



THE GOLDEN DOOM

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CHAPTER I. HIDDEN EVIL

HANSON BARTLEY sat in his well-appointed apartment, smoking an excellent cigar. The aroma of the cigar smoke made him smile with satisfaction. Then his smile faded. His thoughts had turned toward his friend and protege, young Dr. Sutton.

Sutton's behavior had been a bit queer the past week or so, Bartley thought. He was spending a lot more time than usual in his scientific laboratory. Sutton's specialty was cancer research. The last time Bartley had mentioned the subject there had been an evasive look in Dr. Sutton's eyes. He had pleaded fatigue and had left the apartment of his wealthy benefactor as soon as he could conveniently get away.

Bartley had a feeling something was wrong. Tonight the feeling was stronger than ever. He decided that perhaps he ought to step across to Sutton's laboratory and ask him frankly about the cause of his strange aloofness lately.

Sutton's laboratory was literally only a few steps away. It was on the top floor of Mercy Hospital. Between the hospital proper and the apartment of Hanson Bartley was a short, private hall with a locked door at its outer end. By using this passage, Bartley was able to gain access to the hospital whenever he chose

There was an excellent reason for this unusual step. Wealthy men generally have some pet charity project. Mercy Hospital was Hanson Bartley's.

Since his retirement from active business, the financial welfare of Mercy Hospital became Bartley's chief concern in life. He pestered wealthy friends for donations. He did so well at it that Mercy Hospital was now rated the most successful institution of its kind in New York.

It was natural for the trustees to be grateful. Bartley had been appointed honorary administrator. He had been given this private apartment on one of its top-floor wings. An automatic elevator connected with a street exit on the avenue side. The short corridor already mentioned was a convenient shortcut into the hospital itself.

Bartley liked the set-up because it made it easy to have frequent conferences with his young friend, Dr. Sutton.

Bartley had provided most of the funds to equip Sutton's cancer laboratory. Sutton's research work was chemical rather than surgical. He didn't have much faith in either X-ray or the knife.

Few cancer specialists believed that a cure could be discovered from chemistry. But Sutton was brilliant, and he had already made considerable progress. Only a month earlier he had hinted to Bartley that he believed he was on the right track.

Bartley was the only person besides Dr. Sutton who had a key to the lab. A lot of the chemicals and reagents used in Sutton's experiments were not the sort of stuff to be left unguarded.

Hanson Bartley mashed out his cigar and rose to his feet. But before he could leave the apartment, his telephone bell rang. With a murmur of impatience he answered the call.

His momentary annoyance faded, however, when the faint voice on the wire identified itself.

"How are you, old man? This is Dwight Nugent."

Nugent's laugh was cheery.

"Listen, you old highbinder! I haven't forgotten about that donation for Mercy Hospital that you argued me into promising. I thought, if you could come over to my home tonight, we could discuss it. Are you busy?"

"I'm never too busy to accept a donation. Are you in town, Dwight? I thought you were permanently in Washington on the war board."

"I am. I'm just in New York for a brief overnight stay. Can you come over?"

"Right away," Hanson Bartley said.

His uneasiness about Dr. Sutton faded from his mind. He rubbed his hands at the thought of Nugent's gift. It would be a fat one, because Nugent was independently wealthy. And Mercy Hospital could use a generous donation. The war had put a crimp in its financial budget.

Bartley descended in his private elevator to the street. He drove across town to Dwight Nugent's home. It was located on upper Central Park West, one of the few old-fashioned mansions left in a neighborhood of swank hotels and ritzy apartment buildings.

Bartley went up a broad, brownstone stoop, rang the bell. He was admitted at once by Nugent's butler. Bishop apologized for the fact that the vestibule was dark. His voice seemed husky. He kept his face averted.

Bartley was puzzled by the butler's odd behavior. Then, suddenly, his puzzlement changed to alarm. This fellow wasn't Bishop. He couldn't be Bishop! Bartley remembered, now, that when Dwight Nugent had closed up his home to go to Washington, he had dismissed all his servants, including the butler!

Before Bartley could turn to scrutinize the face of this husky-voiced stranger who had moved so nimbly behind him, he was given a violent push. The shove sent him plunging forward from the dark vestibule into a darkened entry hall.

He tumbled flat on his face. Instantly, his assailant flung himself fiercely on top of him.

Bartley tried vainly to squirm away. A blow on the back of his skull filled his brain with a dazzle of flame.

With a groan, Hanson Bartley lost consciousness.

WHEN he recovered, he found himself sitting immovably in an armchair. Tight bands fettered his ankles and his wrists. It was impossible for him to stir. The room in which he sat was pitch dark. He was unable to see anything in that total blackness.

He moaned.

The sound was a signal to hidden enemies. A bright light appeared in the darkness. It was a beam from a powerful spotlight. It focused on Bartley's face. Its brilliance kept him from seeing clearly the two men beyond the light.

He knew there were two men because he could hear them whispering together. The whispering was followed by a calm chuckle.

"There is no need to worry, Mr. Bartley," a voice said. "My associate struck you with a padded weapon. You will find - after we release you - that you have suffered no fracture."

The voice was muffled. It was impossible for Bartley to recognize it.

"Your friend, Dwight Nugent, is still in Washington. I used his voice because it was the simplest way to lure you. I'm using his house for this interview because I happen to know that there isn't one chance in ten million for Nugent or anyone else to interrupt the important demand I am now going to make."

"Demand?" Bartley faltered.

"Listen carefully! You are the honorary administrator of Mercy Hospital. You have complete charge of all gifts and donations that come in from men like Dwight Nugent and other wealthy patrons. I have made it my business to find out about this. Mercy Hospital takes in more than a million dollars in gifts annually. Am I correct?"

"What of it?" Bartley gasped.

"Just this! For every dollar you take in, you are going to pay me half! It will be very easy for you to obey. As a public-spirited friend of the hospital, serving without pay, you will never be suspected of fraud. You will receive instructions later on when and where to turn over my share. Do you agree?"

"No!"

Mercy Hospital was dear to Hanson Bartley's heart. Under his benevolent control its finances had prospered. Its medical staff and its technical equipment were famous. To betray it, even under the threat of death, was unthinkable to Bartley.

"I'll never do it!" he cried. "I'd rather be killed!"

"All very noble," the muffled voice said. "But I haven't the faintest intent of killing you. I need you alive so you can continue to collect endowment funds. If you refuse, I won't kill you. I will kill Mercy Hospital!"

There was menace in the voice that rasped from the darkness beyond the beam of light that bathed Bartley's sweating face.

"What do you mean?" Bartley whispered.

"Just this. Things are going to happen at Mercy Hospital that will end its existence - unless you play ball. There will be a reign of terror there, my friend! Patients will be afraid to enter. Doctors will resign. I will drive Mercy Hospital to bankruptcy and ruin."

"You're mad!" Bartley cried.

"Not at all. I'm sane. I know the name of every wealthy man who has pledged money to Mercy Hospital. Dwight Nugent isn't the only patron. There is Henry Kirkland and Lamont Cranston and Peter Verne and - Shall I go on?"

"Let me think," Bartley whispered.

"No need to think," the hidden voice snarled. "Tonight I'm going to give you a little proof of what I can do. I will exert some slight pressure on your young friend, Dr. Sutton."

The thought of peril to Dr. Sutton's highly important cancer research made Bartley desperate.

"I agree!" he lied. "I'll do whatever you say."

There was a cold chuckle.

"You are not fooling me, Mr. Bartley. Right now you are lying! You hope to be able to trick me somehow; perhaps to notify the police. It will do you no good - and it will do Mercy Hospital deadly harm. You will receive proof of that very soon."

The voice continued sardonically.

"And now you'll have to excuse me, since I will be very busy for a while."

There was a click. The brilliant spotlight on Bartley's face went out.

A heavy odor drifted into Bartley's nostrils. Vainly, he tried to jerk his head aside. Tight hands held him immovable.

For the second time, Hanson Bartley became unconscious.

WHEN he recovered he was still tied in the armchair in Nugent's living room. Ceiling lights were lighted now. He was able to see clearly. The room was empty except for the shroudlike covers on all the rest of the chairs and furniture.

Bartley saw that his bonds had been loosened slightly. In his lap lay a sharp-bladed knife, left there by two unknown captors.

He was able to free himself fairly quickly. He glanced at his watch. He had been unconscious about an hour.

A quick tour through Nugent's house showed it to be empty of any sign of a clue to the identity of the unknown extortioner or his assistant.

Bartley walked dazedly down the front stoop to Central Park West. His car was still at the curb where he had parked it.

The threat against Dr. Sutton frightened him. But the thought of notifying the police frightened him even more. He could almost see the black headlines in the newspapers. The hospital would swarm with cops and reporters. Perhaps Lamont Cranston and Peter Verne and Dwight Nugent would cancel their promised donations.

Bartley groaned. He drove slowly back toward the hospital.

THE two men in the dark sedan talked in low tones - as if they were afraid the man in the back might overhear them.

There was small chance of that. The man in the back was unconscious. He had been given a dose of knockout drops.

"Are you sure this is the spot to dump him?"

"Yes. The areaway is not too dark. Somebody is sure to discover him in the next few minutes. And then" - there was a brief chuckle - "an ambulance will arrive from Mercy Hospital to pick up our drugged friend."

"Just so long as it's Mercy Hospital!" the other man said.

His hat was pulled low on his forehead. He was the fake butler who had slugged Hanson Bartley. The icy-voiced man was his boss.

"The ambulance will have to come from Mercy Hospital," the boss continued. "I took the trouble to map the entire district served by the hospital. The ambulance call will make things simpler for me to get back."

Both men laughed. The boss had sneaked out of the hospital by sliding down a rope from an unwatched window. The return by rope would be too tough a climb. The ambulance call would take care of that. It would permit a cunning criminal to reenter the hospital through the deserted ambulance courtyard.

It was vital for him to do this unseen. He was known at the hospital. He was supposed to be at the hospital now. Anyone who saw him sneaking in would be sure to recognize him.

His henchman was still worried.

"What about the drugged guy?" he whispered. "He'll remember me the minute he comes to. He'll tell the cops that I was the one who gave him the knockout drops."

"I'll take care of him as soon as I get into Mercy Hospital. What I do to him will show Hanson Bartley I mean business. It will bring police in a hurry. And it will get rid of them just as quickly. Because this is one murder that will be impossible for anyone on earth to prove!"

"Just a natural death, huh?"

"They won't even be able to prove that," the boss said. "All they'll ever know is that the man is dead. I'm going to hand the medical examiner a crime impossible to solve."

There was a vicious conceit in his voice. "You know exactly what to do?"

"Yeah. I wait for a phone call."

"Very well."

He left the sedan and faded through the darkness. His henchman waited awhile. As soon as the street was temporarily deserted, he carried the drugged victim swiftly across the dark sidewalk. He dumped the man into an areaway.

A moment later he was behind the wheel of his car.

He didn't try to make speed. The boss had warned him about that. The boss thought of everything. He grinned.

Then, suddenly, the grin wiped from his lips. Another car had drawn abreast of his. It was a police car! A cop jerked his finger toward the curb in an ominous gesture. The man was forced to halt.

The two prowl-car policemen frisked their captive expertly, seeking a concealed weapon. They found none.

"What's the idea?" the man snarled. "You got nothing on me!"

"Sam Romine, eh?" one of the cops said. "What are you doing back in town? Where were you going?"

"Just taking a little ride."

"Let's see your license and car registration."

They were in order. The cops looked disappointed. Sam Romine plucked up courage.

"You boys are just kidding yourselves trying to pin something on me. Didn't you hear the news? I'm going straight these days."

The cops looked irresolutely at each other. They had hoped to pick Romine up on a gun charge or a stolen-car rap.

"Go ahead and pinch me," Sam Romine told them out of thin lips. "I'll be free in five minutes! You can't even hold me for vagrancy. I can even prove I've got a steady job."

The cops scowled. They had nothing against Romine, and they knew it. They hadn't even been looking for him. They had noticed him purely by chance.

"Beat it!" one of the cops growled. "But remember one thing! Watch your step - or we'll put you where you belong!"

"Where's that? The mayor's office?"

Sam Romine gave them the "bird." He drove away with a ratlike grin of triumph.

CHAPTER II. HOSPITAL PHANTOM

SAM ROMINE'S easy brush-off of the cops in the prowl car filled him with elation. To Sam, the word "police" was a synonym for the word "dumb." He figured they had proved their dumbness by not taking a sniff at the rumples in the lap robe in the rear of the sedan.

His cocky grin returned. A perfect shakedown was under way. It was a shakedown that would net

Romine a juicy cut. All he had to do was to keep his mouth shut and obey orders.

Romine was so pleased that he failed to notice a simple fact.

He was being followed!

Behind his car was a rather battered-looking taxicab. It kept at a sufficient distance to prevent Romine from noticing its presence. It was driven by the cleverest hacker in New York.

The name of that cabbie was Moe Shrevnitz. Shrevvy owned his own taxi. He knew all the tricks of the trade, and a lot more than the average cab jockey suspected.

But Shrevvy's biggest secret was something unguessed by either the police or the underworld.

He was an agent of The Shadow!

Luck had been with Moe Shrevnitz tonight. Cruising through Manhattan, he had caught a glimpse of a police prowler car halting a motorist. Shrevvy had slowed up, had taken a shrewd look.

He had recognized the sneering motorist as Sam Romine.

The Shadow was interested in Romine. Reports had come into his sanctum that Romine, a successful, free-lance crook who had faded from New York some months before, was now back in town. The Shadow had learned other facts. Romine was well-heeled. Furthermore, he was avoiding all his usual underworld pals.

The Shadow had passed the word along to his agents to keep a sharp eye out for Romine, to report promptly any additional news concerning his movements.

So Moe Shrevnitz was cautious in the way he trailed Romine. He stayed well in the rear.

But he managed to hang on like a leech.

Presently, he saw Romine's car halt. Romine got out, went into a grill. It was a cheap, unsavory place. The barman in the joint had once done time. Moe began to feel a grim tug of excitement. He had a hunch that crime of some sort was hatching.

He left his cab and slouched close to the grill's dusty window. He could see Romine, but the crook couldn't see him. Romine's attention seemed to be centered on the telephone back of the bar.

He was evidently waiting for a call.

SHREVVY faded to another telephone. He called a number unlisted in any New York directory. He was answered almost instantly. A voice said crisply:

"Burbank speaking."

Burbank was The Shadow's contact man. Through him, orders concerning The Shadow and his agents were received and transmitted. To Burbank went a swift report concerning Sam Romine.

Shrevvy waited without breaking the connection. After a minute or so he heard again the voice of Burbank. The relayed order of The Shadow was succinct:

"Stand by!"

Moe went back to his cab. He began to read a newspaper. From where he sat he had a sidelong view of the interior of the grill where Romine sat.

Presently, Shrevvy heard a sibilant whisper of laughter. It came from directly behind him. The Shadow had noiselessly entered the taxi of his agent.

Eyes like reddish flame stared at Moe from beneath the brim of a black slouch hat. The Shadow's cloak merged with the darkness of the cab's rear seat. His eyes and his strongly beaked face were the only indications of his presence.

A whisper ordered Moe to remain where he was. Silence filled the rear of the parked taxi.

The rear seat was now empty. The Shadow had left the cab as deftly as he had entered. Protected by darkness, he moved to another spot. This time he vanished inside the unlocked sedan of Sam Romine.

His inspection was more thorough than that of the two cops in the prowler car. He bent over the rumpled lap robe in the rear. His nostrils sniffed a faint odor.

He recognized that odor. His lips formed two silent words: "Chloral hydrate."

They didn't call it that in the underworld. "Knockout drops" was the term commonly used. But the purpose of such a drug was unmistakable. Someone had been doped and transported in this car very recently.

The Shadow returned unseen to the taxi of Moe Shrevnitz. He began a patient vigil.

Sam Romine was still watching the bar telephone. He seemed very nervous. Each time the phone rang, Romine started uneasily. But each time the barkeep answered the call, his face turned slightly. His head shook a warning "No" to Romine.

