



THE DEATH TOWER

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CHAPTER I. THE PURPLE SAPPHIRE

THE doorman of the Marimba Apartments on Park Avenue stared long and hard at the face of the stranger. As the man turned in toward the apartment entrance, the doorman uttered a stifled exclamation. There was something about the visitor's appearance to startle any one.

The features of the gentleman were haggard with fear, terror-torn and gray, and his lips trembled in spite of his efforts to keep hold on himself. It was fully five seconds before he was able to speak to the hall attendant.

"I wish to see Doctor Palermo," he said in a tense voice. "Is—is he in his apartment?"

"Wait here a moment, sir," replied the attendant. "I must phone upstairs. Your name is—"

"Chatham. Horace Chatham."

It was not more than half a minute before the hallman received word that the visitor could come up; yet, even during that brief period, Horace Chatham showed signs of unrepressed nervousness.

Pacing back and forth, he clenched and unclenched his fists, and completely betrayed his fearful impatience.

The hallman ushered Chatham into the elevator, instructing the operator to take his passenger to the fortieth floor.

"Sorry about the delay, sir," he apologized to Chatham. "It's our orders, you know."

HORACE CHATHAM did not reply. As the door closed, he leaned against the wall of the elevator, and fought to gain composure.

The smooth, rapid speed of the elevator seemed to restore his confidence. When the operator opened the door at the fortieth floor, he was amazed at the change in Horace Chatham. The man stepped from the elevator with a springy stride, his expression of worry completely gone.

The visitor stood in the anteroom of an apartment that occupied the entire fortieth floor of the building. A single door faced the elevators. There was a bell beside the door. Chatham rang it, and the door opened, released by some mechanical means.

Chatham stepped into a long, dimly-lighted hallway, and the door closed behind him. On the left, the entire wall was fronted with massive bookcases, filled with rows of bound volumes. On the right were several armchairs, and a writing table.

Evidently this was a library. But before Horace Chatham had time to make a minute study of his surroundings, a door opened at the far end of the hallway, and the figure of a tall man stood outlined in the brighter light of the room beyond.

Horace Chatham stepped forward eagerly. The man in the doorway was none other than his host, Doctor Albert Palermo. The two men shook hands; then Palermo took his guest inside and motioned to a comfortable armchair in the corner of the room.

Chatham mopped his forehead as he took his seat. Then he looked up to see Doctor Palermo studying him with quizzical eyes.

THERE was something about Doctor Palermo that commanded instant attention. His face was smooth, and sallow. His hair was short-cropped and slightly gray. His eyes, dark and piercing, seemed powerful, and keenly observant.

It was impossible to estimate the man's age. Chatham knew that he must be past forty—but beyond that he could venture no opinion.

Like his guest, Doctor Palermo was garbed in evening clothes. Except for their facial differences, one might have passed for the other. Yet no one would ever have mistaken the haggard, careworn features of Horace Chatham for the firm, well-molded countenance of Albert Palermo.

The two men faced each other without speaking.

The room was amazingly silent. None of the uproar of the city's streets reached that apartment, five hundred feet above the sidewalks of Manhattan. Yet the silence was expressive.

Doctor Palermo seemed to be mentally questioning his visitor, and Horace Chatham seemed incapable of speech.

Palermo finished his quizzical study. He went to a table, opened a door beneath it, and drew out a

decanter filled with a light-brown liquid. He poured out a small drink, and offered it to Horace Chatham.

The man in the armchair gulped the contents of the glass. It was some potent liquor that was unfamiliar to him. Doctor Palermo smiled as he witnessed its effect.

The drink was a bracer for Horace Chatham. It seemed to bring sudden light to the man's face. He looked about him with a wan smile; then he laughed, forgetful of his nervousness.

For the first time, he became fully aware of his surroundings. He saw Doctor Palermo smiling back at him, standing in the center of the small den, with its exquisite furnishings and paneled dark-oak walls.

"Have a cigar," said Palermo, in a smooth, suave voice.

He proffered a box of expensive perfectos. Chatham took one, and Palermo extended a lighted match.

The doctor also took a cigar, and drew up a chair to the center of the room. There he sat, watching Chatham blow puffs of smoke.

He was a singular man, this Doctor Palermo. His name indicated Italian ancestry, but his nationality was elusive. His words were perfect in enunciation as he spoke to Chatham.

"Worry has brought you here," he said. "Yet you fought against that worry until it became—terror! I am right?"

Chatham nodded.

"You had no worries the last time I saw you," remarked Palermo.

Horace Chatham hunched himself in the chair. He looked speculatively at Doctor Palermo.

The quiet demeanor of the tall physician called for confidences. Chatham shook off all hesitation.

"I have a lot of faith in you, doctor," he said. "Not only because of your skill and reputation, but because of our friendship."

Doctor Palermo bowed and smiled.

"I couldn't trust any ordinary physician with this matter," continued Chatham. "I know what's the matter with me. Partly imagination, and partly real danger."

"When it finally became too much for me, I had to come to you. Up here—away from every one—well, it's the only place I can talk, and you're the only man to whom I can talk!"

DOCTOR PALERMO rested languidly in his chair. He made no effort to hurry Chatham in his discourse. That fact seemed to encourage the visitor.

Well did he know Palermo's reputation. As an analyst of mental disorders, none could compare with this remarkable physician. Doctor Palermo specialized in psychoanalysis alone.

All his time not devoted to consultations, he spent in his experimental laboratory, here on this fortieth floor. Chatham knew of the laboratory; yet he had never entered it, nor had he ever known Doctor Palermo to admit any one, not even a close friend.

"I'll have to tell you the whole story," said Chatham. His words were coming freely now. "It goes back two months—when I was in Florida. Just before Lloyd Harriman committed suicide. You knew Lloyd

Harriman, didn't you, doctor?"

The doctor nodded. "But not professionally. If I had—"

"Perhaps he wouldn't have killed himself," supplied Chatham.

"Well, doctor, that's exactly why I came to you. I am experiencing the same ordeal that Harriman went through.

"I've come close to the brink myself. I've thought of suicide—"

"Stop thinking of it!"

"But the danger that menaces me! It has followed others before. Harriman was not the first victim!"

Chatham paused, and his face was that of a hunted man. He gripped the arms of his chair, and looked pleadingly toward Doctor Palermo. The calm-faced physician was solemn, yet reassuring.

Chatham moistened his lips. He puffed at his cigar. Then he began his story. A slight quavering of his voice alone betrayed his secret fear.

"I met Harriman in Florida," he said. "He seemed very morose. Sick and tired. All he wanted to do was drink and gamble. Borrowed money from me. Lost money to me.

"I began to think the money was bothering him—although Harriman was supposed to have millions. But, of course, all his borrowings were at gaming tables, after he had had runs of bad luck and was only out of cash in pocket."

Chatham stared straight ahead, lost in thought for a moment.

"One night, Harriman asked how much he owed me. I told him— somewhere between three and four thousand dollars. He laughed.

"He brought out a jewel case, and opened it. The case contained a magnificent sapphire—a deep purple color. He told me that it was worth far more than the money he owed me. He asked if I would take it.

"The jewel fascinated me. I accepted it."

As Horace Chatham paused, a slight expression of surprise flitted over Doctor Palermo's features. His eyelids flickered for an instant.

Chatham did not notice this. He was too intent on his story.

"Then Harriman came back," said Chatham. "He wanted me to return the purple sapphire. He offered me twice the amount he had owed me. He seemed insane, the way he pleaded for that cursed stone.

"I refused to give it up.

"Then he told me that the purple sapphire brought ruin to all who owned it. Ever since he had gained it, bad luck had followed him. He talked of the curse of the purple sapphire. He didn't want it to ruin me as it had ruined him.

"He claimed that attempts had been made on his life—all because of the sapphire. He had virtually given it to me to be rid of it!

"I laughed at all this. It seemed ridiculous—such stuff coming from a man of Harriman's intelligence.

"When he found that I would not give the sapphire back to him, he made me promise that I would tell no one that I possessed it. Then he went away.

"I never saw him again. He shot himself a few weeks later. No one knew why—but now, I am sure—"

Chatham leaned forward and spoke in a hoarse whisper.

"- it was the curse of the sapphire!"

ONLY the restraining eyes of Doctor Palermo kept Horace Chatham from losing control of himself. His eyes were wild; his lips twitched. He gripped the arms of the chair.

"The purple sapphire," said Palermo musingly. "I have never heard of it. It is strange that this obsession of Harriman's should have gripped you, Chatham. You are simply the victim of applied suggestion."

Chatham's lips moved, as though he were trying to make them ask a question.

"Harriman believed that the gem carried a curse," continued Palermo calmly. "His belief was so strong that you were subject to it, also. Your promise to keep it a secret unnerved you, after Harriman's suicide.

"Now that you have told me of it, you will experience relief. With a few treatments, I can cure you of all fear. Your terror is not real."

"It is real!" Chatham's voice was a hoarse scream. "It is real, I tell you! I have never felt safe since I took that gem from Harriman.

"I have been followed. People have entered my apartment while I was away. I have never seen them—but I have found evidence that they have been on my trail. Not more than a week ago, a car followed mine as I came into New York.

"Everywhere—at the theater, at the club—eyes have been watching me.

"To-night, when I came here, I was followed! I changed cabs, and managed to avoid pursuit. All because I own that cursed purple sapphire!

"I can never lose the curse of it. Harriman died because of it—"

"What have you done with the gem?" questioned Palermo quietly.

"I hid it!" whispered Chatham, in a tense tone. "I hid it, where no one could find it!

"Then I was afraid. Afraid that some one might capture me, and demand the purple sapphire. So I carried it with me, and my fear has been tenfold!"

"Where is it now?"

Horace Chatham hesitated. He stared fixedly at the physician. For a moment two wills were at odds; then Chatham yielded. The friendly, urging influence of Doctor Palermo seemed to overcome his fears and suspicions.

With a gasp of relief, Chatham reached into a pocket of his coat, and brought out a small jewel case, which he held in his tightly clenched fist.

"Let me see it."

Gently, as though dealing with a child, Doctor Palermo removed the jewel case from Horace Chatham's clutch. He opened it, and the purple sapphire, a huge, exquisite gem, glowed with weird beauty in the soft light of the room.

"Shall I keep it for you?" questioned Palermo, in subtle, alluring tones.

"No! No!"

Chatham made a grasp for the jewel case with its precious contents. Palermo drew away, and stopped the other man with raised hand.

"Easy, Chatham," he said. "Remember, I am your friend."

"But it is mine!" exclaimed Chatham. "I must keep it! I shall always be cursed with it!"

"Harriman did not die until he lost it. While I carry it, my life is safe. Once out of my hands, it will bring me death—"

"Relax!" commanded Doctor Palermo. "Let me talk to you, Chatham."

"I can help you. I can put an end to your troubles and your fears. Sit back in your chair."

Horace Chatham obeyed. He lay back in the chair and reclined his head so that it nearly rested against the oak paneling of the wall. He watched Palermo deftly remove the purple sapphire from its case.

"A beautiful gem," observed the physician. "Strange that those who hold it should fear it. I would not dread its curse, if it were mine!"

The words soothed Chatham. He half smiled as he looked at the gem which Doctor Palermo held. So intent was his mind on it that he was utterly oblivious to all else.

THE panel behind Horace Chatham's head slid noiselessly to one side. The action followed a motion by Doctor Palermo—a simple gesture in which the physician raised the forefinger of his left hand.

As the panel opened, two thick-set brown hands came into view, one on each side of Chatham's chair.

"You will forget your fears, Chatham," came Palermo's dulcet voice. "In an instant they will vanish—and they will never return. I can promise you that—"

The physician spoke on, gazing intently at the gem in his hand. But Horace Chatham never heard the words that followed. For while Palermo talked, the brown hands slipped suddenly forward, and, coming together, gripped Chatham's throat.

A slight gurgle escaped Chatham's lips. He clutched and clawed at the strangling hands, but his efforts were without avail. The grim talons were victorious. The pressure never yielded while Chatham gasped away his life.

When the man in the chair became motionless, the brown hands slipped back into the darkness, and the panel closed in the wall.

Doctor Palermo was still speaking, and his voice was gloating. He was talking to a dead man in the chair.

He stopped suddenly, and looked at Chatham's body while he smiled. Then he turned away, and opened the drawer of a table. Replacing the purple sapphire in its case, he tossed the gem and its carrier into the drawer.

He walked forward to Chatham's limp form. He removed various articles from the dead man's pockets and inspected them.

A smile flickered on his face as he discovered a theater ticket. Doctor Palermo placed the bit of cardboard in his own vest pocket. He also transferred Chatham's wallet and several cards to his own clothing.

From a table drawer, Palermo brought out a long, flat metal box, which he laid on a stand, close by the chair in which Chatham had died.

Then followed a most amazing procedure.

Opening the box, Palermo produced articles of make-up, and with swiftness and precision, he began to apply cosmetics to his face.

He looked closely at the dead man's face as he went through this operation. At intervals he paused, and turned to a mirror. He looked back and forth, comparing his own visage with that of Chatham.

The mysterious physician's face rapidly underwent a surprising transformation. More and more it came to resemble the countenance of Horace Chatham, until it was impossible to distinguish any great differences between the face of the living man and that of the victim in the chair.

The only contrast was the hair. Doctor Palermo overcame that discrepancy by bringing forth a box full of wigs. He selected one that closely resembled Chatham's dark, bushy hair.

When he had placed this on his head, Palermo stood before the mirror and chuckled maliciously as he studied his handiwork.

Palermo snapped his fingers twice. A panel opened in the wall, and from this concealed door stepped forth a tall, powerful, brown-skinned man. Palermo pointed to the body and uttered a few words in a foreign tongue.

The dark man placed his massive hands under Chatham's shoulders, and lifted the victim with ease. He carried the body through the panel, and it closed after him, leaving a solid wall.

The murderer had taken away his victim. No trace of the tragedy remained— except Chatham's hat and overcoat, which lay upon a chair in the corner.

Doctor Palermo disposed of these by donning them. Then he went to a small filing cabinet, and ran through the cards to the letter C.

"Chatham, Horace," he read, half-aloud. "Spends much time at the Argo Club."

The physician chuckled. "A good place to be after the theater," he observed.

One last glance in the mirror. Then Doctor Palermo stood in deep thought. He went back to the filing cabinet, and again glanced at the card that bore the name of Horace Chatham.

He referred to a list of names in the lower corner of the card, and made a quick inspection of other cards in the cabinet.

Something that he discovered there pleased him, for he momentarily forgot the part that he was playing, and his expression was far different from any that had ever been displayed by Horace Chatham. It was an ugly, leering grin, that was most evident at the corners of Palermo's mouth.

The look passed away, and Palermo again became the double of Horace Chatham.

The physician went to the anteroom, and summoned the elevator. His face was haggard and worried as he looked at the operator.

In the hall, he summoned a cab, and stayed within the door until the vehicle had reached the curb.

Then, with a furtive glance, Palermo hurried across the sidewalk, entered the cab, and was driven away.

"Funny bloke," observed the elevator operator, speaking to the hallman. "You'd remember him if you saw him again, wouldn't you?"

"I remember faces, and I remember names," was the reply. "I'll know him if he comes again. Horace Chatham—to see Doctor Palermo."

The disguise had stood its first test. Already two men were positive that the man who had left the Marimba Apartments was Horace Chatham.

CHAPTER II. A MIDNIGHT VISITOR

"GOOD evening, Mr. Chatham."

The speaker was a clerk in a theatrical ticket office on Broadway. He was addressing a man who had just entered, and who approached the counter with a rather gloomy expression on his face.

The man smiled rather wearily at the greeting.

"Good evening," he said. "Have you anything good for to-morrow night? I'd like to see 'Cat's Paws' at the Forty-third Street Theater."

"I can fix it for the fourth row, center," replied the clerk. "But - er— didn't you see that show, Mr. Chatham? I sold you a ticket for it, last week."

"Yes, I saw it," replied the man quickly, "and I recommended it to a friend of mine. Promised to get a ticket for him."

He pulled a roll of bills from his pocket, and purchased the ticket for "Cat's Paws." Along with the money, he held another ticket, and the clerk smiled when he saw it. For he had sold that ticket—for a show to-night—to Chatham, the day before.

The clerk smiled as the man in evening clothes hurried from the office.

"Funny, isn't it?" he remarked to a companion behind the counter. "That guy Chatham paid a premium price for a ticket to the show at the Embassy, tonight. The first act is half over; yet he comes in here, buying a ticket for another show, on his way to the theater."

"Some birds don't know what it means to get in before a show starts!"

Doctor Palermo was smiling to himself as he hurried toward the Embassy Theater. He had tested the character of Horace Chatham, and it had stood the test.

The clerk at the ticket office would remember that Chatham had stopped in just before nine o'clock. Buying a ticket for "Cat's Paws" had been a lucky stroke. The clerk would remember that, also.

Entering the lobby of the Embassy, Palermo had another opportunity to make use of his false identity.

The assistant manager, standing by the ticket box, recognized him as Chatham, and nodded in greeting. Palermo returned the nod, and entered the theater. There he watched the show, and remained until the final curtain.

After the show he called a cab, and directed the driver to take him to the Argo Club.

IN the darkness of the cab Palermo temporarily dropped his impersonation of Horace Chatham. Some plan was passing through his mind, and his own peculiar smile appeared upon his lips.

"Ten minutes at the club," he said softly. "That will be sufficient. I can call Wilkinson from there. He will surely be at home. If he is not, I can wait a little while."

When the cab stopped at the Argo Club, the man who stepped forth was Horace Chatham to perfection. The doorman spoke in greeting as he came through the door, and Palermo exchanged nods with two club members who were sitting in the hallway.

Then he strolled through the lounge and the library, staring straight ahead, as though in deep thought.

He was sure that more than one of Chatham's friends observed him; but he did not tarry long enough to become engaged in conversation with any one. Instead, he went to a telephone in the corner of the hallway, and called a number.

"Mr. Wilkinson?" he asked. It was Horace Chatham's voice that came from Palermo's lips. "Ah! Glad you are in. Must see you to-night. Very important."

"What's that? Good! I'm at the Argo Club. I'll come up to see you right away, Wilkinson."

There was a cigar stand by the telephone. Palermo noted that the clerk had overheard the conversation. He purchased three cigars—of a brand that he had found in Chatham's pocket—then pulled a notebook from his pocket, and pretended to read an address from a page.

"Seth Wilkinson, Grampian Apartments," he mumbled.

Outside the Argo Club, Palermo called for a cab, and told the doorman his destination. The attendant repeated the name of the Grampian Apartments to the taxi driver.

Half an hour later, Doctor Palermo arrived at the uptown residence of Seth Wilkinson, and was ushered into the living room of a pretentious apartment. He knew the place perfectly. He had been there before, but never in the character of Horace Chatham.

The masquerader suppressed a smile, as he waited for Wilkinson's appearance. Wilkinson knew both Horace Chatham and Albert Palermo. This was to be a crucial test.

"Hello, Chatham."

Seth Wilkinson had entered the room. Palermo arose and shook hands. Then he resumed his seat, while Wilkinson took a chair close by, and looked at him as though expecting a statement.

Palermo did not hesitate. He played the part of Chatham to perfection when he spoke.

"Wilkinson," he said earnestly, "I have a favor to ask you. It concerns a man who is a mutual friend of ours—Doctor Albert Palermo."

Wilkinson's eyes narrowed. Something in his sharp gaze caused the speaker to stop.

It was plain that Wilkinson was surprised to learn that Chatham knew Palermo; and it was also apparent that Wilkinson was not pleased.

"So you know Palermo?"

As Seth Wilkinson pronounced these words, he arose from his chair, walked across the room, and picked up a pipe that lay on the table. He stuffed the pipe with tobacco, and stared thoughtfully at the far wall of the room.

Then he turned savagely toward the man sitting in the chair.

"I'll tell you what I think of Palermo!" he growled. "If I had that four-flusher here in this room, I'd give him a lacing that he would never forget! You can tell him that for me, Chatham!"

WILKINSON'S threat was not an idle one. He was a huge, powerful man, with a firm-set jaw that characterized a fighter.

Yet Palermo was unperturbed. Confident beneath his disguise, he simply looked mildly surprised at Wilkinson's outburst.

"Let me tell you something about Palermo!" Wilkinson stopped his discourse long enough to light his pipe. "He's a smooth rascal, who pretends to be a man of importance. I wouldn't trust him for five minutes, and he knows it!"

"But you trusted him once," objected Palermo, mimicking Chatham's voice. "He told me so himself. In fact—"

"That was before he tried to swindle me," interrupted Wilkinson bitterly.

"Listen, Chatham. I'll wager that of all the people Palermo knows— and he is well acquainted among persons of wealth—I am the only one who understands his game. More than that—I'm the only one who can make trouble for him; and that's exactly what I intend to do!"

"Why?"

"Chatham," said Wilkinson, sitting in a chair, and twisting his pipe between his hands, "I've kept silent on this whole affair. I don't know why you've come here, but since I know you well, I'm sure that Palermo is trying to dupe you, also.

"Six months ago, Palermo dropped in to see me. He told me about some wonderful experiments that he was conducting in his laboratory.

"I believed his story, and when he said that he needed thirty thousand dollars, I agreed to give it to him. In fact, I was all ready to pay him the money with no security whatever, for I believed in him.

"But I suddenly came to my senses, and proposed that he sign a note for that amount. He tried to dodge the issue, but when I became suspicious, he suddenly acted in a very agreeable manner. He signed the note, and took the money."

"Exactly what he told me," interposed the man disguised as Horace Chatham.

"Yes," retorted Wilkinson grimly, "but I'll wager that he didn't tell you anything further, did he?"

"No, he did not."

Wilkinson laughed.

"I saw Palermo quite frequently after that. He was always talking of his great experiments—that they were coming well, but slowly. He was working up to what he wanted—an extension on the note.

"About two weeks ago, he dropped in to see me. He showed me some bonds on Consolidated Airways. He suggested that I take them as security instead of his note.

"I looked over the bonds. They were better security, but I followed a hunch. I told Palermo to wait until the end of the six-month period; then I would take the bonds.

"That satisfied him, and he left.

"But I noticed something, Chatham. I remembered the numbers on two of the bonds. The next day, I began an investigation. I located the very same bonds that Palermo had shown me.

"I learned, positively, that his bonds were counterfeits!"

Wilkinson paused. "That revealed Palermo's game. He thought that, with the bonds in my possession, I would grant him another six months at least—for the bonds were worth much more than the money he owed me.

"But suppose that he had never chosen to pay his debt? I would have been left with nothing but the fake bonds in my possession."

"Perhaps you were mistaken," objected Palermo.

"Not a chance of it," replied Wilkinson. "I still have Palermo's note. When it comes due—next week—I'm going to demand payment.

"If Palermo is short on cash, he will never cease to regret it."

"This sounds incredible, Wilkinson," objected the visitor. "Doctor Palermo told me of this matter, although he did not mention the matter of the bonds.

"He said that you held his note for thirty thousand dollars, but he did not think that you would renew it. So I agreed to give you my note in its place in order to—"

"I wouldn't accept it, Chatham."

"Isn't my security good?" There was a note of anger in the speaker's voice.

"It's too good," replied Wilkinson tersely. "I don't want your note. I want Palermo's!"

"Suppose he doesn't make it good?"

"That's exactly what I expect."

SILENCE followed. Wilkinson smiled as he studied his visitor. He suspected that Chatham was preparing a suggestion. This proved correct.

"Wilkinson," said the disguised Doctor Palermo, "this is a great surprise to me. Yet I still doubt the

correctness of your conclusions.

"If you are right, it means as much to me as to you; for, like yourself, I have trusted Doctor Palermo. If he is a faker—well, I should like to aid you in exposing him!"

"How can you do that?"

"By pretending to follow his scheme. By giving you my note, and holding Palermo's in return."

"That will give him time to raise the money."

"I don't think so. Does he suspect that you discovered anything wrong with the bonds he showed you?"

"No."

"Very well, then. He will try to dupe me as he duped you; but I shall be on guard. I promise to notify you as soon as Palermo tries something. We will be able to catch him with the goods—"

"Capital!" exclaimed Wilkinson.

He rose and waved his hand to his visitor.

"Come into my study," he said. "You can make out your note there; and I'll give you Palermo's. But hold onto it, at all costs."

The two men entered a little room that adjoined the living room. Seth Wilkinson unlocked a desk drawer, and brought out a metal box.

Before he opened the box, he handed a blank form for a promissory note to his companion. Palermo filled it out; then, noticing that Wilkinson was busy unlocking the box, the disguised physician drew a card from his pocket. The card bore Horace Chatham's signature.

Concealing the card within his left hand, Palermo copied the signature with remarkable skill as he signed the note. Then he pocketed the card, just as Wilkinson turned toward him.

"You have dated it to-morrow," said Wilkinson, examining the note that bore the signature of Horace Chatham.

"No," came the reply. "It is after midnight. The date is correct."

Wilkinson smiled as he glanced at the clock on the desk. The hands registered a few minutes past twelve.

"Here is Palermo's note," he said.

"Thanks."

WILKINSON was seated at the desk, before the metal box. That one word suddenly aroused him. He was thoughtful as he dropped the note with Chatham's signature into the box.

He seemed to recall the voice that had spoken that word. He remembered a night, nearly six months before, when he had given thirty thousand dollars to Doctor Albert Palermo.

"Thanks."

The word reechoed in Wilkinson's brain. It was not Horace Chatham who had spoken it. The word had

come from Doctor Palermo!

Wilkinson turned his head, and gazed shrewdly at the man beside him.

Doctor Palermo had forgotten the part that he was playing—had forgotten it in his triumph. Now Wilkinson's eyes confirmed the suspicion that had come to his ears.

On the face of Horace Chatham he saw an expression that did not belong there. It was the characteristic smile of Doctor Albert Palermo - that smile that became ugly at the corners of the man's mouth.

Seth Wilkinson now recognized his companion. In a few short seconds, the masquerader had destroyed the illusion which he had so artfully created.

"Palermo!"

Wilkinson began to rise as he uttered the name of recognition. His hands were on the table; he was pushing back his chair. Yet he was acting slowly, as a man waking from a daze.

Palermo's response was instantaneous. He had been on guard throughout his interview with Wilkinson, constantly expecting an emergency such as this one.

He moved to action with a speed that gave the lethargic Wilkinson no opportunity to defend himself. From beneath his coat, Palermo whipped out a long, thin-bladed knife. With a swift motion, he buried the steel shaft in the other man's body.

A short cry came from Seth Wilkinson; then the huge man fell sidewise, and his body struck the desk. It hung there for a moment; then toppled to the floor.

The evil smile still remained on the corners of Palermo's mouth. The murderer stood there, admiring the work that he had done.

Then, with calm indifference, he picked up the note that Wilkinson had given him, and placed it in his pocket. Stooping over the body, Palermo withdrew the knife, carefully covering it with his handkerchief before he put it in his pocket. Then he went to the door, opened it, and entered the living room.

Just as he closed the door behind him, a man appeared at the other side of the room. It was Wilkinson's servingman.

The smile vanished from Palermo's lips. Once again, he was the perfect duplicate of Horace Chatham.

"Did you call me, sir?" questioned the man. "That is, did Mr. Wilkinson call me?"

"Yes," came the calm reply. "He simply wanted you to get my hat and coat, and show me to the elevator. He was busy writing, so I left him."

"Very good, sir."

The man brought the coat and hat, and helped Palermo put them on. Then he led the way to the elevator, and waited there until the guest had left.

In the lobby of the Grampian Apartments, Palermo instructed the doorman to call a taxi. He acted the part of Horace Chatham, and simulated great nervousness and impatience. He stumbled as he entered the cab, and gave the destination, "Grand Central Station," in a voice loud enough for the doorman to hear.

