



PRINCE OF EVIL

Maxwell Grant

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- ? [CHAPTER I. THE MADNESS OF JOHN HARMON](#)
- ? [CHAPTER II. CHALLENGE OF CRUELTY](#)
- ? [CHAPTER III. DANGEROUS BLOND](#)
- ? [CHAPTER IV. THE SECOND BOTTLE](#)
- ? [CHAPTER V. DOUBLE DECEPTION](#)
- ? [CHAPTER VI. GREETINGS FROM HELL](#)
- ? [CHAPTER VII. UNDERGROUND CHALLENGE](#)
- ? [CHAPTER VIII. THE CLOSED CIRCLE](#)
- ? [CHAPTER IX. THE BLUE PARROT](#)
- ? [CHAPTER X. THE BATHTUB CLUE](#)
- ? [CHAPTER XI. SILVER AND BLACK](#)
- ? [CHAPTER XII. TWO IN ONE](#)
- ? [CHAPTER XIII. VICTORY - AND DEFEAT](#)
- ? [CHAPTER XIV. TRIPLE DOOM](#)
- ? [CHAPTER XV. BITTER TRIUMPH](#)

CHAPTER I. THE MADNESS OF JOHN HARMON

JOHN HARMON'S hands were trembling as he took out his spectacle case and put on his glasses. He picked up the check which David Chester had just laid smilingly on the desk. There was a blur of tears in Harmon's eyes that made it hard for him to see clearly for a moment.

Chester misunderstood the older man's emotion. He thought that Harmon was jittery with eagerness to close the deal and take the money.

"A tidy sum," he chuckled.

It was. The check was for five hundred thousand dollars. Chester had already signed it. His signature was like himself - tight, angular and excessively neat. It was the price agreed upon for the sale of John Harmon's business. Harmon was getting every penny he had asked for.

But he was far from happy.

He stared around the quiet, book-lined study where he and his visitor sat, as if trying to think of some way to postpone the deal. Harmon's life had been wrapped up in his business. He had always known that, some day, he'd have to quit and sell out. That time had now come.

Six weeks earlier, John Harmon had had a frightening experience. He had closed up his desk one evening and walked out of his downtown office into nothingness!

Twelve hours of living death had followed. When he came to his senses, he was lying on a cot in the public ward of a hospital. There was a horrible buzzing in his head, and no knowledge of a single event during those twelve blank hours of aimless wandering.

The doctors had called it amnesia. Too much work; not enough rest and relaxation. It was taking its toll from a tired man sixty-two years old.

That was when Harmon began negotiations to sell his business. Not because of himself, but because of his wife. Martha Harmon was an invalid. She had never uttered a complaint; but life had not been too pleasant for her, either. Business had swallowed both their lives. Neither had ever had time for a vacation.

Yet John Harmon had a queer, intuitive feeling that he ought not to sell. It was a strange, frightened sensation. He stared at David Chester.

Chester was harmless-looking. There was a smile on his thin face. He had been easy to deal with, generous in his offer. His reputation was good, his business rating excellent.

"Let me think about it a moment," Harmon muttered.

He began to pace up and down his quiet study.

Behind his back, Chester's smile hardened. He fumbled in his pocket and took out a stick of chewing gum.

The gum was in a plain wrapper. He popped it into his mouth and began to chew.

As his jaws worked, his face turned startlingly unpleasant. His eyes blazed coldly. His lax fingers on the desk clenched into a sudden fist. He seemed at the point of leaping toward his unsuspecting host and taking him by the throat.

Harmon saw nothing of this. He came back and sat down. Chester had regained his self-control. He was friendly and sympathetic.

"After all," he pointed out softly, "you had a warning from nature that you'd be foolish to ignore. A mental breakdown such as you suffered -"

"It wasn't a mental breakdown," Harmon said sharply. "It was amnesia."

"A man over sixty has to be careful. It would be different if your son could take over the business. But you told me he has no interest in it."

"You're right," Harmon said dully. "Bob wants to be an engineer. He still has another year before he graduates from college, and then he'll have to go to a technical school. That takes money, and, unfortunately, my funds are frozen. And yet I hate to sell!"

"You have a daughter, too," Chester said.

"Yes, Jane is a fine girl. She wants to be a physician. She deserves my support."

"You can do it handsomely with a half million," Chester smiled. "How much are you in debt?"

"I owe a hundred thousand."

"A hundred thousand will clear up your debts, leaving you four hundred thousand dollars to invest in

good securities. You and your wife can take a world cruise and have plenty left to enjoy yourself when you return. Surely, your wife deserves a little pleasure for the remaining years of her life?"

"You're right," John Harmon said slowly. "Martha's heart is set on that trip. And she may be right about my health. I haven't felt right lately."

Chester's reply was amused. "And still you hesitate! You pass up the chance to step out of the grind and pocket a cool half million. Why?"

"I don't know," Harmon admitted with a sigh. He rubbed his gray head with a troubled gesture.

"Suppose we call off the whole thing," Chester said curtly. "You keep your business and I'll keep my half million. I'm sorry you have wasted my time."

He reached for the check to tear it up. Harmon uttered a faint cry and clutched at his hand.

"Don't be angry! I just want time to -"

"I've brought the sales contract and the check. Do you wish to sell? Yes or no!"

There was silence for an instant.

"Yes," John Harmon said.

Chester exhaled a tiny breath of relief. "Good!"

FROM his briefcase Chester took two duplicate documents. They were legal contracts, for the sale of John Harmon's business to David Chester for the sum of five hundred thousand dollars. Chester signed both sheets and handed them to Harmon.

Harmon had dictated the contract himself. The document needed no witnesses to make it legal. Having read the terms carefully, Harmon signed both sheets.

Chester retained his own copy. Harmon placed the other one and the check in his study safe. His worry vanished. The deal was finished, and his wife would be happy. He got a bottle of sherry from a cabinet. The two men smilingly toasted each other.

Chester glanced at his watch and arose. "Good night and pleasant dreams." His voice was like silk. He left at once.

A few minutes later, Martha Harmon came into the study at her husband's excited summons. He was smiling and happy. So was Martha, when she learned that the deal was finished. It meant peace and comfort for the few remaining years of their lives.

She had a sweet, pleasant face with a mass of silvery-white hair drawn back from her soft forehead. She leaned heavily on a cane. Arthritis had bent her straight figure in the last few years. But to John Harmon she was still the slim, lovely girl he had married forty years earlier. He kissed her and patted her arm.

"From now on my only job is to see that you're happy. Better write in the morning for some travel folders. We're going to visit some of the places we've wanted to see all our lives."

"How much did Chester pay?" Martha asked.

"The price I asked. Five hundred thousand."

Smiling, he turned to the safe and opened it. He handed his wife the signed copy of the agreement and Chester's check. He relaxed in his leather chair.

His wife's sudden cry brought him to his feet. Martha's face was deathly pale. She was staring at the check as if she couldn't believe her eyes. Her husband sprang to her side.

"What's the matter?"

"Look! The check! It... it -"

She couldn't speak. Harmon snatched the check from her. Then his own face paled. For a moment, he wondered if he had gone suddenly crazy.

He had examined that check only a few minutes earlier. He had placed it in the safe with his own hands. No one but his wife had touched it since. And yet, a horrible transformation had occurred.

The check was correctly drawn to John Harmon. It was signed correctly with the neat signature of David Chester. But the sum was for fifty thousand dollars!

"Fifty thousand!" Harmon cried. "It should be five hundred thousand! There must be some mistake."

He snatched at the sales agreement. It too, was like the check. John Harmon had agreed, according to the signed document, to sell his business to David Chester for the sum of fifty thousand dollars!

Harmon clutched at his temples. His head seemed to be splitting. His eyes were glassy. Then he pulled himself together.

"I saw the amount clearly. I looked at both check and agreement before Chester left. It was for a half million dollars."

He saw, to his horror, that his wife didn't believe him. His memory had been uncertain since the amnesia attack a month earlier. Martha Harmon knew the business was worth every penny of a half million. But she knew, too, that its assets were hopelessly frozen.

Had John become mentally confused under the strain of selling it? Had he agreed to sacrifice his holdings for a ridiculous sum like fifty thousand while he was temporarily incompetent?

The quick thought showed in Martha's tragic glance. It shocked Harmon into action. He sprang to the telephone.

"Chester's copy of the contract will show the truth!"

But he couldn't, get Chester on the phone. The bell buzzed monotonously, without answer.

"Perhaps he hasn't returned to his apartment yet," Harmon said thickly. "I'll go and see him. He'll probably be there by the time I arrive. In five minutes, we'll have that silly mistake in figures rectified."

HARMON grabbed his hat and coat and rushed from the room. He raced to the corner and called a taxi.

His thoughts were in wild turmoil. Was Chester a crook? Had he changed the figures in some way? Or was Harmon himself losing his mind, as his wife's frightened glance had indicated?

Panting, he rang Chester's apartment bell. Chester himself opened the door. He was cool, smiling, very friendly.

"Well, this is a surprise! Come in, Mr. Harmon. What in the world has brought you here?"

"The check! It's wrong! There's been some ghastly mistake! I... I want to see your copy of the agreement."

"Why, certainly."

Chester got his copy of the contract out of a small wall safe and showed it.

"Naturally, mine is the same as yours. Fifty thousand dollars. That's the price we agreed on."

The document proved his words. Harmon glared at the figures with bloodshot eyes.

"But... but that's wrong! The price on the paper when we signed it was a half million dollars!"

"Sit down," Chester said gently. "Let me fix you a drink. You've had another mental attack, I'm afraid. Does your wife know you left the house?"

He was like a grownup reasoning with a child. His voice was like soothing syrup. Dazed, Harmon hardly heard what Chester was saying.

Chester was asserting that the deal was legitimate. He had bought the business at a low figure because it was so hopelessly frozen in its assets. He suggested that Harmon ought to go home at once and summon a physician. He advised rest and sleep until the dazed old man felt better.

Harmon, without realizing exactly how it happened, found himself eased quietly from Chester's apartment to the street.

The hour was late, but he didn't hesitate. Into his tortured mind swam the name of Hubert Jackson. Jackson was a lawyer, and Harmon's friend. At this hour of the night, Jackson was probably already in bed. But Harmon called a taxi. He drove at top speed to the lawyer's home.

Dressed in pajamas and bathrobe, Hubert Jackson listened to the wild story Harmon poured out. He shook his head when he saw the check and the sales contract.

"They look perfectly normal to me. Are you sure -"

Harmon screamed at him. "Of course I'm sure! He's a crook, a swindler! I want him arrested!"

Jackson's voice became soothing.

"Better let me take care of this. Go home and get some rest. Inspector Cardona, of the police, is a friend of mine. I'll get permission from him tomorrow to take the check and the contract to the police laboratory in Brooklyn. If there has been any criminal tampering, the police scientific gadgets will uncover it."

He guided his agitated visitor to the door.

"I'll also investigate David Chester. There's no need for you to worry. Go home to Martha and relax."

"You're a true friend, Hubert," Harmon gasped.

After he had left, Jackson looked thoughtful. The lawyer glanced at the check and shook his head. It seemed perfectly legitimate. He was convinced that John Harmon had experienced a second mental breakdown, this time a more serious one.

The story about the changed figures was too silly to believe. Chester was hardly fool enough to risk going to jail with a swindle that could be easily detected.

Harmon was obviously unbalanced.

The lawyer was sure of it at the close of the following day. From the police laboratory came a definite statement. There was no evidence that the ink on the check or sales document had been changed. The texture of the paper showed no sign of tampering or erasure!

Jackson's investigation of David Chester also gave the lie to the old man's wild accusation of fraud. Chester's financial rating was A-1. His business was that of purchasing shaky firms at cheap prices. Jackson interviewed a half dozen former clients of Chester and all of them said they had been completely satisfied in their dealings with the man.

JACKSON'S face was sorrowfully grim when he visited the home of John Harmon the following evening.

He advised Harmon there was nothing further he could do. Harmon's business was the legal property of Chester. A suit for fraud would be thrown out of court. Harmon's only course was to deposit the fifty thousand dollars and have himself examined by a competent psychiatrist.

There was a pathetic scene between John Harmon and his weeping wife after the lawyer left. Their lives were ruined. All Harmon had left was a check for fifty thousand dollars and he owed twice that!

Dazedly, he listened to the comforting words of his wife. Over and over, he tried to explain to her what had happened. It was useless. He allowed his wife to guide him upstairs to his bedroom. He undressed and turned out the light. Martha went to her own room.

But after she was gone, Harmon got out of bed again. A sudden desperate thought had come to him. He got the tin box in which he kept his valuables, took out a thick envelope. The envelope contained his life-insurance policy. He was insured for one hundred thousand dollars.

John Harmon shuddered, then he clamped his jaws. He knew now that this was the only way out. The insurance policy would pay his debts. The check from Chester would leave enough to take care of his wife, and allow his son and daughter to finish their college educations and get a decent start in life.

Harmon walked slowly into his wife's bedroom. There were tears in his eyes as he bade her good night. She was puzzled by the tightness of his embrace and the slow fervor of his kiss. But he seemed calmer and she was glad of that. Perhaps he'd feel better in the morning.

"What I need is sleep, Martha," Harmon told his wife huskily. "Good night, and God bless you!"

He left her quickly.

Ten minutes later, Martha Harmon heard a sound that brought her out of bed with a frightened cry. The nature of that muffled explosion from her husband's room was unmistakable.

Seizing her cane, she hobbled painfully down the darkened hall. Her husband's room was ablaze with light.

He had fallen back on his bed after firing the fatal shot into his temple. A little blood had soaked into the pillow, but not much.

The agony of despair had left his tortured face. He looked gray and peaceful - and very tired.

Martha Harmon stood frozen for a moment, leaning painfully on her cane. Then she managed to totter to the window. Her scream for help awoke the neighborhood. A man shouted. A policeman's whistle shrilled. Feet pounded along the dark sidewalk.

But what help would that bring to the tired suicide on the bed or the moaning woman at the window?

Crime that was too clever to be recognized as crime had brought tragedy to a peaceful couple who had lived cleanly and righteously all their lives.

The dead man alone knew there had been crime and no one, not even his wife, had believed him.

There was only one person on earth brilliant enough to solve this strange enigma of cruelty and greed.

The Shadow!

CHAPTER II. CHALLENGE OF CRUELTY

THERE was a frown on Lamont Cranston's usually pleasant face as he sat perusing a newspaper in the quiet of the Cobalt Club. He sensed there was something peculiar about the pathetic suicide of John Harmon.

Cranston had not been a friend of Harmon's, but had met him several times in the course of business. He knew the old man had suffered an attack of amnesia a month or so earlier. But amnesia was a long way from insanity. And Harmon's strange story of fraud before he committed suicide certainly sounded insane.

Cranston raised his newspaper to hide the sudden glint that came into his keen eyes. It was an expression that abruptly transformed his appearance from that of an amiable millionaire clubman to something grim and relentless. For a moment his face, shielded by the newspaper, bore an uncanny resemblance to an altogether different personage.

The Shadow!

The look was gone in a flash. Cranston lowered the newspaper. He had heard a man calling his name. A fellow clubman was approaching the comfortable chair where Lamont Cranston sat, the picture of lazy ease.

The man was Hubert Jackson. Cranston was glad to see him. He knew that Jackson had been John Harmon's attorney, as well as his personal friend. The story of Harmon's visit to Jackson's apartment the night before his suicide had been described in the newspapers.

"A shocking-case," Cranston said.

The lawyer nodded. "Poor Harmon was obviously insane. There's no other answer. His sudden suicide proved it."

"He left a family, didn't he?"

"Yes. An invalid widow and a son and daughter. Bob and Jane Harmon have still a year to go before they graduate from college. They're on the way home now, but I'm afraid they'll find precious little when they arrive."

Jackson sighed.

"The boy hoped to be an engineer. Jane was studying to be a physician. That means, of course, additional years of training. Unless something is done, I'm afraid Bob and Jane will have to sacrifice their careers."

"Why can't something, be done to help them?" Cranston suggested.

"I was hoping you'd say that," Jackson replied. "It's the very thing I want to talk to you about. I thought I'd take up a private subscription among some of the people who knew poor Harmon. It would bring some measure of relief to a family stricken through no fault of their own."

"Are you quite sure that Harmon's story of fraud was a figment of his imagination?" Cranston inquired slowly.

"Positive! The police laboratory experts scrutinized both the check and the bill of sale and discovered they were O.K. I visited Chester at his office and found him a perfect gentleman. He offered me every facility to examine his books. He gave me the names of other clients whose business he had purchased. There's no doubt about it whatever. David Chester had nothing to do with Harmon's unfortunate suicide."
"

There was a pause. Lamont Cranston seemed to be too shocked to talk more about the matter at the moment. But behind his quiet countenance, the shrewd, intelligent brain of The Shadow was formulating a plan for further investigation of this strange case.

"I'll be glad to contribute my share to your charity fund," he said.

"I knew I could depend on your generosity."

Other club members were staring at the two men. Cranston used this as an excuse to rise from his chair. He wanted to discuss the case further with Jackson, but he had no intention of doing so in the reading room of the Cobalt Club.

"Could we go to your apartment?" Cranston asked. "I'll write you out a check there, and you can tell me more about this unfortunate tragedy."

Jackson agreed. They got their hats and coats and left the club. Cranston's car was at the curb outside, and both men got in.

"I'M glad you're coming to see my apartment," Jackson said smilingly. "I have a rather good collection of paintings on which I'd like to have your judgment. And then there's Pippo."

"Pippo?" Cranston asked curiously.

"My dog. A little wire-haired terrier. He's been twice a prize winner at the dog show. A finer animal never lived."

Cranston smiled and nodded. He drove his car with swift ease through the midtown traffic to the apartment house where Jackson lived.

At the curb where he parked a childish voice spoke up hesitantly, as the two friends alighted from Cranston's car.

"Hey, mister! Lemme watch your car for you, huh? Only ten cents. I'll wipe off the windshield and shine up the hood. Only a dime, mister!"

The boy couldn't have been more than eight years old. A thin, undersized little waif, with pipestem legs and a pale, half-starved face. His clothes were ragged. His cap looked as if it might have been fished from a barrel.

Cranston's sympathy was touched.

"I'll make you a proposition, sonny. If you wipe the windshield and keep a good watch, so that no other cars scratch up my paint, I'll give you a dollar when I come back."

For a moment, the kid thought he was being fooled. Then he realized that the tall, smiling gentleman meant what he said. A grin of delight almost split his dirty face in half.

"A buck! Gee, whiz! Oh, boy, will I watch this car! I'll shine it up like it was just outta the factory!"

Cranston felt warm inside as he ascended in the elevator with Jackson to the latter's apartment. He liked to do things like that for stray kids.

His face reflected the kid's grin as Jackson opened the door to his apartment and led his guest toward the ornate living room.

Suddenly, Lamont Cranston stopped short. The smile disappeared from his face.

Jackson had uttered a shrill cry of horror. He was standing stiff-legged in the doorway of the living room, staring at a scene of brutal chaos. The paintings on the wall which he had promised to show Cranston hung in tattered shreds. Someone with a wanton knife had slashed the canvases.

The furniture had been converted into junk. Some of it had been attacked with an ax. Other pieces had been splashed with acid that had eaten into the fabric and discolored the beautiful surface of the antique wood.

But the bloody object that lay in the center of the floor was what had drawn that horrified cry from Jackson. It was the corpse of the lawyer's beloved wire-haired terrier, Pippo. A knife had ripped across the animal's throat, almost severing the terrier's head.

Jackson fell on his knees beside his pet. Tears streamed from his eyes. He forgot everything except the fact that his prized dog had been brutally slain.

And for no reason!

That was what Jackson kept mumbling over and over in dazed grief, after Lamont Cranston had helped the stricken lawyer to a chair. Cranston seemed as shocked as Jackson. But his mind was working grimly. Why had this thing been done?

There was only one possible answer. Jackson had no personal enemies. Of that he assured Cranston in a trembling voice. Yet his dog Pippo, the one thing in life that he prized, had been wantonly slain.

Cranston was certain, even before he found the Bible, that the attack had been made because of Jackson's good-natured effort to help the family of the dead John Harmon.

THE Bible lay on the rug beneath an overturned chair. The book had been opened to a particular page. The page was ringed with red crayon.

It drew attention to the story of the good Samaritan!

Even Jackson understood the import of that sneering message, when he had recovered from the shock of

his dog's brutal murder. He realized that he was being punished for trying to help the family of John Harmon. His charity had brought a cruel reprisal.

To Cranston it was proof that the suicide of John Harmon had been willed by a criminal. He asked a swift question.

"How many people besides me did you approach with your charity appeal so far?"

"Only David Chester," the lawyer replied slowly. His face was pale. "I can't believe that Chester had anything to do with this. He was too decent when I called on him. He promised me a contribution later."

"Perhaps this is his idea of a contribution," Cranston said grimly. "At any rate, we know one thing: you've put yourself on the spot!"

Jackson shuddered. "What shall I do?"

"I'd advise you to make a public statement resigning from the job of collecting charity for the Harmons. It's the only way you can save yourself from further attack. Let me attend to it for you."

Cranston picked up the telephone. In a steady voice, he called the number of the City News Association. He knew that this was the quickest way to publicize what he wanted known.

"Mr. Hubert Jackson wishes to announce that, because of ill health, he is resigning from the chairmanship of the fund to help the family of the late John Harmon," Cranston said over the wire.

His voice hardened.

"You may state that his place is being taken by a friend. From now on, Lamont Cranston will accept contributions to the Harmon fund."

He hung up and smiled. Cranston was deliberately offering himself as bait. He was determined to come to closer grips with an unknown criminal. It might be David Chester; it might not. But The Shadow was certain that Harmon's wild story of fraud was a true one.

A cunning and ruthless scoundrel who delighted in evil had raked in a cool profit of four hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

Cranston advised Jackson not to tell the police what had happened in his apartment. Jackson was glad to agree. He was heartbroken by the loss of his prized dog. He was terrified of further attacks if he dared to undertake an investigation.

Cranston left the apartment, convinced he had everything arranged the way he wanted it. He had moved fast. He awaited an answering move. But Cranston had no idea of the appalling speed that answer to his challenge over the phone would take.

He didn't even realize it when he saw the man at the curb. The man was mistreating the boy whom Cranston had left to watch his parked car. The boy was crying. The man had grabbed him by the arm and was twisting it. It looked as if he were trying to break the frightened lad's arm.

Cranston felt a quick surge of anger. He darted forward and shoved the man away.

The man reeled, and recovered his balance. He was a nasty looking individual, with a mop of coal-black hair and a ragged black mustache. He was chewing gum vigorously.

"Mind your own damn business!" he growled. "This kid belongs in school. That's where I'm taking him.

"I'm a truant officer."

He didn't look like one. There was something savagely unpleasant in the way he chewed his gum. Cranston had a cold feeling of disgust and repulsion.

"If you're a truant officer, let me see your credentials."

"O.K. Here they are!"

His hand had dipped slyly into his pocket. He pivoted and struck at Cranston's chin. There were brass knuckles on his clenched fist. Had the blow landed squarely, it would have shattered Cranston's jaw.

But Cranston had swerved aside. The movement didn't completely save him, however. The blow landed on his neck. It was powerful enough to paralyze him, send him reeling backward to the sidewalk.

As he fell, the thug uttered an oath and struck at the boy. This time, he landed his blow with a horrible impact. It hit the boy on the temple and knocked him unconscious.

Cranston, dazed, tried to stagger to his feet. Before he could do so, the thug had picked up the limp figure of the boy and was darting out into the street.

There was a scream of horror from pedestrians. A heavy truck was racing at top speed along the avenue. Straight into the path of the truck, the thug threw the senseless boy! Then he turned and ran.

THE driver of the truck jammed on the brakes. But it was too late to halt the heavy vehicle. The broad-tired wheels rolled toward the limp head of the lad on the pavement.

An instant before it could crush out his life, Lamont Cranston dived headlong into the path of destruction. His shoulder struck the boy, rolling him toward the curb. A quick wriggle, and Cranston swerved aside from the grinding death that loomed over him.

He picked up the boy. One glance and he knew there was no time to lose. The attempted killer had leaped into a waiting sedan and had already made his escape. The boy was all Cranston could see or think about.

Brass knuckles had fractured his skull. He had suffered a concussion of the brain. A glance at his bluish lips and the fixed glaze of his staring eyes told Cranston that unless the boy was operated on immediately, he would die.

A leap, Cranston was in his car. He laid the boy gently on the seat beside him, then headed the car toward the nearest hospital.

Traffic lights were ignored. A cop, who had arrived too late to catch the vanished killer, leaped to the opposite running board of the car. He cleared a path for the speeding sedan with his shrill whistle.

Cranston rushed into the hospital with his limp burden. He got quick action. The boy was taken to an emergency operating room and a skilled surgeon went to work. When it was over, Cranston asked only one question:

"Will the child live?"

"Hard to say. We'll do our best."

"Spare no expense. Put him in a private room. Engage day and night nurses."

Cranston's face was pale. He knew that he himself was indirectly responsible for the boy's attack. A supercriminal had made a prompt answer to Cranston's message over Jackson's telephone.

That telephone must have been tapped. The attempt to kill the boy was a vicious warning for Lamont Cranston to mind his own business about the Harmon family.