Grimly, The Shadow waited.

MEANWHILE, in the rear courtyard at Mercy Hospital, things were not so quiet.

The rear courtyard was the ambulance entrance. It was paved with smooth cobbles. A wide gateway permitted the ambulance access to the street.

A small office faced the courtyard. This was the office of the intern who was on duty. His name was Dr. Hugh Riker.

Murphy wondered what in hell was the matter with the doc tonight. Murphy was the ambulance driver. A call had just come in.

Ordinarily, Dr. Riker swung aboard the rear of the ambulance almost before Murphy could start the motor. But tonight he was oddly late. In fact there was no sign of him!

Murphy glanced at his watch and swore. A full minute had passed. The hospital code of conduct was strict. In the ambulance department, time was especially precious. Delay might mean the difference between life and death for some poor devil lying on a cold sidewalk.

Murphy hurried toward the outer door of Dr. Riker's small courtyard office.

Unseen by the worried ambulance driver, Riker was also hurrying! He was trying to reach his office from the interior of the hospital.

Dr. Riker had left his duty post without permission. He had slipped silently up to the top floor of one of the hospital wings. He had taken extraordinary care that no other doctor or nurse saw him.

The floor to which Riker had sneaked so stealthily was the one on which was located the locked research laboratory of Dr. Sutton!

Now he was back again, in a short hallway just beyond the inner door of his office, trying to regain his breath.

His hand jerked from his pocket. It held a queer object. A woman's lipstick! Quickly, he dabbed the lipstick against the corner of his mouth. It made a small, scarlet smear.

He could hear Murphy's voice calling in a worried tone from the outer door of his office.

"Hey, doc! Doc Riker!"

He took a deep breath. The taut expression of his mouth changed to an embarrassed smile. He was still wearing that foolish smile when he opened his inner office door and confronted the puzzled Murphy.

"Sorry," he said. "I... I just stepped into the corridor for a moment."

Murphy's annoyance faded as he saw the telltale "kiss" mark on the intern's face. He began to grin.

He figured what Riker intended him to - that the good-looking young intern had been flirting with a pretty nurse in a dark hallway. He was sure of it when Riker hastily wiped away the lipstick smear.

"Be a good guy, Murphy," Riker said hastily. "After all, doctors are human. Promise me you won't tell anyone that you caught me off my duty post?"

"O.K.," Murphy said. "Only, for Pete's sake, let's get going! We've lost nearly three minutes."

Riker raced with him to the ambulance. The motor roared. The ambulance sped from the wide, paved courtyard to the street.

There was a thin, satisfied grin on the lips of Dr. Riker as he balanced himself on the rear seat.

It was like a smirk of triumph.

ABOUT five minutes after the ambulance had vanished up the street behind the crimson glow of its headlights, a figure appeared in the paved courtyard.

It slipped quietly through the courtyard gate from the dark sidewalk. Skirting the black edge of the courtyard, the man hurried toward a small door.

He ducked swiftly into the darkened office that Dr. Riker had quit so ostentatiously only a few minutes earlier. Passing through the inner door, he moved along the short hallway where Riker had halted to smear his lips with the phony alibi of a "kiss."

This hallway connected with a larger corridor. It was a rear corridor, used chiefly by hospital employees. Nearby was the receiving room, where emergency patients brought in by the ambulance were given a thorough examination before they were transferred to a ward bed.

The man opened the door of the receiving room briefly and peeped inside. But he didn't delay more than a second. His first goal was an upper floor of the hospital. He headed swiftly toward a flight of service stairs.

No one in the well-lighted rotunda of the hospital caught a glimpse of this flitting figure. His sly method of entrance had placed him well beyond the range of vision of the uniformed attendant at the information desk.

He raced silently up the service stairs to the top floor. This top floor area contained the operating theater, and various technical and X-ray laboratories.

No one saw the stealthy intruder dart toward a locked door at one end of the hall.

It was the entrance to the cancer-research laboratory of Dr. Sutton.

The ground-glass panel in the door was dark, indicating that the laboratory was empty. This was exactly what the intruder had expected.

He had no trouble with the lock. He used a key. Closing the door swiftly behind him, he vanished inside. He was inside no longer than two minutes. He reappeared as silently as he had vanished, careful to lock the door again.

Gloved fingers left no trace of revealing prints.

Once more he hurried along the corridor. This time his swift pace took him downstairs. Only, he used a different route from the one that had brought him aloft.

He used a staircase that led downward through the public section of the hospital. Here were located the private and semiprivate rooms occupied by hospital patients.

It took cleverness to avoid the attention of the elevator operator and the various nurses and attendants who were on duty on these lower floors. But one vital fact was in the intruder's favor. The ceiling lights were dimmed for the night. Only one light burned in each section of the corridor.

It helped the prowler to sneak silently from the staircase toward the spot had in mind.

He faded into the room of a sleeping patient. He didn't enter until he had made sure that the patient was asleep. Then, quietly, he pressed the call button at the side of the patient's bed.

A BUZZER sounded at the desk of a nurse on duty at the other end of the hall. She rose, went to the distant room from which the signal had been sent.

She was surprised and annoyed to find that the patient was sound asleep!

While she stood there, wondering who could have played such a silly joke on her, the man who had lured the nurse away from her hallway post was again on the move!

He raced on tiptoe to the door of Room 317.

This was a private room. The patient who occupied it was wealthy. His name was Peter Verne.

Once a year Peter Verne came to Mercy Hospital for an annual checkup. He came to this particular hospital because it was one of his pet projects. Verne was a trustee of Mercy Hospital. He was one of the men who had promised Hanson Bartley a sizable donation for the endowment fund.

The intruder opened the closed door stealthily. His whispered mirth indicated satisfaction when he saw that the room was empty.

He entered Verne's room for just a few seconds. A slight clink of glass was the only indication of what he

might be up to. Then he reappeared and faded down the blacked-out hall.

He was gone before the desk nurse on hall duty came back from her fruitless answer of the buzzer.

She was angry. She sat down at her desk, unaware that the door of Peter Verne's room was now slightly open. The intruder, in his haste, had forgotten to close it.

Peter Verne, however, noticed it when he came back from the bathroom at the end of the corridor. Dressed in bathrobe and slippers, he stared at his open door with a puzzled frown.

"That's odd," he said.

He walked onward to the nurse's desk, still frowning.

"Were you in my room, nurse, while I was away?"

"In your room, Mr. Verne? Of course not! Why?"

"My door. It's open! I'm positive that I closed it before I went to the washroom."

"Are you sure?"

Peter Verne scratched his tousled head. He wasn't really sure when he tried to think about it. Half asleep, he smiled ruefully.

"Perhaps I'm mistaken. It just struck me as queer, that's all. Good night, nurse."

"Good night, Mr. Verne."

Once more the hall lapsed into the dim silence of a well-run hospital at night. But the nurse at the desk found herself growing increasingly restive. She was no longer angry about the strange buzzer signal from a soundly sleeping patient. She felt herself become more and more uneasy.

There was a sinister quality to that heavy silence along the corridor. The nurse shivered without knowing why. She told herself she was a fool, but the feeling persisted.

A feeling of dread, a sense of something evil stirring behind the placid routine of Mercy Hospital!

She found herself staring at the loud-speaker on the corridor wall beyond her desk. It was the speaker used in summoning doctors whose whereabouts were not known at the moment.

The nurse wondered uneasily if tonight there might be a call for "Dr. Blarney."

Just to think of that name increased her feeling of fright. "Dr. Blarney" was a code name. It was never used except in time of emergency. To nurses and orderlies, the summoning of "Dr. Blarney" meant only one thing:

"Something has gone seriously wrong! Soothe your patients. Kid them along. Don't let them suspect that there is any trouble!"

The last time the loud-speaker had blared "Dr. Blarney's" name, a maniac patient had slashed two physicians to death with a homemade knife!

"I'm acting like a fool," the nurse thought as she stared along the corridor in cold uneasiness. "Everything is all right."

She was mistaken. Everything was not all right!

CHAPTER III. THE GOLDEN DROP

"RIGHT here, doc," the policeman said.

He waved back the crowd of curious loiterers that had gathered about the areaway.

Dr. Riker bent over the victim. He sniffed at the man's lips, made a quick, almost bored examination.

"What's wrong with him, doc?" the cop asked.

"Nothing serious. Chloral hydrate." Riker laughed curtly as if the whole thing were a joke. "That's our medical trade name. Knockout drops to you, officer."

The cop's puzzled expression faded.

"Somebody doped the guy, huh? Is he all right?"

"All he needs is a little routine attention and a chance to sleep off the effects of the drug at the hospital."

Dr. Riker's voice changed slightly. It got harder, a bit more assertive.

"He won't die, if that's what you mean. Here help us get him into the ambulance."

"Wonder who he is?" the cop said. "Whoever doped him took everything out of his pockets. There's no label on the inside of his coat. I looked."

Dr. Riker's face remained aloof.

"Why tell me about it? I'm a physician, not a cop. You make your own report. I'll make mine. Fair enough?"

The cop stared at the ambulance doctor.

"What's the matter? What are you sore about?"

"I'm not sore. I'm in a hurry. We're not supposed to waste time chewing the fat every time we pick up a bum for hospitalization."

"O.K.," the cop growled. He was sorry he had tried to be friendly. Maybe the hospital was working this ambulance doctor too hard. Sometimes overwork made a guy irritable.

Murphy made a quick ambulance run back to the hospital.

The victim of chloral hydrate was carried into the hospital on a stretcher. Before he went, Dr. Riker signed the ambulance slip. It gave the time of the pickup and the nature of the patient's illness. This was for the receiving physician, who would make a more detailed examination of the emergency patient before certifying him for a bed in the ward.

Riker pinned the slip to the man's coat. He waited until Murphy came back.

"Sorry I was so abrupt when I talked to you and the cop," he told Murphy. "My nerves are on edge."

"That's O.K., doc."

Riker hesitated.

"You won't say anything about my being away from my post when the call came through, will you?"

"Of course not," Murphy said.

"It isn't that I'm worried about myself. I'd hate to get a swell nurse in a jam. She and I expect to get married one of these days. You know how it is."

"Yeah," Murphy said. "Forget it! Tell your girlfriend not to worry."

Riker drew a deep breath.

"You're a swell guy, Pat. What do you say we have a little game of cards? I'll be over to your room in a minute."

The ambulance driver's room was alongside the built-in garage that opened on the courtyard. It was close enough to Riker's office for him to hear any ambulance call that might come through. Most of the night interns got in a little card playing under similar circumstances. It helped relieve the tedium of waiting.

But Murphy waited quite awhile after he had found his deck of cards. He couldn't figure what was detaining Riker. He decided that Riker was probably checking over his report stubs.

Anyway, it was nothing to get steamed up about, Murphy figured.

A DIM light burned in the receiving room where the drugged man waited. He lay on a movable bed, with his unconscious face staring sightlessly upward at a dim light in the ceiling.

The receiving surgeon was slow in arriving from the ward. He had been notified that a patient had been brought in, but the demands of a dozen other patients kept him busy for a while.

The receiving physician was still in the ward when the door of the receiving room slowly opened. A hand slid along the wall to the light switch. A faint click sounded. The ceiling light vanished.

Through the darkness a figure moved.

It bent over the unconscious man on the rolling bed. The figure needed no light to accomplish what he had come to do. He made no sound. Even his quick breathing seemed hushed.

He bent over the drugged man for perhaps sixty seconds. Then he faded as stealthily as he had arrived. A faint chuckle testified to the man's satisfaction.

It was a very successful murder!

THE SHADOW was on the move through the darkness of Manhattan. He sat in the rear of Moe Shrevnitz's taxi as it sped quietly along on the trail of Sam Romine.

Romine had left the bar-and-grill where he had waited so nervously for a phone call. He was doubly nervous now as he drove across town - and The Shadow knew why.

The expected phone call had not come through! Romine had stood it as long as he could. Then abruptly, he had put on his hat and hurried outside to his car.

He drove across town almost to the East River. Then he headed south. Soon The Shadow realized the

goal of the crook in the dark sedan ahead.

He was driving to Mercy Hospital!

But Romine didn't stop at the ornate front entrance of the building that rose like a massive cliff toward the night stars above Manhattan. He slackened his speed and drove around the block. He approached Mercy Hospital from the rear.

His slow pace became almost a crawl as he neared the ambulance courtyard. The crook peered through the gateway. Moe thought he was going to get out and enter the courtyard on foot.

But evidently Romine changed his mind at the last moment. His car picked up speed again. It went onward at an accelerated pace and turned the corner into the avenue.

Shrevvy's taxi kept grimly on the trail. But Shrevvy was alone now. The Shadow was no longer a passenger!

To The Shadow it was obvious that there was something wrong inside Mercy Hospital. Romine's peculiar actions suggested that. Besides, The Shadow had not forgotten the odor of chloral hydrate that he had smelled in the rear of Romine's sedan. To his original conception of a kidnapped victim, The Shadow now added another tentative notion.

A kidnapped man had been taken for some criminal purpose into Mercy Hospital!

The Shadow glided, unseen, into the paved courtyard. His black cloak made him seem part of the darkness. He noticed that there were two ways to enter the hospital from this direction.

One was the rear entrance of the hospital that opened upon a well-lighted rotunda. The other was a smaller door that led into what was apparently the duty office of the ambulance intern.

This door was partly open. A glance showed The Shadow that the office was unoccupied.

He also noted, with a whisper of sibilant mirth, that there was an inner door to this office, one that apparently led straight into the hospital.

The Shadow's swift passage made only a momentary streak of blackness. On the other side of the inner door he found a short hall that led to a hospital corridor.

From where he stood, The Shadow could see the lighted rotunda. But he was well out of sight of the information clerk at the desk in the rotunda's center. To his left, farther along the dimly-lighted corridor in which he stood, was a flight of stairs and what looked like a small self-service elevator.

The Shadow assumed correctly that the stairs and the elevator were there for the convenience of nurses and other hospital employees. On some of the floors above were probably located the dormitory rooms that housed the hospital personnel.

A door closer at hand interested The Shadow. On it was a sign that showed it was a receiving room for emergency patients.

The door of this room was ajar. No light showed. The room was pitch-dark.

To The Shadow, this seemed queer. On the threshold of the room was something even queerer. It looked like a tiny splash of gold!

The Shadow bent swiftly. The mark was dry. None of it smudged his gloved finger when he rubbed

gently

He sniffed the strange dry droplet. It was odorless. In color it was like liquid gold paint. But there wasn't the slightest trace of what should have a strong odor of banana oil.

The Shadow didn't devote more than a few seconds to his scrutiny of the gold droplet. He was eager to examine the receiving room itself.

The moment the door closed noiselessly behind him, The Shadow blinked on an electric torch. It was tiny, no larger in diameter than a pencil. But it threw a vivid beam. He directed the beam toward the rolling bed in the center of the room.

He saw the man who had been brought to the hospital by Dr. Riker. A glance at the ambulance report pinned to the man's coat disclosed why he had been brought. The Shadow sniffed the man's lips. The odor of chloral hydrate was strongly noticeable.

But the drugged man was no longer unconscious. He was dead!

THE SHADOW was familiar enough with drugs to know that a simple dose of chloral hydrate could not have killed him. Something else had been used on this unknown victim.

Poison!

Studying the appearance of the corpse, The Shadow uttered a gasp of astonishment. Familiar with the symptoms of poisons, The Shadow made a seemingly insane deduction.

The man had been murdered three times with three different poisons!

The appearance of the corpse left no other diagnosis for The Shadow to make. The cherry-red discoloration of the dead man's skin suggested cyanide potassium! Or, perhaps the far more deadly action of cyanogen gas, released from prussic acid!

A second poison was indicated unmistakably by the spastic rigidity of the dead man's arms and legs. Unconscious at the moment of murder, he had nevertheless writhed in torment before he had died. The name of the poison came in a whisper from The Shadow's lips:

"Strychnine!"

