

BLACKMAIL BAY
by Walter B. Gibson

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I

UNDER the gleam of a bluish light, the chart depicting Cobosco Bay stood out in vivid detail. Jutting in from the lower left corner was a promontory that marked the fishing village of Gosport, a stopping place for the old-fashioned double-decked steamers that still plied the bay, as indicated by a dotted line continuing northward. That line veered to the westward to avoid the Twins, two tiny isles that stood side by side, with a narrow channel in between; then the dotted line took a curve toward the northeast as it approached Spruce Island, the biggest thing on the map, which was portrayed in full topographic detail.

Stretching from the southwest to the northeast, Spruce Island began with Hiram's Head, a dome-shaped bluff which, judging from the numerous contour lines, probably loomed to considerable proportions. It bore a distinct resemblance to a monstrous head, due to a deep indentation to the right, which was marked as Hiram's Cove. Continuing almost due east, the shoreline showed a steamboat landing, indicated by the dotted line and half a dozen tiny blocks that represented buildings. From there, the shore wangled to the northeast, to terminate in a narrow strip of land called Beacon Neck, which led to an oddly formed mark that represented Beacon Light, an old lighthouse at the very tip of the island.

The dotted steamship route ended at the central landing, making it the key factor of the map. As proof of that, a long, thin hand moved into the bluish glow and placed a pointed forefinger on that very spot. It was a left hand, as evidenced by a gem that sparkled from the third finger with its scintillating rays running the gamut from deep crimson to brilliant purple, vivified by flashes of flame that burst into being as though attracted by the all-pervading blue light. This was The Shadow's girasol, one of the unmatched fire-opals that symbolized his ability to conquer crime by dulling the brains of its would-be perpetrators.

Right now, crime was afoot on Spruce Island. The Shadow's fingers were already stalking it, as they moved westward from the landing along the island's only well-marked road that moved inland as it approached Hiram's Cove. There, the Shadow paused to note a short turn-in that led up to a house on the cove; then he continued along the main road, which skirted the cove itself, until it ran directly into Hiram's Head where the bristling contours forced the road to jog sharply to the right and wend northward until the west shore of the island moved in gradually to meet it on a contour marked by a building on a spot called Moffat's Point.

Due west from the Point was Round Island, with a few contours and indentations, plus a sprinkling of buildings that gave it the appearance of a summer resort, though it had no steamboat service. After studying Round Island, The Shadow reverted to Spruce Island, but only briefly enough to note that it had a few irregular back roads, stemming chiefly from the landing which led to buildings that were obviously summer cottages.

The left hand rolled the chart into a cylinder, revealing the surface of

a

polished table, which vanished as the right hand clicked off the bluish glare and plunged the room into absolute blackness, stirred only by a whispered laugh. This was The Shadow's sanctum, the secret headquarters where he planned his campaigns against crime. As proof, a pinpoint of yellow light appeared suddenly amid the Stygian surroundings and a quiet voice came from an unseen amplifier:

"Burbank speaking."

It was the Shadow's contact man, responding to an automatic flash. In return, The Shadow spoke:

"Instructions to Burke. He is to proceed with feature stories covering vacation areas, as accepted by the New York 'Classic'. First assignment: Cobosco Bay. Await further details."

"Instructions received."

"Instructions to Vincent." Again, The Shadow spoke in a subdued, sibilant tone. "He is to confirm the rental of a cabin on Round Island at off-season rates and proceed there immediately."

"Instructions received."

"Instructions completed," came The Shadow's final tone. "Switch to outside wire."

THERE was a click in the darkness. A luminous phone dial showed on the sanctum table. Swiftly, The Shadow's forefinger dialled a number and a girl's voice responded, "Hello."

"Hello, Margo." The response was no longer The Shadow's but a quiet, easy tone that the girl immediately recognized. "About that trip you are taking tomorrow -"

"I'm already packed," replied Margo, "but please, Lamont, tell me where - and why -"

In the same calm tone, The Shadow detailed:

"You will go to Baxter Harbor on the Maine Coast and take the noon boat on the Cobosco Bay Line to Spruce Island. At the general store, you will pick up a reservation for a week's stay at the old hotel on Moffat Point -"

"In whose name will the reservation be?"

"In your name, Margo Lane. A local taxi driver will take you to the Moffat

House and back to the home of Judge Parker Kroft, on Hiram's Cove. There, you will introduce yourself -"

"As a friend of our mutual friend, Lamont Cranston -"

Margo's quick interruption brought an even-toned chuckle from Cranston.

It

carried a touch of The Shadow's subtle mirth that Margo failed to catch. Then came Cranston's response:

"Definitely, no. I've never even met Judge Kroft. The man who wants you to meet him is our mutual friend, Commissioner Ralph Weston. Judge Kroft will explain the rest."

There was a pause, the type that signified that there was more to follow. Margo broke it with an abrupt query:

"Anything else, Lamont?"

"Yes," came Cranston's chuckle. "When you reach the lookout, look out." A click of the receiver told Margo that the call was over.

THE bayliner 'Priscilla' was an antiquated wooden steamer that had long ago been converted to Diesel power, but still moved in plodding style as it ploughed its way from Baxter Harbor toward Cobosco Bay. From the high upper deck abaft the pilot house, Margo Lane watched small craft with sails and outboard motors scud from the bayliner's course until the 'Priscilla' had the whole bay to herself. Half an hour of steady plodding brought her to the end of a rocky promontory where some fishing sloops were gathering about a pier with a weather-beaten sign that said: GOSPORT.

The few houses looked as dilapidated as the pier itself, though, farther back, the roofs of some cottages showed among the pine woods. The 'Priscilla' unloaded some crates and boxes but only one passenger came on board, a tall, lanky man carrying a brief case and, as the 'Priscilla' got under way, he bobbed up through the companionway from the lower deck and gave a cheery "Hello" to the half-dozen passengers. Everybody returned the greeting except Margo and, noting her silence, the man gave an apologetic smile, saying, "I guess we haven't met before, young lady. My name is Lew Barton."

"And mine," rejoined Margo, "is Margo Lane. This happens to be my first trip to Spruce Island."

"I thought so." With a long-jawed smile, the man handed Margo a card that bore the name: LEWIS G. BARTON - INSURANCE. Then, whimsically, he added: "You see, it's my business to know everybody on Spruce Island, particularly when they buy property there."

"But I'm only staying for a week -"

"Good enough for a start," decided Barton. "Let's go forward, so I can show you the sights as we come to them."

The 'Priscilla' was heading straight for what Margo mistook for a small island until she saw a split in the center.

"Why, it's two islands!" she exclaimed. "And we're going right between them!"

"They are the Twins," explained Barton, "but usually we swing around them.

Right now, it's high tide, which gives us another fifteen feet of water, enough

for the 'Priscilla' to make it."

They made it nicely enough, though the sides of the wide-built steamer almost scraped the alders on the banks. Then, Margo gave another gasp as she looked ahead and saw a massive bulk of rock and thick trees looming out of the bay to a height of a hundred feet or more.

"Hiram's Head," identified Barton, "don't try climbing that, Miss Lane, while you're staying on Spruce Island. Unless you get a good hold on a tree, you may slide down into the bay."

As the boat followed the shore, Barton pointed out Hiram's Cove and Margo was enthralled by the brilliant sheen of the sparkling blue water. Well back in

the cove was a large float with a long gangplank stretching to the foot of some

steep steps leading to an attractive ranch house perched on a ledge. It struck Margo that this could be the home of Judge Kroft, but she ignored that fact as she exclaimed: "What a beautiful setting! Imagine, having friends come in and out, in their own speed-boats, at any hour of the day or night!"

"You'd have to imagine it at low tide," laughed Barton, "because when the tide goes out, coves like this one become mud flats and so does most of the shore. So half the time, you wouldn't have enough water to dive in and, as for swimming, the water is too cold this late in the season."

That put a chill on Margo's enthusiasm, but she smiled it off in a casual way as the 'Priscilla' plodded along, arriving at a solid stone landing that ran along the water's edge. There, Barton politely helped Margo down the companionway to the lower deck, where a gangplank had been thrust down on to

the stone wharf. Barton insisted on carrying Margo's bags to the porch of a large frame building which bore an imposing sign:

EARL TORGESEN
GENERAL STORE

Outside the main door was a bulletin board decorated with a variety of notices, small and large, some printed, others hand-written, all held in place by handy push-pins. Barton gave the array a rapid glance as he remarked to Margo: "This is Spruce Island's information center. People tell everybody else what's going on, or leave messages for one another. There's nothing extra special today, so let's go in and talk to Earl."

THEY found Earl Torgesen seated on a high stool behind one of the store's half-dozen counters. He was a stocky, stolid man who kept his arms folded as he

nodded a routine greeting when Lew Barton introduced Margo Lane. Hearing the name "Miss Lane," the store-keeper reached to a handy shelf and drew down two notes, which he handed to Margo with the comment:

"Hobbs brought these yesterday but didn't post them on the board because he figured you wouldn't know to look there."

One was a note from Judge Kroft, inviting Margo to lunch when she arrived;

the other was signed by a woman named Madge Moffat, saying that Margo's room at

the Moffat House was available and that supper would be ready whenever she arrived there. Margo showed the notes to Barton, who commented:

"Hobbs will take you to both places. He runs the local taxi, or jitney, whichever you want to call it. He's outside now."

Through the doorway, Margo saw a relic that looked like an old Model-A with a slouchy man of the same vintage hovering alongside it. Five minutes later, she was on her way to Kroft's, her bags in the trunk compartment where Hobbs said they would be safe until he came to take her to the Moffat House, later in the day. As Margo expected, Kroft's house was the one she had seen on the cliff above the cove, but from this side it was reached by a narrow, rocky path that zigzagged from the road up through a grove of birch trees.

Judge Kroft met Margo at the doorway. He was an elderly, stoop-shouldered man who leaned heavily on a stout cane, but he had keen eyes that peered from a

face as smooth as parchment beneath a shaggy crop of whitish hair. His thin, taut lips moved in a precise, mechanical fashion as he spoke in a crackly tone,

but his manner was courtly as he conducted Margo to the veranda that overlooked

the cove, where lunch was served by a middle-aged woman named Hulda. The judge chatted casually during the meal but when Hulda had cleared the dishes, he came

straight to the point.

"I have a problem, Miss Lane," he stated, "which Commissioner Weston thinks you might help me solve. I am preparing a book from confidential discussions of important cases that I decided while I was an active judge. They

were all carefully recorded, but I find that some of the key tapes are missing."

The judge's accent on the word "missing" prompted Margo to respond: "You mean lost? Or stolen?"

"An apt question," returned the judge, approvingly. "I mean stolen, because I have received anonymous phone calls from a blackmailer who offers to return them for fifty thousand dollars. Cash."

Before Margo could reply to that, the judge went on:

"This blackguard - correction, I should say blackmailer - is apparently well acquainted with Spruce Island, but we have no other link to him. So the commissioner suggests that I have you listen to my remaining tapes and list the names of persons mentioned on them, as that may give a clue to the miscreant involved."

With that, Judge Kroft led the way into a miniature law library, where buckram-bound books lined the walls. He gave Margo a corner table with a tape player, a stack of recorded tapes, some legal pads and a portable typewriter, so she could go right to work.

"As you list each name," the judge suggested, "make notes of any special comments that you hear; then skip along until you come to another name and do the same. I shall let you know when Hobbs arrives to take you up to the Moffat House."

III

IT was after seven o'clock when Hobbs came with his antique jitney. Dusk was settling over Hiram's Cove as he and Margo wheezed past it along the road to Moffat's Point. Straight ahead loomed Hiram's Head, its bulk obviously responsible for the thickening gloom, because as soon as they took the sharp turn toward the right, Cobosco Bay came into sight, glistening in the varicolored glow of a lingering sunset.

By then, Hobbs had said but little, simply mentioning that Lew Barton had gone back to Gosport on the 'Priscilla' when she left on her sunset trip to Baxter Harbor. But now, Hobbs became effusive as he pointed across the bay to a chunk of land that was sprinkled with cottages and boat houses.

"That there," stated Hobbs, "is Round Island, owned by a city fellow named Wilby Weldon, who rents out cottages and speed-boats to summer people who have 'most as much money as he has."

Rattling further northward, the old car jounced over a rise in the road and came in sight of a sprawly, three-story building partly surrounded by an old-fashioned porch.

"And this here," continued Hobbs, "is the Moffat House, right plumb on Moffat Point. Owned by Madge Moffat, the last of the family; and there she is, waiting on the piazza. She must have heard us acoming."

Madge Moffat was a brisk, athletic type of woman who welcomed Margo in a deep-toned voice while Hobbs was unloading the bags from the car trunk. About then, a keen-eyed, bearded man arose from a porch chair and sauntered up to join them.

"This is Lester Blake," introduced Madge Moffat. "He is an artist who stays here during the off-season and paints seascapes. Now that you are here, Miss Lane, we will have supper."

During the meal, Margo admired paintings that were hanging on the dining room wall and learned they were samples of Blake's work. All portrayed the bay and its islands; and Madge Moffat bought them from Blake to sell to guests during the regular season. After supper, Blake carried Margo's bags up a side stairway to a corner room on the second floor, while Miss Madge come along to see that all was in order.

"I've given you the Lookout Room," Madge told Margo. "This was where they watched for boats coming into the bay."

Hardly was Margo alone before a sudden recollection struck her. Clear as a bell, she recalled Cranston's parting words: "When you reach the lookout, look out." This room was the Lookout! But what did the rest of Lamont's cryptic statement mean? Was it a warning to look out for danger here? As Margo mulled

over that, her mind went back to Madge's parting statement that this was where they watched for boats coming into the bay. Acting on that, Margo turned out the kerosene lamp that illuminated the Lookout Room and proceeded to look out across the bay.

It was completely dark by now, except for a thin crescent moon that showed through fleeting clouds, but from the blackness of the bay a semicircle of glimmering lights marked the shore line of Round Island with its cottages and boat houses. As Margo watched, a spot of green light gave two short blinks; and that was all she needed. Groping in a suitcase, Margo brought out a small but powerful flashlight and affixed a transparent green cap over its lens. With it, she flashed two answering blinks from her window.

Two green flashes responded from Round Island. After a short interval, a plain yellow light began a series of dots and dashes. Coming in a secret code that Margo understood, they spelled a single word: M-I-D-N-I-G-H-T. In response, Margo gave two green blinks to signify that she understood; then, with a few hours to go, she lighted the table lamp and began going over notes she had brought from Kroft's, while keeping an occasional eye on her wrist watch.

AS midnight neared, Margo turned out the light, opened the door and listened to make sure that all was silent in Moffat House. Then, putting on a dark raincoat and a pair of black sneakers, she stole softly down the side stairs and out through the door to a pair of steps at the end of the piazza. From there, she made her way to the shore where an old rickety pier jutted out into the bay, which was studded with white crests of wavelets that showed in the midnight blackness. Reaching the shore line, she realized immediately why midnight had been chosen as the meeting time.

It had been almost high tide when the 'Priscilla' had left Baxter Harbor at noon for its forty minute trip to Spruce Island. Now, just twelve hours later, the tide was reaching high again. Only a thin stretch of sand remained between the incoming wavelets and the shore. This meant that a boat, instead of docking far out on the gangling pier to avoid the mud flats, could ride completely over them - even to the very shore line - provided it had a flat bottom.

As if in proof of Margo's theory, two green blinks came from beneath the shore end of the pier and Margo made out the shape of a broad-beamed rubber boat, its sides bulging with inflated air compartments. It had two occupants. As Margo flicked an answer with her own flashlight, one man stepped from the boat and approached with the quiet, recognizable greeting: "Hello, Margo."

It was Lamont Cranston.

Soon, Margo was seated beside him beneath the sheltering pier, going over details of what she had learned so far. She told Lamont about her talk with Lew

Barton, the insurance man; her brief meeting with Earl Torgesen, the store-keeper; and with Ezra Hobbs, the jitney driver; as well as Madge Moffat and her artist friend, Lester Blake. By then, they had to move closer to the shore end of the pier, as the tide, still rising, was licking at their feet while Margo began to tell about the work she was doing for Judge Kroft, a subject that Cranston dismissed almost immediately.

"Checking the tapes was Weston's idea," said Cranston, "but it will take too long. I'll contact the judge tomorrow and suggest plans for immediate results that are already pending."

Cranston paused as a smooth, rhythmic purr came from well out in the bay and the lights of a swift speedboat shot across the open water between Moffat Point and Round Island.

"That's Wilby Weldon, who owns the resort on Round Island," commented Cranston. "He cruises around at night to make sure the channel markers and other devices are all in working order. I'm staying at a cabin that Vincent rented from him."

That ended the discussion, but Cranston remained close by while Margo headed back to the Moffat House. From her window, she blinked a signal that meant "All's well," and fancied that she saw the rubber boat drifting out on the receding tide, but whether it had two passengers or just one, she could only guess.

Perhaps Lamont Cranston had remained - as The Shadow!

IV

BREAKFAST was late the next morning. During the meal, Hobbs arrived with an urgent message from Judge Kroft, asking for Margo to come to his place as soon as possible and to stay there over the next night because of important work. Realizing that Kroft must have heard from Cranston, Margo went to her room and was packed by the time Hobbs and Blake came up to get her bags. On the

way downstairs, Blake told Hobbs:

"I'd better go in with you, Ezra, as I have to buy a lot of art materials and hiking boots, so I can climb Hiram's Head and do some sketching this afternoon."

"You'll have to come back before the 'Priscilla' docks at one o'clock," returned Hobbs, "because there's a mechanic coming out from Baxter Harbor with new parts for my old car, so there won't be any taxi service after he gets here; not until late tonight."

Madge Moffat overheard that and put up a protest:

"But I'm expecting a package from Boston! It will be left in my name at the general store -"

"And I'll tell Earl Torgesen about it," soothed Hobbs. "You know how accommodating he is, Miss Madge. After he closes the store, he'll bring it up here on his bicycle. He needs the exercise."

"Good enough," agreed Madge. Turning to Blake, she added: "You remind Earl, too. And there's my shopping list for the weekend supplies. Bring them along when you come back with Ezra."

During the ride in past Hiram's Head, Hobbs and Blake talked about the problems of Spruce Island, which were chiefly lack of communication. Since the telephone connection came by cable directly from the mainland, the cost of a private line was so prohibitive that there were only two telephones on the island; one at the general store and the other at Judge Kroft's. In contrast, Margo learned, Round Island had a private phone in every cottage and boat house. That proved that it would be easy for Cranston to contact Judge Kroft.

After passing Hiram's Cove, Hobbs stopped at Kroft's to let Margo off and again, he and Blake obligingly carried her bags for her. They left while Kroft was greeting Margo, but hardly had the old car jounced away before the judge snapped his fingers in annoyance.

"I wanted you to go down to the landing with them!" he exclaimed. Then, shaking his head, he added: "But, no! It's not far, so it's better you should walk down there a little later. I'll show you why."

Conducting Margo into the little library, he picked up a square of paper on which he had inked the following words:

EAGER
GRADER
VERY IDLE
TURNER
PASTE
KATE

CRUEL

Studying the column, Margo remarked: "It looks like some sort of a puzzle."

"Exactly," agreed the judge, "But it is also a unique code, consisting entirely of anagrams. Rearrange the letters line by line and it will read like this." On a pad, he wrote:

AGREE REGARD DELIVERY.
RETURN TAPES. TAKE LUCRE.

"The anonymous caller instructed me to concoct such a message," the judge continued. "This is the last day for a reply; otherwise, new negotiations will be necessary. Today, I heard from a friend of Commissioner Weston who suggested

I go through with it."

Knowing that the friend was Cranston, Margo remarked that the judge seemed

to be handling the situation neatly.

"Rather so," he nodded, "though I had trouble finding an anagram for 'money' so I had to use 'lucre' instead. I hope whoever reads it will know that

'cruel' means that I will pay fifty thousand dollars for delivery of the tapes."

"You really mean to pay it?"

"That, we shall see." Judge Kroft tightened his already taut lips. "But you must get this message to its appointed destination around noon. That is why

I had Hobbs bring you here early."

"But - but where - I mean how can I manage it?"

"Very simply." The judge crackled a mild laugh. "It is only a short walk to the general store. Just see that it is posted on the bulletin board where anyone on Spruce Island can read it."

The judge handed the cryptic message to Margo, who was duly impressed by the terms demanded by the anonymous caller, inasmuch as it gave the unknown blackmailer ample opportunity to read it without running the risk of recognition. That was, except for one flaw.

"If I should stay around the store awhile," suggested Margo, "I might notice people who are interested in the message -"

"And you wouldn't have to wait too long," injected Kroft. "The commissioner's friend seemed sure that others might be waiting."

THE clock in the general store showed quarter past twelve when Margo arrived there and found Lester Blake still shopping with Ezra Hobbs hovering uneasily in the offing. Seeing Earl Torgesen behind his usual counter, Margo ignored the others and told the proprietor:

"Judge Kroft would like this posted on the bulletin board. Would you mind putting it there?"

Torgesen spread both arms with a heavy-shouldered shrug.

"No, no," he said indulgently. "People post their own notices. They've done it long before I took over the store a year ago, so they're free to go right ahead. But if you want to ask Hobbs" - he gestured politely with his hand

- "I'm sure he would post it for you."

"Certainly, Miss Lane," agreed Hobbs, taking the sheet from Margo. Turning

to Blake he added: "We'd better start soon."

Blake finished his shopping while Hobbs was posting the coded message. Chatting with Margo on the way out, Blake remarked:

"That reminds me! Miss Madge always has me take note of anything special on the board." Turning over his bundles to Hobbs, Blake made a notation on a pad, stopping, a bit puzzled, when he came to Kroft's cryptic notice; then writing it down in detail. Hobbs began honking the jitney's horn, so Blake hurried over and they took off together. That gave Margo a chance to stroll the waterfront, keeping a casual eye on the few customers who went in and out of the store. All seemed already familiar with the board, for none looked at it.

Margo was still strolling when Hobbs came back in his jalopy, just in time to meet the 'Priscilla' as she loomed up beside the wharf on the dot of 12:45. As passengers came from the lower deck, Hobbs shook hands with the man who was obviously the mechanic he expected, but Margo was more interested to see Lew Barton come ashore. He was chatting with a man she recognized as Clyde Burke, who represented the New York 'Classic'. Margo kept a straight face while Barton

introduced Clyde as a feature writer who was doing a story about Cobosco Bay, because she knew that from now on, Clyde would take over and keep tabs on people who stopped too long at the bulletin board, even interviewing them to get their names and opinions regarding Cobosco Bay and Spruce Island.

While Margo was being interviewed by Clyde, Barton went over and spent a long time studying the notices on the bulletin board, a point that Margo undertoned to Clyde, who responded with a nod. Then Margo strolled away and increased her gait to a brisk walk until she reached Kroft's and found the judge waiting to have lunch with her on the veranda. After lunch, she resumed work in the library, checking the available tape for clues to those that were missing - or stolen.

Down by the landing, things were going not only as Margo hoped, but even better. All afternoon, Clyde Burke had been checking on all patrons of the general store, going and coming, by playing the part of what he really was: an inquiring reporter, no more and no less. That fact was proven late in the afternoon, when the 'Priscilla' was ready for her six o'clock sunset trip back to Baxter Harbor. Just then, a speed-boat pulled in below some steep steps beside the wharf and two men clambered their way up to the top.

One was a big, bluff character, who looked like he either owned everything in sight, or could buy it, which was true in this case. He was Wilby Weldon, who owned Round Island outright and could easily buy Spruce Island for half the price. The other was Harry Vincent, a personable chap who, like Clyde Burke, was an agent of The Shadow.

As Clyde stepped up and asked Weldon for an interview, he was shoved roughly aside in the very manner he expected from such a character. So Clyde settled for Harry Vincent and both smiled as they watched Weldon stride over to the general store.

"What's His Nibs after now?" asked Clyde.

"Some special tobacco that they sell here," replied Harry. "You know how pipe smokers go for exclusive blends."

"He's lost his impetus," rejoined Clyde, "considering how he's stopped to read those notices on the bulletin board."

A clang of bells from the 'Priscilla' interrupted the conversation and Clyde hurried over to join Lew Barton, who was beckoning for him to come on board. All that was visible of the 'Priscilla' was her smokestack poking above the wharf, for the tide was approaching its very lowest. Harry watched the two passengers go aboard a gangplank that led downward from the wharf to the bayliner's upper deck. Then, with another clang of bells and the blare of a whistle, the 'Priscilla' was on her way to Gosport.

Wilby Weldon was coming back with his precious tobacco to join Harry

Vincent; and Margo Lane was doubly right. Other agents of The Shadow had covered the waterfront during her absence. Whatever was happening on Spruce Island would be known to The Shadow!

V

DUSK was deepening over Hiram's Cove when Kroft and Margo had supper on the veranda. The judge looked over the sizeable lists that had kept Margo busy until after seven o'clock. Approvingly, Kroft remarked that when all the names from the tapes had been fully checked, some would surely provide links to the past, but their value would depend chiefly on what happened here tonight. Looking up at the clouded, darkening sky, he added finally: "Come. It is time we began our vigil."

They went to the living room on the land side of the ranch house. When they settled there, Margo was convinced that Kroft must have had a meeting with Cranston while she had been working in the library. The old judge displayed a confidence that she herself had invariably felt when she knew that The Shadow was somewhere in the offing. Even the slightest sound attracted his attention, as though it represented a vital moment that he expected. Then Kroft's smooth forehead suddenly wrinkled at the sound of a steady thumping from outside the house.

"That sounds like the old windmill pump that Hobbs was going to fix," declared Kroft. "But who could have started it - and how? Or why?"

As the thumping continued, Kroft came to his feet and stepped to the back door, beckoning Margo to join him. When he opened the door and stepped to the rear porch, a voice came hoarsely from the dark: "Who's that! Who's there!" On impulse, Kroft pressed a switch and floods of light came not only from the house, but the surrounding trees as well. The circle of light carried almost to

the pump-house; and there, on the fringe of the glare, stood Hobbs, holding a large satchel in one hand, a double-barreled shotgun crooked over his other forearm.

That sight literally produced a chain reaction. An answering shout came from the path leading up from the birch grove. As Hobbs dropped the satchel and

raised the shotgun, he heard the call, "Hi, Ezra!" and recognized Torgesen, who was wheeling a bicycle up the path. Hobbs lowered the gun. The store-keeper leaned the bicycle against a tree and approached with a wave of greeting, but by then, Hobbs was aiming for another target farther down the path, a white, roundish figure that flitted in ghostly fashion as though about to merge with the birches.

The effect was so startling that Margo could understand why Hobbs fired on

impulse, but as he did, he floundered backward as if the recoil had acted before

the shot, sending the gun blast straight upward. Margo looked just in time to see a weird, cloaked figure merge with the blackness beyond the circling light.

Apparently The Shadow's intervention had prevented a fatal shot, for the white shape proved to be a human and not a ghost. Stepping forward from the birches was Madge Moffat, wearing white slacks and jacket. But even as Hobbs recognized

one mistake, he made another.

Lurching forward from a level path through the pine trees that skirted the

cove came a roughly clad man with a noticeable limp, evidently determined to reach Hobbs before he could fire a second shot. Obviously, he hadn't seen The

Shadow's intervention, while Hobbs, jarred by that same action, was befuddled enough to blame this new attacker. Up came the shotgun and again, The Shadow swirled in from the gloom just in time to supply another upward jolt as the second barrel loosed its load.

That left Hobbs standing with an empty shotgun and staring puzzled at another person whom he knew quite well: Lester Blake. By then, The Shadow had again wheeled into darkness and Margo realized that the others had probably been too far away to gain as good a glimpse as she had. The sole exception was Judge Kroft, who was as close by as Margo and also probably aware of The Shadow's presence. In any case, Kroft showed magnificent style, beckoning all the persons toward the porch, as though holding court there. Turning first to Hobbs, the Judge said drily:

"Congratulations on your bad aim, Ezra. Now, may I ask the purpose of your surprise visit?"

"You wanted the windmill pump fixed," replied Hobbs, "but I've been busy working on my car. Tonight, I've got a mechanic working on it, so I brought along my tools" - he gestured to the satchel - "and fixed the pump. I was coming in to tell you."

"Why did you bring your shotgun?"

"In case I ran into a wildcat or some other varmint," rejoined Hobbs. "Guess I just got confused, judge."

Judge Kroft gave the case a gesture of dismissal. Then:

"Glad to see you here, Earl," he said to Torgesen. "Just how did you happen to stop by?"

"I had a package to take to Miss Moffat's," returned the store-keeper, pointing to a handlebar carrier on his bicycle. "I rode up there with it, but nobody was home. So I decided to stop here coming back and see if Miss Lane knew where Miss Moffat had gone."

"And I," put in Miss Madge, without waiting for the judge to quiz her, "thought maybe Earl forgot to bring the package, so I walked down to the store by the old Indian trail, which is a lot shorter than by road. The store was closed up tight, so then I walked up here thinking you could phone Earl and wake him up."

Judge Kroft turned to Lester Blake: "Next!"

"I was up on top of Hiram's Head," explained Blake, "painting a long range view, when I realized it was getting dark below. I started down the back way and slid off a ledge." Showing his torn shirt sleeves and scratched arms, he added: "Got all chewed up by tree branches and lost my sketches. Hurt my knee, too, so I thought I'd better get to a phone and call a doctor."

JUDGE KROFT nodded as though he accepted everybody's story; then invited them all in for coffee. While Hulda was preparing it, Hobbs offered an abject apology to both Madge Moffat and Lester Blake for his berserk behavior with the shotgun.

"Around noon today," Hobbs said to Blake, "I drove you up to Moffat Point and when we went past Hiram's Cove, I saw a speed-boat alongside the float. I pointed it out to you, remember?"

Blake nodded: "I remember."

"It was gone when I came back to meet the 'Priscilla'," continued Hobbs, "and I figured somebody might have dropped off and stayed around here. That's one reason I came to fix the pump. I thought I might meet a prowler. That's what I mistook you folks for. Prowlers."

If that made sense for Hobbs, it made sense for Margo, too. Obviously,

Lamont Cranston had come to Kroft's and stayed there, letting Harry Vincent take the speed-boat back to Round Island. That, in turn, explained The Shadow's present presence on the property.

While Blake was phoning a doctor on the mainland, Torgesen left to ride to the store on his bicycle and find out if Hobbs' car had been sufficiently repaired for Hobbs to take Madge and Lester up to Moffat Point. Twenty minutes later, the mechanic arrived with the old relic in good working order and said that Blake wanted them to stop at the store to pick up Miss Madge's package from Boston, since she had gone to so much trouble over it. With Hobbs and the mechanic in front, Margo got in back with the others, saying she would make a few purchases and drop off at Kroft's on the way back.

At the store, Torgesen gave Madge's package to Hobbs, who put it in the trunk of his car; and while the storekeeper was waiting on Margo, he confided:

"I'm glad you came along, Miss Lane. You remember what Hobbs said about seeing a speed-boat down in Hiram's Cove around noon today? Well, I saw the same thing along about seven o'clock."

"You mean when you were riding your bicycle up to Moffat's Point?" exclaimed Margo. Then, as Torgesen nodded, she questioned eagerly, "Have you any idea whose boat it was?"

Torgesen gave a rueful head-shake. Then:

"Lew Barton has a speed-boat over in Gosport," he recalled. "He left on the 'Priscilla' at six o'clock, so he would have plenty of time to return. You'd make it in ten minutes in a speed-boat."

"Was it still there when you came back?"

"I'd guess so, but it was too dark for me to see. I wasted time getting up

at the Point trying to scare up Miss Moffat, not knowing she was hiking down along the trail." Torgesen paused. As an afterthought he remarked: "Then there's that Wilby Weldon, who owns Round Island and came in yesterday for special tobacco. He kites around at all hours in a speed-boat. He rents out others, so there's no telling who might come traipsing into Hiram's Cove. You ought to tell the judge."

"I'll tell him tonight," agreed Margo. "I'll say you said to."

Hobbs dropped Margo off at Kroft's on his way to Moffat's Point with Miss Madge and Lester Blake. But it was Hulda, not Kroft, who met Margo at the door to tell Margo that her room was ready and that the judge had turned in for the night. So Margo turned over her bundles to Hulda and decided that Torgesen's report could wait until morning. Looking out from her window, the night seemed serene, regardless of the threat of prowlers.

No wonder, since no matter what happened, The Shadow might already be in the offing, prepared to take full charge!

IV

AT breakfast the next morning, Judge Kroft was busily writing a report of all that had been said and done the evening before. That gave Margo her chance to repeat what Torgesen had told her; and how his description of the speed-boat

in the cove at dusk confirmed Hobbs statement regarding a similar craft that he

had seen there around noontime or a bit later. Writing down all that Margo said, the old judge announced: "I shall add this to the agenda."

At one o'clock, Hulda came to the library and told Margo that lunch was ready. When Margo reached the veranda, she heard the spurt of a motor from the cove and looked below to see a speed-boat scooting out from the float. Recognizing Harry Vincent at the helm, she looked toward the steps leading up from the cove and saw Lamont Cranston almost at the top, with Judge Kroft

greeting him. Together, they came onto the veranda where Cranston gave Margo a casual "Hello," remarking to Judge Kroft that they were both friends of Commissioner Weston.

During lunch Margo wondered if The Shadow had left late last night and come back as Cranston today; or whether he had instructed Harry to come over in the speed-boat to account for his arrival. The impassive Mr. Cranston had a bag that could account for The Shadow's cloak and equipment, but the question itself remained unanswered. Margo promptly forgot it when Judge Kroft came to his agenda, which proved to be complete in every detail, including Margo's added report from Torgesen. Cranston's response was an approving nod. Then:

"I am quite sure that I could name the blackmailer from the data as given," stated Cranston coolly, "but our main aim is to catch the culprit in the act. You would have accomplished that last night, Judge Kroft, if everything had gone as planned, both by yourself and the blackmailer, but too many people arrived unexpectedly upon the scene. So the only course is to set up another such meeting."

"But how," queried Kroft, "can that be arranged?"

"Only by waiting until we hear from the culprit -"

"And when will that be?"

"At any time. Perhaps this very minute -"

Cranston's words were suddenly interrupted by Hulda, who came rushing in waving a sheet of paper that she gave to Judge Kroft.

"I just picked up a coffee tray from last night!" exclaimed Hulda. "And I found this underneath it!"

Judge Kroft spread the sheet of paper on the table and revealed the following inked lines:

VARLET
LOGAN
HORSE
ONE CAB
IF YARD
THING

"From the blackmailer," decided Cranston, "who undoubtedly had it ready to leave here in case something prevented the meeting!"

"And anybody in the group," declared Kroft, "could have left it here after I foolishly invited them in for coffee!"

"Or somebody could have come up from the cove," insisted Margo, "left it, and sneaked out again before you invited the other people to come inside."

Rather than debate that question, Cranston decided:

"Since this appears to be another anagram message, why not decode it and see what the culprit has to say?"

Tearing the sheets from the judge's pad, Cranston handed them around and all three began transposing letters, with this result:

TRAVEL ALONGSHORE.
BEACON. FRIDAY NIGHT.

"It's two miles along the shore to the causeway leading out to the old Beacon Light," declared Kroft, "so that must be where the blackmailer wants to meet me."

"And today is Friday," specified Margo, "so we know when as well as why."

"Which leaves the question of who should go," summed Cranston, "and how. Suppose you finish listing those tapes, Margo, while Judge Kroft and I plan the campaign for tonight."

SHORTLY after six o'clock, a sharp rap brought Margo to the library door. She opened it to find stoop-shouldered Judge Kroft standing there, beaming a very wise smile.

"Hobbs is on his way here," said Kroft, "to take the two of us to Beacon Point. Cranston will remain here to handle contacts by telephone. I will carry the money bag" - he lifted a suitcase as he spoke - "and you will bring along a

box lunch that Hulda has made up for us in case we have too long a wait."

Fifteen minutes later, they were riding past the landing in Hobbs' jalopy.

Since the 'Priscilla' had left on her six o'clock trip, the wharf was almost deserted, with only a few late customers coming out of the general store.

Those

few stared, somewhat puzzled, as they saw the ancient taxi take the little used

two-mile road along the shore to Beacon Light. The terrain was barren and the wind had swept sand in from the narrow beach, beyond which Margo saw the broad mud flats, a somber, almost ominous sight in contrast to the highly tinted sunset. A blue sparkle off beyond the flats proved that the bay was still there, despite the low tide.

The causeway was a raised, stony road, too narrow for a car to take, but providing a firm path across a solid, level strip straight to the old lighthouse that loomed from a mound of rock at the far end. Alighting from the jalopy quite spryly, the judge paid Hobbs a fee and told him to return around midnight, an order which gave Margo a slight shudder for, with the settling dusk, the surroundings were becoming spooky. Judge Kroft was wearing an oversized yellow oilskin slicker draped around his shoulders, so as he led the way over the narrow causeway, it was easy for Margo to follow. Again, she was surprised at the agility he showed, particularly in the handling of his long, heavy cane.

When they reached the old lighthouse, the judge pulled open a shaky, creaky door and Margo saw tables and benches on the stone floor. Old-fashioned lanterns hung from the walls of a large, rounded room. The judge explained that

the islanders occasionally held picnics in the place. Still in a spry mood, he moved about, lighting enough of the lanterns to offset darkness, which was now complete; and as an afterthought, he chortled: "Speaking of picnics, Miss Lane,

let's open Hulda's box-lunch and have one of our own!"

They did as suggested and after the repast, Kroft regaled Margo with accounts of his legal career and legends of Cobosco Bay. As minutes turned to hours, the judge seemed to grow younger, though at times his voice became wheezy and he was forced to pause. Then, the only sound was the lapping of waves from the slowly rising tide around the base of the lighthouse until suddenly Kroft said: "Listen!"

As he raised his hand for silence, the creaky door swung open with a clatter and in from the threshold stepped a sinister figure heavily muffled in baggy trousers and a thick sweater topped with a hunter's cap. A bandana handkerchief served as a mask.

The strange intruder clumped steadily forward to thrust a square box on to

the table. From the bandana mask came a forced voice: "Here are the tapes.

Let's

see the lucre." The speaker pronounced the final word "loo-kar" in a derisive manner, but it gave no clue to the intruder's identity. Margo, seated rigidly in her chair, was trying vainly to identify the forced utterance, but it could have represented anything from Hobbs' harsh voice to the contralto pitch occasionally affected by Madge Moffat, with a whole range of tones in between.

As for Judge Kroft, he came slowly to his feet, pressing his hands on the table

to support the weight of his stooped form.

"It's here," he wheezed. Numbly, he opened his suit case, which was lying on the table. "All of it. You can take it." He removed a folded cloth from the suit-case and gestured to packages of currency beneath. "But first count it to make sure it's all there."

The intruder thrust a thickly gloved hand into the suit-case and brought out a sheaf of bills only to emit a vicious snarl:

"These bills are all blanks!"

"And what would you expect?" came Kroft's high-pitched crackle. "A personal check made out to the order of -"

Margo couldn't catch the name that Kroft gave, for the masked intruder drowned it with a savage roar while peeling off a glove and pulling a revolver from deep in a hidden holster. In contrast, Kroft's action was not only swifter, but incredibly deceptive.

From the cloth beside the bag, Kroft whisked a black slouch hat that he clamped on his shaggy head and, in the same action, whirled fully about, rearing his stooped form to full height so that the yellow slicker dropped from his shoulders, disclosing a black cloak beneath. The crackly tone changed to a sinister laugh of mockery as the spin continued and, in a trice, the masked blackmailer was confronted by the cloaked figure of The Shadow, whose bare hand came up faster than the intruder's gun!

A snap of The Shadow's thumb and the forefinger produced a blast that sounded like a miniature bombshell. Blinded by the sudden smoke and flame, the intruder reeled back; then drove forward, slugging wildly with his gun, only to

find that his cloaked adversary was now behind him, clamping him with a forearm

hold. Margo heard The Shadow's order, "Get the gun -" as the revolver dropped to the table. She complied, as the next order came: "- And now the mask!"

Snatching the bandana from the helpless intruder, Margo saw the face of the culprit whom The Shadow, while posing as Kroft, had already identified: Earl Torgesen!

While Margo kept Torgesen covered, the master of darkness clamped a pair of handcuffs on the helpless prisoner and brought a signal flare from the suit-case, telling Margo to take it outside and set it off, which she did. In response to the burst of red light, two speed-boats idling well off shore immediately revved their motors and came in to a landing beside the lighthouse.

Rushing in to inform The Shadow, Margo found that he had already packed his cloak and hat to resume the pose of Judge Kroft, but only momentarily. A quick upward sweep of his hands whipped away a shaggy white wig; then drawing his fingers downward, he peeled away the thin, plastic mask that had formed a perfect replica of Kroft's smooth visage, revealing the hawklike face of Lamont

Cranston in its stead.

SO it was Lamont Cranston who met the new arrivals: Lew Barton and Clyde Burke from one speedboat, with a deputy sheriff from Gosport; Wilby Weldon and Harry Vincent from the other, accompanied by a federal agent from Baxter Harbor. Cranston explained that he had apprehended Earl Torgesen on orders from

Judge Kroft and therewith turned the prisoner over to the lawmen. The dazed blackmailer - who had not witnessed Cranston's transformation - was packed in one boat while Cranston and Margo boarded the other and both craft took off on a fast ten minute run to Gosport.

By midnight, all details were completed there, so Cranston and Margo headed back to Spruce Island in Barton's speed-boat, which was manned by Harry Vincent and Clyde Burke. As the tide was now high, they sped directly into Hiram's Cove, moored the boat at the float and were greeted by Judge Kroft at the top of the steps.

"Hobbs just stopped by," chuckled Kroft. "He'd just gone out to Beacon Light and was amazed because I wasn't there."

"So was I," returned Margo, "when I was out there."

"It had to look as though I had gone out there," explained the judge, "but

we knew that only Cranston could handle whatever happened. That's why we arranged the switch." He turned approvingly to Cranston: "So it was Torgesen, as you said it would be."

"As I told you it had to be," corrected Cranston. Then, for the benefit of the others, he explained: "Although there were half-a-dozen suspects, only one could possibly be guilty. All the rest were totally ignorant of the fact that crime was brewing.

"Thus, if we caught the culprit in a single lie, we would have the only clue we needed. And you, Margo, provided that clue."

Margo's eyes widened, proving she didn't fully understand.

"On Thursday," Cranston went on, "Judge Kroft's reply to the blackmailer was posted on the board where all the suspects could see it. When Torgesen closed his store, he waited until after dark, then rode his bicycle up here, bringing the tapes in a box, as he did tonight out at Beacon Light. To make sure he wasn't noticed, he just decided to wheel his bike some distance up the birch path; and it just happened that Hobbs, who was working at the pump-house,

saw a figure moving among the trees and raised a yell that caused Judge Kroft to turn on the lights."

Nods from listeners corroborated Cranston's quiet analysis as he continued:

"Torgesen handled it neatly. He set the bicycle aside and waved to Hobbs, who recognized him. He could easily have given a plausible reason for coming up

here, such as saying his phone was out of order and asking to use Judge Kroft's.

But the unexpected arrival of Madge Moffat - and later Lester Blake - started Hobbs shooting and caused complications for everybody - except Torgesen. Realizing that neither Madge nor Blake could have been up at the Moffat House, he simply stated that he had gone up there to deliver a package and had stopped

here on the way back. That explained why he had a package on his bicycle carrier, if anyone noticed it. A very neat touch."

More nods from listeners showed that they agreed.

"Instead of giving the package to Madge," remarked Cranston, "Torgesen had

her pick it up at the store, which enabled him to switch packages. Nobody noticed the oversight, so Torgesen, having outsmarted everybody else, went on to outsmart himself. With three people already under suspicion as prowlers, he decided to add two more. So he claimed to have seen a speed-boat in Hiram's Cove when he rode past there. He couldn't have because he hadn't ridden up past

the cove, for if he had he would have noticed that the tide was completely out,

leaving nothing but mud flats there."

So Lamont Cranston - otherwise The Shadow - had spoken the truth when he said that Margo had provided the clue that marked Torgesen as the unknown blackmailer! Not having seen the cove at low tide, she - like Torgesen - had

pictured it as a sheet of blue water; not a mass of brown mud!

THERE was an interesting aftermath to the case.

On Saturday, word came that the prisoner who called himself Earl Torgesen had been fingerprinted and identified under another name as a confidence man of long standing, who incidentally, was among those listed on Kroft's tapes. At six o'clock that afternoon, as Lamont Cranston and Margo Lane were boarding the 'Priscilla' for the trip back to Baxter Harbor, Margo looked up across the wharf to the sign:

EARL TORGESEN
GENERAL STORE

"I wonder," remarked Margo, "why the blackmailer decided to take that name!"

"If you'd wondered sooner," responded Cranston, "we might have had him labeled at the very start. Remember how fond he was of anagrams?"

"Why, of course!"

"Then twist them about: Earl Torgesen and General Store, pairing them letter for letter as you go along."

As Margo did and found that they tallied exactly, a clang of bells and a shrill whistle seemed to say that the 'Priscilla', too, was witness to the fact.

THE END