a lone watcher was keeping vigil. Stationed at his chosen spot, The Shadow gazed beneath the starlight, toward the distant glow of Aurora.

The Shadow had made a complete circuit of the terrain. To Brookdale; then Northbridge; back again to Aurora. At the first town, he had talked with Cliff Marsland; at the second, with Clyde Burke. In Aurora, he had again stopped at Hengle's to hear word from Harry Vincent.

Cliff Marsland had reported strangers in the town of Brookdale. He had spotted a sallow-faced idler who had later ducked from sight. He had seen two shrewd-eyed men drive up in a coupe and park for half an hour on the main street, without leaving their car.

These events had happened prior to The Shadow's arrival. None of the suspects had been about when Cliff had made his report. Indications, however, were that something would soon brew in Brookdale.

All was quiet in Northbridge. Clyde Burke had covered the town, with no results. Clyde was as competent as Cliff. The conclusion, therefore, was that Northbridge would not become a focal point tonight.

In Aurora, Hengle had been absent when The Shadow had made his second stop at the filling station. That was at four o'clock. Harry had reported that Hengle had failed to receive a delivery of motor oil and had driven into town to raise a protest.

The air was clear upon the hillside. From somewhere came the distant chime of a town clock, striking nine. The Shadow's vigil promised to be unsuccessful.

Crooks had chosen cloudy, rainy nights for their previous drives.

That, however, was no indication of their coming actions. Blink Torgue might be the type who would work by a set system; but Blink was not the field marshal who commanded crime. The brain was stationed within the old house; he was a master of crooked craft. With the Feds anxious to thwart the crooks, it was likely that the mastermind would adopt new and unexpected tactics.

Minutes dragged. The Shadow's gaze was steady. Garbed in black, The Shadow stood invisible upon the hillside. There was something prophetic in his

watchfulness. He seemed to expect a token from the night.

It came.

A tiny spark of light - the beginning of a flare. Then, with vivid burst, a puff of crimson flame flashed upward. The signal died. Darkness blanketed the

distant spot from which the red flare had appeared.

Like the green flare, this red one had come from the roof of Peter Langrew's old house.

Purple - blue - green - red -

Four colors had been seen in all. The Shadow knew the towns that the first

three had indicated. Only three were left: Solway to the south; Brookdale and Northbridge to the north.

The red light told nothing in itself, outside of the fact that crime was due. Nothing to The Shadow. But to others - to Blink Torgue, watching elsewhere

- it signified the town where roving criminals should strike.

Anticipating crime, The Shadow had chosen Brookdale as the logical spot. The same flare that ordered crooks to action was the signal that The Shadow awaited. Wherever Blink Torgue might be watching, his vantage point could not be much closer to Brookdale than The Shadow's.

In all probability it would be farther. For Blink was obeying orders blindly, raiding anywhere that he was ordered. Despite the presence of Federal agents, Blink would take a crack at Solway, if told to do so. Blink, though he knew the terrain, could have no previous knowledge of where he was supposed to strike. That was why colored flares were necessary.

CONFIDENT that he could reach Brookdale ahead of the raiders, The Shadow stepped aboard the coupe and coasted the car down the hill to the highway.

A dozen miles to Brookdale. Fifteen minutes would bring The Shadow to the outskirts of the town, for the road was clear and curves, though numerous, were

slight. Though Blink might be prompt in his attack, he and his band could not arrive in less than a half hour.

While he sped toward Brookdale, The Shadow was traveling away from Northbridge, which lay eight miles in the other direction. He was banking entirely upon Cliff Marsland's report, plus Clyde Burke's negative findings.

Ten minutes. The Shadow whizzed through a tiny hamlet, where all the inhabitants had retired. He swung a curve and reached the last straightaway. It

was a long stretch, two miles at least, and in the distance, The Shadow saw the

tiny lights of an approaching car, coming from Brookdale.

The coupe roared onward. The intervening space was lessening. Suddenly, the lights of the approaching car blinked off. Then on - off - on.

The Shadow jabbed a button on the dashboard. His own lights went out; he snapped them on again. In response to the return signal, the approaching car screeched to a stop. The Shadow halted the coupe; the lights of the two cars showed a square-set man leaping to the road.

It was Cliff Marsland; his chiseled features, usually restrained, betrayed

excitement. Cliff sprang to The Shadow's car to meet the keen gaze of his chief.

"The two men showed up again," reported Cliff, hurriedly. "The ones in the

car. Others met them in a pool room. They aren't crooks; they're Feds! I spotted

Vic Marquette with them."

Cliff paused, breathless; then added: "They're covering the Brookdale

National Bank. They must have had a tip-off!"

CLIFF had brought timely news. Knowing where The Shadow was stationed, he had hurried out from town to inform his chief. For Cliff had foreseen trouble had The Shadow arrived ahead of Blink Torgue.

Vic Marquette, leading the unit of government men, was one of the best hands of strategy that the F.B.I possessed. When Vic and his squad covered, the job was complete. Even The Shadow, venturing past an unseen cordon, might be caught in a sudden glare of lights.

Vic Marquette knew The Shadow, for the master-fighter had aided the Fed in the past. But Vic might not be quick enough to stop the fire of his subordinates. The Federal agents were out for business tonight. They were chafing because of previous failures.

To Cliff, one course seemed logical. It was certain that other Feds must have remained at Solway, the town south of Aurora. They had simply decided to double their vigil; to cover another place as well, in case the attackers should try to outguess them.

The Shadow's course - as Cliff saw it - would be to stay outside the cordon. If crooks spotted the Feds too soon, The Shadow would be able to stop the criminals should they try flights instead of battle.

The Shadow spoke a single word:

"Follow!"

Cliff sprang back to his car, confident that The Shadow would lead the way into Brookdale, to stop before he neared the bank. But when Cliff reached the wheel, he gaped.

The Shadow was turning his coupe in the center of the road. He was taking a course away from the town!

The coupe fairly leaped to a rapid start. Cliff jammed his own car into gear. Stepping hard upon the accelerator, he lurched his machine forward to keep pace with the speed that The Shadow had begun.

The cars were gobbling the broad concrete; whirling away from Brookdale as though fleeing a plague.

As he drove, Cliff wondered why The Shadow was speeding from the center of danger. Never before had he known his chief to clear away from a field that offered fight. As miles passed, Cliff fumed, trying to understand. Then the answer struck him.

New strategy by The Shadow!

The crooks had outguessed the Feds before. Perhaps they might be doing so again. Vic Marquette had suddenly shifted to Brookdale. There was a way by which the criminals could offset his move and still engage in evil.

They could pick the town of Northbridge, which alone remained uncovered.

Cliff realized The Shadow's keenness. No need to cover Brookdale; the Feds were there. Better to head for Northbridge, on a chance that Blink Torgue would choose it instead.

The odds had turned suddenly against The Shadow. Only a sustained burst of speed could bring him to the other town before crime was accomplished.

The Shadow was banking upon breaks to aid him tonight. He was hoping to offset Blink's gain; driving, alone, to hurl himself against a band of murderous outlaws.

Already, The Shadow's speed had outmatched Cliff's. Reaching a bend in the

road, The Shadow's car disappeared. Cliff, though he still urged his car to the limit, had begun to realize that he would be miles behind when The Shadow reached the goal.

The best that Cliff could do would be to come up, minutes later, in time to act as a reserve. The first fight would be The Shadow's. Intrepid, daring, the cloaked battler would not hesitate, no matter how numerous the foe.

The Shadow's speed indicated that he knew his present surmise was correct. Small wonder; for he had recognized the shrewdness of the superfoe who managed affairs of crime. Since the Feds were at Brookdale, Blink Torgue would be at Northbridge.

Northbridge was the town that the red flare had signified.
The Shadow knew.

CHAPTER X

THE SHORT TRAIL

HALF past nine was late for the sleepy country town of Northbridge. Even the main street was deserted. It presented a barren scene to the stranger who viewed it. That man was a wiry young chap who stood outside the hotel.

He was Clyde Burke, agent of The Shadow.

As a New York newspaper reporter, Clyde could explain his presence almost anywhere. He had managed to remain inconspicuous in Northbridge; at the same time, he had looked about. All during his stay, Clyde had seen nothing of interest.

Tonight was like the finish of a routine - the end of a duty which was necessary to perform. Idling, Clyde strolled down the main street toward an intersection near the bank, where a main highway entered town.

Another man was pacing the opposite sidewalk. Clyde noted a uniform. The man was a policeman, testing doorways in perfunctory fashion. He represented one of the few officers who patrolled these streets at night.

A sedan pulled up across a street. Two men and a girl alighted. Clyde could hear their voices, bidding someone in the car good night. The policeman passed them. Clyde saw the car draw away; it came in his direction and he watched it roll by.

The girl was waving from the curb when Clyde next noticed her. The two men

must have stepped to the background, for one of them came suddenly into view and

spoke to the girl. They chatted for a few moments, then turned and walked away.

They rounded the corner past the bank.

It was difficult to follow figures when they walked close to building fronts, for the shops of Northbridge were unlighted at night. All the glow came

from the street lamps on the curb; they were few and far between. Yet any person

should have been visible at times, when walking along the street.

That was why Clyde wondered. He could no longer see the policeman coming in and out from doorways. What had happened to the fellow? Suddenly alert, Clyde crossed the street.

He came directly to the doorway near which the sedan had stopped.

Stepping

into the entryway, Clyde lighted a cigarette. As he did, he stumbled. Catching himself, he held the match flame low.

He had tripped upon a huddled body. The flickering match showed the officer, unconscious. Clyde noted that the man's hands and feet were bound; a

broad patch of adhesive plaster had been hastily slapped across his mouth.

THUGS had done quick work. They had used the girl to cover up their action. The moll had played a clever part, waving from the curb. Clyde had been

bluffed. More than that, he had been lucky.

Paused across the street, he had not been noticed by the men who drove away in the sedan. Had he been seen, Clyde would have gained the same fate as the Northbridge policeman. The men who had overpowered the officer were unquestionably desperadoes.

The type that would follow Blink Torgue.

That thought struck Clyde instantly. Stooping, he began quick efforts to unbind the policeman. He ripped the plaster from the man's mouth. The cop groaned feebly.

For a moment, Clyde stood undecided. The policeman had been stunned; but he was recovering. There was no need to seek a physician. The man's gun was gone - Clyde had not found it while untying him - hence he would be useless in combat. Particularly, Clyde knew, because the officer was still groggy.

Discussion would do no good. Crooks were at large, ready for crime in this

very town. The Shadow had drawn a blank in heading for Brookdale. It was Clyde's

task to do the most he could in Northbridge.

Leaving the policeman in the safety of the doorway, Clyde crept toward the

corner by the bank. The building was white-fronted. Clyde decided to stop short

of it. His decision was wise. As he eased beneath an awning, he heard low voices.

He was before the glass window of a stationery store. The speakers were located deeper, in an entry that led past the side display window.

"Blink's about set, ain't he?"

"Should be, Duke. Get ready to hear it blow."

"O.K., Mannie. Say - where'd Jing an' Mac duck to with Daisy, after they slugged the bull?"

"Over across the other street. Opposite the bank. They'll be ready for the

get-away. Better check whether the cop's gotten loose."

Footsteps sounded on the tiled entry. Clyde shifted; from his pocket, he drew a short-barreled automatic that he carried for emergency. Usually, Clyde went unarmed. On this occasion, he had brought a .32, at The Shadow's instruction.

"Duke" stopped from the entry and turned in Clyde's direction. The Shadow's agent shifted outward, jabbed his gun straight into Duke's ribs. The fellow grunted; Clyde saw an ugly fishmouthed face that showed sudden fear.

"Stick where you are!" ordered Clyde. "That's it. Keep your hands up. One move means curtains for you, fellow!"

Thrusting his left hand forward, Clyde found Duke's gun and pocketed it. They stood close together, vaguely visible at the awning's edge. Duke's lips were moving, but the crook was too cowed to chance a shout for Mannie.

The situation put Clyde in a quandary. His best move was to shove Duke along the street, up to the doorway where the officer lay. Perhaps the bluecoat

would be sufficiently recovered to take charge of this prisoner. In that case, Clyde could come back and get Mannie.

But Mannie, in the meantime, constituted a danger. What if he became puzzled when Duke failed to return? What would Mannie think if he peered out from the doorway, to find Duke gone?

THE answer came to Clyde. Mannie would suppose that Duke had gone to the doorway above, to look at the bound cop. That meant that Mannie would come along himself. No need to return. Clyde could wait for Mannie to walk into the trap.

"Come on," voiced Clyde, low-toned to Duke. "You're going with me."

Clyde stopped. He heard other footsteps. Mannie was already stepping from the doorway. The short paces ceased. Mannie's whisper came:

"What you lampin', Duke?"

Duke's body obscured Clyde from Mannie's view. Without a word, Clyde jabbed the pistol more firmly against Duke's chest. The yellow crook understood. He spoke to Mannie without turning.

"Nothin', Mannie," he replied. "Just keepin' lookout."

"No use bein' under cover," chuckled Mannie, still oblivious to Duke's dilemma. "This town is soft. They're all soft, the ones that Blink gets tipped off to."

"He's workin' with a big-shot, Blink is. I don't know the guy, or who he is; but he knows his stuff. Blink's the ace when it comes to handlin' the jobs, after the big-shot gives him word."

"But Shill is smart, too. Leave it to him to pipe the word through to the big-shot. I was with Blink when he seen Shill this mornin', and I heard Blink say -"

A shuddering, muffled blast ended Mannie's comment. The explosion came from close by, for the sidewalk trembled with the quake. Intervening walls had dulled the blast.

Clyde knew what it was. Crooks had entered the Northbridge National - Blink and a crew of henchmen. They had blown the bank's vault.