The terrifically enlarged pupils of the dead man's eyes gave a third ugly name to The Shadow's mental diagnosis.

Atropine! Undoubtedly a huge dose of it to produce so unmistakable an effect!

For the first time in his career of crime hunting, The Shadow felt completely baffled in the presence of this hideous, triple clue to death. Why should a man be killed three times with poison? Why should the crime take place in the most reputable hospital in the city? Why had he first been stupefied with a dose of chloral hydrate?

And what was the connection of Sam Romine with this incredible murder?

The Shadow made a swift examination of the dead man's clothing. He found that the pockets were all empty, the labels missing from the coat. Even the laundry marks had been cut away - probably with a sharp razor blade.

Whoever the dead man was, the murderer intended to make sure that his identity would never be

uncovered by police!

The Shadow's tiny torch went out, plunging the death room into darkness. Silently, he opened the door. He bent to examine again the strange golden droplet that he had first noticed on the threshold.

It was fading fast. There was only a thin film left. Whatever it was, it was evidently a highly volatile compound. It had evaporated rapidly into the air.

An instant later, The Shadow bounded to his feet. He had heard approaching steps on the hard composition floor of the corridor. He faded toward a dark angle of the corridor.

But not quite in time!

The approaching nurse had seen something that brought a gasp of alarm to her lips. She had caught a swift glimpse of a hawk-nosed face, burning eyes beneath the brim of a black slouch hat.

She stood for an instant transfixed by terror. A name trembled on her pale lips:

"The Shadow!"

She could see nothing of a human being in the corner of the hall where that dark-cloaked figure had vanished. Slowly, she advanced along the hall. Her hand reached for the light switch.

The dimness of the single night lamp in the hallway ceiling gave way to vivid brilliance. The girl's pale face peered toward the corner where she thought she had seen The Shadow disappear. She saw nothing at all.

The Shadow was gone!

The nurse hesitated. Her frightened impulse was to hurry on to the rotunda and report what she had seen. But she was afraid to expose herself to ridicule. The Shadow? Skulking like a black ghost in Manhattan's foremost hospital? She would be kidded unmercifully by every member of the staff when a search showed no trace of the cloaked intruder she had imagined.

Before she could make up her mind what to do, her glance moved toward the open door of the receiving room. This time she had something real to investigate. The room was in total darkness. It was a flagrant violation of hospital rules.

The nurse took a deep breath. Fighting against her impulse to flee, she bravely entered the dark room. Her hand clicked on the light.

She saw the dreadful, contorted body of the corpse on the rolling bed. She also saw the man who stepped out from behind the door, an automatic in his fist. His eyes glared. He was aiming at her!

She tried to cry out. No sound came from her throat. Her nerves, already overtaxed by her fleeting vision of The Shadow, gave way. She fell to the floor in a faint.

THE SHADOW did not witness the collapse of the nurse. His quick fade from the dark corner of the hall had carried him silently to the service staircase that led aloft.

He mounted to the floor above.

As Lamont Cranston, The Shadow was familiar with every inch of this hospital. Lamont Cranston, man of affairs, well-known in the financial and social world of Manhattan, was a role often assumed by The Shadow. In fact, Cranston was one of the trustees of Mercy Hospital.

He glided swiftly toward the hospital's drug dispensary.

The killing of the victim downstairs looked to The Shadow like an inside job. The man had been brought into the hospital as a drug case. It seemed obvious that the three poisons which had killed him had come from within the hospital itself.

They must have been stolen from the drug dispensary!

The Shadow noted that the dispensary room was empty. There was no sign of the attendant who should have been in charge. It was probable that he had gone off for a quick smoke in a washroom.

Blessing his luck, The Shadow entered the drug room. He moved like a black phantom toward the rear, his keen eyes scanning the shelves. Here were kept the drugs and the stimulants and the poisons to be released only in small amounts in exchange for receipts that had to be accounted for every twenty-four hours.

The eyes of The Shadow searched for three definite things. He was looking for the bottles that contained the hospital's supply of prussic acid and strychnine and atropine.

He received at once a stunning surprise. All three bottles were in plain sight. None had been tampered with!

The evidence of the corpse had suggested an inside murder job done by someone familiar with the interior of the hospital. Now the evidence pointed just as positively in the opposite direction. The murder was an outside job planned to look like an inside job!

The Shadow had a grim feeling that he was fighting a criminal of extraordinary brains and skill.

He had barely checked on the three poison bottles when he flung himself silently to the floor.

His sharp ears had caught a faint echo from the corridor.

Someone was sneaking furtively along the night-darkened hall toward the apparently empty drug room!

CHAPTER IV. THE MAN IN WHITE

HIDDEN from sight, The Shadow watched a man enter.

He was dressed in hospital whites. The Shadow had an excellent view of him. But he was unable to determine whether the man was actually a doctor or a criminal masquerading as one.

The man wore a surgical mask. It hid all of his face except his eyes.

He went straight to the rear shelf which The Shadow had examined a few seconds earlier. His goal was the three bottles that The Shadow had satisfied himself were unopened.

The man removed all three bottles from the shelf. He stood them on a small table and broke their cap seals.

At his left was a sink. Swiftly he emptied the contents of one of the bottles down the drain. He did the same with the other two.

The Shadow did not disclose his presence. The action of the masked man puzzled him. He watched the intruder hurriedly replace the empty bottles in their normal positions on the drug-room shelf.

The man uttered a grunt of satisfaction.

His muttered whisper floated thinly to The Shadow's ears: "Let the police figure this one out!"

The man in the surgical mask turned away the moment he had achieved his purpose. He began a stealthy retreat from the room.

Sibilant laughter halted him. The sound echoed eerily behind his back. He whirled, his hand whipping toward his white-coated hip. Then he froze into trapped immobility.

"Wait!"

The single word came calmly from The Shadow's lips. Twin .45s in black-gloved hands emphasized the softly-intoned order.

The masked man glared with hatred and fear as The Shadow began a slow advance. He knew what the intent of The Shadow was.

The Shadow's hand reached forward to rip the mask from the man's face.

The luck of the damned came to the aid of the trapped criminal. Sudden steps sounded beyond the threshold of the drug room. A man stepped briskly inside.

It was the drug-room attendant, returning innocently from his unauthorized smoke.

He had no time to cry out at the sight of the white-garbed intruder in the surgical mask. He was seized in an iron grip by the desperate crook.

A quick jerk whirled the terrified attendant in front of The Shadow's gun. A brutal shove sent him plunging forward.

The Shadow had no chance to spring aside. The attendant struck him with a violent collision. In falling to his knees the attendant grabbed at The Shadow's gun hand in a terrified and mistaken effort to protect his own life.

It gave the intruder a lightning chance to spring from the drug room. He sent the heavy door crashing shut behind him.

The unwillingness of The Shadow to harm an innocent man cost him precious time. By the time he had flung the blindly grappling attendant aside, and had thrown open the dispensary door, he found himself staring into an empty corridor.

The masked prowler had pulled a quick vanishing act!

The Shadow had no opportunity to search for his wily foe. From behind him came a shrill cry that echoed along the night-deserted corridor.

"Help! Burglar!"

The attendant was pluckily pursuing the black-robed figure of The Shadow, under the confused impression that The Shadow and the masked man had been in cahoots.

His warning yell was directed toward the open door of an elevator farther down the hall.

THE night operator sprang from the motionless car. The yell of the drug-room attendant had wakened

him from a doze on his stool inside the elevator.

One glance was all he needed to galvanize him into action. He sprang toward The Shadow in an effort to intercept him and hurl him to the floor.

His clutch was too wild to be accurate. The sight of the black-cloaked fugitive with the burning eyes unnerved him. Before he could recover he was pinioned by the throat and shoulder, sent spinning aside.

The Shadow raced into the empty elevator. He sent the sliding door shut with a metallic click.

Outside, in the corridor, The Shadow could hear the faint yells of his pursuers. His hand darted to the control lever. The elevator ascended.

The Shadow rose swiftly to the third floor. There, he stopped the car. He did so with apparent awkwardness. There was a gap of nearly a foot and a half between the floor of the elevator and the floor of the corridor.

Into that black gap The Shadow squirmed!

He had barely vanished when his two pursuers emerged from the boxed-in staircase that ran upward around the elevator shaft. They had delayed long enough below to make sure toward which floor The Shadow was heading. The moment they had seen the indicator stop at "3," they had raced up the stairs.

The brief delay robbed them of a chance to catch a glimpse of their quarry. All they saw was the empty elevator and the narrow black gap between the floor of the car and the hallway.

They made a wrong deduction. It was one which The Shadow had expected them to make. They assumed that The Shadow, unfamiliar with the elevator mechanism, had made an awkward stop. They figured that the fleeing Shadow had leaped to the hallway, had raced down its dimly-lighted length to hide in one of the many rooms that lined both sides.

While they were racing down the hall, The Shadow moved toward safety in an entirely different direction.

Hidden below the motionless elevator, he was hanging to the cable in the shaft with a tight double grip of his gloved hands!

He began to slide jerkily down the cable toward the bottom of the black shaft. He kept his grip grimly tight, allowing himself to move only in short spurts.

The grease on the cable made the feat difficult, but The Shadow was an old hand at rope descent. His twisted legs, the tight pressure of his arms and body, acted as a brake on his descent.

But his gloves were shredded and there were burn marks on his palms when his feet touched the pit at the base of the black shaft.

HE hauled himself upward two or three feet after he had collected his breath. His hand moved to the inside mechanism of the basement door.

He stepped from the shaft into the cellar, sliding the door gently shut behind him. He moved noiselessly through the darkness, taking advantage of every bit of cover.

He skirted furnaces and steam boilers, melted into a sort of small alcove at the far end of the basement. Above the alcove was a cellar window. The Shadow unhooked the window from the inside, emerged

into the cool open air.

There was grass under his feet. He was in a turfed courtyard that formed an air space between two of the huge masonry wings of the hospital structure.

Beyond the wings was a place where The Shadow could gain access to the street by climbing over a low, gray-painted fence.

He began to move across the dark turf, his body bent to avoid being seen by a chance observer at one of the hospital's upper windows.

Suddenly, he halted. He had heard a faint sound aloft! Shielding the white blur of his face with his slouch hat, The Shadow turned a quick glance upward.

The sound he had heard came from a window on the top floor. The window was open. From it leaned a man dressed in white hospital garb.

The Shadow recognized that pale, staring face. He had seen the man many times in the company of Hanson Bartley.

It was Bartley's friend and protege, the brilliant young research chemist who was reported to be on the brink of discovering a cure for cancer.

Dr. Sutton!

But it was the rope that drew sibilant laughter from the lips of The Shadow.

The rope dangled from the open window of Sutton's laboratory. It reached all the way to the ground. Sutton was swiftly drawing the rope upward, pulling it into his room!

Soon his face vanished.

Down on the ground, The Shadow, too, suddenly vanished. In his place appeared a more dapper figure. The Shadow had become Lamont Cranston!

Leaving his cloak disguise in a spot where he could easily find it again, Lamont Cranston made an unseen passage across the gray-painted fence that separated the hospital ground from the dark sidewalk. He walked quietly toward the main entrance of Mercy Hospital.

HANSON BARTLEY had wasted no time returning to the hospital after he had left the house on Central Park West, where he had been lured.

More than an hour had elapsed since he had answered the phone call from the criminal who had impersonated the voice of Dwight Nugent. He entered the hospital by his private door on the avenue. An automatic elevator carried him smoothly aloft. It was hard for Bartley to realize the ugly events that had happened to him. But a name in his brain spurred him to action.

Dr. Sutton!

An unknown criminal had made a vague-worded threat against Sutton. Bartley was eager to warn him of danger. He picked up his phone to call Sutton. He received a prompt surprise.

"I'm sorry," the switchboard operator said. "I can't put your call through, Mr. Bartley."

"Why not?"

"I've been ordered not to accept any calls for the present." The operator's voice sounded breathless, excited. "There... there has been a little trouble, sir. I can't discuss it."

Bartley pronged the receiver. For a moment he stood irresolute. Then he turned toward an inner door of his suite and flung it open.

A short corridor was disclosed. This was the hall that led from Bartley's apartment into the top-floor corridor of the hospital. A few steps beyond it was the door of Dr. Sutton's cancer laboratory.

Bartley hurried through. He saw no one on the hospital side.

A glance at the ground-glass panel in the laboratory door showed that the interior was dark. Sutton was apparently elsewhere.

But a strange hunch of peril made Bartley decide to open the door and have a quick look inside. He was able to enter without trouble, because he had a key.

Bartley's key and Sutton's were the only two in existence. Sutton had been insistent on this point. His experiments were of such a delicate nature that he preferred no visitors except his good friend and benefactor, Hanson Bartley.

As he stepped inside the darkened laboratory, Bartley's hand reached for the light switch. Then he uttered a gasp.

He saw that he was not alone. Dr. Sutton, barely visible in the darkness, was leaning out an open window. He was dragging up a long rope from the outside of the building. He was pulling it swiftly into the room.

BARTLEY'S cry was heard by Sutton. He whirled from the window with a pantherish leap. From beneath his white hospital jacket he snatched a gun.

His finger tightened against the trigger preparatory to sending a bullet crashing into the flesh of the man across the room.

"Sutton - don't!"

Bartley's cry was a shrill scream.

"It's I! Hanson Bartley!"

The murderous trigger finger slackened its pressure. Sutton's harsh breathing was the only sound in the room for a moment. Then he said:

"I'm sorry. I didn't know who it was. Turn on the light, will you?"

Bartley obeyed. The bleak look in Sutton's face faded. He forced a smile.

"What in the name of Heaven has happened?" Bartley faltered.

Sutton put the gun away. He spoke quickly.

"A burglar evidently tried to get into my laboratory. I came back" - Sutton hesitated - "a few moments ago and found the lab dark. I had left it lighted. You see, I had to visit a cancer patient whose case has elements of - interest - for me. When I returned I found my window open and a rope dangling outside. For a moment I thought you were the burglar."

"But -"

Bartley's confused murmur went unanswered. Sutton turned and hurried toward a small locked cabinet at one side of his laboratory.

He took a small key from his pocket, opened the cabinet. From the inside he took something that made Bartley's eyes widen with astonishment.

It looked like a bottle of liquid gold!

The liquid was thick, viscous in appearance. It flowed sluggishly inside the bottle as Sutton turned it in his hands.

"Thank the Lord it wasn't stolen!"

Bartley's wonder grew. He had never seen this bottle before, although he had visited the laboratory many times.

"What is it?" he whispered. "The cancer cure you've been searching for?"

Sutton shook his head. His smile was mysterious. He seemed to be weighing in his mind whether he ought to answer Bartley's question or not.

A sound from another quarter saved him from making up his mind. A loud-speaker in the laboratory wall began a sudden, metallic chant:

"Call for Dr. Blarney, please! Dr. Blarney is wanted at once! Dr. Blarney!"

The sound of that code name, harbinger of trouble in the hospital, brought excitement to Bartley. But it seemed to calm Sutton.

With a steady hand he relocked his bottle of golden liquid inside the cabinet. His voice was almost bored.

"Don't you think we had better go and see what's up?"

CHAPTER V. TRIPLE DEATH

LAMONT CRANSTON entered the main door of Mercy Hospital with a politely indifferent air. His manner suggested the boredom of a thoroughly healthy person making a duty visit to a hospital.

He sniffed the way people always did when they smelled the mixed hospital odor of iodoform and antiseptics.

With a humorous smile he said to the white-starched woman at the information desk, "I wish my friends would have the decency to remain healthy."

The desk woman smiled, too.

"How do you do, Mr. Cranston?"

The Shadow noticed that her smile was pinched. She was obeying hospital rules to the best of her ability. The rules said: "If there is trouble in the hospital, do not mention it or discuss it with visitors. The purpose of a well-ordered hospital is to soothe people, not to excite or alarm them."

"I was passing by," The Shadow murmured in his role of Lamont Cranston. "I suddenly remembered I have a friend here who is ill. I thought I might be permitted -"

"Sorry, Mr. Cranston. We can't receive any visitors tonight."

"Really? Is this a new rule?"

"Not exactly," the woman said.

She hesitated, not wishing to offend Cranston, yet determined to give him no information. It didn't make her task any easier when she remembered Lamont Cranston was a trustee of the hospital, and a wealthy contributor to the endowment fund.

In her dilemma, her glance veered backward toward the dimness of the night office behind her. A man stepped from the shadow of a large filing cabinet. He wore a derby hat and a blue serge suit.

The Shadow was not surprised to recognize him as Ben Kirby, a plain-clothes dick attached to the staff of Inspector Cardona. Kirby grinned.

"Hello, Mr. Cranston."

In his Cranston role, The Shadow was well-acquainted with most of Cardona's men. A friend of Commissioner Weston, he managed to see Cardona and other detectives fairly often in order to keep abreast of affairs at police headquarters.

"Hello, Kirby. What brings you here? I thought you were the healthiest specimen on the police force!"

"Nothing wrong with my health, Mr. Cranston," Kirby said. "With me it's business."

"You mean -"

"A guy got himself murdered!"

Before Cranston could make some banal comment, a stocky built man hurried into the hospital rotunda with a firm, quick step.

This was Joe Cardona, ace inspector in the police department, and an old crony of Cranston's.

His swarthy face lighted-up and he shook hands. Then he turned briskly to Kirby.

"Take your post at the front door. Don't allow anyone in or out of the hospital until further orders."

Kirby moved away. Cardona's grin was sardonic as he stared at Lamont Cranston.

"You're a trustee of this joint, aren't you? I'm afraid the hospital is in for a headache! There is going to be some lousy publicity in the papers. Hospitals are supposed to cure people, not murder them!"

THE SHADOW pretended surprise and distress. He asked Cardona for permission to go back with him and view the body. Cardona nodded. Cranston's status as a trustee entitled him to know what was going on.

His glance dropped imperceptibly toward the threshold of the receiving room before he entered. He noticed that the golden droplet he had seen earlier was now completely gone. Evaporation into the air had removed all trace of that queer golden stain.

The distorted body of the corpse on the rolling bed was not in the same position in which The Shadow had first seen it. The medical examiner had moved the body in order to make his examination. He had concluded his task just as The Shadow entered with Cardona.

"Well?" Cardona rasped. "What's the story, doc?"

The medical examiner hesitated. There was a puzzled look on his face. Normally, having finished his job, he lost no time making a quick departure. This time he was slow to move, slower to speak.

"A poison case, doc?" Cardona asked impatiently.

"Three of them," he said.

"Huh?"

"You heard me." His voice was irritable. He looked unhappy. "This man has been killed three times by three separate poisons!"

"That sounds nuts."

"I can't help how it sounds."

"Are you sure?"

"Let me show you. You know something about symptoms and effects. You see that cherry-red discoloration of the man's skin? What would you say about it, Joe?"

"Asphyxia," Cardona muttered. "Maybe carbon monoxide. Maybe illuminating gas. Most likely one of the cyanides, huh?"

"My opinion is that it was done with prussic acid. And look at his arms and legs, the twisted muscles of his face and throat. Strychnine, if ever I saw it! And the pupils of the man's eyes. Big as drumheads. And here and here!"

The examiner's exasperated voice rose nervously.

"If he didn't also die from a lethal dose of atropine - I'm just plain crazy!"

Cardona bent, sniffed at the dead man's lips.

"No odor of peach pits," the examiner said, with a shake of his head. "The reek of chloral hydrate would hide that, anyway. Why do you suppose somebody gave this fellow three deadly poisons and a dose of knockout drops as well?"

Cardona said vaguely, "We'll figure it out, doc. Don't forget to send us a copy of your autopsy report. That ought to clear things up."

"Well, I wish you luck, Joe! Good night, Mr. Cranston."

He snapped his leather satchel shut and departed.

"Bring in the ambulance intern," Cardona ordered. "Dr. Riker."

THE SHADOW eyed attentively the ambulance intern as he entered. He had a dark, good-looking face, somewhat like Cardona's. He seemed calm, completely at ease. He gave his testimony in a pleasant,

straightforward manner.

It checked with the evidence of his ambulance slip. The victim had been alive when he was brought into the hospital. Dr. Riker stated positively that the dose of chloral hydrate had not been a strong one. It could not possibly have caused death.

His testimony was corroborated by that of Murphy, the ambulance driver who had helped carry the stretcher to the fatal receiving room.

The receiving physician was called next. He established the fact that his unavoidable delay in coming from the ward where he had been so busy had resulted in a space of about ten minutes during which time the unconscious man had been alone.

"O.K.," Cardona barked. "Bring in the nurse!"

She was a blonde and very pretty. But most of her prettiness had evaporated under the fright she had experienced from her fleeting view of The Shadow, followed by her discovery of the murdered man. She told about the other man who had aimed a gun at her.

"I... I guess I fainted," she said.

Cardona tried to shake her story about seeing The Shadow.

"I thought The Shadow always helped the police, not crooks," Lamont Cranston's mild voice cut in.

"You're darned right," Cardona said. "I could cite you a hundred cases that would never have been solved if it hadn't been for The Shadow's help. He's no murderer!"

"But I saw him!" the nurse insisted tremulously. "He sneaked out of the receiving room. He disappeared in the corridor. Why should I lie?"

Her lips twitched. She began to weep.

"O.K., sister," Cardona said in a less aggressive tone. "Nobody's accusing you of lying! That's all for the present. Better go somewhere and take it easy."

She left unsteadily on the supporting arm of a man. The Shadow noted that her escort was the dark-complexioned Dr. Riker.

"I'd like to ask a favor of you, inspector," a new voice said, hesitantly.

It was Hanson Bartley. He had entered quietly while the nurse was being questioned. With him was Dr. Sutton.

Sutton seemed almost bored. The taut expression that The Shadow had seen earlier, when he had noticed Sutton leaning from his darkened laboratory window to draw up a dangling rope that had vanished entirely. There was a faint smile on Sutton's lips. He appeared to be mildly amused.

His suit of hospital whites was the neatest and cleanest in the room. The trousers were freshly pressed, the coat spotless. The Shadow decided that young Dr. Sutton had made a quick and very recent change to a suit fresh from the hospital laundry.

"What's your favor, Mr. Bartley?" Cardona said.

"I'd like you to keep the news of this unfortunate affair out of the papers, inspector."

"Sorry. Can't be done!" Cardona's shrug had finality in it. "A murder is a part of the public record. If it wasn't, it would be damn good news for killers."

Bartley persisted. He pointed out that the crime had occurred in a hospital. There were patients to be considered, some of them seriously ill. If reporters came barging in, serious consequences might result.

"He means," Dr. Sutton cut in smoothly, "that the hospital can't afford crime publicity. It might cause the public to lose confidence in Mercy Hospital. This murder looks like an inside job. Suppose people got the idea that a killer was on the hospital staff? It would bring Mercy Hospital to ruin in short order. Isn't that what you meant, Mr. Bartley?"

Bartley nodded. "Couldn't you keep it quiet, inspector, for just a few days?"

"Not a chance," Cardona said.

It was hard to tell whether Sutton was pleased or disappointed by this failure to hush up the murder.

"Have you found out, yet, who the victim is?" Sutton asked.

"Nope. I don't think it's going to be easy. We took his prints, but I've a hunch it's not going to help. The killer removed everything the guy had in his pockets. And look at the coat. No label. Torn out! Not even a laundry mark. Ripped out - everything!"

There was a brief pause. Cardona rubbed his chin.

THE silence was broken suddenly by a quick staccato sound. A man was running along the corridor at top speed.

"Who the hell is that?" Cardona said.

The feet came racing straight toward the door of the receiving room. It was one of Cardona's plain-clothes men. He yelled over his shoulder to someone else, "Hurry it up, Charlie! Bring 'em along!"

Cardona took heart from the elated expression on his detective's face. "Something new?"

"I'll say! I just found out where the poisons came from! They were stolen from the drug dispensary right here in the hospital! And who do you think did it?"

His voice was thin with excitement as he added:

"The Shadow!"

"Nuts!" Cardona bit off an oath of disgust. "Are you guys all going crazy?"

"Not me. We've got eyewitnesses this time. Bring 'em in, Charlie!"

Another detective entered. With him came two men. One was the drug-room attendant. The other was the uniformed elevator operator.

They told their stories quickly under the prodding of Cardona.

The drug-room attendant reluctantly admitted that he had left his post briefly, to smoke a cigarette in the washroom. He told how he had surprised The Shadow and a masked doctor in hospital whites. He described the quick disappearance of the masked doctor, the subsequent pursuit of The Shadow to an upper floor where his trail was lost.

He was corroborated in his story by the elevator man.

"Did you look at the shelves in the drug room?" Cardona snapped at his subordinate.

"I sure did. Three bottles were tampered with. All of them were empty. The drug-room guy here swears all three of them were filled when he went off for that smoke of his."

"What bottles were they?"

"Prussic acid. Strychnine. Atropine."

"Hm-m-m- It sounds tough," Cardona muttered.

"Tough? Not at all!" The quiet voice was Dr. Sutton's. "To me it sounds fairly simple. I mean, assuming that The Shadow is not the mysterious angel for good that you seem so anxious to believe, inspector."

His sarcasm turned Cardona's face a dull brick-red, but the inspector held his temper.

"Go ahead, doctor. What's your theory?"

"I believe," Sutton said with a serene smile, "that The Shadow is a criminal! The nurse saw him. Two other witnesses saw him. He killed this poor unknown victim who arrived in the ambulance. He did it with those three poisons from the drug room. He was helped by a henchman of his disguised as a doctor."

He turned to Hanson Bartley.

"Don't you agree with me?"

Bartley looked uneasy. His mind seemed to be on something else. "I guess so," he muttered.

The Shadow, watching him narrowly, had a feeling that Bartley was trying to make up his mind to say something that he was half-afraid to divulge.

Bartley's lips started to move. Then Sutton stepped closer to him. His hand touched Bartley's in a negligent gesture. It was just enough to make Bartley turn his head. His eyes met those of Sutton.

A quick glance passed between them. To The Shadow, the nature of that warning glance from the cancer expert was unmistakable. It said grimly: "No!"

Bartley moistened his dry lips. He said no more.

THE SHADOW decided there was nothing further to be gained by waiting in the receiving room. He had more positive plans to attend to.

The dangling rope from Sutton's laboratory window had not been forgotten by The Shadow. Nor had he forgotten Sutton's unexplained change to a brand-new suit of hospital whites.

He was anxious to have a private look at the cancer laboratory on the top-floor wing that was so handy to the apartment of Hanson Bartley.

Lamont Cranston began to edge unobtrusively toward the door. He could hear Cardona talking to the suave Sutton.

"So you believe the killer is The Shadow? If that's the case, where is he? What became of him?"

"You have men posted at all the exit doors," Sutton rejoined. "Unless The Shadow is invisible he could

hardly have escaped past them. That's my answer to your question, inspector. I say that The Shadow is the killer! I also say that he must still be somewhere inside this hospital!"

Lamont Cranston had moved across the threshold of the receiving room. But his plan for a quick departure aloft, toward the laboratory of the cocksure Dr. Sutton, was frustrated by a new alarm.

This time it was brought by a nurse. She came hurrying into the corridor from the rotunda. Her voice was shrill with fright.

"Help! Hurry! Quickly!"

"Who are you?" Cardona rasped as he caught her by the arm. "What's wrong?"

"I'm the desk nurse on duty on the third floor. There's been another crime!"

"What?"

"A private patient. Third floor! Peter Verne. I... I just found him!"

"Dead?"

The question spat like a bullet from the lips of Lamont Cranston. But no one noticed his grim demeanor or the sudden, reddish flare that swam into his mild eyes. It was an expression that faded instantly.

"Not dead," the nurse gasped. "Mr. Verne is unconscious. Somebody has given him a drug!"

"Are you sure he's been drugged?"

"Yes, sir. I smelled his lips. It's chloral hydrate!"

Cardona's voice sounded shaken. "More knockout drops! The same as this guy here! Looks like the killer is starting it all over again!"

He raced into the hall, headed swiftly upstairs.

CHAPTER VI. HELL BROTH

THE private room of Peter Verne was a large one. But the number of people who crowded into it made it seem small.

Cardona was there with two of his detectives. So was the nurse who had given the alarm. Hanson Bartley stood to one side, his face drawn into gray, worried lines. Dr. Sutton stood close to Bartley. He seemed unwilling to allow Bartley out of his sight.

The Shadow attracted no attention at all. In his role of Cranston, he seemed a minor nuisance.

It was Sutton who made the examination of the unconscious Verne. He tested the drugged man's pulse and respiration, examined his heart, sniffed at his lips.

"Chloral hydrate," he said. He nodded pleasantly at the nurse. "You made an excellent diagnosis."

"Is he O.K.?" Cardona asked.

"No danger whatever. The amount of the dose seems to be small. All Mr. Verne needs is quiet and a few elementary attentions, which I am sure his nurse will be able to provide. I wonder where the drug came from? Ah -"

He had turned toward a small table alongside Verne's bed while he spoke. On it was a bottle of what appeared to be medicine.

He lifted the glass stopper, sniffed at the contents.

"What sort of stuff is this, nurse?"

"Blood tonic. Dr. Hayworth prescribed it for him. Mr. Verne was suffering from a mild case of anemia."

"That's how he got the knockout drops," Sutton declared. "Someone must have sneaked into the room and doped his blood tonic. The odor of chloral hydrate is quite pronounced."

"Were you on duty in this corridor?" Cardona asked the nurse.

"Yes, sir."

"Did you notice anybody going into Mr. Verne's room?"

"No, sir. But -"

"But what?" Cardona barked.

The face of the nurse paled. In a frightened tone she explained about the strange buzzer signal that had lured her away from her corridor desk to the distant room of a woman patient.

"You are sure that woman patient was fast asleep, that someone else sneaked in and pressed the signal button?"

"I'm sure of it," the nurse said. "The patient had been suffering pain. She had been given a mild opiate a short while earlier. I had difficulty rousing her to ask her about the signal. She denied it, and I believe her. Besides, I forgot to explain to you about Mr. Verne's door!"

She told about Verne's door being open when he had returned to his empty room from the bathroom at the corridor's end.

"Mr. Verne asked me if I had opened it while he was away. He said he had shut it when he left. It was open when he came back. We were both puzzled, but neither of us thought much about it. I... I guess I figured that Mr. Verne was sort of absent-minded."

"Absent-minded, hell!" Cardona muttered. "That was how the criminal pulled his drug stunt! He lured you away, then ducked in and out. How long would it take to dope that tonic bottle, Dr. Sutton?"

"Not more than a few seconds, I should say," Sutton murmured.

The polite voice of Lamont Cranston intervened.

"Sorry to butt in - but is that a prescription blank hidden under the tonic bottle?"

No one else had noticed it. It looked like the end of a white scrap of paper sticking out from beneath the bottom of the bottle. Cardona lifted the bottle, picked up the scrap of paper.

It was not a prescription blank, but a small piece of folded paper. On it was a brief sentence printed by a heavy black pencil.

Cardona read the message aloud in a puzzled voice: "And the greatest of these is charity."

"What the heck does that mean? It's from the Bible, isn't it?"

"One of the loveliest passages in the entire Bible," Lamont Cranston said. "From the Apostle Paul. Thirteenth Chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians."

"Sounds like some sort of a threat," Cardona growled. "Wonder what it means? We'll have to wait until Verne recovers from the knockout drops to find out."

Hanson Bartley made a quick sound in his throat. He seemed excited. Dr. Sutton tried to interrupt him with a statement about when Peter Verne might be expected to recover consciousness. But Cardona refused to be sidetracked.

"Does this note mean something to you, Mr. Bartley?"

"Maybe I'm just imagining things. But it occurs to me that the reference to charity might indeed be a threat."

"How do you mean?"

"Well - Mr. Verne is a trustee of Mercy Hospital. He is also, you might say, a patron. He has promised to make a large donation to the endowment fund. He promised it last month. I suppose he forgot about it due to his health or perhaps the press of business affairs."

"You think that maybe the criminal was warning Verne to pay up that charitable donation he promised?" Cardona looked disgusted. "What kind of a motive is that? How could a criminal profit if Verne kicked in with a donation to Mercy Hospital?"

"I... I don't quite know," Bartley said. "It was just something that occurred to me."

Sutton began to talk - smooth medical jargon about the condition of the unconscious Mr. Verne. Again The Shadow was conscious that Sutton was trying to make sure that his friend Bartley didn't say too much about crime and motive.

The Shadow drifted casually toward the door of Room 317. No one noticed him fade down the hall toward the staircase. He descended quickly.

He walked along the ground floor until he had reached a rear corridor window.

A moment later, Lamont Cranston was outdoors on the grassy turf between the angle of two of the hospital wings. This was the place where he had seen the rope dangling from Sutton's darkened laboratory. Nearby was the spot where he had hidden his cloaked disguise.

The need for the role of Lamont Cranston had passed. The dapper Cranston changed swiftly to the black-robed figure of The Shadow.

HE returned noiselessly to the hospital corridor through the open window. He melted like a moving streak of blackness toward a narrow flight of stairs.

These were the service stairs that led upward toward the wing where Sutton's laboratory was located. The Shadow flitted invisibly aloft. But he didn't emerge from the protection of the inclosed stairway.

He had no desire to risk detection by trying to pick the lock of Sutton's laboratory door. Another route was more feasible for his plan to maintain complete secrecy in his search of the lab.

He opened a window on the top-floor landing of the stairway. He was already aware, from his scrutiny

of the building from the grass courtyard below, that an outside route was possible into Sutton's locked cancer lab.

Just below the top-floor level was an ornamental stone ledge that ran around the face of the building.

The Shadow had no difficulty reaching the ledge from the staircase window. To his left was the sharp masonry corner of the hospital wing. Sutton's cancer laboratory occupied two sides of this top-floor corridor.

The Shadow began to inch carefully along the narrow space afforded by the stone ledge.

It was a dangerous route, especially in the dark. A single misstep would mean a smashing fall to death. But The Shadow had steady nerves. He aided the slow shuffle of his feet along the ledge by the clinging pressure of his hands and body against the vertical wall of the building.

He reached the small window of the laboratory that fronted on this side of the hospital. His luck was bad. The window was closed and locked! A shade had been drawn all the way down on the inside.

The Shadow could have removed the pane very neatly with a small diamond cutter from a pocket of his robe. But he preferred not to advertise to the shrewd Sutton that a search had been made of his laboratory.

He decided to try the other lab window.

This was the window from which he had seen Sutton draw up the dangling rope. It was around the corner, on the other side of the wing. The Shadow resumed his dizzy aerial advance.

This time his job was doubly tough. He had to inch around the sharp angle of the building without losing his grip. There was a gap in the ledge at the building's corner. The Shadow had to make a jump and a dangerous swing of his body to bridge that awkward break in his aerial journey.

A single wavering of nerves or muscles would have sent him crashing to death through empty space. But The Shadow managed to make the corner leap without catastrophe. His eyes were hot with excitement. Time was essential. He had to hurry!

He found that the closed window on the other side of the building was not locked. It lifted under his even pressure. He slipped, unseen, into the dark laboratory.

He was careful to close the window and leave the shade exactly as he had found it. He could see no sign of the rope that Sutton had pulled in. Before he searched for it, he studied the interior of the laboratory with grim interest.

He was struck instantly by a queer fact. There was an enormous amount of chemical equipment in the lab. He could see bottles and retorts and beakers. It seemed a strange sort of equipment for a man primarily interested in finding a cancer cure.

At one end of the room were tiers of crates, from which came a sort of thin squeaking. Investigating, The Shadow saw that the crates housed rabbits and guinea pigs and a number of white mice.

Behind those piled crates, close to the small window which he had been unable to enter earlier, he made a more important find.

The rope which Sutton had pulled into the courtyard window lay neatly coiled on the floor!

THE SHADOW examined it. Knowing something about the technique of rope climbing, The Shadow looked for signs of threads along the rope. No one could slide down a rope of such length without wearing gloves for protection against friction burns.

The Shadow could find no trace of thread or fabric along the rough fiber of the long rope. It was clear to him that no one had used this rope recently. The notion of a laboratory "burglar" seemed to The Shadow to be a complete myth.

He replaced it; turned to other tasks.

A cabinet attracted his gaze. It had a stout lock. The Shadow wondered why this cabinet should be locked. Nothing else in the way of cupboards or cabinets in the lab was equipped with similar protection.

He picked the lock with a tiny device made of chrome steel. Its slender point moved deftly in the lock mechanism. The sure-fingered efficiency of The Shadow left no telltale scratches on the lock-housing to disclose that an examination had been made.

He found something inside the cabinet that made his eyes gleam. It was a bottle filled with a fluid that looked like liquid gold. When the gloved hand of The Shadow tilted the bottle, the stuff inside it flowed sluggishly and thickly, like mud.

The Shadow, wise in the ways of chemistry, suspected that this liquid was a colloidal fluid.

He was certain that he had found the source of the mysterious gold splash that had evaporated so magically from the threshold of the receiving room, where the unknown victim of three poisons had died!

But his exultation faded when he uncapped the bottle and smelled of its contents. He sniffed a strong odor of alcohol!

The stuff looked like tiny particles of gold leaf suspended in a mother liquid of alcohol. The Shadow had suspected it might be a colloid. It wasn't. It was exactly what it appeared to be - millions of particles of gold leaf floating in what was probably methyl alcohol.

The golden droplet at the threshold of the hospital's receiving room had been entirely odorless. This stuff, whatever it was, was a fake!

The Shadow relocked the bottle in the cabinet. He had barely done so when he heard a slight noise at the laboratory door.

He ducked to the safest spot he could see - the narrow area behind the piled wooden cages of the rabbits and guinea pigs and mice.

At his back was the small locked window which he had been unable to enter from the stone ledge outside. Swiftly, he raised the drawn shade. He also released the window's inside catch.

It was done in the split-second instant that preceded the opening of the laboratory door. Two men entered. One was Dr. Sutton. The other was Hanson Bartley.

Through a tiny chink in the tier of crates, The Shadow was able to see as well as to hear.

SUTTON was no longer the suave young man he had appeared to be during Cardona's police examination. His manner was one of urgency. The Shadow had a feeling that Sutton's new excitement was assumed.

"I had to get you away from the police as soon as I could," Sutton told Bartley hurriedly. "I've got terrible news for you. The poison that killed that fellow who was brought here in the ambulance - was stolen from this laboratory!"

Bartley seemed unable to comprehend what Sutton was talking about.

"Wait! Let me make sure!" Sutton turned abruptly, ran to the locked cabinet, took out the bottle of golden liquid which The Shadow had just examined.

He opened it and sniffed. Then he groaned.

"It's a fake! I was afraid of that the moment I saw the corpse downstairs. Now I know why the rope burglar got in here! He stole the poison, left this alcohol and gold-leaf mixture to fool me!"

"But - poison?" Bartley whispered. "I don't understand! I thought you were concerned only with finding a cure for cancer?"

"I was. I am! This was an entirely accidental discovery. It was a by-product from one of my cancer experiments. What I actually did - without intending to - was to isolate a master poison!"

There was tense excitement in Dr. Sutton's whisper.

"Do you understand what I'm trying to tell you? A master poison! One that simulates the effects of three other poisons - and yet leaves no trace whatever of its own existence in the tissues or blood. I know! I've used it on rabbits and mice. It's the most perfect agency for quick death that any chemist ever dreamed of. In the hands of a criminal, it's an invitation to commit a thousand murders without running the slightest risk of detection."

"But an autopsy - Surely an autopsy would -"

"An autopsy will disclose nothing! That medical examiner will go crazy when he cuts open the victim's body! He will have to certify death from natural causes. Can you see, now, why I was afraid to say too much to those damned cops downstairs?"

"It will ruin Mercy Hospital," Bartley gasped. "Physicians will be afraid to remain on the staff. Patients will leave in droves. This has got to be kept quiet!"

"Exactly," Sutton said. "I knew you'd understand!"

Bartley's face was suddenly pale.

"I've got a secret, too," he said faintly. "It's something I think you ought to know. I know why that poison was stolen! I know the motive of the criminal who got hold of it."

He explained to Sutton the ugly events that had started with a fake phone call from an unknown criminal posing as Dwight Nugent. Bartley revealed how he had been lured to Nugent's empty New York house. He told of the extortion demand.

"An unknown criminal wants half of every dollar that is paid in to Mercy Hospital in the form of endowment donations! He knows who has promised, and how much. He warned me that he expected me to turn over to him at least a half million dollars every year."

"It's The Shadow!" Sutton declared. "And I know who that sneaking rat in the surgical mask was who helped The Shadow raid the drug room. You may not believe me, but you've got to!"

"Who?"

"Dr. Riker! The intern who was on duty tonight as an ambulance surgeon."

"It's unbelievable," Bartley cried. "Riker's record has always been good. Are you sure there isn't a personal bias behind this charge of yours, doctor?"

His voice had become suddenly stern.

SUTTON shrugged. He said: "I'll admit there has been some trouble between Riker and me. He and I happened to be fond of the same nurse. But I assure you, I bear Hiker no malice on that account. I accuse him for a very simple reason. Riker is the only man on earth besides myself - and now you - who knows I had the master poison!"

Behind his screen of crates, The Shadow listened intently.

"Here is what happened," Sutton said harshly. "A week ago, Dr. Riker became suddenly friendly. He came to my room, asked me if I'd spend an evening with him at cards. I agreed because I hate hospital feuds. I was anxious to smooth matters between us. So we played cards together that night."

Sutton drew a deep breath.

"Riker insisted on playing for money. He lost - heavily. He wouldn't let me quit. Said he deserved a chance to win his money back. But he didn't. When the game broke up he owed me considerable. He promised to pay as soon as he could. I told him not to worry."

There was a nasty undercurrent below Sutton's smooth words.

"Two days later Riker came to my laboratory. He brought the money with him. Said he wanted to pay his debt and get it off his mind. Unfortunately, I was at that very instant testing my newly discovered elixir. The golden color of it fascinated Riker. I told him it was a harmless reagent used in the detection of cancerous tissue. But Riker knew enough about cancer to suspect that I was telling him nonsense."

"What happened?" Bartley whispered.

"The fool touched a spilled drop of the stuff with his finger. He started to put his fingertip on his tongue to taste it! Naturally, I yelled, grabbed at him, washed the deadly stuff off his finger with a strong caustic solution. After that I had to tell him what he'd been fooling with! I swore him to absolute secrecy. He agreed to forget what he had seen and what I had told him. I think that from that moment, Dr. Riker plotted the theft of my master poison!"

Something in Hanson Bartley's face made Sutton flush.

"You probably wonder why I didn't disclose my discovery earlier to the proper hospital authorities," he said. "I meant to, of course! But I wasn't sure that it would be wise to make any announcement until I was certain of the nature of my golden hell broth. You see, there was always the possibility that, in tiny doses, it might be the long-wished-for nostrum to wipe out the scourge of cancer."

His voice sounded lame and unconvincing to the ears of the listening Shadow. Bartley looked doubtful, too. But Sutton had one final bombshell to explode.

"Let me show you my last proof of Dr. Riker's guilt," he told Bartley. "Have a look at this!"

He strode across the laboratory to a small closet. From it he took something that was crumpled and white.

He handed it to Bartley. It was a hospital jacket and a pair of trousers.

"Look in the jacket's neckband."

"Why - it's Dr. Riker's! His name is stenciled on the laundry label inside the collar."

"Exactly. Now look at the sleeve. Close to the cuff."

Bartley held up the sleeve gingerly, as if afraid to touch it.

On the white fabric was a small dried stain. Its color made Hanson Bartley shudder.

It was the bright hue of liquid gold!

CHAPTER VII. A CUNNING TRAP

FOR a moment Hanson Bartley seemed stunned. Then he asked a shrill question.

"Where did you get hold of that suit?"

"I found it," Sutton said. His eyes were hard as diamonds. "Hidden in a supply closet downstairs. Stuffed inside a hospital laundry bag."

"It seems incredible. It's hard to believe that a physician on our own staff is - a killer!"

"I'm not accusing Riker," Sutton said. "He's being accused by the evidence he, himself, left. Do you know where that supply closet was?"

"No."

"On the same corridor where the drug-dispensary room is located. In the place where the drug-room attendant and the elevator operator testified that The Shadow's henchman vanished!"

"You think that Dr. Riker and The Shadow are in cahoots?"

"I don't think so. I know! The only reason there is any doubt at all about The Shadow's guilt is the stupid insistence of Inspector Cardona that The Shadow is a hidden friend of the law."

Hidden behind the tier of crates that housed the experimental rabbits and guinea pigs, The Shadow was listening grimly to the swift talk of Dr. Sutton. His secret visit to the laboratory of the cancer-research man was paying off in a rich dividend.

The Shadow was now fully aware of the extent of the threat against Hanson Bartley and Mercy Hospital!

Through a tiny chink between two of the piled crates, The Shadow could see a persuasive smile appear on Sutton's lips. The cancer expert had used shock methods on his friend and benefactor. Now he was about to try persuasion.

"I'm not asking you to take my word about the deadly quality of the master poison I discovered," he said. "I'll show you exactly what happens when a dose of it is administered to a living animal."

"But you haven't any of the poison!" Bartley said. "You told me a moment ago that the bottle in your cabinet is a fake, left there by the thief who stole the real bottle."

"True enough. But it happens that yesterday I performed an experiment on one of my laboratory rabbits.

What I'm going to show you is some of the dead tissue of that rabbit. Then, perhaps, you will understand what happened to the victim whom Riker brought here tonight in his ambulance."

Sutton turned, took a step toward the tier of crates behind which The Shadow was concealed.

The Shadow realized his danger. Discovery was the last thing he wanted! He preferred to keep his hidden presence in the hospital a secret.

He lifted the small window at his back. In a second it was open. In another second The Shadow's black-cloaked figure slid soundlessly across the sill, dropped downward toward the narrow stone ledge on the outside of the building below the window.

His gloved hands closed the window from the outside.

But the necessity for speed ruined The Shadow's chance to maintain a complete silence. The hastily closed window made a slight squeak.

THE noise was heard by the sharp ears of Dr. Sutton as he stepped toward the dark space behind the crates. He uttered a prompt yell of suspicion and alarm.

"Someone's hiding behind those crates!"

A gun whipped into Sutton's grasp from beneath his white jacket. He darted around the end of the tier of crates.

An oath came from his lips as he stared over the barrel of the weapon. The space where he had heard the sound was empty.

"It was probably one of the rabbits squeaking," Bartley suggested nervously.

"Rabbit, hell! There was a man back here!"

Suddenly his eyes veered toward the window through which The Shadow had pulled his quick sneak.

"Look! The shade. It's up! It should be drawn all the way down to the bottom. That's not the way I left it. And the window fastening! It's been opened from the inside!"

The talk between the two men was swift. It took barely a few seconds. The Shadow had hardly faded to the darkness of the narrow stone ledge below the window when Sutton raised the sash and shoved out his head.

His gun pointed murderously toward the stone ledge below. He was itching to empty that gun. He had a permit for the weapon. There was no law against shooting a burglar caught in the act of escaping!

But to Sutton's rage, he found no human target to riddle with lead. The narrow ledge was empty!

His gaze veered to right and left. A considerable distance to the left was the window that gave access to the hospital's stairway. It was too far away, Sutton realized, for a burglar to have reached it during those few seconds that had followed the sound of the window squeak.

His tight finger relaxed on his trigger. He began to doubt the existence of the burglar.

"I told you it was a rabbit," Bartley said nervously from behind Sutton's shoulder, "Listen! There it is again! A rabbit - or maybe it's a guinea pig."

Sutton closed the window with a scowl. He drew down the black shade from the inside.

The Shadow, almost directly under that closed and shaded window, emitted a whisper of barely audible mirth.

The reason that Sutton had been unable to see The Shadow was simple. A couple of feet to the right of the closed laboratory window, The Shadow was hanging like a black pendulum in space.

The overhang of the ledge hid his dangling body. All that was in view were the tips of black-gloved fingers at the edge of the dark ledge.

The Shadow tightened his finger grip above his hidden head. He drew himself silently upward.

Pivoting on one knee, he gained his feet. With his face and body pressed against the vertical wall of the building, The Shadow made the dangerous return trip along his narrow footing.

He reached the stairway window.

He was leaning inward to draw himself to safety across the sill of the window when he heard a snarl.

A face glared from the dimness of the staircase landing. It was Dr. Riker!

His hand struck out viciously at The Shadow in a powerful shove. It was a blow impossible to parry or avoid. The Shadow's grip on the window sill was torn loose.

His feet left the narrow stone ledge. His body toppled backward into empty space!

He made a wild death grab. It was an instinctive clutch, born of desperation. It missed the smooth sill of the window. But it closed on living flesh.

The Shadow's fingers clamped on the outthrust wrist of his would-be murderer!

As he fell, The Shadow hung onto that wrist. The weight of his toppling body pulled Riker almost out the window.

The Shadow hung on. Riker's extended arm was bent across the sill. It was anchored by his bruised armpit and the weight of his own body against the inner staircase wall below the window.

Riker squealed with pain.

He dropped the surgeon's scalpel with which he had tried to slash The Shadow's throat at the moment of his savage shove.

The wrist-hold on The Shadow was an insecure one. He could feel his damp fingers slipping. Twisting desperately in the darkness, he managed to fling his left hand toward the edge of the window sill.

He caught a grip on the sill. He grabbed it just as his slipping right hand pulled loose from the wildly twisting arm of the man jammed in the open window above him.

The Shadow braced himself to beat off another scalpel attack.

But the groaning Riker had had enough. He reeled backward, his wrenched arm dangling limply. With a quick whirl he sprang across the darkened stair landing.

He fled down the staircase.

The Shadow pulled himself fiercely upward with tired muscles and slid across the window sill. He fell inward to the staircase landing.

A quick bound brought him to his feet. He raced down the service stairs on the trail of the fleeing Riker.

He saw no sign of the fugitive. But the dim echoes of racing feet told The Shadow that Riker had not detoured back into a hospital corridor. He had fled all the way to the bottom.

At the bottom were two doors. One led into what The Shadow knew was the hospital's dietary kitchen. It was a huge room filled with steam from soup kettles and the odor of cooking food. The Shadow's cautious peek disclosed the white-capped figures of cooks, busy at stoves. He could see a couple of white-coated orderlies sipping at cups of hot coffee.

It was hardly likely that Riker would have raced pell-mell into such a place with a wrenched arm and a bleeding hand, cut accidentally by his own murderous scalpel.

The Shadow swerved with scarcely a pause through the other door.

He found himself in the open air of a paved parking area for hospital cars. He could see the dark shapes of half a dozen automobiles left there by hospital surgeons. There was a gap in that line of motionless vehicles.

One of the cars was gone!

The Shadow hurried to the exit gate of the parking area. He peered cautiously into the street. He saw no sign of a vanishing crimson taillight.

Riker had had ample time to swing around a corner for a speedy getaway.

The Shadow's laughter did not indicate disappointment at this development. There was strength in his quiet mirth. There was also confidence.

Dr. Riker had proved he was grimly capable of murder. But The Shadow was jumping to no hasty conclusions concerning Riker's guilt of the poison murder in Mercy Hospital or the strange drugging of Peter Verne. Subsequent events might confirm Riker's guilt as a cunning extortioner. Until that time, The Shadow preferred to depend on facts, not guesswork.

There was one fact in this crime riddle that was crystal clear. Whoever the million-dollar extortioner was, his henchman was Sam Romine!

TEN minutes later, the dapper figure of Lamont Cranston entered an all-night drugstore. He carried a small, leather briefcase. He walked quietly to a sound-proofed phone booth and made a call.

A calmly alert voice replied:

"Burbank speaking."

The Shadow asked for a report from Moe Shrevnitz.

Shrevnitz had been assigned to trail the slippery Sam Romine while The Shadow had investigated events inside Mercy Hospital. His report, transmitted by Burbank, was interesting.

Moe had followed Romine's sedan all the way to lower Manhattan. There the trail had turned east. It had ended in a slum block close to the East River.

Romine had faded hurriedly into a crumbling brick tenement. Moe had parked his taxi farther down the street, to wait. Fifteen minutes later his second report went over the wire to Burbank:

"No sign of Romine. Still inside tenement."

That was the last message Burbank had received from Shrevvy. It was seemingly a disobedience of orders, for Moe had been instructed to report every fifteen minutes. Nearly an hour had elapsed since Shrevvy's last call!

The Shadow's voice gave no hint of the reaction this state of affairs produced in his mind.

"That is all!"

He hung up. As Lamont Cranston, he left the drugstore and entered a taxicab. He drove downtown to the street mentioned by Shrevvy's first report.

But he didn't continue in the cab toward the East River. He paid off the driver on lower Broadway, waited in a cigar store until the taxi vanished northward.

Only then did Lamont Cranston walk eastward toward the river.

He walked with careless steps, making no effort to hide himself from possible watchful eyes in the darkness of the slum street.

Soon he came abreast of Moe Shrevnitz's parked taxi. It was empty. Cranston started to slow his pace a trifle in order to gain a quick, sidelong view of the cab's interior.

A second later he changed his mind. His gaze had flicked straight ahead. At the end of the street was the dark shape of a pier head. It was a huge, covered structure, built to protect bales of merchandise and freight that were piled there for water shipment.

A single dim light burned over the entrance to the pier.

A faint flick of reflected light just inside the pier gate told The Shadow that a man was hidden there. The strange flick vanished. Then, again, it was briefly visible.

Someone was watching the empty taxicab of Moe Shrevnitz through a pair of powerful field glasses!

CRANSTON continued to walk onward. By the time he reached the corner, the unknown thug with the field glasses had faded to a safer spot. The Shadow didn't even glance toward the dim pier head. He turned the street corner, walked north along the river front, turned back from it into the next street.

On this rear street were more dingy tenements like those in the block where Shrevvy had vanished. Cranston swerved closer to the line of buildings. Making sure that he was unobserved, he faded down a flight of cellar steps into darkness.

When he emerged in the rear yard, he was garbed in the black cloak of The Shadow. He scaled a rickety fence, glided invisibly through another yard.

He had now gained the tenement in front of which Moe's empty cab was parked.

He left it by way of the cellar steps. Bent close to the sidewalk, he was completely invisible to the hidden watcher at the street end of the pier.

He reached the side of the taxicab without showing himself in the glow of the parking lights which Moe

or, perhaps, his criminal abductors had purposely left lighted.

The Shadow peered into the cab's interior.

On the rear seat was a small white pellet. It looked like a scrap of crumpled paper. The open, sliding window behind the driver's seat explained what that scrap of paper might be.

A message from Shrevvy!

Moe, according to the evidence of the sliding window, had scrawled a hasty note, had tossed it backward for The Shadow to find.

The Shadow's laughter held grim amusement. That evidence was planted! It was incredible that Moe, surprised and captured by smart crooks, would have had the time or the opportunity to write such a note.

The whole set-up smelled like a trap!

Other facts confirmed The Shadow's suspicion of trickery. Beneath the rear seat of the cab was a slight gap. A panel had been opened and closed. But not completely.

Behind the seat panel, The Shadow was well aware that there was a secret recess. In it was kept an extra cloak disguise to be used by The Shadow in emergencies.

Criminals had found the cloak and the slouch hat! They were aware that Moe Shrevnitz was an agent of The Shadow!

A final clue proved beyond any further doubt the existence of a cunningly baited death trap for The Shadow. A piece of wire was tied to the inner door handle at the cab's rear. The wire disappeared under a bunched lap robe on the floor.

The Shadow knew what would happen if he were foolish enough to open the door to investigate Moe's note.

He did something completely different. From beneath his cloak he produced a length of cord of his own. It was light but strong. He tied one end of it to the outside handle of the taxi's door.

Crouched close to the taxi's dark fender, invisible from the thug hidden at the pier, he made sure that his knot was firmly tied.

Then he did a seemingly foolish thing.

He moved toward the front of the taxi. His crouched figure straightened.

The glow of the parking lights silhouetted The Shadow's figure unmistakably!

CHAPTER VIII. RIVER ROGUES

THE SHADOW'S deliberate exposure of himself was brief. He was countering trickery with trickery!

He ducked from sight, as if suddenly aware he had made a bad error by stepping in the revealing glow of the taxi's parking lights. He moved backward in the direction of the cab's rear door.

With almost the same motion, he dropped flat. In his hand was the loose end of the cord he had tied to the door's outside handle.

He crawled along the sidewalk, paying out the cord. The dark fronts of the tenements hid his retreat.

In a few seconds, he reached the black opening of a sunken areaway. It was protected by a rusted railing. There was just enough room to squirm under the lower rail.

The Shadow gave a quick yank at his cord.

Then he rolled headlong below the railing to the concrete floor of the sunken areaway.

He had barely landed when there was a terrific concussion. Flame spouted upward from Shrevvy's taxicab. It was followed by the roar of a violent explosion.

Chunks of jagged metal flew through the air. Something like shrapnel whined over the bent head of The Shadow like the buzz of an enormous bee.

Tenement windows were smashed. The brick walls of the building showed ugly pock marks.

On the dark pier at the end of the street, the man with the field glasses uttered a squeal of delight. He sprang to his feet, raced outward along the covered pier toward its stringpiece.

He believed what The Shadow wanted him to believe. He had seen The Shadow's cloaked figure silhouetted briefly by the parking lights of the taxi. He had seen him fade toward the taxi's rear door.

The thug with the field glasses was certain that The Shadow had been blasted to bloody chunks!

"The Shadow is dead!" the thug snarled gleefully as he raced toward the river.

But, for a dead man, The Shadow was doing some pretty active running! A quick leap carried him upward from the sunken area where he had escaped the bomb blast. He vaulted the railing, darted across the street.

Almost before the echoes of the explosion had died away, The Shadow was gliding invisibly through the pier gate into the smelly darkness of the covered structure.

He listened. The pier was quiet. He could hear no noise of fleeing feet.

Suddenly, he heard a different sound. It came from the open water beyond the pier's stringpiece - the faint squeak of wood rubbing against metal!

The Shadow recognized the sound. Oars moving in oarlocks! The thug on the pier had dropped into a rowboat. He was rowing out into the blackness of the East River.

A moment later, rowboat and thug were both visible. The Shadow did not disclose his cloaked presence near the pier-end. He hadn't forgotten that Moe Shrevnitz was still a prisoner - probably somewhere out in that river darkness. If crooks now fancied The Shadow was dead, it was an excellent strategy to let them keep on thinking so.

The Shadow climbed down the dark slant of a supporting timber at the side of the pier. He let himself slip quietly into the water.

Swimming with slow, careful strokes, he made no noise. His head bobbed around the black corner of the pier.

The thug in the rowboat was already at a considerable distance from the pier. He bent hard at his oars, sending the craft ahead with powerful spurts.

The Shadow spied a dim shape farther out in the river. It looked like a small cruiser. There was no sign of life aboard. But the blurred outline of a deck cabin suggested that crooks were waiting undercover for the return of their lookout pal.

The Shadow swam toward this sinister craft.

BEFORE he could reach it, the crook from the rowboat was already aboard. The man darted nimbly along the deck to the stern, trailing the rowboat's painter. With a few quick loops, he tied the rowboat astern. He vanished forward toward the space beyond the deck cabin.

The speedboat's motor began to roar. Foam boiled in its rear as the propeller began to whirl.

The Shadow, not close enough to make a successful clutch for the stern of the cruiser, caught a wet grip on the trailing rowboat. Cruiser and rowboat began to race down the dark river in the direction of the harbor.

The rowboat jumped and bobbed crazily at the end of its tether. Creamy foam roared astern. The Shadow, dripping, bellied halfway across the rowboat's gunwale. He was almost thrown headlong into the water. His weight threatened to swamp the overbalanced craft.

He dived hastily to the rowboat's bottom. He made a quick crawl toward the bow.

Seated astride the rowboat's bow, The Shadow was sure that his presence behind the kidnap cruiser had not yet been discovered by the captors of Moe Shrevnitz. He could see no sign of the thugs. All of them seemed to be bunched forward, hidden by the dark shape of the deckhouse.

The gloved hands of The Shadow slid along the wet towrope as far as he could reach. His fingers tightened. His feet gave a powerful kick against the rowboat's bow. The Shadow's cloaked figure swung out on the rope between the jouncing rowboat and the boiling wake of the cruiser.

His weight pulled the towline downward. It sank him up to the waist in turbulent water. It was like being dipped into a frothing tornado. The powerful suction of the screw dragged at his submerged legs. Foaming water soaked him with spray. It was difficult to hang onto the sagging towline without being torn loose.

But, inch by inch, The Shadow began to advance!

Hand over hand he pulled himself up the long slant of the towline. His movements became more rapid. He had seen something that threatened to end his chances to board the kidnap craft. The towline, hurriedly fastened by the thug who had rowed out from the pier, threatened to slip loose at any instant!

The Shadow could see the knot sliding. The end of the rope was barely through a poorly-fashioned loop. Each crazy bounce of the trailing rowboat pulled that loose rope-end looser.

Suddenly, with a jerk, the rope-end flew wild! It unraveled from the cleat around which it had been lashed.

The Shadow, blinded by spray, made a desperate clutch. His fingers caught at the speedboat's stern - slipped - then caught again!

The freed towline struck him a vicious thwack across the face. Then, snakelike, it whipped astern as the unmoored rowboat began to drift swiftly backward into the river darkness.

The Shadow hauled himself upward. He leaned bellywise over the cruiser's stern, flung a leg parallel with

its deck.

A shrill yell warned him that his presence had been discovered!

A thug had noticed the accident to the towline. He had raced back to keep an eye on the drifting rowboat while his pal at the wheel cut the cruiser sharply around to head back for its lost tender.

The startled thug found himself glaring downward into the blazing eyes of a black-robed figure who lay sprawled halfway across the stern.

"The Shadow!"

HIS yell of amazement was followed by a snarl of rage. A knife flicked into his hand from a leather scabbard under his coat. He bent murderously before The Shadow could leap to his feet.

The Shadow, unable to rise, grabbed for the ankle of the killer.

His tug jerked the thug off balance. The man fell to his knees, squirmed aside as The Shadow made a vain clutch at his throat.

The knife plunged. The Shadow, watching the glint of descending steel, rolled aside as the knife struck. Its blade quivered in the hard plank of the deck, breaking off its point. Other thugs were running aft, attracted by the shrill yells of their pal. A gun flamed. A slug whistled over The Shadow's prone body, barely an inch above his spine.

The crook with the knife stabbed again. Pointless, jagged, it was a horrible weapon. But it failed to reach its goal.

The Shadow swung the knife expert aside. The gangster's body began to twist helplessly in the jujitsu grip of The Shadow. The Shadow's defensive move and the sharp crack of another crook's pistol came simultaneously.

A bullet aimed for The Shadow drilled into the flesh of the thug with the knife.

He collapsed to the deck.

The Shadow, too, dropped flat. But this time both his elbows were braced, both his wrists steady. Twin .45s recoiled with the shock of a double explosion. Twin bullets spat upward in a scarlet slant from the deck.

One of the attacking thugs tumbled backward as if kicked by a mule. The other turned, ducked desperately for cover.

The Shadow advanced behind the roaring blasts of his .45s. A way cleared for him like magic. He darted ahead past the blur of the deckhouse. He could see two men near the low metal rail of the forward deck.

Sam Romine was on his knees, his face half turned. The second man lay flat on his back, with his wrists and ankles tightly trussed. A heavy weight was tied to him. It looked like a chunk of scrap iron.

The captive was Moe Shrevnitz!

Romine's gun roared. His hasty slug missed The Shadow. But the murderous shove of his other hand did not miss.

Shrevvy fell headlong over the side of the speeding boat. He vanished with a tremendous splash.

Romine ducked flat the moment he had accomplished his grim job. He threw himself headlong through a narrow hatchway in the bow to avoid a hot blast from The Shadow's .45s.

But no bullets roared from the guns of The Shadow. He whirled about at the instant that Moe's weighted body vanished overboard.

With a swift run that carried him toward the rear of the boat, The Shadow dived astern!

HE struck near the spot where the foam of Shrevvy's splash was still boiling. He went down, kicking fiercely to gain depth.

His outstretched hands moved swiftly under water as he saw the dark, wavering splotch of Moe's face. He caught Shrevvy by the hair. Then his grip shifted to Shrevvy's belt.

He could feel the heavy weight of the scrap-metal chunk. It was dragging them both relentlessly down. Both The Shadow's .45s were gone now. In their place was a short-bladed pocketknife with an edge like a razor.

The Shadow slashed fiercely. It was impossible to see Moe's tight bonds, impossible almost to breathe. The ears of The Shadow were filled with strange, bubbling thunder. The weighted body of his agent had dragged him far below the surface. It was sucking him swiftly downward to the muddy bed of the East River.

But the desperate knife slashes of The Shadow put an end to the peril of burst eardrums and water-drowned lungs.

There was an upward lunge of Moe's body as The Shadow felt the chunk of scrap iron fall away. Both men rose to the surface almost as rapidly as they had sunk.

The Shadow kept a tight hold on his agent as they broke the surface. He saw Moe's tightly compressed mouth gasp wide. Shrevvy sucked air into his bursting lungs. The Shadow, too, filled his lungs with precious air.

He still held the knife. Reaching under water, he slashed at Moe's helpless wrists. Moe was able to paddle weakly alongside The Shadow.

An instant later the roar of a powerful engine warned The Shadow that the peril of death had only been temporarily averted.

Sam Romine had witnessed The Shadow's dive after Shrevvy. Leaping to the speedboat's wheel, he had swung the craft around in a wide circle. He was heading back at express-train speed toward the spot where the wet heads of Shrevvy and The Shadow showed darkly above the black surface of the East River.

A machine gun made horrible, hammering echoes. Slugs whistled toward the spot where The Shadow and Shrevvy had been treading water.

The bullets kicked up white patches of spray. They found no target of flesh and blood.

Moe, warned by The Shadow's cry, had dived!

Both men plunged as deep as their upturned legs could force them. The Shadow swam under water,

away from Moe. His intent was grimly protective. The instant their heads showed again above the surface, the roar of the machine gun would blast. The Shadow hoped to direct attack from the weakened Shrevvy. More resourceful, he intended to offer himself as a target for those flying pellets of death.

He let himself rise to the surface before all the air in his lungs was exhausted. He could see the murder boat circling erratically nearby. The beam of its spotlight fingered the dark surface of the water to pick out the head of a victim.

The Shadow saw the bright circle of light skim toward him.

He prepared to dive.

But the roaring spurt of lead from the cruiser seemed to be poorly aimed. It spat upward at a crazy slant toward the black sky above the river.

The speedboat was no longer racing forward to attack The Shadow. It was curving away, heading at a swift pace toward the distant piers and warehouses that lined the Brooklyn shoreline.

Another beam of light had appeared from the blackness of the East River. For an instant, it lit up the fleeing speedboat from stem to stern.

A police searchlight!

A HARBOR patrol boat had heard the snarling echoes of gunfire from farther up the river. It came racing downstream from the massive shadow of the Queensboro Bridge. It had trouble keeping the wily Romine's craft in sight. The speedboat had a powerful engine and a sharp, knifelike bow.

The chase left The Shadow and Moe Shrevnitz treading water far astern in the midst of quiet blackness.

Moe uttered a weak gasp. He was all in, exhausted. The Shadow reached him with a quick stroke, supported his head above water.

A stern command like the sting of a whiplash rallied Moe's fading willpower. He gritted his teeth, fought to keep from fainting.

After a while his thin voice whispered at The Shadow's ear: "I'm - O.K.!"

"Good!"

The Shadow began to swim toward shore. He towed Shrevvy behind him. Shrevvy was smart enough to lie limply in the water. The Shadow towed him like a floating log.

But Moe's knees buckled when, finally, he found himself standing in a muddy tideflat under the cavernous expanse of a pier.

He was glad of the strong hands that assisted him to climb to a horizontal piece of slimy timber, and from there to the stringpiece of a dark pier.

Utterly spent, Moe rested for a long time while the burning eyes of The Shadow stared at him with grim satisfaction. Moe had gotten into a death jam by loyally obeying the orders of The Shadow.

Sam Romine's escape didn't matter. All that mattered to The Shadow was that Moe Shrevnitz's life was safe.

But Shrevvy could no longer be of any use to The Shadow in the murderous network of crime that

centered around Mercy Hospital. Sam Romine knew now that Shrevvy was an agent of The Shadow!

The Shadow issued curt orders.

From now on, Manhattan's streets would see no more of Moe Shrevnitz. He would remain in hiding until later orders of The Shadow relieved him of that necessity.

The Shadow was ready to play a lone hand!

CHAPTER IX. DEAD MAN'S SECRET

DARKNESS filled The Shadow's sanctum.

It was a blackout that was total and complete. Not even the tick of a clock was audible.

Outside this secret chamber, whose location was unknown by either police or criminals, New York was pulsing with noise and activity. But the hush in this sound-proofed room continued.

Presently, a faint sound was audible. It was a hiss of sibilant laughter. Unseen drapes swallowed the echoes of that laugh, made it die away with eerie suddenness.

The Shadow had arrived at his sanctum.

Evidence of his unseen presence increased. A tiny blue light glowed. It seemed to hang in darkness like a tiny star.

Abruptly, a more powerful light sprang into life. It was white, brilliant. The rays of this light were carefully controlled. They shone downward but in no other direction.

In that pool of controlled light the polished surface of the desk was revealed.

Hands moved forward into the white cone of brilliance. Tapering fingers were disclosed. On one of those fingers was a glow of bright color. It changed with bewildering rapidity.

Crimson gave way to vivid yellow; the yellow switched to a glittering green that became almost instantly deep blue. The blue faded to tawny yellow - became again the scarlet hue of blood.

The dazzle came from a fire opal on The Shadow's ring. This gem, known also as a girasol, was the largest and rarest of its kind in the world. It was not worn for ornament. It was The Shadow's hallmark. Many times The Shadow found it necessary to wear a disguise unknown to his agents. The many-colored flash of that rare stone was an instant identification.

His hands moved beyond the cone of light. When they returned to view, they held a compact pile of newspaper clippings.

The Shadow read these selected accounts of New York's most baffling mystery.

The death of the unknown ambulance victim at Mercy Hospital had created a sensation. The Shadow's mocking laughter increased as he noticed that the word "murder" was not used in any of these newspaper stories. The words were vaguer than that. "Outrage" was one. "Sinister puzzle" was another phrase. A third paper called it a "sensational death."

There was reason for this cautious news play-up. Mercy Hospital was the most important hospital in New York. Its list of directors and trustees included people prominent in the city's social and political life. To shout "Murder!" without proof was to run the risk of a costly libel suit.

The report of the medical examiner had made this fact clear to every smart editor in town.

His autopsy denied earlier facts that he, himself, had given to the reporters. He had named three deadly poisons as the cause of death. Prussic acid! Strychnine! Atropine!

Now, in a briefly-worded report to the newspapers, the medical examiner stated flatly that there had been no poisoning whatever!

NOR was this opinion the sole property of the medical examiner. He was supported by the testimony of the city's expert toxicologist. The brain, the lungs, the heart - all the organs of the dead man - reacted negatively to the presence of any poison whatsoever.

The unhappy medical examiner was not even able to report the death as due to natural causes. A "natural cause" in medical terminology implies a breakdown of some normal bodily function or the presence of some definite disease. The dead man's body showed no trace of disease. He had apparently been in excellent health at the time of his death.

For the first time in the history of the examiner's office he was obliged to announce the result of an official autopsy as "cause of death unknown."

The strange drugging of the victim only added to the mystery. The amount of chloral hydrate found in the dead man's tissues had not been sufficient to cause death.

The police had not found any hint of the victim's identity. His fingerprints were not on record at police headquarters or in the F.B.I. Bureau at Washington. His description did not tally with anyone on the list of the Missing Persons Bureau. No relatives or friends had called at the morgue.

The Shadow's grim laughter indicated no surprise. He put the clippings aside, selected others.

This second group of clippings carried an account of the queer explosion that had blown the taxicab of Moe Shrevnitz to pieces. The police assumed that Moe was dead. A search had failed to find him at home or at any of his usual haunts.

Inspector Cardona spoke vaguely about an "underworld bomb job." He assumed that Shrevnitz had innocently learned some gang secret, had been blown to pieces by unknown mobsters. The name of Sam Romine did not appear in Inspector Cardona's remarks to the press.

A third selection of clippings increased the sardonic mirth of The Shadow. Like the news about Shrevvy's "death," these clippings came from an inside page of the newspaper, crowded off the front page by the more sensational events at Mercy Hospital.

It described the outburst of machine-gun fire the night before in the blackness of the East River. The police chase of the mystery boat had resulted in failure. Piloted by unknown crooks, it had gained the protective darkness of the Brooklyn harborline. Before the police boat could get close to the criminal craft, the mystery boat had exploded.

No trace of its crew had been found. A knifed pier watchman indicated that the thugs had escaped from their boat before it went up in a burst of flame. Experts in the police crime laboratory at Brooklyn were trying to establish the boat's registry from some of the shattered planks that had been fished from the oily water.

The Shadow placed a sheet of blank paper under the light. On it he wrote a name:

PETER VERNE

Verne was also a victim of this web of intrigue and death. His drugging, The Shadow knew, had been no accident. He had recovered in the morning without any ill effects. The police paid small attention to this minor incident at the hospital. They attributed Verne's drugging to the mistake of a nurse.

The strange note that had grimly warned Peter Verne of the virtue of charity had been hushed up by Hanson Bartley.

Bartley had also been successful in keeping from the police any knowledge of the blackmail demand that had been made on him. The theft of the golden-hued master poison from the cancer laboratory of Dr. Sutton was still unknown to Cardona.

One final angle of the puzzle yet remained. To The Shadow, this seemed the strangest angle of the whole affair:

Why had an unknown extortioner felt so safe in luring Hanson Bartley to the home of Dwight Nugent in order to make his criminal demand? What had made him so sure that he ran no risk? What was the status of Dwight Nugent in this criminal puzzle?

It was this angle of the case that The Shadow selected for immediate investigation. The light over his desk went out suddenly.

Darkness and silence filled the room. No sound disturbed it.

But movement had taken place under cover of that black silence. The Shadow was no longer in his sanctum!

A SHORT time later the well-dressed figure of Lamont Cranston entered the swanky portals of the Cobalt Club. He nodded politely to the doorman, asked for his mail, then went up to his suite. Cranston was a familiar figure at the Cobalt Club. He usually lived there in a reserved suite whenever he happened to be in town.

As soon as he reached his room he put through a long-distance phone call. He asked to be connected with Dwight Nugent in Washington.

Presently, the bell rang.

"Here is your party, sir," the long-distance operator said.

Lamont Cranston listened intently to the thin voice that buzzed in the receiver. He spoke a moment or two about trivial affairs in order to gauge the quality of the voice to which he was listening.

He was satisfied that he was hearing the actual voice of Dwight Nugent. Nugent was really in Washington where he was supposed to be.

The Shadow came quickly to the reason for his call. In the pleasant tones of Lamont Cranston, he turned the conversation to the subject of Nugent's house in Manhattan.

"I expect to be in New York for quite a while," Cranston said. "The Cobalt Club is satisfactory for short visits, but I tire of it over a long period of time. What are the chances of renting your house, Dwight?"

Nugent seemed to hesitate.

"Nothing would please me better. But -"

"Then suppose we call it a deal? How much?"

"I'm sorry," Nugent said. "It just can't be done, Lamont."

"Why not?"

There seemed to be genuine regret in Nugent's slow voice.

"I wish to the devil you had called me up about this a couple of weeks earlier. I'd have been delighted to rent my house to you. As it happens - it's already rented to someone else."

"I see." Lamont Cranston laughed. "Well, it isn't a life-and-death matter. Whom did you rent it to? Somebody I know?"

The slowness of Nugent's voice became more pronounced. "As a matter of fact the tenant is a stranger to me. A Mr. Albert Thomas."

"Hm-m-m." Cranston registered mild surprise. "Well, perhaps I can still make a deal. I've always liked your house. I'd be willing to pay a premium to secure it. It's ideal for my purposes. Do you think that if I offered this Mr. Thomas a quick profit, he'd be willing to sublease to me?"

"I don't know," Nugent replied. "I don't know Thomas. To tell you the truth, Lamont, I've never even seen him."

"Didn't you come to New York when you rented it?"

"Yes, I did. But Thomas wasn't in town at the time. The deal was handled for him by a broker. Some fellow named Kupper. Kupper was extremely easy to do business with. He didn't try to haggle or beat me down. He accepted my asking price at once. Paid me six months' rent in advance."

"How could Kupper do that?" Cranston asked lazily. "I thought you said Thomas wasn't in town. Did Kupper draw a check of his own to put the deal through?"

"There wasn't any check," Nugent said.

He seemed to be annoyed by Cranston's persistence. He added grudgingly:

"Kupper preferred to pay cash. He deposited the cash to my account in my New York bank."

"Well, I don't suppose it matters," Cranston murmured. "This Kupper seems like a go-getter! Perhaps I could locate some other house in a hurry by using his services. You don't happen to remember Kupper's office address, I suppose?"

He waited, his breath tight.

"As it happens, I remember Kupper's office address well," Nugent said. "It was downtown. Wait, let me think! Nassau Street."

He gave the number. "I'm sure that's correct."

"Thanks," Cranston said.

He changed the subject, talked cheerfully about other things before he hung up. His eyes were aglow.

He reached for the phone, called another number. The crisp voice of The Shadow spoke to Burbank:

"Orders for Rutledge Mann."

Rutledge Mann was one of The Shadow's most specialized agents. He was a business and financial expert. Usually, his task was the tracing and uncovering of tangled business trails like that of the elusive Mr. Albert Thomas and his cash-minded broker named Kupper.

The Shadow's orders were repeated by Burbank. The Shadow waited.

His eyes closed as the minutes ticked by. But he was far from asleep. Behind closed eyelids the brain of The Shadow was considering the new pattern of events revealed by his recent conversation with Dwight Nugent.

PRESENTLY, the telephone rang. Rutledge Mann's report was transmitted by Burbank. He said:

"Kupper unknown in real-estate circles. Not a member of any important realty firm. Name not listed on official brokerage list for 1943. Office located on eighth floor of the building on Nassau Street. Office closed. Kupper still rents it. Hasn't been seen around building for past week."

The Shadow acknowledged the report.

"That is all. Rutledge Mann relieved from further duty."

He rose to his feet. More investigation was needed. It would be personal investigation on the part of The Shadow himself.

The thinking that had gone on behind his closed eyelids while he waited for Mann's report had resulted in a clever decision. The Shadow, facing an unknown criminal of proven cunning, was going to make a move that would force the hand of his invisible foe!

But before this move was made, The Shadow intended to verify a certain deduction concerning a fake real-estate agent named Kupper!

He drove downtown to Nassau Street, walked into a shabby building that seemed to be a catch-all for tenants of every business description. On the ground floor was a dusty store that sold toys and novelties. A sign said: "BARGAINS! MUST VACATE!"

The directory in the building's corridor showed that this come-and-go on the part of fly-by-night tenants seemed to be chronic. Half of the directory spaces were vacant. Kupper had chosen an excellent spot for his will-o'-the-wisp career as a "realty broker."

The Shadow found no difficulty getting past the cheap door of Kupper's office on the eighth floor. Its lock yielded readily to a shining tool in The Shadow's hand. He glided swiftly inside, closed the door softly behind him.

He found little to interest him. Kupper's "realty" business was very obviously a fake. The backs of the row of law books stacked on a couple of dusty shelves were dummies. The floor was unswept. A thin film of dust lay across the surface of a cheap desk. There was nothing in any of the desk drawers.

The Shadow divined that this office had been used only once. It had provided a meeting place for Kupper and Dwight Nugent. Having accomplished the renting of Nugent's house, Kupper had vanished.

But where?

Lamont Cranston stopped at the cigar stand in the street lobby below. He bought a cigar and chatted amiably with the attendant. The man was bored. He was glad to talk with the well-dressed gentleman who had bought such a good brand of cigar.

"Nope. I ain't seen Mr. Kupper lately. He never did come around much. A little guy. Sort of big, heavy shoulders. Gray hair. Around sixty, I'd say."

The Shadow talked further. He encouraged the cigar man to discuss the physical characteristics of the missing Mr. Kupper. When he left there was a bright spark of satisfaction in his eyes.

Kupper had been cunning. But he was not half as old as the cigar attendant thought he was. His gray hair had been a fake! A wig, without any doubt at all!

The Shadow was not fooled because he didn't allow his mind to dwell on unessential externals. Having learned Kupper's approximate height and weight, his unusually small stature, his unusually heavy shoulders - The Shadow had identified his man!

Without a gray wig and the rest of his "real-estate" make-up, Kupper was the unknown corpse in the receiving room of Mercy Hospital!

Kupper would never reveal the identity of the elusive Mr. Albert Thomas, who had rented the home of Dwight Nugent.

His mouth had been shut for ever!

The news did not surprise The Shadow. He had been prepared for it. He was now ready for the clever move which he had decided upon in the silence of his suite at the Cobalt Club.

The Shadow was about to force the hand of an unknown master criminal who fancied himself completely safe!

CHAPTER X. A HUNDRED GRAND

THE SHADOW'S move began with a telephone call. He dialed the number of Hanson Bartley's private apartment suite at Mercy Hospital. He spoke in the pleasant tones of Lamont Cranston.

"I thought I'd call you, Hanson, and find out how things are going. Have you read the newspapers?"

Bartley groaned.

"Yes; I have. It's terrible!"

The Shadow pretended surprise.

"Really? I thought things were improving. According to the papers, the man who died in the receiving room was not really poisoned. The medical examiner states that the cause of death is unknown. Surely, Mercy Hospital can't be blamed for something as vague as that."

Bartley's grunt on the wire sounded impatient.

"The fact that the police department's suspicion of foul play has lessened has made things tougher for the hospital."

"How do you mean?"

"The papers are playing up the hospital's inefficiency and poor management. They're now charging that the death of that man resulted from the delay in the house surgeon examining him. They're trying to prove that our ward staff is undermanned, our nursing staff careless and indifferent."

"That's rot," Cranston said.

"Of course it is! But it looks plausible on account of the drugging of Mr. Verne."

"How so?"

"The report of the medical examiner has ruined the newspapers' hope for a juicy murder. They're keeping the story alive by playing up Verne's mishap. They claim it was caused by the carelessness of the floor nurse. They're demanding an investigation into the whole administration of Mercy Hospital."

The Shadow was aware of this, but he pretended to consider it of no importance.

"Fiddlesticks! All Mercy Hospital needs is support from people of standing in the community. As a trustee, I feel it my duty to start the ball rolling. Therefore, I have decided that this is an ideal time for me to carry out a promise made earlier. I'd like to make a donation to the endowment fund -"

There was a slight gasp at the other end of the wire. It was followed by silence.

Cranston said blithely, "Well? Didn't you hear me?"

"Yes. Of course! It's... it's wonderful! How much are you planning to donate, Lamont?"

"One hundred thousand dollars," Cranston replied.

He could sense the tremor of Hanson Bartley's quivering lips.

"That's generous. But I wouldn't do it just now if I were you. Why not wait until things quiet down a little? Think of the notoriety you may draw toward yourself."

Cranston laughed indulgently.

"I'm really helping myself as well as the hospital. The hundred-thousand-dollar payment will be recorded in my income-tax statement as charity. It will pull me down a peg or two from the higher-tax brackets. Actually, I will save almost as much in taxes as I pay over to the hospital."

"Are you serious about this, Lamont?"

"Of course."

"Before you do anything about the gift, will you come and see me?"

"Certainly."

The eyes of The Shadow gleamed as he hung up.

HE drove across town to Mercy Hospital, rode up in the private elevator on the avenue side that connected with Bartley's apartment.

He expected to find the suave Dr. Sutton there, standing watchfully at Bartley's elbow. But there was no sign of the young cancer specialist. The Shadow found an entirely different visitor ahead of him.

It was Peter Verne.

Verne's greeting to Cranston was strained. He seemed annoyed. There was exasperation in his voice as he resumed his conversation with Bartley after his awkward greeting of Cranston.

"I tell you, it's simply disgusting. The newspapers are right. I'm a trustee, but, by golly, I believe Mercy Hospital deserves a sweeping investigation into the slipshod way it is run."

Bartley tried to placate Verne.

"I don't blame you for being indignant about the tampering with your medicine. But -"

"If the dose had been stronger, I might have been killed. That nurse lied! All this weird stuff about The Shadow sneaking through the hospital is rot!"

"What about the note that was found under the medicine bottle?" Cranston interposed mildly. "We thought that perhaps you might be able to explain it. Do you think that queer Bible reference to charity was an implied threat of some kind?"

"If it was," Verne snapped, "I'm going to obey the threat. I have no desire to be drawn into this newspaper mess. That's why I came to see you, Bartley. I'm canceling my offer to make a donation to the hospital."

He glared at Bartley, expecting argument. To his annoyance, he met with none. The worried frown faded from Bartley's face. He seemed almost jubilant.

"It's up to you," he murmured. "I think you are quite justified in withdrawing your gift."

"You mean you don't want the money? What the hell kind of business is this, anyway?"

The Shadow intervened deftly, using the quiet tones of Lamont Cranston.

He soothed Verne. He minimized the trouble at the hospital. He pointed out that he, as well as Verne, was a trustee.

Smilingly, he announced his own gift to the endowment fund. The size of the sum made Verne's confused eyes bulge.

"A hundred thousand!"

"Why not? I can spare it. The hospital is in trouble. I'm delighted to show my confidence in its stability."

"But, Cranston -"

This time it was Bartley again. The worried frown was back in his face. Before he could attempt to dissuade Cranston, there was an interruption. The door of the corridor that connected Bartley's private apartment with the hospital opened. A man stepped in with careless haste.

It was Dr. Sutton.

"Excuse me," he murmured politely. His glance moved keenly from Verne to Cranston. "I didn't mean to intrude. I thought Mr. Bartley was alone. I just dropped in to discuss some routine matters connected with my cancer research."

He turned to leave. But Bartley halted him with a quick gesture.

"Please wait, Dr. Sutton. I have news I think you'll be interested in hearing. Mr. Cranston has just generously offered to make a gift of a hundred thousand dollars to our endowment fund."

"Really?" Sutton's eyes were suddenly diamond-hard.

"There's no need of keeping this a secret from Dr. Sutton," Bartley told Verne and Cranston. "He enjoys my complete confidence. In fact, I... I think his advice in the matter may be most helpful."

It was a cue thrown to Sutton by a frightened man. He accepted it deftly. He repeated Bartley's argument that now was a poor time to bring more publicity toward the affairs of Mercy Hospital. Wouldn't it be better, Sutton suggested, to delay the gift for a while?

Cranston shook his head.

"I'm afraid it's too late to cancel the gift. You see, I have already announced it to the newspapers."

"Ah -"

Sutton's murmur was barely audible. The Shadow had a feeling that the suave, young cancer specialist was secretly pleased by Bartley's failure to block the payment of the money.

"It's time we took Mr. Verne and Mr. Cranston into our confidence," Sutton told Bartley in a softly urgent tone.

Peter Verne again became annoyed.

"What is the meaning of all this pussyfoot stuff?" he demanded. "What is going on in this hospital, anyway?"

"Something very ugly," Hanson Bartley admitted. "Mr. Cranston's announcement to the newspapers has forced my hand, I'm afraid. What I have to tell you must be heard under an oath of complete secrecy. Are you willing?"

Cranston nodded. Verne, after a splutter of indignation, also agreed.

Bartley told the story of his interview with an unknown extortioner. He explained the criminal demand that had been made on him. Sutton disclosed the theft of the master poison from his cancer laboratory.

Verne was too startled and shocked to utter a word in reply. It was Cranston who made the quiet comment.

"Have you any idea who is responsible?"

"Dr. Sutton thinks that the criminal is Dr. Riker," Bartley said.

"Why?"

Sutton reported his two proofs. Dr. Riker had known about the poison. Riker's hospital suit had been found by Sutton in a corridor closet close to the drug-dispensary room where The Shadow and a masked henchman in hospital whites had so cunningly vanished.

The face of The Shadow remained expressionless. To Sutton's two proofs, he could have added a third. But in his role of Cranston he withheld that third fact.

He said nothing about Riker's attempt to slit The Shadow's throat with a scalpel and hurl him to death from a narrow top-floor ledge of the building.

"I think the only thing for Cranston to do is to pay over the money," Sutton said. "Since his gift is already publicized, it may be our supreme chance to trap the blackmailer."

His voice continued eagerly.

"Here's the way I see it: We will continue to suppress any news to the police concerning the extortion threat and the theft of my poison. That will keep reporters and cops away from the hospital. It will also make the criminal think that Bartley is scared. As soon as the crook reads in the newspapers that Cranston has donated a hundred thousand, he'll have to get busy to collect half of it. How will he do it?"

Sutton answered his own question.

"He'll send instructions for the payoff. When he does that we'll be able to figure out a trap and nab him. We can do it if we all keep our nerve and act with secrecy!"

"It sounds dangerous," Verne said. "What do you think about this, Cranston?"

THE SHADOW didn't reply. He was starting toward the closed door of the corridor that led toward the top floor of the hospital. He had heard a slight sound behind that door. A finger held cautiously across Cranston's lips warned the others.

He tiptoed quickly across the room, reached silently for the knob.

Before he could turn the knob and fling the door open, there was a calm, unhurried knock on the other side of the panel.

The door opened. A man in a white hospital uniform stepped calmly into the room.

It was Dr. Riker, a slight smile on his good-looking features.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, gentlemen! I had no idea anyone was here except Dr. Sutton. I tried to find him at his laboratory, but it was locked. A nurse in the hall told me he had gone to Mr. Bartley's apartment."

"Did you happen to have a duplicate key to Mr. Bartley's corridor door?" Sutton inquired coldly.

The ambulance surgeon kept his temper. All that happened was a deepening of his unpleasant smile.

"The door was not locked, Dr. Sutton. You were good enough to leave it ajar when you came through. If you'll pardon me, I came to return some personal property of yours."

There was a paper parcel under his arm. He held it out to Sutton, his whole attitude one of cold mockery.

"You see, I found in my room a suit of hospital whites that do not belong to me. They have your name on them, Dr. Sutton. Evidently, the hospital laundry made a mistake. I assumed that since I accidentally got your laundry, you might also - accidentally - have gotten hold of mine. Did you?"

"No!" Sutton's reply was bullet-hard.

"Thank you," Riker said. "I'll ask elsewhere."

He laid the bundle on Bartley's table. Without another word he turned and left.

The moment the door closed behind him, Dr. Sutton uttered a low cry of rage.

"You see what a damned trickster he is? That package was a fake! It was only an excuse to listen. Riker may have heard everything we said!"

He ripped open the paper parcel Riker had left. He stared at the name label inside the collar. Then, with a triumphant cry, Sutton ripped the label away from its stitches.

"Look! I said Riker was a liar and trickster! This suit is not mine. It's his own!"

THE SHADOW stepped closer, examined the inside collar. Sutton's accusation seemed justified. There was a double line of torn stitches where the name label had been ripped loose. It indicated that the wily Riker had torn out his own label and had sewn over it the label with Sutton's name.

"Can you see, now, why we've got to cooperate in this matter, gentlemen?" Sutton said grimly.

They nodded. Bartley's indecision was gone. His jaw was tight. Peter Verne lost all his earlier truculence.

He said, "I'm willing to do whatever is deemed advisable."

It was agreed that all four would await developments, using Cranston's endowment gift as a bait for the criminal. Cranston handed over his check for a hundred thousand dollars to Bartley.

"It's too much money to risk," Bartley said.

"I'm risking only half of it," Cranston pointed out. "Besides, I have a hunch we're going to be able to protect it."

He didn't explain what he meant. Peter Verne and Dr. Sutton soon left. The Shadow invented an excuse to stay. He talked amiably, wasted considerable time. He was still in Bartley's apartment when the phone rang.

Bartley's face whitened as he listened to the voice on the wire. The Shadow bent closer. It was a rough, buzzing tone - obviously disguised.

"Listen, Bartley! I've read in the newspaper about that hundred grand from Lamont Cranston. I want my half! If I don't get the dough - all hell is going to bust loose in Mercy Hospital! You understand?"

"Yes... yes!"

"O.K.! You'll be told later how to pay off. Detailed instructions will be given you. That's all for now!"

The line went suddenly dead. Bartley rattled the hook, called back the operator. He tried to have the call traced. The Shadow, who realized the futility of such an effort, shook his head.

"Don't!" he advised in the soft tones of Cranston. "It will be better for our purpose if the criminal thinks you are completely terrified, afraid to fight back."

He patted the shoulder of the honorary administrator of Mercy Hospital.

"There is nothing to do but wait for his final instructions about paying over the cash. I'll be at the Cobalt Club. Verne will be at his home. As for Sutton - I imagine he'll be here in the hospital somewhere."

"Yes... yes," Bartley said nervously. "I'll warn Sutton to stand by for trouble."

Lamont Cranston left the apartment with a peculiar smile.

Outside the hospital, his smile grew. There was menace in it. The maneuvering of The Shadow had been successful!

A trap had been laid in Bartley's apartment. Into that trap, a supercriminal had fallen with headlong speed!

Lamont Cranston had made a deliberate misstatement of fact. He had not notified the newspapers of his generous gift to Mercy Hospital!

Consequently, that disguised voice on the telephone had lied when it said he had read in the papers about Cranston's gift.

Only five people on earth were in a position to know about the hundred thousand.

They were The Shadow himself, Peter Verne, Hanson Bartley, Dr. Sutton - and the eavesdropping Dr. Riker!

CHAPTER XI. UNDERGROUND TACTICS

BACK in his sound-proofed suite at the Cobalt Club, The Shadow sat at his telephone. A prompt voice spoke on the wire:

"Burbank speaking."

"Report desired from Harry Vincent."

Vincent was a well-tailored young man who maintained a modest suite at the Hotel Metrolite. Apparently, he lived on the proceeds from a small legacy investment. Actually, he was one of the cleverest agents of The Shadow.

The Shadow had assigned Harry to keep watch on the empty home of Dwight Nugent on Central Park West.

But Burbank's relay of Harry's message was disappointing:

"Nothing new."

The Shadow spoke again:

"Report desired from Cliff Marsland."

Marsland was rated in the underworld as a shrewd, free-lance criminal. He was able to hang around shady joints and hobnob with crooks without exciting suspicion. The fact that Cliff, having paid his debt to society and was now going straight, was unknown to the underworld.

His task had been the important one of keeping an eye on Sam Romine.

Burbank's relay message showed that Cliff Marsland had met with better luck than Vincent.

"Located Romine. Tenement hide-out lower East Side. Romine drove a small black coupe uptown. Coupe now parked on Columbus Avenue. