



THE BOOK OF DEATH

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CHAPTER I. THE STRANGE VISITOR

THE man who entered the Graymoor Building was old, as his stooped shoulders indicated, but his stride was youthful. It was that difference between carriage and gait that brought looks in his direction. Doorman, elevator operators, and chance passers-by were anxious to observe the face of so curious a person.

They saw but little of his features. The weather was frosty and the old man's chin was wrapped deeply in a muffler. His nose, nipped by the cold, looked like a reddish button, and it was surmounted by a pair of old-fashioned spectacles, which had large, dark-tinted lenses, obscuring the old gentleman's eyes.

There was an impression of white cheeks and an equally pallid forehead, but they were not so conspicuous as the shaggy gray hair that spread beneath the brim of the old man's shabby derby hat. It fitted his head so tightly that it seemed a part of it.

All in all, the old-timer was a human museum piece, and no one overlooked the burden that he carried, along with his gnarled cane. The burden was a brief case without a handle, that filled the space from the old man's armpit to his fur-gloved hand. It was thick but flat, and from the edges which showed through the leather, the case obviously contained a large book.

To many who viewed him, the old gentleman looked strangely familiar, yet none could quite place him. When the stranger had gone up in an elevator, the doorman stepped in from the street and said to the elevator starter:

"I've seen that old gent somewhere."

"Yeah," returned the starter. "I've seen him, too—or maybe just his picture."

"I kind of remember him in a newsreel, a couple of years ago -"

"Around Christmas, huh? Don't tell me he's Santa Claus! I saw enough of his mug to know he didn't have whiskers."

Laughing at his jest, the starter used his clicker to send another elevator upward, and the doorman left in a bit of a huff. He was beginning to remember the old man more clearly, and he resolved that when he did guess the codger's identity, he wouldn't tell the elevator starter.

As for the old gentleman, himself, he was making no actual effort to hide his identity. He had reached the sixth floor and was halted in front of a pretentious suite that bore the legend:

WILVERN CO.

There, the old man was unmuffling his face to show a firm, rounded chin. Hooking his cane over his free wrist, he opened the door and entered a fancy anteroom, where a middle-aged woman was seated at a reception desk. In a slow, precise tone, the old man stated:

"I should like to see James Wilvern, personally."

Such a request was unheard of, in the offices of Wilvern Co. Even the heads of the industries that James Wilvern controlled could meet him only by appointment with the proper secretary, for Wilvern was a man of mammoth wealth, who handled corporation presidents like errand boys. Nevertheless, the woman at the desk did not come back with a refusal.

She, too, could remember the old man. Seeing his full face, she needed only a jog of memory to name him, and the visitor supplied the needed clue, when he drew a dusty calling card from his pocket and passed it across the desk.

In bold type, the card read:

ASAPH DARWICK

A few minutes later, James Wilvern, a man of broad build, bristly eyebrows, and heavy jowls, was staring at that selfsame card. Pressing the button of a desk speaker, Wilvern ordered in sharp tone:

"Summon Jurn, at once!"

Then, strumming the desk with heavy knuckles, Wilvern kept darting looks at the card, his expression running a complete gamut from apprehension to delight, each mood immediately replacing itself by one of the opposite category. The mere name of Asaph Darwick had produced such effect upon James Wilvern, that the man of millions failed to hear a door open behind him.

A dapper man stepped through, approached the desk, and inquired in smooth tone:

"What's it this time, Mr. Wilvern?"

Snapping around in his chair, Wilvern caught himself and picked up the card. He handed it to the dapper man.

"What do you make of this, Jurn?" Wilvern inquired. "He's outside, waiting to see me."

Jurn's eyes popped.

"You mean Asaph Darwick, in person?" he asked. "The mystery man who used to advise Alexander Munston?"

"Exactly!" returned Wilvern. "Munston used to say that he owed his half-a-billion-dollar fortune to his dear friend Asaph. Now that Munston is dead, we've been expecting Darwick to pop into sight and clean up on his own."

"And here he is," nodded Jurn. "But he could never break you, J. W."

"Bah!" snorted Wilvern. "He could break a bundle of men as big as I am! All with a snap of his fingers, from what I've heard about him. Get back in the rear room, Jurn. I'll open the microphone, so that you can take notes on everything we say."

WHILE Jurn was retiring, Wilvern called the anteroom and said that he would receive Mr. Darwick. When the old man entered, Jurn was out of sight and Wilvern, in a most affable mood, was ready with a handshake for the visitor.

Ignoring the extended hand, Darwick gave a short nod, instead. Then, as Wilvern started to help him with the brief case, Darwick said testily:

"I can handle this portfolio, Mr. Wilvern. Its contents are extremely valuable, and they concern my visit."

Reaching the desk, Darwick opened the portfolio and drew forth a thick volume bound in vellum. Gesturing Wilvern to his chair, Darwick stood with one hand resting on the heavy book and spoke in his precise style.

"This volume," declared Asaph Darwick, "explains my entire connection with the late Alexander Munston. It is a complete record of how the principal fortunes in America were acquired, sparing nothing regarding individuals concerned therewith."

Wilvern could only stare.

"The secret of Munston's success," continued Darwick, "lay in fully understanding the persons with whom he dealt. It was my business to learn their tricks, to ferret out their swindles, and to tabulate their misdeeds. This book tells all."

With a forced smile, Wilvern relaxed. He waved his hand indulgently.

"I never dealt with Alexander Munston," began Wilvern. "He dates many years before my time. Therefore -"

"You inherited your original fortune," interrupted Darwick. "It was founded on the promotion schemes of your uncle, who dealt in fraudulent mining stock. Here is the record, Mr. Wilvern."

Darwick swung the big book open. Wilvern observed that the first few dozen pages were missing, apparently ripped from the book. Darwick thumbed through several pages, then came to batches that were fixed together by seals. Reverting to the free pages, Darwick began to run through them for

Wilvern's benefit.

"Here are the names of the persons swindled," declared Darwick, "along with a list of their heirs. These pages contain full proof of each fraudulent transaction and the amounts owing to those dupes."

Wilvern came upright in his chair. "You mean that you expect me to pay them off?" he stormed. "To hand over all the money that you claim my uncle took from them -"

"And more," inserted Darwick bluntly. "The amounts have been computed to date, at compound interest. You see, Mr. Wilvern, it is only fair that your ability at accumulating wealth should also benefit those who were actually responsible for the start of your fortune."

During Darwick's little speech, Wilvern's attitude changed. He was nodding, very solemnly, when the old man finished. Then:

"Clever of Alexander Munston," he said, "to have you pilot him through the snags of big business. But why didn't he demand this restitution on the part of persons like myself?"

"Poor Alec," returned Darwick, with a sad shake of his head. "He was too worldly. I could never convince him that justice was necessary. On his deathbed, however, he relented, and willed this book to me, to do with as I chose."

A sneer played on Wilvern's heavy lips. He turned it into vocal sarcasm, when he said:

"So you have appointed yourself a one-man committee to arrange the restitution of fortunes to claimants who never knew that those fortunes existed!"

"Precisely," affirmed Darwick, in a tone that fitted the word. "Since you may be interested in knowing the sum total of your particular debt, I can give it to you, Mr. Wilvern."

Old Darwick was thumbing through the pages of the huge book. He ran a thin finger down a column and announced:

"It is exactly two hundred and twenty-four thousand, three hundred fifty-six dollars, and seventy-nine cents, computed to this day."

THE old man wasn't jesting. Leaning across the desk, Wilvern gave Darwick a dark-eyed glare, coupled with a bristle of his heavy brows.

"So you expect me to deliver a quarter million to a raft of paupers!" roared Wilvern. "What do you take me for? A fool?"

"I may have mistaken you for an honorable man," rejoined Darwick in his icy tone. "These gaps in the book"—he riffled the stubs from which pages had been removed—"represent other accounts, which have been settled at my request. Those pages were given to persons who paid their just debts, according to accurate records."

"As for these"—he fluttered past Wilvern's pages and thumbed the batches that bore seals—"they represent more accounts that should be settled, some totaling far more than yours, Mr. Wilvern."

For answer, Wilvern snatched across the desk as though to rip the pages dealing with him from the book. Calmly, Darwick lifted the book from within Wilvern's reach. Then the old man brought some seals from his pocket, affixed them to Wilvern's pages, and replaced the vellum-bound volume in its much-worn portfolio. Hooking the leather case under his arm, he reached for his cane and gave a curt bow.

Wilvern overtook Darwick as the old man was stalking to the door. Bristly of manner, his jowls gone purple, Wilvern roared accusingly:

"This is blackmail, Darwick! A demand for money, backed by threat!"

Darwick brushed Wilvern aside with a hand that carried considerable jab. Turning, the old man spoke in a tone of finality.

"I have made no threat, Wilvern," declared Darwick. "I have merely appealed to something which you may have lost, but which I hope you have only misplaced. I refer to your conscience. Should you regain it, you may notify me and we can resume our business. Good day, Wilvern."

With Darwick gone through the maze of corridors leading to the anteroom, Wilvern wheeled back into his private office and slammed the door. The sound was echoed by a click from the other side of the room, as Jurn stepped out from hiding. Calming, Wilvern demanded:

"Well, Jurn, what do you think?"

"I heard it all," responded the dapper man. "It wasn't blackmail, Mr. Wilvern. You hit it on the head when you told old Darwick that he was a one-man committee trying to do people good."

"Do them good, is right," repeated Wilvern, seating himself behind the desk. "Darwick tried to do me out of a quarter million. If he'd only tried blackmail, Jurn, I could fight it. As it stands, Darwick has the upper hand."

Wilvern didn't specify whether he feared new tactics on Darwick's part, or was troubled by the qualms of his own conscience. Watching him, Jurn wasn't sure what was going on in Wilvern's mind. Finally, however, Wilvern voiced an abrupt decision.

"I want that book, Jurn," he declared, "and you are the man who can get it."

"I may need some men to help me," returned Jurn.

"Then get them," ordered Wilvern. "The right sort of men, of course. But the less you tell them -"

"The better," completed Jurn. "I know."

Turning, Jurn started out through the door that formed his special route to and from Wilvern's private preserves. There, the dapper man paused; suppressing a shrewd smile, he looked back at Wilvern.

"Suppose I have trouble bringing the book," suggested Jurn. "Will it be all right if I destroy it, instead?"

"You'll bring it here!" stormed Wilvern. "At any cost! Of course I want it destroyed!" He paused; then, as if in afterthought: "But I should certainly examine its contents, first."

"Certainly, Mr. Wilvern."

Those parting words were all that masked Jurn's thoughts, for when he closed the door behind him, the dapper man was smiling more shrewdly than before. Beginning with a mere surmise, Jurn was now quite sure that he knew why James Wilvern wanted the strange, important book that belonged to Asaph Darwick.

CHAPTER II. TRAPPED BY CHANCE

IT was after dark when Harry Vincent entered the Graymoor Building and stopped at the bulletin board

which listed the persons who had offices in the building. Asaph Darwick had left, hours before, and the stir caused by his arrival and departure had long since ended.

No one particularly noticed Harry Vincent. Harry was youthful, clean-cut, and, above all, he appeared prosperous, which was the best sort of passport that anyone could carry in New York. Naturally, Harry didn't advertise the reason for his prosperity: namely, that he was a secret agent of The Shadow.

One name made crimedom tremble: The Shadow. Mysterious avenger who hunted down men of evil, The Shadow was accredited with amazing ways of tracing crime to its source. One secret of The Shadow's success was his use of competent agents, among whom Harry Vincent rated tops.

Scanning the name board, Harry Vincent reached the letter "J" and paused, as he read:

JURN, OTIS, PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR, 524.

Having heard of Jurn, though he had never met the man, Harry filed the name for mental reference. His present concern, however, was not with Otis Jurn. Continuing to the next letter, Harry found the name he wanted.

The board stated:

KERFORD, BLAINE, ATTORNEY AT LAW, 501.

Harry didn't continue to the bottom of the board, where the name of James Wilvern appeared. Kerford was the man that Harry had come to meet, so The Shadow's agent took an elevator to the fifth floor, and approached Suite 501.

Before he could enter, Harry heard a door open around a corner of the corridor. Stepping in the opposite direction, he saw a tall man, with long-jawed face and grizzled hair, going toward the elevator.

The grizzled man was Blaine Kerford. He had come from a rear door that formed a private exit from his suite, a route he used when avoiding persons waiting in the outer office. Having seen Kerford several times, Harry recognized him and sauntered after him, taking the same elevator to the ground floor.

Though Kerford gave Harry a few sharp glances, he finally classed him as a chance passenger from the fifth floor.

Outside the building, Kerford hailed a cab, and Harry, pausing at the door of a parked coupe, heard the address that the lawyer gave to the cabby. As soon as the cab was away, Harry doubled back into the building to make a telephone call.

IN another building, some twenty blocks away, a gentleman named Lamont Cranston was conferring with his broker, Rutledge Mann.

It was difficult to picture Cranston and Mann as anything other than they appeared to be. Cranston was the epitome of indolence, a typical clubman who seemed bored by such necessary bothers as investments; while Mann, rotund in appearance, methodical in manner, was obviously a man whose mathematical mind was geared to the fluctuations of the stock market.

Yet there was something in Cranston's manner, something in Mann's actions, that belied appearances.

Mere laziness might have accounted for the impassive expression on Cranston's face. Hawkish in contour, his features were masklike; but through that mask gleamed a pair of burning eyes, symbolizing keen intuition in the brain behind them.

Cranston's eyes were watching Mann, and the broker was busy, not with stocks and bonds but with newspaper clippings that he had arranged in little groups. Clippings that came from different cities, all with surprising headlines.

Numbered by dozens, these clippings all pertained to curious legacies, strange gifts, and the lucky discovery of money, by persons throughout the country.

Most of the items were strictly local, in their respective towns, especially the sums that were under fifty thousand dollars. Added together, however, the sums represented by the clippings summed up to a total of more than half a million dollars, and both Cranston and Mann agreed that these recorded cases indicated that there must be many others, wherein the recipients of anonymous gifts had not informed the newspapers.

Cranston and Mann likewise agreed that these windfalls of cash had come from one source—or, rather, Cranston held to that theory, and Mann accepted it. For Lamont Cranston, it so happened, was none other than The Shadow, and Rutledge Mann was another of his trusted agents.

When Cranston spoke, his tone was casual, but his words direct. "The only plausible source of so much wealth," spoke Cranston, "would be the estate of Alexander Munston. He had so many millions, Mann, that he lost count of them." Still sorting clippings, Mann gave a nod.

"As for the manner of the gifts"—Cranston's hand gestured idly toward the clippings—"they indicate a legal mind behind them. Which, in turn, points to Blaine Kerford, principal attorney for the late Alexander Munston."

Mann's roundish face acquired a musing look. Cranston's keen eyes caught the reason.

"Yes, Mann," said Cranston. "Mystery funds might point to a mystery man in the case. I know that you are thinking of Asaph Darwick. However, I can assure you that if Darwick had a hand in this matter, Kerford would know about it -"

It was the telephone that interrupted. Answering it, Mann spoke methodically at first, then showed eagerness in his tone. Dropping the conversation, he turned to Cranston.

"It's Vincent!" Mann exclaimed. "He says that Kerford has gone to visit Darwick!"

"Instructions," spoke Cranston calmly, gesturing for Mann to relay them. "Tell Vincent to meet Margo, and both proceed to Darwick's. They are to watch out front and report anything unusual that occurs there. They can also watch for signals from the house itself."

WITHIN half an hour, The Shadow was approaching the house where Asaph Darwick lived. It was an old-fashioned house that formed part of a row, and its brownstone front had the formidable aspect of a fortress. Viewing it from an angle, The Shadow glided through a space near the end of the row to have a look at the house from the rear.

During that survey, The Shadow saw Harry's coupe, parked inconspicuously some distance from the house. But neither Harry Vincent, nor his companion, Margo Lane, saw any sign of The Shadow.

He was no longer Lamont Cranston; he was a creature of darkness that moved through the shelter of night, clad in a black cloak, his hawkish features obscured by the brim of a slouch hat.

Such was The Shadow; his mission, upon this evening, was simply the investigation of certain matters that might have a bearing upon future crime. Though Asaph Darwick and Blaine Kerford might prove to be men of integrity in their respective ways, the work in which each played a part might prove dire in its

consequences.

Where money went, crime frequently followed. Until The Shadow found the reason behind the bonanzas which had fallen in the laps of so many persons, he would not be satisfied that all was well. Even then, he would have no immediate surety that men of crime were not indulging in the same mission: that of seeking the source of the surprising wealth.

Only a survey of the scene itself could assure The Shadow how matters stood, and he was ready to face considerable hazard to obtain a firsthand knowledge of the situation.

Cracking into Darwick's old mansion was quite a problem in itself. From the rear court, The Shadow studied the back wall of the building and saw barred windows, above. The cellar windows offered a sample of what the bars were like. Stooping, The Shadow examined heavy gratings set permanently into brick.

He tested one grating, to learn its strength, and under the leverage of The Shadow's powerful hands the barrier suddenly yielded. The fault lay with the bricks, not with the bars. Loose mortar broke from the inner wall; a small section of masonry gave and plunked to the cement of the cellar floor.

A few minutes later, The Shadow had the bars swinging inward, as though hinged on the side that was still attached to the wall. Sliding through the narrow opening, he dropped to the cement and pressed the loose bars back into place.

As a final touch, The Shadow set the chunks of brick where they belonged, studied the result with the glow of a tiny flashlight, and gave a whispery laugh that denoted his approval.

More luck followed The Shadow's successful entry. He found stairs up from the cellar; an open door at the top. He paused, drawing the door shut again as a plaintive "meow" came from the steps behind him. Swinging the flashlight, The Shadow caught the reflected glow of a cat's eyes. Evidently a pet of Darwick's, the cat was as black as The Shadow's cloak.

Rather than have the feline cause complications, The Shadow stroked the creature until it purred; then placed the cat a few steps lower, while he turned and opened the door, closing it deftly, silently behind him. The Shadow was in a dim-lit hall, facing toward the front of the house. From a curtained doorway, ahead and to the left, he saw a stronger light, heard the faint buzz of voices. Moving forward, The Shadow reached the curtain, slid between it and the doorway and practically projected himself into the company of Asaph Darwick and his visitor, Blaine Kerford.

They were seated near a desk in the center of a fairly large room. Concentrated upon their conversation, they had no inkling of The Shadow's arrival. The dark curtain shrouded the figure in black; the edge of a large bookcase also obscured their sight of the doorway.

Looking about the room, The Shadow saw that it was something of an office. Along with bookcases and desk, it had filing cabinets; while behind Darwick, in a deep corner of the alcove, was a large, old-fashioned safe, equipped with three dials.

His shocky hair waving as he wagged his head, Darwick was waving a bony forefinger toward Kerford. Old Darwick was displaying enthusiasm, though his eyes showed no sparkle, because of his dark glasses; nor did his pale, drawn face furnish much expression. It was the tone of his voice, high of pitch, that marked the enthusiasm.

"I TELL you, Blaine," Darwick was saying, "the plan is working to perfection! Until today, I encountered no opposition from anyone. When I showed people the book"—he gestured toward the safe—"they

were willing to study the records fairly, and accept my view."

"Until today," repeated Kerford, in a dry tone. "Who gave you trouble today, Darwick?"

The old man shook his head.

"I have my clients, Kerford," he said, "just as you have yours. Everything must be confidential."

"Yes," snapped Kerford, "confidential, until they agree to hand over money to persons mentioned in that ledger of yours! Then you call upon me to pass out the anonymous gifts."

"And why not, Kerford?"

The lawyer didn't answer right away. Instead, he arose from his chair and took a few paces, turning toward the door as he did.

Though The Shadow eased back into the curtain, he gained a good look at Kerford's longish face and watched the lawyer thrust his fingers through the gray-tinged hair above it. More than mere annoyance was registered on Kerford's features.

Turning suddenly toward Darwick, Kerford gave way to a verbal outburst.

"It isn't fair to me, Darwick! Suppose it became known that I had a hand in these disbursements. People, would suppose that I had appropriated huge funds belonging to the Munston estate and was giving them out to straw men, letting each keep a small percent, in return. Such things have been done, you know."

There was logic in Kerford's argument, for such a possibility had already occurred to The Shadow, which was another reason why he had concentrated upon Kerford, rather than Darwick. But Darwick, himself, had an answer to the argument.

"If circumstances reached that point, Blaine," the old man said, "I would make public the whole case and request the donors of the various gifts to declare themselves. They are all reputable persons, even though their predecessors were not."

"And suppose," put Kerford narrowly, "that something should happen to you in the meantime, Darwick? As an attorney, I always consider such eventualities."

"What could happen to me?"

"Almost anything, Darwick. Living alone here, known as a man of considerable wealth, you might become the target of robbery; even of murder. You are totally unprotected. Why, tonight, the door was wide open and I walked right into the house!"

Darwick had tilted his head back to give a long, chuckly laugh. He regarded Kerford's statement as humorous, rather than serious, and the lawyer couldn't understand why, until Darwick finally explained.

"The door was open because I expected you, Kerford," Darwick declared, "and because I trusted you. However, I should be quite safe if the door stayed open always. Turn around, look toward those curtains, and watch!"

Darwick's hand went to a switch on the side of the desk. Kerford, not wanting to miss anything, wheeled toward the curtains.

Simultaneously, The Shadow made a backward twist, a masterpiece of deftness, by which he intended to regain the hallway without leaving a telltale rustle of the curtains. He expected Darwick to hold his

demonstration for a few seconds, so that Kerford would properly witness it; but the abrupt manner in which the lawyer turned made delay unnecessary.

Old Darwick pressed the switch. Instantly, the thin streak of a photoelectric beam licked across the doorway, from a tiny eye beside one curtain toward a similar orb near the other. The beam was cut the moment it appeared, sliced by a figure that neither Darwick nor Kerford spotted: the twisting shape of The Shadow.

The result was sudden. Actuated by the interrupted beam, a trapdoor opened in the doorway, dropping its halves downward with a clatter. In the midst of a quick turn, The Shadow couldn't even clutch the curtain as he went.

Headlong, the cloaked eavesdropper disappeared through the chasm in the floor, a blotch of human blackness that seemed a part of the darkness below.

The Shadow was gone, as rapidly as he had come. Dropped through the chance trap that Darwick had sprung, The Shadow was bound for the cement pitfall designed to receive unwanted intruders, like himself!

CHAPTER III. VANISHED VISITORS

AS the sections of the floor trap slipped up into place, Kerford turned to Darwick with a look of consternation.

"Why didn't you tell me about that thing before?" the lawyer exclaimed. "Why, I might have walked right into it! The way it dropped when you pressed the switch -"

Waving a scrawny hand for silence, Darwick rose from his desk, staring intently at the closed floor.

"It shouldn't have happened that way, Kerford," Darwick declared. "I wanted you to see the photoelectric beam traveling from one cell to the other. Only when the beam is interrupted, does the trap function."

"Even worse!" put in Kerford. "You're admitting that the thing is out of order!"

"Not at all," returned Darwick steadily. "My eyes are not sharp enough to catch things that happen rapidly, but I assure you that this apparatus has been thoroughly tested. Therefore, I am forced to the conclusion that an intruder was hidden in those curtains; that in leaving them, he broke the beam and made the trap function!"

Kerford looked from Darwick to the closed trap, then back again. In sharp tone, the lawyer asked:

"Where would the intruder be at present?"

"In the cellar," answered Darwick, "reposing on the cement. I would suggest, Kerford, that you step out to the street and see if a policeman is in sight. A patrol car passes here quite frequently. Wait a minute, though!"

One hand raised in warning, Darwick used the other to reverse the switch, so that the lawyer could safely cross the trap in the floor.

Kerford made the passage in gingerly style, testing the floor with his foot. He reached the front door, opened it and stepped outside, closing the door behind him.

No police were anywhere in sight. Kerford saw some cars parked across the street, but they looked

empty. With a shrug, the lawyer turned about and went inside, slamming the door behind him. He intended to suggest that Darwick telephone the police, but the idea proved unnecessary.

In the office, Kerford found Darwick loading a pair of shotguns that he had brought from the closet. The old man handed one to the lawyer, and proceeded to finish loading the other for himself.

"We can visit the cellar ourselves," Darwick decided. "Whoever the intruder may be, we shall find him considerably softened by the cement."

FACTS bore out Darwick's statement. In his drop to the cellar, The Shadow had fared rather badly when he met the stony floor. Only his instinctive ability at turning severe plunges into minor smashes had enabled him to land without bad injury. At that, his landing had been by no means happy.

The Shadow was prone on the cellar floor, in a very groggy state. His wide-flung arms had saved his skull from damage, but they had taken the brunt of a blow without fully retarding it. When The Shadow tried to rise, he slumped, because the whole cellar was whizzing about him in merry-go-round fashion.

Only vaguely, could he remember what had happened. The crash had blotted out all recent matters. The Shadow knew that he was in a strange place, where he might be discovered; but how to get out of it was a dilemma in itself, omitting the point that he lacked motive power to travel very far in his present half-stunned condition.

Coming to hands and knees, The Shadow managed a feeble crawl that was punctuated with slumps. He clutched the sides of a doorway and toppled forward. Coming up again, he reached a wall and managed to raise himself, because it was composed of boards, with spaces between.

But his fingers, usually powerful in their hold, began to yield. Finding the top board, The Shadow gripped it with both hands and wavered there.

Along with the whirl of the blackness about him, The Shadow's ears were full of echoes inspired by the clatter of the trapdoor. Everything was bedlam in his mind; until he could forget the tumult that his ears imagined, he was unable to move farther. As he wavered, his knees gave way, and that was the finish.

Though his hands still retained their clutch, The Shadow sagged. The tumult became a roar as blackness overwhelmed him. A blackness so solid that it seemed to batter him into oblivion, swallowing him, burying him in it midst. As the roar faded, The Shadow became motionless.

The door opened atop the cellar stairs, a hand pressed the light switch, and Darwick poked into sight, followed by Kerford. Descending the stairs, they reached the floor beneath the trapdoor, Darwick looking up, to make sure that he had found the right spot.

There wasn't a doubt on that point; what puzzled Darwick was the fact that no victim lay upon the floor.

"He must have crawled somewhere," Darwick told Kerford. "Suppose we have a look about."

Shotguns ahead of them, the pair poked about. They looked into storerooms and coalbins, without result. Darwick suggested that they inspect the windows, which they did, in cursory style. By that time, Kerford was raising objections.

"The fellow may have tricked us," the lawyer declared. "Furthermore, I left the front door unlocked. Someone else might enter and sneak into your office."

"Hardly," returned Darwick, with a chuckle. "I pressed another switch in the hall that also controls the beam across the door of my office. If anyone does try to enter the office, he will drop down here and find

us. Or, more correctly, we shall find him."

Kerford was just about to argue that they weren't doing much finding so far, when something brushed the lawyer and made him jump. Darwick turned at Kerford's ejaculation, and saw the black cat scooting from the lawyer's legs.

"Ah! Here is our answer!" exclaimed Darwick. He caught the cat and lifted it to the light. "I remember, kitty, how you were climbing those curtains once before, to paw at the tassels. So you were our intruder!"

"Well, let this be a lesson, unless you wish to drop into the cellar again." He turned to Kerford and pointed to the cat. "Just a freak of chance, that this cat should have been on a level with the beam. Odd, too, that the cat should have slipped. Perhaps the clatter of the trapdoor alarmed it. Well, that at least ends our worry."

THERE was another worry that Darwick did not know about. Outside the house, a man was sneaking from a car parked down the street. From another car, a girl saw him and spoke to the man beside her:

"There goes someone into Darwick's!"

"I see him." Harry Vincent spoke steadily. "Sit tight, Margo. We'll watch him."

The sneaking man reached the steps and approached the front door. As he opened it and sidled through, Harry saw that the fellow was slight of build. Harry didn't get a look at his face; if he had, it would have been his first sight of Otis Jurn.

Having noted that Kerford went back into the house without unlocking the door, Jurn, acting in behalf of James Wilvern, had decided upon entering Darwick's house himself.

Inside, Jurn saw the lights of the office and stole in that direction. He was just reaching for a curtain, when a sound disturbed him. A door came open at the rear of the hall, and Jurn made a quick retreat to the darkness of the vestibule. He saw Darwick and Kerford come from the door at the rear.

Pausing near the office, Darwick thrust out his hand and cut the electric beam. The trapdoor in the floor slithered wide, and closed again. Darwick repeated the operation, then turned off the hall switch.

"You see?" he said to Kerford. "Anyone who tried to enter this office would have been very unlucky. But that isn't the only trick. I'll show you another."

Darwick led the way across the office, to the safe.

Congratulating himself on his luck, Jurn crept in from the front door and peered past a curtain, knowing that the trap was no longer dangerous. He saw Darwick point to the knobs on the safe.

"Anyone attempting to open this safe," declared Darwick to Kerford, "would naturally turn all three dials. The combination is very simple, because it depends upon the center dial only. This one at the left has a different purpose."

He placed his hand upon the knob in question and held his fingers motionless.

"One twist of this dial," spoke Darwick, "would blow us both to perdition, or wherever else we may be going, Kerford. No one will ever rifle my safe. I have arranged for its contents to be blasted, along with any malefactor."

Kerford began a cautious retreat from the neighborhood of the safe. Darwick withdrew his left hand; he pointed to the dial on the right.

"That is a time dial," he explained. "It can be set, like a clock. Whenever I go out, I set it. Connected with the charge that I just mentioned, it would also blast the safe if I did not return. So you see, Kerford"—Darwick turned to eye the lawyer sharply through the dark glasses—"my priceless book will never fall into the wrong hands."

By then, Kerford had nearly reached the curtains. Jurn was at the front door, ready to open it and slide out. He caught Kerford's next words.

"All the more reason, Darwick," said Kerford, "why you should intrust me with the book. You have drawn me into these matters, almost without my consent -"

Jurn heard no more. Darwick had come up and was clapping his thin hand on Kerford's shoulder. Jurn feared those eyes behind their dark glasses. He had an idea that Darwick wore them to enable him to see others quite closely, without revealing his own thoughts by his eyes.

Despite his friendly manner toward Kerford, the old man was obdurate regarding the book. In fact, had Jurn still been within earshot, he would have heard Darwick indulge in some slight sarcasm at Kerford's expense.

"You knew Alec as well as I did," Darwick reminded. "Don't tell me that he never showed you the book, Kerford. Nor that you would have been dull enough not to make notes of its contents. You know very well that I went to see James Wilvern today."

Kerford delivered a noncommittal shrug.

"I knew that Wilvern's record was in the book," he admitted, "and I thought you would have trouble with him. But I warn you, Asaph, you are dealing with dynamite. I don't like it!"

Smiling, Darwick went back to the safe, as though the reference to dynamite had reminded him of the explosive strong box. He manipulated one knob only: the center one. Opening the safe, he brought out a large package.

"You were frank with me," he told Kerford, "so I shall be frank with you. This package contains photostats of pages in the book covering those accounts that have already been settled. You can have them, Blaine."

"Why only these?"

"Because these persons have already paid their just claims," replied Darwick, "and are therefore free from any blackmail threats through this evidence. Furthermore, they are the only people whose funds you handled, in sending money in the form of anonymous legacies and gifts. This data will protect you."

"And when you settle other accounts -"

"I shall give you photostats of the original documents as soon as each transaction is complete. Good night, Blaine."

BLUNTLY, Darwick showed the lawyer out the front door, then bolted it. As an afterthought, Darwick, when alone, went to the cellar door, called the cat, and after the animal arrived bolted that door as well, thus barricading himself for the night.

He was smiling as he recalled Kerford's worries regarding the safety of this house. Darwick felt that he was quite safe where he was; safer even than Kerford, who was starting out on a trip through the city.

In that surmise, Darwick was quite correct. Had he looked from one of his barred windows, he would have seen the evidence.

Getting into a cab that happened along, Kerford gave a look back at Darwick's house and scowled; but he failed to see the car that pulled away from across the street.

Otis Jurn was at the wheel of that trailing car, and he had other men with him. Jurn had dropped Darwick and was taking up the quest of Kerford, instead.

Immediately after Jurn's car turned the corner, Harry Vincent put his coupe in motion. Who Jurn was or why he was trailing Kerford were matters of mystery to Harry—and to Margo, too—but both agreed that The Shadow's orders meant for them to take the new trail. Passing a cab that was in the next block, Harry gave a signal blink with his lights, then kept on his way.

Things were developing rapidly with these peculiar cross purposes involving Darwick, Kerford and Jurn. When such developments occurred, The Shadow was usually deep in their midst. Tonight, he was still deep in a forgotten cellar.

Like Otis Jurn, The Shadow was simply an unknown visitor who had come to Darwick's house, and vanished later. But the singular way in which The Shadow had vanished, quite beyond discovery, was something of a mystery in itself!

CHAPTER IV. CRIME TAKES A HAND

THE SHADOW stirred; rather feebly at first, then with stronger effort, yet not enough to shake clear of the heavy pressure which gripped and almost stifled him. He needed air, for he was getting it only by degrees, so he thrust himself upward. As he did so, his hands slipped and there was a clatter all about him, but his head poked clear.

Finding his flashlight, The Shadow used it. As disjointed events straightened themselves in his mind, he gave a low laugh. Sometimes luck broke The Shadow's way in most surprising style. This time, it had done its part almost to perfection.

The blackness that cramped The Shadow was very real and solid, at least in chunks. He remembered stumbling through a doorway and clawing at a wall consisting of loose boards. For the first time he saw what he had actually encountered. The doorway was the entrance to a coalbin. The wall was the slatted side of a bunker, filling half the bin. It had been heaped high with coal when The Shadow encountered it, but in slumping, he had dragged the top slats with him. Released, the pouring coal had buried The Shadow beneath its mass as it spread through the entire bin.

No wonder that Darwick and Kerford hadn't found The Shadow on their trip to the cellar!

Hidden beneath a layer of coal, which matched the hue of his cloak and hat, The Shadow had been lying completely camouflaged all during the probe. At present, he was free to resume his investigations, if he chose; however, his choice was otherwise.

The Shadow knew that Darwick might be more alert than before, and that Kerford might have gone his way. Furthermore, considerable time had passed since The Shadow's hard drop into the cellar. He still felt the effects of the unexpected jolt, and therefore decided that a return trip to this house would be better policy than a continuance of the present venture.

Going out by the window with the loosened bricks, The Shadow carefully maneuvered the bars so that they stayed in place. Rather stiffly, he made his way from the rear courtyard, into the next block. There, The Shadow looked for a waiting cab, only to find that it had gone.

A minute later, it came into sight, cruising the neighborhood. The Shadow delivered signal blinks with his tiny flashlight. The cab stopped and picked him up.

This cab was The Shadow's own; its driver, Moe Shrevnitz, another of his secret agents. Moe was seeking his chief, to tell him that Harry Vincent had continued on Kerford's trail.

But there was more to Moe's report than that. The cabby included the fact that other cars had followed Kerford's; cars which, in Moe's opinion, promised trouble for somebody.

Evidently The Shadow shared Moe's opinion. He gave the address of Kerford's apartment house and ordered Moe there, at once, on the theory that it was the logical destination where Kerford had gone. Considering the time lost, The Shadow was far behind the pack; nevertheless, there was a long-shot chance that he might arrive in time.

THE chance was better than even The Shadow supposed. Not more than a dozen blocks from Darwick's, Kerford had looked back and noted that he was followed. Therewith, he had ordered his cabby to do some rapid detours.

Whether he expected to shake his trailers, or merely discourage them, Kerford succeeded in neither. At present, his cab was speeding through Central Park, and every time the grizzled lawyer looked back he saw the same cars, just as close as ever.

As indifferently as if he had merely been taking an airing in the park, Kerford gave his home address to the cabby and told him to go directly there. Followers who merely hung along and made no effort to overtake a fugitive were not very worrisome to Blaine Kerford.

From the last car in the procession, Harry Vincent observed the change of tactics and confided his own opinions to Margo Lane, in the seat beside him.

"I don't know why that crowd is dogging Kerford," Harry admitted, "but I'll bet they show their hand as soon as he gets wherever he's going.

"Be ready to slide over and take the wheel as soon as Kerford's cab stops. Don't worry about me, Margo. Just get clear, and I'll join you later."

As assurance that he could look out for himself, and probably Kerford to boot, Harry drew an automatic from his pocket and released the safety catch.

Sight of the gun didn't exactly end Margo's qualms. It merely promised that if trouble did start, Harry would add to it. Considering the size of the crew ahead, Margo was doubtful that Harry would have a fifty-fifty chance of ending trouble by his intervention.

The test came very suddenly.

Kerford's car screeched to a stop in front of an apartment hotel. Its driver, unfamiliar with the building, had swung the corner so rapidly that he would have gone beyond his stopping point, but for Kerford's order. Two cars behind the cab were discommoded by the sudden halt.

One, containing Jurn and a few companions, narrowly missed colliding with the cab. A quick swerve averted the smash and carried Jurn alongside Kerford's cab. In so doing, it stole valuable space that

Harry needed as he came around the corner, and The Shadow's agent was thrown into immediate disadvantage.

Only by a skilled maneuver did Harry manage to miss the halted vehicles and spin his coupe across the street. Margo gasped as the car careened, and clung tightly to the door, thinking they had bounced against the curb and were due for an overturn. But the car's contortions were due only to Harry's rapid handling of the wheel.

Shrieking tires doubled under rims, then bulged out again and righted the coupe as it finished its whirl near the sidewalk. The door of Harry's side shoved open, and Margo felt her companion pull her to the wheel as he sprang out into the street.

Jurn and his pals, already out of their own car, saw the lurch of Harry's coupe and thought that it was bound for a crash. Such a happening to a car just passing by was much to their liking, as they knew it would distract attention from their own operations.

Keeping to the background, Jurn snapped a quick order to his men and they closed in upon Kerford, who was stepping from his cab. Harry's near crash having captured the lawyer's attention, Kerford didn't realize his predicament, until he found himself surrounded by a cluster of men whose hard voices gave an idea of what their muffled faces must look like.

One man, hand in pocket, was giving Kerford a significant nudge that indicated a hidden gun. Another clamped a tight hand on the lawyer's arm, indicating that rough treatment might follow. A third gripped the package that Kerford carried and tried to wrest it from the victim.

"I'm holding this," the fellow said. "We don't want you to be bothered with it while we're talking to you."

"Yeah," put in another, "and you've got some talking to do. What was the idea, nearly wrecking us?"

WHATEVER Kerford's opinion of the men surrounding him, he was quick to guess their purpose. They wanted the package that he carried, and were trying to bluff him out of it. They wanted it because they thought it contained the very thing that Kerford himself had been so anxious to acquire: namely, the big book belonging to Asaph Darwick.

Cagily, Kerford didn't intend to let them take the package. Showing surprising power, the lawyer twisted away from one man, shoved another aside, and drove a threatening fist at the third, who dodged. Jurn and another thug were springing to halt the lawyer, when Harry arrived.

Coming around the back of a car, Harry saw only a jumble of figures. So far, not a single gun had been brought into play; but Harry didn't know it. He hadn't heard the statements of the men accosting Kerford; he was impressed by their thuggish actions at the moment he arrived. His own gun drawn, Harry sprang into the throng.

The dodging man saw Harry and the gun he brandished. Turning his dodge into a dive, the fellow grabbed Harry's ankle and tripped him, at the same time yapping a warning to his comrades.

They spun from Kerford, to see Harry coming up to hands and knees, groping for his lost automatic. Before Jurn could restrain them, they dropped back, whipping revolvers from their coat pockets.

Almost blindly, Harry was shoving himself right into disaster as he came up with his gun. Foemen were prepared to tug their triggers, on grounds of self-defense, if nothing more. Whatever their bluff toward Kerford, these men with Jurn were thugs at heart, and needed only the challenge of an armed opponent to turn them into marksmen who would shoot to kill.

At that moment, Harry Vincent was as close to death as he had ever been during his long years in The Shadow's service. Thugs were dropping Kerford to handle more imperative business. No argument, no action on Harry's part, could possibly have stayed those criminal hands.

Only a greater, far more pressing threat could veer the death thrust from Harry's direction, just as he had diverted attack from Kerford.

The threat came.

It came with a challenge that riveted the men who heard it. The sound was a defiant laugh, sinister in its mockery, vengeful in its strain. Mirth had pronounced its owner's identity more powerfully than words.

Strange, chilling, it seemed to come from the midst of the aiming assassins, that tone which all men of crime, from small to large, recognized as the theme of their one great nemesis!

The laugh of The Shadow!

CHAPTER V. CHANGED TRAILS

HE was springing from an arriving cab, that figure of blackness, when Jurn's accomplices heard his laugh. The cab, itself, had come from the opposite direction, pointing toward the various cars that were stalled along the street.

It was Moe Shrevnitz's cab, of course, piloted hither by the shortest route, while Kerford had been perambulating through Central Park with others following his trail.

But it wasn't Moe who had picked the cab's stopping point. It was The Shadow, uncanny and unerring in his instinct at picking vital spots and moments, who had told Moe when and where to jam the brakes.

One fling of the door and The Shadow was not only out; he was leaping through space behind Kerford's cab, straight into the semicircle of armed men who had picked Harry as a common target.

The Shadow's course explained the illusion of his laugh. Coming directly toward the door of the apartment house, the weird mirth was echoed back by the yawning portals, giving the deceptive impression that the peal had come within the ranks of crooks themselves.

The moment of mistrust that the thugs shared for one another was quite enough for The Shadow. When his foemen saw him, he was almost upon them, and each of his gloved hands bulked with a .45 automatic. Under the threat of those muzzles, the crooks forgot Harry. They flung themselves in various directions, stabbing frantic shots back at The Shadow as they went.

Another laugh was The Shadow's answer to bullets.

Wheeling back toward the cab, he was ahead of wild-aimed guns. He was finding shelter while drawing fire in his direction. The Shadow's laugh, a gesture of his gloved hand, were cues to Harry to find shelter on his own. Harry reached his feet and made a stumbling dash to the apartment-house doorway.

Then The Shadow's guns began to stab.

He was toying with Jurn's tribe, literally trapping them with bullets. Some had found cover of a sort; others were merely huddled. In every case, The Shadow held the advantage, as he jabbed shots from behind the cab. He sizzled bullets so close that ears could not only hear their whine, but feel their fanning breeze, as well.

Until he learned the full caliber of this crew, The Shadow was showing charity. The fact that Harry had

first displayed a gun was quite apparent to The Shadow. Nor did The Shadow blame his foemen for firing in his own direction, considering the circumstances of his arrival.

It was best that this should remain a bloodless battle until the police arrived, which they would shortly, and took over the scene. Then various persons, Kerford and Harry included, could explain themselves and let crooks try to answer charges. By that time, of course, The Shadow wouldn't be anywhere around.

The Shadow's policy was succeeding twice over. His well-placed shots were making his foemen shrink still farther, while the useless fire which they supplied in return was simply exhausting their ammunition, thereby assuring the law of an easy capture.

In fact, The Shadow was getting results too easily. He didn't like it when matters were as soft as this. Generally something spoiled the set-up.

Something spoiled it this time.

IN reaching the doorway, Harry Vincent came upon a struggling pair consisting of Blaine Kerford and Otis Jurn. Harry recognized Kerford readily enough, but he couldn't see Jurn's face. Kerford had taken the lapels of the smaller man's overcoat and was tightening them around Jurn's face.

Eyes peeking from the folds, Jurn gave a bleat that seemed really genuine. It struck Harry suddenly that Jurn hadn't been among the original attackers who made for Kerford. Harry remembered, too, that his first task tonight had been the trailing of Kerford.

It might be that Jurn had been doing the same; that the man whose face Harry couldn't see was playing an honest game, while Kerford's part still remained in doubt.

At least, Kerford was handling Jurn too savagely. Harry inserted a protest for the man he didn't know. The protest wasn't verbal. Harry simply tried to press Kerford back, to let his victim get a little air.

Kerford didn't like the interference. He shoved Jurn violently across the doorway steps, tumbling him through some ornamental cedars to a patch of concrete beyond. With a bellow, the harassed lawyer sprang for Harry, who caught him in a grapple. Kerford's weight was something of a factor. Though he couldn't flatten Harry, he managed to drive him from the doorway. Still locked, the pair reeled in an eccentric course across the sidewalk.

Wild shouts greeted the sight. Crooks knew that the reeling pair must be Kerford and Harry, because each was too large to be Jurn. Since they couldn't reach The Shadow with their shots, the thugs resolved to blast the pair on the sidewalk.

Scattered shots began. The Shadow stopped them with some point-blank bullets that crippled two of Jurn's followers.

Then, sweeping across the sidewalk, The Shadow flung himself upon Harry and Kerford, ending their tangle with backhand punches from a gun-weighted fist.

As they separated, The Shadow faded almost between them, dwindling below the level of new gunfire as he dropped to one hand and knee. His own shots sent thugs diving, this time for better cover.

They were taking to their car, and the cripples were staggering with them, while Jurn, profiting by the situation, was leading the way with long lopes. Something had happened that The Shadow wanted: his foemen were out of bullets. But the sudden reversal of affairs made The Shadow wish that they had a few more shots to use.

If they'd stayed around to fire, he could have clipped them; but with their guns exhausted, their desperate minds thought only in terms of flight. Jurn was at the wheel of the mobster car.

The Shadow's first chance to halt the car's flight would be to blast bullets at it through the windows of the taxicab that had brought Kerford back to his apartment house. The cab windows were open, and the scared driver was crouched behind his wheel. The Shadow aimed straight through the windows.

Only by a quick effort did he halt his trigger finger, as Kerford suddenly stumbled up against the cab. A moment later, Kerford stooped; but by then The Shadow no longer had an opportunity to fire through the cab windows.

The cloaked marksman shifted toward the front of the cab, springing upon the step, to aim across the hood. The cabby saw him, gave an alarmed yell to Kerford.

The lawyer was rising after regaining his package, which he had dropped beside the cab. His intention was to dart into the apartment building, but he changed it when he saw The Shadow.

Kerford had something else besides the package: a gun. Whether he had pulled it from his own pocket or plucked up a weapon that a fleeing thug had dropped, Kerford did not specify. He made it plain, however, that he intended to use the gun.

Kerford chose The Shadow as his target.

This time it was Harry who shouted a warning. It didn't need words; the tone was enough to tell The Shadow all he needed. With a sweeping whirl, The Shadow was away before Kerford could fire, and the lawyer, baffled by the cloaked fighter's fade-out, made a sudden scramble into the cab before The Shadow could wheel back toward him.

The cab was off before Kerford landed in the rear seat. The scared driver needed no order to get started. The Shadow caught a glimpse of Kerford's face, glowering from the rear window, but made no effort to fire after the fellow.

KERFORD'S case was still a question mark. So far he hadn't shown enough of his hand to classify himself as someone actively engaged in crime. The fact that Kerford had been attacked by a crooked crew didn't whitewash him, as feuds between criminals were common.

On the contrary, Kerford's sudden antagonism toward The Shadow could not be judged a mark against him. In these hectic happenings, where every man seemed a foe, Kerford, too, could have thought in terms of a feud existing between crooks and a black-clad fighter who accosted them.

As the middle man, Kerford could feel that he was the bone of contention, and therefore impelled to fight all comers.

There was only one way for The Shadow to learn Kerford's exact status. That was to overtake the lawyer and question him.

The Shadow didn't wait for Moe to get his cab backed around; instead, he pointed Harry to it. For his own vehicle, The Shadow chose Harry's coupe. Margo had started the motor; thinking she heard Harry spring into the car, she was suddenly surprised at the whispered tone which said:

"Follow Kerford's cab. Don't let it out of sight."

It wasn't any fault of Margo's that she failed to follow The Shadow's injunction. Even Moe, the demon hackie, couldn't have accomplished the required task. At the first corner police cars, which hadn't arrived

when The Shadow wanted them, were appearing in full force. They not only spoiled the chase; they produced a problem for The Shadow as they roared toward the coupe, sirens screeching.

Police had heard the shooting and they picked the coupe as an offending car. Margo spun the wheel and took the turns The Shadow ordered. They finally slipped pursuers when The Shadow spotted the entrance to an alleyway and gave the wheel a neat tug of his own, which sent the coupe whizzing through the narrow outlet before Margo realized that she had control again.

A few blocks away they sighted Moe's cab, which had raced around the other direction. Coupe and cab pulled to the curb together. The chase was definitely off, as Margo understood when Harry rejoined her in the coupe. It was then that Margo suddenly realized that The Shadow was no longer with them.

He'd gone like a thing of the night, but his whispered laugh came back, trailing from between building walls where The Shadow had merged with darkness. There was no disappointment in The Shadow's tone. The mirth spoke of the future rather than the past.

Though The Shadow had lost two trails—Kerford's and that of the unknown crooks who had attacked the lawyer, the game was by no means blind. It was a case of changed trails, rather than lost ones. There was still a man who could be watched: old Asaph Darwick, possessor of a strange book that had some connection, it seemed, with crime.

A closer connection than even The Shadow supposed. The volume that The Shadow had never seen was to become more than an instrument of blackmail—as James Wilvern, for one, had intimated that it might be. It was to become a Book of Death!

CHAPTER VI. WITNESSED BY THE SHADOW

THE assorted clippings compiled by Rutledge Mann received no additions during the next few days. There was a very good reason: the source of the mysterious gifts and legacies had temporarily gone dry. Since the funds weren't coming from the Munston estate, but from people whose consciences yielded to Darwick's arguments, the whole campaign had stalled through Wilvern's refusal to pay up for his uncle's misdeeds.

Not having found the answer to the riddle, The Shadow was dangerously close to a false theory. Knowing that Kerford had been Munston's attorney, he was inclined to blame the lawyer for the sudden cessation of gifts. In fact, Kerford had not reappeared, either at his apartment or his office, since the night he fled with The Shadow in pursuit.

So there was a basis for the false theory, had The Shadow chosen to accept it. It simply happened that The Shadow wasn't in a mood for accepting theories. He wanted facts.

Facts which Asaph Darwick might be able to supply. Which accounted for the fact that Darwick's house was haunted nightly—not indoors, but outside—by a black-clad specter otherwise known as The Shadow.

By day, others took over. Sometimes Moe patrolled in his cab. Occasionally Harry drove by in his coupe; sometimes it was Margo who took the car along the street. A visit to Darwick wasn't wise; not unless the old man had company, to whom he might divulge certain facts within The Shadow's hearing.

The Shadow was simply waiting for Darwick to come out—and finally Darwick did just that.

It was midafternoon when a taxicab pulled up in front of the antiquated mansion. Moe's cab was coming around the corner, so he stopped to argue with the other cabby, who stated that he had come in

response to a telephone call. By then Darwick appeared from the house, dark glasses, muffler, derby hat, and all. He was hobbling on a cane and carrying a well-worn portfolio under his arm.

In crisp style he took the cab that had come for him, and Moe, standing dejectedly by, heard the address. Moe relayed it promptly to The Shadow.

When Darwick entered the offices of a promoter named Norman Dempster and handed over one of his grimy calling cards, he created the usual stir. He gained immediate admittance to Dempster's private office, but the anteroom was still buzzing when Lamont Cranston arrived there.

Usually, one of Cranston's visits created a stir in itself, for he was known as a millionaire who had joined Dempster in some very successful ventures. But with Darwick as the man of the hour, Cranston was overlooked for a while. Finally he managed to get some attention and have his card sent in to Dempster's private office.

MEANWHILE, Asaph Darwick was doing business with Norman Dempster.

The big record book lay open on Dempster's desk, and Darwick stood above it like a presiding judge, tapping the pages with a gloved finger and speaking through the folds of his muffler. Darwick was rattling Dempster's family skeletons, and Dempster was taking it very amiably.

It was Dempster's habit to take things amiably.

Norman Dempster was a middle-aged man whose thin face was usually smiling. His eyes, though occasionally listless, were quick to appraise people. His pointed nose indicated that he was a talker, but today Dempster did nothing but listen until Darwick was through.

"You have stated facts," Dempster then declared in a mild tone. "Facts that I already know, Mr. Darwick. It is true that I married a wealthy widow and received her fortune after she died. A fortune which she had inherited from her former husband, whose method of acquiring it was unethical, to say the least."

"Illegal, the record terms it," reminded Darwick. "Your money, Dempster, came from a man who turned the profits of a shipping company into munitions which were secretly sold to start foreign revolutions."

"You are quite right," nodded Dempster, "although the fact was never proven."

"Never proven against its perpetrator," corrected Darwick. "He covered himself too well. His associates, the men he robbed, were the ones who went to prison. I am here to request restitution for their heirs."

Dempster placed his elbows on his desk. He linked the fingers of his hands, rested his chin upon them, and eyed Darwick very steadily as he asked:

"Is this, by any chance, blackmail, Mr. Darwick?"

For answer, Darwick let his muffler drop to show the smile on his dryish lips. He thumbed the stubs which had once held the early pages of his book.

"These pages are gone," declared Darwick. "They stand for persons who willingly made restitution. As for these"—he lifted a batch of pages that were tightly sealed together—"they stand for a man who felt that he owed no debt."

The sealed pages were Wilvern's, but Darwick did not say so. He was simply telling Dempster that persons who did not pay up were accorded fair treatment; that the pages belonging to the unnamed man

had been sealed again and would remain so.

Darwick let Wilvern's batch of pages fall. They were back again at the open leaves that represented Dempster's own account.

Beyond those open pages lay at least two dozen other batches, all sealed in little sections. They belonged to persons not yet visited by Darwick, new accounts that were to follow Dempster's. In thickness, as well as size, Darwick's ledger was very impressive.

"From what you tell me," said Dempster, thumbing his own pages, "I would be doing the right thing if I paid over, at my convenience, the sum of two hundred thousand dollars to certain deserving persons." Darwick nodded.

"Very well." Dempster opened a desk drawer and brought out a check book that rivaled the ledger in length and width. "The present is the proper time. But first"—he stopped to toy with a card that lay on his desk—"would it be improper to have a witness, Mr. Darwick?"

"Not at all."

Dempster spoke into a desk instrument: "Please ask Mr. Cranston to join us."

THUS, by request of Norman Dempster, did Lamont Cranston, otherwise The Shadow, learn the whole truth regarding the strange record kept by Asaph Darwick. Never, in his whole experience, had The Shadow seen a case crack as wide open as this one.

Strolling into Dempster's office, the casual Mr. Cranston was introduced to Darwick. Hardly had they shaken hands before Dempster was relating the facts about the book.

Cranston listened, quite interested, and Darwick watched the visitor closely through the dark-lensed glasses. The old man was very anxious to witness the reactions of a third party, and, though he caught no change in Cranston's immobile countenance, it was plain that Dempster's friend regarded the records as bona fide, casting no doubts whatever toward Darwick.

Also eyeing Cranston, Dempster was impressed. Any doubts as to policy faded at once from Dempster's manner. Taking it that Cranston, through his silence, had passed judgment in Darwick's favor, Dempster indicated the check book.

"I hold no briefs for my deceased wife's late husband," declared Dempster. "He was a Tartar, that chap, who should have died long before he did. I came into his money purely by chance, and having acquired it, I used it.

"You can vouch for my integrity, Cranston. When I find something to promote, I put some of my own money into it and ask others to do the same. I state the whole case, and we go into the deal with a full understanding of each other. Sometimes we win; sometimes we lose. That's the hazard of the game."

Darwick saw Cranston nod.

"I began with a fortune," continued Dempster, "but I have built it five times over, through my own efforts. Every time I have made money through any promotion, my associates on that venture—Cranston, here, as an example—have received a proportionate share. I've been honest with myself, because I have been honest to others. I shall be honest with myself again."

Opening the check book, Dempster poised a fountain pen and gestured to the opened ledger. He said to Darwick:

"Call off the amounts."

Darwick called them off, and Dempster wrote out the checks, making all payable to cash, but noting the names of the different persons involved. The checks totaled slightly more than two hundred thousand dollars.

Receiving them, Darwick put them in his pocket. Then, grasping Dempster's pages in the vellum-bound book, Darwick tore them along scored lines and passed the whole batch to Dempster, saying:

"To do with as you please."

"I shall keep them," assured Dempster. "As for the distribution of the funds, I leave that entirely in your hands, Mr. Darwick."

Old Darwick gave a grimace.

"It looks as though the duty will all be mine," he said testily. "Hitherto, I have depended upon my attorney, Blaine Kerford, to see that the proper people receive their return from these accounts. But Kerford has chosen to take a vacation without telling anyone where he has gone. However, I shall handle the matter, Mr. Dempster, and give you a full report."

Dempster bowed, and Darwick did the same, taking the exchange of courtesies as the right time for departure. The big book back in its portfolio, the old man walked out with the long, brisk strides that made his cane an ornament, rather than a necessity.

Seated behind his desk, Dempster turned to Cranston and asked solemnly:

"Do you really think I did the right thing?"

"Under the circumstances, yes," was Cranston's reply. "I have always heard that Asaph Darwick was a man who felt that justice was just another name for integrity. The facts that I have just learned prove it."

Dempster extended his hand and gave Cranston a firm, warm clasp. "I've been thinking so myself," declared Dempster. "Two hundred thousand dollars was a lot for Darwick to ask, but it was only right that I pay it. Most men would consider me a fool, Cranston, but you do not. I am glad that I invited you to act as witness."

LATER, when dusk was settling, a limousine passed the ancient house where Asaph Darwick lived. The old man had returned there immediately after leaving Dempster's office. The passenger in the limousine was Lamont Cranston. But the laugh that came reflectively from Cranston's lips was the mirth of The Shadow.

The tone marked approval of Darwick's policies, and with it the wish for the old man's further success in the cause to which he had assigned himself. If there was any doubt, any foreboding in The Shadow's reflective laugh, it applied to one thing only.

The Shadow was thinking of the sealed pages preceding those that Darwick had torn from the volume and given to Dempster. Those pages represented one account that had not been settled, even though Darwick had seen the man in question.

Until that account received a settlement, The Shadow intended to watch affairs at Darwick's. All persons that Darwick approached would not prove as willing or as amiable as Dempster had. The sealed pages that Darwick had passed over most certainly represented a man who did not belong in Dempster's class.

The Shadow was quite correct upon that point, though he did not know that the pages in question belonged to James Wilvern, a man who still had schemes regarding the strange volume that was to become a Book of Death!

CHAPTER VII. MEN FROM THE PAST

AS the week progressed, new clippings of mysterious gifts began to pile upon Rutledge Mann's desk. This time, The Shadow did not have to speculate as to their origin. Nor did another man, who was collecting clippings, too. The other man was James Wilvern.

The day after his brief interview with Darwick, Wilvern had subscribed to a clipping service, and he was getting results. Had the clippings failed to appear, Wilvern would have been pleased. As it was, Wilvern was quite annoyed, and showed it when he phoned an order to the anteroom, saying:

"Summon Jurn. At once!"

The word reached Jurn in the cubbyhole that he called an office. Jurn's office was in the Graymoor Building, too, just below the extensive suite that Wilvern occupied.

Leaving his office, Jurn went toward the elevators, looked around to see that no one was watching him, and opened the door of a storage closet. At the back of the closet, Jurn swung a hinged wall and went through the improvised door, taking a spiral staircase that led him up to Wilvern's suite. There, Jurn tapped lightly at the special entrance to Wilvern's private office.

Wilvern opened the door, gave a snarl for a welcome and gestured Jurn to a chair. From Wilvern's bristly mood, Jurn knew that he was in for something.

"So you were sure that Kerford took the book," sneered Wilvern. "Well, Jurn, look at these clippings and give an opinion. That old fool Darwick is loose again!"

Studying the clippings, Jurn shrugged.

"Maybe Kerford is passing out the dough."

"Maybe he is," conceded Wilvern, "but not unless Darwick paved the way. I told you to get that book, Jurn!"

"We almost got it -"

Jurn's use of the word "we" angered Wilvern. He sat down at his desk and glared.

"I expected you to use finesse," began Wilvern. "Instead, you hired a bunch of thugs -"

"Go easy on the boys," interrupted Jurn. "I've told you they were right guys."

Wilvern plucked a few clippings from the desk. He had clipped them himself, from New York newspapers. They didn't mention anonymous gifts; they pertained to a gun fight outside of a New York apartment house.

"The right men for murder, perhaps," declared Wilvern. "Should I require such services, I shall specify the fact. Keep those dubs out of circulation, Jurn, except under special circumstances. You, at least, are discreet when operating on your own."

"I'll say I am!" returned Jurn, in a pleased tone. "I ducked a tricky trap that Darwick had set for me, and I learned all about that funny safe of his."

"You've reported those details before," reminded Wilvern. "I am fully aware of the dangers existing in Darwick's house. I am equally aware that Darwick still has the book, and that we must acquire it. Where you have failed, I shall succeed—with your assistance, Jurn."

"Keep close check on Darwick. Make sure that no one is snooping near his house. When you are certain that he is at home, phone me either here or at my club. I can handle the rest."

Rising, Jurn paused to grumble as he reached the private door.

"I can't always be sticking my neck out," declared Jurn. "When I check on Darwick, I may need some guys to help."

"With guns?" inquired Wilvern, sarcastically.

"No, not with guns," rejoined Jurn. "I'll pick some guys who wouldn't lug a Roscoe if you paid them!"

"Then use them," ordered Wilvern, waving his hand in dismissal. "I shall pay them, Jurn—through you."

Coming from the storage closet on the fifth floor, Otis Jurn was pleased that he didn't have to sneak around the corner past Kerford's suite of offices. Always, those offices had bothered Jurn, for he pictured Kerford as a man who might be watching what went on about the building. Since Kerford had left for places unknown, Jurn no longer worried about the missing lawyer.

It didn't occur to Jurn that Kerford might have tired of parts unknown and returned to New York. Jurn was particularly anxious to forget Kerford, because he feared that the lawyer might have recognized him outside the apartment house when they had met intimately enough for Kerford to treat Jurn as a spaniel would handle a water rat.

Other people could keep a lookout for Kerford, for all Jurn cared, and other people were doing it. One was a chap named Harry Vincent, who at that particular time was informing his chief, The Shadow, that he had seen Kerford at the apartment house.

Whether Kerford was still there, was something Harry didn't know, particularly as it was getting dark and watching was difficult.

Darkness, of course, was made to The Shadow's order. Harry promptly received orders to transfer his vigil to Darwick's terrain. The old man happened to be out, and The Shadow intended to check on his return. With the Dempster account almost settled, Darwick would soon resume his rounds.

Riding to Kerford's apartment house, The Shadow was thinking about Dempster. As Cranston, The Shadow had talked to the promoter since the other day, and Dempster had felt more and more pleased by his policy of endowing funds upon deserving people.

Old Darwick had been handling everything beautifully, and keeping in constant touch with Dempster. In fact, it was very likely that Darwick's stroll this afternoon had taken him to Dempster's office. The Shadow hadn't gone there, because he knew that Dempster was on a business trip and was not expected back until tomorrow.

Such reflections ended when Moe Shrevnitz's cab stopped around the corner from Kerford's apartment house and The Shadow, fully cloaked, continued on foot. He saw a dim light in Kerford's apartment, which was a few floors up, and against the window shade the motions of a human figure were evident.

Wearing a hat, Kerford was evidently occupied in packing a suitcase, and the effect became more apparent as The Shadow ascended a fire escape and gained a closer look.

There was a way around to Kerford's apartment, and The Shadow took it, finally trying the door of a kitchenette, which yielded under a probing skeleton key. Through the kitchen, The Shadow peered into the living room, but saw no sign of Kerford.

Instead, The Shadow spied a hat parked on a lamp, with an empty suitcase on the table near it. The flutter of the window shade against an open window produced the effect of motion from the hat. Nevertheless, The Shadow was not deceived into thinking that such a trick had fooled him.

He was sure that he had seen an actual figure within the past few minutes. Therefore, Kerford must have just left the apartment, planting the hat at the last moment. On that theory, The Shadow made a quick trip downstairs, and immediately learned that his guess was right.

Moe reported that Kerford had just come out and taken a cab. Having noted the direction, Moe was quick on the trail as soon as The Shadow joined him. Within a few blocks, they sighted Kerford's cab, and from then on the trail was easy, because Kerford, during the interim, had looked back and decided that he was not being followed.

The trail led to the Graymoor Building, where Kerford entered. It was after hours, and occupants of offices had to report to a watchman when they entered.

While Kerford was going through that formality, The Shadow glided into the building, so smoothly that his only trace was a flat blot of darkness that eased across the tiled floor.

By the time Kerford was in the elevator and riding upward, The Shadow had reached a stairway. His trip, however, was a longer one, since he had five floors, to go.

On the fifth, The Shadow noted that Kerford's suite was dark; but when he went around a corner, he saw a light through the frosted glass of a door panel which he knew was Kerford's private route into the suite.

Again, The Shadow saw a shape against the light, and he wasted no time about it. Usually, The Shadow was quiet with his skeleton keys, but on this occasion he let them clatter as he worked on the door.

He watched for some reaction from the huddled figure within, but none came. Nevertheless, The Shadow opened the door, to see the full proof.

Kerford had tried the hat trick again.

A desk lamp was lighted, and on a file rack at the near edge of the desk rested a tilted hat. Kerford had put it in that position to get the shaded effect, but it was a very amateurish job. An excusable job, however, since it had diverted The Shadow long enough for Kerford to continue on his way. At the art of slipping in and out of apartments or offices, Kerford was certainly quite capable.

It was another case of making up for lost time, so The Shadow took a speedy trip downstairs. He passed the watchman in the lobby; the fellow was making an entry in his book, marking the fact that someone had just left.

The Shadow didn't pause to watch if he entered Kerford's name. The opportunity of passing the watchman was too good to overlook. Besides, The Shadow was depending on Moe for a report regarding Kerford.

The cabby wasn't in sight. He'd gone around the block, intending to cruise a short while and float back again, to park near the building. Watchmen were often suspicious of cabs that parked too long near their preserves.

At first, The Shadow supposed that Moe had picked up Kerford, and would report back later; but the cab arrived empty, and would have rolled past if The Shadow hadn't halted it with a quick-blinked signal from a tiny flashlight.

In the cab, The Shadow questioned Moe and learned that he had seen some other cabs go by in the next street, but had not connected them with Kerford. Thus, Kerford's trail was gone again, like the slippery man, himself.

There was only one policy: to play a hunch regarding Kerford's destination. In doing so, The Shadow did not forget that he had already picked a substitute for Kerford before the lawyer's return. He had that point in his mind when he named his new goal.

The Shadow ordered Moe to take him to Darwick's house, as logical a place as any where Kerford might be found. It was a better choice than even The Shadow knew.

This evening, all trails were to lead to Darwick's home, the place where the Book of Death awaited!

CHAPTER VIII. DEATH ON DISPLAY

It was a long trip from the Graymoor Building to Darwick's house and much could happen during the time it took to get there. Much was beginning to happen, even as The Shadow started his journey.

Already, Darwick's house was under surveillance by Harry Vincent, but The Shadow's agent was keeping strictly under cover. From a spot well down the street, Harry saw a cab stop in front of the house and recognized the man who alighted.

The man was Asaph Darwick, spry as ever, but tonight he carried only a cane. His precious portfolio was evidently locked away in his safe. Harry watched Darwick pay the cab driver, then produce a batch of keys as he went up the steps to the house. By the time Darwick opened the door, the cab had left.

Waiting a few minutes more, Harry made sure that there were no lurkers along the street. He double-checked his finding by coming from cover and pacing along the street, glancing across as he passed the house. Around the corner, Harry set out to find a telephone to call Burbank, the contact man who relayed evening messages to The Shadow.

Thus, for several minutes the street remained unwatched, which could hardly have been termed negligence on Harry's part, considering his inspection of the thoroughfare. But Harry wouldn't have been quite so satisfied, had he kept tabs on the cab that brought Darwick home.

That cab stopped near a drugstore a few blocks away, where it was promptly met by a man who stepped out from the curb. The man who met the cab was Otis Jurn.

"The guy's home," the cabby told Jurn. "I picked him up outside that restaurant where he was eating, the way you said for me to do."

"Good enough," returned Jurn. "Here's another ten bucks for your trouble. I'll give you a call when I need you again, Buzz."

The cabby gave an eager nod. Then:

"What's the old gent been staging?" questioned Buzz. "Some kind of a phony deal?"

"It's a confidential matter," informed Jurn, "between myself and an important client. That's the way we handle this investigation work— always in strictest confidence."

Having thus dismissed the inquisitive cabby, Jurn stepped into the drugstore and called Wilvern's private-office number. He received a short hello, given in a cautious tone. Jurn took it that some of the office help were around and that Wilvern didn't want them to know that he was there.

"This is Jurn," informed the private dick. "Old Darwick is back. I think he was over to see Dempster."

The response was another monosyllable:

"Well?"

"Well, Dempster wasn't there," replied Jurn. "He's out of town, I think. Maybe Darwick is expecting him, because he gobbled his dinner in a hurry. I had a cabby pick him up and bring him home."

Wilvern expressed no interest in Jurn's clever method. Apparently, he was taking it for granted that Jurn would use some strategy to trace Darwick. So Jurn concluded his conversation in wise fashion.

"Darwick's home," he said, "and that's what you wanted to know. The sooner you get over, the sooner you will see him. If you want, I'll meet you outside and go in with you. Maybe that would be better, Mr. Wilvern."

The reply that came was as testy as any that Jurn had ever heard from Wilvern. The speaker said crisply:

"I shall visit Mr. Darwick alone!"

Leaving the drugstore, Jurn felt put out at the way he had been shelved. He walked in the direction of Darwick's house, and when he reached the street in back of it, he had a bright idea. If he couldn't meet Wilvern, Jurn could at least look in on the interview that his employer was to hold with old Darwick.

There was only one obstacle—that of getting into Darwick's house. Buzz hadn't reported whether Darwick had left the front door unlocked, but it didn't particularly matter to Jurn. He couldn't afford to even try the front door, because if Darwick didn't spot him, Wilvern might. The proper system was to take a look at the back of the house and see what possibilities it offered.

SOON Jurn was blundering through the courtyard from which The Shadow, a few nights ago, had gained access to Darwick's cellar. It wasn't difficult to pick Darwick's house from the others in the row. Looking up, Jurn saw bars on the windows, and they were the giveaway.

Stooping, the private investigator discovered that the cellar gratings were equally formidable. He wouldn't even be able to dent them during the twenty-odd minutes that it would take Wilvern to arrive.

However, since he'd gone to all the trouble of entering the courtyard, Jurn decided that he ought to study the gratings, just in case Wilvern asked about them later. Jurn felt that he always made a hit with Wilvern when he reported every side light that concerned a case.

Gripping the barred grating, Jurn estimated that it would take an hour's work with a hacksaw to cleave the obstacle. He shook the bars to learn if they were loose, and the result was a real surprise. The bars were so loose that they gave at a touch, and Jurn, thrusting forward, was precipitated through the cellar window amid a clatter of falling bricks.

His grab at the swinging bars broke his fall, and when he looked up from the cellar floor, he saw the condition of the masonry on the inside wall. Picking up the bricks, he studied them with a flashlight and decided that they could be put back in place quite neatly.

Inadvertently, Jurn had tested the same window as The Shadow, and had thereby uncovered the

black-cloaked investigator's private route into the Darwick mansion. Flicking his light about, Jurn saw the stairs that led up to the first floor. He decided that this inside route was better than the front door, even should the latter prove to be open. However, Jurn ascended the cellar stairs step by step, testing each one cautiously. He wasn't anxious to encounter another of Darwick's traps.

Hand on the door, Jurn hesitated, remembering that two dials of Darwick's safe were attached to an explosive charge and that this doorknob might have a similar gadget. When he turned the knob, he did it slowly, finding it difficult to keep his hand from shaking. He heard the latch click open, and gave a chuckle, which changed instantly to a croak of alarm.

From beyond the door came a low, muffled report, enough like an explosion to scare the wits from Jurn. Dropping the doorknob like a hot plate, Jurn dived for the stairs and made a frantic sprawl to the bottom, luck alone saving him from serious hurt.

When he regained his wind and his wits, he turned the flashlight up the stairs again. The door was the same as before; it hadn't suffered from the curious blast. Thinking it over, Jurn decided that the explosion, if such it happened to be, must have occurred some distance from the door. He wondered if Darwick's safe had gone off, and the thought roused his curiosity.

To nerve himself, Jurn drew a revolver and started up the stairs again. He gripped the doorknob firmly, gave it a bold twist, and went through. He blinked at sight of the front hall. Dimly lighted, it was quite unchanged from the time when Jurn had last seen it.

There was a glow from the curtained doorway on one side. Having come this far, Jurn decided to have a look into Darwick's office. Remembering the trapdoor in the floor, he looked for the hall switch. He saw that it was off, but then recalled that there was another switch inside the room.

Almost at the curtains, Jurn halted and recoiled. His manner was that of a man struck by sudden horror; an odd coincidence, for within the next few seconds that horror became real.

IN recoiling, Jurn shifted slightly past the edge of the curtains, getting a sudden preview of Darwick's office. Normally, Jurn would have hurriedly stepped from sight, but it did not prove necessary. There wasn't a chance that Darwick's eyes could spy the clumsy intruder. He wasn't looking in Jurn's direction.

Old Darwick was lying on the floor, halfway between his safe and the desk. He looked as though he had been caught in the middle of a turn, when something felled him. The peculiar twist of his body indicated that he had collapsed in a spiral manner, and his arms, thrust askew, were evidence that his outthrust hands hadn't been able to stop his fall.

His head across one elbow, Darwick's face was looking up from above a twisted neck. It was turned toward the side of the room, away from Jurn, but the man in the doorway could see that Darwick's eyes were glazed and sightless. Then, remembering the puny explosion that he had heard awhile before, Jurn moved into the room to look for something else.

Totally forgetful that the floor was trapped, Jurn went right across the danger spot, but it did not open beneath him. Fascinated by the grotesque figure by the desk, Jurn kept coming closer, until he was looking straight down at Darwick's body. Then Jurn saw it, the telltale splotch of crimson, half hidden by a scrawny elbow.

The coloration on Darwick's shirt front announced that the sound that Jurn had heard was a gunshot. Asaph Darwick had received a bullet through the heart, fired by a murderer who had been on the job while Jurn was still fumbling his way through the cellar.

Eyes lifting, Jurn looked at Darwick's safe. It was wide open and, except for a few scattered papers, was empty. None of those was thick enough to hide a massive volume that was paramount in Jurn's mind. Darwick's bound records had indeed become a Book of Death, for the volume was gone, along with the old man's slayer.

Death had reached Asaph Darwick, keeper of the strange book, before The Shadow could come to his aid!

CHAPTER IX. A QUESTION OF MURDER

DEATH, displayed in the person of Asaph Darwick, brought cold shivers to Otis Jurn. Not that Jurn minded the sight of dead bodies; on the contrary, he was well inured to them. Chasing around morgues to look at unidentified corpses was one of his fairly frequent duties.

But this wasn't a morgue, and there was no question as to the victim's identity. Nor was Jurn here under proper auspices. He was the first man to view the body after death had been done. He was in a house where he had forced an entry, and he was carrying a revolver in his hand. The situation did not appeal to Jurn at all.

As Jurn pictured it, he was in as bad a situation as the actual murderer; perhaps worse. His constant ability to poke into other people's affairs had resulted in a reverse twist; one that supplied a serious jolt. Though he knew that James Wilvern had been determined to acquire the book owned by Asaph Darwick, Jurn hadn't expected murder as the method.

Right now, Jurn's mind, muddled though it was, had begun to piece a few facts regarding Wilvern. All were fixed on the basis that Jurn had underrated the craftiness of his employer.

Wilvern, telling Jurn to get rid of men who handled guns! What a build-up! That phone call, too, with Wilvern bluntly stating he didn't want Jurn on hand at Darwick's—how it fixed matters, working either way!

If Jurn had actually left the neighborhood, he wouldn't have learned about Darwick's death when it occurred, and would have been in a receptive mood for any alibi that Wilvern might offer. Wilvern could have figured it like that; or —considering Wilvern's craft—Jurn's employer might have expected things to happen exactly as they had occurred.

Definitely, Otis Jurn was on the spot, and he couldn't kid himself out of it, as he did with most things.

Shakily withdrawing from the vicinity of Darwick's body, Jurn sought temporary security in a corner of the room. He chose a front corner because it was deeper, and there, an accusing voice spoke suddenly in his ear.

It said, "Meow."

Whipping away, Jurn saw Darwick's black cat, and the creature gave him a green-eyed stare that matched its accusing meow. Jurn didn't like the cat's color; it reminded him too much of a black-cloaked fighter who had loomed from nowhere the night when Jurn and his pals had been hounding Kerford.

That reminder of The Shadow caused Jurn to wheel about to see what was behind him. He was almost at the front window, which had a dawn blind, and as Jurn turned, again the specter of The Shadow reared before him.

Up from the window itself came the shape in black, silhouetted on the curtain, as though ready to burst through and take Jurn in a permanent clutch. Trembling, Jurn felt his knees give. He dropped to the floor,

whining, pleading for the cloaked avenger to show him mercy.

Then Jurn realized that he was bleating his innocence at nothing. He had seen a shadow, surely enough, but it was only his own, outlined against the window shade. Jurn gave a hollow laugh and arose, watching his own shadow come up with him. But his new courage was only temporary.

Jurn was riveted with the thought that he had done more than leave a wide trail behind him. By cowering toward that front window, with its light-colored blind, he had made himself visible from the street. Already, a police car might be stopping, its occupants wondering what was happening at Darwick's, the most important house on their beat.

Wildly, Jurn stumbled out into the hall; there, imbued by a frantic hope that he still might flee in time, he made for the nearest outlet, the front door itself.

As he opened that door, the quiet of the street calmed him. There wasn't a car in sight. The door was unlatched, which was a good point.

Stepping back inside, Jurn closed the door and polished its handle with a handkerchief. He was getting rid of Wilvern's traces, as well as his own, he was forced to admit, but that was all the better. After all, he was working for Wilvern, so he might as well cover up for his boss.

Wilvern paid handsome fees, whenever occasion called. If Jurn dropped in to see him and gave a noncommittal account of this adventure, leaving out all mention of his own chills, Wilvern might see fit to write out a very sizable check. Yes, it was Jurn's duty to cover up for Wilvern, and for himself, as well, since any trail to Jurn might lead on to Wilvern.

COOLLY, Jurn walked back into the office and looked at the body. He was startled when an old clock chimed in the hallway, but he controlled his nerves and listened as it tolled the hour of eight.

The sound ended with a click, which didn't worry Jurn. He had heard old-fashioned clocks act that way before. Quite calmly, he stooped to take a closer look at Darwick's body.

So far as Jurn could see, Wilvern hadn't left a trace of anything, except the bullet that had punctured Darwick's heart. If Wilvern had enough sense to use an unregistered gun, and get rid of it afterward, the bullet wouldn't count. That settled, Jurn's next job was to go out through the cellar, getting rid of any traces that would reveal his own entry.

With that thought, he arose from beside the body, this time watching his own shadow, chuckling at the fact that it would move away, too.

Jurn's chuckle didn't last.

The silhouette that he thought was his own stayed right where it was, glued tightly to the floor. Jurn's fingers went so numb that they hardly felt the coldness of his gun, when they found it in its pocket.

Even at that, the gun felt warm, for it was Jurn who really had the chill. His hand was shaking like a palm tree in a hurricane, when he came about to face an intruder who had stepped into the room.

Jurn saw a middle-aged man, whose face was thin, yet roundish. His nose was as inquisitive as Jurn's own, and the eyes above them looked watery, without any of the burn that Jurn identified with The Shadow's. Though his hand still shook, Jurn began to realize that this visitor couldn't be The Shadow, even in disguise.

The man must have entered as the clock was striking, which accounted for the click that Jurn had heard;

not from the clock, but from the front door. Eyeing the man, Jurn saw horror written on his face, and the sight of Darwick's body wasn't the only reason.

The man was almost petrified, it seemed, by the threat of Jurn's gun. His hands were moving upward, slowly and mechanically.

It occurred to Jurn who this man must be. Today, Asaph Darwick had gone to see a wealthy promoter named Norman Dempster. Jurn, himself, had mentioned that point when phoning Wilvern, together with the belief that Darwick might be expecting Dempster.

Yes, this was Dempster, and he had caught Jurn with the goods. Only, the burden of murder didn't lie on Jurn at all. Though he doubted that he could convince the law on that point, he felt that he could make one man believe it.

He wasn't starting right, by threatening Dempster. Such action made Jurn look all the more a murderer. So Jurn, always an opportunist, broke suddenly into a new routine.

"I didn't kill Darwick!" he insisted earnestly. "Look! I'll prove it." Lowering his revolver, Jurn fumbled with it and managed to crack the weapon open. "See? There's all the cartridges. None used. I'll show you."

He was pulling the cartridges from the chambers, and half of them slipped from his nervous fingers. Dempster still stood with raised arms, his expression doubtful even when he saw the bullets in the cartridges. His gun finally empty, Jurn gave a worried look at Dempster.

"Don't keep standing that way!" pleaded Jurn. "Don't you see—the gun's empty? Here—take it!"

Jurn thrust the revolver toward Dempster, who let his hands drop as he backed away. He seemed to still regard the gun as an incriminating factor, which didn't lessen Jurn's worry.

"I'm being honest with you, Mr. Dempster," insisted Jurn. "I've been framed, and I want you to know it."

CURIOSITY took effect on Dempster. He halted his slow retreat, and asked, with a puzzled stare:

"How do you know my name is Dempster?"

Jurn took a satisfied breath. When people began asking questions, he felt himself on solid ground. Nevertheless, Jurn didn't act too wisely. He was almost apologetic in his reply.

"It's my business to find out people's names," explained Jurn. "I'm a private investigator working for James Wilvern."

Dempster recognized Wilvern's name, but its mention puzzled him.

"Wilvern?" queried Dempster. "What had he to do with Darwick?"

"The old man showed him the big book," returned Jurn. "I guess you know about the book, Mr. Dempster, because you look like the kind of guy who would pay people what they deserve. But Wilvern isn't that sort. He wouldn't pay."

Dempster's expression showed a mingling of doubt and interest. Slowly, he said:

"Yes, I know about Darwick's ledger. I paid my debts this past week, and Darwick distributed the money. He stopped at my office today and left word that he could see me at eight this evening, if I returned.

"They informed me by long distance, and I decided to come in by plane, instead of taking a sleeper from Cleveland. I find Darwick lying dead, with you here ahead of me. Do I understand that someone was ahead of you?"

Jurn nodded, quite pleased. His pleasure ended when Dempster stepped over to the desk and reached for the telephone.

"I shall call the police," stated Dempster simply. "You can tell them your story, and I shall corroborate it, as far as I can."

Jurn made a frantic bound to the desk.

"No, no!" he protested. "Don't you see it's been planted on me by Wilvern? He wanted the book; he said so. He wanted to get rid of his own record, and maybe shake down other people." Jurn paused, then added: "People like you, Mr. Dempster."

"I called Wilvern, to let him know that Darwick was home. Wilvern told me to stay away, because he knew that while I was going some place else, I wouldn't have an alibi. Wilvern must have hopped here in a hurry and knocked off Darwick. I just happened to come in"—Jurn spread his hands hopelessly—"thinking nothing wrong, and now I've put myself in line for a murder rap."

Dempster hesitated, his hand just above the telephone. As the hand moved closer, Jurn shot another plea.

"Suppose I hadn't come in," he said. "Then you'd have walked right into it, Mr. Dempster. I told Wilvern I thought you might be coming over. Maybe the frame was meant for you, instead of me."

Dempster's hand came up, to stroke the chin above it. Jurn promptly played a trump card.

"Look there." Jurn pointed to the safe. "The big book is gone and we know that Wilvern took it. If Wilvern is going to spring the shakedown racket, he won't get rid of it unless he's in a jam."

"If we play smart, Wilvern will think he's sitting pretty. He won't know I'm working for you, instead of him. When I find out where he has the book, I'll let you know, and we can inform the police. They'll grab the book and have the goods on Wilvern."

One thing was certain: Dempster had begun to believe Jurn's story. He was debating whether he should forego his duty of reporting this case to the law, where a question of murder was concerned.

Watching Dempster, Jurn saw the man's thin features tighten into a grim expression. Dempster was staring at Darwick's pitiful form, and the sight was enough. Dempster's nod indicated that he was willing to let Jurn have a chance at trapping the old man's murderer.

"It may be the only way to insure justice," declared Dempster slowly, "On that account, I shall allow it, but for a limited time only."

"Then let's get out of here," put in Jurn quickly. "Come along, Mr. Dempster."

JURN reached the front door first. Opening it a mere two inches, he pressed the latch, then closed the door again, and turned to find Dempster standing puzzled.

"That will keep other people out," explained Jurn. "We'll leave by my route, through the cellar."

"Will that take us out to the rear street?" questioned Dempster. "I left my car there because I saw a

parking space."

"All the better," assured Jurn. "The sooner we get away from here, the quicker we can figure a way to bag Wilvern with the goods. Yes, this takes us to the rear street."

Silence filled the first floor of the old house as soon as the door to the cellar closed behind the departing visitors. A silence that seemed to filter through the entire mansion and spread like a hovering shroud.

The only factor that offset the sinister gloom was the dim light that trickled through the shades of Darwick's front windows. The glow indicated that the owner of the mansion was at home, and at work.

Such was the sight that greeted a new arrival who came along the front street; a figure whose glide carried him from one stretch of darkness to another, so that his passage was constantly invisible.

He preferred gloom as an aid to secret progress, and this being was not the sort to be long deceived by the trickling light from Darwick's premises.

Though Jurn and his new friend, Dempster, had left by the rear route, The Shadow was on the brink of important discoveries within this old house where Asaph Darwick had lived and died!

CHAPTER X. THE SHADOW VANISHES

FILTERING like a compact cloud of blackish smoke, The Shadow trailed an invisible path up the front steps to Darwick's big door. There, his gloved hand settled on the knob and turned it with a squeeze so expert that not the slightest click occurred.

The knob yielded for a trifling space, then stopped hard against The Shadow's pressure. It was latched from the inside, a fact which, on the surface, indicated that Darwick, though at home, expected no visitors.

Darwick was certainly at home. On the way here, The Shadow had profited by a traffic jam, dropping from Moe's cab to make a quick call to Burbank. Having learned that Harry Vincent had just reported Darwick's return, The Shadow had ordered Harry off duty, and then resumed his cab trip.

Unfortunately, the traffic jam had worked ill as well as good. Disregarding other possible complications, it meant that Kerford could have reached this destination well ahead of The Shadow, even allowing the lawyer only a few minutes' start from the Graymoor Building.

Kerford could be more than ten minutes in advance, according to The Shadow's calculations, and much could happen in that span of time. Indeed, much had happened in less than ten minutes. Jurn's discovery of Darwick's body, his meeting with Dempster and their mutual departure had all been packed into the fraction of an hour.

Finding the big door barred, The Shadow took a careful look at Darwick's front windows. Considering the happenings on Kerford's previous visit, there was a chance that Darwick had purposely latched the door, if the lawyer had dropped in this evening. That chance was amplified by the fact that Kerford regarded himself a hunted man and would probably insist on precautions.

If the two were cloistered in the office, the windows would offer a vantage spot from which to look in on them, but the light was a bad factor, and the bars across the windows a preventive to further access.

The one sure route into Darwick's was The Shadow's old one, through the rear window of the cellar, but he still had hope of finding a shorter way.

Dropping from the high steps, The Shadow landed in the basement entry just below. There, he found barred windows and a door which was obviously bolted, from the way it refused to budge to pressure when applied. Turning, The Shadow swung up beside the steps; then, as suddenly, dropped back again.

A car had just swung the corner and the angle was such that its headlights threw a brilliant beam upon the steps. The Shadow was gone by the moment the glare reached him, and he was moving up again as soon as it had passed. Then, more easily, The Shadow eased down again.

The arriving car was a cab, and it was stopping directly in front of Darwick's.

From the cab stepped a man who reached in his pocket for some change, then told the driver to wait awhile. His voice was testy, louder than the wheezes of the panting cab motor, and when he turned about, the man showed his face. The Shadow promptly recognized the passenger from the cab.

That broad face, heavy of jowl and bristly of brow, was well known in the financial circles which The Shadow frequented as Cranston. The arrival at Darwick's was James Wilvern, the big industrialist.

It didn't even require guesswork to put Wilvern in his category. The Shadow knew the source of Wilvern's initial fortune, and could well classify him as a man whose pages formed a thick batch in Darwick's ledger. Indeed, they could well be the very batch that Darwick had passed over, that day in Dempster's office.

Wilvern wasn't the sort who would loosen his hold on bundles of cash to please an old man's whim; nor was he liberal enough in mind to believe that Darwick's proposition lacked a catch. At best, Wilvern's visit meant that he was here to argue Darwick into passing over pages from the ledger; at worst, it might result in threat, or more.

PACING back and forth beside his cab, Wilvern kept watching the corner and, after a few minutes, another cab rolled into sight.

From it sprang a tall, weak-faced man, who almost lost his nose glasses as he stumbled. Nervously, the arrival thrust a brief case into Wilvern's hands, saying:

"Here are the papers you wanted, Mr. Wilvern."

"And you took long enough bringing them, Talbot," growled Wilvern in basso fashion. "I told you to have them here when I arrived."

"But I had to gather them, sir, and besides, I knew it would take you some time to get here from the office."

"I didn't call you from the office!" stormed Wilvern. "I called you from the club, which is much closer. If you had listened, you would have heard me mention the fact, you dullard!"

"But really, Mr. Wilvern -"

"Bah!"

With that interruption, Wilvern opened the brief case and drew some papers into the light. Though still grumbling, he conceded that Talbot had at least brought the right ones.

"After all, Talbot," declared Wilvern, "you are no worse than Jurn. He was to call me at the office or the club, but I didn't hear from him at either place."

The reference to Jurn gave The Shadow a new link. Harry had forgotten to report that the private investigator had an office in the Graymoor Building. Wilvern's naming of Jurn did not supply the missing fact, but it accounted for Jurn's activities since The Shadow had last heard of the fellow, some months ago.

Wilvern had evidently subsidized the private dick and was keeping him constantly busy. Recalling some unethical details from Jurn's past, The Shadow could picture the dapper dick as the instigator of the attack on Kerford, outside the latter's apartment. Jurn had plenty of acquaintances in circles where the members were too careless with their guns.

While The Shadow was reflecting thus, Wilvern turned, as if to dismiss the cabs; then, changing his mind, he decided to keep them both.

"My business with Darwick may be brief," declared Wilvern. "I shall show him these papers which my attorney prepared, and leave him copies, if he wishes them. You may come with me, Talbot."

Wilvern strode up the steps, almost past The Shadow's shoulder, with Talbot following. Gesturing toward the doorbell, Wilvern let the secretary press it. A distant tinkle answered, but there was no other response. Again, Talbot pressed the button.

Still no response. After a third attempt, Talbot reached to try the doorknob, only to be stopped by the sudden clamp of Wilvern's hand. Wilvern gestured toward the cabs, where motors were still running and taximeters merrily clicking up the fares.

"Come, Talbot!" boomed Wilvern. "If Darwick does not wish visitors, we shall not disturb him. I shall return to the club in my cab, and you can dismiss yours when you reach the nearest subway station."

ANOTHER car was nosing around the corner as the two men entered their separate cabs. Slightly up from the steps, The Shadow wasn't aware of it until the headlights shone upon him, for he had shifted to watch Wilvern and Talbot. The glow came across the steps, and the moment that its glare burnished the brownstone, The Shadow dropped from sight.

He watched for the new car to pass the cabs, but it failed to do so. As soon as the two cabs had gone, The Shadow took another look across the steps and saw the car again. It was a coupe, and it had stopped just short of Darwick's house, behind the spot where the cabs had been stationed.

That car could well have come from only a few blocks away. Perhaps it contained Otis Jurn, whose love of snoopery might have caused him to forget the call that he should have made to Wilvern. On the contrary, it might be someone who was keeping tabs on Darwick's house and had been in the neighborhood when the two cabs appeared.

The Shadow definitely mistrusted Wilvern and the statements the financier had made. They sounded something like an alibi, particularly because Wilvern couldn't have come all the way from his club by cab, considering the small change that he had first offered the cabby.

His reference to the subway could mean that he used it himself, and had picked up the cab from the nearest station. It could also signify that Wilvern had been here earlier, and had staged the later arrival for Talbot's benefit.

In considering Wilvern's status, The Shadow did not forget the car that had just arrived. Its lights were out, and whoever occupied it might be on watch. The Shadow eased across the steps, to reach the darkness on the other side, from which he could skirt to the coupe unseen. If he found it empty, he would then search for the prowler who had left it.

The Shadow's hand, probing across the step, encountered something that shifted. Before he could twist back, The Shadow saw light amid the darkness.

The light was produced by the jolt that reached The Shadow's skull. It was delivered with a metallic object that had the hardness of a gun butt. The light splashed like a sunburst, and then was gone, The Shadow's senses with it. The skull-jarring blow carried solid sleep with it. The Shadow settled limply, rolled over to the step below and tumbled to the sidewalk.

His attacker dropped back as a light swung the corner. A patrol car passed, its lights riding right over The Shadow's supine form. Neither of the officers in the car saw the figure in black. They slackened speed only to glance at the lights in Darwick's front window.

"The old boy's home," one remarked. "Look like he's up for another of his all-night sessions."

"Yeah," said the other, "and sometimes he leaves those lights burn all day. We used to tell him, but he said not to bother him. He'd rather sleep late and pay the light bill."

As the patrol car rolled ahead, a crouched figure crept from beside the house steps and reached the coupe. Easing the car forward, the man stopped, directly in front of Darwick's and turned on the parking lights. His face was disclosed as he stooped toward the dashboard.

The Shadow's attacker was Blaine Kerford.

Alighting again, the burly lawyer opened the rear trunk compartment. Then, groping beside the car, he found the cloaked figure that lay there. Demonstrating the same strength that he had shown when encountering Jurn, Kerford heaved The Shadow over his shoulder and dumped him in the commodious compartment.

With a slam, Kerford brought the trunk lid down and turned its latch handle. Stepping quickly from the glow of the central taillight, the lawyer hurried back into his car.

KERFORD drove west across town and reached a ferry. During the trip over to New Jersey, he walked back past the line of cars and noted that the latch handle was at an angle. He didn't bother to twist it farther. He didn't want to be seen fussing around the trunk compartment.

Traffic lights delayed Kerford's trip in Jersey. Each time one halted him, he glared back through the rear window, but didn't get a real view of the trunk compartment. He was anxious to reach the open road, and when he did, he raced the car at a terrific pace.

The road Kerford followed was twisty and narrow, but it was paved and he knew it well, hence felt confident that high speed was safe. He overlooked the fact that there were others who didn't know the road as well as he did, particularly a truck driver who was using the road for a detour.

Kerford met the truck near a bridge too narrow for the two machines to pass. Confronted by the sudden loom of headlights, Kerford jammed his brakes, hoping to stop before he reached the bridge.

He failed. The coupe was careening madly as the bridge timbers took its weight. It grazed one flimsy rail and took a sideswing over to the other. There was a crash of woodwork, a big jounce as a rear wheel mounted a lengthwise beam that served as a guard.

There, the car halted on the bridge edge, with Kerford half blinded by big lights right in front of his face. The trucker had managed to stop on his own side of the bridge, though unable to leave enough space for the coupe to pass him.

Hearing angry accusations from the truck, Kerford leaned from the coupe window and spread his hands in apology, as he called:

"My fault! Sorry!"

Mollified, the trucker backed away and Kerford drove slowly past him. He'd gone a dozen miles or more when a betraying thump told him that his rear tire must have been pinched, or picked up a nail from the guard timber.

Kerford's angry snarl was inspired by the recollection that he'd been in too much hurry to have air put in a deflated spare when he picked up his car from a garage near the Graymoor Building.

There was an old dirt road ahead and Kerford wheeled into it. Getting out of the car, he pondered; then nodded to himself. He hadn't far to go, and he could take a short cut along the dirt road. Carrying The Shadow as a burden wouldn't bother Kerford. He could leave the car right where it was, and come back for it in the morning.

From his pocket, he drew the weapon which he had used to slug The Shadow. It wasn't a gun, but it had answered quite as well for Kerford's purpose. The thing was a monkey wrench, compact but sturdy, and Kerford intended to use it again if his cloaked prisoner had recuperated sufficiently to make trouble.

Monkey wrench poised in one hand, Kerford gripped the handle of the trunk compartment with the other. He gave a dramatic upward sweep, followed by a forward lunge. No fighter cramped in the compartment could have offset so sudden an attack. In fact, The Shadow didn't even try to resist it.

The Shadow couldn't have, because he wasn't there! Kerford's lurch carried him into the compartment itself, where he caught himself against the flat spare tire and finished with a stare as vacant as the trunk compartment.

Blaine Kerford had heard talk of The Shadow and his mysterious ways. From now on, Kerford would need no argument to convince him. Somehow, somewhere, dead or alive, The Shadow had vanished from a latched trunk compartment, to the confusion of the foeman who had captured him single-handed!

CHAPTER XI. BACK TO LIFE

IT was noon and James Wilvern, seated behind the big desk in his private office, had just sent Talbot out to lunch. Stepping to the rear door of the office, Wilvern opened it and admitted Otis Jurn. He didn't give the dapper man a chance to speak. Instead, Wilvern snapped bluntly:

"You didn't phone me, yesterday evening."

Jurn couldn't answer right away. Wilvern's bluntness ruined the whole set-up. It was Jurn's plan to ask Wilvern why he hadn't come to Darwick's, and then wait, with a wise look, while his employer fished for an answer.

Instead, Jurn was doing the fishing, particularly because of Wilvern's tone. Wilvern had a habit of telling Jurn that he hadn't met this person, or seen that thing happen, just as a reminder that certain matters were to be forgotten. He also had a way of putting questions in the same manner.

While Jurn debated, Wilvern added to the dapper man's confusion.

"Don't stare at me like Talbot!" stormed Wilvern. "I expect you to show sense, Jurn. I waited here, then went to the club and waited there until eight o'clock. Finally, I went to Darwick's, only to find he wasn't home!"

Jurn withheld a smile. He could see that Wilvern was building a neat alibi, provided that the phone call remained forgotten. It was best to play along with Wilvern.

"Darwick didn't come home," said Jurn. "That's why I didn't phone you. You said to call when Darwick showed up. Remember?"

Wilvern remembered, and nodded. Jurn let his smile display itself. He'd taken Wilvern's cue and added a gag that bettered it. Good policy, because it might cause Wilvern to loosen and become confidential. But Wilvern simply dismissed the subject with a wave.

"I intended to deliver these to Darwick," Wilvern said, gesturing to a stack of papers on the desk. "My lawyer prepared them, and when Darwick sees them, he'll hand me my pages and the rest of the book with them.

"The old fool has put himself in line for a blackmail indictment by the Federal authorities. My testimony is all they'll need to track down Darwick's operations, which are actually illegal, despite all his blubber about restitution.

"Still, there are other fools who would sympathize with him, and I'm not anxious to be censured. So I'll talk terms with Darwick and make him listen. He's old and doddering, and I wouldn't want anything to happen to him."

Privately, Jurn was quite sure that nothing could happen to Darwick beyond what Wilvern had already done. But Jurn didn't express that opinion. The way matters had turned, Jurn intended to sit tight, because he knew that breaks would come.

Not that Jurn was feeling very chipper about the breaks, because he could see himself adversely involved, though he was positive that Wilvern's situation would be worse than his own.

In considering the future, there was just one thing that Jurn really feared: that was The Shadow's reentry into the case. Whoever and wherever The Shadow was, he loomed as a dangerous figure in the Darwick case.

At that moment, The Shadow was thinking of the case in terms of Darwick's mansion, specifically the coal bin in the cellar. He was wondering why the coal was so badly scattered, and why the cellar was partly flooded.

Opening his eyes, The Shadow saw daylight, though it had the gloom that would be found within a cellar. He tried to rise and his hand slipped from a chunk of coal that was so huge, in comparison to those about it, as to excite his suspicion.

In fact, it turned out not to be a lump of coal. It was a stone, like the other chunks.

Nor did the timbers beside The Shadow represent the doorway of the bin. They were too heavy and too far spaced. They were the supports of a bridge that reared twenty feet above, and The Shadow was lying hidden in its shelter, by the bed of a creek, which accounted for the illusion of a flooded cellar.

Occasional cars were passing over the bridge, but none of their occupants saw the black-cloaked figure below. How he had arrived here, how long he had lain here, The Shadow did not know, but he realized that his luck in Darwick's cellar had been repeated.

This spot was quite as snug a hideaway as the bin full of coal, and more comfortable, despite the stones that propped The Shadow's elbows and the water that flowed about his knees.

Piecing together facts, The Shadow recalled Wilvern's arrival at Darwick's and the mystery coupe that had come later. It wasn't difficult to establish the next sequence. Whoever had slugged The Shadow must have come from the coupe, and carried his prisoner away in it.

Then The Shadow's fingers found a jagged rent in his cloak, and felt grease that the flowing stream had failed to wash off.

The Shadow knew the rest. He'd ridden in trunk compartments before. The system which The Shadow used to leave such roosts had been unwittingly applied by his captor. The Shadow's cloak had jammed in the catch of the trunk compartment.

Something must have jolted the car, so that the partly fastened catch had released itself. Looking up, The Shadow saw the partly splintered bridge rail. It accounted for the opening of the trunk compartment and The Shadow's departure from the same.

Whoever had been driving the car had probably gone on a long way before he found that his prisoner was missing. Too far to turn back and run the risk of finding The Shadow restored to an avenging power.

The Shadow debated the demerits to two names: those of Blaine Kerford and Otis Jurn.

From the facts that The Shadow already knew, Kerford could have gone ahead to Darwick's. He could even have had a brief interview with the old recluse, and then patrolled the neighborhood. He could have picked up his own car almost anywhere along the way.

Having received no evidence of Darwick's death, The Shadow could still classify Kerford as a hunted man. Even his assault upon The Shadow did not ruin Kerford's status. Matters had been badly mixed, that night outside of Kerford's apartment. The lawyer might regard The Shadow as an enemy of his own, and Darwick's, particularly after spotting him outside Darwick's house.

Having made due allowance for Kerford, The Shadow considered Jurn. The dapper man had reason to be around Darwick's. Jurn was working for Wilvern, and keeping tabs on Darwick was part of the job.

Though Jurn was definitely a lightweight, he could have delivered a hard blow with a lethal missile. As for getting The Shadow into the back of the coupe, Jurn might have had a companion to help him. The Shadow had received the jolt on his head before looking into the parked car.

Rising slowly, The Shadow slumped. His knee was hurt, one arm felt weak, and his head whirled dizzily. He managed to slide off the torn cloak. Noting that it was almost completely rent, The Shadow finished the tear and sent the pieces floating down the stream. His slouch hat was battered and grimy, so he sent it on the same voyage. He had other such outfits available, and would tell Harry Vincent to bring one.

The thing was to reach a telephone and call Harry in New York. Though he looked dazed and his clothes were muddy, The Shadow now wore the outward appearance of Lamont Cranston, and had plenty of money in his pocket. Personality and cash would go a long way; but The Shadow intended to go a long way first.

Instead of climbing up to the bridge head, he started down the stream, hoping to find another road, though the hunt might be laborious and slow. It certainly wouldn't do to reappear, even as Cranston, upon a road where any passing car might contain foemen on the lookout for him.

The Shadow preferred to look for others, himself. Two others: Kerford and Jurn. If he couldn't find the slippery lawyer, he could certainly locate the dapper investigator.

So The Shadow supposed, not yet knowing that Jurn had found Darwick stretched motionless in his own house, under conditions which smacked of murder. As much as Wilvern, Jurn had reason to slip from sight at a moment's notice.

LATER that afternoon, Jurn demonstrated his wariness. He was waiting in an obscure corner of the hotel where Norman Dempster lived, and when he saw his new friend enter, Jurn immediately slid to a stairway and went up.

Dempster made a faster trip by elevator, and was in his fourth-floor room when Jurn knocked warily at the door.

Admitting Jurn, Dempster closed the door, then started to question him:

"How did you make out with Wilvern?"

"Not at all," confessed Jurn sourly. "The guy beat me to every punch. He even bluffed about the phone call."

"Couldn't you talk him into becoming confidential?"

Jurn shook his head. He watched Dempster do the same.

"Bad business, this," said Dempster. "I've given you a whole day, Jurn, with no results. It's time that Darwick's death was reported to the law."

"It mustn't be!" argued Jurn. "I'll get results with Wilvern. He's smart, that's all."

"No one is too smart to beat the law," asserted Dempster. "Once a murderer is known, his path can lead only to exposure. We know that Wilvern murdered Darwick. That is enough."

Reaching forward pleadingly, Jurn gripped Dempster's arm. Jurn still wanted to argue.

"Listen, Mr. Dempster," he began. "I told you how foxy old Darwick was, with that trapdoor of his, and the trick safe with the three dials, and maybe a lot of other gadgets."

"Well?"

"Well, don't you see that Wilvern is even foxier?" added Jurn. "If he wasn't, he wouldn't have been able to knock off Darwick and get the big book."

Though Dempster was in a very sober mood, he couldn't help but smile at Jurn's fallacy. Nevertheless, Jurn's plea was ardent enough to impress him.

"I'm going back to see Wilvern," insisted Jurn. "Maybe this time he'll let his hair down. If he does, I'll phone you right away."

Dempster consulted his watch. Glancing from the window, he observed that it was almost dusk. Deciding that Wilvern would not remain long in his office, Dempster spoke final terms.

"I shall give you one hour," he told Jurn. "If Wilvern does not come directly to the point, leave him and go to Darwick's. Wait across the street until I arrive with the police."

"You mean you're going to call them?"

"Exactly!" replied Dempster. "And I shall tell them everything, including the circumstances under which I

met you."

"They won't listen, Mr. Dempster. They -"

"They will when I tell them that you are to meet us at Darwick's. When they find you there, they will be inclined to believe your story."

Jurn's eyes began to perform in darty fashion. He was giving away his thoughts: how easily he could take to flight and let Dempster's story remain unsupported. But Jurn was canny enough to realize that Dempster, who had receipts from Darwick relating to personal gifts involving two hundred thousand dollars, would immediately place himself above suspicion.

With those receipts, Dempster also had his own pages from Darwick's ledger, and could call upon the people to whom he had been a benefactor.

Flight would only ruin Jurn's own cause, and he knew it. At least, Dempster trusted him and would be able to speak in his behalf. Jurn's revolver, reloaded with its unfired cartridges, was in Dempster's possession, along with other evidence. So Jurn took the honest choice.

"I'll be there, Mr. Dempster," he promised. "Out side of Darwick's in an hour."

DEMPSTER clapped a reassuring hand upon Jurn's shoulder and steered the investigator from the room. Feeling more at ease, Jurn went downstairs by elevator and headed directly to the Graymoor Building. Arriving there, he learned that Wilvern had left.

A call to Wilvern's club producing no response, Jurn accepted the inevitable. He went straight to Darwick's house and began a nervous pacing on the sidewalk opposite. He could see the lights still burning in Darwick's office, and knew that they had been glowing all day. But they were small solace against the ordeal that Jurn anticipated, after the police arrived.

A cab swung in from the corner and stopped in front of Darwick's house. Pausing, Jurn expected to see Dempster step from it, perhaps with the police commissioner in person; though, in that case, they should rate an official car. However, no one stepped from the cab except the driver, and he went up the steps of Darwick's house, to ring the doorbell.

Jurn decided to let the cabby keep on ringing; then accost him before he left. Rather grimly, Jurn reflected that the fellow would do a lot of ringing before that door was answered.

This happened to be another time when one of Jurn's ideas went wrong. The first ring produced an immediate response. Before Jurn's astonished gaze, the lights in Darwick's office extinguished themselves!

Then, while Jurn stood gaping amid the gathering dusk, the front door opened and a familiar figure stepped in view. It was that of a stoop-shouldered man, muffled to the nose, his shocky white hair poking out beneath the brim of a derby hat.

In one thick-gloved hand the old man carried an unnecessary cane, which he waved toward the cab. Beneath his other arm, the elderly gentleman gripped a time-worn portfolio that bulged with the bulk of a heavy book. His step was spry as he followed the cabby to the cab.

Entering the vehicle, the old man rapped the window with his cane and the cab pulled away, leaving Jurn on the other curb, more dumfounded than ever before. He'd seen enough, Jurn had, to be sure that he had not witnessed the passage of a ghost.

Otis Jurn had seen old Asaph Darwick, come back to life, starting forth upon another of his strange expeditions to visit someone whose name was registered in the Book of Death!

CHAPTER XII. CRIME'S NEW GOAL

FRANTICALLY, Otis Jurn was dialing numbers in a drugstore phone booth, a few blocks from Darwick's. He'd tried Dempster's hotel, only to find that his friend had left. A call to the office produced no answer. There was another number, however, that Jurn, at Dempster's suggestion, had listed in a notebook.

Dempster had mentioned it as the number of his nephew's apartment, where he often stopped off between his office and his hotel. It had formerly been Dempster's own apartment, and he was always welcome there. Dialing the number, Jurn hoped that his last chance wouldn't drop with a returned nickel.

It didn't.

Not only was the call answered, but the responding voice was Dempster's. Its tone, however, almost shattered Jurn's roused hopes.

"So it's you, Jurn," spoke Dempster wearily. "I thought you'd make a last-minute attempt to reach me, and start a new argument. That's why I came here, but I just remembered that I'd given you this phone number. It's no use, Jurn -"

"Listen, won't you?" pleaded Jurn. "You can't go to the police, Mr. Dempster!"

"What is it now?" demanded Dempster. "A threat? I warn you, Jurn, you can't make a fool out of me!"

"But you'll make a fool out of yourself," Jurn retorted, "if you tell the police that Darwick is dead. I just saw him, alive!"

There was a long pause from the other end; then Dempster put his decision in positive terms.

"Such a statement is preposterous!" he declared. "I shall still go to the police, and when we reach Darwick's, I shall count upon finding you there."

The whole thing suddenly struck Jurn as funny. The laugh he gave was genuine, and Dempster heard it. Unable to picture Jurn finding the situation funny, Dempster demanded the reason for the laugh.

"You'll find out when you get to Darwick's," Jurn told him, still laughing. "You won't find me there, and you won't find Darwick. He's left the dump, I tell you!"

Dempster began to be convinced. His tone came slowly, rather puzzled:

"But we both saw Darwick dead in -"

"Did we?" inserted Jurn. "I told you the old guy was foxy. He faked that murder scene!"

"For what reason, Jurn?"

"He hoped Wilvern would drop around, and wanted to scare the daylights out of him, so he left the safe door open, with the book gone, and lay there on the floor with red ink over his shirt front."

As he talked, Jurn realized the merit of his theory. He remembered that Dempster had been out of town, and that Darwick couldn't have been sure that he would arrive. Even if Dempster had arrived, Darwick could have dropped the sham pose of death.

With Jurn arriving first, Darwick had reason to go through with it, even when Dempster appeared later. Apparently, those points were driving home to Dempster, for he suddenly questioned:

"Didn't you mention a restaurant where Darwick ate?"

"The Cafe Regent," returned Jurn; then, eagerly, he added: "Say— maybe his nibs is there now! You might drop around and take a look yourself, Mr. Dempster."

"I prefer that you should go," stated Dempster, "and find out, if possible, where Darwick is going next."

"And then call you?"

"Yes, but not right away. Leave that vicinity, so Darwick won't see you. Call Wilvern first, in keeping with your usual reports, and tell him where Darwick has gone. Then call me, because I shall go there"—Dempster's tone was emphatic—"and so will you, Jurn. It is time we had a showdown on this very odd business."

RIDING to the Cafe Regent, Jurn pondered on the "very odd business" and agreed that Dempster's term had merit. It was easy to analyze Dempster's reactions. He doubted Jurn; felt piqued at Darwick; and, most important, still regarded Wilvern as a potential murderer.

Obviously, Dempster wanted to see Darwick alive. He preferred to have Jurn at hand, in case Darwick did not appear; while if the old man did, it would really mean a chance for a showdown, if Wilvern happened to be present.

Once Darwick explained himself, Dempster, of course, would forgive the prank of the night before. Thinking of that prank, Jurn suddenly came to the conviction that Darwick, warned, perhaps, by Kerford, had actually expected Wilvern to visit his house and try to murder him. Nothing could so throw cold water on a would-be murderer as finding his victim already dead.

Amid that conflict, Jurn was still hedge-hopping, not knowing at whose base he should eventually land: Wilvern's or Dempster's. At least, he felt relieved when he reached the Cafe Regent and looked through its front window, to see old Asaph Darwick huddled over a bowl of milk toast in a far corner.

As Jurn watched, Darwick wiped his mouth with a napkin, drew up his muffler as he raised his head, and turned toward a phone booth near the cashier's desk.

Moving across the street, Jurn saw the muffled man pay his check and come out. He'd had the derby on his head, even while eating, and now, through those glasses that were the only visible portion of his profile, Darwick was darting birdlike glances in search of a cab.

He was carrying cane and portfolio, and when a cab stopped, its driver was birdlike, too, in the way he hopped out to help Darwick into the vehicle.

While the spry old man was pushing the cabby aside, Jurn slid around the rear of the cab and listened. Darwick was saying something through the window, and the driver was repeating it, with nods.

"Yeah, mister, I hear you," he said. "You want to get to Mr. Blanning's at Holmwood, Long Island... Seth Blanning, you say?... Yeah, I know the way to Holmwood... No, I don't know where the Blanning house is, but we'll find out when we get to Holmwood -"

Remembering that Darwick had very keen eyes, Jurn hastened back to the next corner, saw a drugstore a block away and headed for it. He called Wilvern's club, found that his employer was expected shortly, so said that he would call again.

Meanwhile, Jurn tried Dempster's hotel. Finding that Dempster hadn't arrived, he tried Wilvern's club, and gained results. Wilvern was there, and was very pleased to hear the report on Darwick.

"I take it that Blanning is to become another blackmail victim," spoke Wilvern tartly. "Therefore, it is my duty to be present when Darwick meets him. I shall see you later, Jurn."

Jurn noted that Wilvern showed no surprise whatever at hearing about Darwick, which spiked a slight notion, held by Jurn, that Wilvern might also have viewed the pretended dead man between Jurn's hearing of the shot and his discovery of the body. Still, Wilvern was always an expert at covering up any surprise.

Phoning the hotel and finding that Dempster had arrived, Jurn gave him the same news regarding Darwick's destination, and again promised to appear. Wilvern's statement, that he would see Jurn later, gave the investigator sufficient excuse to go to Blanning's.

Indeed, Jurn was beginning to elate over the existing situation. Wilvern, the money grasper; Dempster, the benefactor, were men of contradictory breeds. The more they disputed over Darwick's policies, the greater their individual need for Jurn's services.

Already subsidized by Wilvern, the tight-fisted member of the rival pair, Jurn took it for granted that he could talk a liberal giver like Dempster into paying handsome fees. It would take cash, in sizable lumps, to keep Jurn working, now that the danger of a murder rap had passed.

But this time Jurn had completely forgotten Blaine Kerford, and had even come to the conclusion that The Shadow was too busy with other matters to bother about the Darwick proposition.

If he'd really guessed how matters stood between those two, The Shadow and Kerford, Jurn would have given up his idea of a trip to Long Island.

ON the same ferry that Kerford had used a previous night, a silent, elusive figure was stalking among the cars that were ranked on board for the short trip from New Jersey into Manhattan. The Shadow had contacted Harry Vincent, and his agent had brought him back, by car, along the probable route that Kerford had used to reach the old bridge.

Since dusk, each load of cars had come under The Shadow's personal scrutiny. With their lights off while they were in transit, the lines of automobiles were shrouded by the darkness of the ferry's interior, giving The Shadow perfect scope for operations.

This trip, as bells were clanging the arrival at the Manhattan ferry slip, The Shadow looked through the window of a coupe and saw the face he sought: that of Blaine Kerford. A moment later only gloom remained where The Shadow had been.

Taking a stairway to the unused upper deck, The Shadow stepped across a chain and reached for a raised gangplank on the dock. Swinging ashore, he preceded the cars that came from the ferry. On the street, the black-cloaked figure suddenly merged itself with the darkness of a waiting automobile.

Harry Vincent was at the wheel. His first knowledge that his chief had joined him came when Harry heard a whispered tone describing a car that would be coming from the ferry. The car was Kerford's, and Harry picked it up immediately. From then on, The Shadow gave the orders.

He kept Harry well enough behind, so that Kerford did not spot the trailing car. At that, The Shadow had another ace in reserve, proving that his strategy was double-barreled.

Moe's cab was trailing Harry's car, and the cab was so far behind Kerford that the pursued man couldn't

possibly notice it.

Should Kerford show symptoms of suspicion regarding Harry, a simple signal from the latter's tail lights would bring Moe to the chase, with The Shadow transferring when the cab went ahead. Thus Kerford, satisfied that a trailer had dropped off, would merely have another tailing his car.

Just as Kerford preferred the ferry because it was on his direct route from New Jersey, so did he favor a bridge to Long Island, rather than the Midtown Tunnel. Soon he was driving across the East River, with a car and a cab still members of an outstretched procession which the lawyer himself headed.

Kerford's present route was more than a mere coincidence, though The Shadow was not yet acquainted with the fact. Kerford was bound for the same destination as Wilvern, Dempster and Jurn.

He was going to the home of Seth Blanning, a man with whom Asaph Darwick had planned important business. Next after Wilvern and Dempster, the name of Blanning was registered in Darwick's vellum-bound volume.

Perhaps that ledger could no longer be termed a Book of Death, considering that Otis Jurn had seen Asaph Darwick again among the living. But there was an equal chance that it would regain its sinister title this evening.

With so many persons of conflicting purposes converging upon a given spot, Blanning's home could well become a goal of crime, despite the approach of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XIII. THE CHANGED DEAL

SETH BLANNING was an elderly man who lived alone and looked it. Until recently, he had been even more of a recluse than Asaph Darwick, for Blanning had even shunned the surroundings of the city and chosen a forgotten house on the shore of Long Island Sound.

Though within the limits of New York City, Blanning's home was truly isolated. It occupied a small promontory, jutting into the Sound, but was reached by an old-fashioned carriage drive that curved in from one set of massive gates and went out through another pair.

Blanning had servants, but they lived in a remote section of his rambling old house and saw him but seldom. They were old retainers, hired during Blanning's palmier days, and they lived on what amounted to a pension basis. When visitors came, Blanning often answered the door himself, so he could personally order them off the premises.

This night, when the doorbell rang, Blanning received a real surprise. Answering it, he blinked across the threshold at the shaggy-haired, muffled man who stood there.

"Asaph Darwick," exclaimed Blanning. "I've been expecting you. Come right in!"

Blanning extended a withery hand as a greeting from one hermit to another, and Darwick accepted it without removing his glove. They reached a tidy little living room, where Blanning invited his visitor to sit down. Darwick's shaggy head responded with a shake.

"You won't like this visit, Seth," came his slow, precise words. "Let us make it as brief as possible."

"Nonsense!" rejoined Blanning. "Open your portfolio and let me see the book. I've been counting on this for years!"

Darwick was taken quite aback. He fumbled with the portfolio as he tried to open it, so Blanning took it

from him. Nodding as he noted the empty pages, Blanning remarked:

"You've been doing quite well, Asaph. Ah! Here are my pages. I recognize them."

Eyes like little beads were glittering through Darwick's spectacles. Blanning's reaction to the ledger was quite different from that of the men previously visited by Darwick. Blanning saw it, and gave a short chuckle.

"You're becoming forgetful, Asaph," he said. "Why, before Alec Munston and I had our famous falling out, he and I were the closest of friends. That was before you ever met him, wasn't it?"

Blanning watched Darwick ponder, before the visitor finally nodded.

"It was just like Alec," continued Blanning, "to have you dig up facts regarding my fortune, after he and I disagreed. He simply wanted to justify himself, and he thought he actually had, until we become friends again.

"Then, one night"—Blanning paused, his fingers hitting a page of the great book—"he showed me this volume, with my own record in among the others. I laughed at him and do you know why?"

Blanning's own eyes sharpened as he put the query. They were trying to pierce the dark glasses that so constantly veiled Darwick's own gaze. Failing, Blanning simply waited until Darwick shook his head.

"You don't know, Asaph?" questioned Blanning. He closed the book, and his gaze showed sympathy. "You should know, because of what I told you about Alec the last time you came here. You remember that, of course."

Since Darwick merely stared stiffly, Blanning wasn't sure that he did remember.

"I told you that Alec's own fortune was tainted," declared Blanning, "and that sharp practice was his favorite nourishment. You were honest in compiling these records, yes. But Alec used them to suit his own purposes. What I said to you was nothing more than what I often said to Alec himself."

DARWICK stepped forward and spread the pages of the book. He was back in form as he methodically counted up the balance which Blanning owed.

Seated, Blanning kept smiling all the while, and finally began to gesture about the room.

"You like the place, tidy like this?" he queried. Then, when Darwick did not answer: "It wasn't this way the last time you came. My niece is visiting me and she is responsible. Bah!" Blanning suddenly showed annoyance. "She'll be after me, next!"

Blanning spread the shabby coat that he was wearing, glanced at trousers that didn't match it, and ran his hand down the junction of a vest that had only two buttons.

"She'll make me buy a new suit and wear it," he mused. His hand stroked his unshaven cheek and stopped on the rough edge of a frayed wing-tipped collar. "I'll have to shave every other day, at least, and buy a new supply of collars."

Pausing, Blanning looked up to watch his visitor, who was still mulling through the pages of the book. "You're fortunate, Asaph, having no relatives."

Darwick swung about accusingly. Lifting a gloved hand, he wagged its forefinger.

"I am unfortunate," he declared, "since my money, at least, was made through honest means. Anyway, I

would know that no graspers would succeed me. Your fortune, Seth, will go to this niece of yours, instead of to those who really deserve it."

Blanning sat with fixed stare, even after Darwick's speech was finished. Then, rising abruptly, he walked to the door and called in high-pitched voice:

"Irene! Come downstairs! I have a visitor that I wish you to meet!" Shortly, Irene Blanning appeared. She was much younger than one might have expected Blanning's niece to be. When he introduced her to Darwick as such, the girl smiled and corrected the statement, remarking that she was Blanning's grandniece.

Irene was not only attractive; she was self-possessed. She'd been busy straightening house when her great-uncle summoned her, hence she wasn't dressed to receive visitors, but the fact did not disturb her poise.

She brushed back stray wisps of light-brown hair from her forehead, smoothed her tan house dress with a single sweep. Her blue eyes, turned toward Darwick, showed a friendly twinkle when she recognized that this visitor must be an old-time acquaintance of her great-uncle.

Blanning waved Irene to a chair beside the table and opened the great book. It took a few moments for him to capture the girl's attention, for she was still looking at Darwick. True, people always looked at Darwick, for he was rather freakish. Hitherto, however, his gaze had put strangers at ease. Tonight, it was working just the opposite.

An odd fact, considering that Irene was a girl who accepted people as they were, and therefore should have liked Darwick. Blanning noticed it and sidled a slight nod in Irene's direction.

Blanning, too, was feeling a mistrust toward his visitor. He'd known Darwick for years, but on this occasion, he hadn't liked the way his handshake was received. That bad start served further to increase Blanning's doubts.

TERSELY, Blanning explained the book to Irene, and she managed to forget Darwick as she listened. When he had finished with the pages, Blanning summed them up in his own style.

"It all goes back to my grandfather," declared Blanning, "which puts it generations before yours, Irene. My grandfather traded with the Indians, and he outsmarted some other traders who were quite as sharp as he."

"Defrauded them, you mean," put in Darwick, his tone rising angrily. "The record gives the details."

"It classes my grandfather as a defrauder," corrected Blanning, "but it does not mention the other men. I have made a study of the methods used in Indian trading of that particular period. No traders were to be condoned."

Irene was looking over the record. Her face became worried.

"But some of this amounted to theft!" she began. "Don't you realize that, uncle?"

"It was all theft," agreed Blanning. "Theft—from the Indians. If any persons should receive restitution, the Indians are the ones in question. Unfortunately, Asaph does not even know what tribe of Indians was defrauded, let alone who their heirs are."

Blanning closed the big book with a heavy thump, and turned to Darwick with a headshake.

"No, Asaph," he declared. "This record is worthless, in my case. It was the result of Alec's spite work, to which you were an innocent party. As for the other cases in the ledger, I admit you may have a reasonable claim for them to pay, if they accept the records on their own merit, alone.

"But I would never pay a cent, considering that the Munston millions— almost billions, I might say—went to Alec's friends, relatives, and the private institutions which he endowed to perpetuate his name. He never asked you to delve into his past, and that of his family. If you had, he still wouldn't have paid, on the strength of records like these."

In outraged style, Darwick took the great book and replaced it in the worn portfolio. The leather case under his arm, he turned toward the door. Blanning gestured across the room and said:

"You're forgetting your cane, Asaph."

"I'll not forget this visit," snapped Darwick, stepping to get the cane. "Nor will you, Seth!"

"I do not intend to forget it," retorted Blanning. "You are the man who has become forgetful. Too forgetful, for your own good. If there is something you should really forget, it is that book that you are carrying with you."

Darwick swung as he heard the words. He raised his cane angrily, and Blanning, also agile for his age, threw up a hand to ward it off.

Hastily, Irene sprang between them, but Darwick, thrusting out an arm, propelled her clear across the room. Then, side-stepping Blanning, the muffled man swung the cane, not at his adversary, but at the table lamp.

Crashing, the lamp was extinguished, leaving only a dim glow from the hall. By it, Irene could see Blanning leaping gamely to the fray. Suddenly remembering that there were servants in the house, Irene shrieked, hoping to bring them; then, coming to her feet, she heard sounds from outside: the motors of arriving cars.

Again Irene shouted, hoping that arrivals would hear her, and she was also dashing forward, seeking to help her uncle, when the cane slashed past her shoulder.

It landed full upon Blanning and staggered him across the room. His right hand must have slowed the blow, despite the crack when it met his head, for he came up into the light beside the door, to point an accusing hand; his left, not his right.

"Look out, Irene!" wheezed Blanning. "Help will soon be here. Meanwhile, hear my words. That man -"

While Blanning spoke, Irene was trapped by a grip that amazed her, coming from a man of Darwick's age. His hand had coupled her wrists behind her back, and she couldn't wrest free. His other hand was showing equal skill in whipping a revolver from his other pocket, but Irene didn't see the gun until it barked.

The revolver spoke three times, each jab a close-range shot at Blanning. Irene's great-uncle never completed his last statement. He coiled to the floor before the girl's horrified gaze.

Beside Blanning, where his attacker had dropped it, lay the leather portfolio, half opened. From it poked the great ledger compiled by Asaph Darwick, which its successor had personally proven to be a Book of Death.

CHAPTER XIV. A MATTER OF AGREEMENT

FRANTIC at her uncle's fate, Irene Blanning broke free from the grip that held her; then, foregoing all impulse to reach Blanning's side, she threw herself upon the murderer, striving to clutch his gun.

She was sure that she could hold Darwick long enough for aid to come, and she very nearly succeeded, thanks to the book that lay upon the floor. As she lost her hold, she saw Darwick stoop to get the book, and he made a wild dive, carrying the portfolio with him, as the girl grabbed for the shocky hair beneath Darwick's tight-brimmed derby.

The murderer wanted his cane, too, and had to pocket the gun in order to regain it. Backing out to the hall, he kept swinging the cane, but Irene could see it coming and dodged.

By then, footsteps were clattering along distant hallways, announcing the arrival of the servants. Irene pointed to the front door when she saw Darwick dodge that way.

Then the door came flinging inward, hurling Darwick behind it. The man who plunged into sight was Kerford. Though she had never met him, Irene took him for a friend and pointed to the front door, thinking that Darwick would dive back to it.

Kerford swung, saw a figure just behind him. The lawyer didn't even look for Darwick.

The newcomer in the doorway was cloaked in black, and he carried an automatic that made Kerford's revolver look small. Kerford hadn't forgotten his earlier encounters with The Shadow, and sight of his cloaked adversary inspired him to savage attack.

He'd slugged The Shadow once before, and intended to do it again, so solidly that his opponent wouldn't recover soon enough to stage another vanishment. Kerford simply didn't take new conditions into account.

Stopping as if a trip hammer had pounded it, Kerford's blow only went halfway. That grip on Kerford's gun wrist wasn't all The Shadow took; he hooked the lawyer by one knee, gave a spiral twist and sent him headlong to a corner of the hall.

Kerford was tough; he took the slam without losing his gun. Swinging about on hands and knees, he aimed back at blackness and fired.

The only blackness that he hit was the oblong of the open doorway, which he mistook for The Shadow. The cloaked fighter was sizzling in from another angle, and Kerford barely turned in time to grapple.

Before he could settle Kerford, The Shadow heard another call from Irene, and turned to see Darwick for the first time. He glimpsed the hat, the shocky hair and saw the portfolio under an arm, with the cane hooked to the same wrist.

The Shadow slapped Kerford against the wall and turned toward the door. He was cut off by a trio of earnest, but infirm, attackers. Blanning's servants, who mistook Irene's gestures toward The Shadow. While The Shadow was brushing off those three, Irene dashed outdoors in pursuit of Darwick.

She saw a man lunge from another car to stop him, but Darwick spilled his adversary in one direction and turned to run another. Irene took a short cut, overtook Darwick and grabbed for his cane, not realizing that his other hand was free.

With a snarl quite savage for a man of his benign appearance, Darwick tugged his revolver from his pocket and thrust it toward Irene. The girl's heart stopped, as though anticipating a bullet. Faltering, Irene dropped back, and therewith paved the way to life, not death.

THE SHADOW was at the doorway. Off the end of the porch, he saw the glimmer of the revolver against the headlights of a car. He aimed for the weapon and fired a shot that would have been perfect, but for the feeble interference of Blanning's last servant.

So close did the bullet come to Darwick's hand, that the murderer dropped back more suddenly than had Irene. He aimed back toward the house and fired wildly; then darted off among the bushes to escape The Shadow's fire.

Irene saw the struggling servant who was spoiling The Shadow's aim, and rushed toward the doorway. By the time she arrived there, the servant was sitting on the porch, a very puzzled look on his face, rubbing his chin from an elbow jounce that The Shadow had given him.

Before Irene could even speak to The Shadow, he caught her with one arm and whisked her back into the house. Dropping to the shelter of the doorway, he opened fire in the opposite direction.

Guns answered, and with their shots came yells. As opponents scattered, The Shadow sprang in pursuit, blasting away with two guns and supplying a weird laugh that added to the rout.

So much had happened in so few minutes, that even Irene's mind was carried from the initial happening: Blanning's death. The girl remembered Kerford's entry, and the sudden arrival of a black-clad fighter who traveled like a smoke-laden hurricane, flinging Kerford aside and cutting a swath through the blundering servants.

He was off again, that human whirlwind, to repel unknown invaders who had attacked from a new direction, but the diversion had allowed Darwick to escape.

Irene remembered that the amazing old man had encountered someone near a car down the driveway, and as she stared in that direction, she saw a man come from between the shrubs, brushing himself off. Another car, arriving along the driveway, threw its headlights on the man in question.

Broad of face as well as build, the man had saggy cheeks that gave his features a pyramidal appearance. As his eyes turned toward Irene, the girl noticed the bristle of the brows above them.

"My name is James Wilvern," he said in introduction. "I came here to warn Seth Blanning of trouble. Apparently, I arrived too late."

Wilvern gestured off into the distance, where the sound of gunfire had dwindled to spasmodic bursts. Then, suddenly aware that the light around him came from a car instead of the house, Wilvern dropped his dignity and cowered toward the bushes, to escape the glare.

Another man entered the light, coming from the car itself. He glanced curiously at Wilvern; then introduced himself as Norman Dempster. His thin lips and mild eyes gave him a serious look.

"I'm sorry I didn't arrive first," Dempster told Irene. He gave a side glance at Wilvern. "Tell me: what has happened?"

Irene beckoned both strangers into the house, where Kerford met them in rather stumbly fashion. The servants gripped the staggering lawyer and kept him on his feet. They were only a bit shaken from their encounter with The Shadow, for he had handled them quite lightly.

Without waiting to learn who Kerford was, Irene led the way to the living room and turned on the light. Stepping back with a sob, she let the others view the body of Seth Blanning. Then Irene blurted:

"He was murdered by a man named Asaph Darwick!"

The girl could have added her hope that The Shadow, intrepid fighter in black, had already overtaken the killer.

As it happened, The Shadow was making valiant efforts to do so.

THE SHADOW was outside the grounds watching two cars speed away, each with a quota of fugitives; but he was confident that Darwick could not have joined that crew, for its members had fled in the opposite direction.

There was a way to check on the matter, but The Shadow postponed it when he heard a man stumbling hastily beyond a hedge. The fellow was panting, and he was obviously one of the gun crowd, who had stayed behind.

He was crossing the driveway in a direction which might mean a rendezvous with Darwick, so The Shadow trailed him.

Reaching a parked car, the man climbed into it and started the motor. Advancing with a drawn gun, The Shadow peered through the window and saw the lone occupant by the glow from the dashlight.

The man was Otis Jurn, and he revealed his face more plainly when he struck a match and applied its flame to a cigarette.

Dropping the cigarette pack on a raincoat that was bundled on the seat beside him, Jurn glanced at the window; then nervously put the car in gear. He didn't see The Shadow, for all outside was blackness, of which the cloaked observer was a part. Moreover, The Shadow had turned away at Jurn's glance.

When Jurn's car rolled from the exit driveway, it showed a taillight on one side only. The second taillight blinked suddenly, as though a dark film had been removed from it. An unseen shape glided to a spot where two other cars were parked in darkness.

Harry Vincent and Moe Shrevnitz were matching for which was to trail the mystery car, when The Shadow's whisper spoke from between them. He told them that he had ridden out on Jurn's bumper, and that there was no need to trail the private dick.

Jurn's presence explained the gun crew; the fellow had unwisely brought along some of his former playmates, and they had gotten out of hand again.

Questioning both Harry and Moe, The Shadow learned that they had seen no other car. He told them about Darwick, and they agreed with their chief that the old man must have made for the Sound, either to take a boat or follow the shore line to a road where a car was waiting.

"Go into Blanning's house," The Shadow ordered Harry. "Introduce yourself as a chance passer-by who heard some shooting. Stay there, and don't lose sight of the girl, until you hear from me."

Then, as Harry was entering his car to drive it into Blanning's, The Shadow joined Moe in the cab and gave the simple order:

"To Darwick's!"

CHAPTER XV. DEATH'S DOUBLE DEAL

WHEN Harry Vincent entered the Blanning mansion, he found a most curious state of affairs there. Two men were engaged in heated debate concerning Blanning's death. The disputants were James Wilvern and Blaine Kerford.

They agreed on one point only: that Blanning was dead. Their quibble involved Asaph Darwick. Wilvern maintained that the old man was a blackmailer of the first water, and therefore capable of murder; whereas Kerford defined Darwick as a public benefactor who would never deal in crime.

All the while, Norman Dempster was standing as if in solemn judgment, and beside him was a very confused and unhappy girl. Though she knew that Darwick had slain her uncle, Irene was actually swayed by Kerford's arguments.

She remembered how Darwick and his ledger had first impressed her. His demand for money involved a cause in which he seemed sincere. It had taken much baiting from Blanning to drive Darwick to a pitch of fanaticism, and Irene realized that her great-uncle had finally become insulting toward his guest.

Darwick's gunfire, delivered amid Irene's shouts and the rush of arriving servants, could have been the work of a crazed man, rather than a deliberate murderer. Coming from Kerford, such statements carried weight, considering that he had rushed to Irene's rescue.

While Irene watched the debaters, Harry attracted Dempster's attention and introduced himself. Dempster glanced at his watch, listening patiently while the argument continued, and finally consulted the watch again. This time, he injected himself into the discussion.

"You are agreed on one thing," he told Wilvern and Kerford. "Blanning is dead, and that forces agreement on another point. The police should be informed, at once."

Both Wilvern and Kerford nodded.

"The question is whether Darwick will return here," continued Dempster, "or go to his own home."

"He'll go there, all right," boomed Wilvern. "He regards his own home as his castle, though he wouldn't concede that privilege to Blanning."

"He will probably return there," admitted Kerford. "Darwick would have no other place to go."

Dempster picked up the telephone and made a call to the Cobalt Club, where Police Commissioner Ralph Weston was a member. Talking to the commissioner, Dempster recited the salient points of Blanning's death, and quoted both Wilvern and Kerford as stating that Darwick, the man responsible, could be found at home.

Finished with the call, Dempster stated that the commissioner wanted some witnesses at Darwick's. Since Wilvern and Kerford were equally anxious to go, Dempster waved them on their way, and they left in separate cars.

Harry casually decided to remain with Dempster and Irene, declaring that his only knowledge of the case concerned the events at Blanning's.

THE call to Weston became known to The Shadow when, nearing Darwick's, he saw the commissioner's big car swing into the street ahead of him.

Giving an order to Moe, The Shadow reached the rear street and cut through to the back of Darwick's house. Using the open route through the cellar, he reached the top of the cellar stairs while Weston's car was stopping out front.

Not knowing what might follow, The Shadow had gun in hand when he neared the lighted door of Darwick's office. At that moment, the front door came open, and The Shadow was ready to voice a warning if he found the photoelectric beam in operation.

He caught a glance of Darwick, in the office; the old man was huddled against the safe, one hand pressed against a knob. In that flash, The Shadow saw menace in Darwick's posture.

A black-clad avalanche swept for the front door, to meet Commissioner Weston and his companion, a police inspector named Joe Cardona. Neither of them even saw The Shadow's onrush. At that moment, something more powerful than any human force went into operation.

An explosion blasted from deep in Darwick's office. Its mighty roar sent a terrific rush ahead of it, not only of air but the noise of bursting doors and windows. The building shook to the brownstone steps down which Weston and Cardona flung themselves.

The Shadow, flinging forward as the blast came, flattened himself in the vestibule. Amid an outpour of smoke, he arose and made his way, unseen, back into the lighted hall. One glance into the office told why the explosion had not been more terrific in its consequences.

The blast had occurred within the safe, and the heavy steel door had taken the brunt of it. One man, alone, had been in a position to receive a devastating jolt: Asaph Darwick.

His body was mangled, and the weight of the broken safe door added crushing effects. Out of the human pulp, Darwick's face was recognizable, but The Shadow did not pause long to view it.

He went down through the cellar and out through the rear window, not pausing to put bricks back in place. That was no longer possible. The shaking of the building had broken more masonry loose.

Old Asaph Darwick could have made no grander gesture than to go out with the blast. If fanaticism had urged him into murdering his old acquaintance, Blanning, the same zeal, coupled with remorse, could account for his sensational suicide.

There was also the fact that such titanic self-destruction was designed to obliterate all the records in Darwick's safe, including the Book of Death.

Departing from Darwick's house, The Shadow foresaw the immediate consequences of the explosion. Weston would summon everyone in from Blanning's; and Dempster, in mentioning his own negotiations with Darwick, would naturally include the name of Lamont Cranston as witness to the transaction.

So The Shadow headed for the Cobalt Club. Arriving there as Cranston, he phoned Margo Lane and told her where to wait for him. Not long afterward, the calm-mannered Mr. Cranston heard his name paged. He was wanted on the telephone by Commissioner Weston.

Chatting with the commissioner, The Shadow heard brief details of what he already knew, and promised to come to Darwick's.

Many cars were in front of Darwick's when Cranston's limousine approached toward the house. Spotting Harry's car among them, Cranston spoke to Margo, who was riding with him.

"Wait in Vincent's car," he said. "When he joins you, repeat the instructions that I have given you."

Margo nodded. She had listened carefully to the instructions in question, during the trip to Darwick's. They were brief but pointed, and equally imperative. What was in Lamont's mind, Margo did not fully know, but she was confident that she and Harry could carry out the orders.

ENTERING the Darwick house by the blast-shaken front doorway, Cranston found Harry chatting with Irene Blanning. Conforming with The Shadow's earlier instructions, Harry had not lost sight of the girl. He had brought Irene into town in his car, while Dempster was bringing along the servants.

On the floor of Darwick's office lay a sheet that covered some ungainly object. The sheet was over Darwick's body, and whenever Inspector Cardona lifted it to show the dead man's face, he simply plucked a corner.

Wilvern and Kerford, arrived earlier, had identified the dead man as Darwick. Dempster was adding similar testimony when Cranston entered.

As for Irene, she gave a slow, sober, nod.

"I didn't really see much of Darwick's face," she declared. "His eyes were hidden by those glasses, and his nose was just a point. His lips were pale, like they are now"—Irene shivered as she gestured toward the sheet—"but the muffler never dropped below his chin."

Irene was standing near the doorway. She stepped back, as Cranston, advancing, said: "Pardon me, Miss Blanning." Then, reaching the sheet, Cranston watched while Cardona lifted it again. With a nod, Cranston stated:

"Darwick."

Commissioner Weston was about to dismiss such minor witnesses as Harry and the servants. Looking toward Cranston, Harry received a nod. When Weston finally gave the dismissal, Harry said good-by to Irene and left.

Meanwhile, Cranston, in his rather tired way, had seated himself behind Darwick's desk. Kerford came over and eased his big bulk to the desk edge, not realizing that he was in such proximity to his former adversary, The Shadow.

Leaning back with hand against the desk corner, Kerford was almost touching the switch that controlled the photoelectric gadget. With a mere nudge of his knee, Cranston could have pushed Kerford's hand aside, but he desisted.

"Whatever his faults," assured Kerford, as though addressing a jury, "Asaph Darwick has accepted the penalty. He destroyed his records with him, and we can regard the case as closed."

"Not quite," argued Wilvern, from the doorway. "Those records may exist in duplicate, as a means for further blackmail. Or"—Wilvern's brows bristled as he narrowed his gaze toward Kerford—"the book itself may still exist. We have no proof that Darwick brought it here after his flight from Blanning's."

Kerford gave a contemptuous grunt that inspired Wilvern to further debate.

"One fact remains unexplained," asserted Wilvern. "Tell me, Kerford: why did you happen to go to Blanning's?"

"Because I foresaw trouble," began Kerford. "Blanning's name was next in the book -"

Catching himself too late, Kerford saw Wilvern glance triumphantly toward the commissioner, who was standing in the center of the room.

"You see, commissioner?" queried Wilvern. "Kerford is familiar with the ledger that Darwick kept. He may even have copied its contents."

"And even if I had," snapped Kerford, again the shrewd lawyer, "I would have full right to them, as Darwick's attorney. The points of law are not entirely on your side, Wilvern. I might ask"—his eyes gleamed craftily—"how you happened to drop in at Blanning's?"

"I heard that Darwick was going there," rejoined Wilvern promptly. "A friend told me; that was all."

THE SHADOW knew, of course, that Wilvern's "friend" must be Jum. Kerford, planning to carry the subject further, arose from the desk and advanced toward Wilvern, who promptly pursued another tack.

"It isn't a question of why we went to Blanning's," began Wilvern. "It's what we did when we arrived there. Very odd, Kerford, that you should have let Darwick escape. You were the first man into the house, you know."

Kerford reached Wilvern near the doorway. They were exchanging glare for glare, with Wilvern backing out into the hall under pressure from Kerford's heavy hand. Irene was by a curtain, frowning slightly as she tried to place exactly what had happened after her uncle's death.

Neither Weston nor Cardona had previously seen Kerford and Wilvern in heated debate, but Dempster had and knew how irate they could become. Again, he stepped between them as arbiter, and the three were clustered in the hallway. Kerford's tone came savagely:

"And where were you right then? You know so much, that perhaps you know too much! Too much for your own good; not mine!"

"Wait!" It was Irene who called, turning from the curtain. "I remember everything that happened. I can explain -"

Kerford, shoving Dempster aside, had gripped Wilvern. A scuffle drowned out Irene's voice as two antagonists and a peacemaker jarred sideward against the hallway wall. From that scuffle, a hand, or an elbow, struck a light switch that controlled the chandelier in Darwick's office.

The curtain opposite Irene obscured the action of the switch, and result was immediate blackness. Hard upon it came something far more startling than the extinguishing of the lights.

There was a shriek from Irene, as though the girl had seen some menace despite the utter darkness; and with the scream, horror struck.

It came in the form of three swift jabs—sharp tongues of flame that represented gunshots. They were aimed for Irene, and they arrowed with quick-changing angles, so that they would not miss their helpless target.

Shots, delivered with the same certainty as those which had spelled death for Seth Blanning. The same fanaticism that had ruled old Asaph Darwick still held its urge upon a human hand. Death was attempting a double deal.

Just as Darwick could never have flung himself from in front of the exploding safe, so was Irene unable to spring from the path of an unknown gunner's fire. The sudden ending of her scream was token of her peril.

Again a murderous hand had done its utmost, this time in the very presence of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVI. DEATH MARCHES ON

IT was Dempster who fumbled for the light switch and finally found it, restoring light to the room of death. Beyond him, in the hallway, stood Kerford, still gripping Wilvern's coat. Weston and Cardona were halfway to the doorway, while Cranston had half risen from the desk.

All eyes were fixed upon the doorway. Men were staring, horrified, expecting to see the bullet-riddled

body of Irene Blanning. Instead, they were confronted, certain of them, by a mystery greater than unexpected death.

Irene Blanning was gone! Commissioner Weston stared at Inspector Cardona, who returned the puzzled gaze. They were the certain men who were completely nonplused by this riddle. Irene couldn't have reached the hall, nor come back into the office. She hadn't even had time to dodge the aiming gun, for it had started its bursts in the middle of her scream.

Never had these representatives of the law been confronted by so incredible a proposition, even on those occasions when they had met with a certain person called The Shadow.

Actually present, in another guise, The Shadow could have solved the riddle, had he chosen; but he left that task to others. He knew that one man, at least, could divulge the cause of Irene's disappearance, and he wanted to hear what the party in question would say.

Cranston's gaze fixed on Kerford. The lawyer rallied to the occasion. He seemed surprised, at first, because Irene had vanished; then, raising one hand, he waved both Weston and Cardona back. This was a great moment for Kerford. By hogging the picture, he could shake off the burdens of suspicion that had recently been shouldered upon him.

"Don't worry about Irene," declared Kerford. "Stay right where you are, commissioner, and you, inspector, until I explain what happened. That is"—he glanced to his right, and seeing Dempster there, turned to his left to face Wilvern—"I can tell where Irene went, though the matter of the gunfire is something you must discover for yourselves."

Crossing the doorway, Kerford pointed beyond it and stated: "There is a switch on the wall that controls a photoelectric beam. Watch!"

He extended his hand through the doorway and sliced the unnoticed beam. A trapdoor opened where previously had been solid floor. Before anyone could look down through, the sections slithered up again and closed automatically.

"Look on the desk, Mr. Cranston," suggested Kerford, with a gesture, "and you will find another switch. Will you kindly press it?"

Cranston found the switch and complied. Kerford strode through the doorway over solid floor.

"You see?" he queried. "That's why Irene screamed. She was dropping through the floor. Not a pleasant experience, but much better than receiving bullets."

Weston stared steadily at Kerford. "You mean that you pressed the switch in the hallway?"

Kerford nodded, and with it, threw triumphant glances about him. As a confidant of Darwick, he could boast of this special knowledge of contrivances in the dead man's house. Wilvern, however, had something to say that jarred Kerford's confidence.

"You haven't proven your main point, Kerford," Wilvern declared. "Namely, that Miss Blanning went through the trap before those shots were fired. I've always heard"—eyes were reflective beneath the bristly brows—"that the first thing a murderer thinks of is disposal of the body."

Kerford rallied to that one.

"And the last thing he thinks of," he said, "is to reveal the details of any such disposal."

BOTH men were subtle. Wilvern was accusing Kerford of shooting Irene and dropping her out of sight. In his turn, Kerford indicated that Wilvern had fired the three shots, and might even have pressed the switch, too.

In that case, Kerford's claim of pressing the switch could be justified, on the ground that he had coaxed Wilvern into saying too much.

In this game of put and take, Commissioner Weston wasn't showing favors. He didn't care to accept either of the implied accusations until he knew more details. The main thing was to find Irene, but before Weston could say so, Dempster made the same suggestion.

"I take it that Miss Blanning must have fallen to the cellar," said Dempster, gingerly stepping upon the fastened trap. "If so, she may have suffered serious injury; perhaps death. That may alter the situation, commissioner."

Wilvern shot a grim smile at Kerford, whose previous claim might prove his undoing. Satisfied that his case would stand, Kerford stepped back, thrusting his hands into the pockets of his coat.

Since each man seemed determined to bluff his way through, Weston suggested that all go to the cellar. He led the way, and when Cardona looked back anxiously toward Wilvern and Kerford, the commissioner undertoned:

"Neither will leave, inspector. In fact, they would find it impossible. Our men are stationed outside."

Cranston followed after Wilvern and Dempster. Looking back, he saw Kerford, hands deep in pockets, staring as though inspired by some new scheme. Leaving the cellar door open for the lawyer, Cranston strolled downstairs after the others. There, the mystery deepened.

It was easy enough to explain a trapdoor in a wooden floor, but certainly none could be found in solid concrete. Yet four men stood, in what seemed real amazement, gazing at the cellar floor where Irene must have landed.

From his personal experience while *The Shadow*, Cranston could have testified as to the hardness of that concrete, but the landing spot had lost its menace.

Irene Blanning had staged a double vanish. She was gone from the spot where she should have been, just as completely as she had disappeared from the place where last seen!

Stamping the cement, Weston decided that Irene couldn't have gone through it. Looking about the cellar, he saw the rear window, with the mass of debris that had formerly been masonry.

"That's where she went!" the commissioner exclaimed. "Out through a window! The explosion must have broken those gaps!"

The Shadow already knew that the explosion had produced such a result. Dempster, who had also used the rear route with Jurn, was viewing the shattered masonry with interest that The Shadow didn't notice. Standing behind Cranston, Dempster did not come under The Shadow's observation.

"She could have gone out that way," declared Cardona. "Only, how would she have managed it after smacking the cement? It would have given her an awful jolt."

Weston pondered, and Cardona saw a chance to insert a hunch. The ace inspector was famous for his hunches, but he liked to build them up before expressing them to his doubting chief.

"Maybe some guys were posted down here," suggested Cardona, "to grab her when she dropped. If she'd been weighted with a few bullets, they'd have been in an even bigger hurry."

Cardona was looking around as he spoke; his gaze passing Cranston and Dempster, the inspector fixed it on Wilvern. Disliking the silent accusation, Wilvern gestured, as if to a man beside him.

"Perhaps Kerford can help you, inspector," said Wilvern. "He has an answer for everything."

When Cardona stared blankly, Wilvern turned, to find that he hadn't gestured toward anyone. Kerford wasn't with the group in the cellar; but his absence wasn't a mysterious disappearance like Irene's. The simple fact was that Kerford had not come down to the cellar at all.

"I'll find that bird!" snapped Cardona, hauling a revolver from his pocket. "I'd like to know what bluff he will hand us this time!"

Dashing upstairs, Cardona was followed by the rest. There was no sign of Kerford in the hallway, nor did a look into the office reveal him.

Dashing outside, Cardona shouted to some bluecoats stationed there. "Did you see that lawyer, Kerford?"

"Sure thing," an officer responded. "He told us the commissioner was through with him, so we let him go, like those other witnesses."

"How did he leave?"

"In his car. A couple of minutes ago."

"Then get started!" roared Cardona. "Head him off, before he can get clear! We want him—for murder!"

THINGS moved very rapidly. There were plenty of police cars in the vicinity, and they scurried away as though released by catapults. Cardona turned to Wilvern and Dempster and took them one by one, frisking their pockets in expert style.

"Just to make sure that neither of you have a gun," Cardona told them. "We don't want Kerford to have any comeback, when we catch up with him. You haven't been out of my sight, nor the commissioner's, but Kerford has."

The search completed, Cardona dashed down the steps and joined the commissioner in his car. The others followed, and Cardona nodded when Wilvern suggested that they join in the hunt.

Wilvern went toward one car, Dempster for another. Invited along with neither, Cranston gave a shrug and watched the cars pull away. Then, idly, he strolled off toward the corner.

There was method in the leisurely tactics that The Shadow applied as Cranston. Unfortunately, he chose the wrong corner toward which to stroll. Hardly had he gone from sight before a car swung in from the other corner, to be stopped by two patrolmen near the Darwick house.

The man who stepped from the car was Otis Jurn. He introduced himself as a private investigator and showed credentials. Asking for Inspector Cardona, Jurn learned about the chase and wanted to know who was involved.

At mention of Kerford's name, Jurn grinned and stepped back into his car.

"I'll wait here," he said. "If you see Inspector Cardona, tell him where to find me."

Jurn had every reason to be satisfied. With Kerford popping up as the surprise factor in the case, the heat was off completely. Jurn could go on working for both Wilvern and Dempster, and the longer the hunt for Kerford continued, the more his services would be in demand.

The best policy, for the present, was to sit tight and look wise, after he met Cardona. Jurn could simply say that he had heard about Darwick and the book the old man carried. He wouldn't have to state who his employer was; and, thereby, Jurn would win the favor of both Wilvern and Dempster.

Like Cranston, the patrolmen had gone their way, and Jurn was looking for his cigarettes. He found the pack, but it was empty. Remembering that he had another in his raincoat, Jurn lifted the garment on the seat beside him. Immediately, he forgot all about his cigarettes.

He was staring at something that he had seen before, and remembered far too well. On the seat, uncovered by the lifting of the raincoat, was Darwick's Book of Death!

Jurn didn't notice a package that was on the car floor, for it was in darkness. But it wouldn't have meant anything, even if he had seen it. Through Jurn's frantic brain ran wild, fantastic thoughts that baffled all understanding, though with them he had glimmers that confused him all the more.

Then, from Jurn's very shoulder, a voice spoke. It said, in very steady tone:

"I'll take that book, Jurn."

His face coming up, Jurn betrayed himself by his expression. He showed, too plainly, that he was willing to tell all he knew, now that facts were established in his mind. His revelation, silent though it was, impressed the man whose face Jurn saw.

Through the same window where his head and shoulders appeared, the man shoved a revolver, so quickly that Jurn could not ward off the weapon. The gun jabbed as it pressed forward, and its first shot was muffled against Jurn's chest.

So were the two shots that followed, and three bullets were enough for Jurn. The dapper man caved as though a batch of props had been pulled from beneath his shoulders.

With Jurn a lifeless thing, the murderer took the book and the package that lay with it. Back turned upon the scene of new crime, he hastened toward the very corner that Cranston had chosen, carrying the Book of Death.

CHAPTER XVII. THE SHADOW'S GOAL

LIKE a spreading hurricane, the search for Kerford was widening from Darwick's neighborhood, leaving a calm center in the midst of storm. It was through that silent vortex that The Shadow glided, looking for traces of activity.

A nearby hunt could prove better than a distant chase, considering the circumstances surrounding Kerford's flight. At best, the hunted lawyer could have gained only a few minutes' start, for The Shadow had personally planned that no more time elapse.

The rather retiring Mr. Cranston had been about to comment on Kerford's absence, when others noticed it. The furor following the discovery of Kerford's flight was also to The Shadow's liking. Even if Kerford had begun a rapid getaway, he'd be forced to double back as the police spread and passed word on ahead for other searchers to close in with a tightening network.

Thus, Cranston's idle stroll around the block was actually a most potent search for Kerford. Keeping well to darkened spots, Cranston was playing the role of The Shadow, even without his black cloak. Few eyes could have discerned him as he moved along, but his own observation was by no means limited.

Such was proven when Cranston paused, spying a stir a short distance ahead. It came from an alleyway in back of Darwick's house, and The Shadow, conversant with all such crannies, knew the best way to approach the outlet. From one flight of house steps to another, he drew closer upon his prey.

The prey sidled out into the light.

It was difficult for Kerford, rangy and somewhat awkward, to keep entirely to shelter. He had managed it, that night at Darwick's, when he had applied the slug to The Shadow. On that occasion, however, Kerford had been on a street that he knew quite well; he had also profited by the diversion caused by Wilvern's departure.

Tonight, Kerford was the hunted, not the hunter. He didn't know the street, nor did he sight The Shadow. He was looking for cars, the kind with sirens and bluecoats in them. Seeing none, he crossed the street quite boldly, hoping to find another pathway between buildings that would carry him one more block away from Darwick's.

Knowing that Kerford wouldn't find a by-path, The Shadow stalked along his own side of the street. Given another hundred feet, he would reach a darkened stretch, where, even in Cranston's guise, he could cross without Kerford's notice. He wanted to take Kerford suddenly, when the man was unaware, and deprive him of the gun he carried.

Kerford was desperate, and might do considerable damage if pursuers tried to take him openly. His testimony, too, would prove important, and couldn't be spoken by a dead man. Moreover, The Shadow had a personal score that wasn't fully settled with Kerford. He wanted the elusive lawyer to experience the sensation of having someone bob up from behind him and supply a sincere blow with a chunk of metal.

The Shadow intended to do it more neatly than Kerford had. One clean tap from an automatic would daze Kerford lightly, but still allow him to retain his senses, thereby appreciating the fact that he had been outguessed.

Turning to make his move across the street, The Shadow let his gaze rove ahead. He saw a grayish stretch of sidewalk, then the corner, and a car parked beyond it. Only the front end of the car was visible, and The Shadow couldn't have seen it earlier, because he had barely reached the angle from which he could see it at all.

Dim lights blinked suddenly from the car's cowl lights.

Remarkable work on Kerford's part, reaching that car so swiftly and so soon. Even more remarkable that he should have eluded The Shadow in so doing. Had The Shadow been garbed in black, he wouldn't have believed it possible, for in that case he would have clung closer to Kerford.

The only thing was to blame it on Lamont Cranston, The Shadow's other self, who didn't navigate the dark so capably as did his double of the black cloak.

Of course, Kerford deserved a share of the credit, for proving himself more slippery than The Shadow had deemed he could be. The important thing, however, was to reach the car before Kerford started away.

SPRINGING from the curb, The Shadow began a quick run for the corner, cutting in at an angle so he couldn't be seen. His Cranston get-up would have served him quite effectively, had not a blaze of headlights reached him.

The glare didn't come from the car around the corner; it was from the opposite direction. A car, swinging into this rear street, was driving through at a high rate of speed.

Dropping behind some steps, The Shadow saw the first car scud across the corner, as if alarmed by the approach of the other machine. Taking it that the new car contained police, The Shadow did as Cranston should have done. Springing into sight, he waved and pointed, to send the car along the trail that it had spoiled for him.

Instead of keeping toward the corner, the car with the blazing headlamps swerved Cranston's way and bore down, full speed, upon its helpless-looking victim!

The weird laugh that offered challenge didn't seem to come from Cranston's lips. He was flinging himself for shelter in a basement cranny that the threatening car couldn't reach. The men in the car, hearing the laugh, thought that it originated elsewhere. Shoving guns from the windows, they began to blast at random, hoping that their shots, though wild, would force their old enemy, The Shadow, to reveal himself.

Reveal himself he did, though not from where crooks expected. It was Cranston, the helpless man, who answered with a brace of automatics. Thugs had forgotten him, and were unable to amend their mistake, for those shots from the house wall were wrecking their whole system.

Bullets dug through tires, flattening them. A perfect shot clipped the man at the steering wheel, causing him to lose control. Whistling slugs sent gunners ducking, flinging out through opening doors as the car careened over the curb. There was a clanging smash as the car wrecked itself, trapping some of its occupants when it overturned.

Like an epilogue to the swift and positive victory came the strident laugh of The Shadow!

A car pulled out from back along the street and spurted the other way. It was turning the corner when The Shadow came from his shelter and saw the last twinkle of its taillights. Then wailing sirens answered the rattle that guns had given. Within another minute, two police cars arrived to scour the sector.

While officers were dragging thugs from the overturned car, and rounding up two others who were cringing in doorways opposite, Lamont Cranston entered the scene, to give his version of the fray.

Gunless, he gestured as he told an impersonal story of a rapid-fire marksman who could only be The Shadow. The fact that the cloaked sharpshooter wasn't anywhere in sight merely corroborated Cranston's statements. The Shadow didn't make it a habit to stay around after he had softened badsters and left them to the police.

Other cars arrived. The first brought Weston and Cardona; the commissioner took charge of the scene while the inspector quizzed the prisoners.

Wilvern and Dempster arrived separately in their cars and joined the commissioner. He was too busy to talk to them, so Cranston told them of this new development which had almost made him its victim.

Then Inspector Cardona supplied facts that counted. He'd made the prisoners talk.

"This bunch was working for Otis Jurn," declared Cardona to Weston. "They say this is the third time he's made them buck The Shadow while he, Jurn, ducked out on his own. They're sick of it."

"You mean Jurn, the private investigator?" queried the commissioner. "What's he doing around here?"

In Cranston's calm style, The Shadow glanced toward Wilvern and Dempster. He saw both hesitate. Wilvern's manner was to be expected; Dempster's hesitation answered a question which Cranston could have asked previously, but hadn't, because he was sure he had the key to it.

THE question concerned why Dempster had come to Blanning's this evening. Old Darwick, always close-mouthed on matters concerning different individuals, would not have told Dempster about Blanning. The Shadow had therefore calculated that Dempster, like Wilvern, had heard of Blanning through Jurn.

The situations of the two men differed.

Wilvern couldn't well deny connection with Jurn, since he had actually subsidized the man's services. On the contrary, Dempster had kept his relations with Jurn quite secret, and to reveal them would be a betrayal of confidence.

Only the calm eyes of Cranston saw how Wilvern's worry grew, while Dempster's slackened. At last, Wilvern spoke boldly:

"I hired Otis Jurn."

"For work like this?" stormed Weston, indicating the wrecked car. Then, gesturing toward the prisoners: "You actually paid Jurn to use mobsters like these?"

"Absolutely not," returned Wilvern indignantly. "My secretary, Talbot, will bear witness that I instructed Jurn to operate independently, as an authorized private investigator should. He brought me reports on both Darwick and Kerford; in fact, it was Jurn who told me that Darwick was going to Blanning's house tonight.

"But such men as these! I never realized that Jurn even associated with them. I suppose, of course, that he was fearful of Darwick and Kerford, knowing them to be potential murderers, and therefore hired these fellows to accompany him. But it is something which I never would have approved."

Wilvern spoke convincingly, and his reference to Darwick and Kerford carried weight. Weston ordered others to resume the hunt of Kerford, while he went back to Darwick's. The commissioner took Wilvern along, and Cranston, having no car, accompanied the pair. A patrolman arrived hurriedly on foot just as they reached Darwick's door.

"You've seen Mr. Jurn?" the officer asked Weston. "He was looking for Inspector Cardona, but I suppose he'd like to talk to you, commissioner."

"I'd like to talk to Jurn," returned Weston emphatically. "Where is he?"

"In that car, commissioner."

Weston strode along the street to Jurn's car; he wrenched its door open, and stood stock-still. Then, slowly, he raised his hand, gestured mechanically and pointed. The patrolman looked into the car; went around and opened the door from the other side.

Cranston and Wilvern arrived just in time to see Jurn's body tumble outward under its own sheer weight. They went around the car with Weston, and all three viewed the dead man.

"Kerford's work," declared Weston solemnly. "He murdered Jurn despite the fellow's bodyguards."

They were still standing there when others arrived, including Cardona and Dempster, back from another futile search for Kerford. Cranston's eyes were fixed on Dempster as the promoter gazed at the man who had been in his service, as well as Wilvern's.

Then Cardona gave opinion.

"Jurn was always after dough," said Joe. "He might have sold out to Kerford, Mr. Wilvern. I'll tell you why. Somebody must have grabbed the Blanning girl when she fell through the trap, and Jurn was the only guy who had a bunch around here. The crowd we grabbed were only half his crew."

Wilvern nodded, and Dempster followed suit, though their experiences with Jurn had differed. Wilvern happened to know that money was Jurn's main object; whereas Dempster had personal proof that Jurn would switch his loyalty if it suited him.

Commissioner Weston regarded the Jurn angle as closed, along with others. He turned to his friend, Cranston.

"We've settled the matter of Darwick's record book. There's no question that he blew the safe to get rid of it. Our one job is to find Kerford and the Blanning girl. When we do, we'll learn whether we want Kerford for murder or on a kidnap charge."

Cranston's nod was only for Weston's benefit. Behind the impassive face of Cranston, the brain of The Shadow was at work, piecing Jurn's death into the order of things and summing it all into his own total.

The law could continue its search for Kerford and Irene. The Shadow's goal was still to find the Book of Death!

CHAPTER XVIII. THE NARROWED TRAIL

THE successive tragedies of Blanning, Darwick, and Jurn were heralded in great headlines in the days that followed. Never had the newspapers struck a better bonanza than this triple tragedy that surrounded the Book of Death.

Coupled to such news was the added punch of Irene Blanning's disappearance. It stayed in headlines longer than the murders did. But even the news of the hunt for the missing girl and her alleged abductor, Kerford, was dwarfed by the next sensation that developed.

The Book of Death came back to life!

Like some creature from a scummy depth, the forgotten volume began its insidious work, guided by a hand that lacked the kindly touch of Darwick's.

No old gentleman appeared, with muffler, cane, and portfolio, to spread his vellum-bound volume and explain his plans of restitution. Instead, persons of wealth received anonymous letters containing photostatic samples of certain accounts which concerned them.

There was no offer of a friendly settlement through cash payments to the heirs of defrauded parties. This wasn't a matter of a conscience fund. It was blackmail.

Tartly worded, the letters stated that, to avoid public exposure of the records in question, substantial sums would have to be delivered to the anonymous writer. Such exposures promised scandalous details regarding many of America's leading fortunes. Prompt payment, through suggested channels, would be the only preventative.

Certain of those letters reached Commissioner Weston. He called a private council of persons whose advice might prove helpful: James Wilvern, Norman Dempster, and, finally, Weston's most trusted friend, Lamont Cranston.

Inspector Cardona was in attendance when the group met at the Cobalt Club. Always taciturn, Cardona had developed a glum mood of late. Contrasted to Weston's brisk manner, Cardona had a beaten air, which showed upon his swarthy features.

Easy enough for Weston to act the part of a go-getter, when his business consisted of parcelling orders to others, with Cardona heading the list of those who received them. The hunt for Blaine Kerford had narrowed considerably, but had given no actual trace of the missing lawyer. These anonymous letters, all mailed from New York or vicinity, didn't give any added clues to Kerford's whereabouts.

How the present conference was to help, Cardona couldn't understand. Nevertheless, it was his duty to attend the meeting; so he did.

Weston opened proceedings with a tirade against the blackmail letters.

"Kerford's work!" stormed the commissioner. "You can see it in the phraseology of the letters. Do you realize what the scoundrel is doing? He's collecting ransom for the contents of that book!"

"It's blackmail, handled in a kidnaper's style, but without a guarantee to deliver anything. Kerford simply states that he will suppress the records if people pay; and the fools are doing it! These letters"—Weston gave a despairing gesture—"are but a few samples of the dozens that Kerford must have sent out."

While Weston was waiting for the others to show their reactions, Cardona provided a suggestion.

"If we get Kerford demanding a ransom for the Blanning girl," said Joe, "he'll have to show his hand. You can't get by in a kidnap case with promises only. If the girl comes back into circulation, she may be able to give us a line on Kerford." Weston wasn't convinced.

"Kerford is too smart for that," the commissioner declared. "He doesn't need money, as most kidnapers do. His blackmail racket is producing dividends. If he didn't murder Irene Blanning, that night at Darwick's, he probably disposed of her since."

REVERTING to the letters, Weston pointed out the feature that he termed the "teeth": namely, the terms which the blackmailer offered to his victims.

"He's letting them off for twenty-five percent," Weston declared. "But he intimates that he will raise the percentage with persons who do not pay within the required period. That sort of thing always brings result."

Wilvern nodded at Weston's words. Dempster saw it and expressed an opinion.

"It might with some people," said Dempster, looking steadily at Wilvern. "There are those who refuse to recognize just claims. It is not the demand for money that makes this case so monstrous, commissioner. It is the fact that the blackmailer intends to keep the cash for himself, instead of disbursing it among the proper persons."

Wilvern bristled.

"You talk as though you still admired Darwick," he told Dempster. "Next thing, Dempster, you will be standing up for Kerford."

"I admired what I saw of Darwick," insisted Dempster stoutly. "His purpose, at least, was admirable. As for Kerford"—there was a flash in Dempster's eyes as they steadied on Wilvern—"I am still not sure that he is the man behind this blackmail."

It was evident to Weston that Wilvern and Dempster could never see eye to eye. Bluntly, he ended the conference with the announcement that he wanted them both to be available, in case Kerford's capture took place. Despite Cardona's glum stare, Weston stated positively that the trail had narrowed down.

When Wilvern and Dempster had left, the commissioner added a pointed remark to his friend, Cranston:

"If Asaph Darwick came back to life and turned to outright blackmail, he couldn't be doing a more thorough job than Kerford is at present."

Oddly, Weston was stating a thing which was almost fact. Had the commissioner been present that night when Jurn almost stumbled over Darwick's body, he, too, would have classed the old man as dead. In a sense, Asaph Darwick had returned to life, though his stay had been brief.

Something in Weston's words made Cranston ponder. He was trying to picture a scene at Darwick's in terms of Wilvern and Dempster, as well as Kerford. As a basis, he was projecting his thoughts to one night later, considering the parts that those three had played at Blanning's.

Into both pictures came the face of the dead man, Otis Jurn. Much hinged on Jurn; so much, that his murder had proven necessary.

A FEW hours after the conference, Weston's prediction neared its realization. News flashes came bombarding from the radio, stating that searchers had at last located Kerford.

A squad of Feds were closing in upon an isolated cabin in the New Jersey woods, some thirty miles from New York. They were definitely sure that it was Kerford's hide-away.

Even Cardona showed signs of shaking off his gloom when Weston put in calls to Wilvern and Dempster, telling them to listen to the stream of news reports. Very soon, there was another flash. It stated that the raiders had captured the cabin, only to find it empty.

No sign of Kerford; none of Irene Blanning. There was plenty of evidence, though, that the cabin was actually Kerford's. In his haste to elude the mesh, the ever-slippery fugitive had been unable to take along many personal effects, which proclaimed his identity.

Those abandoned items did not include the Book of Death. The nearest thing to it that the Feds discovered was duplicate pages, covering the earlier accounts which Darwick had settled in legitimate fashion.

There was a further report, but it wasn't in the form of a news flash. It was a confidential report from Harry Vincent to his chief, The Shadow, through Burbank, the contact man who relayed all such reports.

Summoned to the phone in the Cobalt Club, The Shadow announced himself as Cranston and heard Burbank's methodical tone:

"Report from Vincent. Kerford observed on ferry from New Jersey, traveling in car. Trail picked up by Shrevnitz."

"Report received."

With those words, The Shadow concluded the call and phoned Margo Lane. In Cranston's quiet tone, he

gave instructions that Margo had long awaited.

The Shadow had just ended his chat with Margo, when he received another call from Burbank. It was a relayed report from Moe Shrevnitz. The cabby had followed Kerford to his destination.

It was the exact destination that The Shadow expected. There was a slight smile on the lips of Lamont Cranston when he strolled from the Cobalt Club and entered his limousine. He gave an order to his chauffeur, then leaned forward to draw a secret drawer from beneath the rear seat.

From that hidden compartment, Lamont Cranston took a brace of guns, together with a black cloak and a slouch hat. He was putting on the black garments as the limousine turned the corner.

Crime's trail had narrowed to a focal point.

It was time for Lamont Cranston to become The Shadow, for he was to keep a long-sought appointment with a man who dealt in murder!

CHAPTER XIX. THE SHADOW'S JUDGMENT

JAMES WILVERN was seated at his big desk, turning the dial of a radio.

He had been here every evening of late, preferring the solitude of his office to places where he might meet too many people.

He was resting a jaw on one hand, and the pressure gave a one-sided appearance to his face. The effect would have been rather ludicrous, but for Wilvern's glower.

Wilvern was thinking of the recent conference and the news reports that followed it. At times, his loose hand stole to a desk drawer, where a revolver lay in sight. Then, at the sound of a click behind him, Wilvern suddenly relaxed. Turning, he spoke:

"All right, Jurn -"

Catching himself too late, Wilvern sped his hand back toward the drawer. Again, he was belated; the man who stepped in sight already held a gun, and its muzzle covered Wilvern.

The man coming from the private door was Blaine Kerford.

"Before we discuss important matters," began the lawyer, "allow me to congratulate you, Wilvern, on your clever little act. You mentioned Jurn as though you had forgotten that he was dead. Have you increased your murder victims, Wilvern, to the point where you have lost count?"

Coldly, Wilvern stared at Kerford's gun, then made a nervous gesture.

"You would seem to be the murderer, Kerford, considering your mode of entry."

Muttering something about necessary protection, Kerford pocketed his revolver. He kept his fingers handy, however, so that he could have it at an instant's notice.

"I have come to make you an offer, Wilvern," said Kerford bluntly. "Release Irene Blanning and you can retain the Book of Death, to do with it as you please. It is unfair that the girl should suffer for your crimes."

Wilvern spread a hand across his broad jaw, gave it a long, sweeping rub.

"Interesting terms," said Wilvern. "They were exactly what I intended to propose to you, Kerford."

Kerford snorted.

"Why try to bluff me, Wilvern?" he asked. "I saw much the other night, and I've read a great deal since. Jurn was your man, and he snooped around Darwick's. You dropped Irene through that trap and fired those shots. Only Jurn and his crew could have carried her away."

"Odd that I fired the shots, Kerford, when you had the gun."

"Afterward, yes," admitted Kerford. "This habit of mine stood me in good service." Kerford paused, his hands thrust in his coat pockets. "I felt the gun soon after you planted it on me, Wilvern. Already being under too much unwarranted suspicion, I deemed it wise to leave."

Wilvern's broad face spread in an unpleasant smile that expressed his contemptuous disbelief.

"Tell me," queried Kerford sharply. "Is the girl dead?"

"I was about to ask you the same question, Kerford."

"If she is, the deal is off," asserted Kerford. "They've routed me from refuge, which is why I stopped here for a showdown. But I'll find another and keep on hounding you, Wilvern. I'll dig up evidence that the law can't. I'll tip off the Feds to certain names in Darwick's book, and beat your attempts to collect blackmail!"

Blandly, Wilvern settled back into his chair and tried another tack.

"What makes you think that Jurn knew so much about Darwick?" he inquired. "I'd like to know, Kerford."

It was a play right into Kerford's hands. Face gleaming, the lawyer advanced to the desk and tapped Wilvern's telephone.

"This told me," said Kerford. "This, with Jurn on the other end. I'd seen him slink past my office, and I knew he had a route up here. So I used it, the night you were expecting a call from Jurn."

"You never received that call, Wilvern, because I answered it. It was easy enough to fake that testy voice of yours. I've heard you snarl, often, at elevator operators and other people in this building. I learned enough that night to put a new complexion on this case."

Wilvern pondered over what Kerford had said. He soon was able to refute it.

"You've only put yourself in deeper, Kerford," Wilvern decided. "And now, since we seem so definitely at odds -"

HE finished with a sweep to the desk drawer, scooping out his gun. Kerford, dropping back, yanked his revolver, too.

Gun to gun, the two paused, each realizing that a duel might prove suicidal. It was a timely moment for an interruption, and one came.

Again, the private door swung open, and both Wilvern and Kerford diverted side glances toward a new visitor. The man who joined them was Norman Dempster.

Looking at the guns, he gave a hopeless shrug, and it served better than a command. Wilvern and

Kerford pocketed their revolvers, to hear what Dempster had to say.

Dempster made it brief.

"I've listened to this double bluff," he said. "Though I sympathize with neither of you, I must admit that only one can be guilty. Suppose I referee the matter -"

He let his voice drawl, the sentence uncompleted. Dempster was stepping toward the desk to take a midway position between the other men. Neither suspected what he had in mind until he accomplished it.

Dempster sped one hand to the telephone, lifting it from the stand. As he carried attention that direction, he dug his other hand into his pocket and came out with a gun of his own. He was waving it between the other men, when he added the finish to his sentence:

"- until the police arrive!"

Wilvern accepted the situation better than did Kerford, which was logical, since the industrialist was on excellent terms with the very authorities who were hunting for the lawyer.

But when Kerford observed Wilvern's satisfied expression, he, too, decided to take matters as they came.

Both men heard Dempster call the Cobalt Club and ask Commissioner Weston to join him in Wilvern's office, bringing Inspector Cardona. He whetted Weston's interest by stating that important developments had occurred, but did not specify the details.

"I shall be fair to both of you," declared Dempster, as he laid aside the telephone. "You must concede, Wilvern, that Kerford demands a friendly hearing; a chance to explain his case to the commissioner as I just heard it, through that amplifier behind the door that Jurn so often used."

Wilvern furrowed his brows.

"You've learned a lot, too, Dempster."

"Yes," Dempster acknowledged. "I heard it from Jurn. He rather doubted your, integrity, Wilvern, which is one reason why I consider your case no better than Kerford's."

The scene was becoming very tense. Noting it, Dempster kept his gun in motion. Separately, Wilvern and Kerford were doubtful of what was to come, and each was anxious to take over. Wilvern had grounds enough, these being his own premises; whereas Kerford, already a fugitive from justice, was half inclined to continue further flight.

In that tightened atmosphere there was a stir from the darkened doorway at the front of Wilvern's office, the usual route by which people came when calling on the financier.

There was no click from the latch, because the door was already ajar. The stir itself was silent, yet the eyes of three men turned suddenly in that direction, as though drawn by the force of a magnetic personality.

Darkness materialized as it came forward, shaping itself into the cloaked form of The Shadow. He, too, had been close by when the discussion started, and he was equipped to keep both Wilvern and Kerford under control.

The Shadow was gripping two automatics, each at a different angle. Covering Wilvern and Kerford, he

nodded for Dempster to put his own gun away. Dempster complied, with a satisfied nod.

"SINCE we are all so well informed," spoke The Shadow, "it is time that we discussed the real mystery in this chain of crime. I refer to the murder of Seth Blanning by his friend, Asaph Darwick.

"I think that we must all agree"—The Shadow included Wilvern in his sweeping gaze—"that murder was not in Darwick's realm. It would be wise, therefore, to consider Darwick's actions prior to his trip to Blanning's.

"I speak with good authority"—The Shadow was recalling a report from Harry Vincent—"that Darwick was last seen alive when he returned home the night he hoped to hear from Dempster. The same night when you came to visit him, Wilvern, and when you, Kerford, saw fit to post yourself outside of Darwick's house."

Wilvern confronted The Shadow boldly.

"Darwick was seen the next night," Wilvern declared. "Jurn told me that he saw him leave the house. He saw him again, at a restaurant where Darwick ate, before starting to Blanning's."

"Someone left the house and went to Blanning's," The Shadow agreed. "Someone who passed as Darwick, but did not behave in true style. Whoever was playing the role of Darwick tried the imposture on Jurn first.

"Since it deceived Jurn, he tried the same game with Blanning. He wanted Darwick to be seen alive, to cover the fact that Darwick had been murdered the night before. It happened that Blanning knew Darwick and recognized the imposture. The man who posed as Darwick was forced to murder Blanning."

Drawing nearer to the group, The Shadow stood so close that all could see the burn of his accusing eyes. That glint was meant for the murderer, as were The Shadow's next words:

"What proof have I of this? The certain fact that Darwick did not leave the vicinity of Blanning's before I did. Yet Asaph Darwick was in his home, in front of his safe, when I arrived there by the shortest and swiftest route.

"The real Darwick, of course. A Darwick who did not move; whose hand was dead upon the safe dial, where the impostor had placed it. I know a corpse when I see one, gentlemen"—there was an ominous touch to The Shadow's words, considering that his big guns could manufacture dead men at a moment's notice—"and I recognized Darwick as such."

Two men forgot The Shadow's guns, to glare at each other. The pair, of course, were Wilvern and Kerford. Dempster observed their mutual challenge and stepped back, speaking to The Shadow as he did.

"Whoever you are," said Dempster, in a tone of deep respect, "you have solved the real riddle in this case. I had hoped to merely act as referee. Upon you rests the power of judgment."

Well spoken were those words. The discovery of a murderer rested upon the judgment of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XX. THE END OF THE BOOK

FROM that moment on, three listeners were treated to a display of sheer analysis that only The Shadow could provide. Beginning with the premise of Darwick's early death, The Shadow traced more events as they must have occurred from the moment of murder at Blanning's. It was obvious, The Shadow pointed

out, that the murderer had to rid himself of his disguise and the huge book that he carried. That done, he had been free to reappear in his own identity, letting Darwick trace an imaginary course back to his own house.

In that, the murderer succeeded, but encountered difficulty with one person: Irene Blanning. Within her own house, the killer had threatened the girl with his cane; outside, he had tried to shoot her. The reason was that Irene had by that time seen too many people while the false Darwick was still in sight.

"So the impostor decided to get rid of Irene," declared The Shadow.

"He rushed the attempt when she started to give new testimony at Darwick's. Those shots were fired by the man who had earlier slain both Darwick and Blanning.

"Later, he got back the Book of Death and the disguise that he had used to pose as Darwick. Unable to leave them at Blanning's, he must have managed to transport them to the vicinity of Darwick's. We know that Jurn was out at Blanning's; therefore, we can assume that the killer used the simple expedient of placing those articles in Jurn's car.

"The thing explains Jurn's death. The murderer did not trust him. In regaining the book and the disguise, he was forced to reveal himself to Jurn, and he accompanied that disclosure with fresh bullets."

His eyes passing Dempster on the way, The Shadow kept looking from Wilvern to Kerford, each well covered by a gun. It was difficult to analyze their conflicting thoughts from their expressions, but The Shadow had one point that he knew would startle both.

"We have credited the killer with too much ability," The Shadow remarked, "when we assume that he fired three shots at Irene and dropped her through the trapdoor at the same time. Occupied with one thing, he could not have done the other; nor would he have, even if possible, for one would have proven superfluous.

"The murderer, himself, is still perplexed by Irene's disappearance, and has tried, in vain, to learn whose hand pressed the switch. You will all be surprised to learn that it was done at my suggestion, by a gentleman named Cranston. He pressed the desk switch; not the one in the hall. Cranston was very prompt. Irene was on her way, ahead of the first shot."

The Shadow's emphasis on the name "Irene" was a cue that brought a stir from the outer office. Into Wilvern's private preserves stepped Irene Blanning, accompanied by two friends: Harry Vincent and Margo Lane.

Those instructions that The Shadow had given Margo were all a part of his plan to protect Irene. Margo had passed them to Harry; the two had entered Darwick's cellar from the back window. Catching Irene when she plunged through the trap, they had spirited her out through the convenient exit and away.

Anxious to track down her uncle's murderer, Irene had stayed with Margo ever since, of her own volition. The question as to whether Irene had been murdered or kidnapped, could be answered in one word: neither.

Advancing toward the desk, Irene met The Shadow's gaze and gave the slightest of nods. Fixing her eyes on the opposite wall, she lowered the pitch of her voice and spoke, in a tone strangely like her uncle's:

"You have forgotten your cane, Asaph."

Irene's words were followed by The Shadow's whispered laugh. His hands performed a sweep toward a central point, bringing both guns away from the men they covered. The weapons were now trained on a

single person:

Norman Dempster.

At that moment, Dempster didn't see the guns. Caught unawares, he was half turned toward the desk, his hand stretching to pick up a cane, as it had at Blanning's. He'd practiced the part of Darwick so often that he couldn't quite forget it. Before he could halt his bit of pantomime, the give-away was done.

Two men swung for Dempster in savage style. The Shadow had to gesture with his guns to ward them back. Wilvern and Kerford each had good reason to spring upon Dempster, for he had been tossing the burden of crime back and forth, from one to the other.

Restrained by The Shadow, Wilvern at least felt free to blurt aloud the phase of Dempster's game that most impressed him. It was this:

Dempster's payment of the conscience fund, as suggested by Darwick, had been an investment, not a gift. An investment with an insurance policy to boot, for it had placed Dempster beyond all ordinary suspicion where murder of Darwick was concerned.

The large sum that Dempster had paid so willingly was to be regained, tenfold, through schemes of blackmail after Dempster acquired the Book of Death. All the while, Dempster could continue to show scorn for Wilvern, the man who wouldn't share. A great act, on Dempster's part.

Kerford picked up where Wilvern left off. The lawyer's own case produced a second angle. As Darwick's attorney and confidant, Kerford not only knew the contents of the record book, but was familiar with Darwick's premises. Anything discovered there—even the fact that Darwick's safe had exploded from the time-set dial, not the one that operated at touch—would be attributed, in final analysis, to Kerford.

That was why Dempster, after pressing the light switch in Darwick's hall and firing three shots in Irene's direction, had dropped the incriminating gun in Kerford's pocket, rather than Wilvern's.

Dempster accepted all those verbal outpourings and shook them off with shrugs. Seemingly, he felt no malice toward either Wilvern or Kerford, for they had been perfect tools in his competent hands. When Dempster's roundish face went bitter, it was turned toward Irene.

The girl was repeating the testimony that The Shadow wanted her to give: the facts which Dempster had tried equally hard to suppress. Like The Shadow, Irene had seen Kerford in the Blanning hallway while the false Darwick was still there. But she, alone, had witnessed the chance encounter between the impostor and Wilvern beside the latter's car.

As long as the impostor remained unknown, Dempster intended to pin crime on Kerford. Should it be discovered that a fake Darwick visited Blanning, Dempster was counting upon Wilvern as a substitute for the award of guilt. Irene was the one person who could have ruined that device; hence Dempster's desire to murder her.

The Shadow had outwitted Dempster.

Actually, Dempster thought that either Wilvern or Kerford had dropped the girl to safety through the trap, with persons unknown posted below to receive her. This explained why Dempster had bided his time until the eventual meeting between Wilvern and Kerford. He wanted to learn which held Irene, so that he could settle her case permanently.

With a show of evil pride, Dempster drew himself erect and faced The Shadow defiantly.

"You have guessed well," sneered Dempster, "but there is much you missed. My meeting with Jurn, for instance, came right after I killed Darwick. I saw him moving around beyond the window shade, so I returned, after putting the book in my car, and blamed the crime on him.

"From then on, Jurn was serving me, not Wilvern. I gave him the number of a telephone at the Cafe Regent, stating it was my nephew's apartment phone. He phoned me after he saw me come from Darwick's and when he phoned me, I learned how well the stunt had succeeded.

"I told him to go to the cafe and look for Darwick. He did, and saw me still in disguise. He learned where Darwick was going, because I let him overhear. But I changed my mind in that cab, and stopped off at my own hotel long enough to pick up another phone call from Jurn."

Triumph actually was registered on Dempster's face as he bragged of his double deeds. Then, in a tone that fairly rang, he added:

"Jurn was a double-crosser! He deserved to die! He tricked his own men into trouble and let them take the consequences. When I go in for crime, I show the way!"

DEMPSTER was baiting Wilvern and Kerford again, and they couldn't restrain themselves. Despite The Shadow's warning, they flung themselves upon their mutual adversary, and Dempster dived away from them toward Jurn's favorite door.

With two men blocking his aim, The Shadow couldn't fire at Dempster; but Wilvern and Kerford, both drawing guns, were determined not to let him get away.

Dempster didn't try to get away. He whipped the door inward, falling behind its shelter, and therewith loosed a group of men who also carried guns. They were the remnants of Jurn's mob, hired by Dempster through telephone conversations inspired by Jurn's notebook, which Dempster had acquired from the dapper dick's raincoat.

They'd heard enough of Dempster's talk to be fully in his favor, and they thought that he was to be their spearhead in a thrust against their common foe, The Shadow. Bowling Wilvern and Kerford aside, they drove ahead, reserving their bullets until they met The Shadow.

It happened that The Shadow met them first.

Already lunging, he was in their midst, slugging them, flooring them in his human-whirlwind fashion. Dempster sprang across the office, and a few men went with him. All, Dempster included, were turning to take pot shots, when they heard The Shadow's laugh.

A singular laugh, considering that he was still concerned in beating down a pair of crooks and couldn't take care of Dempster. Nor could Wilvern or Kerford aim, for the intruding thugs had sprawled them.

Harry was shoving Margo and Irene off to a safe corner and hadn't time to come around with his gun.

It looked very bad for The Shadow, from Dempster's viewpoint, but not from The Shadow's own. He was looking past the murderer, and he could see the thrust that came.

Dempster had forgotten one slight detail: his phone call to the police commissioner.

In from a front office surged Cardona and a squad of headquarters men, flinging Dempster and his companions half across the inner room. Guns roared, and those on the side of right were first.

The Shadow was dropping the thugs who clutched him, while they tried to aim their guns. Dempster and

the few pals beside him were taking police bullets.

Loaded with lead, the murderer came up with a spasmodic effort and made a last savage effort to reach Irene Blanning with a bullet. Death to the girl would have been his idea of a dying triumph; but Dempster never fired.

Triumph was The Shadow's as his gun spoke, battering Dempster with a final slug that pitched the threefold murderer to the floor. With a gasped cough, Dempster flattened, dead. Like a solemn knell, a mirthless laugh responded.

That tone was The Shadow's token of departure. The rear door closed; beyond it, Wilvern and Kerford glimpsed only a swirl of fading blackness. Irene saw it, too, but had no time for a farewell to her friend and rescuer, The Shadow.

Seldom did The Shadow reappear after he had dealt final justice to men of crime; but this was one occasion when he was seen again. Not at Wilvern's office but at Dempster's hotel, where the others went immediately.

ON the way, Kerford was explaining about his misguided frays with The Shadow; how he, too, had finally realized that the black-cloaked fighter was his only friend.

He had just finished, when they reached the door of Dempster's lavish hotel suite, which Cardona unlocked with a passkey.

All halted on the threshold. They were looking into Dempster's living room, where a fire was burning in a large fireplace. The Shadow was standing there, fully cloaked. Hearing the door open, he turned.

Against the glow of the fire, he displayed the items of Dempster's disguise: a derby hat, with shocky wig attached; dark spectacles, a muffler, thick gloves, a cane.

One by one, The Shadow tossed the articles in the fire; as the flames caught them, he stepped to a table, drew open its drawer and produced a mammoth book. Spreading its covers, he held the book so that the firelight showed it in lurid red; then, with a final toss, he consigned the great volume to the flames.

The Shadow gave a whispered laugh as he stepped back into darkness. He was taking his own course to another exit from the suite, but to those at the doorway, his laugh still lingered; hence they stared, amazed, when they realized The Shadow had gone.

Then, fascinated, all were gazing at the fire, listening to a crackle that seemed the echo of The Shadow's mirth.

The crackle came from the crisp pages of the burning volume. It faded as those pages turned to ashes.

The Shadow had decreed a final climax; one with which all were in accord. Before witnesses, he had fulfilled his own decree. His hand had put an end to the fatal Book of Death.

THE END