Clyde stood rigid. He was in a tough spot. He had Duke helpless; but he had to await Mannie's move. He had hoped that the fellow would slide back into the entry; and Mannie did, but only part way.

Chancing a look through the show window, Clyde saw Mannie by the side window. He caught a hazy view of a pasty, tight-lipped face; then he saw a sudden leer on Mannie's part. The thug had spotted Clyde. He was ready to leap out and aid Duke.

Clyde took the only course that came to him. Jolting forward, he gave Duke

an unexpected shove; one that was timely through luck, rather than design. It sent Duke hurtling backward, just as Mannie came from the doorway. Mannie snarled as he bounced back into the entry.

With his shove, Clyde kept on, straight for the bank corner. He had no time to turn after he rushed Duke. He guessed that the crooks would expect him to turn back. By crossing the dope, he gained a head start. The bank corner was closer than the policeman's doorway.

More than that, Clyde was maddened with the hope of thwarting crime. Though death might be his lot, he was ready to thrust himself squarely into the horde of criminals whom he knew must be around the corner.

AS Clyde wheeled past the corner, he saw two cars. One was a touring car, parked by the bank itself but pointed in the opposite direction. The other was a sedan, on the opposite side of the street, faced toward Clyde and closer. Both cars, oddly, were parked on the wrong side of the street, in reference to their direction.

Four men were scrambling out from the bank lugging huge bags of swag. They were already on the street when Clyde saw them. They were scrambling into the touring car. Desperately, Clyde aimed, in hope that he could wing one of the

robbers.

Before Clyde could fire, a shout sounded from behind him. Turning instinctively, Clyde saw Mannie. The thug had arrived at the corner; he was shouting the alarm as he aimed pointblank for Clyde.

With a quick leap, Clyde gained the wall of the bank, just as Mannie fired.

Two shots whizzed wide. Clyde jabbed one in return. Mannie had already swung his aim. Quick with the trigger, the crook had a chance for a bull's-eye.

But Clyde, looking past him, saw a blaze of light from two brilliant headlamps.

A coupe was roaring in from the other side of the main street.

The Shadow!

Even as he fired wildly at Mannie, Clyde guessed that his chief had arrived. An automatic barked from long range as the car approached. Mannie's aiming hand went up; the crook's gun dropped, as his scowling face registered that he had been clipped.

As the gun bounced from the sidewalk, another hand snatched it. Duke was in back of Mannie. A quick-triggered gang-fighter, Duke aimed for the coupe, which was already alongside the corner curb. Duke pumped bullets wide, for his aim was hasty.

Flame tongued from the coupe. A fierce laugh sounded. The Shadow's .45 withered Duke where he stood. The ruffian sprawled forward.

Down by the bank entrance, the touring car was starting for its get-away. Across the street, men were out of doorways, boarding the sedan, where a ready driver had the wheel and newcomers were swinging a machine gun. Their move was too late to stop The Shadow.

One press of the accelerator would have carried him past that starting sedan, beyond a hail of futile revolver stabs; into the clear before the machine gun could begin its rattle; off to the chase of the touring car that carried Blink Torgue and the swag.

The Shadow, master-fighter, had his opportunity. He did not take it.

Clyde Burke was the reason. The Shadow knew what would happen to his aid. The sedan was headed for the spot where Clyde stood flat-footed, trapped against the wall, with no time to regain the corner. When The Shadow's car roared past, the sedan would drive in this direction. Clyde would be riddled by machine-gun fire.

The Shadow sacrificed the chase to save his agent.

THE sedan, driving forward, belated, was pointed at an angle across the street. The Shadow, skimming the left-hand curb, could roar past before the other car blockaded. The thugs in the sedan wanted a crash. The Shadow gave them one; but not the sort that they expected.

He slued the wheel to the right; the coupe's rear wheels skidded leftward.

The Shadow swung hard to the left. The coupe righted. Yells came from the sedan

as The Shadow's car roared in amidships. At forty miles an hour, it struck the sedan's left side.

The Shadow gave his car the brakes as he hit. He was braced far back from the wheel; and it was well. The radiator, motor, hood of the coupe were driven back by the terrific impact. The steering wheel jammed upward, stopping just short of The Shadow's chest.

The sedan was lifted bodily in air. Though heavier than the coupe, its weight was insufficient to save it. The projecting machine gun was driven back among the men who held it as the sedan smashed down upon its right side. Still impelled by the force of the collision, the sedan rolled over on its top.

Clyde Burke saw it poise there, its wheels spinning as a beetle would

wave

its legs; then the car toppled lazily along, to thwack down again upon its shattered right side. Howls changed to groans. There was no fight from those within the ruined car.

The left door of the coupe ripped outward. The Shadow had banged it open with his shoulder. He came from the wreckage of his own machine, a black-cloaked figure that loomed like the personification of vengeful fate.

In one stroke, without a single shot, The Shadow had vanquished four killers - the occupants of the sedan. They lay, overwhelmed, within the hulk of their own car.

But there were others; they bobbed from far doorways: "Jing," Mac and Daisy. Clyde saw the men yank revolvers, while the girl made a dash for the corner beyond the bank.

The Shadow, turning toward Jing and Mac, wavered. Clyde saw him stagger and sag against the smashed front of the coupe, just as the two crooks fired.

Wildly, Clyde leaped forward. He stabbed prompt shots with his automatic. He crippled one enemy; he heard the other mouth a curse, then yank his companion off along the route that the girl had followed. Clyde reached The Shadow.

His chief was straightening. He had not been clipped by bullets. He had sagged as an aftermath of the collision. Clyde steadied The Shadow as he stepped away from the coupe. Then Clyde pointed.

"Look!"

Jing and Mac had reached the far corner. With the girl, they were boarding an automobile, a reserve car that must have been parked upon another street. Crooks had gone through the rear of the bank to reach the vehicle. They were about to turn and roar along this street, in hope of downing The Shadow and his agent.

Both The Shadow and Clyde stood in plain view. Though they held weapons, they were outnumbered. Small handicap for The Shadow under ordinary conditions; but Clyde could see his chief about to sway, still groggy from the crash.

THEN, as with Clyde's rescue, came the brilliance of headlights. Another coupe wheeled up from the near corner. It stopped; from it sprang Cliff Marsland, ready to add his gun to the defense, should the crooks head in this direction.

Up ahead, the car by the far corner wheeled. Blink Torgue's reserves had lost their nerve. They knew that their waiting adversary was The Shadow. He had gained a car of his own; with an added gun to fight beside him. Others might be in that same car. Crooks, at their distance, could not tell that it was only a coupe.

They chose flight. Clyde saw their car head away, taking Blink's direction. Then came an order from The Shadow:

"Follow!"

The word was addressed to Cliff. With a nod, he sprang to the wheel of the coupe. The Shadow swung suddenly from Clyde's steadying clutch. Vigor regained, he boarded Cliff's coupe. The door slammed shut. Clyde stood stupefied, clutching his revolver.

A gloved hand came from the window. It clutched Clyde's gun, took it from his grasp and tossed it to the street. Then came The Shadow's order to Clyde:

"Remain!"

The coupe shot away. Clyde saw its tail-light twinkle in the distance. He understood. It was his job to stay in Northbridge. There was time for Clyde to decamp from the scene of battle.

Time, he knew, to get back to the doorway where the groggy policeman lay. To be the first to aid the officer; to explain that he had arrived after the fray. Clyde became alert; he dashed forth on his mission.

OUTSIDE of Northbridge, a new chase was on. The Shadow had picked up the trail of Blink's reserves. There was a highway outside of town, one that skirted Northbridge. The Shadow had ordered Cliff to head southward.

The Shadow was acting on the supposition that the crooks had doubled on their course, to throw off any chance observers. He was right. Two miles below Northbridge, he spied the car ahead. It was distant; its lights formed a tiny twinkle upon a hillside more than a mile away.

Seven miles. The fleeing car had maintained its distance. Suddenly, The Shadow spoke to Cliff. He ordered a stop. Cliff obeyed. Relaxing at the wheel, he stared in the direction that The Shadow indicated.

Off to the right was a straight stretch, reached by a curve of the road. It showed like a thin white ribbon, in the light of a rising moon. At the pace that it had taken, the pursued car should be upon that stretch.

It was not. It had stopped or turned off somewhere in between. The Shadow ordered Cliff to proceed. Within half a mile, they came to a cross-road, where rough macadam offered no marks of tires as a clue.

The thugs had turned from the main highway. This crossing was the last spot to which they could be traced. The fleeing car had ignored earlier and better turn-offs. The Shadow's conclusion was that its occupants had believed that they had outstripped pursuit.

Therefore, the retreaters had turned off to reach their hide-out, where Blink Torgue and the first cluster of thugs had already arrived. Somewhere in this vicinity, rogues could be found.

Tonight would produce a search. Aided by Cliff, The Shadow planned to narrow the area, wherein men of crime would be found. The Shadow had won a battle with foes of right. He had thinned their band and driven them to cover.

With their newly gained swag, Blink Torgue and his skulking henchmen were due for new and greater trouble.

CHAPTER XI

THE LINK BETWEEN

IT was late the next afternoon. Harry Vincent was alone on duty at Hengle's filling station, when a coupe pulled up beside the Pure Blue standard.

It was Cliff Marsland's car. The driver, unaccompanied, was The Shadow.

The car had come in from the north. The Shadow was in his calm-faced guise of Henry Arnaud.

"Report!"

The word was quietly uttered while Harry began to wipe the windshield. Harry responded.

"No signs of life," he stated, referring to the old house. "I spotted the flare last night; but only like a reflection from the tower roof. Noticed it from my room upstairs in the service station.

"All quiet today. Hengle went down town an hour ago to get some parts for a repair job. I've read the local newspapers -"

"Report received!"

The Shadow tendered Harry two one-dollar bills to cover eight gallons of gasoline purchased. Harry thrust the money in his pocket and brought out

change. The Shadow drove away, heading toward Aurora. Harry went back into the service station.

Between those dollar bills he had felt a small envelope. He knew that it must be a message bearing instructions. The Shadow had planned to hand Harry the envelope with the money so that Hengle, if present, would not see it.

Although Hengle was absent, The Shadow had used his planned procedure as a reminder that this was the way in which messages might come.

Harry had read the newspapers thoroughly. As an aftermath of the bank robbery, there had been two survivors who had crawled from the wreckage of a smashed sedan. They had dodged in and about the town of Northbridge and finally commandeered a roadster that they had found in a parking lot.

Starting flight, they had encountered a carload of Feds, summoned in from Brookdale. Desperately, the thugs had opened fire. The Feds had annihilated them through necessity.

Through that, Harry knew, a valuable link had been lost. For Harry realized that The Shadow must have followed the crooks who had previously fled.

Not only because he was not sure that the sedan contained survivors; but because

he would have been handicapped had he remained in Northbridge.

Clyde Burke must have remained on the scene. Clyde had probably learned something. If The Shadow had contacted him today, the message would contain Clyde's information.

HARRY opened the envelope. He read brief lines, inked in a code that he understood. The statement was that The Shadow and Cliff were seeking the hideout of the criminals. Then came the final statement:

"A crook called Shill serves as contact. Watch everyone, including Hengle."

To the Feds, it would seem that crooks had learned of their presence in Brookdale and had carried that news to their leader, early in the day. That was

correct. Blink Torgue had undoubtedly been informed. But The Shadow knew more: namely, that Blink had slipped the word to the mastermind who lived in the old house at Aurora. That was why the red flare had been given, announcing the final order as an attack on the bank at Northbridge.

Knowing that there was a contact, The Shadow had seen importance in Clyde's report of a man named "Shill," mentioned in the conversation between Mannie and Duke.

The Shadow had also remembered that Hengle had absented himself from the filling station part of yesterday. There was a chance that Hengle might be Shill.

Right now, The Shadow had gone into Aurora simply to keep up his part of Arnaud, as a registered guest at the hotel. After dinner he would return to join Cliff, who was still scouring the terrain where the concealed hide-out lay. On the way, The Shadow would stop here for a later report from Harry.

Writing had faded from the note, for it was inscribed in The Shadow's special ink. Harry tossed paper and envelope into a wastebasket. He went out front and idled by a gasoline standard, gazing occasionally at the old gray house across the way.

It was nearly dusk. Harry saw the dim lights of an approaching car and thought that it was a customer; for the car was pulling into the filling station. Then he recognized Hengle's machine. It had come from the direction of Aurora.

The brawny man stepped from his car and nodded bluntly to Harry. Then Hengle glanced at his watch.

"Getting close to six, Bill," he said, gruffly. "You can go off duty. Shed your overalls and wash up."

HARRY went into the service station. He doffed his overalls and washed. All the while, he kept watch in a mirror. It seemed to him that Hengle was stealing glances in his direction.

This did not trouble Harry. He felt secure in his role of Bill Detty. Suddenly suspicious of Hengle, Harry felt that the fellow was simply on his guard.

Finishing his wash, Harry went upstairs. He lowered ragged shades, then turned on the light in his room, which had windows at front and back. That done, Harry sneaked out and stopped in a little hallway that lay between his room and Hengle's. There was a tiny window through which Harry could peer.

The Shadow's advice was sound. Hengle needed watching.

Certain that Harry was in his room, the brawny man had gone to his car.

He

was pulling out flat packages from beneath the front seat. Stacking his prizes on the running board, Hengle sneaked a look toward Harry's shaded window.

Satisfied that he would be able to see Harry's silhouette against the light, Hengle took it for granted that his employee was not spying upon him.

Hengle's next move came as a real surprise.

Harry saw the man go to the gasoline standard nearest his car. It was the unused gasoline post - the one supposed to contain the Coronet brand that Hengle did not carry.

Hengle unlocked the post. Hastily, he gathered his packages. Despite the tinge of dusk, Harry could see the man bundle the packages into a cylindrical container.

Hengle pushed the cylinder downward. He pulled a lever. He closed the hinged standard and locked it. Harry could distinguish a pleased grimace on Hengle's face.

Harry's solution to the occurrence was based on more than guesswork. It was an obvious conclusion. Hengle was Shill. Harry had learned his mode of contact with the house.

The gasoline standard housed a pipe line that led across the street. The cylinder was propelled through the tube by compressed air. The cylinder was large enough to contain objects of several inches in bulk. The packages that Harry had seen were a give-away.

They were the spoils from last night's raid. Bank notes and securities gained by Blink Torgue's raid. Hengle had shipped the swag into Peter Langrew's. Hidden in that house, the big-shot of crime could keep his illicit gains secure.

The cylinder was probably a long one; for Hengle had sent everything in one load. The tunnel through which it ran had probably been installed at the time the gasoline station was constructed. If, at that time, there had been pipelaying into the old house, the hook-up would have been an easy matter.

Messages, as well as swag, could go through by that pipe line.

Harry surmised that, yesterday, Hengle must have contacted Blink.

Learning

that Feds had come to Brookdale, Hengle - otherwise Shill - had sent the news through. At dusk, when Harry had just gone off duty.

STILL watching from the little window, Harry decided upon a plan. He would

go out to eat; then come back early in the evening. Hengle would suspect nothing. In case The Shadow arrived during Harry's absence, the news should be awaiting him. Harry decided to write a prompt note.

Just as he was turning from the window, Harry saw a car roll up in front

of the service station. It was a rattly old flivver; the youth who leaned from it was a long-faced country lad. Harry decided that he could be nothing more than a chance customer.

The youth chatted with Hengle while the proprietor filled his tank. Harry saw the flivver pull away.

Stepping into his own room, Harry was about to write a coded message in special ink when he heard Hengle's gruff voice calling from below:

"Hey, Bill! Come down a minute! It's important!"

Hastily, Harry scrawled the brief words, in code:

Back before eight. News.

He folded the message, overlapping the edges so that the ink would not fade through contact with the air. He tucked it in an inconspicuous spot, under the lower edge of the rear window. Calling to Hengle, Harry announced: "Just a minute, boss!"

Donning his coat, Harry started for the stairs tying his necktie, which was hanging loose from his collar. His air was nonchalant. He expected no trouble with Hengle. Harry was astounded when he reached the room below.

Hengle was standing sideways, inside the outer door. As Harry reached the bottom step, the brawny man lunged about. His right hand held a revolver.

With a savage snort, Hengle shoved the weapon hard against Harry's chest.

"Up with your mitts!"

Harry complied, puzzled. Hengle sneered.

"So you're Bill Detty, eh?" quizzed the brawny man. "That's a hot one! A lad just stops by, says he's Bill Detty and asks for his friend, Joe Ditson, who works here.

"I'm wise enough to say that Joe's gone away on a vacation. And I'm wise enough to guess that this lad with the flivver is the real McCoy. The real Bill

Detty! And that gives me a hunch to who you are. You're a stoolie, working for the government!"

Hengle paused; then stabbed a question: "Looking for a guy named Shill, maybe?"

Harry remained rigid, his hands on a level with his shoulders. Hengle scoffed.

"I'm Shill! That's what they call me. Shill Hengle. But your name ain't Joe Detty; and maybe you ain't working with the Feds. Maybe you're with The Shadow. He mixed into this business last night.

"You think you're not going to talk. Well, maybe you ain't, while you're here. But you'll talk when I take you to the right place - when Blink Torgue gives you the heat! You'll talk -"

IT was Hengle who interrupted himself. He had thrust his glaring face squarely in front of Harry's. He was pressing hard with the revolver that he held in his right hand. All this was to make Harry forget his left.

As The Shadow's agent stared, Hengle brought his free fist straight upward with a hard, square jab.

The punch clipped Harry's chin and drove his head straight back. With the blow, Harry saw stars, as vivid as if he had been rammed upon the head. The flash was the last thing he remembered.

With a harsh laugh, Hengle pocketed his revolver and stooped to raise the unconscious form of his slugged employee.

Hengle was as brawny as he looked. He carried Harry to where the car was parked. He shoved his prisoner into the front seat. Harry had shown no sign of recovering from the knockout. Hengle made no effort to bind him.

He simply took the driver's seat and drove the car from the filling

station. With lights turned on, Hengle headed northward, leaving the service station unattended.

Hengle's trip was not a long one. It was less than fifteen minutes before the brawny man returned. He parked his car beside the filling station. Chuckling to himself, he donned overalls and took up his duty at the pumps.

Harry Vincent had followed The Shadow's order. He had watched Hengle; he had learned that the man was Shill. He had gained full knowledge of Shill's mode of contact with the house across the way.

Harry had done well. Only an unfortunate break - the chance arrival of the real Bill Detty - had offset the efforts of The Shadow's capable agent.

That break, however, could mean grave trouble for Harry Vincent. Helpless,

he had been turned over to a desperate band to learn the evil ways in which Blink Torgue could apply the heat to those who came within his toils.

Through his haste to keep Shill Hengle unsuspecting, Harry had neglected his last opportunity to get word to his chief. The message that he had left for

The Shadow carried no inkling of the fate that had befallen Harry Vincent.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SECOND VISIT

IT was shortly after seven when a cloaked shape appeared just beyond the concentrated glow of Hengle's service station. The Shadow had returned. From darkness, he was observing the top floor of the little shack that Hengle and Harry used as their quarters.

Hengle was filling the tank of a tourist's car.

The Shadow edged toward the service station. Like a weird wraith of blackness, he reached the door and entered. Unnoticed by either Hengle or the tourist, he faded beyond the dim glow of the light in the service station.

The Shadow ascended the stairs and came to Harry's room. Shading the blink of his flashlight, he looked about for a message. He saw the protruding corner of Harry's paper beneath the window sash. The Shadow opened the paper and read the coded words.

Before eight. A logical time for Harry to return; for Hengle would not expect his employee to eat hastily after finishing for the day. Nothing about the room indicated that Harry had run into trouble. Hence The Shadow simply raised the window, lowered it from the outside, and dropped to the ground beneath.

A few minutes later, The Shadow appeared beside the big tree close to Langrew's house. He scaled the trunk; attached his wheeled carrier and skimmed at a downward angle to the center of the wire. The Shadow had not removed that track. He had known that no one would visit the roof except at night, when the wire would remain unnoticed.

The trapdoor pried as easily as before. Quick work with the jimmy was something that The Shadow had not expected. He had supposed that the trap-door would be more secure, fitted with new fastenings because of the episode that had marked his first visit.

That was why The Shadow used caution when he descended the steps from the close-walled tower room. He flashed his light ahead of him. It showed the door at the bottom. The inner surface of that barrier had been sheathed with metal.

A soft laugh in the darkness. From the bottom step, The Shadow turned his light upward. He saw something else. Loose in the ceiling was the bottom surface of a crude barrier that had been fitted up into the wall of the room above. It was ready to fall, if actuated.

The Shadow jammed the jimmy between the loose barrier and the edge of the

space that contained it. Satisfied that the bulwark could not drop, he stepped forward to the sheathed door.

A loose board gave under the pressure of The Shadow's foot. A click sounded from above, but the raised barrier did not fall.

Had The Shadow avoided his precaution, he would have been trapped between two metal-surfaced barriers. Within the tiny space that the lower landing afforded, the air supply could not last long. The Shadow had counteracted a death snare.

THE SHADOW'S problem was to force the sheathed door. He had the tools to do it. Drilling at the metal, he slowly carved a vertical slit near the spot where the bolt was located on the other side. He spent a full quarter hour at this task, for the metal was stubborn. The long slit completed, The Shadow pried away the metal. It overlapped the edge of the door; but by bringing the metal inward, The Shadow found space to insert his loop-ended coil. He engaged the bolt, then drew the wire downward. The slit ran clear to the floor; The Shadow pulled the wire beneath the door, where a space still was present.

At the hinged edge, he encountered trouble until he pried away a lower corner of the metal. Then he managed to pull the wire up to the hinge. A careful, steady tug. The bolt slid free. At the end of nearly half an hour's effort, The Shadow had gained clear way to the interior of the house.

Opening the door, The Shadow stepped into the hall. He closed the portal carefully and removed the wire. As he bolted the door, he noted that his operations on the other side had left no trace. This side of the door was exactly as it had been the other night.

The Shadow started for the stairs that led to the ground floor. As he neared them, he heard footsteps coming up. They were the cautious tread of old Theodora Langrew. The supposed invalid was once again prowling through the house.

This time, The Shadow chose the rear hall as a waiting post. He saw Theodora peer from the stairway. The old lady's gaze was sharp and suspicious; but it was particularly concentrated upon the front hall.

She did not see The Shadow. Theodora stole toward the door that led to the tower; she listened there, then stepped across and stood by the door of Peter Langrew's room. The woman muttered, shook her head; then, with a twisted smile, she left Peter's door and entered her own room.

The Shadow heard the creak of the bed; then new footsteps from the front stairs. Theodora recognized them. From her room, she shrilled:

"Beale! Beale!"

The servant appeared. He came to Theodora's door.

"Ice water, Beale!" ordered the old woman. "Here I am, helpless, unable to move; yet no one thinks to come here unless I shout! Do you want me to awaken Mr. Peter?"

"No, Miss Theodora."

"Then remember that I require service. Go get the ice water, Beale."

THE servant took the front stairs, which was to The Shadow's advantage. As soon as Beale was gone, The Shadow emerged and moved cautiously to the same stairway.

It was plain that Theodora Langrew was playing a double role, with regular success. She had kept her prowling unknown to any of the regular occupants of the house. Only The Shadow knew of Theodora's excursions. It was obvious, too, that Theodora had some definite opinions concerning her brother Peter.

These, The Shadow had not fully learned. He would gain further knowledge after he continued his investigations here.

The Shadow descended.

Beale had gone through the dining room to reach the kitchen. The curtains were still trembling in evidence of the servant's passage. The Shadow saw a door that stood ajar. It was the entrance to Peter Langrew's unlighted study. That was where Theodora had been.

There was a reason why she had failed to close the door entirely. Voices were audible in the hall. They came from the living room. Theodora had been afraid of making too much noise.

The Shadow approached the livingroom curtains and listened. He knew that Theodora had probably wished to do the same; but with Beale about, she had not dared it. The Shadow, himself, was running a risk with Beale; but The Shadow possessed a faculty for moving out of sight in emergency.

The conversation that The Shadow heard was audible, but the voices were low-toned. Peering through the curtains, The Shadow saw three persons. Gilbert Eldron and Beth Kindell were seated in a corner of the living room. Standing near them was Jack Hallison.

All faces were strained. The trio was beginning a hushed conference. Gilbert was about to speak, when Beth put in a troubled remark.

"I saw the door to the tower, Gilbert," declared the girl, "when Beale was fixing it. Mr. Langrew was there -"

"Past the door?" queried Gilbert. "Did he come down from the tower?"

"He might have. He told me not to disturb the work. He said that Beale was in charge -"

"Exactly! But he is working under Peter's orders. Peter has been up to the tower again. I think that Beale knows why. But Peter has been down in the cellar, too."

"You saw him go there, Gilbert?"

"Yes. Shortly before dinner."

"What was his purpose?"

"I do not know. When I saw him next, he had returned from the cellar. He came from his study when Beale summoned us for dinner."

A pause. The Shadow could see Beth's lips twitch. The girl was more nervous than before.

"You told me, Gilbert," she declared, "that there was something important that I should know. That it involved Jack Hallison -"

"It does," interposed Gilbert, steadily, "and for that reason, I shall let Jack tell the facts himself."

BETH turned to Jack. The young man nodded. Slowly, he began to speak, while Beth listened, awed. Gilbert was as tense as the others; none realized that a hidden listener was present for their conference.

The Shadow had arrived at an important time. He was here to learn facts that pertained to this old house. He was hearing them; and he knew that Jack Hallison's remarks would be but the first that would come. The Shadow heard Beale's footsteps going up the back stairway. The big clock in the lower hall chimed as its dial showed the time as quarter of eight.

Silent, motionless, The Shadow gave his full attention to those within the living room. As he listened, he gained the only clues he needed. To his keen mind came the answers that gave away the game of crime.

AFTER EIGHT

"I CAME here as a chance visitor," explained Jack to Beth. "I once lived in this old house. I was anxious to know whether or not it was for sale. I came the night before you met me."

Beth stared, incredulous. She turned to Gilbert.

"Then you and Jack were not old friends -"

"Hear his story, Beth."

Jack told of his entry into the house, of his desperate plight in the steel-walled room, of his saving by Gilbert.

"I heard the thrumming of the walls, that night!" exclaimed Beth, suddenly. "It was a vague thump, audible in this room. It stopped soon after it

began. I suppose that was because I did not hear it until after I had come down

from Miss Theodora's room."

"Where was Peter Langrew?" queried Gilbert. "Did you see him? Was he in his study?"

"No. I think he was asleep in his own room. Unless he had gone to the tower. You say he goes there frequently, Gilbert?"

"He does. But that is another matter. Let me see: Peter was upstairs; Beale was in the kitchen."

"Then Beale must have heard the machinery."

"Of course he did Beth. He works for Peter Langrew. The machinery probably began automatically; Beale reported it later to old Peter. He must have told him

when it stopped. Peter thought that the victim was dead; that the machinery had

finished its work and stopped as automatically as it had begun."

"Then Beale thought the same."

Gilbert shook his head.

"Beale is stupid," he declared. "True, he obeys Peter's orders. I have an idea that he put more than metal sheathing on that doorway to the tower stairs.

He may have transformed it into another death trap."

BETH stared, affrighted. Gilbert thought it was the girl's nervousness.

The Shadow, watching, knew that Beth's fear was deeper. She was thinking of The Shadow, wondering if her mysterious friend was in trouble. This was proof that Beth had not spoken of her meeting with The Shadow.

"Yes, Beale obeys orders," continued Gilbert, "but he knows that Peter is eccentric. Beale sees no machinations behind the old man's ideas. He thinks that they indicate insanity; not deviltry."

"I agree with you, Gilbert," put in Jack. "You have convinced me on that point. You are right when you say that Beale will be useful to us later."

"Useful?" queried Beth, anxiously. "How?"

"We intend to end old Peter's game," declared Gilbert. "To do that we need

evidence and testimony. Jack can give evidence against him; so can Beale, when he is forced to do so."

"I can give some," added Beth, thoughtful as she spoke. "But I do not know

about Miss Theodora -"

"She knows nothing," interposed Gilbert. "It depends upon the three of us;

for I have testimony as strong as any. The three of us, and Beale. He is Peter

Langrew's tool, but he has done no crime. He has obeyed his master's orders; that is all.

"If Jack had died, Beale's position would be serious. But no murder has been done. Only Peter Langrew is a criminal. That much is definite."

"Not quite, Gilbert," objected Beth. "You say that there has been no murder. Then how can Peter Langrew be guilty?"

"He is guilty of other crimes. I am positive of it, Beth! But that is where we need evidence. We must search for it at once."

"In the study?"

"Yes. Come!"

GILBERT was rising. The Shadow edged from the doorway. He reached the curtained alcove by the front door and glided out of view. Soon afterward, he saw the trio steal from the living room. They approached the door of the study.

There, Gilbert paused to listen for any sounds from upstairs.

Satisfied that Beale had descended to the kitchen, he motioned the others into the study. Jack snapped the light; Beth entered and Gilbert followed.

Spectral in the gloomy hall, The Shadow appeared from the alcove and stalked to the study door. Gilbert had closed it part way. Peering through the space, The Shadow watched developing events.

Beth was standing idly, nervous; Jack was beginning to open desk drawers.

"Wait," whispered Gilbert. "Our time is limited. We must use judgment. This room is often open. Peter would not leave important papers where anyone might find them."

He looked about the room, searching for a place that would offer sure concealment. The Shadow saw Gilbert point to the top rows of the deep bookshelves.

"Those are out of reach," whispered Gilbert. "The old man could keep papers behind them. Get a chair, Jack. Start along that farther wall while I take this one."

Both brought chairs to the shelves. Even then, they could barely reach the top line of books, although both were above average height. Beth stood by while each man stretched, removed books, and pawed into the space behind.

"No luck," declared Gilbert, replacing one batch of books. "We'll keep on, though -"

A sharp exclamation interrupted. Jack's hand emerged with a bundle wrapped in paper. He passed it down to Beth, while Gilbert hopped from his chair to view the find.

"Money!" whispered Beth, tearing away the wrapping. "Look, Gilbert! Bills - one-hundred-dollar bills!"

"And here are more," whispered Jack, turning on the chair, with another package. "This shelf is filled with them, all along!"

"THEY may mean nothing," remarked Gilbert, with a shake of his head. "Probably this is the hiding place where old Peter claims to have buried his wealth. Maybe he has just been fooling all of us with his talk. I expected to find records - papers that would tell us of his past.

"I wonder -" He paused, musingly, as he fingered the crisp currency from the bundle that Beth had opened - "I wonder how long ago old Peter began to hoard this wealth. These bills look new; but that only means that they were never in circulation.

"One-hundred-dollar bills. All bank notes. Drawn out at the same time, I

suppose." Gilbert nodded as he spoke. "Yes, all the serial numbers are in order. All these notes were issued by the Bucksport National Bank. I wonder if old Peter had an account there. Bucksport is near here -"

"Bucksport!" interrupted Jack. His eyes were wide. "Did you say the Bucksport National, Gilbert?"

"Yes. Of course!"

"Haven't you read the newspapers?"

Gilbert snorted.

"Have you seen a newspaper in this house?" he queried. "That's one of old Peter's taboos. He says that newspapers are filled with lies. He doesn't read them; and he doesn't like anyone who does. That's one thing Theodora agrees with him about."

"Hold on, Gilbert," protested Jack. "This is important! I haven't seen a newspaper since I came here, but I've been reading them regularly enough. Didn't you know that crooks were in this territory?"

"Doing what?"

"Raiding banks. They cracked the Bucksport National first of all. After that, the Templeton Trust Company and -"

Gilbert waved an excited interruption.

"More bundles, Jack!" he whispered, hoarsely. "More bundles! Hurry!"

Jack supplied them. Gilbert and Beth ripped wrappers, as Jack came down to join them. Currency, securities, then a stack of deposit books. Gilbert pointed; spoke breathlessly.

"The Templeton Trust Company!" he read. "You've hit it, Jack! We've learned the game. Old Peter is the head man in these robberies!"

"Here's some Northbridge National," remarked Jack, who had opened a bundle himself. "There was no robbery in Northbridge."

"There's probably been one since you arrived here," decided Gilbert, promptly. "So this is the old codger's game. He holds the swag. The others supply it. Here: Put these bundles back where you found them. Replace those books."

"There must be a lot more, Gilbert," stated Jack. "What shall we do about them?"

"Leave them where they are. Our task is to inform the law. This evidence shows Peter Langrew to be a criminal!"

"How can we reach the law?"

GILBERT considered. Jack had brought up an important problem. At last, Gilbert spoke. "We may have a chance tonight," he declared. "That's why I wanted to find something this evening. You remember how chummy old Peter was at dinner?"

Jack and Beth nodded.

"He talked to me later," continued Gilbert, "just after we left the dining room. He said that he had something important to tell me. He intimated that it would be the secret that he has kept for so long."

"He has no secret," began Jack, hotly. "None except this -"

"Wait! I see his reason, Jack. He wants to get rid of us. To send us somewhere far away from Aurora. To dig up his pretended treasure, wherever it is."

"While he makes off with this swag!"

"Exactly! We must play in with the game, Jack."

"How can we do it?"

"We shall see. We must consider Beth. It would be better if one of us - you or I, Jack - should depart alone and inform the authorities, while the

other remains here."

"There are government men in the vicinity."

"Good! We can inform them and get quick action. But in the meanwhile, we must keep the old man lulled. It would be suicidal to attempt to leave this house without his permission."

Jack nodded his agreement. He had not forgotten the trap which had snagged him on the night of his arrival.

"We have until ten o'clock to wait," affirmed Gilbert. "Old Peter won't be awake until then. You and I must put up a bluff, Jack. We will be smoking in the living room when he comes down. If he wants to talk to me, he will invite me here, in the study."

"And I'll be ready, Gilbert -"

"I know it, Jack. As for you, Beth, it would be best if you stayed well away. Up with Theodora -"

A distant interruption sounded in the room. It was the very person whom Gilbert had mentioned. Theodora was calling:

"Beth! Beth!"

The shrill tones were a summons. Gilbert turned to Beth.

"Better answer," he said. "Call to her when you reach the stairs. I'll watch at the door while Jack stows these bundles back on the shelf and puts the chairs where they belong."

THE SHADOW withdrew from the doorway. He moved swiftly toward the front alcove. He stopped before he reached the curtain. Beth did not see him, for she was hurrying to the stairs. When the girl had gone up, The Shadow moved deliberately behind the curtain.

He waited there a few minutes. Then he saw Gilbert and Jack appear from the study. They turned out the light, left the door as they had found it, and moved across to the living room.

The big clock began its chime. It was striking the hour of eight.

Two hours to wait. A vigil which The Shadow might well choose, since he had viewed events and knew that important episodes were due in this house at ten o'clock.

Eight, however, meant something else to The Shadow.

Silently, he opened the small porthole in the alcove. He could see the front wall; beyond it, the glow of Hengle's filling station. The shack where Hengle lived was dark on the second floor.

Harry Vincent had not returned.

The Shadow's agents kept their appointments. There was one place where Harry would have gone, directly upon his return. That was to his room. Even if Hengle had called him below, Harry would have left the light on as a signal to The Shadow.

Instantly, The Shadow knew that Harry had met with some disaster. Again, he was confronted with the necessity of protecting one of his own men.

The Shadow suspected Hengle as a crook. There was a chance that the man might be Shill. Harry had learned that to be a fact. But Harry had left no detailed statement for The Shadow.

That left the matter open. It was possible that Harry had trailed someone from the neighborhood of the house. An outsider could have captured him. The Shadow could see a better plan than that of questioning Hengle.

That was to go directly to the spot where Harry would surely be. The Shadow was sure that he could find it. Today's search for Blink Torgue's hide-out had not been barren.

EDGING from the curtains, The Shadow went past the living room and reached the stairs. He ascended quietly, yet rapidly. Speed was essential; for with two hours in which to work, he still had opportunity to return here before ten. In this speed, The Shadow needed aid.

He paused at the top of the stairs. There were voices from Theodora's room. The Shadow saw Beth standing just within the door. He gave a whisper, so low-toned that it was audible only to the girl. The whisper carried a warning that Beth understood.

Without turning, Beth bade good night to Theodora. She stepped into the hall, to find The Shadow standing there immobile. Fearlessly, Beth followed the motion of a guiding finger. She went to the door of the tower stairs. The Shadow joined her.

Beth had gained her former assurance. Such was the power of The Shadow's personality.

Where others planned, The Shadow commanded. Beth felt that he should know of all that she had learned. Before she could speak, a whispered utterance silenced her. The girl realized that The Shadow already knew whatever she might tell.

Then came the command:

"Bolt the door! Say nothing of my visit!"

Beth nodded.

"Be ready for my return! Before ten! Unbolt the door when you hear the signal!"

With fingertips, The Shadow gave slight taps upon the door. Beth's nod told that she would be prepared to admit The Shadow upon his return.

Not a minute would be lost, either in departure or arrival. The Shadow's whisper denoted satisfaction. Unbolting the door, the being of blackness stepped beyond. The door closed. Carefully, softly, Beth bolted it.

A shrouded shape appeared upon the tower, beneath the dim glow of starlight. A rising leap, and The Shadow clutched the wheeled carrier. His cloak swished as the trolley zipped to the thick darkness of the tree below the house.

The Shadow had departed upon an immediate quest. He would return within the time allotted him.

CHAPTER XIV

THE HIDE-OUT

THE dash-light of Cliff's coupe showed exactly half past eight when the car stopped at the cross-roads where last night's chase had ended. The Shadow had made speed from Aurora.

Headlamps blinked. The signal was not answered. A soft laugh quivered from

The Shadow's hidden lips. Cliff, if here, would have responded with a flashlight

blink. The Shadow had hoped that Cliff would be gone.

Pulling the car to the side of the road, The Shadow extinguished the lights and stepped to the ground. His flashlight glimmered a tiny circle upon the turf beside the crossing. It showed a large stone imbedded in the ground. The Shadow lifted the stone. There was an envelope beneath.

It contained a coded message from Cliff. It read:

Northeast to second cross-roads. Mileage: 3.6.

Cliff had been posted here when The Shadow left. He must have seen a car come out from the road that led to the northeast. That had given Cliff a clue to the direction of the hide-out.

The Shadow drove northeast. His speedometer showed two and nine-tenths when he reached a cross-roads at the top of a hill. His whispered laugh sounded again as he took the downgrade. The mirth had scarcely ended when The Shadow reached a second crossroads, where the speedometer registered three and six-tenths.

Cliff had done a good job. After the crooks had come out, he had gone in until he reached a cross-roads, and had posted himself there. The crooks had returned after dark. They had not turned off at the crossing where Cliff lay hidden. But he had watched their lights and had seen them turn at the crossing beyond.

Lights out, The Shadow looked for another message. He turned up one stone; then another. Beneath the second, he found the note. It read:

West. Second road to right. Mileage: 1.3

The Shadow followed. The first road to the right was only a quarter mile from the crossing. The Shadow's lights showed that it could not have been taken by the crooks. Though muddy from recent drizzles, the road showed no signs of tire marks.

When he reached the second dirt road, The Shadow knew at once that Cliff had made a hit. To begin with, the macadam that he was traveling ended a hundred feet beyond; and The Shadow's lights showed that it became a dirt stretch under construction.

The road to the right had been traveled. It evidently served as a detour for the few tourists who chose this route.

Blocks of construction stone stood near the turn-off. The Shadow saw one block projecting oddly from its stack. Stepping from the car, he raised the stone. A third note greeted him. It said:

Fork. Mileage: 1.8.

IT was quarter of nine when The Shadow reached the fork. He delivered a timely blink with his headlights. A man scrambled from the brush at the side of the road. It was Cliff Marsland.

"Report!"

Cliff heard the order as he reached the side of the coupe. He thrust a penciled diagram beneath the dash-light. Eagerly, he whispered:

"I tried the left fork first, but it didn't look good. No turn-offs. It led into a little village. I chanced the right fork, on foot. Saw a flashlight moving on the first road to the right.

"It may have been a lookout posted, going back to the hide-out. Lucky I didn't use the motorcycle, like I'd been doing. This diagram is one I copied from the survey map. There's only three houses they could have gone to. One of three."

"Describe the car you saw," ordered The Shadow.

"A touring car," returned Cliff, "like the one Clyde spotted at the Northbridge bank."

"Its occupants -"

"Four men when it went out."

"When it returned -"

"There may have been more. I couldn't see. It was before dark when the car went out. After dusk when it returned."

An order from The Shadow. Cliff got in the coupe.

"I've buried the motorcycle in the bushes," he stated. "Here, by the fork." Silently, The Shadow drove along. He extinguished his lights as soon as he saw the first road to the right. Cliff sat amazed as The Shadow picked his way through darkness.

It was uncanny, the progress of the car. Cliff realized that The Shadow was guiding by the feel of the front wheels.

They jounced slightly as they took the road to the right. The Shadow's eyes were upon the instrument panel, the only bit of light in the coupe. Cliff watched the speedometer click off its tenths of miles. The dash clock showed five minutes of nine.

Estimating from the diagram, with its marked houses, The Shadow was picking a strategic place to stop. The car slowed to a bare movement; then halted. The Shadow had twisted it into a narrow private road. He had found this haven blindly.

Instructions came to Cliff. He was to follow the private road; to investigate the house at the end of it. Tracing dotted lines on the diagram, gloved hands showed Cliff his course.

If this house proved innocent, Cliff was to cut across on a semicircle toward another.

The Shadow, Cliff knew, would go toward the third house, off on the far side of the road; then swing across and meet him at the second.

Cliff opened his door as the dashlight went off. As he stepped to the ground, he fancied that he heard a laugh in the darkness. The Shadow had started upon his trail; a longer one than Cliff's. Yet the agent knew that he would have to move rapidly, for he could not cover ground at a pace close to The Shadow's.

FORTUNATELY, Cliff's route proved both easy and short. Groping through the darkness, he spied a light ahead. Guiding by it, he approached a farmhouse. Cliff stumbled; a dog set up a yelp. Cliff sidled back to the road.

Cliff's slip turned to his advantage. A door opened in the house; against the light, he saw an overalled figure. He heard a rustic voice:

"Shet up, thar, hound dog! The moon hain't riz! Blame it - you beginning that danged howling ag'in tonight?"

The barks subsided. The door slammed. Evidently the hound had barked at the rising moon last night. Cliff had seen enough to know that this was not Blink Torgue's hide-out. If the leader of the bandit gang had commandeered an occupied house, the farmer would have been muzzled along with his dog.

Time saved, Cliff crept from the road and made his way through trees until

he reached a field. In the clear, he made in the direction of the second house,

a quarter mile away. Cliff came to a crude stone wall; by the dim starlight, he

saw the hulk of an abandoned house.

Carefully, Cliff crept toward that goal. As he approached he noted a tiny dot of light through the chink of a closed shutter. Cliff was tense. He had found the hide-out. Steadily, he drew his automatic. He edged up to the frame side of the building.

One hand against the shutter, Cliff stopped to listen. He thought he could

hear a sound close by. Something clinked against stone. It could have been a pebble, snapping from a crunching foot.

Cliff wheeled toward the spot. As he did, a hand shot forward from almost behind him.

A gloved hand clamped Cliff's wrist. The Shadow had arrived.

That thrusting hand had told its story. The Shadow knew that Cliff would recognize it and remain motionless; whereas an enemy would have started a fight. If it had been other than Cliff, The Shadow would have gained the immediate advantage. That clamp was the beginning of a jujutsu move.

No report was necessary from Cliff. Nor did The Shadow need to speak.

Cliff realized that his own speedy search had been outmatched by The Shadow's. The cloaked master had visited the farthest farmhouse to find it free of criminals.

This was the house that needed investigation. Cliff wondered what The Shadow intended to do. So far, The Shadow had said no word concerning Harry Vincent. Cliff had no reason to suppose that The Shadow would consider entry necessary.

Still, he was not surprised as his chief drew him toward the shuttered window. Cliff listened while The Shadow pried at fastenings. Though he knew the work was going on, he could hear no noise. The token of success, two minutes later, was when the dot of light became a streak.

The Shadow was opening the shutters outward.

Blackness blotted the light. Cliff knew that The Shadow was peering into the house. He felt the grip of The Shadow's hand. It was a sign for Cliff to approach and look.

The window was but four feet from the ground. It opened into a little hall, and afforded an angled view through a doorway, from which the light came.

There, Cliff spied a sight that brought an audible grit from his teeth.

A MAN was seated in a chair, placed in the center of the room. His back was toward Cliff. The man was bound; his wrists, behind him, were tight between a rope.

The prisoner was in the presence of inquisitors. Beyond him, glaring at the captive, was a man who answered the description of Blink Torgue. On either side were hard-faced ruffians, as tough as their evil leader.

Half behind the prisoner was another. This thug had shoved an iron bar between the ropes. He had twisted it to make the bonds tighten. The prisoner's shoulders were strained backward.

"Still comfortable, eh?" Cliff heard Blink's snarl. "Too comfortable to talk? Give it another twist, Jing."

Cliff saw the man in back turn the rod. He noticed that the fellow was using his left hand. His right was bandaged, in a sling. He was the crook that Clyde had clipped last night. Evidently the wound had not been serious.

As Jing twisted the rod, the prisoner hunched farther back. Cliff stared, in admiration of the man's nerve. The shutter had widened. The Shadow, too, was watching.

"Come on!" snarled Blink. "Squawk! What do they do in Washington? Put the heat on you, so you'll be in trim? Squawk, you mug!"

No response from the prisoner. Cliff thought the fellow was a Fed. He expected The Shadow to intervene; yet he heard no command from his chief.

Blink gave the nod to Jing. The torturing rod turned under the leering henchman's twist. The prisoner's back was tightened; his head jerked as his face lifted toward the ceiling. Helplessly, the man shifted in his chair.

Cliff saw his face. Fiercely, Cliff thrust his left hand to the window sill, gripping his gun in his right. He was ready to leap in upon the scene, to

mow down opposition and effect a rescue. Cliff was wild with sheer rage; for he had recognized the prisoner.

The man under torture was Harry Vincent!

As Cliff started forward, an outthrust hand restrained him. It swung like a blocking barrier, that jolted Cliff back from the window. For a moment, Cliff

was defiant; then, with a fierce breath, he subsided.

The Shadow had stopped his rush.

CHAPTER XV

RIDERS IN THE NIGHT

"WAIT!"

The whispered tone brought Cliff to his senses. He realized how hopeless a mad drive might have been. Yet, with that realization, he faced another riddle.

To watch Harry's torture was an ordeal. Cliff had felt the strain; yet The Shadow had not. Cliff could not guess the answer.

Always, in times of plight, The Shadow's agents had confidence in their chief.

Cliff, himself, had been saved from torture in the past, thanks to The Shadow's prompt delivery. The Shadow knew ways of rescue. This seemed a moment when he should attempt one.

"Wait!"

The whispered word had been a firm command. It echoed in Cliff's ears. Cliff waited and watched, though he trembled. He could be cool and steady in the midst of danger; but he could scarcely stand the sight of a friend's torture.

"Cover Jing," ordered The Shadow. "Ready!"

Cliff raised his automatic. He covered the man designated. He sensed that The Shadow, in turn, was covering Blink with one .45; that he had another bearing toward a henchman. One man, alone, remained clear. He could be dealt with afterward.

Cliff expected the order to fire. It did not come.

"You're finished," Blink was sneering to Harry. "Finished! Get it? You're through unless you talk!"

Harry's paled face toppled sideways.

His body sagged despite the ropes that gripped him like a strait-jacket. Blink glared evilly, then snapped a question at Jing:

"Is he out?"

"Looks like it," returned Jing, bending above Harry's head. "He may be faking, though. Maybe, if I give another turn -"

Cliff's finger was itching on its trigger. He wanted to drop Jing where he stood. Yet The Shadow's word still flogged his brain:

"Wait!"

Wait, Cliff did. Burning with urge for action, he restrained himself, held back as forcibly as if in a tight grip.

"Yeah?" Blink was savage as he barked at Jing. "Another turn - how's that going to help?"

He stared at Harry's face; then ordered: "Loosen."

Jing unwound the rod. Harry caved forward; he would have spilled upon the floor if the two men beside him had not caught his fall.

"Well done!"

The Shadow's whisper was a commendation that reached Cliff's ear alone.

Cliff understood. Harry had staged a capable game.

The torture had been terrific; but Harry had met it well. He had pitted his nerve against the ferocity of torturers. Had he caved too early, Blink would have known it for a bluff.

But Harry had resisted past a point where the average man would yield. He had held out until he knew that one more twist would end endurance, or bring him real injury. At that last moment, he had feigned collapse.

It was a perfect move; for it had only been partly faked. When a man holds out through torture, on sheer nerve alone, the moment that he gives in, his strength will go.

Harry knew that fact. He had counted on it. In a sense, his faint was real. He could not have revived himself immediately had he tried.

Blink wanted Harry to talk. Harry knew it. It worked out as Harry hoped. Blink had taken off the clamps.

WEAKENED, Harry had but little difficulty in continuing his bluff. He did not have to overdo it. His body, relaxed from its bonds, was too limp to gain quick recovery.

Sagged, Harry let Blink's underlings shove him back into the chair. Weakly, he tried to hold his position and failed. Henchmen grabbed him again, to prop him in position.

Cliff could see that Blink was convinced. Mumbling, the rogue was planning a new torture. Blink waited a minute, then gave his decision.

"Stow him away," he ordered. "Rope him right, but loose enough to move."

Henchmen dragged Harry from the room, off in a direction that neither The Shadow nor Cliff could follow. They heard thumps, however, that indicated an upward course upon a stairway.

Blink turned to Jing.

"Bring back the molls," he growled. "It's over for a while; it won't hurt for them to hear us talk about what we'll be doing next. Not as long as they don't see the guy getting the heat."

Jing grunted.

"Daisy could 'a' stood it," he affirmed. "What did ya crowd her out for?"

"On account of the other dames. They'd have got sore - like they did last night, when we took Daisy along with us."

"Dumb doras, the pair of 'em."

With this comment, Jing went to a far door and admitted three young women.

Daisy was recognizable by her nonchalance. Her eyes were hard as they circled about the room. She pulled a rouge-tipped cigarette from the corner of her mouth; then questioned, hard-voiced:

"Where's the mug? Couldn't he take it?"

"He went cold," returned Blink.

"Yeah?" quizzed Daisy. "Maybe you couldn't give it. Maybe he was just faking."

"Not a chance," put in Jing.

"What do you know about it?" demanded Daisy. "Say - leave me in on it when you hand him the real heat. I can spot a guy when he's only funning."

She looked contemptuously toward the two girls who had accompanied her. They were of her own type, and one was copying Daisy's hard-boiled manner. The other, however, looked pale.

"What's the matter, Meg?" snorted Daisy. "Just jittery? Or maybe you got a crush on the good-looking guy."

"Lay off!" snapped Blink. "Get on out, the three of you, while Jing and I talk business. Or stay, if you want to; but leave out the chatter."

FOOTSTEPS were returning from the stairs. The Shadow urged Cliff from the window and closed the shutters silently. He led the way toward the back corner of the house.

Cliff realized suddenly that The Shadow must have heard betraying sounds from upstairs, for he stopped just beneath a shuttered second-story window.

Moving away, The Shadow reached a low woodshed. He scaled it while Cliff waited. Dimly, his form appeared against the faded white of the house wall. The

Shadow was stretching along toward the shutter.

Clinging to the window ledge, while his feet still held their toe-hold on the roof, The Shadow worked to loosen the shutter. It was double; Cliff gave a start as he saw one half swing out. The Shadow's body made a downward sweep; Cliff thought his chief was due for a short plunge.

Instead, the swing was intentional. The Shadow had gripped an outer ring and an inner bar. He swayed beneath the shutter as it pointed outward. His inner hand caught the window ledge. The other shutter opened. The Shadow went through the window.

Tense minutes passed. Then, Cliff saw a form emerge and perch upon the window ledge. He knew that it must be Harry, ready for a downward drop.

Slowly,

Harry moved about, so that his legs could dangle. He wavered; then paused.

Cliff

knew that The Shadow was there to steady him.

A whispered order from above. Cliff stood ready. Harry dropped. Bracing, Cliff caught him as he fell. Harry sagged weakly upon the ground, then managed to rise with Cliff's aid.

"I'm - I'm all right," he gasped. "All I need - is air!"

They stepped back. Lithely, The Shadow swung from the window ledge. He clung to one side and closed the opposite shutter; then shifted and swung the second shutter into place.

The Shadow dropped beside his agents. The luminous dial of a watch appeared suddenly in his hand. Its time was twenty-five minutes of ten.

Harry Vincent stood rescued. The Shadow had opportunity to reach the old house in Aurora, soon after the appointed hour. He knew that Blink Torgue would

wait long, before visiting Harry's room. The criminal wanted the prisoner to revive before he started a new campaign of torture.

Time to finish in Aurora and return to this hide-out. Such was The Shadow's estimate. His order told it. A single word to Cliff and Harry:

"Cover!"

The cold handle of an automatic pressed into Harry's hand. Armed once more, Harry could stand vigil with Cliff. Lost in the darkness outside the house, they could open damaging fire should the crooks start from the hide-out.

But that would not come, so they thought, until after The Shadow's return.

A swish in the darkness. The Shadow was gone; back to his former mission. Cliff and Harry waited alone.

TEN minutes passed. Cliff knew that The Shadow had already reached the coupe and was clear of the dirt road, speeding on macadam toward Aurora. Harry was stretching in the darkness, ready for any move. Cliff gave a suggestion.

"We'll creep along the wall," he whispered. "We can look through the window by the hallway. Get a glimpse of Blink and Jing."

As the agents started their move, they heard a grating sound. It came from

above; Cliff caught it first. He gripped Harry; and held him quiet. The shutters

of Harry's prison room were swinging outward.

The shutters swayed momentarily; then came a girl's gasp. It was followed by a harsh contralto voice, that Cliff recognized as Daisy's.

"Meg! You crazy fool!" Daisy was hard-toned in her denunciation. "I saw you sliding in here! Say - it would be your finish if Blink got wise."

"I - I wasn't trying to let the fellow loose," gasped Meg. "I thought - thought maybe he'd need air - all cramped in this place -"

"And what would Blink think?"

"I was going to tell him. He wants the fellow to get better, don't he? So he can talk easier?"

"What use is air to a guy that's dead to the world? Take a look at him, Meg. Maybe he's cold!"

A pause; then Daisy's sharp, wild utterance:

"You wanted to give him air! Say - he's taken the air himself! The guy's not here!"

A plaintive cry from Meg. Daisy interrupted.

"Say - I know you didn't cut him loose. I saw you sneak in here, didn't I?"

And I came right in while you were opening the shutters. Listen Meg, I'll square

you with Blink. Come along."

"Where to?"

"To tip off Blink that the guy's gone."

Footsteps dashed from the room above. Cliff yanked Harry away from the house.

"Get to the stone wall!" he undertoned. "They'll be out in a minute. We've

got to be ready for them. They may come from both ends of the house."

They reached the stone wall and dropped beyond it. A moment later, doors clattered open. Flashlights glared from front and back of the house. They lighted up a vacant scene.

"Ready," voiced Cliff. "When they move this way, we'll let them have it."

A shout from the front of the house. It was Blink's. The men at the back doubled around the other side. Blink was giving an order.

Both agents heard the loud words from the front porch.

"The guy's got a start." Blink was emphatic in his tone. "We can't take a chance, stirring up the woods for him. He may get to some house. He'll have the Feds out here."

A pause; then Blink added, hoarsely:

"Tonight's the pay-off! We've got to get hold of Shill. Pick up Mac and his crew on the way. Shill will be waiting for the tip from the big-shot. Get going - all of you! We've got time before that guy finds a farmhouse."

LIGHTS swung suddenly away from the front of the house. Muffled shouts; approving words punctuated with oaths. The lights bobbed along a path, moving off from the direction of The Shadow's agents.

Cliff issued quick words to Harry.

"They're starting for Aurora! To the old house! We've got to get after them. It's a mile to the fork where I left my motorcycle."

Springing over the wall, Cliff and Harry took the route that Blink and his

crew had chosen. They followed it unchallenged; for cars were roaring from the driveway as they passed the house above. Grimly, both agents kept up their pace. Harry, though weary, kept even with Cliff.

The chance discovery of Harry's rescue promised grave consequences. The Shadow had headed for a danger zone; unmolested, he might deal with enemies there. But other enemies were on his trail. Blink and three henchmen; planning to pick up Mac and other minions on the way.

Blink and his followers did not know the big-shot's headquarters. But they did know Shill Hengle, the chosen man who had contact with the master rogue of crime. They knew that in this emergency, Shill would be prepared to take them to the evil thief's domain.

To Harry, that situation was appalling. For he knew how close Shill Hengle was to the house where crime was fostered. Cliff had guessed the facts, in part. Harry panted the details as they reached the dirt road and scrambled desperately along.

The Shadow, ready to face a crimemaster, prepared to deal with a superfoe, would need his agents before his work was finished. He would need their aid and all other help that he could summon.

For The Shadow's victory - if he gained one - would end with the closing in of odds. The Shadow's present field of action was destined to become a trap.

CHAPTER XVI

LANGREW AWAKES

BETH KINDELL was worried as she watched the clock on the mantel in the living room. Beth had come downstairs to learn the correct time, as the clock in Theodora's room had stopped. Beth had not paused in the hallway; she had come into the living room where Gilbert and Jack were seated.

The clock showed ten minutes of ten. Beth was troubled. There had been no signal to denote The Shadow's return.

"Steady, Beth." It was Gilbert who spoke. He could see the girl tremble. "Don't worry. Go back upstairs before old Peter wakes."

Beth nodded; turned toward the door. She halted as she reached the curtains. There were footsteps on the stairs. Peter Langrew had awakened; he was coming downstairs earlier than usual.

Gilbert heard the footsteps. He sprang to the door to join Beth. Both saw Langrew as he reached the hall. The old man delivered a chuckle.

"I slept well," he affirmed. His tone, though harsh, was a pleased one. "Yes, my nap was a good one. I thought you would be waiting up for me, Gilbert."

"Ah, Beth!" He smiled dryly as he faced the girl. "I suppose you are going up to see Theodora? A good idea. She asked for you when I passed her room."

"I just came down to learn the time," explained Beth. "The clock was stopped in Miss Theodora's room."

"Trust Theodora to send you on such an errand," rasped Langrew. "Bah! What

is time to her? She has nothing to do, nowhere to go. It is memory of the past that makes her restless.

"Theodora was active once. She liked the outdoors. Indeed, she did." Langrew paused, shaking his head in reminiscence. "She even went on deer hunting expeditions. Years ago, many, many years -" Langrew suddenly changed his manner. He stepped forward from the stairs. Forgetting Beth, he spoke to Gilbert in a low, harsh tone.

"Where is your friend Hallison?"

Eldron nudged toward the living room. Beth walked past Langrew and reached

the stairs. The old man turned around; he saw that Beth had gone. He smiled

cunningly.

"Come, Gilbert," he ordered. "Let us go into my study. I have important matters to discuss."

BETH, waiting at the top of the stairs, heard the study door go shut. With tense breath, the girl turned toward the front of the second-story hall. She stopped as she heard Theodora call:

"Beth!"

"Yes?" Beth spoke as she entered Theodora's room. "What is it, Miss Theodora?"

"What is my brother up to?" demanded the old lady. She was sitting upright in her bed; her hands were clenched like talons. "What was Peter talking about, downstairs?"

"He mentioned you," smiled Beth. "He said that you used to go on deer hunts."

"So I did," snapped Theodora. "I bagged my game, too. But that has nothing to do with tonight. Tell me: what has Peter done?"

"Nothing, Miss Theodora."

"Has he gone into his study?"

"I suppose so."

"Alone?"

"I am not sure. He was talking to Gilbert."

Theodora's lips became firm. Her hand crept toward a cane that rested beside the bed. She had used it to get about, when first an invalid. Noticing Beth's glance, Theodora stopped her move. She sank back wearily upon the pillows.

"Bring me the box from the bureau," she ordered, in a tired tone. "The one that has the keys to the bureau drawers."

"Do you want something from within the bureau?" inquired Beth.

"No," replied Theodora. "I want to find some old trinkets that are in the box."

Beth brought the box.

"Where is Beale?" questioned Theodora.

"In the kitchen, I think," answered Beth. "I can find out."

"Never mind. Where is that young Mr. Hallison?"

"In the living room, alone."

"Go down and chat with him, Beth. He is a guest here."

"You need me no longer?"

"I need no one!"

Theodora spoke sourly, as she began to pick out objects from the box. She added a final order:

"Go downstairs, I tell you!" The aged voice was shrill. "Close the door when you leave!"

Beth departed, gladly. She closed the door as Theodora had ordered. Quickly, she went to the front of the hall and listened by the door to the tower. There was no token of a signal

Half a minute passed. Beth chewed her lips. Ten o'clock was almost here. Should she remain?

A plan struck the girl. It could not be long before her mysterious friend arrived. It was unlikely that Beale would come upstairs. Gilbert was in conference with old Peter. Slowly, Beth drew back the bolt.

That done, the girl stole to the stairs and descended. At the foot, she heard a whisper. She looked about. She saw Jack Hallison outside the study.

"Stay here," suggested Jack, in an undertone. "Give me the word if Beale

shows up. I want to be close by, if Gilbert needs me."

Beth nodded. It was a good plan.

INSIDE the study, old Peter Langrew was seated at his desk. Opposite him was Gilbert Eldron, studying the old man's brilliant eyes. An eagerness had come over Peter Langrew. Gilbert had mentioned that fact, earlier.

"I am leaving here, Gilbert," pronounced Peter. "Theodora must go with me,

even though we have to carry her. Beth will help me with her."

"And I?" queried Gilbert.

"You shall have my secret," assured Peter. "Your friend, Jack Hallison, is

trustworthy. If you can swear him in to aid you -"

"I can. Jack is reliable."

"Then my plans are made. They will bring happiness, Gilbert. Can't you see

how well I feel, now that my decision is made? I have waited a long while, Gilbert. So long, that I am sure that my enemies are lulled.

"I still have years to live; and Theodora may regain her health, elsewhere

than in this house. You and Beth have a future. I want you both to be happy."

Taking a pad from the drawer beside him, Peter Langrew began to write down

figures. His body stooped forward but his shoulders remained erect within the smoking jacket that he was wearing.

"My fortune will be divided into ten parts," declaimed the old man.

"Three

for myself and Theodora together. Two for you, Gilbert; and two more for Beth. One for Beale. The rest - two parts - to charity.

"To you, I leave disposal of those funds. I shall tell you the hiding place. You will go there. It will be your duty, Gilbert, to retain all my wealth until you hear from me. Or better" - the old man chuckled - "better until I hear from you."

He paused and pushed the paper across the desk.

"Nearly two million dollars," asserted Peter. "Fortunes, for all concerned! We - Theodora, Beth, and I - will live upon my personal funds until we bear from you."

"Here?" queried Gilbert.

The old man shook his head.

"I shall sell this house" he declared. "We shall go to New York. I shall tell you the name of the hotel before you leave."

"How soon do I go?"

"Tonight perhaps. Or tomorrow. I am not quite decided."

"Jack will go with me?"

"Yes."

Peter Langrew arose. He paced the space behind his desk. He paused once, to stare toward the book shelves. He was reflective; then suddenly he smiled. He turned to the desk, drew a large key from the drawer and slid it across the mahogany to Gilbert.

"You will go to New Orleans," stated Peter.

"Taking this key with me?" queried Gilbert.

"Yes," replied the old man. "It opens a small mausoleum. One that is owned

in the name of Pierre Crielle."

"And Pierre Crielle?"

"You will be Crielle."

"I do not look like a Frenchman."

Peter Langrew chuckled. His mirth was harsh.

"New Orleans," he declared, "is heavily stocked with mausoleums. So many

that they are never disturbed by robbers. Cemeteries are above ground in New Orleans. That is why there are so many vaults instead of graves.

"Many people who live in New Orleans have French names, but look like Americans. You will experience no difficulty in identifying yourself as Pierre Crielle."

THE old man stooped beside the desk. He picked up an old atlas that lay upon the floor. Savagely, he ripped the pages from the book while Gilbert stared. A sheet of paper peeked from the back binding. Peter drew it forth.

"This is the deed of ownership," he declared. "It has no signature. That was omitted, by my design. Here -"

He paused to push forward a bottle of ink.

"Sign, Gilbert," he ordered, "using the name of Pierre Crielle."

Gilbert picked up a rusty pen. He wrote in his own hand, applying his name

to the line that Langrew designated. Dried paper drank the ink, which Gilbert noticed was a watery-blue.

"I thinned the ink," affirmed Langrew, "so that the signature would look faded. I kept this deed blank, Gilbert, until I found the right man. Once in New Orleans, you can tell the cemetery superintendent that you stored an old casket in the mausoleum. Add that you wish to remove it.

"The deed and the key will pass you. Particularly when you sign your assumed name, which will match the one that you have just written. Take the casket to wherever you deem wise."

"The casket contains the treasure?"

"Yes."

The deed was creased. Gilbert folded it carefully and placed it in his pocket. He spoke soberly.

"You can trust me, Mr. Langrew," declared the young man. "I shall leave before midnight - or later, if packing delays me. Jack will go with me. Look out for Beth; tell her that I expect to see her soon again."

He thrust his hand forward. Langrew received it. The old man's eyes were sharp, his breath coming tensely, as though he felt that he had taken a drastic step.

"Have no worry," insisted Gilbert, finishing the handshake. "Rely upon me, Mr. Langrew. I shall see you again before I leave."

He stepped to the door and placed his hand upon the knob. He drew the door

inward, then stopped before he had it barely opened. A harsh command had come from the desk. Wheeling, Gilbert saw Peter Langrew erect.

The old man had jerked an automatic from the pocket of his smoking jacket.

He was holding the weapon leveled, covering Gilbert Eldron.

"Come back!" rasped Langrew. "Move in from that door! Hands raised - that is right! In front, here!"

Stepping to meet his prisoner, Langrew thrust his free hand into Gilbert's

coat pocket. He whipped out a revolver that he found there. With a snort, he pocketed the gun.

"I thought so," he jeered. "Your haste betrayed you. So that was your game: to steal my secret. To lull me into telling it! You traitor!"

FORGETTING the partly opened door, Langrew had raised his voice. Face close to Gilbert's, he sneered:

"I waited long before I spoke. I was ready to trust you; but I never ceased my doubts. I wanted to see how you would act. I promised myself that if

you took it too easily, I would not let you leave my sight.

"I was lulled. Yes, lulled too well. Even to the point where I let you sign your name. It is fortunate that the ink is watery. It can be eradicated. But your knowledge cannot be ended. You will stay here, guarded, while I -"

"No!" protested Gilbert, suddenly. His voice was as loud as Langrew's. "You are wrong! I am no traitor I can prove -"

He gave a sudden glance toward the door and gaped. Langrew swung about instinctively. The old man halted, staring, his gun unaimed. Jack Hallison was on the threshold, pointing a revolver that Gilbert had given him. He had Langrew covered.

Trapped, old Peter trembled. His right hand opened; the automatic clattered to the floor. The situation had altered in an instant. Peter Langrew had been rendered helpless.

CHAPTER XVII

THE ROGUE REVEALED

"QUICK, Jack! Get him!"

Wildly, Gilbert Eldron uttered the order. He was facing the doorway. He saw Jack Hallison, tense but steady, finger motionless on his revolver. In his outcry, Gilbert did not hear the thud of Langrew's dropping automatic.

"Get him!"

"I've covered him, Gilbert," broke in Jack, thrusting himself into the study. "Look - he's dropped his gun!"

Langrew had backed away from the desk, his hands raised scarcely above his hips. His dried lips were fierce in their expression. The old man looked like a tiger at bay.

"Look out, Jack!" cried Gilbert. "He's faking! He has my revolver. He'll yank it -"

Desperately, Gilbert plunged in front of Jack, to snatch up Langrew's automatic from the floor. His words, however, had spurred the old man to action. Gilbert had blocked Jack's aim. Langrew thrust his left hand to his jacket pocket, to draw Gilbert's gun.

Gilbert saw it. He plunged from Jack's path, juggling the automatic, losing it from fumbling fingers.

"Get him Jack!"

Jack aimed. He had the bead. Old Langrew's left hand was slow with its gun. The revolver caught as it came from the jacket pocket. Jack hesitated. He did not think that Langrew could aim.

"Drop it!" he called. "Drop it, or I'll fire!"

"Don't fire, Jack!"

It was Beth who gave this cry. The girl had sprung into the room. She saw the revolver slipping from Langrew's hand. The girl gripped Jack's arm; then suddenly dashed past him and leaped toward Gilbert.

Langrew had given up. His hand was open, the revolver falling. But Gilbert, at last gripping the automatic was turning to open fire while he shouted again to Jack:

"Get him!"

Beth caught Gilbert's arm and twisted hard to stop his aim. For a moment, Gilbert wrenched excitedly; then Beth brought him to his senses.

"Look, Gilbert!" cried the girl. "See? Jack has made him drop the revolver. Look, Gilbert."

"All right." Gilbert nodded and stepped back. "Good work, Jack! You were cooler than I was. Pick up Peter's gun, Beth. Bring it here to me."

He smiled; then added: "I mean pick up my gun. I already have his."

Beth complied. Gilbert pocketed Langrew's automatic and held his own

revolver. He faced the old man. Langrew glared, his raised hands clenched into fists.

"TWO rogues," rasped Langrew. "Conspirators, both of you! I knew it. Thieves, who sought my secret! And you, Beth, whom I could really trust, turning against me."

Jack ignored Langrew's protest. He spoke to Gilbert.

"What about Beale?"

"Don't worry about him," laughed Gilbert. "We have the man who counts. Beale won't make trouble."

"Thief!" snorted Langrew. "You, Gilbert, and your crony. Carrying weapons, here in my home! Threatening me with guns!"

"What do you call this?" queried Gilbert, coolly. He brought out Langrew's automatic and jockeyed it in his left hand. "This is a gun, isn't it? You threatened me with it, didn't you?"

"When you turned traitor -"

Gilbert was quietly covering Langrew with the automatic. Without turning his head, he spoke to Jack.

"Pocket your revolver. You won't need it. Come over and search Peter. Make sure he has no other weapons."

Then, to Beth, Gilbert said: "Call Beale."

The girl stepped to the door; then turned about and said:

"Beale is coming from the dining room."

"Good," declared Gilbert, with a smile. Then, to Jack: "Never mind searching the old man. Move him over toward the bookcase, in front of the desk.

Be ready to grab him if he makes trouble."

Peter Langrew offered no resistance. Beth showed sudden alarm, thinking that the old man was depending upon Beale's arrival. Then she saw Gilbert nod her in from the door.

"Over here, past where I am standing, Beth."

The girl scurried deeper into the room, just as Beale arrived. Gilbert's right hand was pointing its revolver toward the door. The servant stopped short then hoisted his hands mechanically.

"Come in, Beale," greeted Gilbert. "We're waiting for you. Step over beside me and face Miss Kindell. By the way, Beale, do you happen to have a revolver on you?"

Beale's cadaverous face showed an odd semblance of a grin. The stooped servant nodded.

"Then cover Beth," chuckled Gilbert, "while I take care of the others, Beale."

Wheeling, back to the door, Gilbert held both guns leveled. The automatic still covered Langrew. But the revolver was aimed toward Jack Hallison!

At the same instant, Beale dropped his raised arms. Thrusting one hand to his pocket, the servant produced a revolver and pointed it squarely toward Beth Kindell.

A FIERCE rasp came from Langrew.

Jack gave an astonished blurt. Beth gaped, too amazed to make an outcry.

A hardened voice spoke from Gilbert Eldron's lips.

"You wanted it," growled the mustached man. "So you got it! I gave you an out, Hallison, when I yelled to pick off Langrew. But you flopped."

Jack stared; he could not understand.

"Don't you get it, lug?" jeered Gilbert. "I'm the big-shot! I'm the bird who run things. I brought in that swag and planted it here in the study. I bought out Beale two weeks after I walked in here.

"Sure! I planted the swag! Just enough of it to make a showing. I wanted you and Beth for witnesses to prove that old Peter Langrew was a crook. After I grabbed his secret. But I didn't want him alive to do any talking.

"I wanted you to get him. You didn't. Even then, you had a chance. I'd have handled him myself and let you testify for me. But Beth queered it. She kept me from loading the old man with lead. Then it was too late. I couldn't shoot too long after he had let the gun drop."

Gilbert Eldron paused. His face had become insidious in the gloom of this tense room. A mask had lifted; for the first time in months, this shrewd supercrook was free to show his true self. He seemed to enjoy the situation.

"There'll be shooting now," promised Eldron, harshly. "My one out is to rub out the three of you. That's coming, soon enough. The bank swag will pay off the crew. Old Langrew's dough was what I really wanted.

"I was handling two games at once. Keeping a crew together. Ready for the finish; to plant it on Langrew, or to get rid of him. I found the right place when I picked this one. I -"

Beth had been staring past Beale, unnoticed by Eldron. The girl's hopeful gaze was toward the door. Her lips had started an exclamation, which she had repressed. Beale had seen it; the servant was turning, barking a warning to Eldron.

The interruption came too late.

Upon the threshold stood an avenging figure clad in black. Automatics loomed from beneath burning eyes. One .45 covered Eldron. The other held Beale.

The Shadow's laugh chilled the ears that heard it.

Whispering, creeping, bringing echoes that shuddered from every wall, it told Gilbert Eldron that he stood helpless. He knew that a ready finger was prepared to deliver a death bullet if he made a single false move.

A GUN thumped the floor.

Beale's. The clatter of the weapon told Eldron his course. The big-shot let his fingers open. His unmatched guns bounced at his feet.

Turning slowly, his hands clutching vacancy, Eldron faced The Shadow. A defiant snarl stopped upon the crook's frozen lips. Like Beale, Eldron stood cowed.

For The Shadow's laugh had repeated its weird mockery. It betokened triumph. It told of mastery. It signified that this had been no chance arrival.

The Shadow had identified the criminal within the house. He had seen through the game of crime. He had come to get Eldron, not Langrew.

Facts learned during his last visit to this house, had told The Shadow where the danger lay. Only outside circumstance had delayed his return until this moment of peril.

Peter Langrew had risen early from his nap. That, too, had given Gilbert Eldron his opportunity. But the supercrook, believing himself secure, had failed to hurry his final work of murder.

Eldron's confidence had served The Shadow.

CHAPTER XVIII

HENCHMEN THRUST

THE SHADOW'S laugh had ended. Dread silence held the room within its

clutch. Then, The Shadow's sinister whisper:

"Your game of crime was known!"

Eldron quailed before the gaze that accompanied the words.

"You, yourself, betrayed it," pronounced The Shadow, "in your rescue of Hallison. Only the one who started those crushing walls would have stopped them."

Jack Hallison gaped. He looked toward Peter Langrew. He saw bewilderment upon the old man's face. But the truth had dawned upon Jack.

He realized that Peter Langrew would not have left a crushed body lying in the cellar, without at least learning who the intruder had been. That had not occurred to Jack before. But it was plain when the light was shown to him.

This house had been fitted for protection; but only with closed doors and barred windows. Jack remembered that Langrew had given Eldron full privilege to

strengthen the barriers. It was Eldron who had installed the death traps.

The Shadow's voice had resumed its weird monotone.

"Beale would have heard the motor," spoke the cloaked rescuer. "Beth heard

it in the living room, and Beale was in the kitchen. I knew Beale for an accomplice; one that you needed, Eldron. You could not have covered up your work alone."

Beth realized that Peter Langrew had been upstairs the night that Jack Hallison had actually arrived. She had been upstairs, too. That was why Eldron had risked operating the motor, with only Beale to hear. Beth, too, had been deceived - had only heard the last of the thrumming when she came downstairs.

"Your object, Eldron, was plain," spoke The Shadow. "You wanted to see who lay within the trap. You knew he might be useful. You started the closing of the

walls, so you could pose as rescuer."

Eldron found voice as The Shadow paused.

"Sure," he admitted, sourly. "I thought maybe it was a Fed. I saw that this lug Hallison didn't look like one. I had a way to use him."

"As a witness later," added The Shadow. "A witness to Langrew's supposed crime. Moreover, you installed a trap upon the tower stairs."

"Why not?" queried Eldron, with a false show of bravado. "The old man told

Beale to iron-clad the door, after the time he chased up to the tower. I had Beale make a trap out of it."

"To incriminate me," put in Langrew, harshly. "And to doom intruders in the meantime!"

"That is not all," spoke Beth, to Langrew. "He told us that you had been to the tower often, and into the cellar."

A laugh from The Shadow called for silence. The Shadow spoke:

"To the tower, Eldron, to ignite your signal flares! To the cellar, to bring in the spoils and send your messages to Hengle. It was yourself, not Langrew, who visited tower and cellar!"

ELDRON'S set lips weakened. All challenge faded from him. The Shadow had gained every fact. The mention of Shill Hengle showed full understanding of the game.

Of a sudden, the master-rogue changed manner. He became whimpering, pleading, seeking mercy. Beale crouched, quivering, beside him, believing that Eldron was sincere in this new game.

"I went crooked," admitted Eldron. "But it wasn't until after I'd come here. Blink Torgue knew where I was. He told me I'd have to work with him, or he'd squeal. I wanted to play fair with Langrew. I was going to grab his dough

- but only because the jig was up.

"If I'd have seen a way out, I'd have taken it. It's been Blink who's staging all those jobs. Not me - honest, not me! It's Blink who -"

"Who knows you as the big-shot," interposed The Shadow. "Who held back for your signals. Who depended upon your brain!"

Eldron winced. He darted a look at Beale, hoping that the servant would stand by him. But Beale thought Eldron's plea was genuine.

Backing slowly, Eldron crouched as though weakening through knowledge of his own guilt. His eyes were to the floor. He wanted a chance to snatch up a discarded gun, but he lacked the nerve to attempt it. Jack Hallison caught a sudden gleam from The Shadow's steady eyes.

Jack drew his revolver. Stepping forward, he planted it in Eldron's back. The crook straightened as if jolted.

"I owe you nothing," reminded Jack. "Remember that, Eldron. You wanted the law to know about matters here. The law will learn through me, as you intended it to be. When I received the word -"

Jack looked toward The Shadow. Instinctively, he was ready to obey every command of that grim avenger. It was to The Shadow that Jack Hallison, like others present, owed his life.

The Shadow began words of command; then paused. A full hush followed. From

somewhere, this being in black had sensed a faint sound. The Shadow's gaze focused toward Peter Langrew. Hidden lips spoke:

"Cover Beale!"

Promptly, the old man bobbed from the bookcase and picked up his own automatic. While Jack kept Eldron helpless, Langrew stepped in front of Beale and firmly poked his gun against the servant's hollow chest.

The Shadow wheeled. His cloak swished as he stepped toward the door into the hall. His shoulders disappeared through the doorway.

A cry from Beth gave a sudden alarm. Eldron, suddenly desperate, had sprung a move.

STRAIGHTENING, the big-shot whipped about, reckless of the gun that pressed his back. Jack Hallison stood stupefied, as he had done when covering Peter Langrew. Eldron had counted upon Jack's ignorance of firearms. Viciously,

he made a grab for the man who covered him.

Jack grappled. The Shadow, turning in the doorway, saw the fray. Steady with an automatic, he was ready to drop Eldron; but Eldron had twisted, swinging Jack in front of him as a shield.

A sudden tussle; Eldron had Jack's gun. Twisting free, the crook aimed for The Shadow. Tugging the trigger, Eldron fired wild as he pounced forward. He had seen The Shadow whirl out into the hall.

That move was to draw the crook. The Shadow wanted a clear shot. He gained

it, from a longer range. His left-hand .45 tongued flame through the opened portal. Eldron staggered sideways, slipped against the desk; then rallied.

Before The Shadow saw need for another shot, two guns spoke, stirred into action by the battle. Jack had snatched up a gun from the floor. He was firing quick shots at Eldron. Langrew, pushing Beale into a corner, joined with his own gun.

Gilbert Eldron swayed, toppled with a spiral twist and sprawled to the floor dead. The Shadow's bullet had stopped his fight; others, delivered while the rogue still was standing, had finished him forever.

That rapid fire acted like a signal.

While the shots still echoed, the big front door burst inward. A flood of vicious battlers poured through the wide opening. Foremost were Blink Torgue and Shill Hengle, brandishing huge revolvers. Other weapons glittered from fists of following henchmen.

The Shadow's previous move had carried him away from the safety of the study. Turning to meet these foemen, he stood just away from the stairs, with no chance for cover.

Two guns against a dozen. Such were the odds that faced The Shadow. Alone, he was finding combat with a murderous horde that had arrived with unexpected precision.

THE thugs from the hide-out had found Shill. Blink had passed the word. Shill Hengle had pointed out the old house. He had carried a duplicate key, given him by Eldron. Thugs had approached; hearing battle from within, they had surged to enter.

Whether their chief was dead or not, they did not know. The fact that Eldron lay sprawled upon the study floor meant nothing to these would-be murderers.

Hardened criminals all, they recognized the warrior who faced them. The Shadow!

Lips snarled the name, along with oaths. Blink and Shill leaped apart as they aimed for the cloaked figure, to give their followers room. Men of crime were determined to win this battle if it cost them their own lives!

They had reached an ultimate that meant more to them than all the spoils that they had harvested for Gilbert Eldron. Alive or dead, the big-shot was forgotten for the duration of this fray.

One thought gripped every vicious brain throughout that invading crew. One evil hope - the desire that criminals galore had held before, but had failed to cash. Leering faces, aiming guns - both bespoke the maddened wish: Death to The Shadow!

CHAPTER XIX

CRIME'S END

THE SHADOW'S automatics boomed the first shots. As he fired, The Shadow wheeled toward the door of the study. His move was a feint. His swift spin reversed direction; he faded away toward the stairs.

His automatics blazed again, hard upon the opening volley from thuggish guns. Crooks fired wide. The Shadow had drawn their aim in the wrong direction.

Revolver bullets peppered the walls, but The Shadow's automatics found living targets. The Shadow was firing squarely into the cluster of gunmen that filled the doorway. His bullets were withering.

As a final touch to his twist-about, The Shadow drove forward against the recoil of his pumping guns. Three foemen took the brunt. Two sprawled; the third staggered forward to grapple with The Shadow. This fighter was Mac, toughest of Blink Torgue's lieutenants.

All happened in the space of short, swift moments. The Shadow's aim was to stop the massed invasion. In that, he succeeded almost instantly. His shots, straight toward the doorway, sent reserve crooks staggering back.

As The Shadow gun-clubbed Mac to one side, he dispatched emphatic bullets

that clipped a last thug who was scrambling for the outside air.

There were two, however, with whom The Shadow had not dealt. They were the most dangerous of the invading squad: Blink Torgue and Shill Hengle.

Blink had sprung inward, toward The Shadow's right. Shill had chosen the opposite side. Each was in front of a curtained alcove. Both were out of the path of The Shadow's fire. In his successful effort to halt a horde, The Shadow had neglected the leading pair.

Both had fired, along with their followers. Both had been bluffed by The Shadow's quick maneuvers. Until the cloaked fighter encountered the wounded Mac, Blink and Shill had loosed their bullets toward spots that The Shadow had just vacated.

Shill was the first of the two to gain a straight bead. The Shadow was facing him obliquely, at the moment when Mac sagged uselessly to the floor. Shill fired hastily, just as The Shadow's right arm swung in his direction. Amazing in his speed, The Shadow gained a simultaneous shot.

Shill staggered back against the curtains of the alcove, howling as he clamped his gun hand to his left shoulder. Blink aimed for The Shadow; then halted his finger on the trigger. He voiced a hoarse cry of elation.

Shill had clipped The Shadow!

SLUMPING sidelong, the cloaked marksman lost his footing. He lodged upon the outsprawled body of Mac. His left arm had dropped, limp; numbed fingers had lost their hold upon an automatic. His right arm raised, The Shadow was pointing toward the doorway, to stop any rally there. He was momentarily unable to twist about and take aim at Blink.

Deliberately, Blink leveled his big revolver. Half crouched, he prepared to end The Shadow's life with a sure shot. He was aiming from a range of only five feet.

A revolver crackled from somewhere in the background.

Blink Torgue winced. His grin turned sour. His whole body shook; then tightened. He regained his aim. A second shot barked from the depths. Blink slumped.

Those shots had come from the stairs. Standing midway on the steps was a stooped figure clad in dressing gown. Theodora Langrew had heard the battle; the old woman had come from her upstairs room.

She had unlocked the bureau to obtain an old-fashioned revolver. She had brought her heavy cane; she was leaning her weight upon it as she fired. Her left hand rested on the cane; her right gripped the revolver.

Theodora had not lost the sharpness of her sight. With two shots from the ancient revolver, she had settled Blink Torgue.

There were shouts from the front door. Faces appeared there; revolvers were flourished. The Shadow boomed last shots with his lone automatic. Crooks dived for cover.

Unheard amidst The Shadow's outburst was a snarl from the left of the open door.

Shill Hengle had recovered. Forgetting his clipped shoulder, the contact crook leaned back against the wall. Copying Blink's former move, he took a straight bead toward The Shadow. He was about to fire, as The Shadow sent a last shot through the doorway.

Theodora saw Shill. Coolly, the old lady aimed. Her scrawny finger squeezed the trigger, ahead of Shill's tug. Another timely blast from the throat of the ancient revolver: One more hit for Theodora Langrew.

Shill took that bullet in the chest. His own gun never spoke. With a

sickly attempt at a snarl, Shill slumped to the floor.

The Shadow had dropped his emptied .45; prone, he had used his right hand to pick up the weapon that his left had dropped. He rolled back and forth with each recoil as he fired new blasts through the doorway, to hold back attackers who planned another surge from outside.

Grimly, Theodora aided from the stairs. Each time she saw a face, she fired. Then came belated aid from the study. Jack Hallison and Peter Langrew reached the hall and stood ready with their guns.

OUTSIDE, gunmen had rallied. More than half a dozen strong, they were obeying the orders of a last commander.

Jing, conspicuous because of the sling that held his right arm, was shouting for a new and stronger attack.

Two henchmen were lugging a submachine gun. Another had a tear-gas gun, brought from a rifled bank. Jing was taking no chances. His plan was to open with the Tommy gun; to support it, if necessary, with a blast of tear gas. Crooks were ready for the charge. Jing snapped the order.

A chugging roar sounded from beyond the front wall. Screams came from a parked touring car. Those cries were warnings to Jing; they were from Daisy and

the other molls. The girls had guns, but they began their fire too late. The gate broke open. In came Cliff and Harry; for the roar had been their motorcycle. The agents were ready with their automatics. Point-blank, they riddled the crooks who held the submachine gun framed against the light of the opened front door.

The gunners fell. Jing made a mad dive for cover. Leaderless, the other thugs scattered. One crook threw aside the Tommy gun and ran for the wall. Firing as they advanced, Cliff and Harry captured the machine gun. They swung the heavy weapon into action.

Circling fire plastered the walls inside the grounds as The Shadow's agents operated the machine gun. Bullets sprayed everywhere, dropping one last ruffian who had not gained the wall. The others, led by Jing, had circled the house. In full flight, they were making for the back gate.

New guns barked. There were shouts; the roars of motors. The law had arrived. Feds were rounding up the fleeing thugs. From in front of the house, a touring car shot away. It circled, cut through Shill Hengle's filling station, jounced to the street and headed for the open road.

Daisy was at the wheel of the fleeing car. She and the girls with her were trying to escape. A big sedan roared off in pursuit.

Harry and Cliff stopped the machine gun. They turned toward the house, intending to enter. They saw a blackened figure arise from among the bodies that cluttered the door. The shape wavered; then moved outward. The Shadow was coming to join his agents.

THOSE within the house witnessed the strange departure. They stood silent as the figure of their rescuer went through the door, descended the outer steps, to be swallowed by gloom beyond.

They did not see The Shadow stumble; but the agents did. Harry and Cliff supported their faltering chief. They heard the triumphant laugh that whispered

from The Shadow's lips. The Shadow's wound had handicapped him in the fray; but

it was not one that would prove serious otherwise.

A motor throbbed beyond the front gate. The Shadow heard a shout, in a voice he recognized. It was Vic Marquette's. The leader of the Feds was on the scene. The Shadow spoke a whispered order.

With Harry and Cliff beside him, he strode toward the side of the house. The agents kept pace with their chief; the trio were gone when Vic and his squad came dashing in from the front.

Out back, all was quiet. Scattered thugs had fled this terrain when pursued.

With his right hand, The Shadow swung open the rear gate. He led his agents through the darkness, to an obscure spot where they found Cliff's coupe.

Wearily, The Shadow managed to enter the car. He relaxed between his agents. With Cliff at the wheel, the coupe moved slowly through the night. Its dim lights showed an open street ahead. The Shadow's keen eyes saw the route before them.

Again, The Shadow laughed.

CHAPTER XX

WEALTH RECLAIMED

VIC MARQUETTE stood in Peter Langrew's study. A stocky man, dark-visaged with black mustache, Vic was poker-faced as he listened to the accounts of those who had witnessed battle.

Upon the desk were spoils that had been stacked behind the books on the top shelf. They represented but a portion of the swag that crooks had gained from rifled banks. Upon the floor, however, were other bundles, that Feds had brought from a cache in the cellar.

"It fits," decided Vic. "Gilbert Eldron was the king-pin of the outfit. A crook who had no record. He could have put it all on you, Mr. Langrew.

"He wanted to keep Hallison and Miss Kindell alive, right enough. But when

that scheme went sour, he figured them better dead. He'd have sent that swag downstairs back through the pipe line to Hengle. We wouldn't have found that pipe line in a week!

"How about it?" Marquette swung to Beale, who stood pale-faced, a prisoner. "Was that his game?"

"It was," admitted Beale, weakly. "I - I was to flee with the chief. Shill

was to send men in here - to make it look like a raid. You were to find dead bodies, and - and some of the swag."

"Enough to make Langrew look like the big-shot," growled Marquette. "To make us think that his bunch had turned against him and made a get-away with all that they could find. We'd never have traced Eldron to New Orleans."

Marquette picked up the mausoleum deed which had been plucked from Eldron's pocket. He handed it to Langrew.

"You'd better go there yourself," decided the Fed. "You thought you had enemies. Well, you did have one - and he's dead. With Eldron gone, you've got nothing to worry about, Mr. Langrew."

"I believe that you are right," nodded the old man. "I have been a fool. An absolute fool!"

A chuckle intervened. It came from Theodora.

"So you've admitted it at last, Peter!" exclaimed the old woman. "Bah! I could have told you that long ago, if you had listened. From the moment that scamp Eldron set foot in this house, I mistrusted him."

Beth Kindell stared, amazed.

"You never told me so, Miss Theodora -"

"Why should I have told you?" demanded the old lady. "You never would have

believed me. You were ready to trust Eldron. All that I could do was pretend myself an invalid, unable to leave my bed, so that Peter would put off the day when we left this house.

"While we stayed here, his secret was safe. That rogue Eldron was too smart to push matters. I guessed his game; but I couldn't prove it. I watched him, many times, when everyone thought that I was moaning in my room.

"I saw him go into the tower; to the cellar. But what could be done about it? Nothing, until I had proof that would stand against him. I even came in here at times, but I never climbed up on chairs to look behind book shelves."

Theodora paused for breath; then turned to Peter. She added:

"Tonight, you looked more foolish than ever. I thought that you would talk

to that rascal Eldron. That's why I brought out my old revolver. I was coming downstairs, to corner the scamp if he made trouble.

"Perhaps I waited too long" - she paused and smiled dryly - "and perhaps I did not. Perhaps I happened to wait just long enough"

VIC MARQUETTE nodded approvingly. He had heard full report of the mysterious, cloaked stranger who had arrived to deal with Eldron. He also knew the part that Theodora Langrew had played when The Shadow needed aid.

Vic was about to make remark, when a Fed entered, breathless. The arrival reported:

"The girls made for the hide-out! We trapped them there! No swag, there, though."

"It was here," explained Marquette. "Stacked in a hidden room at the front of the cellar. One that Beale rigged up for Eldron. Beale showed us the place. The crooks were to pick it up across the street, at Hengle's.

"A smooth game, all through. Eldron had a quarter million in the bag, from those bank robberies. He could have kept half of it and paid off the crew with the rest.

"But some of that swag didn't suit him. It was hot. He wanted bigger dough. He wanted Blink, Shill and the rest of them to be satisfied. He'd have given them all of it, tonight. He'd have been clear, forgotten, when he found Langrew's millions in New Orleans."

"Quite right sir," affirmed Beale. "I was to go with him; to receive fifty thousand dollars for myself."

"Less than a quarter of the amount I intended for you, Beale," remarked Peter Langrew. "I cannot understand why you sided with Eldron."

"I thought you a harsh master," pleaded the servant. "I expected nothing from you. I doubted your words, when you mentioned secret wealth. Eldron convinced me that you were insane. He threatened me, unless I obeyed his orders.

"I did not know the full extent of his evil. I saw no newspapers; I did not know of the bank robberies. I was not a member of the band. Really, sir, I -"

"That's enough, Beale," broke in Marquette. "You've given us evidence; we'll be lenient with you. We've rounded up the real crooks - all that were left of them, after they tried to shoot it out with us.

"That reporter, Burke, must have had a real hunch when he told us there might be trouble in Aurora. That's why we came into town, figuring that the crooks might take a stab at one of the banks here."

Feds were bringing another box from the cellar. They dumped it. Out fell maps and colored flares. Another man entered. He passed a note to Vic Marquette, who read it and smiled.

"You talked to this doctor?" he queried. "After he came back from the Aurora Hotel?"

"Yes," was the reply. "He said that he was summoned there; that the patient's wound is not serious. He met two others -"

"That's enough. It's all here in the note. Forget it. We've cleaned up the crooks. This case has nothing to do with us."

VIC was poker-faced as he made his statement. Secretly, he felt relief. Marquette had been aided by The Shadow in the past. He knew the power of that master who battled crime. He had hoped that The Shadow had escaped severe injury. Because of that, Marquette had ordered direct reports from all physicians in Aurora.

Moreover, Vic knew that he had acted as The Shadow had expected. That fact pleased the leader of the Feds. Once again, The Shadow had gained proof that he could rely upon Vic; and Marquette knew that he could always count upon The Shadow.

There were others who guessed what Vic had done; they shared the same elation. Jack Hallison spoke to Beth Kindell, as the two walked to the front door together. The moon was rising over Aurora; they stood beneath the pleasant glow.

"I'm glad that I was no friend of Gilbert Eldron's," announced Jack. "I was duped; but I tried to make amends for it."

"You did," returned Beth with a smile. "So you have become a friend of ours. This is a secret, Jack: I told Peter Langrew that this house was once your home. He intends to deed it to you."

"Then you will leave Aurora with the others?"

"I suppose so. Unless -"

Jack smiled as he gathered Beth into his arms.

Silence held sway with moonlight, above the house where crime had met its finish. All that whispered was the wind through the magnolias; yet the breeze carried recollection of another sound.

A wafted echo still pervaded. It was the remembrance of a tone that could never be forgotten. Mirth that had sounded triumph over crime; that had brought

happiness to two persons who deserved it.

Lingering in memory - the laugh of The Shadow!

THE END