Shortly afterward, the form of Horace Chatham mingled with the crowd in the concourse of New York's great railway terminal. The man disappeared unobtrusively toward the Lexington Avenue entrance. He walked a few blocks, then hailed another cab from the darkness.

When the vehicle drew up at the Marimba Apartments, it was Doctor Palermo, hat and coat upon his arm, who stepped to the curb.

There was no hallman on duty after midnight. The former elevator operator was gone; his shift had ended at twelve. Thus the attendant who took Doctor Palermo to the fortieth floor was not surprised to see the physician. He did not know that no one had seen Doctor Palermo leave the building that evening.

CHAPTER III. TWO MEN INVESTIGATE

THE murder of Seth Wilkinson was front-page news. From Times to tabloids, the event was retold to the readers of the daily journals. Involving the name of Horace Chatham, a man as socially prominent and as wealthy as Wilkinson, the story was of double interest to New Yorkers.

The police were sure that they knew the murderer. The one problem was to find him.

Seth Wilkinson's manservant had undergone a grueling quiz, and his account had remained the same. Ten minutes after Chatham had left Wilkinson's apartment, the man had found the body of his master.

Only Chatham had entered the apartment that night. No one else could have come or gone, without the servant observing him.

The hallman of the Grampian Apartments corroborated this testimony.

He had noticed the nervousness exhibited by Horace Chatham. He told how the clubman had stumbled when he entered the cab. He had felt sure then that something was wrong.

When Wilkinson's servant had spread the alarm, a short while later, the hallman had recalled the incidents of Chatham's departure.

The police had discovered the motive for the murder. The note signed by Horace Chatham was sufficient evidence that some business transaction had led to the killing.

In the reconstruction of the crime, the scene in Seth Wilkinson's study was fully visualized; and the terse tabloid writers made good use of it.

Chatham, they believed, had given Wilkinson his note for thirty thousand dollars. Perhaps it was to pay a gambling debt, for both men were inveterate gamblers. Whatever the purpose of the transaction, it must have led to a sudden quarrel; and in the fraction of a minute, Horace Chatham had killed his friend.

While the police had lost all traces of Chatham after the cab driver had deposited him at the Grand Central Station, they had been quite fortunate in discovering his actions prior to the time of the murder.

Horace Chatham lived uptown, in an old brownstone residence that had been the home of his family for many years. His unmarried sister and two servants were the only other occupants of the house. They testified that he had left there at noon.

He had lunched at the Argo Club, had remained there most of the afternoon, and had eaten an early dinner. He had been seen at a theatrical ticket agency, and at the Forty-third Street Theater.

After that, he had returned to the Argo Club; and had been overheard telephoning to Seth Wilkinson.

The only break in the chain of circumstances lay during the interval between Chatham's dinner at the Argo Club and his arrival at the ticket agency. This period was not accounted for until late in the afternoon following the murder.

Then the police received a phone call from Doctor Albert Palermo, of the Marimba Apartments. The physician informed them that Horace Chatham had called upon him before eight o'clock, and had left his apartment for the theater.

A DETECTIVE from headquarters called upon Doctor Palermo, and found the physician quite willing to supply the missing link in Chatham's actions.

Doctor Palermo was known as a nerve specialist. He testified that Horace Chatham had come to consult him. He added that, while it might ordinarily be unethical for a doctor to reveal his patient's troubles, he was under no restraint in the case of Horace Chatham.

The clubman had simply stated that he was worried over financial problems, and had not stated their nature. Doctor Palermo had merely advised him to think of other matters for a few days; then, if his problems still troubled him, to return. Palermo had been under the impression that Chatham was exaggerating his situation.

It was not an unusual case; many of Palermo's patients had temporary problems that involved money, and he had found that wealthy persons invariably magnified their financial difficulties.

The detective who visited the Marimba Apartments also interviewed the elevator operator and the hallman. From them he ascertained almost the exact time of Chatham's arrival and departure.

Thus it was definitely understood that Horace Chatham had been ill at ease during the day before the murder; that he had worried about money; and that all had led up to his encounter with Seth Wilkinson.

The question that now occupied the front pages was that of Horace Chatham's actions following the murder.

Had Wilkinson given him thirty thousand dollars in cash? Wilkinson was known to have kept that much money in his apartment. Perhaps the sight of the money had maddened Chatham.

Yet the police could discover nothing to prove that Chatham was in financial straits. His affairs were involved, it was true; but he had bank accounts that totaled considerably more than thirty thousand dollars.

The solution of the mystery obviously lay in tracing Chatham; in bringing him back to New York.

It was believed that he had fled to Canada. The police of Canadian cities were given full information.

A man with thirty thousand dollars in his possession could travel anywhere, yet New York police were confident that Chatham would soon be discovered, for he possessed none of the attributes found in the usual criminal, and would, sooner or later, fail in his efforts to keep his identity unknown.

Certain newspapers commented upon the fact that there were now three names of prominent New Yorkers involved in affairs of homicide.

Less than two months before, Lloyd Harriman had committed suicide in Florida. Like Seth Wilkinson, Harriman had been a friend of Horace Chatham. One tabloid screamed this fact in lurid headlines.

Had Horace Chatham been concerned in Lloyd Harriman's death? Had Harriman committed suicide,

or—

The question stopped there, but the inference was plain.

Perhaps Chatham had killed Harriman also. Braved by one successful murder, he would have possessed the nerve to kill another man.

But even the tabloid restrained from making further imputation.

THREE days had gone by, without a trace of Horace Chatham. Yet the hue and cry still persisted.

Perhaps the hectic columns that told of the Wilkinson murder were becoming tiresome to the public at large; but to one man, they were most enjoyable. This individual sat at his desk in a small office on Forty-eighth Street, with piles of newspaper clippings in front of him, and smiled as he ran his scissors through the pages of the afternoon newspapers.

The reversed letters on the glass door of the office proclaimed his name and occupation:

CLYDE BURKE

Clipping Bureau

Burke finished his search through the newspapers, then sat back in his chair, and lighted his pipe. He seemed well contented with life.

Burke was a man not yet thirty years of age, but his firm, well-molded features indicated long experience. He was light in weight, almost frail in build; yet his eyes and his face showed a determination found in men who seek action.

One would have supposed that Burke, through keen imagination, found an outlet for his natural desire of action by visualizing the events that he read as he clipped newspapers.

Even now, it was evident that he was putting together the items of the Wilkinson murder; that his keen mind was formulating firm opinions. In fact, he was so engrossed with thought that he did not see the door of the office open.

He started suddenly as he realized that another man was in the room. When he recognized his visitor, he scrambled to his feet with an exclamation of surprise.

"Mr. Clarendon!"

The man whom Burke addressed stood silent and smiling. Yet his smile was as strange as his appearance.

He was tall and wiry, with slightly stooped shoulders. His white hands had long, slender fingers, with pointed nails. His face was pale, and almost masklike.

It was the solemnity of the face that made the smile so peculiar; for like the other features, the smile seemed part of a chiseled countenance.

The man bore an expression that would have resembled death, but for the remarkable light that shone in his deep, piercing eyes. They were like living coals.

He glanced at the piles of clippings, and his eyes seemed to flash approval. Burke grinned.

"They're all yours, Mr. Clarendon," he said. "I was just waiting for word from you. All ready to send."

"They include the back dates?"

"Yes. I went through the morgue at the Daily Sphere, and found everything that concerned Harriman, as well as Wilkinson and Chatham.

"I haven't missed anything. I've been extremely careful in their arrangement. I've done a lot of work on this case; still, I'm being overpaid."

"Forget that."

"I can't forget it, Mr. Clarendon." Burke's eyes expressed both appreciation and admiration. "I've been waiting to see you, always hoping that I could tell you how grateful I am for all you've done for me."

"Just what have I done for you?" The same mirthless smile remained on Clarendon's face.

"I'll tell you, Mr. Clarendon," said Burke earnestly. "When I lost my job, the time the Evening Clarion was taken over by the Daily Sphere, I was down and out. I didn't know where to turn. I was a good police reporter, but there were too many of them in New York.

"When you called me up, and told me you would pay the expenses for starting this clipping bureau, I figured that it would just about make me a living.

"Your second offer—to pay me a salary for sending you any clippings that you might require—meant a lot to me. You said that you would fix the figure.

"Since then, you have been sending me a hundred dollars every week. If I had billed you as a customer, you would have received the same clippings for one-tenth the amount you pay. No wonder I'm grateful.

"Yet I don't feel right about it. I actually owe you more than two thousand dollars."

"What do you intend to do about it?"

"I don't know," came the frank reply.

"BURKE"—George Clarendon's voice was firm and expressive—"I have paid you well because I wanted intelligent cooperation. You have done your part.

"This is only the second time that you have met me. I want your honest opinion. Do you trust me?"

"Positively!"

"Would you work for me, faithfully, without question?"

"I would."

"Keeping all our dealings confidential—"

"Absolutely."

"Then I can tell you my real purpose in setting you up in business. Burke, I am a criminologist. I have my own way of dealing with crime. Those who work for me must always obey me implicitly—"

Burke nodded.

"- even though they may not understand my motives." Clarendon's voice was firm, almost severe. "Even though they may face danger!"

A look of enjoyment appeared upon Burke's visage. He sensed adventure. The smile remained upon George Clarendon's lips, as though the man with the masklike face knew what was passing in Burke's mind.

It was the sealing of a bargain. From that moment, the ex-reporter was the henchman of George Clarendon. For a full minute the men looked at each other with mutual understanding. Then Clarendon pointed to the clippings on the desk.

"You have read them thoroughly?" he asked.

"Yes."

"What do you think of the case?"

"It's an unusual one," said Burke, thoughtfully puffing at his pipe. "I've gone into it carefully, Mr. Clarendon. It seems obvious that Chatham murdered Wilkinson, yet—"

"Yet you would like to reject the obvious."

"Exactly so."

"Why?"

"Because the motive doesn't seem sufficient."

George Clarendon nodded. Thus encouraged, Burke went into his story.

"Chatham must have had money," he said. "Yet he borrowed thirty thousand dollars from Wilkinson. His note was accepted. Wilkinson put it away.

"Six months, Chatham would have to pay that note; yet he murdered Wilkinson on the spot. It seemed a foolish thing to do. He could have waited a while, if murder was necessary."

"But suppose a sudden quarrel occurred?"

"That's just it. Chatham showed great presence of mind when he encountered Wilkinson's servant, outside the room. The testimony showed that he came out quietly, without haste.

"Therefore, I am wondering why Chatham didn't take time to open the metal box and take out the note he gave to Wilkinson."

"Have you mentioned that to any one, Burke?"

"No, sir. You impressed me with the fact that I should say nothing regarding any case on which you desired clippings. That was a reasonable request, and I have abided by it."

"Aside from speculation, Burke," said Clarendon, "what have you found that has not been widely circulated in the news accounts?"

IN answer, Burke reached for the pile of clippings. He drew out one - evidently an item taken from an old newspaper. He read it aloud.

"Sapphire changes hands. Lloyd Harriman, wealthy New York clubman, is now the owner of the famous purple sapphire. He purchased it at auction, for eighteen hundred dollars. Jewel is alleged to be jinxed, but Harriman says, 'Blah!'"

"Evidently a tabloid account, with a photograph above it."

"That's right," said Burke, grinning. He displayed the clipping, which showed Lloyd Harriman, garbed in white flannels, holding the gem before the eyes of two admiring young ladies.

"What of the purple sapphire?" questioned Clarendon.

"It's jinxed all right," replied Burke, referring to another pile of clippings. "Sounds like the same old stuff, though."

"Belonged to King Alphonse of Antaria, at the time he was bounced from the throne. Was sold to an English noblewoman, who was killed in an airplane accident."

"You know how those stories circulate. But the fact remains that Lloyd Harriman committed suicide several months after he acquired it."

"What about Harriman's suicide?"

"Well, there's a question in my mind about that. I've got clippings on it."

"It looked like a suicide, right enough, but here's a new theory suggested by a tabloid."

"Since Horace Chatham murdered Seth Wilkinson, maybe he knows something about Lloyd Harriman's death. It's a wild idea, but—" Burke paused in thought, then added "- but Chatham was in Florida when Harriman died; and I can't find any trace of that purple sapphire after the time Harriman bought it."

"So you suppose—"

"I don't know what to suppose," admitted Burke frankly. "I'm no detective, although when I was a police reporter I knew as much as any dick on the force. I don't swallow this jinx stuff, as a rule; yet sometimes it seems to work."

"But let's suppose that Chatham got hold of that sapphire. Then something would have happened to him. Instead, the evidence shows that he killed Wilkinson."

"Burke," interposed Clarendon, "your ideas are interesting, even though they are scarcely tangible. There is a definite angle to this situation, however."

"We know that Harriman purchased the sapphire at a fraction of its value. Therefore it is possible that he was pursued, not by a fanciful danger, but by living men who sought to get the jewel—"

"Wait!" exclaimed Burke. He pulled a clipping from the pile that he had previously consulted, and showed it to Clarendon:

Harriman was in a mix-up, not long after he bought the sapphire. He was held up on a road in Florida. Some bandits searched him, and took fifty dollars and his watch. He didn't have much money with him that night.

"Keep those clippings, Burke," Clarendon said, returning the slip. "We may find a connection there. But in the meantime, let us consider this case of Chatham's—and the murder of Seth Wilkinson. Your point is well chosen; that the motive was not sufficient for Chatham to kill Wilkinson. We also have the question

of the note.

"Why did Chatham leave it there?"

"I don't know," confessed Burke.

"Have you seen the note?"

"I haven't been out of the office. The police have the note, all right. They're holding it as evidence—"

"You know them at headquarters—through your former connection with the Clarion?"

"I know all of them."

"Come along then." George Clarendon rose from his chair. Clyde Burke followed, and a few minutes later the two men were riding in a cab to police headquarters.

"The police have two letters from Chatham to Wilkinson," Burke mentioned as they traveled along Broadway. "Those and the note are being held. I think we can get a look at them."

CLARENDON nodded, but said nothing. He seemed to be deep in thought. He remained silent until they arrived at headquarters.

Burke led the way into the building. He inquired for Detective Steve Lang, and when the man appeared, Burke introduced him to George Clarendon.

"Whatcha doing now, Clyde?" the detective asked Burke.

"Newspaper correspondent," replied the ex-reporter tersely. "Thought I might be able to send out some dope on this Wilkinson murder. Say! Could you let me see that note and those letters that Chatham wrote—"

"Can't let you see the originals," replied Lang, "but we've got photostats. All the police reporters have seen them. You're one of the crowd. You can have a look at them."

He conducted the two men into the office, and produced the photostats.

He pointed out the fact that Horace Chatham's note was dated on the twenty-third, indicating that it might have been written after midnight. He also made a brief comparison between the signatures on the letters and that on the note.

Burke passed the photostats to George Clarendon. The latter looked at them, nodded, and returned them. He was evidently satisfied.

"Thanks, Steve," said Burke. "I just wanted to make sure about the letters. The newspapers reported them correctly; just a couple of friendly letters written by Chatham when he was in Florida."

"That's all," replied the detective. "They don't mean nothing, except that the two guys corresponded a bit."

Clarendon and Burke rode back uptown.

"I'll drop you at your office," said Clarendon. "Keep on this job until you hear from me again."

"What did you think of the evidence?" questioned Burke.

"Two letters and a promissory note," replied Clarendon thoughtfully.

"Both written by Horace Chatham."

"Burke," said Clarendon thoughtfully, "what would you do if you were on the detective force, and in possession of those documents?"

"I'd do just as the detectives have done. Consider the promissory note as a business transaction between Chatham and Wilkinson, the letters, with the same signature, as evidence of friendship between the two men."

"You would not go further?"

"I don't believe so. It is obvious that Chatham wrote to Wilkinson, and later gave him the note. I only wonder why Chatham left the note there after the murder."

The cab stopped in front of the building where Burke's office was located. Clarendon placed his hand on the other man's arm, just as Burke was about to leave the taxi.

"One moment, Burke," Clarendon spoke in a low voice. "You remember that you said you would like to reject the obvious?"

"Yes."

"Yet you regard it as obvious that Chatham wrote both the letters and the promissory note. You believe that fact, just as the police believe it.

"They looked at the signatures just to check up—and I saw you do the same.

"You were interested in the contents of the letters and the amount of the note. But I was interested in the signatures alone. Thus I learned—"

Clarendon paused and looked steadily at Burke. The ex-reporter had opened the door of the cab, and had one foot on the step. But now he hesitated in astonishment, as something began to dawn upon him.

"What I learned must be kept secret by you and myself," said Clarendon. "Both the letters and the note bore the same signature— yet there were minute differences between the signature on the note and those on the letters. Therefore I believe—"

"What?" gasped Burke.

"That the note signed by Horace Chatham was a forgery!"

With his subtle smile, George Clarendon gently urged his companion to the street. Clyde Burke stood openmouthed as the door of the cab closed.

Then, just as the taxi started up the street, a sound came from within the vehicle. It was a low, weird laugh—a laugh that was both mocking and triumphant!

Clyde Burke watched the cab as it lost itself amid the passing traffic. With eyes half-closed, he imagined that he could still see the masklike face of his mysterious employer, and through his brain reechoed the sound of that weird, sinister laugh!

CHAPTER IV. CLARENDON EXPLAINS

CLYDE BURKE was perplexed. For twenty-four hours, he had been puzzling over the strange revelation made by George Clarendon.

He had thought of it during the evening. It had occupied his mind since his first waking moment in the morning. Now, in his office, Burke still pondered, to no avail.

Clarendon's discovery that the note signed by Horace Chatham was a forgery was singular enough. But the real cause of Burke's bewilderment was George Clarendon, himself. The man was an enigma.

Burke realized now how little contact he had had with his benefactor. For months he had forwarded clippings to George Clarendon, yet he had no idea where the man lived.

He sent the clippings when instructed; and the method of transmission was to place the clippings in an envelope and deposit it in the door of a dingy office in a building on Twenty-third Street.

The name on the door was M. Jonas. Burke had never inquired who Jonas might be. He fancied that the man was simply a friend of Clarendon's. The office had always been locked; and Burke had never seen any one there.

Now Clarendon had appeared; had explained that he was a criminologist; and had partly taken Burke into his confidence.

That was not surprising to Burke. He realized that his mysterious benefactor was a man of intuition. Clarendon must know that Burke could be trusted.

There is a spirit of loyalty that governs every experienced newspaperman. Clarendon had evidently seen it in Burke.

Sitting at his desk, the ex-reporter reverted to the Wilkinson murder. He examined some of the clippings; then laid them aside, and taking paper and pencil, began to jot down rough ideas.

Granting that Chatham's note for thirty thousand dollars was a forgery— what did it signify?

The possession of a forged note by Seth Wilkinson might have been a sufficient reason for Chatham to kill the man. Yet that note was dated at the time of the murder!

It could have been made out by no other than Chatham himself— unless Wilkinson had forged it in Chatham's presence.

Burke had another thought.

Perhaps Chatham had actually signed the note, but had disguised his normal signature. Perhaps Wilkinson had observed the difference, and had mentioned it to Chatham. That might have led to the murder.

But why had Chatham left the false note in Wilkinson's study?

Burke's hand was busy as he thought. Almost subconsciously, he was writing the figures 30,000 all over the sheet of paper.

Now he was placing dollar marks in front of the figures on the sheet, and was repeating, half aloud, the words: "Thirty thousand dollars."

"Quite a bit of money," said a voice beside him.

Burke nearly toppled from his chair. He looked up, a startled expression on his face, to see George

Clarendon standing near him. The man was smiling— that strange smile that Burke had noticed yesterday.

GEORGE CLARENDON sat down in the other chair, and Burke waited for him to speak. The ex-reporter was usually alert; hence he marveled at the way in which Clarendon could arrive, unheard and unseen.

"This case puzzles you," said the visitor.

Burke nodded.

"I am not surprised," said Clarendon, "because it has been puzzling to me. Yet I am beginning to form a theory. I take it that you have no theory of your own."

Burke shook his head.

"You must be right about that forgery, Mr. Clarendon," he said. "But as far as I can see, it leaves us nowhere. What does it prove?"

"It proves," said Clarendon quietly, "that something has been learned by rejecting the obvious."

"We have taken the last step in the dramatic murder of Seth Wilkinson— namely, the finding of a promissory note signed by Horace Chatham—and have rejected its accepted significance."

"Now let us go backward, step by step. What happened before that?"

"Chatham was seen leaving Wilkinson's apartment."

"By whom?"

"By attendants at the Grampian Apartments. By Wilkinson's man."

"Correct. How well did they know Horace Chatham?"

"Well," said Burke speculatively, "I guess that Wilkinson's man had seen him a few times; but not very often." He paused, then added suddenly. "You don't mean—"

"I mean just what you are thinking," replied Clarendon, his smile increasing almost imperceptibly. "Just as the police thought they had found a note signed by Chatham, so did those men at the Grampian Apartments think they saw Chatham leave!"

"I see it now!" exclaimed Burke. "It wasn't Chatham who signed the note. It wasn't Chatham who killed Wilkinson. But wait! The theory ends right there!"

"Wilkinson must have known Chatham well enough not to be mistaken. It must have been Chatham himself who came to see Wilkinson."

"Do you have Wilkinson's testimony to that effect?" inquired Clarendon softly.

"Whew!" gasped Burke. "You're driving it home, now. Perhaps Wilkinson thought it was Chatham, too, until—"

"Until he recognized his error. Then the man disguised as Chatham had only one course—to kill Seth Wilkinson."

BURKE was groping mentally. Fantastic though the theory might be, it seemed very real to him.

After all, the one man qualified to identify Horace Chatham was dead. Yet he still found it difficult to depart from accepted facts. He was on the point of asking a question when Clarendon forestalled him.

"Let us go back further," said the man with the masklike face. "You may check me if I am wrong on any detail.

"Horace Chatham was heard to call up Seth Wilkinson. By whom? A man at a cigar counter. He was seen at the Argo Club—but had no sustained conversation with any one. Before that, he was observed at a theater. He was also seen in a ticket agency.

"Is there any witness yet who might not have been easily deceived?"

"No."

"He also left the Marimba Apartments, after visiting Doctor Albert Palermo. That was just before he went to the theatrical ticket agency. I believe the hallman remembered his departure.

"Am I correct?"

"You are."

"The hallman, like the others, is a poor witness. But now"—Clarendon was no longer smiling, and his voice was low—"now we have reached a solid link in the chain. Chatham spent some time with Doctor Palermo. We may consider the physician to be a reliable witness."

Burke nodded his assent.

"Therefore," concluded Clarendon, "the last man who really and authentically saw Horace Chatham was Doctor Albert Palermo. He is the one who should be questioned as to the identity of Horace Chatham."

It was amazing to Burke. Yet the newspaperman was used to facts in preference to fancies.

"But so many persons saw Chatham," he protested weakly. "It seems incredible that everybody could have been deceived—"

"Burke," interposed Clarendon, with his odd smile, "I know the efficacy of a good disguise. I could cause a dozen people—friends of yours—to swear that they had seen you on Broadway, or in a newspaper office, while you never left this room.

"It is my knowledge of disguise that leads me to suppose—simply to suppose, mind you—that the last person who saw the actual Horace Chatham was Doctor Palermo. That is, if Doctor Palermo saw him."

"Now it's becoming more confusing," objected Burke. "If we reject Doctor Palermo—"

"We are not rejecting him," returned Clarendon. "It is possible, of course, that Palermo was also duped. But, there are also other possibilities.

"For example: Palermo may be shielding the false Horace Chatham. Or Chatham may have dropped out of the picture after he left Palermo's apartment. Or—"

The speaker stopped. He simply spread his hands in an expressive gesture. Somehow, Burke understood the significance more thoroughly than if Clarendon had spoken.

"Perhaps," murmured the former reporter, "perhaps something happened to Horace Chatham when he was with Doctor Palermo!"

"Exactly." Clarendon spoke firmly. "That is why, Burke, I expect you to resume an old role to-night—that of a newspaper reporter, seeking an interview. You will call on Doctor Palermo, and question him regarding Horace Chatham.

"Keep all these theories in the back of your head. Use your own judgment; but I would suggest that your theme be the subject of Chatham's mental condition at the time he called on the eminent psychoanalyst.

"If all is progressing nicely, you may bring up the question of"—the voice almost whispered its final words—"the purple sapphire."

Clyde Burke was tense for a moment. Then he grinned. It was the greatest assignment he had ever had. It was like a part in a play—only this was a real drama, with a hidden purpose.

"You can say that you are connected with the Daily Sphere," came Clarendon's suggestion. "Many of your friends are there—from the old Clarion staff."

THE two men descended to the street. As they walked toward Broadway, Clarendon spoke steadily to his companion, in a low, whispered voice that echoed strangely in Burke's ear.

"To-night is important," were the words. "Remember that, Burke! If you uncover important facts, it will be the beginning of a desperate struggle.

"There will be danger—but you are not the man to fear it. Yet danger requires caution.

"Should any strange events develop, you will not see me again—that is, not as George Clarendon. Instead, you will receive messages—usually written messages.

"These messages will be written in a special ink, Burke. You will reply in kind. A bottle of the ink is on your desk, where I placed it.

"Each word in every message will be written backward. You will write your words backward when you answer.

"Perhaps you are wondering at such a simple code. Yet it serves its purpose; for all messages written with that ink fade completely away a few minutes after they are exposed to the air."

The men were nearing Broadway. They had reached the fringe of the afternoon crowd. As they turned to cross the street, Clyde Burke was looking straight ahead, toward the surging traffic. Clarendon's whispering voice was scarcely audible above the din.

"Leave all replies at the Jonas office," came the final words, "and remember—when you receive a message, read it immediately. For it will fade into nothingness. The words will disappear from your sight, just as I am disappearing—"

It was less than one second before Burke realized that he was no longer listening to the voice of George Clarendon. He turned quickly to look at the man beside him. There was no one there.

Burke glanced up and down the street, peering into the faces of the passers-by. Clarendon was gone. Yet, while Burke stood alone on the curb, his ears caught the sound of a laugh that he remembered.

Burke looked in vain for the author of the laugh. Then he crossed the street, and mingled, still wondering,

with the Broadway throng.

His mysterious companion had vanished like a shadow—yet not even a shadow remained to betray his presence!

CHAPTER V. A STRANGE INTERVIEW

THE elevator reached the fortieth floor of the Marimba Apartments and Clyde Burke was left alone in the anteroom. He had already been announced. Now the newspaperman studied the door before him with observant eyes. He was impressed by the massiveness of its construction.

He rang the bell and waited. There was something uncanny in the way the door opened.

Entering, Burke felt a sinking feeling. The dimly-lighted hallway, with its huge bookcases, seemed like the entrance to a medieval castle.

As the newspaperman walked along the thickly carpeted passage, the door opened at the other end, and he beheld a robed figure standing there.

The form of the man seemed like some inquisitor, until Burke had approached more closely. Then he identified the man's garment as a physician's gown, but instead of being the usual white, the gown was a deep yellow.

"Mr. Burke?"

The question came in a modulated voice. As Burke acknowledged it, he realized that he was in the presence of a most unusual person, and surmised correctly that it was Doctor Palermo.

The physician ushered Burke into the paneled room, and invited him to take a chair. Burke accepted the cigar that was offered.

These ceremonies over, Doctor Palermo stood in the center of the room, his hands behind his back, and waited. There was nothing questioning in his attitude. He merely expected the visitor to state his business.

"I appreciate this reception," began Burke. "It occurred to me, to-day, that you might be willing to grant me an interview—"

"On what subject?" came the doctor's interruption.

"On the subject of Horace Chatham," answered Burke frankly.

Doctor Palermo laughed, without changing the steady impression of his lips.

"I have stated all that I know about Chatham," he said, in carefully accented words. "He was here the afternoon before he visited Seth Wilkinson. You will find my statements in the newspapers. That is all that I have deemed it necessary to say."

He bowed slightly, as though he wished the interview to be concluded. Burke merely leaned back in his chair, blew a puff of smoke from his cigar, and eyed the doctor rather curiously.

"There are certain factors in the case of Horace Chatham," he said, "that brought me here to-night. I understand perfectly that you have given a complete statement of Chatham's visit in this apartment.

"But I think—in fact, I feel sure—that Chatham was governed by certain emotions unknown to you."

"If so," returned Palermo coldly, "it would not interest me to know them now."

"And it would interest me to know your opinion regarding them."

THE young journalist met the physician's gaze unflinching. Burke's physical appearance was deceiving, but his indomitable spirit could be seen in his eyes.

Palermo recognized it. He realized that he was dealing with a man of purpose. For a moment a trace of anger came upon his features; then he suddenly softened, and seemed to express real interest in Burke's words.

"Very well," said Doctor Palermo, in an indulgent tone. "Tell me what you have ascertained regarding Horace Chatham."

"Doctor Palermo," said Burke, "I have met many men who have committed crimes. I have invariably found that they are either extremely hardened, or excessively emotional.

"If—as is well conceded—a murder was committed by Horace Chatham the night after he was here, it seems to me that you would have detected something in his manner that would have warned you.

"That has been covered in my statement to the police," retorted Doctor Palermo. "Chatham was emotional that evening. But the inspiring motive of his emotion was money. He could talk of nothing else. He was almost incoherent—"

"Yet," interposed Burke, "it now appears that Chatham did not lack money. His finances were in reasonably good shape. If he killed Wilkinson for the sake of thirty thousand dollars, he was wasting his efforts."

Doctor Palermo shrugged his shoulders. Burke was inwardly pleased. He had forced the physician into a position that made a quick reply impossible.

He waited for the doctor to speak. But Palermo artfully changed the subject.

"You must pardon me for a few minutes," he said. "I can discuss this with you later. I was working in my laboratory when you called, and I must return there."

He started away, then motioned to Burke.

"Come along, if you wish," he added. "My laboratory may interest you."

He led the way through two curtains at the side of the room. He unlocked a strong door, and Burke followed him. They entered a large room, fully equipped with apparatus.

Doctor Palermo stopped at a white-porcelain table where a bowl of green liquid was boiling above a gas burner. The physician took a small vial from a shelf, and poured a few drops from it into the bowl.

Immediately the bubbling ceased, and as the liquid simmered, it changed from green to a deep red.

"One of my experiments," explained Doctor Palermo. "It may develop into a great scientific discovery. Hassan!"

His last word was a loud exclamation. It startled Burke. He could not understand its significance, until he saw a huge brown man appear through a door at the side of the laboratory.

The man was dressed in a white robe, and wore a white head-covering. To Burke's imaginative mind, he

might have been a jinni of the "Arabian Nights," summoned at his master's command.

Doctor Palermo uttered a few words in a foreign tongue. The servant bowed. He removed the glass bowl with his white gloved hands, and carried it into a smaller room that adjoined the laboratory.

"Hassan is my assistant," explained the physician. "He is an Arab who does not understand a word of English. More than that, he has lost the use of his tongue and cannot speak."

"That must be a disadvantage," observed Burke.

"Not at all," returned Palermo. "In my studies of the human mind, I have noted that the loss of one faculty invariably develops the others.

"A deaf man uses his eyes better than the rest of us. A blind man has a wonderfully keen sense of touch. Those who cannot speak become wise because they are silent.

"Hassan is faithful, willing, and—necessarily—discreet. Come."

HE took the newspaperman to a corner of the laboratory, and showed him a row of glass jars, each containing a mass of white substance. He brought down one of the jars, and opened the top.

"A human brain," he said. "A human brain, with its furrowed surface. A brain that once had ideas—that once created thoughts— now nothing but a mass of idle mechanism.

"This brain"—he set the jar upon a table—"may have caused all types of impulses; but now one could not identify it from another.

"Let us suppose, for instance, that this is the brain of Horace Chatham. Can you see anything that would indicate a mind for murder?"

There was a daring challenge in Palermo's voice. Burke suddenly remembered the words of George Clarendon—that unended sentence which had led to the supposition that Chatham had suffered ill at Palermo's hands.

Burke became suddenly tense, and suspicion surged through him. Then he caught Palermo's steady gaze. Burke laughed.

"The police would like to have Chatham's brain in a glass jar," he said. "If they ever catch him, and give him the third degree, his brain won't be much use to him after they are through.

"By the way, doctor"—Burke was artful as he changed the subject— "where do you obtain all these brains?"

"From various sources," replied the physician quietly, "but those that I prize most highly are willed to me."

"Willed to you!"

"Yes. By patients whom I have benefited. I have often made that bargain with them.

"Their brains are useful to them when they are alive. I have enabled them to overcome mental disorders. More than one has agreed willingly that some day his—or her—brain may repose in my collection.

"Here"—he went back to the shelf—"is the brain of an eminent lawyer. This"—he indicated the side of another brain—"is the cerebral mechanism of a man who was once a most prominent artist.

"I don't believe I have the brain of a journalist in this exhibit. Perhaps —" he looked speculatively at Burke.

"Perhaps newspapermen have no brains?" questioned Burke, with a forced laugh.

"No," replied Doctor Palermo seriously, "not that. All men have brains. I thought perhaps you might be willing to some day contribute your brain to my collection—provided, of course, that you should die young."

Burke was silent. There was something ominous in the physician's tone. The ex-reporter felt ill at ease. He decided to bring the discussion back to the subject of his visit.

"Regarding Chatham—" he began cautiously.

"Ah, yes," interrupted Doctor Palermo. "Horace Chatham. I was just mentioning his brain. I already have the brain of one murderer.

"But you are interested in the living, not the dead. Therefore you would like to discuss Chatham as he was the evening he called upon me. My experiments are finished. Come."

As Burke followed the doctor from the laboratory, he recalled a subtleness in the man's last sentences.

Palermo had said that he would discuss Chatham "as he was." Did that mean that Chatham no longer lived?

The newspaperman realized that he was dealing with a genius who spoke with double meanings. Therefore, he resolved upon extreme discretion.

Hassan met the men outside the laboratory. Doctor Palermo made a sign with his right hand. The servant assisted him in removing his laboratory garments. Then he brought out an Oriental robe of deep crimson, embroidered with gold dragons. Evidently a Chinese dress, thought Burke.

Doctor Palermo donned the robe, and his whole appearance changed. He looked more like a mandarin than a physician. A strange man, thought Burke. Yet Palermo's next action was more remarkable.

He snapped his fingers, and as though in answer to a command, a panel slid open in the wall beside the laboratory door. It revealed a circular staircase.

With a motion to follow, the crimson-clad physician went up the staircase, with Burke at his heels.

They reached a penthouse on the roof. Here was a gorgeous room, bizarre in its Oriental furnishings. Doctor Palermo seemed to fit into the surroundings, while Burke felt out of place. The physician sat in a large chair that was almost thronelike, and Burke took his position on a high-backed couch.

"This impresses you as odd?" questioned Palermo, with a smile. "You would not wonder if you understood. It is my method of complete relaxation.

"I realize the dire results of high nervous tension. When I have completed work in my laboratory, I invariably come here. It completely changes my mental attitude. Hassan!"

At the command, the Arab seemed to appear from nowhere. Like his master, he was clad in Oriental garments. He seemed to know what Doctor Palermo desired, for he went to the French doors at the end of the room, and swung them open.

Burke could see out over the city below. Myriads of twinkling lights shone in the distance. It was a

wonderful vista that was beyond the most imaginative dream of an ancient writer.

"Come!"

Burke walked to the roof of the building. It was flat, with a railing. Doctor Palermo led his visitor to the rail, and pointed out beyond.

"Here," he said, "I am monarch of the world. The trivial affairs of mankind"—he pointed to the street below, where toylike automobiles rolled along a street that seemed no wider than a ribbon—"those affairs seem very small and futile.

"It is a long way down there. It would seem long if one should fall. Moments would seem like hours. To a falling man, all the past events of his life flash through his mind."

The doctor's hand gripped Burke's elbow, and the newspaperman stepped back from the rail in alarm. Palermo smiled broadly, and Burke saw that smile in the light from the Oriental room.

He noticed the ugly expression that came to the corners of the physician's mouth. Burke shuddered instinctively.

"Come!"

THEY went back into the penthouse. Hassan arrived with two small glasses, containing a browning liqueur, that shone with specks of glistening gold. Burke took one glass, the doctor the other.

When Palermo raised the glass to his lips. Burke did likewise. The drink was new to him. It had a potency that he had never before experienced.

"Regarding Chatham," said Doctor Palermo suddenly. "I regret very much that I did not have time to study his case. Had I done so, I would have possibly prevented a murder. I expected him to return at a later date."

"Did you notice anything peculiar about his actions?" ventured Burke.

"In what way?"

"Did he—did he seem like himself? Or did he, perhaps, seem to have assumed a different personality?"

Doctor Palermo's eyes narrowed, and Burke could almost feel their scrutiny. He regretted his question. Perhaps it had been too leading.

"You mean," asked Palermo, "you mean—was I sure that he was Horace Chatham?"

"No, no," came Burke's hasty reply. "Of course it was Horace Chatham. His actions have been thoroughly traced by many witnesses who saw him. I just thought he might have seemed well, different, that evening."

"He was nervous," said Doctor Palermo thoughtfully. "Outside of that, he was his usual self."

Burke was feeling the effects of his drink. He seemed to have a new boldness that led him to press the issue. His cautiousness was in conflict with his usual good judgment.

"Did Chatham"—Burke's voice was slightly agitated—"did Chatham mention anything about a—a—purple sapphire?"

"A purple sapphire?" The doctor's voice registered slight surprise. "Why, no! I thought all sapphires were purple."

"They're a deep blue," said Burke. He swayed slightly in his chair. "This one was—a deeper blue. It was—purple. It belonged to a man named Harriman—Lloyd Harriman—friend of Chatham's."

"Harriman died in Florida—suicide. The purple sapphire was bad luck. Perhaps—perhaps Chatham got that sapphire. Bad luck, you know. I wondered—"

The evil grin spread slowly over Doctor Palermo's face. Clyde Burke saw it, as one might see a phantom in a dream. He seemed to be living through a nightmare, now. He tried to speak again, but words refused to reach his lips.

"The purple sapphire." Doctor Palermo's words seemed to come slowly, as from a distance. "Was it valuable?"

"Very—very—valuable," murmured Burke thickly.

"I must consider this—" said Doctor Palermo. "You must come again, and tell me more. But to-night—you do not seem well. Hassan!"

THE Arab entered softly. Doctor Palermo pointed to Burke, now sagging limply in his chair. Hassan left the room and returned with a glass of water. Doctor Palermo then left the room.

Burke did not see him go. He was drinking the water with Hassan's aid. When the physician returned, Burke was sitting upright in his chair, looking like a man who had recovered from a daze.

"Ah! You feel better?" The physician's voice expressed concern. Burke nodded, and grinned.

"That drink was a bit stiff," he said sheepishly. "What were we saying?"

Doctor Palermo smiled mildly. This time there was no malice in his expression. He impressed Burke with his kindness.

"It is too late to talk now," he said. "You seem tired. Call the apartment to-morrow, and I shall arrange another appointment for you. I have just been telephoning. I have called a cab to take you home. I thought you were unwell."

"Never mind the cab," protested Burke. "I take the subway home—up to Ninety-sixth Street."

Doctor Palermo shook his head.

"The cab is paid for," he said. "It would be best for you to ride in it. Besides"—he pointed to Hassan, who was closing the doors to the roof—"it is raining now. I have made all the arrangements. Come!"

Burke followed the physician down the spiral staircase. He felt steady now. The door at the bottom was open; a minute later they were standing by the elevator.

"The hallman will show you to the cab," said Doctor Palermo, as the elevator arrived.

"Thanks," replied Burke.

The elevator door closed, and the newspaperman began his downward trip.

Doctor Palermo turned, went back into his apartment, and up the spiral staircase to his Oriental room.

There he rested in his thronelike chair, for all the world like an Eastern potentate.

"There are big fish," observed Doctor Palermo softly, "and there are little fish. Big nets for the big. Little nets for the little. This one was little. Perhaps there is a big fish, also."

Hassan appeared with another glass of the gold-flaked liqueur. Doctor Palermo drained the fluid in one swallow.

Then, with the glass still in his hand, he looked straight across the room, and his lips spread to form a demoniacal smile—a smile that betokened evil satisfaction.

CHAPTER VI. THE SHADOW STRIKES!

THE cab was speeding up Broadway. The bright lights of the White Way were reflected in the puddles that were forming on the street, for the downpour had increased shortly after Clyde Burke had left the Marimba Apartments.

Now, in the back of the cab, Burke felt strangely weak. It must have been the trip down on the elevator, he thought; for he had been quite alert when he had entered the cab, and had given his address to the driver.

Now he experienced a tired sensation in the back of his head. The driver had closed the windows of the cab, including the partition between the front and the back. Perhaps that accounted for this weakness.

He reached to one window and tried to open it, but the knob would not turn. He tried the other window, with no result. He reached forward to tap on the partition; then dizziness seized him, and he sank back in the seat.

He heard the motor coughing. The driver must have choked it too much, Burke decided. Then he began to think of his interview with Doctor Palermo, and his mind became a curious medley of jumbled thoughts.

The cab pulled up at a traffic light. A coupe ran alongside of it, almost jamming the fender. Burke could see the taxi driver glare at the coupe; then the light changed.

The cab swung suddenly to the right. Burke heard the screaming of brakes, and managed to look back in time to see the coupe make a sudden swerve in the center of the street. It seemed to avoid two other cars almost miraculously; then it followed in the wake of the cab.

After that, Burke became indifferent to what went on. The cab darted into a side street and sped at reckless speed. Behind it loomed the lights of the coupe.

The cab passed a light as it turned from green to red. Thirty feet behind it came the coupe, ignoring the red light. The shrill sound of a policeman's whistle reached Burke's ears, but he did not open his eyes.

Had he done so, he would have seen the cab driver lean out and stare down the street in back of him. The coupe was coming on. The police whistle had failed to stop it.

Now the driver of the cab was using every trick he knew to dodge away from the car that sought to overtake him. He knew that the man in the coupe was pursuing the passenger within the cab, and he was determined to prevent the capture.

IT was a thrilling race through the city streets, zigzagging along the brightly lighted thoroughfares toward the more secluded roads of Central Park. In his efforts to get there, the cab driver virtually doubled on

his tracks.

Through it all, Burke was drowsing in the back seat, totally indifferent to his surroundings—utterly oblivious of his fate. If great danger threatened him, he did not know and did not care.

At last the taxi driver gained his opportunity. He shot recklessly between an automobile and a trolley car.

The coupe, close in the rear, was stopped short by the trolley. Before the slow moving barrier was gone, the taxi had turned down a side street.

Two minutes later, it reached Central Park.

The driver was more careful now. He looked through the glass partition and grinned as he saw his passenger resting in the corner of the seat, apparently asleep.

There was no sign of the coupe. It had been lost in traffic.

The cab whirled along a less traveled road. The driver laughed softly to himself.

But as he made a sharp turn that led into another road, a sudden exclamation came from his lips. Swinging along in the same direction was a car that looked very much like the coupe he had just eluded!

The chase began again, and now it was a chase on the straightaway, with the cab at a hopeless disadvantage.

No cars were coming in the opposite direction. The coupe gained rapidly. It shot up alongside of the taxi, and the driver of the coupe relentlessly bore to the right.

He was driving the cab to the curb. The chase seemed ended.

Then came a cry of triumph from the man at the wheel of the cab. Just as his front wheels were mounting the curb, he saw a road to the right. With a quick turn of the wheel, he took the curve, nearly overturning the cab in the effort.

He could not have succeeded had the turn been sharp; but the angle was oblique, and he made it with an effort. The coupe stopped too late to make the turn.

The driver of the cab thrust his head from the side, and laughed in new triumph as he saw the coupe halt. Then came a sudden end to his momentary victory.

Three shots sounded from the coupe. The hands of the cab driver became nerveless. His foot sought the brake pedal, but it slipped, helpless, before any pressure was exerted.

The taxi left the road and crashed among the trees, the driver hanging from the side of the front seat.

One side of the cab was tipped. Burke, completely oblivious, slipped to that side. The motor's rhythm ceased.

The coupe turned and came up alongside the wrecked taxicab. The driver of the pursuing car leaped to the road, and yanked at the door of the cab. It yielded to his efforts.

He seized the inert form of Clyde Burke and dragged it from the cab. Lifting the man with ease, he placed him beside the driver's seat in the coupe.

Burke gasped, and his eyelids flickered. The man who had carried him smiled grimly. He first made sure

that Burke was resting easily, with his head beside the open window. Then he went back to the taxicab, where he lifted the face of the driver, and stared at the man's features. He seemed to recognize the face.

"Dead," he said softly. "One less gunman in New York."

The speaker went to the back of the cab, and turned on the interior light. He noticed something beneath the back seat. Reaching in, his hand encountered an opening.

"From the exhaust," he murmured. "Carbon monoxide. A few minutes more—"

The chugging of a motor cycle reached his ears. Then came the raucous sound of a police horn.

The man walked away from the taxi, and crossed the road in front of the coupe. As he came into the glare of the lights, his figure was revealed—a tall form, garbed in a black cloak and broad-brimmed black hat.

The man seemed like a monstrous creature of the night, a phantom shape that had emerged from nothingness.

The motor cycle was coming closer. The sounds of the cylinders indicated that it was turning into the side road.

The coupe moved away without a sound. The driver was back at the wheel, coasting the car down the slight hill that lay ahead.

CLYDE BURKE stirred. He opened his eyes, and looked weakly at the form beside him. All the events of that exciting evening were dim in his mind; for now his thoughts were centered on that strange being with whom he was riding.

What had happened?

Burke could not recall. He remembered that he had been in a taxicab - that was all. Now he was controlled by some unknown individual, who seemed nothing more than a silent monster of the night.

The coupe swung down a side street. It stopped before a house. Burke suddenly recognized his surroundings. He was at the house where he lived.

Now he was being helped from the cab; up the steps of the house; up the stairs within; to his own room. Exhausted, Burke fell upon the bed.

He caught one good glimpse of the man who had brought him upstairs. The figure was plain in the lighted room—a tall, black form, its face hidden by the collar of its cloak, and the turned-down brim of the black hat.

The echoes of a soft, uncanny laugh came to Burke's ears. Although he had not recognized the man, he recollected the laugh.

Burke had shut his eyes momentarily. He opened them now. The light had been extinguished. The man was gone.

The noise of a car driving away was the last sound that Clyde Burke heard that night. He fell asleep immediately, through sheer exhaustion.

IN the morning, the newspaperman recalled vividly his experiences with Doctor Palermo. He knew that his visit had been real, even though everything now seemed fantastic.

Of the events following his departure from the Marimba Apartments, Burke remembered only the beginning of the ride in the taxicab, and the concluding events of his journey, when the unknown man of the night had brought him to his room.

The morning newspaper told of a killing in Central Park. A taxi driver had been shot on a side road. The dead man had been identified as a notorious gunman. The reports mentioned the fact that the windows of the cab were jammed shut, and that there was difficulty in opening them.

But the police had not noticed the opening that lay beneath the back seat, from which the deadly carbon monoxide from the exhaust had entered the back of the cab.

Clyde Burke wondered about the newspaper report. He fancied that the wrecked cab might have been the one in which he had ridden. He seemed to remember windows that refused to open.

Still, there was no mention of a passenger in the cab; nor did the newspapers tell of a phantom man in a coupe.

Could it have been George Clarendon?

Burke recalled the soft laugh. Yet there was nothing else that might have revealed his rescuer's identity.

"He seemed like a shadow!" murmured Burke. "Like a shadow, that came and went in the blackness of the night!"

CHAPTER VII. PALERMO TALKS BUSINESS

IT was night again. A truck drew up at the side entrance of the Marimba Apartments, and the driver beckoned to the porter.

"Here's that box you were expecting," he said. "Better get another guy to help us lift it. It's heavy."

"That little box?" questioned the porter incredulously.

"Must be loaded with lead" replied the driver. "Took three husky boys to hoist it on the truck."

The porter looked about him. There was no one else on duty. While he was wondering about the third man, a figure appeared from the shadows at the side of the building. It was the form of roughly dressed man, whose old, frayed sweater seemed too bulky for the size of his thin frame.

"I'll help youse, boss," said the newcomer, in a wheedling voice. "I usta work on a truck. Lemme lend youse a hand."

The three men tugged with the box, which was cubical in shape, measuring slightly more than three feet to a side. The porter and the truckman sought to bear the brunt of the work, but they were scarcely able to move it, until the stranger added his efforts.

Then the box moved easily, and the truck driver stared in amazement at the strength exhibited by the volunteer.

"Whoosh!" exclaimed the porter, when they had the box in the freight elevator. "I'm glad you showed up with this. Doc Palermo has been asking about it all afternoon. He bothers the life out of us, with his blamed boxes and packages. Rabbits, guinea-pigs—a lot of junk!"

The elevator reached the fortieth floor. Hassan, the Arab, was awaiting it. He helped the three men slide the box from the elevator, and the operator also lent a hand. With five at work, the box moved easily.

The freight elevator opened on the only entrance to Doctor Palermo's apartment, and the men lifted the box to carry it through the opened door. Hassan urged them to the left, where an opening beside the bookcases took them into the physician's laboratory.

The porter nodded and pointed to the stranger who had helped them. Hassan seemed to understand. He gave the man fifty cents.

The elevator operator went out with the truck driver; the stranger, after a moment's hesitation, followed. The porter was about to leave, but Hassan stopped him.

The porter understood that he was to open the box. He pulled a hammer from his pocket, and pried off the lid.

With Hassan's aid, the box was turned on its side, and a bulky object wrapped in burlap slid from the packing case. Hassan gave the porter some money, and the man left.

After cutting the wrappings of the burlap, Hassan left the laboratory and closed the door to the anteroom.

"What became of that guy that helped us?" questioned the porter, as he rode down in the elevator.

"Guess he came down with me," replied the operator. "He came out with us. To tell you the truth, I forgot all about him. Ask the truck driver."

The truck was no longer there when the porter reached the street, so the matter was forgotten.

IN the meantime, a passenger elevator was speeding upward to the fortieth floor. When it stopped, a woman stepped out, and rang the bell in Doctor Palermo's anteroom.

Hassan, in the hallway, drew back a small curtain that covered a frame on the wall. He pressed a switch. A picture lighted, to show a full view of the anteroom.

The woman in the picture was facing the closed door. She was smartly dressed, trim of figure, and exceedingly handsome. Her well-molded features, and eyes that sparkled beneath dark lashes were evidently familiar to the servant.

He pressed another switch as he closed the curtain over the picture. Then he went into the laboratory. It was fully fifteen seconds before the door opened of its own accord, and the woman entered.

It was Hassan who came from the door at the end of the hallway, and bowed in recognition. The woman walked along the hall, and as she passed a niche beside the bookcases, her shadow, long and fantastic, seemed to merge with a spot of blackness on the floor.

After she had passed, the blotch trembled, as though the moving shadow had disturbed it. Neither the woman nor the Arab noted the strange phenomenon.

Hassan led the way to the door that opened on the circular staircase. The Arab snapped his fingers. The door opened.

The woman did not appear to be surprised. Evidently she was familiar with this place and its mechanical mysteries. She went up the staircase.

Hassan closed the door and returned to the laboratory.

Then, from a corner of the room, appeared that same blotch that had been in the hallway. It took the

shape of a man's shadow. It moved toward the door that led to the circular staircase.

It seemed to rise and became human in form. A man dressed in black stood before the door, his sable cloak and his turned-down hat concealing his identity.

The man snapped his fingers. There was no result. He moved closer to the door, and repeated the action. Still the door did not respond.

The head of the figure bowed, as though the man were looking at his feet. Carefully, he chose a position, picking the exact spot where he stood. As he snapped his fingers for the third time, the man in black moved his left foot slightly forward.

The panel-like door slid back. The Shadow stepped through and closed the door behind him. A soft laugh came from beneath the hat.

THE sound of a low, melodious voice pervaded the Oriental room upstairs. Doctor Palermo, clad in his crimson robe, was speaking, as he sat in his thronelike chair.

Before him sat the feminine visitor, an alluring smile upon her lips; and beyond was the distant vista of the lighted metropolis.

"You have done well," said Doctor Palermo. "Our work has been slow, but careful. Sometimes I have chafed at the delay. Had we used more haste, it would not have been necessary for me to take certain risky measures with other persons.

"However, I do not fear the consequences. One hour more, and the wealth that you have left with me will be ours."

"Will be yours, Albert," replied the woman softly. "Yours, as I am yours."

"Thelda, you have served me well." Doctor Palermo's voice expressed approval. "In return, I have promised you happiness. With that happiness, you shall have wealth. Wealth and power. Without wealth and power, no one can be truly happy.

"Then"—the man's voice became prophetic—"you and I can perform great undertakings. When you love me, Thelda, you love the most powerful man the world has ever known."

There was no boastfulness in Doctor Palermo's statement. He recited it as a fact. The woman nodded in understanding.

The man in the crimson robe arose and walked to the doors that opened on the roof. He surveyed the panorama of twinkling lights, and his lips formed that ugly, evil smile.

"The world is mine"—resumed the speaker—"mine, if I choose to take it. But the one failing of those who possess power is their desire to overexert it.

"I shall be wise, Thelda. I have been wise in the past. Then, I needed money. Now, with millions—"

He turned and looked at the girl. She rose from her chair, her eyes bright with admiration. She approached Palermo and clutched his arm.

"You mean it, Albert?" she asked. "From now on—you and I—"

The strangely-clad man shook his head slowly. With a gentle, easy motion, he removed the girl's grasp. He pointed to the chair, and went back to his own resting place.

"We must wait, Thelda," he said. "We must wait first of all—until Roger Crowthers has died."

"That will be within the hour!" the girl exclaimed, her eyes sparkling with sudden hatred.

"Then," returned Palermo, "we will be free—free to use the wealth that he has given you, unknown to any one. As his nurse, Thelda, you have played a perfect part.

"The world will be surprised that his wealth is not greater. They will not know of the millions which you have brought to me—nor can any one discover the effects of the slow poison you have administered by my direction."

"Then we are free—free to-night to—"

"Not yet. I suspect a hidden danger. It affects me—Albert Palermo; but not you—Thelda Blanchet.

"Last night, a man called here. He questioned me. He pretended to be a newspaper correspondent. He spoke of many things, and among others, he mentioned—this!"

From beneath his robe, Palermo brought forth a jewel box. He opened it, and revealed the purple sapphire. With an exclamation of delight, Thelda stepped forward to view the gem more closely.

"Some day," said Palermo significantly, "this sapphire will be yours, Thelda. But I must keep it for the present—until I have dealt with the unknown dangers which surround it."

"The man who was here last night?" Thelda's question expressed grave concern. Palermo dismissed it with a laugh.

"A creature of little account," he said. "I would not have troubled with him, myself. I gave the word to Macklin. That was all.

"But something went wrong with Macklin's plans. The man did not die. He was rescued—by another. We have an enemy who may be troublesome. That is why I say to wait."

BEFORE the girl could reply, Hassan entered. He went to the corner of the room, and opened a sliding door that revealed a dumb waiter.

The Arab pulled the cords, and the carrier came in view. On it rested the strange Oriental image of a dwarfed, seated figure.

The statue was of bronze; its arms were crossed, and its fierce, ugly face stared straight ahead with glaring eyes.

"What is it?" questioned Thelda, in an awed voice.

"The image of Chong," replied Doctor Palermo. "I have long desired it for this Oriental den. It is said to have come from the imperial palace in Peking."

He helped Hassan lift the image from the carrier. The two men were barely able to raise it. They placed it upon a taboret in a corner of the room, a place that had evidently been prepared for the bronze statue.

A long shadow appeared upon the floor; but no one observed it, so intent were they in their examination of the Oriental statue. As Doctor Palermo stepped back, the shadow disappeared in the direction of the hangings on the wall.

"Perfect!" exclaimed Doctor Palermo. "Perfect!"

Thelda Blanchet glanced at her wrist watch.

"I must go," she said. "It would be well if I were there when—" She glanced toward Hassan, and stopped her sentence. "It would be well for me to go."

Doctor Palermo bowed. He smiled slightly as he detected the look of tenderness in the girl's eyes. Thelda followed Hassan down the circular staircase.

Minutes ticked by. Doctor Palermo sat on his thronelike chair, and stared steadily at the image of Chong.

The physician himself was as motionless as the statue. A long interval had passed before he moved. Then only his lips acted, as they spoke aloud.

"The image of Chong," said Doctor Palermo. "Patient, unmoving, and unyielding. With it here, I shall know absolute security. It is a perfect reproduction."

His voice rose, and he seemed to be playing a dramatic part, as he spoke venomously.

"One man blocks my path to power! One man! I shall eliminate him!"

"To-night, his identity is unknown to me. Soon I shall know him. Once I have seen him—"

He did not complete the sentence. A sudden intuition told him that he was not alone in the room.

He turned quickly, expecting to see the form of Hassan. Then Palermo became motionless, his gaze transfixed.

A tall man in black cloak stood in the center of the room. The figure's hands were hidden by its folded arms. The man's face was invisible because of the black brim of a large turned-down hat. Yet, from beneath that brim, glowed two eyes of fire!

"Once you have seen him"—it was a whispered voice that came from the man in black—"once you have seen him—what then? Answer my question! The man you seek is here!"

CHAPTER VIII. ANOTHER MAN DIES

THE two men stood motionless in the Oriental room. They were like living statues, as silent and as still as the glaring bronze image that faced them. They were a marked contrast, these two—Doctor Palermo, in his strange Chinese robe; the man in black, with his face obscured from view.

The physician viewed his unwelcome visitor warily. He did not fear the apparition, nor could he ridicule it. His crafty brain was working, seeking a way to meet this unexpected foe.

He bowed courteously, and spoke suavely to the man in black, choosing his words with his customary care.

"It is a pleasure"—said Doctor Palermo—"a rare pleasure, to meet you. It has cleared a slight doubt in my mind.

"Last night I felt positive that the young man who called on me was directed by one who possessed a keener mind. Now I am sure of it."

The black-clad man did not reply.

"Though you choose to conceal your identity," continued Doctor Palermo, "it may interest you to learn that I know who you are. I have heard of you in the past.

"I have been told"—the physician's voice became ironical—"that there is a man who lives in the underworld, who masquerades in black, and who frightens chicken-hearted gangsters.

"You, I believe, are that man. You call yourself The Shadow."

As he spoke the final words, Doctor Palermo raised his left hand in a slight gesture. The action was seen by the man in black. Quick as a flash, he wheeled, and spread his arms apart.

He revealed an automatic in each hand. With one gun he covered Doctor Palermo. The other covered the top of the circular staircase. Hassan had appeared there, silent and grim.

The Arab was crouching for a spring. In another instant, he would have been upon his master's foe.

The Shadow motioned with the gun that covered Hassan. The Arab understood his meaning. He crossed the floor, staring sullenly at the man in the cloak, and took his position beside Doctor Palermo. With a long, sweeping motion, The Shadow placed both revolvers beneath his cloak.

"DOCTOR PALERMO," he said, in a deep, sinister whisper, "I have come to warn you. To warn you that you must answer for your crimes.

"You are twice a murderer; and last night, but for my intervention, you would have been responsible for a third death. But before you die - and death will be your punishment—I offer you an opportunity to clear the name of a man you have wronged, and to restore those things which you have stolen.

"In return, I shall grant you the privilege of choosing your own death, at your own hands—an easy task for a man of your scientific knowledge."

Doctor Palermo smiled slowly. He realized that he was at the mercy of this man, yet he sought to defy him by forced bravado.

"You speak of murders," he said, "and also of thefts. What proof have you that I committed them?"

"I need no proof. I have received a full report of Clyde Burke's visit here last night. My brief visit to your laboratory confirmed my suspicions.

"But that you may understand my knowledge, I shall enumerate the counts against you."

Palermo listened in silence.

"One," said The Shadow, in a tone of judgment. "You murdered Horace Chatham. I may add that you dissected his body in your laboratory."

The man in the Chinese robe shifted uneasily. This statement was uncannily true.

"Two," came the whispered voice. "Disguised as Chatham, you killed Seth Wilkinson."

Palermo offered no denial.

"Three and four," continued The Shadow. "Each of these men was robbed by you. From Chatham you took—" There was a momentary pause. The eyes beneath the black hat seemed to be reading the physician's mind. "From Chatham, you took a purple sapphire.

"From Wilkinson, you took"—again that ominous pause—"a paper signed by yourself, leaving in its place a forged note."

Doctor Palermo's face became solemn. He seemed to be considering The Shadow's accusations. A pallor came over his features.

Acting mechanically, he sat down in the thronelike chair, and rested his hands upon its arms. The Shadow loomed before him, like a sentinel of doom.

"You accuse me of those crimes," said Doctor Palermo hoarsely. "Suppose your charges are true. Are they all?"

"They are all."

A gleam of triumph spread over Palermo's features. The man in black had arrived too late to hear the first of Palermo's conversation with Thelda Blanchet. He did not know of the doom now hovering over their next victim, Roger Crowthers!

"I shall consider your terms," said the physician quietly. "Perhaps I may agree—"

He did not complete the sentence. Instead, he pressed his hands against the arms of the Oriental chair.

The Shadow saw the action, but was too late to respond. There was a sudden puff of smoke from the chair, and with it, the lights of the room were extinguished. The den was plunged into total darkness.

The automatics were in The Shadow's hands; but as he pressed the triggers, a bulky form plunged upon him. Shots rang out, but the marksman's aim was deflected.

Hassan had leaped upon The Shadow, and the man in the cloak went down beneath the Arab's attack.

Hassan was powerful; but he had not reckoned the skill of his antagonist. As the pistols fell from The Shadow's hands, he struck out with his clenched fist.

His aim was as straight as if the room had been fully lighted. The blow landed squarely on the Arab's jaw. The servant rolled upon the floor.

Striding unerringly through the darkness, The Shadow reached the wall and pressed the light switch. Illumination filled the room.

Hassan lay unconscious. The bronze image of Chong glared with its fixed expression. But the Chinese chair was empty!

In a few brief seconds, Doctor Palermo had completely disappeared!

THE SHADOW picked up his automatics. He approached the chair and examined it. He turned in all directions, while his sweeping gaze covered all parts of the room.

Quickly he stepped over and pressed the tapestries that covered the walls. Then he strode to the doors that opened on the room, and merged with the outer darkness. The light of an electric torch swept about the roof. It revealed nothing.

The Shadow returned.

Perplexity gripped the man in black. He had been completely deceived by the clever illusion performed by Doctor Palermo. The physician's disappearance had been a startling mystery.

As if seeking the solution, The Shadow took his position in the thronelike chair, and pressed his hands against the arms. There was no result.

There was a sharp click from the opposite side of the room. A panel slid open. It revealed a fine meshwork of steel, with a single, tiny opening, through which extended the muzzle of a revolver.

The gun was fixed in place; yet a swivel arrangement of the meshwork enabled the weapon to cover the entire room. Behind the meshwork stood Doctor Palermo, his hand resting leisurely upon the instrument of death.

"You fool!" The physician's voice was gloating. He smiled as he looked at The Shadow, and even through the meshwork, it seemed the evilness of his smile was apparent. "You thought to trap me here in my den.

"Had I expected your visit, you would have died before now. It pleases me to let you live for a few minutes, for you are helpless.

"Fire away with your automatics. No bullet can pierce this steel that shields me. I advise you to wait, however, while I entertain you with a few brief facts. For should you become restless, I may suddenly terminate the interview."

Doctor Palermo moved his right hand significantly upon the handle of the swiveled gun. The Shadow watched him silently, his useless automatics held in his relaxed hands.

"You are nearly correct in your conjectures," said Doctor Palermo. "It was Hassan—not myself—who killed Chatham. I disposed of his troublesome friend, Wilkinson.

"Forgetting these trivial matters, you may be wondering how I disappeared so completely from that throne you are now occupying, and how I reached the special elevator that brought me here.

"I, in turn, am wondering how you penetrated to my apartment. Hassan must have been careless; I shall reprimand him for his mistake.

"Yet it is well that you came here. Your visit will enable me to proceed with my intended plans, free from molestation.

"No one suspects me of any crime. My past deeds were slight, compared with those that I intend to perform.

"Here, high above the city, I am living in a veritable Gibraltar— upon a mighty rock. No gangsters or mobsmen of your type can reach me. I am secure!

"While I speak—this, I know will interest you—a man's life is slowly passing. Within a few minutes, Roger Crowthers, the well-known millionaire, will depart from this world.

"The proper treatment might save him, but his physicians do not realize that his malady is caused by a slow, subtle poison, and that the last dose will soon be administered with his usual medicine. You could save him, perhaps, if you were free."

As though actuated by a sudden frenzy, The Shadow sprang from the Chinese throne and aimed an automatic toward the steel meshwork. The gun spat fire, and a bullet flattened itself against the metal screen. A second shot followed.

Doctor Palermo calmly turned the swiveled gun toward The Shadow's body, and placed his finger

against the trigger. As he exerted the pressure that was to loose the death shot, The Shadow fired again.

The bullet, guided by an unerring aim, reached an unexpected spot. It struck the muzzle of the swiveled gun. Palermo's hand fell limp at his side.

THE SHADOW turned toward the circular staircase. Before he had gone a single step, he met with a new opponent. Hassan had arisen.

He caught The Shadow from the side, and pinned the arms of the man in black. Palermo, weaponless behind his steel screen, uttered a cry of satisfaction as he witnessed the Arab's action.

The Shadow stooped, and gave his body a sudden twist. Hassan was hurled headlong to the floor. The huge bulk of the Arab overturned and smashed an ornamental Chinese table.

Undaunted, the man scrambled to his knees and made a dive for the man in black. The butt of The Shadow's automatic landed on the Arab's skull.

A shout of mingled rage and fury came from behind the steel meshwork, as Doctor Palermo saw the escape of his intended victim. He was unable to make an immediate pursuit. Precious seconds had gone by before he managed to unfasten the screen from the inside.

Once free, he hesitated. He was sure that The Shadow had gone, yet he feared that the man in black might be waiting down below.

The Shadow, however, was no longer in the apartment. Rushing to the anteroom, he summoned the elevator. Then he quickly removed his black robe and hat.

When the operator arrived, he was surprised to see a quiet, solemn-faced man awaiting him. He did not know that Doctor Palermo had been entertaining a visitor.

There was a telephone in the drug store that adjoined the lobby of the Marimba Apartments. There a man entered, hastily consulted a directory, and put in a call. He waited silently until the number was obtained.

"I would like to speak to Mr. Crowthers' physician," said the man at the phone.

After a brief pause, a new voice came from the other end of the line.

"I must speak to you regarding Mr. Crowthers' condition," said the man at the phone. "It is a matter of life and death—"

An interruption came across the wire. The solemn voice of Crowthers' physician was tragic as it sounded clearly in the receiver.

"I am sorry"—were the words—"very sorry to inform you that Mr. Crowthers died seven minutes ago."

CHAPTER IX. THE SHADOW'S AGENTS

As Clyde Burke rode downtown on the subway, his mind was occupied with the unusual events that had surrounded him since the first visit of George Clarendon to the office on Forty-eighth Street.

There had been Burke's interview with Doctor Palermo; following that, the stirring incidents in the taxicab. The very next afternoon, Burke had received the first message from his mysterious employer, and it had caused the former reporter to make important changes in his usual routine of life.

He had been instructed to close the clipping office, and to find new lodgings. He had been warned to tell no one of his plans.

In accordance with these instructions, Burke had moved to a rooming house more than a mile from his former lodging. He had taken a new office in the downtown section of Manhattan, and no name appeared upon the door.

He was on his way there now, confident that he had followed the orders correctly.

Burke had sent in a full report of the doings at Palermo's. His memory had been singularly clear the next morning, and he had left his detailed description at the Jonas office before noon. Thus Clarendon was fully conversant with the situation.

Burke had escaped death once, and a gunman had died. That fact presaged new attacks.

It was a warm day, Burke noted, as he trudged from the subway station toward his new office. He had chosen an old, obscure building, and his office was an inside room. It seemed stifling when he entered. He removed his coat, and hung it over the back of a chair.

Then he glanced at the single window, which was closed. An open window would mean loose clippings fluttering about in any vagrant breeze. Still, there would not be much wind from the court, and the room was insufferably hot.

Burke went to the window, and unfastened the lock. He tried to pull up the sash, but it would not budge. It had evidently been closed all winter. For a minute, Burke tugged in vain; then he felt the window yield slightly, and he prepared for the final effort that would raise the sash.

"P-s-s-t!"

The low, whistling whisper came from the doorway. Burke turned suddenly.

A man had opened the door, and was standing there. He was a young fellow, good-looking, and of powerful build. He was in his shirt sleeves.

"Don't open that window!" exclaimed the man, in a low voice. "Turn back to it, again, and pretend to pull at it."

Burke obeyed. The man's tone betokened some important purpose.

The man had not stepped inside the door; apparently he did not wish to be seen.

"That's right!" The voice from the doorway spoke its approval. "You've done enough, now. Give it up, and sit at your desk for a minute. Don't look this way."

Burke did as he was told. He felt like a movie actor in front of the camera, following the director's instructions. He busied himself at his desk, and tried to conduct himself in an indifferent manner.

"Back to the window," came the next order. "Try again; but fail. Rub your forehead, as though you were very warm."

Burke went through the pantomime.

"I am closing the door," came the voice. "Work at the window a few seconds longer. Then walk away, as though you were going for the janitor. Leave the office, and come to Room 463."

BURKE kept up the pretense. Finally, with a grimace of disgust, he turned away from the window.

Stepping out of the light, he quickly picked up his hat and coat and left the office. He went to the room designated.

It was a sparsely furnished office, with an alcove in one corner. The man who had conversed with him was awaiting his arrival. Without a word, he handed Burke a sealed envelope. The newspaperman opened it. Within was a message:

EKRUB: YLER YLLUF NO EHT NAM OHW SEVIG UOY SIHT. NODNERALC.

Within a few seconds after Burke's keen eyes had begun to scan the carefully lettered words, the writing disappeared completely. The code was a simple one. Reversed, the words were:

BURKE: Rely fully on the man who gives you this. CLARENDON.

But if any other person had opened the envelope, the message would have faded away before he had realized that the words were spelled backward.

Burke's companion evidently knew the contents of the note. He extended his hand, and as Burke shook it, the man introduced himself.

"My name," he said, "is Harry Vincent. You and I are engaged in the same work. Before I tell you more, let me show you something that will interest you."

He drew Burke to the alcove, which had a small, high window. He handed the newspaperman a pair of opera glasses.

"Look through the glasses, Burke," he said. "Third window to the right— next floor above—across the court."

Clyde Burke focused the opera glasses. The sun was shining into the window indicated. Clyde's magnified vision discovered something that he could not have observed without the aid of the glasses.

A man was standing back from the window. Beside him was the dim outline of what appeared to be a tripod. Mounted on the structure was a rodlike device with a large, cumbersome muzzle.

"A rifle," explained Harry Vincent, as Clyde was about to question him. "A rifle, fitted with a silencer. It's trained directly on the window of your office. Had you opened that window—well, a few days from now, they would have discovered your body."

"But how—"

"How did I discover it?" Harry smiled. "I have been watching you, Burke— watching both you and your surroundings. I was here to warn you.

"We are working for the same cause, and to-day I expect that we will receive definite instructions. You are safe here.

"While we wait, I shall acquaint you with important facts."

THEY went back into the office, and Clyde Burke's face showed eagerness as he awaited Harry Vincent's next words.

"I have just come from Florida," said Harry. "I was sent there, a few days ago, to investigate the death of

Lloyd Harriman—who presumably committed suicide a few months ago."

"And you discovered—" Burke could not suppress his interest.

"Nothing that would hold in a court of law," returned Harry, "but I learned much that was of value. I am fully convinced that Lloyd Harriman was cleverly murdered, after he had first been subjected to a holdup that had not brought the results expected."

"Murdered by whom?"

Harry Vincent shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know," he replied. "But while Harriman was in Florida, there were two other men there—"

"Was Horace Chatham one?"

"Well, he was there also. I refer to two men besides Chatham. One was a gentleman of reputed underworld connections, known as Gunner Macklin. The other was a prominent neurologist called Doctor Albert Palermo."

"And they—"

"Apparently they were not acquaintances. Macklin is one of the smoothest figures of gangdom. No one has the goods on him.

"Doctor Palermo possesses a high reputation. But it is my theory that the two worked together. While one—probably Macklin—put an end to Lloyd Harriman's life, the other—therefore, Palermo—made a systematic search of Harriman's apartment.

"I feel positive that they made a considerable haul between them, in cash, or marketable securities. At the same time, there is no evidence that they obtained the most important article they were after."

"The purple sapphire?"

"Exactly."

Burke became contemplative.

"If you obtained all this evidence," he began, "it would seem to me -"

"I obtained no evidence," interrupted Harry. "I have only indications. I was working upon information given me—upon suspicions, which were partly the result of your study through old newspaper files.

"I was recalled, to make contact with you. A gangster, disguised as a taxi driver, made an attempt upon your life, a few nights ago. The gangster is dead; but we believe that he was acting upon orders from Gunner Macklin, who, in turn, was following the dictates of Doctor Palermo."

"I have met Gunner Macklin," said Clyde thoughtfully. "He was brought into court while I was a police reporter on the Clarion. They never hung anything on him.

"He was a material witness in that case—and since then, I understand, he has been living a life that is above suspicion."

"You would recognize him, if you saw him?"

"Yes."

"Good! We may encounter him, later on. In the meantime, we are taking steps to guarantee your safety. You have learned facts that involve Doctor Palermo. You have been marked for death!"

THE statement made Clyde shift uncomfortably. Harry smiled at Burke's lack of composure.

"Don't worry," he said, in a low tone. "I may be in the same boat. We are up against a formidable antagonist.

"Doctor Palermo is planning new and more insidious crimes. Through Gunner Macklin, he can command forces of the underworld—men who will murder for money, without knowing who their employer may be.

"Palermo lives in a veritable fortress. He considers his position impregnable. But while he remains in his place of safety, forty stories above the street, he can act only through his mobsters.

"They can prove no match for the man who commands us!"

"George Clarendon—"

Clyde put the question in a puzzled tone. He knew that his employer was a man of mystery, but he had not classed him as a man who could cope with forces of the underworld. Harry Vincent smiled.

"You have met him as George Clarendon," he said quietly, "but that is not his real identity. He is a man who has assumed various personalities—so many, that even I, who have aided him on many occasions, do not know who he actually is.

"There is but one identity by which I can define him, and that identity is as mysterious as the man himself.

"The man who commands our actions is The Shadow!"

Clyde Burke opened his mouth in startled amazement. He tried to speak, but words were lacking. A medley of surprising recollections were passing through his mind.

"The Shadow," repeated Harry softly. "A man of mystery. A man of power. A man with a supermind, who appears in strange disguises; whose own identity, when he assumes it, is hidden beneath a black cloak.

"A man whose cry of triumph is a mocking laugh, which brings terror to the hearts of his enemies."

The words of Harry Vincent came as a revelation to Clyde Burke.

He recalled the strange personality of George Clarendon; how the man could appear and vanish almost miraculously. He remembered that creepy laugh that he had heard, and he had vague recollections of the figure in black that had brought him safely to his room.

His tongue loosened.

"The Shadow!" he exclaimed. "I have heard of him. I have listened to his voice over the radio. They say that his identity is unknown, even in the broadcasting studio."

"That is true," said Harry.

"I have heard his name mentioned," went on Burke. "It has been spoken in a whisper, by close-mouthed

crooks who have feared him.

"Some have said he is a supercriminal. Others have claimed that he is a great detective. Which is true?"

"I do not know," replied Harry frankly. "I can tell you only that The Shadow never fails those who work in his behalf. Furthermore, he has brought disaster to the schemes of dangerous men.

"Now he plans to thwart the machinations of a villainous person— Doctor Albert Palermo. It is our duty to obey The Shadow. Do you agree?"

Clyde Burke silently gripped Harry Vincent's hand.

"Remember this." Harry Vincent's words were emphatic. "Gunner Macklin and his gangsters cannot defeat The Shadow. As The Shadow's agents, we will offset their attacks.

"Palermo may be safe in his Gibraltar, but while he remains there, his schemes will be thwarted, due to the helplessness of his underlings. This means —"

"That Palermo will be forced to come into the open!" exclaimed Clyde.

"Exactly," agreed Harry, with a smile. "The Shadow has uncovered Palermo's channels of activity. He is prepared to stop them at every point. We are to aid in that work."

Clyde Burke arose.

"I'm going back to my office," he declared. "Don't be worried"—he noted Harry's glance of apprehension—"I'll be careful. I'm going to pick up some of those clippings. I'll return in a few minutes."

Going down the corridor, Clyde pondered on the revelations made by Harry Vincent. The newspaperman had been alarmed by the first disclosures. Now he felt confident and mentally at ease.

He opened the door of his office, entered the room, and closed the door behind him. A form precipitated itself from the corner. Clyde saw the foe just in time. He grappled with his adversary, a strong, powerful individual.

Small, but wiry, the ex-reporter fought grimly. Then an arm tightened about his neck. Clyde found himself staring goggle-eyed into the brutal face of his opponent. The man's lips wore an evil sneer.

The pressure relaxed. Clyde slumped to the floor, half-unconscious. He could barely see the man bending over him, holding the upraised butt of an automatic.

The blow was about to fall upon Clyde Burke's skull. Weak and choking, Clyde could only stare in helplessness.

Then a powerful fist shot into view. It clipped the gunman squarely on the chin. The leer became an expression of ugly surprise as the would-be murderer toppled to the floor.

Harry Vincent helped Clyde to his feet. As though in a dream, Clyde felt himself being helped back to the other office. Harry rested him in a chair, and gave him a drink of cold water. Clyde gulped the liquid and felt better.

"I looked out the window in the alcove," explained Harry quietly. "The office on the floor above was empty. I suspected that you had entered a trap. I hurried over to help you."

"Thanks," gulped Clyde. "But what about the fellow you cracked on the chin?"

"I left him there," answered Harry. "He doesn't even know what hit him. We can let him lie there. One of Macklin's men. We'll recognize him if we see him again. I took a good look at his face. I brought your clippings along, too."

There was a slight noise at the closed door. An envelope fluttered in through the mail chute. Harry opened it. When he had finished his hurried reading of the message, he let the paper fall to the floor—a blank sheet.

"We have our orders," he said quietly.

He opened a closet door and brought out a large suitcase. From this he extracted articles of old clothing, two automatic revolvers, and two envelopes.

He threw trousers, shirt, sweater, and cap to Clyde.

"Put them on," ordered Harry.

In a few minutes, the two men were garbed as typical roughnecks. The clothes completely changed their appearance. It would have been difficult to identify them.

Harry placed their discarded garments in the suitcase. He pocketed one envelope and gave the other to Clyde Burke.

"A couple of tough guys from Chicago," declared Harry, with a broad grin. "Artie Feldmann and Harry Boutonne. We're looking for Gunner Macklin and his gang of gorillas. These letters"—Harry tapped his envelope—"are introductions from a big shot in Chicago."

CHAPTER X. PALERMO PLANS

THAT night, Doctor Palermo received a visitor in his apartment. The two men sat in the living room on the fortieth floor. The guest was a tall, powerful fellow. His face, from a short distance, seemed handsome. Closer view showed that it bore expressions of both brutality and cunning.

"So you missed your man again," Doctor Palermo was saying. There was a subtle sarcasm in his voice.

"Yeah, we missed him," replied the visitor. "Bugs Lakey went out to get him. Had a bead on him from an office across the way. But the guy wouldn't open the window, and he couldn't chance it through the glass, on account of the noise it would make.

"So Bugs laid for him in his office. He woulda got him there, but some other guy waded in and knocked Bugs cold."

"Very unfortunate," commented Palermo. His voice carried a tone of sarcasm and disgust.

"Not as bad as it mighta been," was the retort. "Jerry Marcus got the works that night he had Burke in the taxicab. Guess it was the same guy that poked Bugs Lakey in the jaw—"

"That's immaterial, Macklin," said Palermo. "The point is this. I've paid you pretty well, haven't I?"

"Yeah."

"Even when I had to go out of my way to get the money," added Palermo smoothly. "All I have asked is that you provide good men, who could do the jobs assigned them. Only in one instance have I ordered you to do a job yourself."

"I did it, didn't I?" retorted Macklin. "Nobody ever wised up that Harriman wasn't a suicide. I didn't get that jewel you wanted. Harriman didn't have it on him.

"You figured that maybe he had given it to that guy Horace Chatham, and I had a couple of men trailing Chatham, until he bumped off Wilkinson and disappeared."

"Quite right," agreed Palermo. "We have dropped Chatham, now. He didn't have the purple sapphire. I believe I know where it is at present, and I can acquire it myself.

"No, Macklin, I have no fault to find with your work until recently. But this double failure in the simple matter of eliminating a newspaperman—namely Clyde Burke—may prove to be serious. In fact, it is hampering some of my most important plans."

"Why?" Macklin's voice was challenging. "Whadda you care about a guy like Burke? He ain't got anything on you, has he?"

"Nothing of consequence."

"Why all the fuss then?"

"Macklin," said Palermo suavely, "you have one failing. You cannot see beyond facts that are extremely obvious. You realize, of course, that Burke has escaped through the aid of a friend, or protector. Yet you have no idea who his protector may be."

"Yeah," admitted Macklin, "you're right there, Doc. Maybe I have got a one-track mind. I told the boys to get Burke. I didn't think much about this other guy. If he—"

"If he were out of the way," put in Palermo, as Macklin hesitated, "it would be easy to get Burke, wouldn't it?"

"Yeah. I hadn't thought of it until now."

"All right. Put him out of the way."

"That would be easy," laughed Macklin, "if I knew who he was. But right now I ain't—"

"You'd like to know who he is, wouldn't you?"

"Yeah."

"I'll tell you who he is," said Palermo, in a low, subtle voice that made Macklin stare. "I'll tell you who he is. They call him"—the speaker paused impressively—"The Shadow!"

"The Shadow!" Macklin's eyes were wide.

"The Shadow," repeated Palermo impressively. "Have you ever heard of him?"

"Gunner" Macklin was on his feet, walking nervously up and down the room.

"You're sure of that, Doc?" he questioned, in a whining voice. "You ain't kiddin' me, are you?"

"Certainly not," replied Palermo coldly.

"The Shadow!" whispered Macklin. "I can't believe it, Doc! What a guy he is! There ain't no gunman that could ever get him! I never figured I'd be up against The Shadow!"

"Tell me, Doc"—the voice was pleading—"are you sure about this? Tell me—have you ever seen—seen—The Shadow?"

"Yes. In this apartment!"

MACKLIN stared about him as though he expected some black monster to rise from the wall and overwhelm him. Then his eyes sought Palermo's face, and Macklin winced as he saw the expression of disdain upon the physician's lips.

Palermo clapped his hands. Hassan appeared, carrying two glasses of liquor on a tray.

"Only one, Hassan," said Palermo calmly. "Let Mr. Macklin have it. He needs it.

"The Shadow proved to be a rather clever person," added Palermo, after Macklin had gulped his drink. "In fact, he thought he had me trapped. I was forced to employ one of my best illusions. I disappeared in smoke."

"You—what?" Macklin was incredulous.

"I vanished," said Palermo calmly. "When next The Shadow saw me, he was at my mercy.

"Until then, he had been rather stupid. He suddenly showed signs of cleverness. Before I had chosen to blot him from existence, he managed to escape."

"Whew!" exclaimed Macklin. Palermo's description was too deep for him to understand, yet he accepted it. "Have you seen him since?"

"No." There was a tone of disappointment in Palermo's voice. "That is why I called you in, to-night. I want you to find him."

"Find The Shadow!" blurted Macklin. "I wouldn't go after that guy for all the money in the mint. He ain't human! Nobody even knows what he looks like, and those that have tried to find out ain't around to tell their story."

"I have paid you well to remain in my employ," Palermo said. "But suit yourself. Either our arrangement is at an end, and you may count yourself out on all future profits—or—find The Shadow!"

Macklin shook his head. "I know what that guy can do. There ain't enough money in it. Don't talk price. I won't listen."

"I might mention," resumed Doctor Palermo, "that The Shadow is concerned with the past as well as the future. He is particularly anxious to reveal my former activities, and those of any who have been associated with me.

"It is not a question of money, Macklin. It is a matter of self-protection for me—and for you."

The last phrase was emphatic. "Gunner" Macklin turned pale and swayed slightly in his chair. He rubbed his forehead and found cold perspiration there.

"FURTHERMORE," the physician continued, in purring tones, "The Shadow has no reason to believe that I will cease my activities on his account. He is watching for our next move—our move, Macklin, not mine alone.

"If we fail to move, he will force the issue. We are menaced, and I may state positively that you are the one who faces the first danger. If you decide to abandon me, you will place yourself in a hopeless

position."

Gunner Macklin mopped his brow with a huge silk handkerchief. He was convinced that Doctor Palermo spoke the truth. His face became piteous as he gasped and looked toward the physician.

"I see that you understand now," said Palermo. "Therefore I shall tell you how to act. Have you a good safecracker you can trust?"

"Yeah. Louie Seligman. He's been layin' low. The cops don't know he's in town."

"Good. To-night, send him to the home of Raymond Hoetzel. The address is on this paper.

"Hoetzel's home is an old house, wonderfully protected by burglar alarms. But Hoetzel, a patient of mine, told me about the system that protects the place; and later I discovered its weaknesses. This envelope contains all the instructions that Seligman will need.

"Send four gunmen with him to watch the place. Let them be on guard while Seligman cracks the safe. Be sure that they watch outside.

"Give them orders to shoot any one who tries to interfere. But do not tell them that they may be disturbed by The Shadow!"

"Right," replied Macklin. "Say, Doc, I've got a couple of Chicago gunmen who just blew into town. Looking for some real dough. How about it? Shall I put them on this?"

"Where did you meet them?" asked Palermo cautiously.

"They brought letters from Frank Margio," explained Gunner Macklin. "Chicago was too hot for them. Margio is in with the big shots out there; he's O.K."

"All right. Use them."

"What about the swag?"

"It's likely to be a good haul," replied Palermo. "Make your deal with Seligman. Pay off the gorillas. After that, it's fifty-fifty.

"If The Shadow is bumped off—well, there'll be lots for both of us after that. You must be on this job, Macklin."

"Me?" The gangster's question was uttered in a weak voice.

"Yes, you. Across the street from Hoetzel's house is an open space where a few cars are parked. Drive up in your car, and back in there.

"You can watch the front and side of Hoetzel's place. If The Shadow appears there, give him the rod. You won't be mistaken if you see him."

Macklin thrust the envelope and the addressed paper in his pocket. He rose clumsily and started from the room.

FIFTEEN minutes after the departure of Gunner Macklin, another person called on Doctor Palermo. The new visitor was Thelda Blanchet.

Hassan ushered the young woman into the apartment, and led her to the Chinese room on the third floor.

There Doctor Palermo was seated in his Oriental throne, as silent and impassive as the bronze image of Chong that rested in the corner.

The physician smiled at his visitor. The girl was beautiful in the soft light of the Oriental room. The jet-blackness of her hair made her face seem molded of ivory.

She typified all that was alluring in femininity. The daring lines of her stylish gown added to her seductiveness.

Approval gleamed in Palermo's eyes, and Thelda, detecting the man's expression, rewarded him with a sophisticated smile as she seated herself close beside him.

"It seems a long time since I was here," said Thelda softly. "Yet actually it was but a few nights ago. You told me then—you told me that it would not be long before—before you and I would—"

She paused, and gazed at the impassive face of the man beside her.

"It will not be long, I hope," replied Palermo. "Still, we must wait. That night, when you were here, I had an unexpected visitor."

The girl seemed to sense something ominous in Palermo's words. She gripped his arm in momentary alarm, but the man remained as impassive as before.

"But you sent for me, to-night," protested Thelda.

"Only to tell you of our danger," was the reply. "The man who came here called himself The Shadow."

"I have only heard of The Shadow," said Thelda, "but I know that he is a strange, unaccountable man of mystery. No one has ever found him."

"I have." There was a note of pride in Palermo's voice. "I have found him. I can destroy him. But I need your aid."

"It is yours."

"The Shadow," said Palermo, "works with the daring of a criminal. He is not a man of the underworld. He belongs to the highest realm of society."

"Knowing this, I have studied my complete records. They contain data concerning all those who move among the Four Hundred. One by one I have eliminated possibilities, until I have discovered the only name which cannot stand full analysis."

"The Shadow, when he chooses to mingle with the elite, appears under the name and person of George Clarendon."

The name meant nothing to Thelda.

"George Clarendon," continued Palermo, "will be at an exclusive affair tomorrow night. It will be held in the ballroom of the Larchmore Hotel."

"You will be escorted there by Mr. Herbert Archer, a young society man. You will be introduced to George Clarendon."

"If you are as beautiful to-morrow night as you are to-night, Clarendon will respond to your charms."

The girl nodded. She began to understand Palermo's plans.

"You will watch him carefully," said Palermo. "Very carefully, and alluringly. Young Archer will leave you with George Clarendon. Perhaps you can detain Clarendon from then on.

"If he should depart unexpectedly, express your regret, and arrange to see him again. And should he leave tomorrow night, call me as soon as he is gone."

There was silence in the mysterious room. Palermo was scheming in his mind. Thelda was considering the prospect of the coming night; but more than that, she was lost in the glamour of her present surroundings, in the presence of the man she loved. Palermo's voice suddenly broke into her reverie.

"You must go now," he said.

"No, no!" protested Thelda. "No, no, Albert! Let me stay a while—"

Doctor Palermo shook his head.

"Not yet," he said. "You must go, and you must stay away until I summon you. That will be after we have ended this menace.

"To-morrow night may bring us freedom. I am counting on you, Thelda."

The girl rose sadly.

"You are in danger, here," she said.

"Not here," replied Palermo. "Here I am safe."

"But you are lonely. Only Hassan is with you."

"Not only Hassan." A faint smile appeared upon Palermo's countenance, as he waved his hand toward the corner of the room. "Don't forget Chong. He is good company."

The girl looked at the bronze image, with its folded arms, and its ugly, glaring face. She could not repress a shudder. The hideous metal idol seemed to disturb the melodious harmony of the Chinese room.

Thelda turned pleadingly to Palermo, but the man seemed obdurate. Silently, the girl left the sanctum.

For many minutes, Doctor Palermo sat motionless in his throne, while the gold dragon on his crimson robe seemed to writhe with the breeze from the roof.

Palermo was plotting new schemes, planning moves like a chess-master, far in advance. His eyes were on the bronze image of Chong; as he stared at it, the ugly smile came upon his face. It would have been difficult then to have decided which was more hideous—the horrible idol or its sinister owner.

CHAPTER XI. DEAD MEN DO NOT TELL

THE trap was laid. But even the man who had laid it could not foresee the outcome.

Gunner Macklin was acting in accordance with the instructions given him by Doctor Palermo. He was after big game to-night—game so big it appalled him. He did not even dare to mention the name of the man whom he sought to overcome. For Gunner feared The Shadow.

The gangster considered himself fortunate. In Louie Seligman he had a safe-cracker of the first water. Besides the man who was to puncture Hoetzel's strong box, Macklin had chosen four others.

"Bull" Goldman and "Carver" Brill were old reliables upon whom he could depend. With them were two Chicago gangsters, Artie Feldmann and Harry Boutonne.

Macklin smiled grimly as he drove uptown. He felt that he could rely upon any one of the four.

Macklin parked his car across the way from the Hoetzel house. A street light gave him a shadowy view of the building and the alley that led down the side. That was the way the men had gone.

Twelve o'clock had been the zero hour. Macklin had not arrived until five minutes later.

Macklin reached beside him and lifted a bottle. He swallowed a mouthful of liquor and steeled himself for what was to come.

The Hoetzel home was accessible only from the front or from the side. Palermo's plans had called for an entrance from the side. The four men had gone by that direction, with Seligman, the safe-cracker, in command.

Louie alone knew the method of disconnecting a very important wire that controlled the burglar alarm. Macklin had intrusted the man with that information.

The other four were lost in the blackness of the narrow alley, commanding the only approach—unless some one should reveal himself in front of the house. Any one who might enter that alley would go into the jaws of death.

The four men had been told to comb the alleyway, to make sure no one was hidden there. In leaving, they were to come in pairs. Seligman, should he be forced to flee alone, was to swing the bag which held his tools—and which, Macklin hoped, would later contain the swag.

The gunmen had been surprised at Macklin's insistence on these rules. They did not know that their chief intended to be on the scene, watching with hawklike eye from across the street. For they had been told nothing concerning The Shadow.

MACKLIN did not know how the men had stationed themselves. He tried to picture their positions, but failed in the attempt, even though he aided his imagination with another swallow of liquor.

He satisfied himself with the knowledge that there were four good guns all ready for any person who might creep down that alleyway. There could be only one who might enter. That was The Shadow. No other person could have business there.

The man in the car gripped the handle of his automatic. He realized that Doctor Palermo was a keen analyst. Macklin, obeying orders, was not here for any idle purpose. Something warned him that the crucial scene might take place outside that alleyway.

Well, his title of "Gunner" was one that he had earned. Day or night, drunk or sober, Macklin was a dead shot.

If The Shadow appeared to-night, he would have to enter the alley and leave it. Macklin laughed a hollow laugh. He could picture The Shadow entering, but not leaving!

While the man in the car waited patiently, knowing that Louie Seligman was taking his time on the job, a very ordinary occurrence was taking place at the Larchmore Hotel.

A gentleman named George Clarendon was expressing his regrets because he was forced to leave so early. The girl to whom he spoke seemed quite disappointed after his departure. She did not return to the

dance floor, where the hilarious party was at its height.

Instead, she went to a telephone booth and called a number. What she said, and what occurred because of it, played a very important part in the career of Gunner Macklin.

HALF an hour had gone by when the man in the automobile became suddenly alert. He fancied that he had seen something across the street near the alley. He raised his automatic while he watched.

Light, trembling shadows clung to the wall of the house next to the Hoetzel home. They seemed like living shadows—particularly one, blacker than the rest.

Gunner hesitated. He was looking for a shadow called The Shadow. He expected it to be elusive, but at least more than a vague phantom. He was ready to fire; but he knew that a single foolish shot would cause trouble for the four men in the alleyway.

The shadow that he was watching seemed like a human shadow. Macklin strained his eyes to find the form to which it belonged.

He was unsuccessful.

The shadow was motionless now. It began to move as though swayed by the slight wind. It seemed to slide along the wall toward the alley.

Still Macklin waited. His gun was trained on the opening of the alley; his finger was trembling on the trigger.

The shadow was in front of the alley. Little by little it was gliding into the darkness. Macklin clenched his teeth. The man must follow the shadow, he knew. Despite that fact, the man was still invisible.

The shadow merged with the blackness. It was gone.

To Macklin came the incredible realization that the man had gone with it. Before his eyes The Shadow had entered the trap! The phantom shape had been a living man!

Macklin expected to hear the shots of automatics. But he waited in vain. Evidently The Shadow had not reached the four men beside the open window. They would surely have detected his presence. It would have been impossible for the one man to have overpowered the four. Why was there no action?

Minutes were ticking by; The Shadow had not reappeared.

It was then that Gunner Macklin had a flash of revelation. A chance thought entered his mind; it began a chain of ideas that revealed the startling truth.

Unless The Shadow might be foolishly waiting at the opening of the alley, he must have joined the four men by the window. Macklin was positive that his own gangsters were loyal but he suddenly suspected the gunmen from Chicago. He visualized a scene that was remarkably correct.

Bull Goldman and Carver Brill lulled to indifference by the apparent watchfulness of the Chicago gunmen. The Shadow, creeping down the alley, and entering the low window unmolested.

Macklin suppressed a cry of rage. He had been double-crossed!

As if in answer to his suspicions, a sound came from the alley. It was not the sound of a gun; instead it was a mocking laugh, uttered by some invisible being. Then came shots; and the laugh was repeated.

Four men dashed from the alleyway. Macklin counted them as they turned down the street. He could not tell them apart in the darkness; but he knew they were his four men—two true, and two double-crossers.

Macklin waited. He could seek vengeance on the Chicago men later. Now he had a score to settle with The Shadow.

A POLICE siren sounded from the head of the street. It could not have arrived so quickly if the shots had brought it. Something must have happened in that house.

The answer flashed through Macklin's brain. The Shadow had overpowered Louie Seligman at work and had called up the police. Then he had mocked the men in the alley, laughing at them from the room within the building.

The shots had been fired through the window by Goldman and Brill, but they had been foolish, wasted shots.

The approach of the patrol only served to encourage. Macklin. He felt sure The Shadow would come out before the police arrived.

Here, in the darkness, he felt safe for the moment. Still, he would leave nothing to chance. He slipped the car into gear and placed his foot on the starter.

He saw a shadow across the street. It seemed to grow from the sidewalk in front of the alley. It was taking on a human shape, moving toward the building away from the Hoetzel house.

The patrol was coming closer.

Gunner Macklin started his car. It rolled from the parking space, and he shot it into high gear. He steered with his left hand, bearing directly toward the spot where he could still see the moving shadow. The front wheel grazed the curb on the opposite side of the street.

Macklin, his teeth clenched in triumph, leaned suddenly from the side of the car, his automatic in his right hand. He fired once—then again—and his bullets were flattened against the wall of the building. It was then that he saw The Shadow.

The headlights of the car illuminated the blackness of the wall. Revealed in the glare was a man in black—a silent, motionless figure, garbed in long cloak and broad-brimmed hat.

There was a sparkle beneath that hat-brim, as though the headlights were shining into two brilliant eyes.

By a strange twist of fate, Gunner Macklin had accomplished the unexpected. He had disclosed The Shadow, that dread phantom of the underworld. For the first time in the annals of gangdom, The Shadow had been unable to slip into some black crevice where the eye could not discern him.

The Shadow was on the spot!

Gunner Macklin, of unerring aim, had found his opportunity. His only mistake had been his first two shots. They had served as a warning.

Already, as Macklin was swinging his automatic directly at The Shadow, there was a motion of one of the black-clad arms. A flash of flame came from the wall. A second bullet. Then a third.

The first shot struck Gunner Macklin's wrist just as his finger pressed the trigger of his automatic. The

hand dropped as the bullet left the gun.

The second shot struck Macklin's forearm. The third messenger from The Shadow's pistol buried itself below Gunner's shoulder. Then the car swung by the spot where The Shadow stood.

No longer was the sable-clad figure outlined against the wall. With the glare of the headlights gone, The Shadow had again become a portion of the darkness beside the street.

Pain and fear were overcoming Gunner Macklin's rage. Now his one thought was of flight. Flight from The Shadow's vengeance, from the patrol bearing down upon his car.

Steering with his one useful hand, Macklin drove like a madman. A taxicab shot in front of him at the corner. Macklin made a valiant effort to swerve his car, but his one hand lacked the necessary strength.

The cab veered away as the fast-moving automobile hit the curb and plunged against the side of a building. Macklin was thrown against the windshield. The police found him unconscious.

HALF an hour later, Gunner Macklin opened his eyes in the emergency ward of the Uptown Hospital. The first face that he saw was that of Detective Steve Lang. The police officer's expression was tinged with sarcasm.

"So," he said ironically. "Gunner Macklin, eh? Playing around with Louie Seligman, the safe-cracker.

"We got the goods on you this time, Gunner. We got Louie where we want him. He's just about ready to squeal, too. Whatta you got to say for yourself?"

"Nothing," retorted Macklin grimly.

"They say you're going to pass out, Gunner," returned the detective. "Better give us the lay before you go."

Gunner Macklin closed his eyes. Steve Lang turned away in disgust. It was not the first time that he had tried to make a gangster talk, without success. As he faced the door, Lang's face brightened with joy. Into the room strode Jerry Haggerty, one of Lang's confreres.

Jerry was the one man on the force who was ever able to make a mobster come clean.

"Let me talk to Gunner, here," said Haggerty. "You be ready, Lang. I'm going to make him squeal."

Haggerty leaned over the injured man.

"Look at me, Gunner," he commanded in a harsh voice. "Got you at last, eh? Speak up!"

"Try and make me," retorted Macklin, opening his eyes.

Haggerty leaned forward and whispered a few words into the man's ears. Macklin's jaw dropped. His eyes became glassy.

"How—how—" he could not overcome his stammer. "How did you know that?"

"You've been double-crossed, Gunner," replied Haggerty. "There's only one way to get the guy that did it. Tell us."

"Palermo is The Shadow?" mumbled Macklin incredulously. "I can't—I can't believe it!"

"Don't tell us what I told you," said Haggerty, grimly addressing the injured man. "Tell us what you know."

"Begin a few months back. Tell us what happened in Florida."

A look of hatred came over Gunner Macklin's face. He could not figure how the detective knew of either Palermo or The Shadow.

He was only sure of one thing—that somehow he had been double-crossed. Now he was trying to build up facts in his bewildered brain. Haggerty stepped back to let Steve Lang sit close beside Macklin.

"I see it now!" screamed Gunner, trying to rise. "He told me last night—he told me we would have to get—" He sank back exhausted.

"I see it—" His voice was more quiet. "It was all a fake. He wanted to get rid of me, because I knew—I knew too much, and he didn't need me any more. Fifteen grand, he paid me."

"Begin with Florida," came Haggerty's voice.

MACKLIN'S eyes were shut. Had he seen the detective then, he might have confused his tall form with a figure clad in black that he had encountered not so long before. But Gunner Macklin was lapsing into unconsciousness.

"Go on with it, Steve," said Haggerty. "I'm going outside a minute. I'll be back."

He went to the door and stood there waiting. A nurse entered, and approached Steve Lang.

"They telephoned to tell you that Detective Haggerty is coming up here," she said.

"All right," grunted Steve. Great stuff, he thought, to call up with such a message after Haggerty was already here.

But the man at the door seemed impressed by the word that the nurse had brought.

Gunner Macklin opened his eyes and began to speak.

"I'll tell you everything, Steve," he said. "I don't think I'm going to die—but I'll tell, just the same. I'll begin when I was in Florida." His voice became weak. "When—I was in Florida."

An interne had entered the room, carrying a glass of medicine. He came directly to the bed, keeping his back toward the door so that his face was not seen by the tall man standing there.

"Let him drink this," said the interne, speaking to Lang in a low voice. "He'll be better then. He'll talk, all right."

He placed the glass to Gunner's lips. The injured man gulped down the liquid. The interne turned away with the empty glass. He went out by another door, still keeping his back toward the spot where Jerry Haggerty stood.

Macklin sat up suddenly. His eyes brightened.

"I'll talk now," he said. "I'll tell you everything, Steve."

Lang looked toward the door just in time to see Haggerty step out. He called but the other detective ignored him.

Lang turned back to Gunner Macklin. The man's testimony was important. Now was the time to get it.

"Down in Florida," began Macklin glibly. "That was where I did a real job for this guy who double-crossed me."

"What was his name?" inquired Steve Lang.

"His name?" gulped Macklin. "His name was Doc—Doc—"

The injured man pressed his hands to his chest. He tried to speak again, but his lips were soundless. He coughed suddenly, and collapsed.

The detective leaped to his feet. Some one entered the room. Lang turned and saw Jerry Haggerty.

"Hurry, Jerry," exclaimed Lang. "He's taken sick or something. Gee - I'm glad you came back. Where did you go?"

"Go?" echoed Haggerty. "What do you mean? Go? I just got here." He pointed to the man in the bed. "Do you think I can make him talk?"

Steve Lang was totally amazed. The situation seemed unexplainable. Then the unconscious condition of Gunner Macklin aroused the detective to action.

"Where's that interne?" he demanded. "Ah!"—he saw a white-clad figure entering the door—"here he is. Say, this patient's passed out. You got another glassful of that stuff you just gave him?"

"That I just gave him?" queried the interne. "I haven't been in here since you came."

"Where's the interne that was here?"

"I'm the only one."

The interne looked at the form of Gunner Macklin. Then he turned to the two detectives.

"The man is dead," he said solemnly, "and it looks to me as though he had been poisoned."

ONCE again, The Shadow had failed to halt Palermo's hand of death. Disguised as Jerry Haggerty, he had subtly urged Gunner Macklin into a confession.

But Palermo had foreseen the move. When he had heard from Thelda, he had come directly to the Uptown Hospital, knowing that any one injured near the Hoetzel home would be brought there by the police.

Disguised as an interne, he had been ready with the poisoned glass, hoping that The Shadow might be brought in wounded. Overhearing Macklin's attempt to confess his crimes, Palermo had nipped the revelations by giving his own hireling the dose prepared for The Shadow.

With the arrival of the real Jerry Haggerty, The Shadow had disappeared. Palermo, his mission of death fulfilled, had left the hospital.

Gunner Macklin was dead, and two bewildered detectives and a mystified interne were the only ones remaining on the scene!

CHAPTER XII. THE NET TIGHTENS

Two men sat in a dark room, looking from the window. Opposite them was the brilliantly lighted front of

the Marimba Apartments. The gorgeously uniformed doorman was making his nightly parade.

From the lookout room, on the second floor across the street, the two hidden men could see everything that took place before the apartment.

The window was open; the sounds from the street were quite audible. The two men talked in low-pitched voices, scarcely able to hear each other above the din of the street. They were discussing exciting events that had occurred a few nights before.

"It still amazes me, Harry," said one. "We knew The Shadow was coming down that alleyway. We did our part, all right, whispering to those two gunmen, while we pretended to be watching the window. But even though we were on the alert, The Shadow passed through without our noticing him!"

The other man laughed.

"The more experience one has with The Shadow," he replied, "the more remarkable he seems. I had a hunch that we would not hear him enter. Our job was to keep the way clear, Clyde, and we did it."

"His laugh startled me," admitted Clyde Burke. "It scared Bull and Carver, too. When you said, 'Let's scam!' they didn't need any encouragement."

"I was afraid we wouldn't be able to keep up with them when we ran for that car they had parked around the corner."

"We covered up our tracks, all right," added Harry Vincent. "Bull and Carver thought it was best for us to drop out of the picture after that escape. So far as they know, we were just a couple of Chicago gunmen who have gone back to the Middle West."

"I have a hunch that Gunner Macklin wised up—but he can't trouble us any more."

"The newspapers are certainly squawking about his death," observed Clyde. "Wow! What a story I could give them! Steve Lang and Haggerty are still completely mystified."

"Who played the part of Haggerty? Who was the unknown interne? It's plain to us that The Shadow was one and Palermo the other. But none of the investigators have been able to pick up a clew."

"Palermo must have been desperate, to blot out Macklin the way he did. The Shadow failed to force Macklin's statement; but Palermo has lost his one lieutenant. He's up against it, now."

"You think so?" Harry's voice was solemn. "Well, you're wrong there, Clyde. Macklin was the only man living who had anything on Palermo. Now Macklin is gone."

"The Shadow has been checked, Clyde. Without Macklin to testify, there is no chance of revealing Palermo's crimes. His tracks are completely covered."

"If they knew the facts about what happened in the Uptown Hospital -"

"They would mean nothing," interposed Harry. "The Shadow is scarcely more than a myth, so far as actual knowledge is concerned. Palermo, you may be sure, has covered his tracks perfectly."

"There is only one chance—that the police may stumble upon some strange clew that will give them a bona fide starting point. Without that, nothing can be laid to Palermo."

"WHAT does The Shadow intend to do?"

"Why ask me?" said Harry. "The Shadow, when he acts against supercriminals, is relentless. He seeks to undermine them; to make them betray themselves.

"Many times he has forced dangerous men into corners from which they could not escape. The police have caught them with the goods.

"When The Shadow fails in such an effort, he uses all his power to enmesh his enemy, keeping him in a helpless position. That is what he is doing with Palermo, now."

"But what will be the result?"

"Palermo will be forced to desperate measures," explained Harry. "That will give The Shadow another opportunity to break him. Only in the most extreme cases will The Shadow take the law into his own hands.

"You can see how the mesh is tightening. Palermo was terribly dangerous while he controlled a crowd of gangsters through Gunner Macklin. Now, his power has been clipped. Palermo is safer than before, but he has been forced to be on the defense.

"Watching every one who enters the Marimba Apartments, we can keep tabs on Palermo's visitors."

Clyde Burke made mental note of two men in evening clothes who were entering the apartment house. Then he raised an objection.

"There are forty stories in the Marimba Apartments," he said. "People come and go all evening. How do we know which ones call on Palermo?"

"You have a car in the street, waiting to follow any visitor who may leave—but which are Palermo's visitors, and which are not?"

Harry Vincent laughed.

"I might mention," he said, "that the night elevator operator at the Marimba Apartments was discharged two days ago. His place has been taken by a new man—a quiet chap, Burbank. I may add that Burbank is one of The Shadow's operatives."

Clyde Burke uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Burbank will notify us," continued Harry. "That is why we are keeping tabs on all arrivals. The first person who calls on Doctor Palermo will be watched on his way to the fortieth floor. We will be notified."

The effectiveness of The Shadow's system captured Clyde's admiration. He realized that he had become an integral part of a smooth machine that was already forcing Doctor Palermo into a helpless position.

Either the murderous physician would be forced to admit defeat and remain a virtual prisoner in his turret above the fortieth floor; or he would be compelled to make a counterstroke that would render him vulnerable.

Clyde knew the dynamic personality of Doctor Palermo, and he felt sure that the man would make a desperate effort to escape from The Shadow's net.

The situation was dramatic. This was the first evening that the men had watched the entrance of the Marimba Apartments. Clyde had a suspicion that perhaps The Shadow had been on watch the night

before. Perhaps the vigil would continue for many nights.

Palermo must have caution as well as wisdom. But if he were waiting for The Shadow to betray his plans, Palermo would wait in vain. For there was no way in which he could detect the watchers hidden across the street.

Clyde and Harry were in an apartment of an older building. The entrance was a street beyond. They did not come within a block of the Marimba Apartments when they made their entry.

"What is Burbank like?" asked Clyde. He was wondering if Doctor Palermo would suspect the new elevator man.

"A quiet chap, as I said before," answered Harry. "He's the ideal man for this job. He is a jack of all trades. Operating an elevator is right in his line. He fits the part to perfection."

"Palermo won't suspect him?"

"No one would suspect Burbank. The Shadow uses him on very rare occasions. I have never talked with Burbank; in fact, I have scarcely ever seen him.

"The instructions that I received today explained Burbank's part in this work. That was all that was said about him."

A LIMOUSINE drew up in front of the Marimba. Two ladies came out of the apartment house and drove away.

A taxicab pulled into the space. The doorman opened the door. A short, stocky man made his exit. Clyde was watching from an angle. He saw the man pay the driver. The cab rolled away.

Clyde caught a glimpse of the man's face. He gripped Harry Vincent's arm excitedly.

"Look, Harry!" he exclaimed. "Do you know who that fellow is?"

"No."

"It's Stanley Warwick!"

"The detective?"

"Right! The pride of the New York detective bureau. I've interviewed him. He has an international reputation, Harry. He follows up the biggest cases."

"He just came back from Italy, didn't he?"

"That's right. Tracing some of the Mafia. Following a clew that began here in New York. They say that Mussolini offered him plenty to chuck up his job here and stay abroad."

The hidden men watched the gray-coated figure of Stanley Warwick as the detective entered the Marimba Apartments.

The arrival of this man seemed significant. Both watchers were tense.

"We'll soon know," replied Harry.

Three minutes went by. A buzz came from the corner of the room. It was the telephone, which had no

bell. Harry went to the instrument and spoke in a low voice.

"Vincent," he said. "Yes—Right—Man was noted from here—About five feet six—Gray coat—Short brisk walk—Description perfect— Right. Will report."

He hung up the phone and turned to Clyde, who could barely see him in the light that came from the street.

"That was Burbank," said Harry quietly. "Stanley Warwick went up to the fortieth-floor. Keep on watch while I report."

He dialed a number on the phone. It was a private line, Clyde noted, not a phone connecting within the apartment. There was a short pause; then Harry evidently made the connection.

"Vincent," he said. "Opposite Marimba. Observed man enter. Burke identified him. Stanley Warwick, detective. Burbank called in. Warwick up to forty."

There was silence as Harry received his reply. Then:

"Orders received," he said.

The phone hung up, Harry returned to the window.

"We are to stay here," he said. "Check the time of Warwick's departure. We are not to follow him. The Shadow evidently knows Warwick's business here."

"You have no idea—" began Clyde.

"I have an idea, of course," returned Harry, with a low laugh. "It is entirely my own; but I believe Stanley Warwick has received a tip.

"From some source unknown to himself, he has received information that has enabled him to piece together fragments of the Gunner Macklin mystery. His visit here to-night is the result."

"That sounds feasible," said Clyde. "Yet, after all, we do not know."

Harry Vincent, standing back from the window, was lighting his pipe. Clyde Burke could see his face illuminated in the tiny glare of the match. He saw his companion's lips move slowly as they phrased the cryptic sentence:

"Only The Shadow knows!"

CHAPTER XIII. WHAT WARWICK LEARNED

STANLEY WARWICK sat facing Doctor Albert Palermo. They formed a remarkable contrast.

The detective's face was furrowed with deep lines. He was a rocklike man whose appearance also bespoke energy. He had removed his gray coat and now appeared in a wrinkled suit.

One easily recognized him as a man who did not care for formalities - a hard-headed investigator who could not be deceived by the gloss of gentility.

All this was apparent to Palermo; yet the suave physician preserved his air of smoothness. He was wearing a business suit of the latest cut. Immaculate to the extreme, he exhibited an air of superiority.

He summoned Hassan with a handclap. The servant appeared with two glasses of golden liqueur.

Warwick gruffly declined the drink. Palermo waved the servant away.

"Let's get down to business, doctor," said Warwick, in a deep voice. "You called me on the phone a short while ago. Said you wanted to see me. I have never met you before. Why did you call me?"

"I wanted some information," replied Palermo. "I thought perhaps you might know who was investigating the death of a man called Gunner Macklin."

"Is that all?" Warwick laughed grimly. "Did it ever occur to you that the detective department knows how to manage its own affairs?"

"I have known the detective department to welcome information," replied Palermo, in an unruffled tone.

"What information do you have?" questioned Warwick sharply.

"That will be divulged," returned Palermo, "only when I see the man who is handling the case."

"Spill it now, then," retorted Warwick suddenly. "I'm the man on the Macklin job."

"Ah!" Palermo seemed pleased. "That is excellent, Mr. Warwick. How far have you progressed?"

"Farther than you think, Palermo." Warwick's words were brutally frank. "Far enough to ask you a few important questions."

Palermo raised his eyebrows slightly.

"So you have information already?" he questioned smoothly. "You must be quite clever, Warwick. Or else—"

"Or else what?"

"Or else some one has been giving you ideas."

"I'll tell you how far I've gotten," said Warwick, leaning forward in his chair. "That's far enough to ask you how you happened to be in Florida the same time as Gunner Macklin."

"A logical question," purred Palermo. "But not one that would have occurred to you merely because Macklin said something about Florida when he was dying."

The detective did not reply. He sat back and looked wise.

"Warwick," said Palermo thoughtfully. "You're the only man capable of sifting this thing to the bottom. Evidently you're working alone on the case."

"I'm not saying that," returned Warwick cautiously.

"You aren't saying it, for obvious reasons," laughed Palermo. The wide, evil grin appeared momentarily upon his face. "Sometimes detectives have said too much when alone with men whom they suspect of murder. Is that what you mean?"

Warwick remained impassive.

"Don't worry," continued Palermo. "You are safe here. Whether or not you are the only man who suspects me, the case is in your hands. You can follow it as you choose."

"You have been tipped off. You don't know by whom. But I know. You don't like tip-offs unless they fit

in with something you already know.

"Macklin talked of Florida. So when some one called you and said: 'Doctor Palermo was in Florida at the time Macklin was there'—well, you decided to look into it."

WARWICK was still studying the physician. He gave no indication that Palermo's words had struck home. Nevertheless, the speaker continued:

"The tip-off came some time before I called you. Therefore my call must have been a surprise. Something like a coincidence, wasn't it?"

"There was no coincidence about it. I simply surmised that you were due to be tipped off. I hoped that I was first. But your voice, over the phone, betrayed you. It had just that touch of surprise that is easily detected by a keen listener—"

"Palermo," came Warwick's interruption, "you may know a lot; but you think you are too wise. Let me do the talking. I know more than you believe.

"Answer this question. What were you and Gunner Macklin doing in Florida?"

There was no reply.

"What do you know about Lloyd Harriman? He was there at the same time."

Doctor Palermo met the detective's gaze unflinchingly. The two men stared coldly at each other. A grim look appeared upon Warwick's face.

"What do you know about Lloyd Harriman?" he demanded, through clenched teeth.

Doctor Palermo smiled mildly as he rested his chin upon the knuckles of his hand.

"Do you intend to answer me?" quizzed Warwick.

Doctor Palermo pursed his lips. He seemed about to speak. While Warwick waited, the physician made a slow and deliberate reply that brought a gasp of amazement from the detective. For Palermo did not speak in words. He spoke in letters.

"N... O," he said.

"Y... E... S," replied Warwick, staring as a man in a daze.

"Noyes," said Palermo quietly, pronouncing the letters as if they were one word.

"Seyon," was Warwick's peculiar response.

Palermo pressed his hands to his chest. One hand was spread; the other showed two fingers.

"The Silent Seven," hissed Palermo.

Automatically the detective put his hands to the lapels of his coat. One hand was spread; the other formed a fist.

"The Faithful Fifty," said Warwick, in a voice filled with awe.

From his vest pocket, Palermo removed three coins—a five-cent piece and two coppers. Rising, he delivered them to Warwick. The detective stared at the coins. All three bore the date 1915.

The detective fumbled in his pocket and brought out a fifty-cent piece, which he gave to the physician. Its date corresponded to those on the other coins.

"WARWICK," said Palermo, drawing his chair close to the detective, "you know the mission of the Silent Seven. They are known only to themselves"—his voice became low and impressive—"and their followers must obey them without question."

Stanley Warwick nodded.

"Like the others," continued Palermo, "you have gained your present position through the influence of some member. We are men of power, seeking more power.

"Here in New York you have been useful to us. But never did we demand your services except in cases of extreme urgency. That is why our power has become great and our secrecy has been preserved—because we have not abused our privilege. How often have you worked for us?"

"Only twice," replied Warwick.

"Both times concerned matters of tremendous consequences, did they not?"

"They did."

"Then be prepared. This time a great task lies before you. It concerns a most dangerous man—a man who, if he ever suspected the existence of our band, would do his utmost to destroy it.

"That man is called The Shadow!"

"The Shadow!"

"Exactly. Like each member of the Seven, I have purposes. I perform my work so smoothly that no one has ever before suspected me.

"But The Shadow is a superman. It was he who disguised himself as Haggerty, in an effort to force a confession from the lips of Gunner Macklin. I prevented it. Pretending to be an interne, I gave Macklin a poisoned drink.

"The Shadow is now seeking to destroy me. It was he who told you to investigate me."

"A whispered voice," gasped Warwick. "It sounded uncanny—over the telephone."

"The voice of The Shadow," said Palermo. "The voice of my most bitter enemy! I must thwart him!"

Warwick's furrowed face took on an expression of determination. He was a fighter, this man. The public knew him as a detective who worked months upon a single clew, a man who would stop at no opposition.

But he owed allegiance to the Silent Seven; that allegiance ruled his life.

"With your aid," came Palermo's low voice, "I can defeat The Shadow. You are a man above suspicion. The police are at your disposal. Through you, I can combat this menace which threatens all of us."

"Give me your commands," replied the detective.

"Say nothing of the Macklin case," said Palermo. "Work on your own, in your accustomed way. Keep all information to yourself.

"The Shadow may be watching your departure from this building, but he will suspect nothing. He will believe you came here to quiz me.

"In the meantime, I shall set a trap. The Shadow may be watching for gangsters; he will never believe that the police are out for him. He is a dangerous man. He must die!"

Stanley Warwick's face seemed to harden as he nodded.

"You have been here long enough," Palermo said. "I know where to reach you. Do not come again until I instruct you to do so."

When Stanley Warwick left the Marimba Apartments, four eyes were watching him from the darkened room across the street. Harry Vincent made his report. Stanley Warwick had been in Palermo's apartment less than half an hour.

The Shadow's agents left their hiding place, satisfied with their work. They were confident that the net was tightening about Palermo.

Little did they suspect that their enemy had already laid the groundwork for a new and vital thrust.

The name of Stanley Warwick bore the sterling mark. As Palermo had said, this relentless pursuer of criminals was above suspicion. No one could possibly know what had transpired that evening in Palermo's apartment. No one—not even The Shadow!

CHAPTER XIV. PALERMO'S MESSAGE

A MAN and a woman were finishing dinner in an alcove of the roof garden atop the Riviera Hotel. Palm trees secluded them from the main dining room.

The soft, melodious music of the dance orchestra seemed very far away. A gentle breeze came through the arched opening on the other side. The girl looked out through the archway, where the myriad lights of Manhattan glittered like jewels in the darkness.

"Cigarette?" questioned the man.

The girl nodded.

The man watched his companion as she blew tiny puffs of smoke which took an orange hue from the mellow light of the alcove.

She was very beautiful. Her eyes were half-closed; her long, black lashes added to her natural charm. She seemed a modern Circe—an enchantress whose loveliness could lure a man into forgetfulness.

The girl smiled as she glanced at her companion, but his face revealed nothing. His features were somewhat handsome, yet they seemed stern and masklike.

The girl slipped her hand across the table and gently pressed her companion's wrist.

"George," she said softly, "life has seemed different since I met you. I have never forgotten that night at the Larchmore.

"You left me, then—you have never told me why. But since that night, I have thought of no one but you. We have been together often, since then.

"Although it has been but a few days, it seems as though I have known you always."

The phantom of a smile appeared upon the man's thin lips.

"In these new dreams of yours," he said, "have you forgotten—"

"Others?" questioned the girl. "Yes. I have forgotten them. From now on there can only be one. You will always be first in my heart, George. First and alone.

"Tell me. Do you feel the same toward me?"

"I have no past remembrances," said the man solemnly. "Love is a new emotion in my life, Thelda. It is new—and wonderful."

Their eyes met. The girl's gaze was appealing. Her face held an expression of sincerity. As she looked into the eyes of George Clarendon, she seemed to be peering into infinite depths. There she saw a strange glow that betokened tenderness.

EITHER these two were governed by mutual sincerity, or they were actors par excellence. For neither betrayed any expression that would belie the words that they had spoken.

Had Doctor Palermo been there to see them, he would have been disturbed. For it seemed as though Thelda Blanchet, in her efforts to win George Clarendon's confidence, had succumbed to the man's dynamic personality.

And Clarendon seemed yielding to the charm and beauty of this exquisite girl.

The two were playing a part in a grim game. Each knew the circumstances, although no mention had been made of them.

While they were together, George Clarendon apparently controlled the only agent through whom Doctor Palermo could act. In like manner, Thelda Blanchet, while she accompanied George Clarendon, prevented action by Doctor Palermo's archenemy. It was a neutralizing of forces.

While this condition existed, the death duel between Palermo and The Shadow was indefinitely postponed. Strangely, both participants in this passive drama seemed to have forgotten everything but each other.

"George," said Thelda, in tones of sincerity, "I shall be frank with you. I have forgotten the past. Are you willing to forget? Now that we have found each other, why should we think of anything else? All our affairs are trivial— compared to love."

She glanced through the archway, and smiled bitterly as she viewed the lights of the city. "I should like to be away from all this; to be some place where I could live—and love."

George Clarendon remained impassive. False or true, the girl's words were alluring.

If she were still loyal to Palermo, her suggestion was a snare. If she sincerely meant what she said—and there was no deceit in her voice—George Clarendon might find great happiness.

But the result would be the same. Should the man desert duty for love, Palermo would be freed of the menace which now enveloped him.

"I am willing to forget the past," said the man. The girl seemed to thrill at his words. "Yes. I am willing to forget the past—later. At present I have work to do. Then, Thelda, we shall be free."

"No, George!" exclaimed the girl. She met Clarendon's gaze with eyes that were filled with apprehension.

"We must not wait! We cannot tell what may happen to prevent our love."

"We must!"

"No." The girl became suddenly sentimental. "We love each other. We must act. Now."

She placed her hands upon Clarendon's as she leaned across the narrow table. Clarendon, too, leaned forward. The girl's arms were upon his shoulders. Their lips met in a long kiss.

The soft lights of the room; the distant melody of the orchestra; the gentle breeze from the archway—all were forgotten in the happiness of the moment.

The girl sank back in her chair, triumphant. She could see the rapturous glow in George Clarendon's eyes. The man had yielded to her love. His expression was one of wonderment.

For a full minute he gazed steadily at the girl, and Thelda waited, confident that he would rise and seize her in his arms.

He rose slowly and came around beside Thelda. His right arm embraced her shoulders. The girl nestled snugly against his breast and gazed upward with a bewitching smile.

Clarendon lifted her chin with his left hand. He bent his head and again his lips met Thelda's. There was tenderness in his kiss.

"Forget everything else," whispered Thelda, as Clarendon raised his head and looked into her deep brown eyes. "Forget everything."

"Everything," replied Clarendon, in a low voice. "Everything except -"

"Our love—"

"Everything," repeated Clarendon, "except—" he slowly turned his left hand palm down. His eyes left Thelda's as they consulted the watch upon his wrist "- everything except a certain appointment—"

The girl gasped. Clarendon could not tell whether she was disturbed by disappointment or by chagrin. He bowed and formally extended his hand, inviting the girl to rise. Thelda bit her lips; then she smiled sweetly.

"You are right, George," she said quietly. "We must wait. You are a busy man"—her tone indicated that she was trying to forget her defeat—"and you must give attention to your interests. But promise me that later—"

"I promise," replied Clarendon, "provided that you really love me."

"Always."

The girl was smiling as they went down in the elevator. She seemed desirous of leaving her companion in a good mood.

"Since you will be busy," she said, "I must find some other interest this evening. You are taking a cab?"

"Yes."

"Suppose you drop me at the Alwyn Theater?"

They entered the taxi and stopped before the theater. Thelda blew a kiss to her companion as she alighted.

"Call me later, darling?" she questioned.

Clarendon was smiling as he nodded.

THE car rolled on as the girl entered the lobby. It entered a mass of evening traffic. The driver indulged in repartee with the man at the wheel of another cab. He did not hear the door of his vehicle as it opened and closed again.

Thelda Blanchet was standing at the end of a line at the box office. She glanced carelessly toward the street; then turned impatiently and left the line. She entered a drug store that adjoined the theater and went to a phone booth.

"Doctor Palermo's apartment," she said, after obtaining the number.

The physician's voice came over the wire a moment later.

"This is Thelda," announced the girl.

"You failed to hold Clarendon?"

"Yes. But I am progressing."

There was a pause. Then Palermo spoke slowly.

"Take paper and pencil and write this down—everything I tell you.

"Residence of Doctor Brockbank, No. 711 Eastern Avenue." Palermo continued. "Key is in letter addressed to you at Hotel Bargelle. Enter house. Room on second floor at head of stairs. Find key to desk in drawer of telephone table. Open desk. Lower drawer on right. Large manila envelope marked 'P.' Remove it. Bring here immediately. Do not act until midnight."

There was a momentary pause.

"Repeat," declared Palermo's voice.

The girl read the message aloud.

"Now tear up what you have written. Make eight pieces of it. Drop them on the floor of the booth."

The girl obeyed.

"I have finished," she said.

"Then nullify."

Palermo's last words were uttered in a low tone. The receiver clicked immediately afterward.

THELDA BLANCHET left the telephone booth. She paid no attention to other persons standing there.

A man consulting a telephone directory sidled into the booth immediately, but the girl did not even glimpse his face. She entered the lobby of the Alwyn Theater and bought an orchestra ticket.

The man who had taken the girl's place in the booth had evidently observed her while she had been

talking. With a clever, sidewise motion, he picked up the torn pieces of paper. Failing to obtain his number, he left the booth.

In an obscure corner of a hotel lobby, the same man put the slips of paper together and read the message. He dropped the torn fragments in an ash receiver and touched them with a lighted match.

Then he smiled.

Only that smile, slight and momentary on the thin lips, would have reminded an observer of George Clarendon. For the face seemed entirely different.

The man drew a watch from his pocket. Even in that detail he differed from Clarendon. It was ten minutes after nine.

"Ten thirty will be soon enough," the man murmured.

He remembered every detail of Palermo's message. All that he lacked were the two words which the physician had given after Thelda had torn the paper. "Then nullify."

That was one of Palermo's individual orders. It had meant one thing to Thelda Blanchet—that she was not to follow the instructions given her. She was not to go to Doctor Brockbank's home that evening.

The man in the hotel lobby had failed to learn the final verbal instructions. Without realizing it, he was about to enter the trap that Doctor Palermo had set for him.

CHAPTER XV. WANTED—THE SHADOW

THE home of Doctor Jeremiah Brockbank was an old residence that had withstood the inroads of newer buildings in that vicinity. It stood like an old curio amid a mass of tall apartment buildings—a reminder of New York in the late '90s.

The house was closed. Its windows were boarded. The massive oak door was a formidable barrier.

There was nothing of value in the house—a casual observer could surmise that fact. The owner had been away for many months, and there was no indication of his return.

A shadow appeared in front of the building. It was only visible for a moment. Then it vanished. It did not reappear.

Behind the old house, in the darkness of a delivery alley, the same fleeting shadow crossed a spot of light.

A board came loose from a back window of the house. It seemed to move of its own volition, soundlessly, without the contact of a human hand. Another board followed. The window was raised. Then the boards moved back into place.

No sound occurred as the window sash was lowered. Something from the blackness had entered the old house.

Only the boards had moved. Still, they were white in color, and white may be seen when it trembles in semidarkness. Eyes peering from a dark room in an apartment house behind the Brockbank residence had seen the motion of those white boards.

There was an immediate result. Stealthy forms crept up the delivery alley. Men in plain clothes stationed themselves on either side of the front of the Brockbank home. The back door was unlocked by a careful

hand. Figures entered softly.

There was a light inside the house—a light that could not be detected outside. It was a tiny circle from an electric torch. It moved along the floor amid the sparsely furnished rooms. It arrived at the front stairs, and the person who carried it moved silently upward. The light stopped. It entered the room at the head of the stairs.

The light swept quickly about the room. It stopped on a telephone table. The dust-covered telephone was outlined; then the light was focused on a drawer.

The drawer came open. A thin white hand appeared. Nimble fingers moved through the drawer. They brought out a small key.

The light now sought an old-fashioned desk in a corner of the room. The hand that held the key unlocked the desk. It opened a drawer, and the light of the torch revealed a large brown envelope, thickly padded.

The light was carefully placed on the desk. Two hands, working with incredible smoothness, peeled back the flap of the envelope. Upon one hand was a ring with a stone that glowed a deep red.

It was the hand of The Shadow—the hand which wore the mysterious fire opal, a talismanic gem that seemed to protect its bearer from all harm.

The hands paused as they were taking the papers from the envelope. The light went out. From somewhere in the hall outside the room, the man in the darkness had heard a sound. He was listening now—listening with ears that were wonderfully acute—ears that could detect the slightest rustle.

No further sound occurred. The light flashed again. The papers were drawn completely from the envelope. The hands replaced a wad of folded blank papers.

One hand produced a tiny tube and applied a gummy substance to the opened flap of the envelope. Delicate fingers smoothed the flap back into place. The envelope, perfectly sealed, was replaced in the drawer.

Out went the light. For nearly a minute absolute darkness prevailed.

A man was listening in that darkness. Not even his breathing disturbed the stillness. The light, still resting on the desk, came on again as the hands unfolded the original papers which had been taken from the envelope.

These papers were as blank as those that had been substituted!

THE hands remained motionless as though the mind directing them had been taken with surprise. Then came a low, almost inaudible laugh. It was a whispered laugh, scarcely more than a faint echo in the gloom.

The light was turned off; the hands reached the telephone table and replaced the key.

Silence prevailed for five full seconds. No one could have known that a man was moving through the darkness toward the door of the room. Perhaps it was that mysterious silence that brought action.

From somewhere in the house came a quick, short, trilling whistle. Some hand must have pressed a master switch. In an instant, the whole house was illuminated.

The little room at the head of the stairs was brilliant. Three men in plain clothes dashed up the stairs, headed for that room. Another—a tall fellow wearing a badge—stepped from a closet in the room. Two more closed in from the hallway. Every one of the six carried a loaded automatic.

In the midst of a suddenly formed group stood the object of their approach—a tall man clad in black.

The detectives stopped short. Their guns covered their victim. They waited before approaching him—waited the command of their leader, a short, stocky man who was one of those who had come up the stairs.

The stern, furrowed face of Stanley Warwick commanded the situation.

The Shadow was completely surrounded. He knew that all retreat was cut off—that, could he escape the men who surrounded him, he would encounter others downstairs and outside the house.

He stood motionless, awaiting capture. The collar of his cloak obscured his face. The broad-brimmed hat hid his forehead. Even his eyes were invisible. Their strange glow was lost in the brightness of the room.

The Shadow's hands, hidden in the dark folds of his clothing, were pressed against his chest as though to hold his cloak about his face. Handcuffs jangled in Stanley Warwick's fist.

The detectives waited for their chief to slip them on. Instead, Warwick waited. He stood firm and unyielding, viewing The Shadow as one might study a strange creature captured from the depths of the sea.

Stanley Warwick was perfect in his acting—so perfect that even The Shadow did not fathom his game.

The detective showed slight traces of surprise. He apparently had expected to find some other person there, in place of this black-clad figure. His pretense was so perfect that The Shadow wondered.

"The Shadow," said Warwick quietly. "Still trying to conceal his identity! You thought, the other night, that you had deceived me. But I suspected you, even then."

His meaning was plain to the man in black. Warwick was identifying The Shadow as Doctor Palermo, even though he did not mention the name.

It was cleverness on the part of the detective. He, like Thelda Blanchet, had received instructions from Palermo to deceive The Shadow, should he be captured. Not for one instant would Warwick reveal that he was working for other forces than those of the law.

Warwick seemed loath to use the handcuffs to complete the capture. There was a purpose in his waiting—a purpose founded on an explicit order from Palermo.

Warwick did not wish to capture The Shadow alive. He had planned the death of that man of mystery. Even now he was turning events to his liking.

With his same deliberation, the detective approached and placed the handcuffs on The Shadow's wrists. He made no attempt to reveal his prisoner's identity. He seemed chiefly concerned with the handcuffs, making sure that they were tightly locked.

He stepped behind The Shadow and planted the muzzle of his automatic between the prisoner's shoulders.

"All right, men," ordered Warwick. "I've got him all right. Go outside, and form along the stairs. I'll march

him down."

The plain-clothes men obeyed.

WARWICK waited, positive that The Shadow would make an effort to escape. And that action would spell his doom. Two detectives were posted on either side of the door, in the hallway. Encountering them, The Shadow would be forced to run the gamut of the stairs.

Any hesitation would lay him open to Warwick's bullets from behind. Every man in plain clothes had been instructed to shoot the moment escape was attempted. Warwick counted on them to wound and stop The Shadow.

He himself would fire the fatal shot.

"Move," said Warwick, and pressed the gun more firmly between The Shadow's shoulders.

The detective did not want to kill his prisoner openly; he required a pretext to explain the killing to his men. Now the moment was at hand. Warwick expected The Shadow to duck and dive for the door.

Instead, the prisoner turned suddenly. As he turned, he extended his shoulder blade. The unexpected twist knocked the muzzle of Warwick's automatic to one side. The detective fired, the barest fraction of a second too late.

Leaping back, he pointed his gun toward the handcuffed prisoner. As Warwick's finger again pressed the trigger, The Shadow swung his manacled wrists downward. He hit the gun with the handcuffs. The bullet was diverted to the floor; the automatic fell from Warwick's clutch.

Upward came those steel-joined wrists. The body of the handcuffs met Stanley Warwick's square chin. The detective's head went back as he fell.

Wheeling toward the doorway, The Shadow kicked the half-opened door. It swung shut in the faces of the plainclothes men. The Shadow sprang to the door and locked it.

There was pandemonium outside. The man in sable black appeared not to notice it.

The keys to the handcuffs were in the possession of the unconscious detective; but The Shadow chose a quicker way to release himself.

The telephone table had an old-fashioned marble top. The Shadow swung his hands downward, striking the cuffs against the projecting edge of the table top. The marble cracked from the forceful blow. One arm of the handcuffs sprang open.

Another heavy stroke and The Shadow's other hand was free. Silently, swiftly, the tall man removed his black cloak and hat.

The detectives were crashing at the door. The barrier began to break beneath their blows. Above the uproar came a sharp cry from within the room.

The men stopped as they recognized the voice of their chief, punctuated by a pistol shot.

"Hold it," came Warwick's voice. "I've finished him. Stand by. I'm opening the door."

The key turned in the lock. The door opened inward. A gray-clad arm indicated a huddled figure in black that lay on the floor, face downward, with the broad-brimmed hat beside it.

"I shot him," Warwick's tones came from beside the door. The soft gray hat obscured the speaker's face. "Pick him up and carry him out."

The detectives surged forward. Two of them lifted the limp body. The face came into view.

"It's the chief!" cried one of the men.

THE others leaped toward the door, just as a gray-coated figure flashed from view. Shots followed; but they were wide.

Then did the detectives realize the ruse. The Shadow—with incredible speed—had donned Warwick's coat and had enveloped the detective in the black cloak. He had even clipped handcuffs on Warwick's wrists!

"Get him!" came the cry from the top of the stairs.

A man stationed at the front door heard the shout. He was bewildered for an instant as he saw the form of Stanley Warwick approaching him. Then he realized that the oncoming man was taller than his chief.

Before he could act, the detective fell beneath a sweeping punch. The front door opened. The escaping prisoner stepped forth, deliberately closing the door behind him.

The lights of the street did not betray his false identity. The Shadow had not assumed the features of Stanley Warwick but his pose was a perfect imitation of the detective.

With his head turned down, he glanced swiftly in both directions. He waved his thumb over his shoulder, and issued a command in Warwick's customary tones.

"Inside men," he ordered. "Make it snappy! We've got our man!"

Two detectives came from the front of the building. The man with the gray hat stepped to the sidewalk as they dashed up the steps. The front door opened before their arrival. Two men in plain clothes burst forth.

"There he goes!" cried one, indicating the man with the gray coat and hat, who was moving swiftly along the street.

Shots came from steps. They were answered by a gibing laugh that tantalized the pursuers. The range was too great for accuracy.

The detectives hurried to the sidewalk, in time to see their quarry disappear around the corner. When they reached the spot, their quarry was nowhere in sight.

The Shadow, superman of action, had escaped. Still living, he could block Palermo's crimes.

Nevertheless, the keen-minded physician had scored a victory. That night, Stanley Warwick issued a statement that put in effect new police orders.

A dangerous criminal had eluded the police. All officers were instructed to watch for him. His name was not known; but his alias had been revealed.

The Shadow was wanted!

CHAPTER XVI. PALERMO MOVES

THE search for The Shadow lost its official approval as soon as it had begun. The ardent efforts of Detective Stanley Warwick were overruled by his superiors.

Nothing like this had ever occurred in the history of the New York police force. Men could be wanted for crimes; clues could be followed in tracking unknown criminals. But it was impossible to swear out a warrant for every person who might be wearing a black cloak and hat.

The voice of The Shadow had been heard over the radio the night after the affair in the house on Eastern Avenue. That meant nothing. There was no proof that the man who had eluded Warwick was the same person as the radio announcer.

Police records showed that more than one criminal had claimed to be The Shadow. In the face of previous occurrences, the police commissioner deemed it wise to rescind the order which Stanley Warwick had sponsored.

Warwick was quick to realize his folly. He knew that he could demand to know the identity of the man who broadcast every week; at the same time, he saw that such an action would be a mistake.

He would not know The Shadow if he should meet him face to face. He would be ridiculed, and would gain nothing. He felt that his best policy was to wait until The Shadow again became active.

If a man in black should commit a crime or place himself in a suspicious position, that would be a starting point.

Warwick already had a tip. Palermo had secretly notified him that George Clarendon should be watched.

Warwick quickly learned facts concerning Clarendon, who was well known in society. But he could not trace the man, nor could he learn where he lived.

All data on Clarendon ended at a certain point. Beyond that, nothing was obtainable.

It was evident that The Shadow was exercising caution, and Doctor Palermo had gained the freedom he desired, temporarily at least.

He advised Warwick to track down The Shadow's agents, and named Clyde Burke as one of them.

The ex-reporter was not to be found. Following instructions from The Shadow, he was living in the apartment across the street from the Marimba. Harry Vincent was the only one who ventured forth.

Had either of the men been quizzed, they could not have furnished important evidence. For The Shadow made all his phone calls from different sources. Each hour word was received from him; the return number was invariably a new one.

The vigil kept on. On the fourth night following the encounter between Warwick and The Shadow, the phone buzzed while Burke was watching from the window. Burbank was on the wire.

"Called to the fortieth floor," came the report. "Must hurry back. Palermo may be going out."

WORKING quickly in the dark, Harry Vincent dialed the latest number given by The Shadow. There was no reply. It was a moment that required decision.

"Come," said Harry shortly. "We can't miss this chance."

The two men hurried to the street and slipped into Harry's coupe. They drove around the block. A

taxicab was pulling away from the Marimba Apartments. They could not see the face of the passenger.

"Guesswork," grunted Harry. "We'll follow this bird, just the same."

The cab rolled uptown, the coupe staying well in the rear. The course led to Eastern Avenue. The cab stopped in front of an old house with boarded windows.

Harry and Clyde saw a man go up the steps and unlock the door. They drove by as they watched.

"It's Palermo," said Clyde softly. "That house is the one mentioned in the newspapers—the home of Doctor Brockbank, where Warwick met The Shadow."

"It's a funny thing," observed Harry, as he stopped the car around the corner. "Warwick started the rumpus about The Shadow. Warwick is also after Palermo. Why hasn't he identified Palermo as The Shadow?"

"Because Palermo is not The Shadow."

"Of course not. But Warwick has quizzed Palermo and he has encountered The Shadow. He must see some connection—"

"Either he thinks they are working together; or he knows the truth, namely that Palermo and The Shadow are opposed to one another. Warwick is a keen man, Harry."

Harry climbed from the car, and Clyde followed. Together they went to the back of the house. Harry observed the white-boards over the rear window where The Shadow had entered.

"Loose," he remarked, after a quick inspection. He pried the boards open and tried the window. "Unlocked. Come along."

Clyde pushed Harry through the window and his companion helped him follow. They were in total darkness at first; when they had made their way to the front of the building they observed a light at the head of the stairs.

"Come along," said Harry.

From his pocket he drew a loaded automatic and gave it to Clyde. With his own gun in hand, Harry led the way.

They stole up the stairs. The door at the top was ajar. They could not see who was in the lighted room.

A board creaked under Clyde's foot. Harry pushed his companion down the hall. They waited in the darkness. They could hear some one coming to the door of the room. The door opened. Palermo was visible as he stepped into the hall.

"Who's there?" came his voice.

Palermo pressed the button of a flashlight. He turned the instrument along the hall. Its glare revealed the watching men.

Harry did not hesitate. He leaped forward, covering Palermo with his automatic. The physician dropped the flashlight and backed into the room. The young men followed him.

Doctor Palermo sat in the chair beside the desk, his hands above his head.

"What does this mean?" he snarled. Then his manner became suddenly smooth. "Ah! It's my friend Burke," he added, in a pleased tone.

After making sure that Burke was master of the situation, Harry went downstairs. He found the telephone, called the number that The Shadow had given him. The low, familiar voice replied.

"Vincent," said Harry. "At the Brockbank house. Trailed Palermo upstairs in the little room. Burke has him covered. We can hold him."

"How long?"

"As long as you require."

A laugh came from the other end of the wire. It was not the usual laugh of The Shadow. It carried no triumph; it bore no mockery. It was a dull laugh that seemed to indicate disappointment. Harry was perplexed.

"Hurry back to the little room and order Palermo to come back with you while you resume conversation with me. Hurry, or you may be too late!"

Harry rushed upstairs wondering. He had been watching the top of the stairs all during his conversation with The Shadow. What had The Shadow meant by the words "too late"?

Harry reached the top of the stairs. He had his automatic in readiness; already his command to Palermo was on his lips. Then he stopped short in astonishment.

The little room was empty! Silently, mysteriously, Doctor Palermo had completely vanished from the room with its single door and its boarded window!

Somehow, he had escaped from the trap—more than that, Clyde Burke had vanished with him!

CHAPTER XVII. THELDA TELLS

"BURBANK reporting."

The voice came through the receiver of a telephone.

"Proceed," was the reply.

The speaker was a man clad in black. He sat in the gloom of a dingy room. Only a faint light trickled through from a narrow courtyard outside the window. Opposite was a blank wall.

"Box delivered at five thirty," said Burbank's monotonous voice. "Information gained from the janitor."

"Any description of the box?"

"Exact size not given. Evidently live stock. Box contained air holes."

"Good. Do you go on duty immediately?"

"Yes, sir."

"Any report on Palermo?"

"Still absent."

"Good. You are prepared?"

"Yes, sir."

The speaker hung up the receiver. He rose from the dilapidated chair beside the rickety telephone table. There, in the semidarkness, his tall form was scarcely more than a fantastic outline.

The man put on a large hat. He threw a dark cloak about his shoulders. Standing for a moment by the window, he drew two automatics from his pockets and examined each in turn. Satisfied with the inspection, he left the room.

Darkness was approaching when the man appeared in the street. His unusual attire seemed inconspicuous as he walked slowly along.

It was a squalid street of the East Side. The warm spring day foretold the approach of summer. Already half-clad children were seeking the evening air. The man stopped as two boys fell in front of him, wrestling.

He stepped by them with a smile. There was a similarity even between the struggles of children and the grapplings of master minds.

The man entered a garage on another street. A few minutes later a coupe drove forth. It was a car built for speed; yet there was nothing striking in its appearance. It was not an automobile that would attract attention.

The deepening shadows of twilight rendered the man invisible from the street. He drove easily, choosing an irregular course. The car turned on to Eastern Avenue. It moved more slowly as it passed a boarded house that bore the number 711.

A policeman was standing outside the building. The man in the car smiled as he went by. The police had been there ever since last night. They had arrived less than a half an hour after the mysterious disappearance of Doctor Palermo.

They had made a thorough search of the premises, looking for a man in black. They had not found him; for he had been wise enough to stay away.

BROADWAY lights were gleaming as the car rolled down that busy thoroughfare. It turned into a side street. There the driver parked it.

He strolled back toward Broadway, a lone individual in the vast throng that moved along the sidewalks. He seemed even more inconspicuous here. Like so many of the strollers, he was leisurely in his walk.

Choosing a street above Fortieth, he turned from the busy thoroughfare and entered an apartment house. It was an unpretentious place. A clerk sat at a desk, answering phone calls, asking the business of each arrival.

The newcomer, however, did not approach the desk. Instead he went up the stairway.

His way was blocked by a closed iron grillework. All visitors were supposed to ascend by elevator. The barrier was locked; but the sombre man opened it quickly with the aid of a sharp-pointed steel instrument.

He closed the gate behind him and went up to the fourth floor. He stopped before the door of a corner apartment. He listened to the sound of a woman singing softly.

Again the pick worked, smoothly and noiselessly. The man opened the door and entered.

A woman was smoothing her hair before a full-length mirror in the living room. She was singing when the man came in; now her voice dropped to a gentle hum.

She was exquisitely gowned, apparently about to go out for dinner. The reflection of her face was beautiful, seen in the mirror.

Suddenly her face became rigid. A look of horror spread over her features. Gazing in the mirror, she had seen the image of the man in black.

He stood in the doorway behind her, the collar of his cloak obscuring his face, the broad brim of his hat throwing a shadow over his forehead.

The girl stood motionless. The man in black made no move. A grim, ghastly silence seemed to pervade the room. The girl recovered from her first shock. Still the look of terror remained on her face as she turned from the mirror to view this nocturnal visitor.

Words came from the man at the door—words that seemed uttered by no human lips. The voice was terrifying in its tone. The whispered statement recoiled from the very walls.

"Thelda Blanchet," said the man in black. "I am The Shadow."

The girl was too startled to reply.

"I have come to question you," continued the man in his sinister tone. The sibilance of the word "question" was unnerving.

The girl placed her hands before her eyes. She swayed, then recoiled as the figure approached step by step. Leaning against the mirrored door, Thelda became suddenly limp. She would have fallen but for two black-gloved hands which caught her arms.

The Shadow threw back his head. The broad-brimmed hat fell to the floor. The collar of the cloak dropped. The girl opened her eyes. She was staring into the face of George Clarendon.

"You tried to betray me," came Clarendon's voice.

"No, no," gasped Thelda.

"Do not lie to me." There was restrained fury in the man's words. "You tried to win my love that you might lead me to my doom!"

Thelda's eyes were pleading as she tried to face her accuser. She was barely able to support herself. The pressure of the hands upon her arms brought marks of livid red. The fascination of the burning eyes seemed to overpower the girl.

"You pretended to love me," said Clarendon slowly. "Yet your love was only a lure. Look into my eyes that I may know the truth. You sought my love that I might meet destruction. Acknowledge my statement!"

The girl nodded feebly.

"You sought my love," repeated Clarendon. "Now, know its power!"

The sternness disappeared from the piercing eyes. Instead they began to brighten as though filled with a

miraculous light.

The girl was fascinated. Her strength returned as Clarendon released her arms. She extended her hands. As they rested on the man's shoulders, Thelda raised her face beseechingly, her lips seeking a kiss.

"Speak to me first," commanded Clarendon.

Thelda clung closely to the man in black, still held by the power of those searching eyes.

"You loved Albert Palermo," said Clarendon.

"I love him no longer," whispered Thelda.

"He ordered you to seek me."

"Yes."

"Where is he now?"

"I do not know."

"When will he return?"

"Not until midnight."

Clarendon's words were amazing in their tone. They bore a marked resemblance to the sinister speech of The Shadow and at the same time carried no unfriendliness.

Thelda's replies were spasmodic. They seemed to come without effort, as though the girl spoke without realizing what she said.

"I am going to Palermo's apartment to-night," said the man.

"Don't go!" The girl's words carried anxiety. "There are terrible dangers there!"

Thelda's eyes were wide with fear for the safety of this man whose personality had conquered her. All loyalty to Palermo was forgotten. George Clarendon now dominated her existence.

"Tell me"—came Clarendon's quiet tones—"where the danger lies."

"In the Chinese room," replied Thelda, speaking in a far-away voice. She seemed to be visualizing that apartment with all its barbaric splendor.

"There are many snares in that room. Some objects are charged with an electric current sufficient to stun or kill any one touching them. There is a little incense burner, so exquisite that one cannot resist the temptation of examining it.

"When Albert is away, that burner contains a dangerous explosive. The telephone, should one handle it, emits a poison gas. Yet this I know: if you do not touch a single object in that room, nothing can harm you."

"The Chinese throne?"

"It carries no danger."

"That statue of bronze—"

"No one should touch it. Albert received it one day when I was there. He said it was shipped to him from China. It may now be another trap."

Clarendon considered the girl thoughtfully. She seemed eager to tell the truth. He continued his questions.

"Where does Palermo keep his stolen goods?"

"In the corner of the Chinese room. The taboret in the corner opens. In it are securities and other papers, some of which I—I helped him to obtain."

"Is the taboret dangerous?"

"Yes. Its secret is a simple one but very dangerous. You must turn a little knob to open it.

"Any person doing so is sure to turn the knob to the right. Such an action would mean instant death. The taboret is always prepared that way.

"Sometimes I have shuddered when Albert has opened it. He always turns the knob to the left. He has seemed so close to death—so close to death—"

THELDA'S voice trailed away. The glamour faded from her eyes. The strain had weakened her. She was on the verge of collapse.

Clarendon caught her as she was about to fall. He placed her in an armchair and looked at her with pity. Thelda opened her eyes.

"George," she whispered weakly, "George, I love you. Tell me that you will not—go away."

The man in black drew a pad from his pocket and wrote a few penciled words. He folded the paper and placed it in the girl's hand.

"Thelda," he said sternly, "I do not condemn you for your past actions. You have made amends. Your future will be different. You must forget Albert Palermo."

"I have forgotten him."

"You must forget me."

"I can never forget you. George I love you!"

"You must forget me." The man's voice was prophetic. "You shall forget me. You are leaving here to-night. You are going away from New York. My instructions are written on that sheet of paper; they are the last message you will ever receive from me."

He turned away. His action denoted decision. From that instant, Thelda Blanchet knew that her love for George Clarendon had become hopeless.

Clarendon was The Shadow again, his cloak about his shoulders, his broad-brimmed hat upon his head. He had assumed the shape of a gigantic creature. He dialed a number on the telephone; his voice became a whisper as he spoke.

"Vincent," he said, "are you ready?"

There was a pause; then The Shadow began to give instructions. He seemed totally oblivious of the

presence of the girl. He did not even look at her.

He acted as though she could hear nothing that he said. In this he was correct. Thelda had fainted.

When the girl recovered consciousness, she was alone in the room. She could not recall a word that she had said.

All had been a strange dream, a fantastic vision in which terror had turned to love and love had become disappointment. The face of George Clarendon dominated her recollections.

She stared at the paper in her hands.

Thelda: Go. To-night. Home.

There was no signature. The message needed none. The girl now understood it all.

Her former love for Albert Palermo had become a shoddy sham. She hated the name of the man. Her new love for George Clarendon was denied her.

The temptress had been conquered. For the first time in her life she felt remorse.

A man passing in the outside hall paused a moment; then went on. He had heard a woman sobbing.

The sound came from the same apartment where The Shadow had heard a woman's song.

CHAPTER XVIII. IN THE LAIR

A MAN entered the lobby of the Marimba Apartments, carrying a suitcase. His stride betokened familiarity with the place. He passed the lobby attendant and entered the elevator where he stepped out of view into a convenient corner. The hallman came questioningly toward the elevator.

"It's all right," said the operator, leaning from the door. "Going up to that party on the thirty-fourth floor."

The hallman nodded. The door of the elevator closed and the car moved upward. Had the hallman noticed it, he would have seen that the indicating dial above the elevator door moved very slowly and that the car made a rather long stop at the thirty-fourth floor.

Inside the elevator, the passenger was working rapidly. Immediately after the door had been closed, he stooped and opened the bag. From it he drew a black cloak which he donned and raised so that the collar completely hid his face. He also drew out a pliable black hat which he adjusted to hide his forehead.

By that time, the car was at the thirty-fourth floor. It waited there while the black-garbed man produced two automatics from his bag. He deposited these beneath his cloak and tossed his original hat into the bag.

The elevator operator looked at him. The car went upward, to the fortieth floor.

Here, the door opened. The man in black remained hidden in the elevator. The operator stepped from the car. He walked across the anteroom of Doctor Palermo's apartment and pressed the button.

The door swung open, and the huge form of Hassan blocked the entrance. The Arab looked questioningly at the elevator man.

"Important letter for you," announced the operator, in a brisk voice. "Got it here with me."

He fumbled in a right-hand pocket of his uniform. Not finding the letter, he tried a left-hand pocket. He brought out an envelope and extended it toward Hassan.

The huge brown man inclined his head slightly as he reached for the envelope. Like a flash, the elevator operator pulled his hand from his right pocket. He swung his forearm in a quick, short motion. A blackjack landed just behind Hassan's left ear.

The Arab fell.

The blow had not been a hard one, yet it had momentarily stunned Doctor Palermo's servant. Before Hassan could recover, the man in the black cloak had sprung from the elevator, carrying the black bag.

As Hassan groaned and opened his eyes, the man pulled a rag from the bag and held it to the Arab's nose. The odor of chloroform pervaded the anteroom. Hassan lay still.

"Going down," said Burbank, the elevator operator. His voice was methodical. His face was calm and expressionless. "Will fake a call when Palermo returns. Telephone bell will warn you," he added in a guarded tone.

The door of the elevator closed while the man in black was still nodding his approval.

FROM the bag, the mysterious visitor removed two straps. He dragged Hassan's body into the apartment and closed the door behind him. He used the straps to bind the Arab.

He left the bag at the door and began to walk about the apartment. The place seemed unfamiliar to him. Cautiously he tried the door to the laboratory. It was locked. He could not find the key on Hassan.

He abandoned the search and walked through the apartment. He came to the panel that concealed the secret stairway.

Here he made no pretext at the theatrical finger-snapping performed by Doctor Palermo for the mystification of his visitors. He simply sought the floor plates beneath the rug. When he stepped on them properly, the door slid open.

The man in black went up the stairs. There was something cumbersome about his movements. He was proceeding cautiously.

In the mellow light of the Chinese room, the man's shadow spread across the thickly-rugged floor. He turned around to study every feature of the room. He inspected each article, but touched nothing.

He gazed carefully at the bronze image of Chong; that silent, glaring idol from far-off Cathay. The figure was hideous; its arms and legs were thin carvings. The fingers of its bronze hands were long-nailed talons.

The sculptor who had perpetrated that image must have been governed by a morbid imagination, for it looked like no creature that had ever lived.

The man in black went to the Chinese chair. It aroused his curiosity. It was built like a throne, with a broad seat and solid, upright arms.

The man placed his gloved hands on the arms of the chair. His fingers found two buttons. He pressed them.

With a smooth mechanical motion, the seat of the chair broke in half. Both portions dropped. At the

same instant, a cloud of steamlike smoke arose and enveloped the black-clad man.

His eyes caught a full view of a room below, where a springy net was set to catch a falling body. Then two panels fell from the arms of the chair. They formed a new seat to replace the one that had dropped.

The secret of Doctor Palermo's mysterious disappearance was revealed!

Covered by the rising smoke, Palermo had dropped from view and the heavy Oriental chair had become an apparently solid structure. Evidently the room below communicated with the small elevator shaft up which Palermo had risen on that eventful evening.

The investigator made a short further inspection. He stepped out on the roof, which seemed very large in the darkness, its further rail showing white at the opposite end of the building. The penthouse was at one end of the apartment house.

The man in black came back. He stood listening. For a moment he hesitated as though about to descend the stairway and make a search below. Then his head turned directly toward the taboret.

This article of furniture was of Chinese manufacture, an exquisite piece of woodwork. The corner of the room was vacant. The taboret stood about four feet from the corner. The image of Chong was the same distance from the corner, but set against the adjoining wall.

There was no mistaking the taboret. It was the only one in the room that contained a closet beneath it.

The image of Chong was also on a taboret—there were several of the little tables in this Oriental chamber. But the one near the corner was the largest of them.

The man in the black cloak approached closely. He appeared a trifle nervous. He bent low and cautiously extended his hand.

His glove trembled slightly as it touched the knob of the door beneath the taboret. Then the fingers clutched the knob. They moved slowly to the left. The door came open. It revealed a stack of ebony boxes.

The black-gloved hands removed the uppermost box and opened it. The man hesitated. He half rose and looked quickly about him, to make sure that no one had entered. The room was silent.

He removed the papers from the box. He closed the box and replaced it in the hollow beneath the taboret.

At that moment, a strange event transpired. The bronze image of Chong began to move. Silently, gruesomely, the hideous figure came to life! It stretched its long arms and rested its hands beside its body.

With a hopping motion, the image slipped from its pedestal. Its bare feet were noiseless as they reached the floor. The living monstrosity crept forward. Its staring eyes and grinning lips did not change their expression.

The fantastic being stopped behind the man in black. He was removing the second ebony box. He drew back from the taboret.

The long emaciated arms of Chong shot swiftly forward. Tentaclelike, they clutched the neck of the stooping man.

With a choking gasp, the victim reached for his throat and tried vainly to rid himself of that terrible grasp. The hands clutched more tightly, the long nails sinking into the flesh through the folds of the black cloak.

The victim writhed and tried to roll upon the floor. The hideous dwarf did not relax its grasp. With a last effort, the man in black-raised himself; then failed and sprawled head down upon the rug. His hat fell from his head. He lay still.

Slowly, the bronzed hands of the living image released their hold. The prostrate man did not respond. Stepping backward, Chong withdrew to his pedestal.

He placed both hands upon the table. He lifted his body to its old position. There he sat, motionless again, the perfect representation of a metal idol. The only change in the appearance of the figure was the direction of its gaze.

Steadily, unflinchingly, this guardian of the sanctum waited in readiness for a new attack, should its victim show the slightest sign of regaining consciousness.

A telephone rang in the apartment below.

No one answered it, although there were three living beings within hearing distance.

One, Hassan, lay bound. Another, the man in black, was unconscious. The third had become a statue of bronze.

CHAPTER XIX. THE MASTER APPEARS

THE door of the elevator slid open at the fortieth floor. Doctor Palermo stepped out. He paused while he looked at the silent, calm-faced operator.

The man was apparently forty years of age. He wore an expression of indifference. His pale-gray eyes expressed no interest as they met the physician's gaze.

"You are a new man here?" asked Doctor Palermo.

"On duty a few days, sir," came the reply.

"What is your name?"

"Burbank, sir."

"From now on, Burbank," said Palermo, "do not bring the elevator to this floor, unless I summon you. That is a rule of the apartment house. I chose the fortieth floor so that I would not be disturbed.

"I want no visitors to-night. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

The elevator door closed. Doctor Palermo, with a short laugh, twisted the push button beside the elevator door. The button screwed tight.

In so doing, it operated a secret mechanism which the physician had never before utilized. Until he should choose to release the button, it would be impossible for an elevator to come above the thirty-ninth floor.

Palermo rang the bell of his apartment. There was no response. The physician drew a peculiar key from his pocket and inserted it in a crevice between decorations of the door. The barrier opened.

Palermo stepped into the apartment. He stumbled over the bound form of Hassan. He evidenced no great surprise.

From the inside pocket of his full-dress coat, he drew a folding knife. He opened the instrument and cut the straps that bound the Arab. Hassan rose sheepishly.

"He came to-night?" questioned Palermo, in the language familiar to his servant.

The Arab nodded.

Palermo waited a moment; then pointed to the telephone. Hassan nodded to indicate that the instrument had been ringing.

Palermo laughed. He beckoned to his servant to follow him.

They went to the sliding panel. Doctor Palermo gave the finger snap. The opening appeared. The two men ascended to the Chinese room.

Palermo instantly observed the black-clad form that lay, face down, upon the floor, its arms outstretched. The evil smile began to play upon the physician's lips. It became a leer as the man turned and surveyed the image of Chong, which still stared steadily at the body on the rug.

The master spoke in a strange tongue. The idol came to life. It clambered from its perch and disappeared through a gap in the tapestries.

Palermo pressed his hand against the wall. A panel slid back. A carrier moved forward, bringing the genuine bronze image to the top of the pedestal. The metal idol was a perfect replica of the hideous dwarf who had just gone.

PALERMO removed his coat and clapped his hands. Hassan came forward with the red robe that bore the golden dragon.

Palermo moved to the throne; there he discovered that the mechanism had been operated. He clapped his hands. Hassan went to the throne, to adjust it to its former condition. Palermo took his place on the throne.

Now he began to evidence real interest in Chong's victim.

Palermo had withheld his curiosity regarding the man in black. The expression on his face showed that he was realizing something that he had long anticipated.

He clapped his hand and pointed to the black cloak with the form beneath it. Hassan picked up the man's body as though its weight were trivial and set it in a chair. He turned the seat around so that the unconscious man faced Palermo.

The Arab drew down the black collar of the cloak, so that his master might see the face of The Shadow.

This act revealed the features of Harry Vincent!

A slight expression of surprise came over Palermo. He studied the man in the chair. He had seen that face the night before, in the home of Doctor Brockbank.

Harry's eyes opened. He stared weakly toward Palermo. The sight of the man's red robe puzzled him.

Palermo noted his perplexity, but attributed it to his sudden recovery of consciousness.

"So!" Palermo spoke with the solemnity of a mandarin. "The Shadow has come! I am surprised to find him such a youth. But I have heard that he assumes disguises."

Harry tried to frame a sentence. His voice failed him. Palermo read the message on his lips.

"Where is Burke?" asked the man in the scarlet robe. "He is here, awaiting you. He was surprised last night, as you were surprised to-night.

"I must congratulate you, however. You were far more wary. You avoided all my traps—save one.

"A few weeks ago, you might have succeeded in your mission. But recently I decided that my snares had a failing. I had no way of observing any victim who might enter this well-planned lair.

"So I placed a new trap—one that could see and hear as well as act—"

He stopped suddenly. He observed that Harry Vincent did not understand the full significance of the statements.

Palermo realized that the victim had no idea what had happened to him. The thought brought a chuckle from the physician.

"We can return to that matter later," he resumed, indulgently. "For the present, let us consider your agent, Burke.

"When you left him in charge of me last night, he was completely within my power. I might mention—if you have not already guessed the fact—that Doctor Brockbank and Doctor Palermo are one and the same person. When I assume the role of Brockbank, I am quite as careful as at present.

"Here"—he waved his hand—"I have many curios, and most of them spell destruction for the man who makes a mistake in handling them.

"Doctor Brockbank's little sanctum is unpretentious, but effective. Its carpet simply covers a thin wire screen that becomes charged with electricity by the simple procedure of pressing a lever underneath the desk. The spot by the desk is not wired.

"So, while I was at the desk, Burke became my victim. He was stunned by the shock that he received. I took him away with me, through a hidden door at the back of the closet."

Harry Vincent sat dumfounded at these revelations.

"The Brockbank house," said Palermo, smiling, "connects—through the cellar—with an old storeroom. A box was shipped from the storeroom to-day. It came to this apartment. It contained Mr. Burke, who was in a drugged state.

"He is now in the laboratory. Hassan will bring him up presently.

"I might add that you were nearly at my mercy last night. Had I known, then, that you were The Shadow, I might have dealt with you.

"I thought, however, that you were merely another agent, and that The Shadow would arrive later. So I notified the police to wait his arrival. You covered your identity well, last night. I have kept Burke to lure you here. You may wish to know what I intend to do with him. You shall learn. It will interest you—since your fate will be the same as his.

"I have dissected many bodies, Friend Shadow. Your man, Burke, has seen my collection of brains,

which includes that of Horace Chatham. But I have seldom had good subjects for vivisection. In fact, some of my experiments have been forced to wait on that account.

"To-night, I shall be able to work as I have long desired. Burke will be my first subject. You will be the next. Hassan!"

THE Arab appeared. Harry, roused to desperation, tried to scramble to his feet. He reached for his automatics. They were gone.

Now the Arab forestalled Harry's action. He pinned the young man's arms and held him. Palermo stepped from the Chinese throne.

From the sides of Harry's chair, he drew curved iron bars. In a few seconds he clamped his prisoner's wrists and ankles to the chair. Hassan lifted an iron band that was attached to the back of the chair, and fastened Harry's neck.

"A torture chair," explained Palermo suavely. "In China, it is used as a pillory. I advise you to remain quiet. Struggling will do you no good."

Palermo and Hassan pushed the chair to the corner of the room. Harry found himself facing directly toward the tapestry.

"Chong shall see this," Palermo murmured.

The evil smile appeared as Palermo lifted the top of a taboret and removed a small vial. He held the tiny bottle to Harry's nostrils. A pungent odor manifested itself. Harry lapsed into unconsciousness.

Palermo uttered a call. The dwarfish Chong appeared. The man in the red robe went to the bronze image and moved it back into the wall. Scarcely had the mechanism closed the panel before the living Chong was in his place.

When Harry Vincent opened his eyes, a moment later, he saw no change in the room. His eyes, as they fell upon the image of Chong, still saw a statue of bronze.

The tapestries moved aside. They revealed a wide but shallow elevator which contained a wheeled stretcher.

Under a white sheet lay the form of Clyde Burke. Only the man's face, pale as the cloth itself, was visible. Hassan rolled the stretcher to the center of the room.

Clyde's eyes were open and staring wide. They turned toward Harry. They seemed to plead, those eyes, as though they could not recognize the helplessness of the other man.

"This, I may state, is a condescension on my part," remarked Palermo, addressing Harry Vincent. "My experiments are usually conducted in the laboratory. I shall begin here. However, when your turn comes, Hassan and I will move you back to the laboratory."

While the Arab was attaching a lamp to Burke's stretcher; Doctor Palermo walked across the room and closed the French doors. He came back and helped Hassan wheel a small motor from the elevator.

The Arab closed the tapestries. Doctor Palermo adjusted the lamp and turned it on, so that it threw a glare upon the white features of Clyde Burke.

Palermo removed his red robe and donned one of yellowish white. The Chinese chamber began to take

on the aspect of an operating room.

Harry shuddered. He did not know in which guise Palermo appeared more terrible.

"I might mention one fact," came Palermo's voice. "We shall not be disturbed here. So if you have any other friends"—he looked at Harry as he spoke—"do not count on their help.

"I told you once that this was my Gibraltar. I have arranged it so that no elevator can come to this floor. There is no possible chance of an entry.

"Those lights"—he pointed to a board that was inconspicuous upon the wall—"are now set to notify me of any annoyance. Only when I leave the way open does any person enter here.

"Here we are forty stories above Manhattan. So you may prepare yourself for the same fate that Burke will meet."

HASSAN brought a case of instruments. Doctor Palermo had discarded the guise of a mandarin for that of a surgeon. He made careful, methodical arrangements that Harry had never before witnessed.

The preparations made Harry tremble. He could only stare in horrified fascination. The motor began to buzz. It purred with a steady rhythm, that made the scene more terrible.

"You are about to witness a most delicate operation," said Palermo in a cold, heartless tone. "It will be performed on the base of the brain. I shall proceed slowly. It will be several minutes—I hope— before the subject loses consciousness."

The noise of the motor was maddening. To Harry's ears it seemed to come from all parts of the room. His senses were rendered more acute, perhaps, by this terrible drama before him.

He was not thinking of his own doom; he was overwhelmed by his desire to aid his friend. The clamps held Harry as he struggled to free himself from the restraining chair.

Doctor Palermo was oblivious to everything except his intended work. Hassan seemed occupied in watching him. The image of Chong glared steadily, an outlandish figure in this room which had been changed from an Oriental chamber to an improvised laboratory.

Palermo's right hand was steady as it held a long, thin knife. His left hand turned the head of Clyde Burke as though it were an inanimate object instead of a portion of a living human being.

Clyde's eyes still held their helpless appeal. The point of the knife rested high on Clyde Burke's neck.

The throbbing purr that had come to Harry's ears was dying. Still, the motor was whirling as before. It was a peculiar, unexplainable phenomenon.

Palermo must have suddenly noticed it. He became motionless, standing in the attitude of a listener. A few seconds passed. Palermo inclined his head to proceed.

An instant later he looked up, an expression of profound astonishment upon his features.

THE French doors swung inward with a crash. Out of the black night appeared a tall figure clad in black. Its arms were spread, and the hanging folds of the cloak appeared like the wings of a huge, monstrous bat.

Bright eyes glittered beneath the encircling hat rim. They were eyes that glowed with unsuppressed rage.

Like some great flying mammal, this being had come from the inky heavens to wreak vengeance upon the white-clad criminal who stood with knife in hand.

The Shadow, master of the darkness, had arrived just in time to stay the hand of the murderer!

CHAPTER XX. PALERMO'S THRUST

THE incredible appearance of The Shadow had thrown Palermo completely off his guard.

The master criminal had fully believed that he had captured The Shadow when Harry Vincent had fallen into his hands. He had taken every precaution necessary to assure the success of his nefarious plans. This denouement had been totally unexpected.

For once he had encountered a situation that completely dismayed him.

The amazement of the evil man was fully reflected in the countenance of his servant, Hassan, the Arab.

To Harry Vincent, the arrival of The Shadow was a godsend. Clyde Burke's life was saved. Harry thought of his friend before himself.

The helpless man on the operating table was too weak from the effects of drugs to fully appreciate what had happened, but a sudden light that appeared in his listless eyes showed that he partially understood his deliverance.

Only one being in that room preserved a completely unchanged expression. That was the dwarf Chong. The hideous monster still glared in its statuesque pose. The false image thus escaped the attention of The Shadow. The man who had arrived from the night was centering all his attention upon Palermo.

The Shadow lowered his arms. He drew an automatic and covered Palermo and his servant with the shining muzzle of the revolver.

Reluctantly, the doctor dropped the knife and raised his hands above his head. Hassan was quick to follow suit.

"Move back," came The Shadow's whispered command.

He stepped forward as Palermo and Hassan obeyed.

With his free hand, The Shadow manipulated the bars that restrained Harry Vincent. They seemed to break beneath his touch. Only for a second did a tiny steel instrument gleam in the hand that broke the fetters, thus revealing the method that the man of mystery employed.

Harry scrambled from the chair. He needed no instructions. He went to the side of Clyde Burke to cut the straps that bound the helpless man to the operating table.

Oddly enough, Harry performed this action with the very knife that Palermo had held. The murderer had dropped it when The Shadow had entered.

The Shadow had moved away from the opening to the roof. There Palermo saw the explanation of the amazing arrival of The Shadow.

On the roof rested a strange machine—an autogiro. Long horizontal arms extended from the top of the remarkable airplane—arms that revolved slowly like the wings of a Dutch windmill.

Descending almost vertically, the remarkable machine had stopped upon the roof with only a single turn

of its wheels!

Although his work had been foiled, Palermo still plotted. The Shadow had arrived; now he must depart, carrying his two aids with him.

Palermo had taken a special precaution. When he had entered that evening, he had been followed by none other than Stanley Warwick. Even now, the detective was posted in the lobby of the Marimba Apartments, waiting word from his secret master.

Palermo's one thought was to temporarily avoid The Shadow's vengeance. If he could communicate with Warwick—and he had a means of so doing—he might defeat The Shadow at this late moment!

THE SHADOW'S immediate actions brought keen disappointment to Palermo. The man in black pointed to Hassan, and waved the Arab toward the chair where Harry Vincent had been held prisoner. Hassan was sullen as he obeyed the order.

Harry had propped Clyde Burke in Palermo's Chinese throne. Now he saw what The Shadow was doing, and came to aid. With a smile of real enjoyment, Harry put the clamps on Hassan.

The Shadow made no disposition with Palermo. The archvillain was standing by the tapestried wall.

Not for one instant did The Shadow remove his relentless eye from his enemy. He was giving orders to Harry Vincent, who was obeying them with precision. The final command concerned Clyde Burke.

Harry placed one arm under the newspaperman's shoulder. He helped Burke across the room and through the open French doors. Then Palermo could see a man beside the autogiro. The Shadow had not come alone: he had brought an experienced pilot with him.

Burke was lifted into the plane. The pilot took his seat and turned the ship while Vincent aided from the roof. Then Harry was aboard.

The motor roared as the autogiro started across the roof. At first it clung to the top of the building and seemed endangered by a crash. Then it rose suddenly, to clear the far railing. With increasing swiftness the flying windmill moved upward and disappeared from view.

Palermo had observed it all, with staring eyes. The Shadow, his back toward the roof, had taken it for granted. He had not even made a move to turn and watch the autogiro make its successful departure.

Palermo's intended victims had escaped his clutches. The Shadow alone remained, ready to demand a settlement for the villain's crimes.

"Palermo," came the sinister voice from beneath the black hat, "I demand two things. First, a confession of your double murder—your killings of Horace Chatham and Seth Wilkinson. Second, your own life. Choose your mode of death. If it meets with my approval, I shall stand by to witness your suicide."

"Suppose I choose no death?" retorted Palermo.

"There can be but one alternative," replied The Shadow firmly. "I shall be forced to kill you!"

Palermo tried to consider the situation. For a moment his cause seemed hopeless.

Had The Shadow spoken of turning him over to justice, matters might have turned in his favor. But The Shadow had foreseen this. He had come as a grim agent of retribution, determined to end Palermo's villainous career and bring protection to all intended victims.

Palermo's mind refused to function until his eye chanced to observe the image of Chong. It gave him a sudden flash of inspiration. He determined to deceive The Shadow.

"You have won," said Palermo to The Shadow. "I am willing to accept your terms. What do you wish me to do?"

"Draw up your confession," said The Shadow sternly.

"There is no need of it," said Palermo, in a dull voice. "Full evidence exists. It is more convincing than any death statement that I might make. You will find it all in that taboret in the corner. Your agent was searching there when I surprised him."

The frankness of Palermo's statement did not disarm The Shadow. Still, it made him hesitate. If Palermo spoke the truth, his confession would be a useless requirement.

Palermo watched The Shadow. He believed he knew exactly what thoughts filled the mind of the man.

To learn if Palermo had spoken true, The Shadow would have to examine the documents in the taboret. It would not do for him to wait until Palermo had died. The logical plan was to make an immediate inspection.

If The Shadow ordered Palermo to bring out the papers, the criminal might find an opportunity to make a break for freedom. Should The Shadow perform the operation himself—

That was Palermo's only hope!

PALERMO suppressed a smile that crept automatically to his lips. The Shadow was moving toward the taboret!

Should he turn the knob to the right—Palermo believed that Vincent had done the opposite by some freak accident—it would be The Shadow, not Palermo, who would die.

Still watching his quarry, The Shadow reached the taboret. He turned his back to it as he stooped. From this position, his view was partly toward the image of Chong.

The Shadow turned the knob. The result for which Palermo had hoped did not occur. The Shadow had turned the knob to the left. The door of the taboret opened.

It was then that Palermo acted boldly. He realized that his death would be postponed, if possible, only until The Shadow had examined the documents. With hands still upraised, Palermo began to move to the right, drawing The Shadow's eyes away from the image of Chong.

The man in black sprang to his feet. Before the menace of the automatic, Palermo stopped short. His boldness left him. He trembled as he saw The Shadow's finger on the trigger.

Satisfied with his threat, The Shadow stepped back to the taboret. He began to stoop, still watching Palermo.

The criminal was almost gloating. The Shadow was falling into the same snare that had enmeshed Harry Vincent. In another moment The Shadow stopped just as his gaze was completely away from the bronze image. His captive had unconsciously shifted a trifle to the right. Without realizing it, Palermo had disobeyed The Shadow's command.

Again The Shadow was on his feet, covering Palermo closely. Now he spoke.

"Palermo," he said, "I have warned you. I shall not hesitate to end your life if you make another move!"

Palermo regretted his mistake. The opportunity would come again within a few seconds, however.

The fate of The Shadow was virtually in the hands of Chong. As soon as the man in the cloak returned to the taboret, his game would be scheduled for a sudden and unexpected conclusion.

The Shadow smiled. He looked intently at Palermo. "Perhaps"—his voice became a sinister whisper—"perhaps you consider yourself immune from bullets. Perhaps you doubt the perfection of my aim.

"Let me show you, Palermo, just what a bullet can do when it strikes an object"—the automatic was swinging slowly back and forth - "for instance, an object made of—bronze!"

The automatic barked as the finger pressed the trigger. That very instant, The Shadow's sweeping aim had turned directly toward the glaring image of Chong, with its evil, saturnine countenance.

Perhaps the hideousness of the idol had caused a sudden repugnance to seize The Shadow. Whatever had caused his twist of fancy, he had certainly not expected the result that followed.

THE bullet, instead of flattening itself against an ugly mass of bronze, found its mark in the forehead of a living creature.

With a sickening gasp, the motionless dwarf toppled forward. Instinctively the monster spread its thin, horrible arms as death overtook it, body sprawled and writhing for a brief instant after it had fallen.

The Shadow's arm dropped. The black cloak seemed to sway as though its wearer had been dumfounded. The Shadow, who had never known the emotion of surprise, was momentarily overcome by the hideous reality.

Not for an instant had he suspected that the metal monstrosity had been a freak of humanity. In the amazement of the moment, that tall, unyielding man forgot his surroundings, his mind completely fascinated by the sight of the ugly thing that he had unwittingly slain.

Palermo seized his opportunity. With three stupendous leaps, he fell upon The Shadow before the avenger had lost his astonishment.

The attack brought back the reality of the situation. Palermo had seized the barrel of the revolver. The Shadow still clutched the butt. Their free arms were locked. Together they staggered in the center of the room.

The physician was the first to yield. His sudden weakness brought no material advantage to his antagonist. Palermo simply allowed himself to be forced backward across the room.

The Shadow pushed him against a screen, which fell to the side. Palermo knocked against a table. The Shadow pressed the trigger of the automatic, as it was turning toward Palermo. The other man stopped the motion of the barrel and the bullet grazed his body.

Another shot followed. Again Palermo escaped.

"Help!" cried Palermo.

The Shadow saw the purpose of his opponent's shout.

When Palermo had tipped the table, he had knocked a telephone from its place. The instrument, of

French pattern, had fallen to the floor, with the receiver off the hook.

The revolver shots, the cry for help—all had been heard at the desk downstairs.

It was now a fight against time. Unless The Shadow could quickly overpower his antagonist, help would be at hand.

The odds seemed greatly in Palermo's favor, but the criminal knew too well that he could not expect immediate aid. He, himself, had made it impossible for the elevator to rise above the thirty-ninth floor. He could only rely on Warwick's keenness.

The detective might take the emergency measure of sending a man up the shaft on top of the elevator. Even then it would take time to batter down the heavy door of the apartment.

Realizing this, Palermo displayed a sudden attack. He managed to wrest the automatic from his opponent's grasp. Then the barrel eluded his fingers, and the gun fell to the floor.

Backward went The Shadow, while Hassan watched from the torture chair, his teeth clenched in hatred. The Shadow staggered and fell to the floor. He came up again, still clutching his foe; but now his left arm had become limp.

The Shadow had weakened. He was fighting to hold his own. Palermo had the strength of a bull.

WITH raging force, Palermo virtually lifted The Shadow and bore him through the opening to the roof. There The Shadow twisted free.

His hat was gone; now his cloak was torn from his shoulders in the grappling, but Palermo could not see his face in the darkness.

The physician was governed by one single purpose—to lift The Shadow bodily and carry him to the rail of the roof. He was succeeding, although the effort strained him to the utmost.

Now they had reached the parapet. The Shadow seemed weaker than before. Palermo pushed him to the rail. The Shadow clung desperately to the posts. He was over the rail now, still fighting.

Suddenly his efforts became tremendous. Palermo, leaning upon the rail and trying to force The Shadow downward, felt himself drawn over the edge.

Down below him gleamed the tiny lights of the street. The Shadow was almost conquered; but that sight of the depths below aroused in Palermo the one thought of self-preservation.

He was balanced on the parapet; he relaxed his hold upon his opponent in a sudden effort to gain a more secure position. Then The Shadow's right arm shot upward through the air and caught Palermo by the neck.

It was the stroke that decided the struggle.

Palermo's hands slipped from the rail. For an instant he was balanced on a fulcrum; then the leverage of The Shadow's grasp toppled him outward.

Palermo's hands struck the edge of the roof. They found no purchase there. Head foremost, the master of villainy shot forward into space.

He uttered a long, shrill cry of terror as he fell. It seemed to die away in the distance as he sped to his doom.

The Shadow watched as he clung feebly to the post beneath the parapet. He saw Palermo's body grow smaller and smaller. He saw it turn twice as its speed increased. Then its downward course stopped with breath-taking suddenness.

From that point, high above the city, all that remained of Albert Palermo was a tiny, pitiful blotch of whiteness upon the sidewalk far below.

CHAPTER XXI. THE SHADOW DEPARTS

A BLACK-CLAD figure slowly entered the penthouse. Hassan recognized the form that seemed weary beneath its frayed cloak and shapeless hat. He knew that the distant cry he had heard had been the death shout of his master. The Shadow picked up the automatic. He looked at the dead form of Chong. Then he went to the chair in the corner and slowly unlocked the fetters that bound the Arab.

Hassan stepped free, as The Shadow walked away. Too well did the Arab know the threat of that automatic. He made no effort to attack The Shadow. He stood silently, awaiting orders. None came.

The Arab walked to the roof. The Shadow watched his white-clad form as it went to the parapet and looked over to the edge, seeking a view of the man who had gone.

Then, with deliberate precision, Hassan raised his body to the rail. His figure seemed strange and weird against the distant sky. Without further hesitation the faithful Arab leaped from the parapet.

His death had not been demanded, yet he had chosen to follow his master into oblivion.

A slight sigh came from The Shadow's lips. It did not express regret for the Arab's death. Hassan had murdered; like Palermo, he deserved his end.

It was the action of the Arab, his loyalty to his master in spite of the latter's faults, that had brought that sigh from The Shadow.

It was the tribute of one brave man to another.

The Shadow went to the taboret. He emptied the ebony boxes. He quickly sorted the documents he found therein.

Palermo's statement had been correct. There was sufficient evidence in these papers to implicate the renegade physician in many crimes, once the documents had been turned over to the proper persons.

His inspection ended, The Shadow attempted to place the papers in his pocket. His left arm seemed to fail him. He used his right instead.

He rose to his feet and almost tottered. He caught himself as he stumbled over the dead form of Chong. He looked for a place to rest, and staggered to Palermo's Chinese throne. There The Shadow reclined, indifferent to what might transpire.

His conflict with Palermo had been a desperate one. He seemed to be completely exhausted by his efforts.

The sound of dull, crashing hammering came from below. The Shadow did not hear the distant noise. He still remained in that chair, a stranger figure than the man who had been wont to occupy it.

The distant hammering ceased. There was silence for several minutes. Then came new strokes, closer by. They were at the foot of the circular staircase.

Wood splintered as the blows of an ax shattered the sliding panel. Footsteps rang on the stairway. Excited voices were heard.

The Shadow suddenly raised his head. His lethargy was forgotten. He was himself again, his strength renewed. He was ready for action as he started to leave the throne. Then it was too late.

The black-cloaked form sank back as Detective Stanley Warwick entered the room, followed by another plainclothes man.

The newcomers stopped short when they encountered the ghastly form of Chong. Both stared at it as though they were seeing some absurd shape that had reached the world from another planet.

Warwick's eyes passed beyond the body. They saw the black-clad man who occupied the massive chair.

"The Shadow!"

Warwick's cry was one of triumph as he leaped forward, with his companion close behind him. The detective was drawing an automatic as he sought to capture the man who had previously eluded him.

He was met by a taunting laugh. It rose in mockery as the detective's hand came from his pocket.

The black-coated fingers of The Shadow pressed the arms of the throne. A burst of smoke obscured his figure. From the midst of the cloud came another peal of uncanny, frenzied laughter, as of a demon leaping into an inferno.

The detective staggered back as the smoke cleared away. The throne was empty; yet the laugh still echoed from the tapestried walls of that bizarre room.

Like Palermo, The Shadow had disappeared, leaving no trace of his departure. The master mind of the villain had created the illusion; the avenger had used it for his dramatic and sensational exit!

WHILE the two detectives still stood in amazement, The Shadow appeared in the apartment beneath. He walked slowly through to the anteroom, where he found the heavy door smashed to bits.

He picked up the suitcase that lay inside the door—the only remaining evidence of unknown visitors. He dropped in the cut straps with which Harry Vincent had bound Hassan, the Arab.

The door of the elevator shaft was open, but no car was there. The Shadow peered down the shaft. He saw the top of the elevator at the floor below.

Warwick and the other man had ridden up on top. Armed with axes, they had smashed their way into Palermo's Gibraltar. The Shadow inclined his head and whispered:

"Burbank."

The weird tone echoed from the walls of the shaft. It was recognized by the man in the elevator.

"Yes," came the response.

"You are alone?"

"Yes."

"The car can come no higher?"

"No."

The Shadow was about to step to the top of the elevator. He paused to listen. There was no sign that the men in the penthouse were returning.

The man in black pressed the button beside the elevator door. It did not respond.

"Burbank," he whispered, "do you get a signal light from this floor?"

"No, sir."

The Shadow laughed softly. He unscrewed the button. When it was loose, he pressed it.

"Now it lights," came Burbank's voice.

"All right. Come up!"

The elevator rose to the fortieth floor. The Shadow entered with the suitcase.

"Leave the door open," he ordered. "Start down."

"There's another elevator running now," explained Burbank, in a matter-of-fact voice. He was not looking at his companion. "They use two at night—local to twentieth, express to fortieth.

"When I brought the dicks up, they told me to wait there and they put a second express car in operation. It couldn't get past the thirty-ninth, either."

"All right," came the response. "Drop me somewhere."

Burbank stopped the elevator suddenly. They were at the thirty-third floor. He brought the car up a flight.

"Party on this floor, sir," he said. "It's a good place to board the elevator."

"Right. Go back to the thirty-ninth. Wait there. Let the other man find the clear course to the fortieth."

The Shadow slipped from the elevator, taking the suitcase with him. The door closed.

There were several apartments on this floor. The Shadow stood in a hallway. The sound of singing and melody came from the end of the building.

The man in black suddenly merged into a shadowy alcove. He remained there for a few minutes.

THE operator of the emergency elevator stopped at the thirty-fourth floor to take down a passenger. A young man entered hilariously, carrying a suitcase. The roisterer wore a soft gray hat. He had a jolly face and a pleasing grin.

The operator laughed as the passenger joked on the way down. He was going home early, he said. Not enough life at that party. He told the operator to guess what was in the suitcase.

They last saw the merryman as he staggered out through the lobby and stumbled into a waiting cab.

The taxi had difficulty going along the street. A police patrol was there. An ambulance was at the corner.

Some fellow had fallen from a window, the taxi driver said. But the young man in the cab did not appear to be interested. He left the cab on Broadway, and shortly after, he might have been seen zigzagging

down a side street.

That was the last any one could have seen of him. There were few people on the street. The only one who might have encountered the young man was a tall gentleman in black, whose face could not be discerned because of his broad-brimmed hat. He appeared on the side street shortly after the young man had faded from view.

THE newspapers carried accounts of the tragic death of Doctor Palermo. It was assumed that his Arab servant, Hassan, had thrown him from the roof outside the penthouse. The servant had evidently regretted his action and feared arrest; for he had been a suicide a short while later.

The real mystery in the case was the finding of a body of a Chinese dwarf. Stanley Warwick, the investigating detective, held the theory that the Arab had gone berserk; had killed the Chinese servant; and had then murdered his master.

Many of Doctor Palermo's eccentricities were brought to light. The curious arrangement of the Chinese room was studied by the police, and some facts regarding it appeared in the journals.

There was no mention of The Shadow. Warwick had tactfully avoided it. His former experience had nearly made him the butt of ridicule. He saw no reason why he and his fellow detective should mention the vague form that they had seen just before it vanished in a puff of smoke.

The detective had much at stake. He had done his duty toward Palermo; the secrets of their negotiations and conferences had perished with Palermo. Warwick was glad the episode had ended.

The detective displayed good judgment in this respect. For the name of Doctor Albert Palermo came into disrepute a few weeks after his sudden demise.

Documents were brought to prove that he had murdered Horace Chatham; and that he had also killed Seth Wilkinson. His name was linked with the supposed suicide of Lloyd Harriman.

Among other articles discovered in Palermo's apartment was the famous purple sapphire that was supposed to have brought destruction to all who owned it. The hoodoo had held true in the case of Lloyd Harriman. It had also functioned with Doctor Palermo.

How he had obtained the jewel from Harriman, no one knew. The possibility that Horace Chatham might have owned it in between was completely overlooked.

Certain securities belonging to Roger Crowthers, deceased millionaire, were returned to the estate. The name of Doctor Palermo was not linked to them.

But it was definitely proven, through evidence submitted anonymously to the police, that Doctor Palermo had been outlawed as a practicing physician in a Western State. The man had possessed considerable medical knowledge; that was admitted. But, professionally, he was branded as a charlatan.

In all this mass of news, no mention was made of The Shadow; nor were the names of Harry Vincent and Clyde Burke seen in print.

No newspaper—not even the wild tabloids—discovered that an autogiro had made a night landing on the roof outside of Palermo's penthouse.

The absence of these facts was amusing. Harry Vincent laughed about it as he perused the newspapers in his room at the Metrolite Hotel. Clyde Burke smiled as he cut out clippings in his new downtown office.

They talked about it together, one day at lunch.

"A wonderful story," said Clyde, his reporting instinct coming to the surface. "Yet no one knows about it except us—"

Harry Vincent smiled. He supplied the finish of the sentence, in these three cryptic words:

"The Shadow knows!"

THE END