It was a follow-up of the attack on Jackson's dog. But this time, cruelty had singled out a human life as a pawn.

Cranston felt a surge of hot anger. He kept it under control while he answered routine police questions. He told all he knew - which was nothing. His wealth and social position enabled him to get away from the hospital without too great a delay.

He had only one angry thought. He intended to drive straight to the office of David Chester. He'd get the truth out of the sleek Chester, if he had to batter him with vengeful fists!

Cranston was actually halfway to Chester's office before common sense returned to him. He realized he had lost his sense of balance. He was behaving exactly as the crooks wanted. He was playing their game, not his!

He parked, and the hot rage drained slowly from him. He stopped thinking about the limp figure of a young lad on a white operating table.

He found a public telephone in a place where no one could overhear him. He called a number not listed in any phone book.

"Burbank speaking," a quiet voice answered.

Burbank was the contact man in The Shadow's organization. His duty was to receive orders and transmit them to other secret agents of The Shadow.

The Shadow explained what he wanted done. He mentioned a name. The name was that of Clyde Burke, one of his agents.

CHAPTER III. DANGEROUS BLOND

THE office of David Chester was located on one of the upper floors of a big skyscraper in the midtown district.

Clyde Burke took a good look around as he stepped in from the corridor. He had a plausible excuse to enter. He was an ace reporter on the Daily Classic. He had come to interview Chester on the subject of the strange suicide of John Harmon.

That was what he told the pretty blond secretary who sat in the outer room. She was very friendly. In fact, she was so friendly that Clyde looked her over with quick interest.

Her hands were soft and white. Her complexion was flawlessly lovely. Clyde was no judge of the quality of women's clothing, but he guessed that the outfit this blonde was wearing had come straight from Paris. It emphasized her luscious figure. And she was well aware of it. She smiled boldly.

"Are all reporters as good-looking as you, Mr. Burke?" She pushed back from her desk to rise. "I'll tell Mr. Chester you'd like to see him."

She walked into the inner office. After a moment, she returned to her desk. Chester emerged from the

inner room. He didn't seem annoyed by Clyde's intrusion. He shook hands smilingly, as he said:

"A sad case, that of poor Harmon. I'm afraid there's nothing I can add to what I've already told the press. Harmon was obviously insane when he pulled the trigger that ended his life. However, I'll be glad to discuss the case with you, if you don't mind waiting. I have an appointment with a gentleman whom I expect at any moment."

Clyde said he'd be glad to wait. He was puzzled by this Chester. Under the man's smiling exterior was a hint of tension.

The corridor door behind them opened suddenly. A man's harsh voice said: "Hello, Mr. Chester. I didn't know you were busy. I'll come back later."

"No, no! Don't go, Charlie. Mr. Burke has agreed to wait until we're finished."

The man grunted. Chester introduced him hastily as Mr. Charles Horn.

Clyde didn't like Horn's looks. He was chewing gum vigorously. He had sharp black eyes in a pallid face. Everything about him looked thin: his lips, his high cheekbones, his sparse sandy hair. But the thing that Clyde noticed most was the pattern of the suit the man was wearing. Also his blue-and-white striped tie. The tie looked badly rumpled.

However, Clyde gave no indication of his own tension. But as he stared at the man, he was mentally placing on that sandy hair a black, tousled wig. He tried to think of Horn with a black mustache.

He was convinced he was facing the unknown thug who had thrown an innocent child under the wheels of a speeding truck!

The pattern of the man's suit tallied with the description Burke had received from The Shadow. The blue-and-white tie had been twisted out of shape when Cranston had clutched at the fake truant officer outside the apartment of Hubert Jackson.

As Clyde watched the two men disappear into Chester's office, the blond stenographer began to click busily at her machine, making a loud racket. Clyde wondered if she was doing this to drown out any echoes of conversation between Horn and Chester in the inner office.

Clyde left the chair to which Chester had waved him. He crossed over to another and picked up a newspaper that was lying there. The chair's back was directly against the inner partition. The newspaper made a good excuse for sitting there.

Clyde spread the paper wide and pretended to read. Behind the shield of the paper, he rested his ear against the partition. The click of the typewriter made hearing difficult, but he could pick out a few phrases in the snarling murmur of Charlie Horn:

"- working fast - trained nurse - not a chance that Mrs. Harmon -"

Suddenly, the noise of the typewriter ceased.

"Oh - darn!" the typist said.

Clyde lowered his paper. He was afraid to keep it raised, for fear of exciting the blonde's suspicion. She was staring directly at him, a sugary smile on her red lips.

"The ribbon on my machine has broken. Do you mind helping me fix it? I just hate to get my hands

soiled."

Regretfully, Clyde left his eavesdropping post. There was nothing else he could do. The blonde's smooth fingers were very warm on his. She sat on the corner of her desk, while Clyde took her chair to examine the machine.

The ribbon had not been broken. It had been cut. And the job had been done by the blonde! A paper knife was visible in the open end of the desk drawer she had not quite closed. The edge of the knife was smeared with carbon.

THE girl pushed the drawer shut with a quick pressure of her knee, and tried to divert Clyde by patting his hand. Her game was obvious. She was trying to take his attention from what was going on in the inner office.

Clyde decided to play the blonde's own game. By the time he had the ribbon removed and a new one in place, he had all the appearance of a man who was thoroughly smitten. He asked the blonde what her name was, and she giggled and told him. Dorothy Bruner.

"Why do you want to know my name?" she asked archly.

"Because I always like to know the name of the girl I take out to dinner. How about it? Tomorrow night?"

She hesitated. But Clyde knew that was a bluff. Finally, she nodded.

"It's a date."

Clyde's hands were smeared with carbon, and Dorothy Bruner showed him where the washbasin was. The moment he had finished, he made test No. 2. He grinned and took Dorothy in his arms.

She didn't resist his embrace. The pressure of her lips and the warmth of her body made Clyde dizzy. But he was grimly cold inside. This blonde might be the means of finding out plenty later on, concerning the suave David Chester and the ugly Charlie Horn.

Clyde was worried by the fragment of talk he had overheard. It was something about a trained nurse and Mrs. Harmon. Was more evil brewing for that ill-fated family? Clyde would have been even more worried, had he overheard the full import of the conversation which Dorothy Bruner had so cleverly interrupted.

"I'm working fast," Charlie Horn had told Chester, with a twisted grin. "I've got the trained nurse. There's not a chance that Mrs. Harmon or the doctor will suspect a thing."

"What about the regular nurse?"

"I sidetracked her. This other nurse has been in trouble before. Her name is Peggy Dooley. It's the first job she'd had since the hospital fired her. She'll make an ideal sucker."

"Swell!" Chester muttered. "Where is she now?"

"Downstairs in a cab. I've coached her what she's to tell the doctor. She's supposed to be a girl friend of the real nurse."

"Be careful to cover your own tracks," Chester warned.

"I won't have to," Horn chuckled, "if the thing works out the way you predicted."

"I'll bet a thousand to one it will," Chester said. There was cruel anticipation in his narrowed eyes. "O.K. You beat it. Let me take care of that dumb reporter outside."

The two men walked into the outer office. Clyde was still sitting near the stenographer's desk, talking to her. He would have liked to have followed the departing Horn, but Chester gave him no opportunity.

Chester, inviting him into his private office, began a long-winded discussion of the Harmon case. He said nothing that Clyde didn't already know. Clyde guessed that the only purpose of the talk was to keep him from following Horn.

There was an ash tray on Chester's desk, but the man kept rising nervously and leaning out the window to dispose of his ash. It made Clyde instantly suspicious.

He picked up a cigarette from a desk box and lit it. When he blew out the match, he leaned toward the window. His gaze dropped in the same direction that Chester's glance had taken.

He was just in time to see a dirty figure emerge from the lobby of the building. The man stared up as he hurried across the sidewalk to the curb. It was Charlie Horn.

A taxicab was parked there. A woman was waiting for Horn in the rear seat. Clyde could see her clearly because the cab was an open-air type. Its roof panel had been tilted back. He caught a glimpse of a bluish-gray jacket and skirt. There was a small leather bag in the woman's hand.

She was a trained nurse.

Clyde's heart skipped a beat. He turned slowly from the window, and through his brain darted the fragment of talk he had overheard through the office partition:

"- working fast - trained nurse - not a chance that Mrs. Harmon -"

He glanced at his watch, uttered a faint exclamation.

"I didn't know it was so late! I'll have to rush back to the office, if I'm going to catch the presses for the next edition. Thank you for your interview, Mr. Chester. You've been very helpful."

CLYDE delayed in the outer office a minute or two, to smile at Dorothy Bruner. He still intended to date her for the following evening. He had hopes of using her to get a line on Chester.

Dorothy's eyes were bright and flirtatious. She pinched his palm playfully under cover of the handshake. Clyde congratulated himself inwardly that he had made quite an impression on her.

He'd have been less satisfied, could he have seen the expression on Chester's face. Chester stood behind the reporter, staring fixedly at the blond. The moment he caught her eye, his fingers touched his lips. He made a quick pantomime of chewing.

Dorothy saw the signal.

"Have a stick of chewing gum?" she asked Clyde.

He took it, rather than argue. He was in a hurry to follow Charlie Horn to the Harmon house. He didn't notice that the stenographer took the stick of gum from its wrapper before she handed it to him. She crumpled the wrapper in her palm. It was plain paper, without any brand name on it.

Again, Chester gave the blonde a sharp look. This time, Clyde caught the wordless exchange. He said nothing, but it put him on his guard.

Chewing on his borrowed gum, he walked down the corridor toward the elevators. His heels made a clicking sound on the tiled floor. But Clyde was using that noisy departure as camouflage. The moment he reached the elevator shaft, he turned and tiptoed back toward Chester's office.

Crouching outside the closed door, he placed his eye at the keyhole. He was just in time to witness a scene of grim activity.

"Quick!" Chester whispered to Dorothy. "Get the starter in the lobby!"

All the prettiness had vanished from Dorothy Bruner's rouged cheeks. She looked hard and vengeful. Her hand clawed at the telephone. She whispered an urgent message over the wire to the elevator starter in the building lobby downstairs.

"Hello - Pete? Emergency! We've got a sap up here on the eleventh floor we want taken care of in a hurry. Send up Car No. 3. Hold the other cars... Who's on No. 3... Smitty? That's fine!"

She hung up with a chuckle.

"That'll do it! Give your baby a kiss, David!"

Chester swept her into his arms. They clung to each other in a long, passionate embrace.

Clyde Burke didn't wait any longer outside the closed door. He darted noiselessly back to the elevator shaft. When the doors of Car No. 3 slid open, Clyde stepped innocently inside. His hand rested near a coat pocket where a small gun nestled. He wasn't taking any chances on Smitty.

Smitty ignored the button calls from lower floors. When Clyde mentioned it, he said curtly: "This is an express, buddy."

Clyde began to slide his gun toward the flap of his pocket. To his horror, he found he was unable to move it. His hand felt cold and paralyzed! There was a queer buzzing in his ears. He tried to cry out, but no sound came from his throat.

Too late, he remembered the chewing gum Dorothy had given him. He felt his knees buckle. He fell to the floor of the car.

Dimly, he was aware that the descending car had halted below the street level of the shaft. It stopped at the basement. The grinning Smitty picked up Clyde, carried him down a whitewashed corridor to what looked like an empty coal bin. He threw Clyde inside and locked the door.

That was all Clyde remembered for a while.

WHEN Clyde recovered his senses, he was on his feet with a broom tightly gripped in his hand. He felt a sense of wild, savage cruelty in his blood. He was pursuing a mouse around the coal bin, but there wasn't anything funny about it.

Clyde wanted to kill that mouse! He had blocked off the rodent's tiny escape hole in the wall. His fingers itched with the mad desire to smash that mouse with the broom!

It was only after he had killed it that Clyde recovered his sanity. Horror flooded him. His temples ached. There was a sickish taste in his mouth. He spat out the wad of gum he had been chewing. He realized vaguely what the gum had done to him.

It was a powerful drug! It had knocked him out at first because he wasn't used to it. But its later effect

was more hideous than an ordinary narcotic. It had turned him for a few unwitting moments into a savage killer.

Had the mouse in the coal bin been a man, Clyde realized, with a shudder, he would have killed him just as readily.

The shock sobered him. He still had a feeling of wild, unleashed strength, but he put the drug's effect to better use than it was intended. He found an iron bar and got to work on the lock of the door.

The padlock was a cheap one. Clyde levered until he had snapped off the heavy iron hasp. With the bar in his hand, he tiptoed toward the cellar exit.

He could hear the snoring of a man sleeping inside a cellar apartment. Clyde halted. His fingers tightened on his iron bar. He guessed that the man asleep inside was the building janitor. He fought against a hot impulse that flared anew in his blood.

He wanted to kill that janitor! He wanted to smash at him with the iron bar until the man was battered and dead!

Murder seemed so exciting. And so easy! Clyde could picture the terror of his victim as he struck at him. It would be sheer delight to maim the fool before he killed him.

The thing that saved Clyde was the thought of the chewing gum. He knew that the savage whisper that urged him on to murder was not his own brain talking, but the voice of a powerful drug.

Laying the bar on the concrete floor, he ran for the cellar exit. He didn't glance back. He was afraid that if he did, he'd be tempted to pick up the bar and commit a senseless and brutal crime.

A steep flight of stone steps brought him out into the open air of an alley in the rear of the office building. The cold bite of the breeze was like a draft of cooling water against his parched lips. He began to get a grip on himself. Once more he was Clyde Burke, a normal human being who would go out of his way to avoid hurting a fly.

But the memory of those dreadful minutes in the cellar made his face pale. He realized now how a man could do so horrible a thing as throw a boy under the wheels of a speeding truck. Or cut the throat of a pet dog. Drugs had done it!

Clyde raced to the sidewalk beyond the alley. He flagged a taxi and got in. Charlie Horn and a trained nurse had gone already to the home of John Harmon's invalid wife. Treachery was planned - and perhaps murder!

Clyde gave the driver Mrs. Harmon's address. A glance at his watch showed him that more than a half hour had elapsed since he had lost consciousness in the coal bin. Was it too late?

He leaned forward and shouted a harsh order; The taxicab's speed increased.

CHAPTER IV. THE SECOND BOTTLE

IT was dim and quiet in the sick-room of Martha Harmon. The shock of her husband's death had been a cruel blow to her. She lay with closed eyes in her bed, too tired to pay any attention to the whispering of a man and a woman who stood near her medicine table at the other side of the sick-room.

The man was Dr. Pemberton. He was tall, with iron-gray hair and gentle, competent hands. One of the best physicians in New York. Hubert Jackson, the lawyer and friend of John Harmon, had paid Dr.

Pemberton to take care of the dead man's ailing widow.

The woman was dressed in the starched white uniform of a trained nurse. Her name was Peggy Dooley. She was the nurse who Charlie Horn had planted in the sickroom under the orders of David Chester.

Dr. Pemberton had accepted her rehearsed story without suspicion. He accepted the fact that his regular nurse had been prevented from attending the case by circumstances beyond her control.

However, Dr. Pemberton had a queer sense of uneasiness. He thought that perhaps it came from the fact that his memory was bothering him. He was trying to remember where he had seen this Miss Dooley before. He asked her about it.

"You must be mistaken," she said quickly. "I've done most of my work outside of New York. You've probably confused me with some other nurse."

Pemberton's frown faded. But he didn't smile. He turned toward the medicine table that stood along-side the wall near a curtained window.

"I think that Mrs. Harmon is resting easily. But the effects of the sedative I've given her will wear off soon. When she awakes, give her a hot compress with one of the tablets in this bottle. Just dissolve one of the tablets in boiling water to make the solution."

"I understand," Miss Dooley said.

Dr. Pemberton hesitated. He still had that peculiar feeling of uneasiness. He pointed to two bottles that stood side by side on the table. They were the same size, exactly alike, except that the bottle with the white tablets for the compress treatment had a warning red label on it, with a skull and crossbones. The sedative tablets in the other bottle had a plain white label.

"Be careful you don't confuse them," Pemberton whispered. "The sedatives are harmless. The others are a deadly poison, if taken internally. You understand?"

"Of course," Miss Dooley said.

She said it quietly. But there was a cloudy look in her eyes. It was as if she remembered something horrible.

Dr. Pemberton realized that this nurse must have once been a very pretty girl. She was pretty no longer. Something had happened to dull her eyes, and put a streak of premature gray in the hair that showed at the edge of her starched cap.

Pemberton wasn't particularly interested. Miss Dooley's personal affairs didn't worry him. Having given his orders and written out a prescription, Dr. Pemberton took his leave.

The nurse busied herself with the patient. She was deft and gentle. Her hand on the forehead of the sleeping woman was like a cool caress. The tight look gradually left Peggy Dooley's mouth. It was good to be on a case again! This was the first assignment she had had in over three years.

The thought made her eyes blur with tears. She was doing the thing she loved, caring for the sick and the helpless. She blessed the good luck that had put her in touch with Charlie Horn. She didn't mind fooling Dr. Pemberton. Her conscience was clear. She was an efficient nurse - no matter what anyone said to the contrary!

Presently, Mrs. Harmon stirred. The nurse bent over her.

"How do you feel?"

"Better," Mrs. Harmon said feebly.

"That's because of the sedative Dr. Pemberton gave you."

Mrs. Harmon shook her head, said, "You're entirely too modest. It's you I have to thank. That massage you gave me relaxed every muscle in my body. Could you give me another?"

"Of course!"

MISS DOOLEY sat beside the bed. Her deft fingers went to work with gentle persistence at the base of Mrs. Harmon's neck and along the bony ridges of her spine.

"It feels so good," the widow murmured. "Do you think my son and daughter will arrive soon?"

"There was a telegram from them earlier today. Their train should reach New York in an hour."

"I can hardly wait. They're such good children. I want Bob to take the cash in the bank and continue his education. Jane, too."

"You mustn't excite yourself."

"Will you send Bob and Jane in the moment they arrive?"

"I surely will. Now forget about it. It's almost time for your medicine."

The old woman leaned over and patted the nurse's hand.

"You're very sweet to take such care of me. I... I've had so much trouble and grief that I... I -"

"Trouble is something that comes to all of us," the nurse said.

There was something in the way she said it that made Mrs. Harmon's head turn. She saw that there were tears in Miss Dooley's eyes.

"My dear! You're crying! What's wrong?"

"Nothing."

"Tell me about it."

"It doesn't matter."

"But it does!" She took the nurse's hand in a feeble grip. She was getting excited again and Miss Dooley didn't want to upset her. She sat down and they talked in low toned murmurs.

The older woman's gentle persistence broke the nurse's resolve not to discuss a secret she had locked in her heart for three tragic years. She found herself talking without shame or restraint.

"Miss Dooley isn't my real name," she confessed, with a pale face. "I'm a fraud! My license as a nurse was taken from me. I have no right to practice."

"You did something wrong?"

"They thought so at the hospital. A fatal error was made in the treatment of a patient. He was given the

wrong hypodermic injection. He died as a result of it. It ended my career."

"But you didn't really make that error, did you, my dear?" Mrs. Harmon said in her frail, gentle voice.

The nurse stared at her.

"What makes you say that? How did you know?"

"I know that I trust you. I've lived long enough to know good from bad. You're too good a nurse to have made a mistake like that. You sacrificed yourself for someone else. Whom were you protecting?"

Peggy Dooley wept. The old woman patted her hand.

"You'll feel better if you confide in me."

"It's been hell for three long years. I won't tell you the name of the actual culprit. He was a young doctor. I was in love with him. He begged me to cover his guilt - and there was no other way except to take the blame myself. After I was discharged from the hospital I went to see him. He had promised to marry me. Instead, he offered me money!"

There was a sob in the nurse's voice.

"He begged me not to expose him. How could I? Rotten as he was, I still loved him. I left New York and tried to make a living any way I could. I washed dishes and scrubbed floors. Half the time, I nearly starved."

Her voice was barely audible.

"Then I came back to New York. Nursing is the only profession I know. I wanted to help people who were sick. I stole credentials and forged them with the name of Peggy Dooley. I registered at a small nursing agency. No one recognized me. Yesterday, a man came looking for a nurse."

She stared wildly at Mrs. Harmon.

"How can you ever trust me again?"

"I wouldn't have any other nurse but you. Perhaps it's because I, too, have suffered. I know what suffering means."

Peggy Dooley leaned impulsively forward and kissed her.

Neither of them were aware of a motion across the dimly lighted room.

A gloved hand slid quietly across the sill of the opened window. The curtain helped to hide its stealthy progress. It reached the small medicine table on which stood the two bottles left by Dr. Pemberton. The hand picked up the harmless sedative tablets. Then the other bottle.

Behind the folds of the window curtain a hellish thing took place. The white sedative pills were dumped into a murderous palm. The poison tablets intended for use with a hot compress were transferred to the bottle with the plain label!

In a moment the double transfer was accomplished. The bottle with the skull and crossbones now contained harmless medicine. The poison was in the bottle with the plain label.

The hands vanished.

AFTER a long time, Peggy Dooley stirred gently from the feeble hold of Mrs. Harmon. She glanced at her watch.

"Time for your medicine. I'm afraid I've excited you with my silly troubles."

"I'm more excited about the arrival of my son and daughter. Surely, they should be here?"

"I'll tell you, the moment they arrive," the nurse promised.

She picked up the bottle with the plain label from the medicine table. She carefully made sure it was the right bottle, then took out one of the tablets. She brought it in a glass of water to Mrs. Harmon.

"Drink it, please."

"It smells funny."

"It's perfectly safe."

The glass tilted. Mrs. Harmon opened her mouth - then suddenly she pushed the glass from her lips. The bell at the front door had begun to ring.

"It's Bob!" Mrs. Harmon cried excitedly. "Jane and Bob! Let them in quickly!"

Her hand shook so that some of the liquid in the glass spilled. The nurse set the drink down on a bureau, started to answer the bell.

Then she stopped. She was watching the patient's face. There was an alarming red flush on Mrs. Harmon's cheeks. Her body was twitching. Peggy Dooley came back and picked up the glass.

Her motive was honest. She knew that unless a sedative were administered at once, her patient might go into a nervous convulsion. Without realizing the terrible thing she was doing, she held the glass of poison to Mrs. Harmon's pale lips.

Mrs. Harmon drained it.

The nurse hurried downstairs. She smiled at the thought of how good the arrival of the son and daughter would be for her patient.

But she had a shock when she opened the door. It wasn't Bob and Jane. A young man with a pale face was staring at her. He shoved the nurse aside and forced his way in. He slammed the door behind him.

The man was Clyde Burke.

"Where's Mrs. Harmon, I've got to see her, at once!"

"You can't. She needs absolute quiet."

Something in the sound of the nurse's voice made Clyde stare at her more sharply. He had been trying to identify her face. Where had he seen it? And that voice! So low and sweet. He had heard it somewhere before, somewhere where a sweet voice had seemed curiously out of place.

His jaw tightened. He remembered now. The thought sent horror through him.

Three years ago. She had been younger then, prettier. She had stood in terror on the brightly lighted stage of the police line-up at headquarters. She stood accused of manslaughter because of the death of a

hospital patient.

"You're Claire Weston! You're the nurse who was discharged from Mercy Hospital!"

She tried to deny it, but her lips failed to frame an audible word. Clyde seized her by the arm.

"What are you doing here? What are you up to?"

She gasped from the pain of his clutching fingers. But another cry cut through her faint exclamation. It was shrill and agonized. It came from the bedroom at the top of the staircase.

Clyde sprang up the stairs. Behind him raced the terrified feet of the nurse. She knew that something terribly wrong had happened in the sickroom.

Before either of them could reach the bedroom, a quick transformation took place at the medicine table near the open window. The gloved hands that had willed death for Mrs. Harmon were busy again. This time, they were reversing the deed they had accomplished earlier.

The poison tablets went back into their proper bottle. The harmless sedative pills were replaced in the bottle with the plain label. A swift twist removed the cork from the poison bottle.

The loose cork was left lying on the table, as if the poison bottle had just been opened by the nurse.

A MOMENT later, Clyde Burke was in the room. He bent over the bed. One glance showed him that Mrs. Harmon was dead. Her face was horribly contorted.

Clyde sniffed at her lips. There was a faint odor, which he recognized. It was the odor of a corrosive poison!

He sprang toward the medicine table and looked at the two bottles there. He saw that one had its cork removed. A glance at its warning label and he swung accusingly toward the nurse. She, too, was staring at the label with the skull and crossbones, at its cork lying on the table.

"You gave her the wrong medicine!" Clyde cried.

"I didn't! I swear I didn't!"

She read Clyde's eyes, knew what he was thinking. She had done the same thing once before in a hospital. She had done it again.

"No, no!" she moaned. "You've got to believe me!"

Clyde didn't reply. With a set face, he walked across the room, picked up the telephone.

"Police headquarters," he said.

Peggy Dooley watched him with stark, tragic eyes. There was doom in his voice as he reported Mrs. Harmon's death. There'd be doom in the voices of the police who would arrive presently. How could she explain to them what she couldn't understand herself? Who would believe her?

Peggy Dooley made a sudden rush for the medicine table. Before Clyde could drop the telephone to intercept her, she had seized the poison bottle.

She thrust a tablet in her mouth, crunched it, swallowed it.

Clyde was unable to stop her. He heard a choking cry at his ear.

"Before God... I... am innocent!"

It was the last word Peggy Dooley uttered. Her body writhed suddenly in Clyde's arms. The undiluted tablet worked fast. She slipped from Clyde's arms and lay in a lifeless huddle on the floor.

Again, evil had struck at the Harmon family. A supercriminal with a passion for cruelty and horror had successfully murdered John Harmon's widow. This time, he had ruthlessly sacrificed the life of an innocent nurse to hide a planned crime.

He had fooled Clyde Burke. Could he fool The Shadow?

The Shadow was facing the supreme test of his career!

CHAPTER V. DOUBLE DECEPTION

THE SHADOW was in his sanctum. It was a place of utter darkness. The roar of the city's traffic in the streets was hushed here. No clock ticked. Darkness and silence.

Suddenly, the stillness was broken by a whisper of sibilant laughter. There was no mirth in that laugh. It was a challenge to organized evil. The cold, measured laughter of The Shadow!

A blue light came on. Its glow revealed the polished surface of a desk. It reflected the vague glimmer of a face. Piercing eyes stared at the desk with calm assurance. A powerful, hawk-like nose was visible.

The rest of The Shadow was invisible. His arms, his clothing, the chair on which he sat, were part of the darkness.

A hand appeared on the surface of the desk. One of the fingers seemed to glow like flame. A gem of unusual size and beauty was set in a ring on the third finger of The Shadow's left hand.

The precious stone in that ring was a girasol - a fire opal that was unique in the world for size and beauty. It was the hallmark of The Shadow's power. Whenever it was seen by an agent of his, it commanded instant and loyal obedience.

The hand of The Shadow moved. A pile of newspaper clippings came under the glow of the desk light.

These clippings contained accounts of the death of Mrs. John Harmon and the suicide of the nurse named Peggy Dooley. They were all alike. They attributed Mrs. Harmon's death to a tragic blunder. The suicide of the nurse proved it. Her fingerprints showed that once before she had made the same fatal error in a New York hospital.

The Shadow disagreed with this theory. He suspected murder. He was content for the police and the newspapers to drop the case. He had instructed Clyde Burke to make no mention of certain facts.

The names of David Chester and Dorothy Bruner appeared in none of these newspaper clippings. Nor did that of Charlie Horn. The Shadow preferred to shield them from premature arrest until he was ready to move against them himself.

He knew that the poison tablets had been switched in that tragic bedroom of Mrs. Harmon. Clyde had given him a complete description of the room. He could visualize the location of the bed, the medicine table, and the window.

He had discovered that a narrow ledge ran along the rear face of the building. A sly hand at the window could easily have murdered Mrs. Harmon and planted the blame on an unfortunate nurse.

Mrs. Harmon's death was linked to the suicide of her husband. The technique was the same. A switch in medicine tablets - a switch in the figures on a check and on a bill of sale!

Someone who took a fiendish delight in pain and agony was behind this growing tragedy. Even outsiders who tried to help the Harmon family were included in the attack!

The killing of Hubert Jackson's dog proved that. So did the wanton slashing of his valuable paintings. And the moment that Lamont Cranston had assumed charge of the charity drive to help the Harmon family, the attack had turned toward him! The ruthless attempt to maim and kill a street boy in whom Cranston had shown friendly interest was another proof of the delight in evil of an unknown criminal.

Victims were attacked not directly, but through the things they most loved.

Was David Chester the real genius of crime behind all this planned horror? The Shadow's answer was no.

Remembering the testimony of Clyde Burke concerning the passionate embrace he had witnessed through the keyhole of the door of Chester's office, The Shadow sought further for the real enemy. This enemy was a man of cold and twisted intelligence. He would never give way to the charms of a blonde like Dorothy Bruner.

Charlie Horn was probably a go-between.

The situation could be demonstrated mathematically. The Shadow drew a sheet of blank paper under the gleam of the desk light. With an antique quill-topped pen, he wrote a mathematical formula:

$$(\text{Chester} + \text{Dorothy}) + \text{Horn} = X$$

There was one other factor in the mystery that The Shadow had not forgotten. Under the equation he had set down, he wrote two additional words:

Chewing Gum

The gum, of course, was a drug. A peculiar drug, which apparently had the power to whip those who used it to a pitch of brutal sadism.

It seemed queer that Dorothy Bruner should risk giving Clyde the stick of gum. But The Shadow knew the real answer. Clyde's collapse in the elevator was the clue. Unused to the powerful drug, he had fainted and become an easy prisoner.

Dorothy Bruner had counted on that. She and Charlie Horn were veteran addicts by now. They were better able to control themselves after chewing the gum. They would do cruel, vicious things, but they would retain the ability to reason clearly.

Charlie Horn, for example, had been able to escape with extraordinary skill after his attempt to kill the street boy.

It was Horn who seemed to The Shadow to hold the key to the mystery of X.

THE SHADOW decided to pick up Horn's trail by seeking a link between him and the blond stenographer. Dorothy Bruner's apartment address was already known to The Shadow.

His hand moved suddenly. The light over the polished surface of the desk vanished; darkness flooded the sanctum. There was no indication that The Shadow had risen from his desk.

And yet The Shadow had moved. He was already gone.

Lamont Cranston appeared presently on the street. No one paid any attention to his trim, well-dressed figure. The hour was late. Workers had already taken subways and elevated trains to their homes.

Lamont Cranston turned west through one of the narrow canyons. He had parked his car under the shadow of the Ninth Avenue elevated. His reason for this precaution was simple. He was eternally on the alert.

If Lamont Cranston's automobile was recognized by criminal eyes, The Shadow preferred the recognition to come in a neighborhood that was not too close to the building in which was hidden the sanctum of The Shadow.

Turning the corner where his car was parked, Cranston saw no one in sight. Dark warehouses loomed like enormous packing boxes on either side of the avenue. The structure of the elevated cast a deep gloom on the pavement. A few empty trucks waited here and there for morning loading.

Cranston's movements were unobserved.

Such was his first thought. A moment later, he stiffened with the grim knowledge that he was being watched.

A man was standing in the gloom of a locked doorway. It was the doorway of the warehouse that faced the curb where Cranston's car was parked.

The man had every indication of a half-drunken loiterer. His clothes were trampish. He leaned heavily against the door casing, as if in an alcoholic stupor. But his eyes were clear and alert. They were vicious eyes. The mark of the criminal was stamped unmistakably on that lean, pallid face.

Cranston's hand dropped swiftly to his pocket. He turned and advanced with a quick stride toward the warehouse door.

But quick as he was, the thug in the dark entry was quicker. He whirled without a sound and clutched at the door handle. It opened and closed with a bang. As it closed, a bolt shot home, putting an effective barrier between Cranston and the thug.

It was a queer situation. Why had the thug fled so swiftly? He had made no attack on Lamont Cranston. He hadn't even drawn a gun. The Shadow felt a quick surge of suspicion. This meeting and flight must have been deliberately prearranged.

Cranston reached the doorway only a few seconds after the thug had beat his successful retreat. There was a dim overhead light burning in the ceiling of the ground door of the warehouse.

A glass panel in the doorway revealed the flitting figure of the fugitive inside. He had crossed the floor at a swift pace. He was already disappearing through a door over which a red exit lamp burned.

The Shadow realized that the thug had entered a staircase. But had he gone up or down? And why had the whole strange incident happened at all?

Cautiously, Cranston started to retreat toward his parked car. He could see nothing wrong with it. It was exactly the way he had left it. He knew that no one had forced an entry in the car or had moved it,

because there were certain precautions he always took. Any tampering with the car would have been instantly noticeable to him from a dozen feet away.

The sudden tinkling of a bell diverted him from his path toward the car. The bell sound came from behind him. Whirling, he recognized its source. It came from beneath the sidewalk.

It was a bell that rang to warn pedestrians that the warehouse's outdoor freight lift was rising to the sidewalk. These outdoor elevators were a common thing in the district. They were used mostly for the removal of ashes and garbage to the street.

A city ordinance required the bell to sound every time the elevator rose, in order to avoid injury to pedestrians who might be standing on the flat metal panels that formed its sidewalk covering.

The panels were already pushing upward. The platform below them was rising.

Cranston guessed that the thug he had chased had gone directly to the cellar. He was now returning for some unknown method of attack.

Shielded by the tilted panels in the sidewalk, Cranston leaned over the exposed pit, gun in hand. He received an instant shock of surprise. The elevator platform was empty!

At the same instant, the rapid thud of feet behind Cranston warned him of danger from the rear. Before he could whirl, hands circled his throat with terrific pressure. His twisting face caught a glimpse of his attacker. Then he was forced to fight for his life. But he knew now who his assailant was.

Charlie Horn!

HORN seemed possessed of superhuman strength. The gun was twisted from Cranston's grasp and fell clattering to the empty platform of the rising elevator. With a heave and a grunt, Horn kicked Cranston's legs from under him, forced his victim into a sitting position at the edge of the sidewalk pit.

He held him there with a grip of steel. Cranston was unable to move. The elevator ascended slowly, like an instrument of doom.

Cranston knew, too late, the fate that was in store for him. His dangling legs hung over the edge of the pit. The rising elevator would crush them to bloody fragments of splintered bone. He would not be killed, but he would be horribly crippled for the rest of his life!

The thought of his peril galvanized him into action. Already, he could feel the rising platform of the elevator pressing inexorably against his dangling feet. With a desperate surge of strength, he bent forward. Unable to break Horn's strangling hold, he threw himself deliberately into the shaft.

Charlie Horn fell with him. Maddened by drugs, he was unwilling to relinquish his grip. Their bodies turned over as they fell. Horn struck the platform of the rising elevator with a horrible impact. Cranston landed on top. Cushioned by Horn's body, he retained his senses. But Horn was out cold.

The Shadow grabbed his gun. As he did so he saw a blur of movement in the street doorway of the warehouse. The thug who had started the elevator machinery in the basement had returned the same way he had vanished. He fired at Cranston as the elevator reached the sidewalk level. The slug creased The Shadow's thigh.

Cranston gave the thug no time for a second shot. His own gun spat flame. The man in the doorway clutched at his stomach. He pitched forward on his face and lay very still.

Cranston raced to the curb, to his car. He made no effort to carry the unconscious Charlie Horn with him. Before he kidnapped him for questioning, there were certain necessary things to accomplish inside The Shadow's car.

Unlocking the door, Cranston busied himself in the back of the car. He worked fast, knowing that the snarl of gunfire had awakened thunderous echoes in the deserted street. Police would arrive soon. Cranston had no desire to be detained for questioning or to allow Charlie Horn to be taken by police.

Opening a secret recess under the rear seat, Cranston removed the black cloak and slouch hat of The Shadow. He also took from a small drawer a tiny glass capsule filled with a colorless liquid. The walls of that capsule were frail. Cranston pocketed it very carefully.

With a rolled blanket under a heavy lap robe, he faked the presence of a man on the rear floor. He planted his gun at the edge of the bundle, as if a man hidden under the lap robe were pointing the weapon at the front seat. Over the gun barrel, Cranston fixed the slouch hat of The Shadow.

It was done almost in an instant. To a casual eye, the bundle on the floor suggested that The Shadow was hidden as a grim stowaway in Cranston's car.

Cranston raced to the front seat and started the engine. Then he did a peculiar thing. He uttered the word: "No!" in a voice utterly unlike his own. The sound seemed to come from the edge of the lap robe in the rear.

Satisfied with his ventriloquism, he darted across the sidewalk and picked up the senseless body of Charlie Horn. He was just in time. As he retreated with his burden to the car, a cop pounded into view around the corner.

Before the cop could see anything clearly, Cranston drove him to cover in a cellar opening with a hail of bullets. He fired over the cop's head. It gave him a few seconds' respite.

By the time the cop peered cautiously from concealment, Cranston had Charlie Horn propped in the front seat of the car. Cranston's foot kicked the gas pedal. The car darted away.

It vanished through the night at terrific speed.

TWENTY minutes later, in a totally different neighborhood, Charlie Horn recovered consciousness in the front seat. The car was parked. Horn was still dazed, but not too dazed to recognize the aristocratic face of Lamont Cranston beside him.

Cranston questioned him sternly. But Horn's lips closed stubbornly. He refused to talk.

"All right," Cranston said calmly, a gun pointed steadily at the crook. "If you won't talk, we'll try the police. I'm going to hand you over to the police for attempted murder!"

"No!"

The sound came from the rear seat. Cranston turned with a simulated cry of amazement. So did Charlie Horn. He saw a menacing gun barrel and a black slouch hat at the edge of the bulky lap robe on the floor. His fuddled mind worked exactly the way Cranston hoped it would. "The Shadow!" he gasped.

"Drop your gun, Mr. Cranston!" a metallic voice from the rear ordered. "I'm taking Horn myself! I have methods to make this rat talk - and I don't want police interference!"

Cranston obeyed the voice he himself was creating. He dropped his gun over the back of the seat in

apparent panic. He also dropped the fragile glass capsule which was concealed in his left hand. It smashed soundlessly on the floor.

No liquid spurted from it. The liquid was converted to gas the moment it was exposed to the air. The gas swirled upward in invisible fog, directly into the panting mouth and nostrils of Charlie Horn.

Half dazed, he was an easy victim. He had time only for a single choked cry. Then his head sagged. He collapsed against the tense figure of Cranston.

The Shadow's lips were tightly shut. He had held his breath from the moment he had broken that glass capsule. A quick thrust opened the car door. The invisible vapor was dissipated by the cold breeze from outside. The gas was highly volatile. In a few more seconds it was possible to breathe without danger.

Cranston closed the door. He was parked in a deserted spot. No one had witnessed his strange deception. His flight from the cop had been successful. The cop had failed to note his license number. Charlie Horn was again unconscious.

But with an important difference. Horn had been completely deceived. He thought that he had been captured from Lamont Cranston by The Shadow. When he awoke later in the place where Cranston intended to take him for questioning, no power on earth would make Horn believe that Cranston and The Shadow were the same person.

That was exactly what Cranston wanted. His laughter made a sibilant sound of triumph. It was the grim mirth of The Shadow.

CHAPTER VI. GREETINGS FROM HELL

CHARLIE HORN emerged dazedly from unconsciousness. He was lying flat on his back on a padded floor. To his groping hands, the floor covering felt like the padding used on the inside of moving vans to protect furniture from damage.

Horn's face was soaking wet. He could smell a pungent odor in his nostrils. A quick sniff and he identified it. Ammonia.

The reek of the liquid cleared his brain. He remembered now what had happened - or thought he did. He had tried to kill Lamont Cranston. The Shadow had captured him from Cranston!

The memory brought Charlie Horn staggering to his feet. He clawed for his gun, half expecting it to be missing. It wasn't. A quick inspection showed him that it was fully loaded.

He eyed the chamber in which he had recovered his senses. It was swathed entirely in black. The padded floor covering was inky. So were the hangings that draped the four walls and the ceiling. A dim light glowed in the ceiling. The glass that protected the bulb was stained black. The illumination that streamed downward held a dark-grayish hue.

There was no sign of any doors or windows.

Instinctively, Horn groped in his vest pocket. The gesture was a matter of habit. In that pocket he always kept a supply of chewing gum - gum that could not be purchased at any candy store. It was wrapped in a plain covering.

When he chewed it, Horn always felt an excess of brutal strength. It sharpened his mind and made it cruel and cunning.

His hand emerged empty from his pocket. The drugged gum had been taken from him. His loss made him grit his teeth with anger.

The cry he uttered brought an instant echo. The sound of soft laughter mocked him. It came from a spot across the shrouded room, almost directly in front of him.

Horn could have sworn he saw a section of the velvet black drapes that lined the wall twitch a little, as if a hand behind it had brushed at the fabric.

He fired instantly. He saw a hole leap through the velvet. Then the roar of his shot died into silence.

Charlie Horn sprang forward and tore the drape away. There was no human being, behind it. All that was visible was a steel wall. The slug that Horn had fired through the black curtain had flattened itself against the wall. It lay in a warm, shapeless chunk on the floor.

Horn began to whimper. His terror returned. He was not used to fighting against a foe who had the ability to vanish into thin air. He searched every inch of the wall and could find no trace of an opening. No door. No window.

The other three sides of the room were the same. Flat steel, shrouded by black drapes that hung from the ceiling to the padded floor.

A shriek of rage came from Horn. He was beginning to miss the acrid taste of the chewing gum that made him cruel and strong.

The Shadow knew this. He intended to break Horn's will and force him to confess certain facts. The theft of the drugged gum was his first bit of scientific torture. There would be more torture if Horn continued obstinate.

Suddenly, the black-tinted light in the ceiling went out. The room became pitch-dark. In the blackness, faint whispering sounds became audible. The words could not be understood. They seemed to come from spots all over the room.

Horn heard a whisper behind the curtain at which he had fired. It was answered from a point opposite. The room seemed filled with unseen figures jeering at the captured crook.

A whisper sounded behind Horn's shuddering back.

He whirled. His fingers closed on empty space. Wildly, he fired his gun. It roared three times. He knew he had hit nothing. But at the crash of his gun, the horrible whispering ceased. Horn thought his torture had ended.

Then light came again to the room.

It was clear and white, the whitest light Horn had ever seen before in his life. It came from what looked like a crystal ball. The ball was about six inches in circumference. It hung from the black ceiling on what looked like a sliver chain.

There was a face visible in the depths of that translucent ball. The face of The Shadow! A calm, quiet voice spoke!

"Who ordered you to kill Lamont Cranston? Confess!"

Horn clamped his lips.

"Was it David Chester?"

Horn was silent. The gun in his hand began to lift slyly toward the crystal ball that hung high above his head, with the face of The Shadow within its silvery depths.

Suddenly, Horn's lifting hand froze. The crystal became suddenly empty. The face of The Shadow was gone!

But only for an instant. In its place appeared a black-gloved hand. The hand was held palm uppermost. On that black palm, lying there like a tempting mirage to the tortured man below, was a stick of chewing gum sealed in a plain wrapper.

With a spasm of rage, Charlie Horn emptied his gun into the heart of that glowing sphere above his head.

Bullets ripped through the ball. The sphere swayed on its silver chain. But no holes appeared in its lustrous surface. It was like a strange sort of gelatin. It took the impact of the bullets, allowed them to whiz through and clang against the steel ceiling.

But the sphere itself showed no hurt. Nor was the gloved hand in the depths of the globe harmed. It faded gradually from sight and was replaced by the calm features of The Shadow.

"Confess!"

CHARLIE HORN was disarmed now. He had fired every bullet in his gun. But he had no intention of talking.

The Shadow realized it. Sitting quietly in a spot outside those four steel walls, with his image reflected in the crystal ball that hung on a liver chain from the ceiling, The Shadow divined the reason for Horn's stubborn behavior.

Horn was afraid to betray what he knew and incur the wrath of the unknown criminal leader he served.

The Shadow wasted no time. The light in the crystal ball began to get stronger and stronger. It was like the blinding stab of the sun. It flooded every nook and cranny of the chamber with an intolerable brilliance.

No matter where Horn crouched, he was unable to avoid it. Closing his eyes availed him nothing. Light beat in dizzy waves through his eyelids until he could feel it pricking at his brain like the stab of a sharp lance.

Then it stopped. Blinded, he waited. Nothing happened. Horn's sobs were the only sound in the black-draped chamber. Gradually, he found himself able to see. Then he heard a sound. It came from the crystal overhead.

It was a low, musical whistle. The sound of the whistle increased. It got shriller, louder. The volume of increasing sound put Charlie Horn's teeth on edge. He could feel his skull vibrate with that hellish clamor. And it kept steadily getting louder and still louder!

He jammed his fingers in his ears. Useless. The shrill screaming penetrated as if his ears were wide open. It was like the drill of a dentist, penetrating with agonizing force into the tissue of Horn's brain.

He flung himself flat to the floor. He rolled over and over, vainly trying to shut out the unbearable sound. He felt himself going mad.

His lips opened and he shouted. The sound from the crystal made his words inaudible. But The Shadow, watching his criminal captive from outside the chamber, sensed that Horn's will was broken.

The hellish sound of the shrill noise ceased as suddenly as the dazzling bright light had vanished. Charlie Horn's groaning voice became audible.

"For God's sake, stop! I'll... I'll talk!"

"Confess!" came the grim voice of The Shadow.

"What do you want to know?"

"The name of your employer."

"David Chester."

"How did he trick John Harmon and force him to commit suicide?"

"He used secret ink. Two kinds - white and black."

"Did Chester invent this ink?"

"No. I brought it to him from - someone else."

"Who?"

Charlie Horn's face became suddenly livid with terror. He could barely mouth the three words.

"I don't know."

The Shadow believed him. The quiet voice from the crystal asked another question.

"You act as a go-between from Chester to this criminal chief whose identity you don't know?"

"Yes."

"This unknown man gives you money and drugs and orders, which you transmit to David Chester at the latter's office?"

"Yes."

"But you've never seen his face?"

"No. It's pitch-dark at the meeting place where I get my orders."

"Where is this place?"

Charlie Horn hesitated. There was terror in his face at the thought of betraying a supercriminal. But his fear of The Shadow was even stronger.

He whispered a street and an address. It was on the upper West Side. The address was that of a Chinese restaurant. The restaurant occupied the second floor of a two-story brick building. It was in the restaurant that Charlie Horn made contact with Chester's invisible chief.

"How?" The Shadow barked.

"There are dining booths in the rear for special customers. He waits in the last one on the left. That is, I wait, and then he comes - I don't know how!"

"Is there a password necessary to get into this last booth on the left?"

"Yes. It changes every week."

"What's the word for this week?"

"Shanghai!" Horn gasped.

THE crystal went suddenly dark. A cool breeze seemed to blow softly on Horn's tortured face. With it came the scent of fresh grass and budding flowers. It was so lovely that Horn drew a deep breath. Another. He didn't realize that his senses were fading.

The soft padding of the floor muffled his collapse. There was not a single bruise on his body. The torture he had received from The Shadow had been scientific. A matter of nerves and senses. It had been bloodless and efficient.

A half hour later, the bound-and-gagged body of Charlie Horn lay on a cheap bed in a furnished room on the lower East Side. The Shadow, in the guise of a white-haired old man, had taken the crook there.

He explained in a piping voice to a frowzy landlady that the man with the over-bright eyes and the dragging feet was a nephew of his.

The landlady eyed The Shadow's money and asked no questions. It was that kind of place. Having locked the window and drawn the shade, The Shadow tied and gagged his victim. When he left the rooming house, the key to the locked room was in his pocket.

The old man shambled to a drugstore and entered a phone booth. He called police headquarters and asked for Inspector Joe Cardona.

When Joe answered the call, his jaw dropped. He was listening to the mysterious voice of The Shadow! The Shadow had an amazing message for Cardona. He informed him that he had located the killer who had tried to murder a street boy that Lamont Cranston had befriended. He told where the killer could be found.

"Wait!" Cardona cried. "I don't understand. I -"

He found himself talking to an empty wire. When a radio car drove with screaming siren to the drugstore from which the call had come, there was no sign of the white-haired old man.

He was on his way uptown in a fast car that was licensed in the name of Lamont Cranston.

The Shadow parked a half block away from the address that had been furnished him by Charlie Horn. Turning the corner, he saw a flashing electric sign that advertised a Chinese restaurant on the second floor of a two-story brick building.

Horn had told the truth.

The old man climbed a flight of worn stairs to the second floor. A Chinese waiter smiled at him and gestured toward a nearby table.

Shaking his head, the old man continued to the back of the restaurant. A partition separated the large room in front from a smaller area in the rear. Behind the partition a narrow aisle separated a double row

of closed dining booths.

The old man headed straight for the last booth on the left. Before he reached it he was stopped. A fat Chinese, who had hurried from behind the cashier's cage, was staring wickedly at the old man.

"Out of order," he said. "No can be used."

The old man's lips brushed the yellow ear.

"Shanghai," he whispered.

The result was magical. The fat Chinaman grinned suddenly. He waved away scowling waiters who had begun to crowd closer. With fawning ceremony, he conducted The Shadow to the last booth on the left. He unlocked the door with a flourish, closing it quickly as The Shadow stepped inside.

The key grated in the lock. The Shadow was a prisoner!

But he was not worried. He had expected that. If an unknown master of crime used this spot as a meeting place, he would hardly risk the danger of interruption during a conference.

At first, The Shadow could see nothing inside the booth. The bulb in the ceiling was either defective or disconnected. Then he turned on a small electric torch he had brought with him. It showed four bare walls, a table, two chairs.

The table filled the whole width of the booth. It was impossible to step around it. The outside chair, where The Shadow stood, was riveted to the floor. So was the table.

Suspicious, The Shadow leaned over the table and tried the inner chair. This one was not nailed down. He was able to tilt it from the floor. But the moment he had done so, he realized he had made a serious blunder. The legs of the chair which he had tilted were metal. There was a plate of metal in the floor on which they had rested.

Instantly, The Shadow guessed the significance of what he had done. Those metal chair legs and the plate underneath were grim proof to him that an electrical connection existed between floor and chair. By moving the chair, he had broken the connection.

It stood to reason that Charlie Horn would never tamper with the furniture. He knew what to expect. The Shadow didn't. By his action, he had warned a supercriminal that a stranger was in the dining booth.

There was no chance to retreat. Nor would The Shadow have done so, even if the booth door behind him was unlocked. He was determined to identify the face of his unknown foe.

THE SHADOW didn't sit in the chair that was nailed to the floor. He suspected there was purpose in that peculiar immovability.

When he snapped off his torch, he noticed that behind the chair in the darkness, at a point almost in line with where a man's head would be, was a strange blur of paint on the inside of the booth door.

The blur seemed to glow faintly, as if a small amount of phosphorus had been mixed with the paint.

In pitch-darkness, The Shadow crawled under the table. He waited, every sense alert.

Minutes passed. Not a sound came to his listening ears. And then, suddenly, without any physical evidence to support his belief, The Shadow had a strong certainty that someone was now inside the booth with him!

He listened for the slight sound of a man's controlled breathing, but could hear nothing. He could feel the hair bristle on the back of his scalp. He held his own breath, to keep from betraying his position under the table.

Suddenly, there was a rasping snarl in the darkness:

"Greetings to The Shadow - from hell!"

CHAPTER VII. UNDERGROUND CHALLENGE

THE snarl of that hoarse voice was drowned out by another sound.

A faint hiss, like a spurt of escaping steam, became audible. Or perhaps it was the fizz of charged water. The Shadow, crouched unseen beneath the table, couldn't be sure.

The two images he thought of were the first that came to his tense mind. The soft purring of steam - the faint hiss that a bottle of club soda makes when the cap is suddenly removed.

The Shadow suspected the nature of the attack.

He uttered a choked cry of agony. But the cry didn't come from beneath the table where he was crouching. He threw his voice as accurately as he had when he had been in his automobile with the captured Charlie Horn. His cry echoed from the immovable chair where he was supposed to be sitting.

Silence followed. The Shadow listened. He had no wish to engage in battle in this unfavorable spot with an unseen adversary. The odds were too strongly against him. Outside the tiny dining booth were scores of Chinese waiters. Everyone of them was adept in the use of jujitsu and the knife. A direct attack now could have only one outcome - the death of The Shadow.

Besides, he had a more intelligent plan in mind.

It was obvious that the killer had some secret method of entering and leaving the dining booth by the inner wall. The sound of his withdrawal would give The Shadow the clue.

By following the trail of the unknown genius of crime, The Shadow might be able to track him to his secret headquarters and be able, with a greater degree of success, to uncover his identity.

He waited in utter darkness for a betraying noise.

Suddenly, a queer smell began to tickle his nostrils. The odor of scorched wood! But he paid no attention to the smell. He guessed what had caused it. The certainty of a different fact filled him with amazement and dismay.

Except for his crouched body beneath the table, the dining booth was now empty! His unseen enemy was gone! Without a single sound, his assailant had withdrawn as deftly as he had entered. The Shadow realized this as clearly as if he could see every nook and cranny of the dark alcove.

He rose to his feet and snapped on the light of his torch. One glance and he shuddered.

The inner side of the door behind the fixed chair where The Shadow had been intended to sit, was sheathed with a strip of metal. The metal was wet where brownish liquid had splashed against it. The liquid had run down the metal and dripped to the floor.

Grayish vapor rose from it. The wooden floor was burned and pitted by the stuff. It was this charred

wood that the nostrils of The Shadow had smelled.

Acid! A caustic and corrosive acid, the identity of which The Shadow easily recognized. Had he been sitting in the nailed chair, he would have been hopelessly blinded. He would have gone through life with a face like a mask of horror!

He was not surprised by the method of attack. Cruelty was the hallmark of the criminal in this strange case.

It tied in with the attack on the Harmons. It recalled the wanton slaughter of Hubert Jackson's dog and the hellish cruelty that had maimed an innocent street boy. It had nearly smashed the legs of Lamont Cranston to bloody pulp in the shaft of a rising sidewalk elevator.

Someone with a warped lust for evil was behind this whole cycle of horror. And now he had vanished!

The Shadow stared at the table in the center of the dining booth. A familiar looking leather-bound book lay there. It was a duplicate of the book that Lamont Cranston had seen on the floor of Hubert Jackson's library after the death of Jackson's pet dog and the slashing of his valuable paintings.

A Bible!

THE SHADOW opened the religious tome at the proper page. There was no difficulty finding the place. A silk bookmark indicated it. A line of red crayon had been drawn around one of the parables in the New Testament.

It was the Parable of the Uninvited Guest.

The Shadow recognized the sneer in that challenge. His clever substitution of himself for Charlie Horn had availed him nothing. He had been checkmated by a foe as smart as himself.

And Charlie Horn had paid for his unwilling confession with his life!

The Shadow realized Horn's doom when he read the newspaper clipping. The clipping was tucked inside The Bible. It read as follows:

The body of a man cruelly mangled was found early this morning on the tracks of the East Side subway, just south of the Bowling Green Station. Police believe he was an underworld stool pigeon who attempted to betray the chief he worked for. They had expected to find him in a furnished room on the lower East Side, but when they arrived the man was gone.

The tip the police received is reported to have come from a busybody detective who calls himself The Shadow. The stupid blunder of The Shadow has made him lose face - in more ways than one!

The Shadow looked grim at the vicious pun. Had the corrosive acid touched him he would indeed, have lost face! Then he noticed something strange about the printed clipping in his hand. It was dated for

tomorrow!

It had been hand-printed on rough paper by a man with a sardonic sense of humor. A little sneering morsel to toss the bewildered police.

The Shadow pocketed the clipping. He turned his attention to the inner wall of the alcove. It was obvious that an exit of some sort existed. But where? And how was it operated? It had been done in the dark without sound. Not the slightest squeak had betrayed the arrival or departure of the criminal. It smacked of magic.

The Shadow didn't believe in magic. What one man could do, another could do also.

Sensitive fingers went over every inch of that inner wall. The result was complete failure.

The Shadow tried to reconstruct the method that must have been used. The man had hurled acid at the chair opposite the table. Therefore, he must have stood with his back to the wall.

In that case, he'd have scarcely had time to whirl and explore the wall behind him with his fingertips. He had escaped with extraordinary speed. Some other method must have been used.

Could he have used his feet?

The thought of the man's feet emphasized an important fact to The Shadow's keen mind. There had been no sound of any kind. Surely, a pair of shoes should have made some noise! Leather should have squeaked. Even rubber soles would make a tiny thump when they were shifted swiftly by a man in a terrific hurry to maim a victim and vanish.

Had the criminal been barefooted?

The Shadow believed he had the true answer. He removed his shoes and socks, tied the laces of the shoes together and slung them about his neck. With his back to the wall, facing the spot where the acid had been hurled, he took approximately the position that must have been taken by the unseen criminal in the dark.

Could the edge of the table hold the secret of a noiseless panel in the rear wall?

The Shadow tried everything in reach of his questing fingertips. He even squirmed around and groped at the wall behind him with his left hand. He was assuming that the acid thrower had been right-handed.

Failure!

An ordinary investigator would have quit at this point. But not The Shadow. Stubbornly, he continued to search for something he knew must be found with patience and intelligence. He shifted his feet, moved along the mocking surface of that blank rear wall.

It was one of his bare feet that gave him the clue. He felt a tiny sensation of coldness against the flesh under his toes. It felt like the smooth head of a nail.

He looked down. It was a nail. A nail with an unusually large head, that rested flush with the worn surface of the wooden floor. With a gasp of triumph, The Shadow dropped to his knees.

He wondered if there were other nails of the same kind in the floor. He found another. It was about six inches to the left of the one he had stepped on with his bare foot.

They were the only two nails in the entire floor. The Shadow proved that by examining every inch of the

worn boards. Faint laughter bubbled from his lips. He divined that he had the explanation of a magical disappearance.

The sense of touch that had guided a criminal standing in pitch-darkness with his back to the inner wall, was the feel of two tiny nail-heads against the flesh of his bare feet. Knowing where the nails were, the criminal could easily locate them in the dark. The double pressure probably worked an electrical connection.

The Shadow tried it. No sound was audible. But when he turned toward the wall behind him, there was an oblong opening in its surface!

IT was pitch-dark beyond that opening, except for the glow of The Shadow's torch. He peered in.

He was gazing into a narrow corridor, scarcely wider than the width of a man's body. It had been built into the wall that separated the Chinese restaurant from the adjoining building.

The Shadow stepped through. Instantly, the wall panel slid back into position. The Shadow had duplicated the magic vanishing of his unknown foe.

He squeezed silently on bare feet along that strange passage inside the wall. It led in the direction of the front of the building. He knew that, unseen, he was paralleling the line of dining booths at the rear of the Chinese restaurant.

Then he came to the staircase.

The staircase was as narrow as the passage. The steps led downward in a steep slant. Descending, The Shadow realized he was now on the ground-floor level. He recalled that there was an empty store adjoining the restaurant building. It had whitewashed windows and a "For Rent" sign hanging inside the glass of the locked front door.

The bottom of the secret staircase ended in a blank barrier. But The Shadow had now learned the secret of passing through solid walls. He eyed the floor by the light from his torch. There were two nail heads flush with the wood; he placed a bare sole on each of them.

Again, a noiseless panel slid aside. The Shadow stepped out of his narrow prison into an empty store.

His memory had been correct. The windows of the store were coated with a thick layer of soap. No one on the sidewalk outside could look in. The store had been empty for a long time. There was dust on the walls, cobwebs in the corners. But The Shadow noticed a grim fact the moment his eyes surveyed the floor.

There was no trace of dust underfoot. Someone had gone to the trouble of sweeping that dingy floor absolutely clean.

The Shadow knew why. He had hoped to find a trail of footprints in the dust. That hope was now denied him. His criminal foe seemed to out-think him at every stage of the game. The man was a genius who overlooked nothing. Only the shrewd skill of The Shadow had enabled him to stick to the trail thus far.

He put on his socks and shoes again. The need for caution was now gone.

He stared at the back of the "For Rent" sign that hung in a tiny cleared space on the glass of the soaped door of the store. He'd have liked to turn the placard and read the address of the owner or the agent of the premises. But he was afraid to.

There might be a furtive watcher outside on the sidewalk. The turning placard would warn criminal eyes that someone was inside the empty store. The truth of The Shadow's amazing escape from disfigurement and death would become known too soon.

Turning, The Shadow retreated to the rear of the store. He found a back door and tried the knob softly. The door was not locked.

Opening it on a cautious crack, The Shadow stared into the blackness of a rear yard. Behind the yard were the brick walls of a towering warehouse. To the left was an alley that evidently connected with the side street.

The Shadow slipped into the cool air. There was no sign of a lurking foe. No one attacked the stealthy figure of the old man who slipped silently through the alley to its exit. He squirmed past a pile of empty ash cans and walked with shambling steps toward a car that was parked at the curb halfway up the block.

The old man got into the car. A moment later, he had disappeared forever. In his place behind the wheel sat a man with faultlessly tailored clothes and the mark of wealth and distinction.

Lamont Cranston.

He drove slowly around the corner and past the front of the empty store. He didn't halt the car, but his eyes missed nothing of the placard that hung behind the glass of the door. It was the only clean spot in the entire soaped area of the glass. The placard contained nothing but the words: "For Rent."

The lack of the name and address of a real-estate agent had been expected by The Shadow. The sign itself was a device to explain to curious passers-by why the store remained without a tenant so long. The Shadow suspected that if a legitimate tenant applied - and could locate anyone to do business with - the rent demanded would be ridiculously high.

The store was intended to remain vacant.

LAMONT CRANSTON speeded up his car. When he halted, finally, it was outside a drugstore. He went in, and made a low-toned telephone call to an unlisted number.

He was answered at once by the dry, unemotional voice of Burbank, The Shadow's contact man. To Burbank, The Shadow gave swift orders. Burbank repeated them accurately. His job was to transmit those orders to Clyde Burke, ace news hawk of the Daily Classic.

In approximately a half hour, Clyde would appear at the office of Inspector Cardona in police headquarters.

Lamont Cranston got back into his car and drove swiftly to the same address. Cardona was delighted by the unexpected visit. Cranston was an old friend of Joe's. He had a habit of dropping in at odd times. Cardona assumed that Cranston had been bored at some expensive social function and had visited him for an old-fashioned chat.

They were still talking when Clyde Burke arrived. He came in with a rush and an air of grim excitement. He knew Cranston and gave him a nod, but it was purely a formal glance. His excited talk was directed wholly at the startled Cardona.

What Clyde said brought Cardona bounding to his feet. A mysterious phone call had come into the Daily Classic office. The night city editor was away from his desk and Clyde Burke had taken the call. It was a confidential report of a murder.

"Murder?" Cardona growled.

"Yes. Somebody in a disguised voice said that there was a man's body lying in the subway. On the tracks just south of the Bowling Green station. You know - where the tunnel begins under the East River."

"Did you trace the phone call?"

"I tried to. No use. It came from a public booth in a cheap little store uptown. When I investigated, the guy in the store said the man who made the call had left in a hurry."

"What did the fellow look like? Did the clerk remember?"

Clyde glanced at Cardona with a wry smile.

"He gave me a rather complete description. But I don't know what good it's going to do us. The guy that made the call, according to the clerk, looked a lot like Mr. Cranston here."

Joe Cardona's eager face fell. He uttered a growl of disgust.

"Nuts! That isn't going to help us a bit!"

"I'm afraid not," Cranston agreed dryly. "Crime is something for which I have no aptitude whatever. I had been hoping for a quiet talk with Joe about nothing in particular. And now -"

He shrugged with an expression of complete boredom.

"Let's go," Cardona snapped to the Daily Classic reporter. "Want to come along, Mr. Cranston?"

"Anything to break the monotony," Cranston yawned.

They made the run to the Bowling Green station of the East Side subway in record time. On the way downtown Cardona picked up two cops for an escort. They raced down the stairs to the subway platform, past the startled eyes of the man in the change booth. They descended to the tracks. The cops snapped on their pocket flashes.

It wasn't hard to find the victim. He lay between the tracks, a quarter mile south of the station. He was horribly mutilated. It looked as if train after train had run over his torn body.

But the theory of an accident was not a sensible one. The dead man could hardly have crawled to the sheltered spot between the tracks where they found his corpse.

The gashes on his body suggested systematic torture, rather than the steel wheels of a train.

There was no way to identify the man. Only Lamont Cranston realized that the hideously mutilated victim was Charlie Horn. He had proof of it when he picked up a tiny scrap of paper that lay under the bloody bundle in the dark tunnel.

No one saw Cranston pick up that scrap of paper. Cardona was uttering swift commands to the two cops. Clyde Burke had turned away from the horror of the sight. Lamont Cranston slipped the paper into his pocket, after a glance at the brief sentence that had been typed on it.

The message gave him a cold feeling of rage. There was sneering challenge in that note. It was a sneer that was directed at The Shadow, and a mocking requiem sermon for the death of Charlie Horn.

Horn had committed the unpardonable sin of the underworld. He had squealed to The Shadow. He had

tried to betray an unknown genius of crime under the compulsion of The Shadow's scientific torture of bright light and unbearable sound.

The typed sentence on the paper in Lamont Cranston's pocket was a criminal reply. It was a quotation from The Bible. The message read:

"The way of the transgressor is hard."

CHAPTER VIII. THE CLOSED CIRCLE

ON the following morning, Lamont Cranston put thoughts of crime out of his head in order to attend to a humane duty.

The body of John Harmon's widow had been taken to the cemetery and laid gently in its last resting place. Cranston had attended the funeral with Hubert Jackson and one or two close friends of the family.

He had met Bob and Jane Harmon, the son and daughter, who had arrived home from college. He took a quick liking to both of them.

They were stunned by the swiftness of the double tragedy that had made them orphans. But Cranston, watching the tall Bob and his lovely sister, realized they were both thoroughbreds. They said nothing of the fact that they were now practically penniless. Their father's life insurance policy had been used to wipe out his debts.

Some of the fifty thousand dollars which had been received from David Chester went for funeral expenses. A lot more went for additional obligations of John Harmon, about which he had forgotten and which had to be met after his death.

Cranston was well aware of the financial plight of Bob and Jane, when he spoke gently with them in the quiet living room of the Harmon home.

He mentioned the charity fund which he said he had taken up. The "fund" to which Cranston referred was a white lie on his part. After the attack on Hubert Jackson had terrified the lawyer and induced him to withdraw from the chairmanship of the fund, Cranston had made no effort to collect more money. He didn't want to expose anyone else to peril.

Every penny of the substantial amount which Lamont Cranston now offered as a free gift to Bob and Jane Harmon came from his own pocket.

His gift was politely refused. Bob shook his handsome head.

"It's good of you, sir," Bob said huskily, "and we'll never forget your generosity. But Jane and I can't take it."

"Why not?"

"You tell him, Jane."

"We've talked it over, Bob and I," Jane said, her sweet smile making her look very lovely. "We prefer to stand on our own feet."

"What about your college careers? Bob wants to be an engineer. You have years of medical training before you in order to qualify to be a physician."

"That's all finished," Jane said. "We'd both rather be independent, earn our own way. Bob already has a job. I'm trying to get one, too. Later on, we'll be ready to go back to college with money we've earned for ourselves."

Cranston's admiration for Bob and Jane Harmon increased. But he was puzzled by the quickness with which Bob had found employment. Jobs were scarce. How had he been so lucky?

"I really had two offers," Bob said smilingly. "One was from David Chester."

Lamont Cranston's face became expressionless, as he said. "Did you take it?"

"No sir. To tell the truth, I didn't like Mr. Chester's looks very much. He was too sleek, too eager to hire me. I didn't trust him. Besides, I couldn't help thinking it was Chester who indirectly caused my father's death even though Chester, of course was innocent of any blame."

Cranston didn't say anything.

"I'm glad you took the other job, Bob," Jane said.

"What other job?" Cranston asked with quick interest. "Who hired you?"

"I had a rare piece of luck. I was hired by none other than Mr. Benedict Stark."

"Benedict Stark!" Cranston's interest changed to astonished wonder. "Do you know Mr. Stark?"

"No, sir. He sent for me through one of his secretaries. He said he had read about the deaths of father and mother and felt sorry for me. He offered me a wonderful salary to start with, and a chance to train myself to be one of his secretaries. Naturally, I took the offer at once."

"Naturally," Cranston echoed in a queer voice.

Benedict Stark! What in the name of all that was mysterious had brought him into this tangled case?

BENEDICT STARK was probably the richest man in America, which made him the richest man in the world. Cranston, who was himself a millionaire, was not in the class of Benedict Stark.

Stark owned railways and steamships, factories and mills all over the United States. His investment company on Wall Street was not rivaled. He was a billionaire.

And yet, with all this wealth and power, Benedict Stark was literally the man nobody knew.

He had an aversion to newspaper publicity. His picture had never been printed in the social columns or in the Sunday rotogravures. Stark attended no public functions. When he traveled, it was always by special train or by private yacht.

His huge mansion in Manhattan was a showplace. But no one except a select few friends of the billionaire had ever been inside its palatial doors.

Cranston, who went everywhere and met everybody who amounted to anything, had never laid eyes on Benedict Stark.

He felt a queer twinge of uneasiness at this peculiar offer of help to Bob Harmon. Stark had never, so far as Cranston knew, contributed a penny to charity. He was interested only in himself and the piling up of more dollars to swell his already enormous fortune.

Why should a man like that suddenly go out of his way to befriend an orphaned young college man, a lad with no particular training for business life?

There was no sensible answer to it.

Lamont Cranston kept his uneasiness to himself. He congratulated Bob, advised him to accept the job. He left the Harmon house as soon as possible and went back to the Cobalt Club. He walked in order to have time to think about this new and unexpected development.

What did the strange kindness of Benedict Stark mean? Was it connected with the peculiar chain of events that had made the newspapers refer to the Harmon family as the "Unlucky Harmons"? Was Stark in any way behind the criminal attacks that had begun with the sale of John Harmon's business to David Chester?

It seemed ridiculous. But to The Shadow, nothing connected with crime was too ridiculous to investigate.

He racked his brain to try to figure some way in which he might meet Benedict Stark face to face. He wanted to study this selfish billionaire who had become so suddenly charitable toward Bob Harmon.

He was unable to devise a scheme. With a grunt of annoyance, he entered his room at the Cobalt Club. There was a letter waiting for him. When he opened it his jaw sagged.

The note was from Benedict Stark!

It was brief, but friendly. It was an invitation for Lamont Cranston to call on Benedict Stark at the latter's downtown office. The Shadow read the note with narrowed eyes:

DEAR CRANSTON:

The pressure of business has hitherto denied me the pleasure of making your acquaintance. I'd like very much for you to come and see me at my office. I have a practical reason for this belated request. I'd like to accept a kindness from you - and to return one.

With best personal wishes,

BENEDICT STARK

Cranston whistled softly as he stared at the note. What was this peculiar reference to "a kindness"? What kindness could Cranston possibly perform for a man as wealthy and powerful as Stark? And on the other hand, what was Stark's interest in Lamont Cranston, a man he had never before taken the trouble to meet?

It sounded interesting.

Cranston acted on the note at once. He hurried from the Cobalt Club and got into his car. He drove downtown to the towering skyscraper that housed a few of the far-flung business enterprises of Benedict Stark's industrial empire. Stark was busy when Cranston arrived. He had to wait in an outside office that seemed almost as large as a railroad terminal. While he sat there, his eyes were busy.

One fact struck him instantly. The employees who worked in the outer office were certainly an unusual

lot. The Shadow had a queer feeling that he had blundered by mistake into a Hollywood movie studio.

The girls, who busied themselves with typewriters and adding machines and filing cabinets were gorgeously lovely. Their faces and figures were something to look at. Anyone of them, Cranston thought softly, could without any trouble at all win a beauty contest by the simple process of donning a tight one-piece garment and facing the dazzled eyes of a beauty judge.

There were redheads, blondes and brunettes. They had poise and charm. Cranston suspected that Benedict Stark must pay these beauties plenty to keep them satisfied with the humdrum jobs they were so calmly attending to.

And the men, too, matched the girls. Not a single man was middle-aged. They answered telephones and dictated correspondence like a superior tribe of Greek gods. Bob Harmon, handsome as he was, was not in the class of these male office assistants of the great Benedict Stark.

Cranston was more eager than ever to get a look at Stark. He rose with alacrity when he was finally summoned to the billionaire's private office.

He received an instant shock. He found himself staring at what was undoubtedly the ugliest man he had ever seen in his life!

STARK was seated at his desk dictating to his personal secretary. He sat humped forward like a well-dressed ape. He glanced up briefly, grimaced with what was intended to be a smile of welcome, and then went on with his rapid dictation.

Cranston sat down in a nearby chair and watched Stark. The more he stared at the billionaire, the more amazing the man's ugliness became.

His body was barrel-chested, like a gorilla's. He was so short in stature that his chair had extra long legs to bring his head well above the level of his desk.

One of his arms was shorter than the other. Evidently the malformation had occurred at birth. It made using the left hand difficult and awkward. But Stark continually used it to pick up papers and to fiddle with pens and pencils. It almost seemed as if he enjoyed drawing attention to his deformity.

His head was enormously large on a short neck. The weight of that huge head made it sag forward toward his chest. He had a jutting lower lip, which gave him a sullen, unpleasant pout as he wrinkled his beady eyes to concentrate on the material he was dictating to his lovely secretary.

The girl made Benedict Stark's ugliness more hideous by merely sitting next to him.

Watching her, Cranston revised his enthusiastic approval of the girls in the outer office. If they were queens of loveliness, this girl was an empress! She was, without exaggeration, the most gloriously perfect beauty that Cranston had ever seen. No woman he had ever beheld on stage or screen, or in the most expensive nightclubs, could compare with this girl.

She finished her task presently. Stark uttered a croaking murmur.

"That will be all, Millicent. You may go."

She rose obediently. Cranston could detect no flaw in her from head to foot as she walked gracefully to the door. The room seemed dark and dingy after she had gone.

Benedict Stark laughed briefly.

"Tell me, Cranston, what has impressed you most since you entered my private office a moment ago? Be honest about it, please."

Cranston didn't hesitate a moment. He had gauged the billionaire's character. He knew what Stark wanted to hear.

"Your ugliness," he said calmly.

Stark threw back his head and laughed. His outthrust, pouting lip quivered. He was pleased by what he heard. A vain man, he was proud of his ugliness.

"I was afraid you'd refer to Millicent's beauty," he admitted. "She is lovely, isn't she? She'd be in Hollywood right now, if it were not for the fact that I instantly double every offer Millicent receives from movie producers - and I will continue to do so indefinitely."

His wrinkled eyes gleamed with sardonic amusement.

"I keep Millicent here at my side to emphasize my own ugliness. After a certain point has been reached, ugliness becomes an art. Don't you think so?"

Cranston nodded politely.

He was aware that behind the apparently aimless talk of Stark was a cool, searching brain. Every change of expression on Cranston's face was being checked and analyzed. He felt those small eyes boring deep into his personality. Ordinarily, he prided himself on his poker face. Now he wasn't so sure. He felt naked under the searching gaze of Stark.

Lamont Cranston had never before met a man whom he considered his intellectual equal. That state of affairs was no longer true.

"You wish to do me a kindness, according to your note, Mr. Stark," Cranston reminded his host suavely.

"So I do. And I hope in return to receive a kindness from you. I've already performed my good deed. Permit me to explain."

His explanation was brief. He referred to his hiring of Bob Harmon at a generous salary. He linked it with Lamont Cranston's visit to him, by alluding to the fact that Cranston had been publicly identified with efforts to aid the Harmon family.

"I, too, wanted to help," Stark said smoothly, "but not by a gift of money. I don't believe in charity, as you perhaps know. A job and an opportunity to climb the ladder of success are things that an independent minded lad like Bob Harmon can appreciate."

Cranston had a feeling that Benedict Stark was jeering at him behind the trite words he was uttering.

"You mentioned a kindness I could do for you in exchange," Cranston said curtly.

"True. And it is this. I am not a man to waste words getting to the point. I'm very anxious to meet Kent Allard. I've heard that you are Kent Allard's best friend. I want you to introduce him to me."

THE SHADOW tensed inwardly. But he managed to keep his lips curved in a careless smile. Kent Allard was a famous American aviator. It was natural for Benedict Stark to desire to meet so famous a celebrity. And yet...

Kent Allard was the Shadow!

Where the name of Allard was a household word, few, if any, persons knew he was The Shadow.

The Shadow himself was a creature of darkness. When a public appearance became necessary that information on pending crime might be obtained, The Shadow sometimes assumed the name and social position of Lamont Cranston.

Was Benedict Stark suspicious of this state of affairs? Cranston tested Stark with a vague reply.

"I'll be very glad to tell my friend Kent Allard how anxious you are to meet him."

"I'm extremely interested in aviation," Stark continued. "Allard has enjoyed the romance and adventure that I've missed by being chained to a business man's desk. I'd like to talk with him and ask him technical questions about flying that only a genius of aviation like Allard could properly answer."

"I'm sure I can arrange a meeting," Cranston replied. "At present, Allard is in Washington. But he's flying to New York in the next day or so, for a brief stop before he goes on to Boston. It will be a delight to tell him you wish to meet him. I'll send him over to your home for a brief visit."

Stark shook his head to that. Something like a monkeyish grin twisted his pouting lips.

"That won't do," he murmured in a silky voice. "It would be only half a pleasure. I want both of you to come! I'm arranging a small party at my home. You're entirely too modest, Mr. Cranston. As a world traveler and big-game hunter, you're quite a celebrity yourself. We'll call it a date, eh? You shall bring Kent Allard and introduce him yourself to me and my guests."

"I shall be very glad to," Cranston murmured.

He could see he was being drawn into a trap. But there was nothing to do but accept the ugly situation.

He knew now why Benedict Stark had sent for him. If Stark's suspicions about The Shadow were correct, he was forcing an impossible showdown. The Shadow would have to appear at the same time, in the same place in the role of two entirely different human beings!

Could such magic be accomplished? The Shadow realized he had been placed in a grim situation. And yet he had to go through with it, if he were to continue to play the role of Lamont Cranston in public with impunity.

He rose to his feet and excused himself. Stark rose, too. But he detained his guest for a moment longer. Waddling on his short legs, he led Cranston to a sunlit window that overlooked the busy turmoil of New York harbor.

It was a magnificent view. But Benedict Stark drew attention to something closer. With a smile, he pointed to the shadow of Cranston's arm in the warm sunlight on the window sill.

"Are you interested in shadows?"

"Not particularly," Cranston murmured.

"I am. I'm quite an amateur photographer. I like to play with photographic effects of light and shade. You, of course, have been to Africa as a hunter and explorer. Have you ever heard the amusing African superstition about a man and his shadow?"

Cranston's lids dropped suddenly, to hide the gleam in his eyes. His tone remained casual.

"Oh, yes. The natives believe that if a man were to lose his shadow, he would at the same time lose his life. An amusing notion. Not very important, I think."

"I'm afraid I'm boring you. Thank you for coming to see me. I'll expect you and Kent Allard at my mansion tomorrow night for the little reception I'm giving. Goodbye."

CRANSTON gazed idly about the room before he departed. He allowed his eyes to range over the filled bookcases that lined the walls of Stark's palatial office.

It was an impressive collection. There were books on literature and art, medicine and chemistry, criminal and civil law. Almost every subject an intelligent man might busy himself with. And this ugly-visaged Mr. Stark was undeniably intelligent. The framed diplomas from some of the biggest American and European universities proved that.

Was Benedict Stark the evil brain that directed the activities of the sly David Chester? There was nothing to prove it - and yet, The Shadow's eye held a reflective gleam when he reached the street and got back into his car. If Stark were secretly a criminal behind the fortress of power and wealth, he was the most dangerous foe The Shadow had ever encountered.

The Shadow hoped to have a partial answer when he returned to the Cobalt Club. He had ordered his financial agent, Rutledge Mann, to investigate the ownership of the building in which the Chinese restaurant was located.

Rutledge Mann's report was ready when Cranston reached his desk. But it was a report that made Cranston grit his teeth with helpless disappointment. The building that housed the Chinese restaurant, and the one next door, were both owned by the same corporation. The man who controlled that corporation had a familiar name.

David Chester!

Cranston uttered a clipped oath. He knew now that Chester was merely a stooge. The vicious circle had closed again, leaving The Shadow no wiser than before.

Was Benedict Stark checkmating The Shadow at every turn? The Shadow did not know! Only the future would tell.

CHAPTER IX. THE BLUE PARROT

ON the following evening, a taxi-cab drove slowly eastward on one of the best residential streets of Manhattan. Its goal was a towering apartment building in the swanky society section over near the East River.

Wealth and social prestige had transformed what was once a slum river district into the most desirable neighborhood in town. There was a float at the river's edge to accommodate the speedboats of wealthy tenants. A few seaplanes rode at anchor.

The streamlined taxicab looked like one of a thousand others on the busy highways of Manhattan. The driver was Moe Shrevnitz. He was a secret agent of The Shadow.

Moe drove slowly, because a conference was going on between his two passengers - a conference in which Moe took a necessary part. Certain facts had to be discussed before the cab reached the building in which a blonde named Dorothy Bruner maintained an expensive apartment.

Clyde Burke was keeping a promise he had made Dorothy a couple of days earlier. He was taking her

out on a date in his role of an amorous reporter.

Clyde's companion in the taxicab was older. He looked like a successful lawyer or a man familiar with stocks and finance. In the telephone book he was listed as an investment broker. His name was Rutledge Mann. Actually, he was an undercover financial agent of The Shadow.

Mann's job tonight was to take advantage of the absence of Dorothy Bruner after she departed on her date with Clyde. The Shadow was certain that hidden somewhere in that swanky apartment of Dorothy's were vital documents that might throw a revealing light on the activities of the sleek David Chester. He had instructed Rutledge Mann to make a careful search of every inch of the place.

A statement by Moe Shrevnitz confirmed one of the facts The Shadow had already deduced. The real name of Dorothy Bruner was Mrs. David Chester. She and her employer were secretly man and wife.

"I found it out by jawing with the building doorman," Moe said with a grin of satisfaction. "The renting agent is a notary public and the doorman is his brother-in-law. Last year, Chester took his income tax report to the renting agent to be notarized. It was a joint return for David and Dorothy Chester."

His grin hardened.

"Chester is up in the blonde's apartment right now! I saw him sneaking through the delivery entrance about a half hour ago. Unless he went away in the last five minutes or so, he's still there."

"Dorothy probably told him about her date with me," Clyde growled. "My guess is that Chester will hide somewhere out of sight and try to listen in while Dorothy pumps me. I'm afraid they both suspect by this time that I'm a lot more than a reporter for the Classic."

He didn't sound worried, however.

"I've figured a scheme to get rid of them both tonight," he told Rutledge Mann, "so you can get in and have plenty of time to search the empty apartment. I'm going to pull a stunt to scare this Chester guy and send him out on a wild-goose chase."

"How will I know if your scheme works?" Mann asked.

"We'll use the old 'match pad' trick," Clyde said. "I'll ask Moe for a match when I bring Dorothy down to the taxi. Moe's job will be to watch the delivery entrance of the building and make certain that Chester has sneaked out. You'll be waiting in a dark doorway to take the message. It's a cinch!"

Rutledge Mann nodded. He was familiar with the trick to which Clyde alluded. It had been used before in similar situations.

The taxicab increased its speed toward its destination.

MEANWHILE, an interesting conversation was taking place between David Chester and his blond wife in the expensive apartment rented under the name of Dorothy Bruner.

"Be sure you pump this damned newspaper reporter for all he's worth," Chester growled. "I'll be listening in the usual spot. Ask him particularly about Lamont Cranston and Kent Allard. I had an emergency telephone warning from the boss. There's a possibility that Cranston and Kent Allard are the same man!"

"Why so much interest in Cranston?" Dorothy Inquired.

"Because Lamont Cranston may be - The Shadow!"

Dorothy uttered a peal of silvery laughter. She was amused and scornful.

"Don't be silly! You're forgetting something, aren't you, darling? Charlie Horn spilled his guts before he was tortured to death in the subway. He explained exactly how he was trapped and forced to confess all he knew. His story proved that Lamont Cranston and The Shadow can't be the same! The Shadow kidnapped Horn - from Lamont Cranston!"

She laughed again, but there was an edge in her mirth. Both she and Chester were worried. Queer events had been taking place lately, events that might mean disaster for a couple of smart crooks.

"What about this man Benedict Stark?" Chester snapped.

"Now, you're being silly! Stark's already a billionaire. What earthly reason -"

"Lamont Cranston paid a visit to him. We know that. Perhaps this Benedict Stark might be tied in with Cranston. He might be hiring detectives to investigate us. By the lord, Benedict Stark himself might be The Shadow!"

"You're crazy!" Dorothy rejoined. "You're getting jittery. Take my advice and -"

Her words were cut short by a ring of the apartment bell. Both stiffened and glanced grimly at each other. They knew what that ring meant, Clyde Burke had arrived for his date with Dorothy.

Chester darted from the room to take up his post in an unseen hiding place. Dorothy preened herself at a mirror, to make herself more alluring. Then she walked to the door with an arrogant sway of her hips.

Clyde's eyes popped at sight of her. He didn't have to fake his admiration.

"Like me?" Dorothy said with an enticing smile.

Her evening gown had been designed by a foremost dressmaker. Only a woman of superb figure would have dared wear it. It was strapless and backless. It made a perfect foil for Dorothy's blond beauty, the creamy softness of her shoulders and arms. The clinging fabric of the gown drew attention to the fact that Dorothy had a slim perfectly molded figure.

With a faint pressure of warm fingers on his, she led Clyde to a small reception room. It was a spot that gave the hidden David Chester a perfect opportunity to listen and to watch unseen.

Cleverly, Dorothy tried to pump the reporter on a variety of topics. Clyde, however, was on the alert. He gave her plenty of misinformation on the subject of Lamont Cranston. He didn't seem to know very much about the famous aviator, Kent Allard. But he talked freely on every subject the blonde brought up.

When he got the chance, he even introduced a subject himself. He spoke with assumed eagerness about the discovery of the body of an unidentified victim on the tracks of the East Side subway. He had found a clue, Clyde revealed excitedly.

"A clue?" Dorothy said. "How interesting! What was it?"

Clyde worked his gag, after a show of reluctance.

"The clue was on the dead man himself. It was a scrap of paper inside one of his shoes. By a rare piece of luck, I got hold of it. The police don't know I have it. I expect it to lead to a tremendous scoop for the Classic!"

"What was it? A note?"

"A rather important message," Clyde nodded. "It was a reference to a Chinese restaurant. I think the victim knew he was about to be killed and meant the police to see it. Unfortunately, the message was so blurred with blood that the name and the address of the Chinese restaurant can't be deciphered. But I'll fix that soon.

"I'm going to take the paper to a chemical laboratory and have the bloodstains dissolved. That can be done, you know, without spoiling the writing underneath."

"How thrilling!" Dorothy cried. There was a faint gasp in her voice. "Have you got it with you?"

"Yes," Clyde lied.

"May I see it?"

She leaned forward, her whole body sweetly alluring. Her warm nearness, the fragrance of her perfume made Clyde's blood pound. But he shook his head.

"Sorry. After all, I'm a reporter, and it is a tremendous scoop. I can't show it to you."

He didn't tell Dorothy the real reason for his refusal. His whole build-up about the clue was a bluff to reach the ears of the hidden Chester. There wasn't any paper in his pocket. The clue was imaginary!

CLYDE saw a flick like flame in the eyes of Dorothy. She stopped her wheedling tactics at once. Clyde knew what that meant.

She hoped to get him drunk later on and steal the evidence that pointed to the Chinese restaurant. Or if that failed, Chester himself might organize a fake holdup at some prearranged spot.

Clyde had a grim hunch that the invisible Chester was already on his way out of the apartment. He was sure of it, when Dorothy pointed impatiently to her jeweled wrist watch.

"Time is flying, darling," she said softly. "There are so many interesting places I'd like to see tonight. It isn't often a girl has a chance to do the town with the guidance of an ace reporter. Will you show me all the spots that we ordinary people miss?"

As Clyde agreed, he noticed her eyes were on his dinner jacket, staring at the slight bulge his wallet made in an inner pocket. He knew that Dorothy didn't care about the money that wallet contained. From her appearance, she had no cares about money.

The thing that worried her was a bloodstained note that linked a murder in the subway to a certain Chinese restaurant. Dorothy had fallen for Clyde's imaginary clue.

Downstairs, Moe Shrevnitz's taxicab was waiting at the curb.

The smiling couple got in. Clyde delayed telling Moe where to go. He took a cigarette from a silver case and reached for a match. Then he swore under his breath. He had, it seemed, run out of matches.

Moe was watching him with pretended anxiety to please his swanky customers.

"Need a light, mister? Here's a match pad."

"Thanks." Clyde took the paper pad, then he uttered a quick exclamation of dismay. "Wait. There's only one match left in it. I don't want to use up the last match you've got."

"That's O.K. I got plenty more in some of my other pockets."

Clyde struck the match and lit his cigarette. He turned so that he faced away from Dorothy for an instant. In the quick glow of the flaring flame he glanced at the paper pad in his cupped palm. What he saw soothed out the wrinkle on his forehead.

He tossed the empty match pad carelessly to the sidewalk.

"Hotel Monmouth," he told Moe Shrevnitz.

The cab rolled swiftly away.

A few moments after it had dwindled in the darkness, a man stepped out of a nearby doorway. He walked slowly along the sidewalk past the ornate entrance of the apartment house. He kept close to the curb.

The loiterer was Rutledge Mann.

He picked up the empty match pad. The doorman had gone back into the building foyer. Mann's eyes glanced swiftly up and down the quiet street. Satisfied that his brief halt had been unobserved, he ducked into the service alley of the apartment building and descended concrete steps to the basement.

The moment he was out of sight, he read the hastily scrawled pencil message on the inside of the match folder. Moe Shrevnitz hadn't wasted any words. The message read: "O.K."

It meant to Mann that Moe had watched the side entrance of the building while Clyde was busy upstairs with the glamorous Dorothy. Moe had seen David Chester make a quick sneak. The coast was now clear for Rutledge Mann to make a careful, and painstaking, search of the apartment upstairs.

He reached his goal by using the service elevator from the rear of the basement. He got himself upstairs with utter secrecy. He had little trouble with the kitchen entrance of the Bruner apartment. Skeleton keys took care of that.

Closing the door gently behind him, Mann got busy at once. He knew he could rely on Clyde Burke to delay the return of Dorothy indefinitely.

Chester, too, would not return, until he got his itching hands on the clue he was certain was in Clyde Burke's wallet. Clyde would see to it that the fake holdup attack he expected would take plenty of time to develop.

It was a perfect set-up for Rutledge Mann.

MEANWHILE, Clyde and the glamorous Dorothy had sipped a cocktail at the Monmouth and were on their way to another famous hotel.

Dorothy gave the reporter a side-long glance. Her red lips curved in a pouting smile.

"I thought you were going to take me to some of the unusual night clubs."

"We've got plenty of time."

"I think you're mean! You promised me a thrill tonight. You said you'd take me to some of the places where they put on a really hot show. Places where it's hard for ordinary people to get in."

"For instance?"

Clyde was conscious of the girl's repressed eagerness.

"The Blue Parrot," she said.

"The Blue Parrot! You wouldn't want to go there. It's a regular underworld hangout. It's full of mobsters and cutthroats."

"I'm not afraid. Please! Be a good boy and take me."

Clyde allowed himself to be persuaded. But he made one reservation before he agreed to drive downtown to the notorious night spot in Greenwich Village.

"Let's stop first and have another drink."

"All right."

They stopped at a hotel grill, and Clyde excused himself after he had finished his cocktail. He disappeared into the men's washroom.

His heart was pounding with excitement. One glance around the tiled interior of the room and he uttered a silent prayer of thanks. He was all alone.

He had to manufacture the fake evidence which he knew Dorothy and Chester were hoping to steal from him. Unless they found it, they might suspect they had both been deliberately lured away from their apartment.

Clyde tore a sheet from a small notebook he carried. On it he wrote hurriedly in pencil the name and address of the Chinese restaurant where The Shadow had had so amazing an adventure in a locked dining booth.

With tightening lips, Clyde reached for his penknife. Glancing about him to make sure he was unseen he drew up a trousers leg, exposing his sock and the bare calf above it.

With the sharp point of the small blade Clyde pricked his skin.

Blood welled from the tiny incision. Clyde rubbed the fake note against the small puncture until the address he had written was hopelessly smeared with blood. Then he dropped his trousers leg and placed the paper inside his wallet.

He was all set now. He wanted that paper to be stolen from him. It would establish him all the more securely in his role of a dumb reporter who talked too much. Chester and the blonde would never dream that the whole thing was a plant.

When Clyde returned to Dorothy's table she was waiting impatiently. They went at once to Greenwich Village.

The Blue Parrot was outwardly a ramshackle little dive. But once they passed its narrow portals, even Clyde was impressed. The place reeked with expensive furnishings. It was decorated entirely in pale tints of blue.

A waiter gave Clyde a sharp look, but he conducted him and Dorothy to a table at the very edge of the tiny stage.

Clyde noticed some of the faces of the guests as he walked behind the waiter. He saw notorious crooks on every side of him. Most of them were big-shots, the sort whom the law never seemed to be able to lay a hand on.

Too, Clyde was conscious of murmurs in his wake. The word was being passed around that he was a newspaperman. But no one objected to his presence or attempted to stop him. At any other time, he'd have been tossed out on his ear. Now, the sullen-looking waiter seemed positively glad to welcome him.

THE lights were already beginning to dim. Clyde and Dorothy were just in time for the daring specialty dance that gave the night club its picturesque name.

Darkness dropped like a sudden cloak. Above the unseen stage a spotlight glowed abruptly. Its light was blue. It made a dim moonlit circle on the floor.

Into that circle swayed a lithe and lovely figure.

The girl's hair was blue-black. So was the swirling costume she wore. A blue parrot was perched on her left shoulder. The girl began to dance with sinuous skill. The blue spotlight followed her every movement. She seemed unaware of the bird perched sleepily on her gracefully draped shoulder.

But Clyde was well aware of the significance the parrot played in the dance. So were the rest of the unseen customers. Clyde could hear a faint sigh rustling through the hidden audience as the parrot fluttered upward in the air. The bird circled above the head of the whirling dancer.

The dancer paused. The parrot swooped downward in answer to some unseen signal. Its beak seized the trailing edge of a blue scarf. The scarf was jerked loose and fluttered to the floor, leaving the exposed throat and shoulders of the dancer gleaming like snowy marble.

Again the girl danced. What she was really engaged in was a novelty strip tease. Her act had been imported from Paris. It was an act well suited to the ideas of a wealthy underworld audience. Every time the parrot swooped, a lightly clasped garment fluttered away in the dim blue brilliance of the spotlight.

At the climax, the dancer was seemingly completely disrobed. She posed rigidly, her arms flung upward like a frozen statue. It was impossible to detect even her breathing. For the space of ten throbbing seconds, she held that daring pose of marble nudity - then the dim spot-light winked abruptly out.

Darkness dropped. A roar of applause thundered from the audience. When again light returned, the stage was empty.

"How did you like it?" Clyde asked Dorothy.

"I'm frightened!" Dorothy whispered.

"What's the matter?"

"I... I don't like the people here. They look tough, vicious. Maybe we ought to leave."

Clyde stared at her. He was puzzled by her sudden desire to leave. No one had harmed her. She had known the sort of audience to expect before she had entered. Why this sudden change of tactics on her part?

He turned and followed the direction of her gaze. She was staring at a thin-faced, tight-lipped man who sat almost directly behind Clyde. The man's face was expressionless. But Clyde was as not deceived. His quick turn had surprised an unspoken signal in the man's heavy-lidded eyes.

The crook had just sent a wordless nod to Dorothy Bruner. Clyde was certain it was a signal.

CHAPTER X. THE BATHTUB CLUE

RUTLEDGE MANN stood alone in Dorothy Bruner's living room. He cursed with disappointment. His search of the apartment had ended in complete failure.

Not a single inch of the place had escaped his vigilant eye. And yet there was no evidence of the secret business records that The Shadow had ordered Mann to locate.

Bureaus had been explored, rugs lifted, pictures shifted on the walls. Even the medicine cabinet in the bathroom had not been overlooked by the resourceful Mann. He was positive that he had not missed anything in sight.

And yet, he had met with failure.

Another man would have acknowledged defeat at this point. But not Rutledge Mann. A powerful impulse urged him to make a second and even more thorough search - the belief of The Shadow that there were secrets to be found here.

This time, Mann used a different approach to his problem. Having restored everything to normal, he began to look for some evidence of a hidden room. He was guided in his new hunch by the architectural peculiarity of the apartment. It seemed laid out in haphazard fashion.

A small sitting room between the living room and Dorothy's bed chamber didn't serve any understandable purpose. Also, it seemed much too small for the full extent of the floor plan.

The bathroom was unusually small, too. Its entrance was through Dorothy's bedroom. Mann began to suspect there was still some added space unaccounted for. He took a tape from his pocket and began to measure distances.

When he had finished, he was convinced that there was a secret L-shaped chamber hidden somehow between the walls of the bedroom, the bathroom and the small sitting room.

He concentrated finally on the bathroom. The sight of an opened tube of tooth paste on the lower shelf of the medicine cabinet made him smile grimly. He himself had taken off the cap and squeezed a tiny portion of the tooth paste from the tube. It was a signal he had agreed on beforehand with Clyde Burke.

Mann expected Clyde to return to the apartment later on, with Dorothy. The appearance of the tooth paste tube would determine Clyde's subsequent behavior. If it was neatly capped, Clyde would know that Mann's search had been successful. He would make a hasty good-bye to the amorous Dorothy and depart as soon as possible.

If, however, the cap of the tube remained off, with a half inch or so of paste protruding, Clyde would recognize it as a signal of failure on the part of Rutledge Mann. It would be a message to Clyde to delay his departure and try to uncover something himself.

Having still found nothing, Rutledge Mann left the cap off the tube of tooth paste.

Again, he examined the bathtub. This time, he saw something he had missed on his first inspection. Added vigilance on his part brought the clue to his notice.

It was the faint - very faint - impression of a rubber heel in the bottom of the orchid-colored tub. But the size of the ghostly print of that rubber heel made it stranger still. No woman could have made it. It was the large heel-print of a man.

David Chester?

Mann didn't waste any time wondering. He knew the precious minutes were passing fast. If he delayed too long, he might find himself caught in an awkward trap by the return of the sly Chester.

The mark in the tub indicated that someone had stood there with his back to the wall. Mann took the same position. Standing thus, he tried to reach every point within reach of his fingertips.

It didn't do him a bit of good. There was practically nothing he could reach except the sleek edge and side of the tub itself. If there was a hidden mechanism, this was certainly no way to discover it!

Suddenly, Mann uttered an exclamation of disgust at his own stupidity. He had been misled by the footprint. It must surely have been made by Chester when he had left his secret hiding place, not when he had entered it! The very fact that Chester had been careless enough to leave the print was proof of this supposition.

Leaving, Chester must have been in a tremendous hurry. He had overheard Clyde's story about the fake note. He had sneaked out with swift eagerness to some prearranged spot where he could steal the "restaurant clue" from the Classic reporter.

HAVING figured this, Mann turned around in the tub so that he faced the tiled wall of the bathroom.

He found that in this position he could easily reach various objects - the lower hot and cold water handles and the faucet for the tub; the upper handles that controlled the flow from the overhead shower; the shower-head itself; part of the chromium bar that supported the shower curtain on its hooks.

Mann manipulated all these objects hopefully. He ended up no better than he was before. But he didn't quit. Admitting failure on an assignment was not one of the habits of an agent of The Shadow.

Mann finally turned his attention to the soap niche built into the tiled wall. It interested him because it was one of the things within reach of his questing hands from where he stood.

It had a short porcelain bar above the soap enclosure, for a bather to steady himself when he rose from a sitting position. Mann tried to work the bar. No use.

There was a cake of scented soap in the niche. He removed it and persisted grimly. He was rewarded for his incredible patience.

He found, by inserting his fingers, that the bottom of the niche was ribbed to keep the soap from melting in a puddle of its own making. That was normal enough. But behind the last ridge was something not so normal.

Four tiny depressions were at the rear of the niche! They were large enough to accommodate the tips of Mann's four fingers. He pressed steadily.

Over his bent shoulder he heard a faint click. To his amazement the tiled wall at the end of the tub began to shift. It rose vertically in a solid sheet. Behind it, an oblong opening was disclosed.

Mann had found the camouflaged entrance to a secret chamber!

He didn't put back the cap on the tube of tooth paste in the medicine cabinet. Perhaps his search of the secret chamber might not lead to the discovery of important clues or documents. A methodical man, he decided to wait until he was sure of success before leaving the O.K. signal for Clyde.

He crowded into the black opening beyond the bathtub, squeezed along a narrow passage that turned an abrupt corner inside the wall. It led to what looked like a completely equipped laboratory-and-office.

On a flat zinc-covered table were all sorts of chemical instruments and glass vessels. Racks of test tubes stood in a wooden holder. Most of the tubes were empty, as were the glass retorts. But two of them were filled with liquid.

Mann examined these two. One of the liquids was jet-black. The other was a pale, smoky silver. With trembling fingers, Mann removed the corks from the open ends of the tubes. He was tremendously excited, so nervous that he accidentally spilled some of the stuff on the zinc.

A drop of the silver liquid mingled with the black. Or rather, it didn't merge! The two colors in that tiny spilled puddle remained entirely distinct and separate. The silver seemed to run in swift dizzy threads through the black.

In a moment, both colors were gone. They didn't evaporate. The action was too quick for that. They simply vanished through some chemical action of their own.

Mann couldn't understand the meaning of the strange behavior of those two fluids; but he had no time to speculate. There was a safe at the other end of the room. He saw also a filing cabinet whose unseen contents he was eager to explore.

He tried the handle of the safe, but it was securely locked. He knew it could take an expert safe-cracker to make an impression on that tough steel. So he turned toward the filing cabinet.

But before Mann reached it, he noticed a tiny indentation on one of the two inner walls of the room. It looked suspiciously like a peephole. It was!

By pressing an eye to the peephole, Mann was able to peer through a cunningly embedded lens that gave him a clear view into the bedroom of Dorothy Bruner. A similar lens, sunk flush with the surface of the other wall, commanded a view of the tiny sitting room.

The sitting room was where Clyde had told Dorothy about his "clue" taken from the shoe of a dead man on the subway tracks below the Bowling Green station.

A microphone earpiece on a nearby shelf showed how easily Chester had been able to listen, unobserved, to the interview between Dorothy and Clyde.

The filing cabinet drew Rutledge Mann's eager attention. It was made of thin, ordinary sheet metal. The drawers were locked, but they didn't offer too great an obstacle to The Shadow's agent. Compared with the safe, the filing cabinet was a cinch to crack.

Mann produced a thin bar of tempered steel. It was edged at one end like a cold chisel. The edge was almost as sharp as the blade of a knife. Mann was able to insert it between the locked end of the drawer and the frame of the cabinet.

He applied pressure with slow, even strength. The bar gave him powerful leverage. There was a sharp snap of broken metal. He had cracked the lock.

Eagerly, he slid open the drawer. But as he did so he gave a shrill cry and flung himself backward. It was too late!

The cry Rutledge Mann had uttered was a yelp of pain. Both his extended wrists had been caught in a grip of steel. They looked like steel handcuffs, but they had a more cruel and torturing power than ordinary police bracelets.

On the inside of the steel circlets were notched teeth like the saw edges of a bear trap. They bit into

Mann's flesh with a cruel agony, that brought the blood dripping from his writhing fingers.

Feebly, he tried to free himself.

He could see through a haze of pain that the drawer he had forced open was empty. The cabinet was a burglar trap. The concealed cuffs worked automatically when the drawer was opened.

Already, Mann's fingers were numb. He could scarcely move them. They felt like chunks of wood. Terror filled his heart as he realized how hopelessly he was caught. He knew he had no chance to break that agonized grip on his bleeding wrists.

It was only a matter of a short time before David Chester would return.

Rutledge Mann was doomed!

AT the Blue Parrot night club, Clyde Burke continued to stare at the sleekly dressed criminal at a nearby table. He knew the fellow was a criminal, because he recognized the hard, thin-lipped face. The fellow had a long police record, but no convictions. His name was Harry Marco.

Marco was the man whom Dorothy Bruner was pretending to be afraid of. Yet Clyde knew this was merely part of a cunning build-up. He had seen a quick, wordless signal pass between Marco and the blonde beside him.

"Let's get out of here," Dorothy whispered. "I'm frightened!"

Clyde agreed. He summoned a waiter and paid for the drinks. He adjusted Dorothy's wraps and was about to walk with her to the cloakroom to get his own coat and hat, when he felt her trembling hand on his.

"Look! That man is waiting for us to leave. He's going to follow us!"

Clyde followed Dorothy's glance. He saw that Marco had left his table and hurried to the foyer beyond the cloakroom. Marco had already donned his coat and hat. He was lingering in the shadow near the exit door.

Dorothy whispered to the waiter. The waiter nodded. He asked Clyde for his hat check, and hurried off with it

"What's the idea?" Clyde inquired under his breath.

"I asked the waiter to let us out by a different exit," Dorothy explained. "It's the only way we can dodge trouble on the way home."

Clyde didn't reply. He knew that the blonde was lying. Her trick was to force a holdup opportunity, not to avoid one. Her fright and uneasiness were part of a deliberate build-up.

Keeping his face impassive, Clyde accepted his hat and coat from the tough waiter. He followed the waiter to a side aisle of the dimly lit night club. Above a narrow door, a tiny red exit lamp gleamed like a smear of blood.

The next moment, the door closed softly behind Dorothy and Clyde. Cool, fresh air was blowing on their overheated faces. They were in a dark alley that ran between the night club and the building next door. Dorothy clutched tightly at Clyde's arm.

"Let's hurry out the rear end," she breathed. "We can be in a cab and away before that fellow out front

realizes that we've given him the slip."

Clyde allowed her to guide him, although he expected quick treachery. His guess was correct.

As they passed a heaped pile of empty ash cans at the read end of the alley, a dark figure rose noiselessly to confront them.

A gun gleamed in the dim light of the alley. Its muzzle was aimed accurately at Clyde's heart.

"Freeze - both of you!" a sullen voice whispered.

Dorothy didn't utter a sound. Her arms lifted in prompt and silent obedience. Clyde raised his own, under the menace of the gun.

"If it's money you want -" Clyde began.

"Shut up!"

The thug stood perfectly still, his gun gleaming. He made no move to attack or to search Clyde. He seemed to be listening.

In a moment, the soft pad-pad of running feet was audible from the front end of the alley. A man raced into view.

It was Harry Marco.

MARCO wasted no time. He stepped behind Clyde, out of range of the thug's gun, and began to search him. His expert fingers unbuttoned Clyde's overcoat and Tuxedo jacket. They dipped into the inner pocket where the reporter kept his wallet.

At the reporter's side, Dorothy kept moaning. But it was a moan in a remarkably low key. It couldn't be heard three feet away from the holdup tableau.

Harry Marco snapped open the wallet. He pretended to gloat over the currency he found inside it. But Clyde knew exactly what Marco was after. He saw the quick motion of the man's left hand.

It dipped for an instant into the crook's pocket. With it went the blood-smeared note that Clyde had manufactured in the privacy of a hotel washroom.

Marco said in a hurried snarl, "O.K. Sammy! Hold these punks here a minute or two. If they make any squawk, blast them both!"

He turned and fled down the dark alley, the same way he had come. The sound of his racing feet died into silence. Sammy kept his gun on the two captives. He waited five minutes, with quick glances at his wrist watch.

Finally, his stained teeth showed in a triumphant leer.

"So long, stupid!" he told Clyde. "If you try to yelp for help or follow me. I'll dig a subway through your belly with a lead shovel!"

He faded with stealthy steps, his gun gleaming ominously in the hall darkness. Dorothy's hand tightened instantly on Clyde's arm.

"Don't try to follow him. You'll only be killed!"

She was playing her part in the conspiracy with great ease, Clyde thought bitterly. She should have been an actress. But he was content to follow her lead. He was no longer interested in the gunmen. What he wanted to do was to get back to Dorothy's apartment and find out whether the search of Rutledge Mann had been successful.

As soon as he had located a taxi and helped Dorothy inside, he suggested that they return to her home. Dorothy demurred at once. Her nerves were completely shattered, she said. What she needed was a drink.

Clyde knew that what she needed most was time to allow David Chester to get the loot from Harry Marco and sneak back to a hiding place in the blonde's apartment.

But Clyde didn't mind the delay. Mann had had plenty of time to search the apartment and scam. Clyde stopped off with the blonde at a nearby night spot and they both had a couple of drinks.

Then they started home.

In the cab, Clyde became very drunkenly amorous. He wanted an excuse to go upstairs with Dorothy, so he could get a good look at the apartment. If nothing was out of place, Clyde would know that Mann's search had been successful. His own assignment would be done. He kept insisting Dorothy invite him up for a nightcap.

"I think you had better say good-night down here in the cab," she whispered, when the taxi stopped in front of the apartment house.

"Don't be silly, darling," he breathed. "One more little drink won't hurt either of us. I promise I'll stay only five minutes."

"I'll see you some other time. I'll... I'll give you a date any night you want. Not now - please!"

"Come on," Clyde insisted. "Be nice! One more drink upstairs, and then I'll go home and dream about you."

"All right."

Clyde paid off the taxi driver. A smile of satisfaction curved his lips. But he had no idea of the ugly turn events had taken inside that sleek apartment of Dorothy Bruner.

He was entirely unaware that Rutledge Mann was in frightful peril!

CHAPTER XI. SILVER AND BLACK

RUTLEDGE MANN gave up hope when he felt his imprisoned hands begin to lose all feeling in the cruel grip of those saw-toothed steel cuffs.

He was unable to make the slightest move to free himself. He stared with dull despair at the drip of blood from his imprisoned wrists. He had been too hasty in his search. A mind smarter than his had trapped him.

Death for Mann would come with slow torture. With a shudder, he closed his eyes. He thought of the bloody death that had come to Charlie Horn in the blackness of a subway tunnel. That was a sample of the treatment he would receive.

He didn't expect death at the hands of Chester. It was the unknown supercriminal who ruled and directed

Chester, that Mann feared. His head sagged with pain; he was close to fainting. But a sudden sound made his eyes blink wide open.

Chester was returning to the secret room!

Mann could hear the faint thud of feet in the bathtub beyond the secret passage. The sound nerved him to a wild struggle. He fought dizzily to tear his bleeding hands loose from their encircling steel bands.

The pain clouded his vision. But for an instant he had a blinding stab of uncomprehending wonder.

The intruder had bounded into sight from the concealed passage. It wasn't Chester. Mann found himself staring at a calm face, with a strongly beaked nose and blazing eyes.

"The Shadow!"

It was a cry wrenched from pale lips barely able to frame the words. The shock of his unexpected deliverance was too much for Rutledge Mann. He fainted.

The Shadow sprang to his assistance. There was pity in those deep-set eyes, but The Shadow didn't allow pity to interfere with speed. He had entered the apartment because Mann's delayed departure seemed to indicate trouble. Now he found grim confirmation of his worst fears. Minutes, perhaps seconds, would herald the arrival of David Chester.

The Shadow didn't wish either Mann or himself to be discovered in the secret room.

He freed the unconscious prisoner without too much trouble. A sharp cutting instrument took care of the jointed, tubular rods that controlled the action of the automatic handcuffs. The Shadow didn't attempt to cut the cuffs themselves loose from Mann's bleeding wrists.

Time. He needed every second!

A glance at the safe showed that it was useless to attempt to force it open quickly. There remained the filing cabinet. All the drawers were empty. The cabinet was merely a burglar trap.

The Shadow turned his attention to the zinc-topped table on which stood the two test tubes that had so puzzled Mann. Flame kindled in The Shadow's eyes as he stared at the silvery liquid in one and the jet-black liquid in the other.

Like Mann, he uncorked the glass vials and spilled some of the liquid. Unlike Mann, his move was not accidental but deliberate.

He saw how quickly the two spilled drops vanished. He knew the action was too fast for ordinary evaporation. Mixing another drop of the silver and the black liquid, he noted how each color stubbornly retained its own identity. The silver again spread in wriggling filaments through the black, as Mann had observed earlier.

The Shadow suspected that these two queer substances were new and completely unknown types of ink. The black liquid contained no carbon judging from its external appearance. And certainly the silver stuff contained no carbon either, dyed or otherwise.

DARTING to a nearby desk, The Shadow picked up a pen. Having divined the fact that the two liquids were unknown types of ink, the mind of The Shadow leaped to a more daring surmise.

He wrote on a sheet of paper with the silver ink the following sum: \$50,000. It faded quickly to

nothingness. Then, carefully cleaning his pen, The Shadow dipped it into the black liquid. This time he wrote a larger figure. He wrote it over the blank space where he had inscribed the first sum. The new sum read, \$500,000.

For five slow minutes, The Shadow stared grimly at those second figures. Then they faded. But a strange thing happened - a thing that brought a gasp from The Shadow. He had expected this result, but the cleverness with which it worked filled him with unwilling admiration for the genius of an unknown criminal foe.

As the black figures faded, the hidden silver ones reappeared. They were silver no longer. Something had happened to the pale ink while it was latent on the white surface of the paper. It reappeared as jet-black!

And now, instead of \$500,000 The Shadow was staring at a smaller sum: \$50,000.

It was startling evidence of the way in which the swindle against John Harmon had been worked. It was proof of something even more startling. The Shadow, as a master of chemistry, was familiar with every known type of secret writing. This stuff was absolutely new to him.

No wonder the police had been fooled when they had tried to analyze Chester's check and bill of sale at the crime laboratory in Brooklyn!

With a quick gesture, The Shadow placed the recorked test tubes in an inner pocket of his black cloak. He stuffed the pocket with a handkerchief, to prevent a breakage of his precious loot. Then he bent over the unconscious figure of Rutledge Mann.

He brought back Mann to his senses with methods that here painful but necessary. Mann groaned. He glanced appealingly at his cuffed and bloody wrists, but The Shadow shook his head. The final freeing of Mann would have to come later. With a hand under each of the victim's armpits, The Shadow guided his agent from the secret chamber.

He manipulated the mechanism in the soap niche of the bathtub. It closed the entrance to the wall passage at the end of the tub.

The Shadow sprang to the medicine cabinet, where a tube of tooth paste lay uncapped. He capped the tube and disposed of the protruding inch of paste. By this action, he removed the only sign of disorder in the apartment. It would be a wordless signal to Clyde Burke, when he returned with the blonde, that the search had been successful.

The Shadow had barely accomplished his purpose when he seized Mann and hustled him quickly from the bathroom to the adjoining bedroom. His palm stifled the cry of pain that bubbled on Mann's pale lips.

Someone was entering the apartment by way of the front door! The click of a turning key was distinctly audible.

In a moment, the door slammed. Hasty footsteps rushed through the apartment. They came straight to the bedroom.

The taut face of David Chester was disclosed.

He saw no sign of The Shadow or of Rutledge Mann. Both had vanished behind a heavy drape that hung near the window. The Shadow had punctured a tiny hole in the thick drape. He was able to watch unseen the triumphant grin of Chester.

The man sprang at once into the bathroom. He headed for the bathtub and the secret passage that lay beyond the tiled wall.

He was gone only a short while. When he returned, a startling change had come over him. The grin was gone from his lips. Rage gleamed in his eyes.

Chester had discovered that his secret hide-out had been searched during his absence. He had seen the open filing cabinet, the snapped ends of the handcuffs. There were telltale drops of blood on the floor from Rutledge Mann's torn wrists.

And Chester had missed the test tubes that contained the silver and the black ink!

His whispered oaths were like a croon of death. But there was terror in him, too. The Shadow realized it from behind the security of the heavy drape. David Chester was obviously thinking of the consequences he might face from the pitiless leader he served.

The Shadow had no proof of the identity of that unknown leader. But he remembered the books on chemistry he had seen in the magnificent sunlit office of Benedict Stark. Was Benedict Stark the evil genius behind this amazingly concealed criminal organization?

THE SHADOW had no time to speculate. Again, there was a faint click from the front door of the apartment, as someone inserted a key.

Presently, the voices of a man and a woman echoed softly from the living room. Dorothy Bruner's coy giggle was audible. So was the more throaty laugh of Clyde Burke. Both were apparently in high spirits. The giggle was abruptly muffled by a kiss.

Then Dorothy said, "Sit down, and I'll mix us up a drink."

The face of David Chester was ghastly with rage as he listened in his bedroom. He tiptoed to a dresser and wrote a quick message on a slip of paper.

The Shadow watched from behind his concealing curtain, with a hard concentration. His gaze would have availed him nothing, were it not for a lucky accident. The mirror above the dresser was tilted. Dorothy had obviously tilted it earlier, in order to take a final admiring glance at her slim silken legs before she had gone out on her date with Clyde Burke.

The mirror reflected Chester's hasty scrawl upside down.

To The Shadow, the mental rightening of that scrawl was not too difficult a task. By the time Chester tiptoed to a wardrobe closet opposite where The Shadow lurked, the words of that hastily scrawled note were tucked away in the mind of The Shadow:

Get rid of him quick without making him suspicious.

Chester placed the paper in the pocket of a negligee that hung from a hanger in Dorothy's closet. Then he tiptoed noiselessly into the bathroom.

Dorothy came in a moment later. Her red lips were curved in a smile. She had no idea of the hidden drama going on all about her. With a quick gesture, she removed her wrap. For a moment, she hesitated before the open door of the closet. Then her smile deepened as she took out her negligee.

She removed her evening gown.

Would she find and read the note in the pocket of her negligee? The Shadow wanted her to. He wanted to get rid of Clyde, in order to facilitate the escape of himself and Rutledge Mann.

Dorothy donned the flimsy robe. Her smile faded when she slid her hand into the wide pocket of the negligee. Her face turned deathly pale as she read the note. She knew that something had gone seriously wrong!

Instantly, she changed her plans. Instead of detaining Clyde, she used her wiles to get rid of him. It wasn't an easy task. Clyde was determined to find out if the search of Rutledge Mann had ended satisfactorily. The only way he could tell was by examining every room in the apartment, to make sure nothing was out of place.

To humor him, Dorothy agreed to his peculiar request. Clyde looked drunk and stubborn. She figured it was the quickest way to get rid of him.

She even permitted him to enter her bedroom. Clyde saw nothing out of place. But he was taking no chances. There was still one room he hadn't seen.

"How about the bathroom?"

"It's probably very messy," Dorothy said quickly. "Wait till I see how it looks."

She went in hurriedly, carefully closing the door behind her. The Shadow, observant behind the bedroom curtain, knew why the blonde was so careful. She wanted to make sure that Chester had not left the tiled end of the tub open, disclosing the entrance to the secret chamber.

Evidently everything was in good order. Smilingly, Dorothy beckoned to Clyde to take a look. He made admiring comments. His smile was fuddled, as if he had taken too many drinks. But his eyes were alert. He could see no sign of anything out of place.

Satisfied, he withdrew. Dorothy saw him to the door, and after a long, lingering kiss, Clyde departed.

THE moment Clyde was gone, the blonde raced back to the bedroom. David Chester was waiting for her. His grim news brought a cry of alarm from Dorothy.

"Are you sure?" she gasped.

"Of course, I'm sure! My secret room was searched. Two vials of ink have been stolen. Whoever made the search was caught by the handcuffs in the filing cabinet. But someone else released him!"

"Who could it have been?"

"Who else but The Shadow!" Chester snarled. "He sent one of his damned henchmen here, and when the fellow fell into my trap, The Shadow saved his bacon."

"What does it mean?"

"It means," Chester replied with deadly slowness, "that the reporter you thought was so dumb is pretty smart! I don't believe that note we went to so much trouble to get away from Clyde Burke is genuine. I think it was a trick to lure both of us away from the apartment."

With an oath, Chester crossed the bedroom and picked up the telephone.

Had he walked three steps farther and moved the heavy window drape aside, he would have discovered both Rutledge Mann and The Shadow. But he was too frightened to think of anything but the urgent need

to get in touch with his mysterious chief.

The number Chester dialed was one familiar to The Shadow. It was the number of the Chinese restaurant where the Shadow had come within an inch of having his face destroyed by acid.

"Hello! Is this Ho Fang...? I've got to get in touch with the chief immediately. What's the special phone number for tonight?" Chester listened carefully, nodded to himself.

"Thank you."

He hung up, and wiped the sweat from his forehead. His hands were trembling. Evidently the prospect of reporting his blundering behavior to his unknown chief filled him with forebodings. He dialed again, with such quick nervous haste that The Shadow, in spite of his strained attention, was unable to distinguish the separate clicks of the rapidly twisting dial.

He had no idea what number Chester had called. Even if he had, it would have availed him little. From the scrap of talk he had already listened to, he was aware that the telephone link to a master criminal was changed daily.

Chester's conversation was brief. He did more listening, than talking. When he hung up, he looked like a corpse. His eyes were sunk in his head.

"The note was a fake!" he screeched. "There was no paper left in Charlie Horn's shoe for anyone to find! Horn's body was stripped and searched before he was killed, in order to make sure there would be no hidden clue for the police."

"What else did the chief say?" Dorothy whispered through terrified lips.

"He said that you and I had forfeited our lives by making this blunder tonight."

"No, no! He can't kill us! We've served him too well. It's the first mistake we've ever -"

"One mistake is a death sentence." Chester replied hollowly. "We were warned of that before we began. But there's a ray of hope. Maybe we can yet save our lives, if fate is with us."

"How?"

"He said he may wish to use us later on, in a scheme to take care of The Shadow. He'll let us know our fate tomorrow."

"I can't stand it," Dorothy shuddered. "Why don't we pack up and flee? Get out of the country! Europe - South America - anywhere!"

"What good would that do? You know what always happens to people who try that. Remember the man who was blown to pieces in Paris? And the woman who was found dead of poison in Buenos Aires last year? I tell you, it's hopeless!"

"He won't kill me!" Dorothy cried. "I'll fight back! I'll -"

"Fight back? Against whom? We don't even know who our chief is! You can't fight nothing! Or flee from it, either! We've got to wait until he decides what he wishes to do with us."

Chester groaned.

"Fix me up a stiff drink. I need one!"

They walked slowly from the bedroom like pale figures cut from cardboard. They disappeared in the direction of the pantry.

THE moment they were gone, the cloaked form of The Shadow slid quietly from behind the window curtain. His strong arm supported Rutledge Mann.

Mann was suffering torture from the steel teeth of the handcuffs that bit into his wrists. But he uttered no sound. The Shadow guided him noiselessly through the empty living room to the front door. They vanished without a single betraying sound.

The Shadow didn't ring for the elevator. He assisted Mann to descend flight after flight of fire stairs, until they reached the second-floor level. Only then did the finger of The Shadow press the button to summon the elevator.

When the car ascended and stopped, there was no one in the corridor. The operator scratched his head and waited.

This delay gave The Shadow all the time he needed to beat an unobserved retreat with Mann. The two drove swiftly away in The Shadow's speedy car, which was parked nearby at the curb.

At a place reserved for just such emergencies as the one that now confronted him, The Shadow found tools to free Rutledge Mann from the cruel bite of the steel cuffs. Then he undressed his fainting assistant and put him to bed.

Quickly, The Shadow raced downstairs to his waiting car. But before the car started, The Shadow had vanished. In his place was a calm-featured, well-dressed gentleman with a faint smile on his lips.

Lamont Cranston.

Cranston drove swiftly toward the Chinese restaurant.

The restaurant was the focal point of this whole conspiracy! He had heard the name of Ho Fang, mentioned. He identified Ho Fang as the fat Chinaman who had stopped him when he had tried, in his disguise as an old man, to enter a certain dining alcove without first giving the password.

Ho Fang was evidently a contact man for the criminal organization. To the Chinaman was entrusted the knowledge of the telephone numbers by which members of the gang could get in quick touch with the Prince of Evil.

That was the name by which The Shadow now thought of his powerful and unknown foe: Prince of Evil!

By seizing Ho Fang, he might at one quick blow attain the means of ripping the shroud of mystery from the most dangerous supercriminal he had ever battled against.

But he was doomed again to failure. Cranston sensed it long before he reached the restaurant. There was a sullen red glow in the night sky. His arrival at the restaurant found the street jammed with fire apparatus.

The building was a spouting inferno of flame. So was the building next door - the one that contained the empty store on the ground floor.

As Cranston fought nearer through the crowd, there was a sudden yell from the spectators. The crowd swayed back. With a thunderous roar, the whole front of the building collapsed. The wall at the side toppled a moment later.

The Shadow suspected explosives had helped along the work of the flames. He suspected more. Deep in the heart of those flames lay the blackened body of the Chinaman, Ho Fang.

The ruins would disclose no hint of secret passages in that rat's nest of crime, by the time the fire cooled enough to permit an inspection of the ruined premises.

The roar of the mounting flames made a sound like sardonic laughter in Cranston's ears. Prince of Evil! Who was he? Could he really be the billionaire figure of Benedict Stark?

Into The Shadow's eyes came a deep gleam, as if he were looking into the future.

CHAPTER XII. TWO IN ONE

THE New York home of Benedict Stark was an imposing mansion at the northerly tip of Manhattan Island, near Inwood Hill Park. It overlooked the broad sweep of the Hudson River. A park-like lawn surrounded the mansion.

On the evening following the terrific fire that had destroyed the Chinese restaurant of Ho Fang, Lamont Cranston rang the bell at the imposing portal.

This was the evening of the reception to which Stark had invited both Lamont Cranston and Kent Allard. He had placed The Shadow in an unpleasant situation.

The Shadow would have to be both Lamont Cranston and Kent Allard tonight! More difficult than that, as Cranston, he had to introduce Allard as a separate individual!

It seemed like a task requiring magic. But The Shadow smiled as he rang the doorbell. He had figured out an amazingly clever scheme. It would require nerve and proper timing. Much would depend on Harry Vincent, his main secret agent.

Stark's gray-haired butler looked startled as he opened the door.

"Good evening, sir. You're rather early. You're the first guest to arrive."

Cranston's smile was bland. His early arrival was no accident. He wanted to be the first at the party.

He found the huge living room empty. There was no sign of Benedict Stark. The butler had a quick explanation for the discourteous absence of the billionaire. Too quick an excuse, Cranston thought instantly.

"The master is asleep, sir," the butler said. "He usually takes a nap before his guests arrive. He tires easily, you know. I have strict orders not to disturb him."

Cranston nodded carelessly. But, inwardly, he became alert. Stark was mentally keen, physically strong. Wherever he was, it was certain he was not asleep.

After the butler had departed to the rear of the house, Cranston walked quietly through an arched doorway into Stark's magnificent picture gallery. He had smelled cigarette smoke. He suspected someone else had already arrived, in spite of the butler's denial.

He found a tall, good-looking young man admiring the paintings. One glance, and Cranston felt a sharp stab of concern. The young man was Bob Harmon, who had been hired so mysteriously by Stark after the tragic suicide of Bob's father and the "accidental" poisoning of his invalid mother.

Was more crime in prospect? Was Bob destined to be a new victim of the "unlucky curse" that seemed to hang over the Harmon family?

The young man didn't seem worried. He looked clean-cut and handsome in his evening clothes.

"Mr. Stark is training me as one of his personal secretaries," he said. "He thought I ought to have plenty of social experience. So he invited me here tonight. I think he's a remarkable man."

Cranston agreed dryly. As soon as possible, he found a convenient excuse to leave Bob. It was not difficult. The young man was deeply interested in the paintings.

Cranston retreated through the living room and gained the quiet expanse of the dimly lighted front hall.

After a quick glance to make sure that he wasn't observed, he slipped soundlessly up the staircase.

His goal was the master bedroom of Benedict Stark. He knew exactly where it was, because he had pumped Bob in his lazy conversation with the lad.

The door was closed and locked. There was no light burning inside the bedroom, as Cranston discovered when he applied a cautious eye to the keyhole. But there was enough moonlight coming through the window to show that the bed was unoccupied and the room empty.

The window had been raised from the bottom. Stark, for some unknown reason, had furtively left the mansion! The rungs of a ladder outside the moonlit window sill showed how Stark had departed - and would presumably return.

Crouched outside the door in the dimly lighted corridor, The Shadow waited.

He didn't have to wait long.

The face of Benedict Stark appeared suddenly on the ladder outside the window. He squirmed inside. The ladder vanished. Cranston suspected it was being promptly removed by the sly butler.

A click, and the bedroom was filled with light. Stark's face was revealed in all its ugliness. There was more than physical ugliness in it now. Cruelty gleamed in his small eyes. He uttered a malevolent laugh.

The next instant, Stark whirled and stared at the locked door of his room. The Shadow hadn't uttered a sound outside the keyhole, yet Stark sensed peril. He seemed to have the incredible sense perceptions of a wild beast. He began to tiptoe swiftly toward the locked door.

Lamont Cranston fled to the staircase.

As he descended, he heard a door close in the rear of the house. He was afraid of the return of the butler. It increased his speed. He heard a muffled exclamation from someone hurrying toward the front hallway from the pantry.

But Cranston had already reached the shelter of the living room. He slowed his pace and went through the arched opening to the picture gallery. Bob Harmon smiled at him. Cranston was deep in conversation with the lad when the butler peered in.

"I... thought I heard someone on the main staircase," the butler said, with a sharp glance at Cranston.

"Really? Perhaps your master has awakened and is coming to join us," Cranston yawned.

It was the right thing to say, for almost at the next instant Benedict Stark himself entered the room. He

was bland and smiling. No trace of hate remained in his unpleasant eyes. He laughed when Cranston apologized for his early arrival.

"It's quite all right. You didn't wake me."

He got rid of the butler with a curt order. Then his voice became very bland. To Cranston's amazement, Stark calmly disclosed that he had not been asleep upstairs. Staring at his visitor, he admitted that he had been away from his home until a few moments ago!

He was either badly rattled by his suspicion of Cranston, or hellishly clever. Cranston decided on the latter explanation, as he listened to the billionaire's story.

Stark explained that he had had to attend an important business conference at the home of his lawyer. A vast financial merger was being arranged, one that required secrecy.

So Stark had pretended to go to his bedroom for a nap in order to be able to deny that he had taken part in a merger conference, if a rumor of what was going on reached Wall Street. He mentioned the name of his lawyer - Richard Liophant.

"I know I can rely on your discretion," Stark concluded. "Otherwise I wouldn't have told you this."

Cranston nodded courteously. But his mind was working swiftly, to discover the real answer to Stark's amazingly frank confession. Cranston was convinced that Stark suspected his hidden presence outside the locked bedroom door. Being smart, Stark had neatly killed Cranston's hot clue with an alibi that included his lawyer, Richard Liophant.

Liophant enjoyed an excellent reputation. It was inconceivable that he would lie to protect Stark and cover crime.

There was a faint sneer on Stark's lips as he abruptly changed the subject. He asked about Kent Allard.

"I thought you were bringing Allard with you, to introduce him to me."

Cranston was ready with a smooth explanation. He asserted that Allard was flying from Washington and was due very soon at Newark Airport. Allard intended to come straight from the airport to the Stark mansion, for a brief visit before he took the air again to fly to Boston.

Cranston paused. Then, with an innocent tone he exploded his well planned little bombshell.

"Why don't you send your chauffeur to the airport to meet Allard?" he told Stark. "I'm sure that Allard would appreciate it, if your chauffeur greeted him the moment he stepped from the plane and drove him here without loss of time."

FOR a moment, Benedict Stark looked thunderstruck. It was plain that he suspected Kent Allard and Lamont Cranston were the same man. But how could that be, if Cranston's suggestion was genuine?

Stark's small eyes gleamed. He called his chauffeur and told him to drive to the airport at once. With a tight-lipped smile, he further instructed the chauffeur not to wait outside the field in the car, but to be on hand when Kent Allard stepped from the transport plane.

His excuse was that Allard might be missed in the confusion of landing. But Cranston knew the real reason for this maneuver. Stark wanted to be sure that Allard actually arrived in the plane.

The chauffeur departed. Cranston smiled dimly. His well-laid scheme to fool Stark was ticking like a

clock.

Guests began to arrive at the mansion. There were not very many, but all of them were important. The governor of the State was there, with his wife. So were a couple of senators. There was a famous screen actress, a few corporation officials, and one or two prominent social figures.

Cranston enjoyed meeting them.

Meanwhile, Stark's chauffeur had met the Washington plane at Newark Airport. He saw Allard step from the cabin, recognized him at once from his description. He bowed and escorted him to the waiting limousine.

The arriving air traveler, tipped off by The Shadow, had expected this. He made no objection to the arrangement.

The smiling, good-looking young aviator was not, of course, Kent Allard. Harry Vincent was playing a role in which he had been well tutored. His face had been deftly altered to fit the part. A young man, he was able to make the change to Kent Allard without too much trouble.

He was calm as he rode to the Stark mansion. But there was anxiety beneath that calm. The most dangerous part of the trick was still to come. Harry Vincent knew nothing about the technicalities of aviation, and Benedict Stark did.

It was important for Harry to avoid talk with the billionaire. Harry's job was merely to convince Stark that Allard had actually arrived from Washington by air, and that Allard and Cranston were two separate persons.

After that, the rest was up to The Shadow.

There was a hush of interest as Harry entered the Stark living room. The fame of Kent Allard was tremendous. A shy man, he seldom went anywhere. Everyone present was anxious to meet him.

Particularly the tight-lipped Benedict Stark!

After Stark had shaken hands with the handsome visitor, he attempted to sound him out on a subject concerning which Harry Vincent knew practically nothing.

Harry parried the attempt skillfully. He announced that he was tired and dusty after his journey. Could he retire for a moment and make himself presentable?

A servant was called to direct him. As he left on the heels of his guide, he turned back for an instant.

"Oh, by the way, Cranston! Do you mind coming with me while I clean up? I've arranged everything for that hunting trip by air we planned to take next month. I'd like to tell you some of the -"

Cranston said deftly to the others, "Excuse me." He followed his agent up the broad stairs, to a beautifully tiled washroom the second floor.

As soon as the servant departed, a swift transformation took place.

Cranston, with a few deft motions around his face, got rid of the outward appearance of Lamont Cranston. This was easy, because the role of Lamont Cranston was merely a convenient cover-up for the real identity of The Shadow.

The Shadow's real identity was Kent Allard! He himself was the famous aviator so renowned for shyness

and inaccessibility.

Facing Harry Vincent, he congratulated himself on the skill with which he had transformed his agent. The two looked like peas in a pod.

The Shadow took the white gardenia from Harry's lapel. His voice changed as he whispered final instructions. It was younger, more vibrant - the voice of Allard.

Harry Vincent went out the washroom window. He dropped noiselessly to the soft turf in the rear of the mansion, sneaked through the darkness toward the empty limousine parked out front. The chauffeur had gone inside the servants' quarters for a smoke and a cup of coffee. The coast was clear.

Vincent entered the parked limousine. He stretched himself as flat as he could on the floor, and covered himself with a lap robe.

Part 2 of a clever substitution had been accomplished safely. Part 3 still remained.

THE SHADOW left the washroom as Kent Allard. He hurried to the living room and mingled socially with the guests, particularly Benedict Stark. Stark was completely unaware that in the space of ten minutes he had greeted two different men as Kent Allard.

Stark began to pump The Shadow on the subject of aviation. The Shadow welcomed the test. He was amazed by the tremendous technical knowledge Stark had concerning planes and problems of flying. But smart as Stark was on the subject, The Shadow was smarter. Why not? He himself was actually Kent Allard!

A long talk between him and Stark soon put the billionaire hopelessly out of his depth. The suspicious gleam faded from Stark's small eyes. He was satisfied he had been mistaken in his theory about Allard. He allowed other people to chat with the famous aviator.

But The Shadow didn't deceive himself. He knew he was still in peril. At any moment, Stark would realize that Lamont Cranston was not to be seen anywhere. Allard would have to leave instantly to make the deception perfect.

The Shadow glanced at his watch and uttered a regretful exclamation. His plane, he explained, was waiting to take him to Boston. He had an appointment there, that couldn't be broken. He had enjoyed his visit with Stark, and hoped to come again. Would Stark excuse him and accept his apologies for having to leave so soon?

Stark himself accompanied The Shadow to the door. He watched him get into the limousine. He heard him say in a brisk tone: "Newark Airport."

Stark was satisfied. He went back into the mansion and rejoined his guests.

However, if he had remained outside and glanced toward the nearest corner, Stark might have observed Part 3 of The Shadow's masterpiece of deception and substitution.

The limousine halted for a red traffic light. The moment it did, a taxicab scraped fenders with it on the left side. Angrily, the chauffeur's head turned. The cab driver was deliberately insulting; he kept the chauffeur busy arguing. He was Moe Shrevnitz.

Under cover of the interruption, the rear door of the limousine opened gently. The Shadow slipped unseen to the pavement. The moment he did so, Harry Vincent rose from his concealment beneath the lap robe on the floor and slid swiftly to the seat vacated by The Shadow.

It was done so neatly that the chauffeur was unaware of the change. Glancing back as the traffic light changed to green, he saw Kent Allard still sitting calmly where he was supposed to sit. The faint click of the door was what had disturbed the chauffeur.

"I'm afraid it's improperly closed," he said through the speaking tube, to his distinguished passenger.

"Quite so," Vincent replied smoothly. He slammed it tightly shut.

The car gathered speed. It sped southward and through the Holland Tunnel to the Newark Airport. Vincent smilingly took his seat in a plane.

The chauffeur watched until the ship was a speck in the black sky. Satisfied, he drove homeward, to make his report to Benedict Stark that everything was normal.

He had no idea that the real Kent Allard was still in the Stark mansion. The Shadow had sneaked back to the house through the washroom window in the rear.

The Shadow wasted no time. He had thrown away Harry Vincent's white gardenia. His dark evening clothes didn't have to be touched. A few deft touches with grease paint and putty dimmed his youthful handsomeness and added the slightly older appearance of Cranston.

AS Cranston, The Shadow hurried downstairs. He glanced about for the prettiest woman he could find. He was deep in conversation with the movie actress, in one of the adjoining rooms, when he felt the hand of Benedict Stark touch his shoulder lightly.

"I've been looking for you, Cranston, ever since your friend Allard left. Where in the world have you been?"

"You'll have to excuse us for our rudeness," the actress said smilingly. "Mr. Cranston is a fascinating talker."

Innocently, she had given The Shadow the alibi he needed. It sounded as if he had been flirting with her during the entire time he had been out of Stark's sight.

Cranston was completely triumphant. But, suddenly, he had a strange feeling of impending evil. A servant had approached Stark with eager haste.

"You're wanted on the telephone, sir. Something important."

To Cranston, it seemed that Stark had expected that interruption. His eyes were, for an instant, like cold, pitiless flame.

"I'll take the call here in the living room. Plug in the phone, please."

Cranston wondered why the servant had brought a portable phone. If the message was so important, why did Stark answer it before the eyes and ears of his guests? Did he want them to hear what was said?

Cranston watched Stark. He saw the billionaire's face register surprise, shock - then terror.

"Oh, that's horrible! It can't be! Are you sure? Yes - he's here. But I - I can't bear to tell him!"

He turned to stare at two people - Lamont Cranston and young Bob Harmon.

"It's the police," he whispered. "Inspector Cardona is calling. There's been a terrible murder! The police

have just discovered the crime."

Stark hesitated. Then with a harsh rasp, he spoke again.

"The victim is Jane Harmon - poor Bob's sister. Her body was found in her bedroom, horribly mutilated!"

Cranston seized the phone. He suspected a trick of some kind. But the voice at the other end of the wire was Inspector Cardona's. He verified what Stark had said.

Bob Harmon was staring dazedly at Cranston. "My sister! Is it... true?" His face was as white as chalk.

Cranston didn't reply, but his silent nod was a death warrant.

Bob Harmon tried to take a faltering step toward the door. He reeled and fainted. Someone ran to his aid.

Cranston kept his gaze on Stark. There was a sparkle in the eyes of the billionaire host, a gloating gleam that was quickly masked. Cranston wasn't even sure that he had read the expression rightly.

Prince of Evil! Was Benedict Stark that unknown supercriminal? Had he struck again at the doomed Harmon family; this time, directly under the baffled eyes of The Shadow?

CHAPTER XIII. VICTORY - AND DEFEAT

A LIMOUSINE sped swiftly through the darkness of upper Manhattan. It was driven by Benedict Stark's chauffeur. It was heading at breakneck pace for the Harmon home.

Bob Harmon sat in limp horror on the rear seat, supported by Stark and Lamont Cranston. The news of his sister's murder had transformed him into a rigid ghost of his former self. Whenever he could force himself to speak, his trembling lips framed bitter curses at himself.

"I shouldn't have left Jane alone at home," he gasped.

"You shouldn't be going there now," Stark said. "You've had a terrible shock. You ought to spare yourself a worse one."

Bob Harmon shook his head.

"I've got to find out why Jane was killed - and by whom! Perhaps I can find a clue."

"I still think you ought to have remained at my home, to get a better grip on your nerves," Stark insisted.

Cranston wondered why Stark stuck to the point so persistently. He had done his best to dissuade Bob from looking at the body of his sister. He had declared that it was better to leave things in the hands of the police. But when Bob had insisted on rushing to the scene of the crime, Stark abruptly changed his tactics. He decided that he, too, would go.

His excuse was that he could help Lamont Cranston take care of the grief-stricken lad. Cranston wondered if that was Stark's only reason.

The limousine made a swift trip southward along the darkened avenues of the West Side. It drew to an abrupt halt outside the Harmon home.

A policeman was on duty at the front door of the house. A small crowd had already collected, drawn

together by the lure of tragedy and crime. The cop scowled at the three men who raced across the sidewalk from the swanky limousine.

"Sorry. No one's allowed in! Orders."

But he changed his mind when he learned the identity of the trio. Orders didn't apply to men of the caliber of Lamont Cranston and Benedict Stark. The cop nodded respectfully. There was pity in his eyes as he realized who the pale young man was.

"Her brother, eh? O.K. I'll speak to the inspector."

The inspector was Joe Cardona. He greeted Cranston and Stark crisply. He gave Bob a slower, more sympathetic stare.

"You better stay downstairs, son. It's not exactly a pretty sight to look at."

But Bob shook his head.

"I've got to see my sister... to know how she... was killed."

"All right," Cardona said. "The body's upstairs in the bedroom."

He stayed close to Bob's elbow. Upstairs, a cop moved aside. Cardona opened a door. His hand was firmly on Bob's arm when the boy stepped into the room. Cardona's caution was needed. Bob uttered a shrill cry as he recognized the bloodstained clothing of the girl on the floor.

"Jane!"

Cardona caught him as he fell. He carried the limp figure to the bed.

Lamont Cranston looked grim as he stared at the victim of a vicious murderer. The corpse lay on the floor midway between the dressing table and the rear window. It would have been impossible to identify her except for her clothing.

Her head had been chopped from her body!

"We haven't been able to find the missing head," Cardona said, in answer to Cranston's unspoken question. "The killer carried it off with him. God only knows why! He must have been a madman - a degenerate of some kind."

"Surely he left a clue?" Benedict Stark said softly.

"Nothing," Cardona growled. "We went over this room with a fine-tooth comb. No fingerprints. No understandable motive. No nothing!"

"A pity," Stark said. "I wonder why he chopped off the unfortunate girl's head."

CRANSTON wondered about that, too. He didn't voice the quick thought that flamed into his keen mind. There was no sense to the horrible beheading of the corpse. It had gained the murderer nothing except an added problem of disposing of the severed head elsewhere.

That was the simplest view of the puzzle. But suppose the stealing of a dismembered head had gained the murderer something! Could it be the attempt of an infinitely clever criminal to fool Bob Harmon and the police?

Suppose the dead woman were not Jane Harmon at all! A maimed body dressed in Jane Harmon's clothes!

With the head missing, it would be a difficult substitution to prove. An examination of the corpse's fingerprints wouldn't help. Jane had never had her prints recorded. Bob would identify the clothing as that of his sister. To the police, there would be nothing wrong with that identification. They would merely widen their search to locate the missing head.

The Shadow doubted if they would ever find it.

His unspoken deductions went a step further. If his theory were correct, he could guess who that unfortunate victim on the floor really was. Dorothy Bruner, the blond wife of the crooked David Chester!

The Shadow remembered certain terrified words he had heard spoken in the bedroom of the Chester apartment while he and Rutledge Mann had lurked in hiding behind a heavy window drape. Chester had telephoned his unknown chief, to report the discovery and search of his secret room. It had brought a prompt death sentence to Chester and Dorothy.

Was this headless corpse in the Harmon home the answer? And if so, why had Jane Harmon been kidnapped to make it look as if she herself was the killer's bloody victim?

It seemed to hint at a cruelty far more ugly than murder. The Shadow suspected a plot directed not only at a kidnapped and living Jane, but at her brother Bob.

Bob had been carried downstairs after his collapse. When he recovered, he found Benedict Stark talking gently to him. Stark urged the young man to return to his, Stark's, mansion in order to rest and recover from the shock of his sister's death.

But Cranston quickly intervened.

"I'll take care of Bob," he said firmly. "He'll be quite comfortable in my suite at the Cobalt Club. There's no need for you to trouble yourself, Mr. Stark."

"It will be no trouble," Stark replied.

Then he saw the expression in Cranston's cool, level eyes. There was challenge in those eyes, an unspoken determination not to let Bob out of his sight. Stark shrugged.

"Whatever you think best," he agreed, his voice like silk.

He was driven away, presently, in his limousine. After Bob had regained some measure of control over himself, Cranston took him to the Cobalt Club.

In his quiet suite at the club, Cranston spoke sharply to the dazed lad.

"I've got to leave you here for a short while," he said. "Whatever you do, do not for any reason whatever leave this room! Keep the door locked. You're in deadly peril! Do you understand me?"

Bob nodded dully. Tears were streaming down his cheeks. He walked to a couch and threw himself face downward. Cranston felt sorry for him, but he was powerless to ease the boy's agony. He dared not tell Bob that he suspected his sister was still alive. It might ruin everything, by some premature move of the grief-stricken lad.

Meanwhile, Cranston had an important visit to make.

When he left the Cobalt Club, he carried a small brief case with him. He drove swiftly to the East Side apartment building where Dorothy Bruner lived. He entered by the tradesmen's alley and vanished into the dark basement. At this hour of the night the basement was deserted.

In the darkness, Cranston made a quick change of garments, taking others from the brief case. When he stepped into the empty rear service elevator, he was robed entirely in black. A slouch hat shaded his keen eyes. The collar of his cloak covered his throat and chin. Black gloves were on his tapering fingers.

He had become The Shadow!

THE SHADOW got into Dorothy Bruner's apartment by the rear door. Not the slightest sound betrayed his cautious movements. He passed from the kitchen to the pantry, stowed the briefcase there, and continued down a long, narrow corridor to the living room.

The living room door was closed. But there was light, beyond that closed door - the only light in the entire apartment.

Kneeling, The Shadow peered briefly through the keyhole. What he saw stiffened him into immediate action. With a quick movement, he was on his feet. His gloved hand whirled the knob and threw open the door.

A gun menaced the surprised and snarling figure of David Chester.

Chester was on his knees alongside a large leather suitcase. The suitcase was open. Chester had been engaged in packing it with bundles of currency. The bundles were piled helter-skelter on the floor.

"The Shadow!" he screamed, as he recognized the black-robed figure.

He cringed backward, upsetting one of the packages of currency. The Shadow saw the denomination of the topmost bill. It was a thousand-dollar bank note!

It was as evident that Chester had been interrupted just at the moment when he was prepared to flee with a fortune. Greed was stamped on his face. He uttered an oath as he heard grim laughter from The Shadow.

His voice edged to softness, The Shadow said:

"You're a fool!"

His sharp eyes, staring at the packages of currency, had detected something not yet realized by Chester.

"Look!"

A black-gloved finger of The Shadow's left hand pointed toward one of the bundles of money.

"Open it!" the voice of The Shadow continued.

Hypnotized by the strange mockery in that voice, Chester broke open the seal of the package. Instantly, he uttered a cry of amazement and rage. Only the top and bottom bills in that bundle were, genuine thousand-dollar notes. The rest was blank and worthless paper.

Chester had been double-crossed!

He knew it now. The sharp eyes of The Shadow had proved it to him. Instead of fleeing with a fortune, Chester was packing a suitcase with worthless junk.

The gun of The Shadow remained pointed grimly at the deluded crook.

"Talk!" said his measured voice. "Confess!"

Chester was afraid to utter a sound. He feared The Shadow, but he feared his unknown chief even more.

He said nothing, until the crisp words of The Shadow informed him that Dorothy Bruner had been trapped and killed.

"Murdered? Where? How do you know?"

"In a bedroom in the Harmon home. She was beheaded."

Chester uttered a cry of terror. There was no mistaking The Shadow's sincerity. Chester knew that Dorothy had gone to the Harmon house and why she had gone. He realized, too late, that, like himself, she had been double-crossed. Dorothy's reward for service had been a horrible death.

The shock of that knowledge unlocked Chester's pale lips. He began to babble fiercely as much as he knew. He had forgotten his dread of The Shadow and the law. All he wanted now was revenge.

He admitted that Dorothy Bruner had been sent to the Harmon home to kidnap Jane. The plan was to ship Jane to South America and keep her there by force, unknown to anyone. Dorothy had obeyed the chief's order, hoping to join Chester as soon as she had attended to the kidnapping of Jane.

Dorothy intended to flee with Chester aboard a ship leaving for Europe. Chester was bringing with him every penny of cash he could lay his hands on. But the unknown chief must have suspected that Chester planned to skip. He had tampered with every package of money hidden in the safe within Chester's secret chamber.

There was more loot than that, Chester gasped. Since the fire at the Chinese restaurant, Chester had been unable to contact his secret chief directly. Money from various crooked enterprises had piled up.

"Where?" The Shadow rasped.

Chester ripped open the front of his shirt. A key was disclosed on a gold chain suspended about his neck. He snapped the chain and tossed the key at The Shadow's feet. The Shadow bent and seized it.

With pale lips, Chester whispered an address. He was eager to cooperate now - to bring about the exposure of a fiendish supercriminal who had used Dorothy as a pawn and then killed her.

"His name?" The Shadow said harshly.

Chester wrung his hands in despair. He didn't know. He had never known! Not once in his entire association with the Prince of Evil had he ever laid eyes on the man.

But the next question of The Shadow brought an understandable gleam to Chester's revengeful eyes.

"How was your wife instructed to go to the Harmon home tonight? A message? A man?"

"A man. He came here after I had been warned by phone to obey whatever -"

"Describe him."

Chester's mouth opened; but no sound came from his lips. There was a queer blue circlet on his forehead. It had been stamped there with appalling suddenness. A bullet hole!

From the doorway of the living room had come a faint sound, like a wheeze.

David Chester crashed to the floor, stone-dead, with a bullet in his brain. A bullet fired from a silenced gun.

THE SHADOW saw the gun as he whirled. A hand was visible at the frame of the doorway. A second bullet from the concealed murderer whizzed past The Shadow as he flung himself downward. He escaped death, but it gave the hidden marksman a chance to flee.

There was a swift race of disappearing feet.

By the time The Shadow reached the outer hall, the spinning arrow above the elevator shaft showed that the car was dropping at full speed toward the street level.

The Shadow raced down the stairs. When he reached the lobby, he found the car resting quietly in the shaft, its door wide open. The operator was dead. He had been shot through the temple.

The switchboard operator at the front of the lobby was dead, too. The escaping murderer had taken no chances on leaving a living witness behind him. There was no clue to tell who he was or what he looked like.

Further pursuit was useless.

The Shadow leaped into the elevator and raced it upward. He found his briefcase where he had secreted it in the pantry of Chester's apartment. He changed back to the, well-dressed appearance of Lamont Cranston. Using the rear service elevator, he made a quick retreat from the building.

He was just in time. A police whistle was blowing shrilly on the sidewalk. Someone had already discovered the dead switchboard operator in the apartment building lobby.

Before the police radio cars began to arrive, Lamont Cranston walked quietly to a hack stand in an adjoining street. Once in a cab, he instructed the driver.

Presently, The Shadow saw the lights of a telegraph office. He told the driver to stop, went in the building.

He picked up a telegram envelope and slipped a key into it. It was the key that had been on a thin gold chain around the neck of David Chester.

On a telegraph blank. The Shadow wrote an address. The address had been gasped out hurriedly by Chester, but The Shadow was certain that he remembered it correctly.

Below the address he wrote a hurried note, explaining in quick detail certain instructions he wanted obeyed at once. He sealed and addressed the envelope after making grimly sure that it contained the key and the message.

Then he smiled at the sleepy night manager, told him he wanted messenger service.

A uniformed boy rose from a long bench in the rear.

"This envelope is to be delivered at once to Mr. Rutledge Mann," Cranston said.

He paid the service fee, added extra money for taxi fare, and included a big tip.

Cranston left the telegraph office with a lighter step. He had put certain forces into motion. His next move would be to explain a little of what was going on to the grief-stricken Bob Harmon. He could tell Bob enough to assure him that his sister was still alive.

The Shadow had a hunch he was going to be able to rescue Jane before too long. Bob Harmon was the keystone of his whole plan.

He entered the Cobalt Club and went hurriedly to his suite. One glance, and his face paled. Again The Shadow had received an unexpected blow from a cunning master of crime.

Bob Harmon was gone!

CHAPTER XIV. TRIPLE DOOM

FAR downtown, on the lower East Side of Manhattan, stood an ancient and sagging frame house.

High above it, like a gaunt shadow, stretched the shore span of the Brooklyn Bridge. Over the East River, the bridge was a thing of beauty. But here inshore, where it spanned narrow streets and the roofs of dingy tenements, the bridge looked down on ugliness and decay.

The frame house was flanked on either side by taller brick buildings. Their closeness seemed to be the only thing that kept it from collapsing. Paint hadn't been applied to it in years. Its chimney sagged. The windows were boarded up.

From its appearance, no human being had set foot across that dusty threshold in many years.

Its appearance, however, was deceptive. There was a man hidden inside the house. He was opening the street door with stealthy care.

The man peered out cautiously, to make sure that there was no one in sight along the narrow street. Then he picked up two heavy objects and emerged.

The heavy objects were two suitcases. He hurried quickly westward, panting as he lugged his heavy burdens.

The stealthy figure was Rutledge Mann.

He had obeyed the orders of The Shadow brought to him by the telegraph messenger. The address in the message was that of this ancient frame house in the shadow of Brooklyn Bridge. The key from the gold chain about the neck of David Chester had opened the front door of the disreputable old shack. Rutledge Mann had searched its crumbling interior with swift thoroughness.

Under the worn floor boards in an upper room, he had found what The Shadow had anticipated. Money! A whole secret cache of it. More than four hundred thousand dollars in bank notes!

It represented profits from some of the cunning business deals that had been made by the sly Chester. Chester had been unable to turn it over to his chief for a simple physical reason.

Charlie Horn, his usual go-between was now dead, killed for attempting to squeal to The Shadow. The Chinese restaurant where Horn had made his contacts with the unknown supercriminal, was now burned

down. The Chinaman, Ho Fang, had been burned to death.

All direct contact between Chester and the Prince of Evil had been temporarily blocked. That was why Rutledge Mann had been able to fill two suitcases with a hoarded sum of cash that amounted to nearly half a million dollars.

He was in double peril as he hurried stealthily along these narrow, crooked streets under the shadow of Brooklyn Bridge. Men had been held up and murdered in this grim neighborhood for the price of a few drinks. If a hint of the contents of those suitcases became known to the rat-faced dwellers of cellars and dives, Rutledge Mann's throat would be slashed in the twinkling of an eye.

Police interference was an added peril. For Mann to be halted and arrested now, would spoil The Shadow's planned scheme for restitution and justice. The money would be impounded. There would be a long, futile investigation. Worse than that, Mann's secret connection with The Shadow would become known to the authorities, ruining his future usefulness.

The ears of Rutledge Mann were keyed to sharp tension as he hurried westward toward the comparative safety of City Hall Park. Suddenly, he heard the brisk slap-slap of steady feet. It was the echo of a patrolman's brogans. He was approaching the corner which Mann had almost reached.

A moment later, the blue-coat came into view. He stood there, peering suspiciously through the darkness. He thought he had heard something. But he could see no sign of a living being. Mann had already gained the shelter of a doorway.

He stood there, scarcely daring to breathe, as the cop stared directly toward his refuge. The cop took a step or two down the street, then stopped. His beat was along the avenue. He didn't relish the notion of butting into trouble on some other patrolman's post. His own tour was almost completed.

He crossed the street at the corner and continued down the avenue.

After a slow five-minute wait that seemed like centuries, Mann left his hiding, place with a beating heart. The heavy suitcases dragged at his arms, but he increased his pace. He didn't slow down until he reached the stairs of the pedestrian exit from Brooklyn Bridge.

He headed toward City Hall Park as if he had just emerged from the bridge. A nighthawk taxi was parked nearby. The hacker paid no particular attention to Mann. He assumed that the tired-looking guy with the two bags had just descended the exit stairs from a bridge train.

The address Mann gave was further proof that his possession of traveling bags at this hour of the night was entirely normal.

"Grand Central Station," Mann said.

ARRIVING at Grand Central, Mann walked through the terminal proper, to a baggage check room. He checked his two suitcases and received a receipt tag.

He didn't keep the tag long. He drifted unobtrusively to the part of the terminal where public lockers were located. There were two tiers of lockers, one above the other. Mann counted ten from the left and dropped a dime in the slot of the top locker.

Inside it, he stowed the luggage check and a small piece of paper on which he had scribbled something with neat precision. Having closed the locker, he placed its key well back out of sight on its dusty top. The key would remain there entirely invisible, except to someone who would know where to look.

That someone was The Shadow.

Rutledge Mann's dangerous job as finished. With a sigh of relief, he left the terminal and hailed another night cab on Forty-second Street. But he did not go home yet.

A methodical man, he still had research work to do in reference to some of the facts he had found out. He had the cabby drive him to a building where he maintained an impressive office, in his role of investment broker.

Entering the office, Mann moved toward the massive, burglarproof safe where he kept his records. But as he did so, his step halted. His roving, glance noticed the closet door.

The door was not completely closed. Mann knew he had closed that door tightly the last time he was in the office. He suspected burglars had paid a visit during his absence.

Reaching for his gun, he wrenched open the door.

It was a fatally rash action. Before he could level his hastily drawn gun to menace the pale-faced intruder he saw in the dark closet, a pair of brass knuckles struck Mann a terrific blow on the forehead.

The gun slipped from his relaxed fingers. He pitched backward to the floor, lay there without motion.

With catlike tread, the thug who had slugged him emerged. Behind him came another man. The second thug had been crouched in the back of the closet. Both had been waiting there for more than an hour. Robbery was not their motive. They were expert snatch artists.

The closet door had been deliberately left ajar to induce the victim to peer in. It had worked like a charm. Mann lay on the floor like a dead man, a slow trickle of blood oozing from his forehead.

It was a matter of seconds to gag and bind the helpless victim. He was picked up like a sack of grain and carried down a deserted corridor to a rear elevator. The elevator took the thugs and their captive to the cellar.

At the end of a rear alley, a car was waiting, its engine purring softly. A third thug was hunched over the wheel.

The car rolled off presently. It didn't hit up too much speed. This trio of snatch artists were experts at their ugly trade.

Unknown to The Shadow, Rutledge Mann was in the grip of agents of the Prince of Evil!

WHEN The Shadow discovered that Bob Harmon was missing from his rooms at the Cobalt Club, he felt a cold premonition of disaster. He had given Bob strict orders not to move until he returned. He had impressed on the lad's mind the dangerous spot he was in.

Yet Bob had deliberately disobeyed Cranston's orders. He had left the Cobalt Club of his own free will.

Cranston knew this, when he saw the torn half of the note that Bob had dropped on the floor in the haste of his sudden departure. Evidently, in cramming, the note into his pocket, Bob had lost one of the torn pieces.

The Shadow was able only to guess at the full import of that message. But he could see at a glance several things that increased his apprehension of disaster. For instance, the fragment of a name at the bottom, typed in capital letters: "STON."

Obviously Cranston's name had been signed fraudulently to that note. It was a lure to lead a grief-stricken lad into a murderous ambush.

Phrases on the torn fragment hinted at the nature of the lure. They indicated unmistakably that Jane Harmon was not dead. She had been reserved for a fate worse than death. Kidnapped, she was about to be secretly transported to South America and held there - for what terrible purpose, only the Prince of Evil knew.

The Prince of Evil had used the name of Lamont Cranston to acquaint Bob with the situation. He knew the lad would rush instantly to the address mentioned in the note.

But what was that address? Only part of it was left on the torn fragment of paper in The Shadow's hand. It read:

ge 1274B East River

Forgetting everything else, The Shadow tried to concentrate with every atom of his brilliant mind.

The words "East River" narrowed the problem considerably. But it was still a task almost hopeless. Where, along the black waters that washed the east shore of Manhattan Island, was "ge 1274B"?

It couldn't be a street; the number was too high. Manhattan streets that ran to the East River, ended shortly above 125th Street. Nor could it be an address. The highest house number possible fell considerably short of the fantastic sum of 1274B.

The East River piers? That, too, was unthinkable. There weren't anything like a thousand piers along the East River.

It was something more simple than that. Something connected with the mysterious letters "ge."

The Shadow closed his eyes in deep thought. He made no progress until he began to think of things connected normally with a river.

Then, suddenly, his eyes opened in a piercing gleam. He had it!

A barge! That was it. B-a-r-g-e! A lot of barges had names, sometimes very fancy ones, given them by their captains. But all of them had registry numbers! Somewhere in the darkness along the East River shore of Manhattan, a barge numbered 1274B was tied up at one of the docks.

Bob Harmon was already rushing there, lured by a fake note. But where?

There was no immediate answer to that question in The Shadow's mind. There could be none without an intensive examination of marine records in the dock department.

Even if the dock department were open at this late hour, the task would take hours. And to attempt to locate the barge by a personal water-front search was even more hopeless.

Lamont Cranston was faced by defeat. But facing defeat and accepting it were two different things. He raced downstairs and located the night doorman of the Cobalt Club. He was acting on a desperate hunch.

As he anticipated, Bob had left the Cobalt Club in a mad flurry of haste. The doorman remembered his fierce yell for a taxi. Bob had not been content for the cab to slide to the curb in response to the doorman's whistle. He had darted out into the street, wrenched open the door and slammed himself in.

The doorman wondered what the devil was going on. The whole episode seemed so curious, that he had no trouble remembering for Lamont Cranston the exact words Bob had shouted to his hackman as the cab raced away:

"Drive like hell to Fulton Street and turn east!"

THAT was all Lamont Cranston needed to know. His own car was parked outside the Cobalt Club. In another instant he was behind the wheel, driving swiftly downtown.

But he broke his journey briefly, in order to satisfy himself about the safety of another person - Rutledge Mann. The Shadow had given Mann a dangerous assignment. Had he completed it successfully - or was Mann too, a victim of the lightning like moves of the Prince of Evil?

The Grand Central Terminal was on The Shadow's route downtown. He hurried through the station and headed for the corridor where the public lockers were located. He counted ten from the left. Making sure that his movements were unobserved, he ran a hand along the top of the tenth locker on the upper tier.

He found the key Mann had left there.

Opening the locker, Cranston discovered a luggage check and a slip of paper. Written on the paper, in Rutledge Mann's precise handwriting, was a sum of money: \$439,752.17.

The Shadow's eyes gleamed. It was proof that Mann had succeeded. The sum he had stored away in two suitcases in the baggage check room at Grand Central was almost as large as the amount swindled from Bob Harmon's dead father. Restitution of that money would be prompt and just.

But would Bob and his kidnapped sister Jane be alive to receive it?

Cranston crammed the luggage check into his pocket. Moments later, he was back in his fast car, driving with reckless speed on the trail of the deluded lad.

Lower Broadway was like a black, deserted canyon. So was the dimly lit expanse of Fulton Street. Ordinarily crowded at noontime with hundreds of thousands of clerks and business men, it was now an echoing emptiness between the dark fronts of tall skyscrapers.

Cranston parked his car a block away from the East River piers. He didn't anticipate too difficult a search. The supercriminal who had lured Bob would have made things as easy as possible for Bob to find the barge.

North of the Fulton Street pier, where ships left for Central and South America, was a smaller dock. It was old and disused. It had fallen into rotting decay.

Cranston slipped closer in the darkness. One side of the dock was empty, except for floating driftwood; greasy water faintly gurgled against green-scummed piles. But on the other side was the squat shape of a moored barge!

The Shadow stared at its stern. He was, indeed, The Shadow now! Lamont Cranston's well-dressed figure had vanished. In its place was the black slouch hat and the dark, enveloping cloak of The Shadow, master avenger of crime.

Easily visible from the string-piece at the edge of the street were the registry numbers on the stern of the barge: 1274B.

The Shadow boarded the craft without sound. He moved on tiptoe, like an unseen part of the night itself. An added blackness along the narrow deck near the cabin of the craft was all that denoted the presence of a rising being.

There were shutters on the only window that offered a view of the interior of the cabin. With infinite care, The Shadow moved the slats of the shutter. He was able to see through the slats, but his feat availed him nothing. The window inside the shutter impeded his view.

The glass was lined on the inside with black tar paper.

Turning soundlessly, The Shadow retreated on tiptoe to the cabin door. His gloved fingers tightened gently around the knob. With infinite care, he prepared to turn it with one hand, while his other gripped the butt of an automatic.

Suddenly, his hand left the knob of the door as though it were the smooth head of a poisonous adder.

His pursuit of Bob had been too easy! So easy, in fact, that The Shadow now knew that it had been planned that way by a supercriminal.

Why should Bob Harmon have dropped that torn half of a note so conveniently on the floor of Cranston's room at the Cobalt Club? Why had the dropped fragment been the one that contained the all-important number of the barge?

To The Shadow, the answer was grimly clear. It was not a lucky accident. The Prince of Evil made no blunders. Bob had not dropped that torn fragment of a forged message. It had been left as a lure by the kidnapers of Bob and Jane Harmon.

Three people were destined to die tonight aboard this sinister barge.

The third victim was to be The Shadow himself!

CHAPTER XV. BITTER TRIUMPH

THE realization that the barge was a death trap spurred The Shadow to grim speed. He was certain now that the cabin door was unlocked. The knob was meant to be turned and the door opened. The knob controlled a death device of some sort.

Noiselessly, The Shadow tiptoed along the narrow deck of the barge.

The cabin was sunk almost flush with the deck. Not more than a foot or two of its squat-roofed shape projected above the hold of the ungainly craft. It was the roof that engaged The Shadow's attention.

He vaulted upward. His rubber-soled shoes made a slight bump, but he paid no attention to the sound. He was no longer afraid of betraying his presence to enemies within. The set-up convinced him that there were no enemies inside that dark cabin!

A cunning death contrivance awaited the entrance of The Shadow through the doorway. Criminals would not expose themselves to destruction. Only Bob and Jane were within!

Such was the thought of The Shadow as he busied himself with the task of forcing an entry from above.

The weather-beaten condition of the ancient barge was an aid to The Shadow's efforts. The roof planks had been warped by the rain and snow of many years of service along the water front. A plank end at the edge of the roof began to lift with squeaking reluctance under the pressure of The Shadow's grip.

The nails gave slightly. Leaping to the deck, The Shadow searched for, and found, a short iron bar lying near the barge's rusty capstan. The bar enabled him to pry the loosened plank farther upward. It broke with a snap of rotted wood.

Another plank followed. And another - a narrow hole was disclosed between the sloping beams of the roof.

The Shadow peered inward. He lowered himself feet first through the narrow hole. It was tough work wriggling through. Rusted nails ripped at his straining shoulders. But he was unmindful of the pain those rusted nails made as they drew blood.

He dropped to the floor of the cabin.

Two pairs of terrified eyes stared at him. Bob and Jane Harmon were lashed securely to a pair of wooden chairs that were tied back to back. The ropes that bound them were drawn cruelly tight. Arm or leg motion was impossible.

The only chance left to them was to upset the chairs and try to crawl together, chairs and all, in a desperate effort to reach the cabin door.

They had not dared to do this. Staring at the two victims, The Shadow knew why.

He saw the taut wire - and the explosives.

The explosives were in two open canisters that stood on either side of the bound captives, just out of their reach. A third canister stood just inside the door.

That third canister had been planted there to take care of The Shadow, the moment he turned the knob on the outside!

There were enough explosives in the cabin to blow the entire barge into a flaming mushroom of destruction. The Shadow himself would have perished in that river-shaking roar, had he entered as a master criminal had intended.

The taut wire that had prevented Bob and Jane from daring to overturn the chairs in which they were bound and gagged, led in a straight line to the knob of the door. A crossed wooden spindle had been attached to the inner knob. The slightest turn of the knob would have turned the spindle.

The wires were attached to a mechanical device that controlled a hammer- like contrivance poised above a percussion cap.

All three canisters would have exploded simultaneously!

The Shadow clipped those trigger wires with infinite care. Sweat beaded his forehead as he steadied the strands of death with his free hand. The slightest vibration from the snip of the tiny cutters he had produced from an inner pocket of his robes would have set off that deadly blast.

It was a test of nerve that Bob and Jane couldn't bear to watch. But when they opened their closed eyelids at the sound of sibilant laughter, The Shadow was holding the harmlessly severed ends of the wires.

THE SHADOW ripped the gags from the mouths of the brother and sister, and slashed their bonds loose. They pitched woodenly to the floor; long confinement had paralyzed their limbs.

But under the quick ministrations of The Shadow, they were able presently to regain their feet. They stood staring in wonder at their strange rescuer.

"The Shadow!" Bob gasped.

There was fear, as well as joy, in his eyes. He had no knowledge that the slouch hat and the black coat masked the personality of his friend and benefactor, Lamont Cranston.

The Shadow reassured Bob and his trembling sister. His calm voice explained certain facts.

Jane Harmon had not been destined to be kidnapped into South America. David Chester and Dorothy Bruner had thought so, but they were wrong. It was merely a cunning device to lure Bob to the barge. The real intent was murder - a giant explosion that would have wiped out the last survivors of the unfortunate Harmon family.

"But why?" Bob faltered. "What harm did our parents ever do to a living soul on this earth? Why should Jane and I -"

It was a question that The Shadow had pondered many times. He was silent. The only answer lay in the mind of the unknown Prince of Evil.

Was he a maniac smarting under some fancied wrong? Had he become enraged at some innocent action on the part of John Harmon? There could be no answer, no knowledge, until the mask of mystery was ripped from an unknown foe.

The Shadow was positive this foe was Benedict Stark. But there was not the slightest shred of proof to justify the suspicion. All The Shadow was certain of, was that Jane and Bob Harmon had been saved from death.

He had ripped the close-knit organization of the Prince of Evil apart. David Chester was dead. So was the dangerous Dorothy. The go-between, Charlie Horn, lay buried in a nameless grave in potters field. Ho Fang, the Chinaman, had been roasted alive in the restaurant fire.

Even the clever swindling device that had caused the suicide of John Harmon could never be repeated on another victim. The silver and black inks were now in the possession of The Shadow.

He had analyzed them in his laboratory, with chemicals and reagents unknown to the ordinary methods of the police laboratory experts. The Shadow knew the secret of the composition of those strange inks that faded and returned and left no trace of their appearance on the fiber of the paper underneath.

All that remained was the restitution of the money stolen from John Harmon - money he should have gotten for his business.

In the palm of wondering Bob, The Shadow laid a luggage check. Alongside it he placed a slip of paper. The sum on that paper was \$439,752.17. It represented the cash that Rutledge Mann had deposited in two bulky suitcases at the check room of Grand Central Station.

The sum fell a little short of the amount that had been stolen from John Harmon, but it was close enough to constitute a complete restitution.

In a quiet voice, The Shadow told Bob to present the check in the morning and claim the bags. The money was rightfully Bob's. Its return would hurt no one but thieves. Another page in the annals of The Shadow had been successfully turned.

But there was anger in his deep-set eyes, as he watched Bob and Jane step from the dark deck of the barge and melt away into the gloom of Fulton Street. He had won everything - except the final triumph.

The cleverest and most dangerous criminal in the history of The Shadow's career was still at liberty!

Grimly, The Shadow went over every inch of that sinister barge at the edge of a rotting East River pier. But he found nothing to connect Benedict Stark with the case. No clues of any kind. Not the slightest shred of evidence.

AN hour later Lamont Cranston walked with tired steps into his suite at the Cobalt Club. Tired as he was, he was determined not to eat, drink or sleep until he had figured out a move against Benedict Stark.

He might have spared himself the task. A move had already been made. A move that utterly puzzled Lamont Cranston. And Stark himself had made the move!

The proof of it was a letter that lay on Cranston's desk. It read:

MY DEAR CRANSTON:

I wonder if you'd mind joining a few of my most honored friends in wishing me bon voyage. Tomorrow evening I'm leaving on my private yacht for a well-earned vacation in Bermuda. I don't suppose I need tell you that I'm rather tired after certain business exertions of late. My farewell party would be incomplete without you. Do come - if only to give me the opportunity to gratify my vanity.

BENEDICT STARK

Cranston read that note many times in the next twenty-four hours. There was an undercurrent that puzzled him. He was still puzzled when he boarded the long, white yacht of the billionaire the following night.

Stark was as sleek as butter. There were many important social figures at the party, but none received greater attention than Lamont Cranston. Stark went out of his way to flatter him.

But his words and actions were like the letter he had sent to the Cobalt Club. There was a faint undercurrent of triumph, a veiled sneer in everything Stark said or did.

Mockery!

When it was time to leave the yacht, Cranston was the last guest down the gangplank. Stark chuckled, as he gripped his hand for the last farewell.

"Stop frowning, my friend. You look positively sad! One would almost think you had lost your best friend!"

It was a gibe that Cranston paid no attention to. But he remembered it later, as he stood on the pier and watched the graceful shape of Stark's yacht blend with the darkness of the lower Hudson on its way to a warm tropic playground.

A man touched The Shadow's shoulder.

"Mr. Cranston?"

"Yes."

"I have a package for you. It was sent to the pier by special messenger."

The Shadow took the bulky parcel. He carried it to a pier light to examine it. There was no address on it; no mark to identify from whom it had come. When he looked about him, he saw no sign of the man who had given it to him. The fellow had vanished.

The Shadow took the parcel to his parked car. He felt an icy sense of foreboding. His dread was justified when he opened the package. It contained the complete set of a man's garments. Hat, coat, shirt, shoes and socks, underwear. Suddenly, he remembered the parting gibe of the sleek Benedict Stark:

"One would almost think you had lost your best friend."

He knew now why he had been summoned to the bon voyage party, why he had received that sinister bundle.

The clothing belonged to Rutledge Mann!

With a sinking heart, The Shadow realized, too late, that Mann's apparent success in carrying out orders had ended in failure. Mann had been captured by the Prince of Evil. Naked and helpless, he awaited doom!

Was Mann a prisoner aboard the swanky yacht of Benedict Stark? Or was he lying in some rat hole in Manhattan awaiting the return of a cruel supercriminal from a pleasant vacation in the tropics?

To accuse Stark without proof would merely brand Lamont Cranston as insane.

He drove away from the pier with a grim face, deep in thought. In the darkness ahead of his slowly moving car he seemed to see the naked body of Rutledge Mann, its pale face pleading mutely for help.

The Shadow had thought his battle with the Prince of Evil had resulted in a stalemate. Now, he knew that the supercriminal had triumphed.

In Rutledge Mann, the Prince of Evil held a winning ace. Unless Mann was located and rescued, The Shadow would be forced to cease all attacks on crime in order to save the life of his kidnapped agent.

The real battle with a titanic foe was only just starting!

Was The Shadow for the first time in his career doomed to defeat? Only time would tell!

THE END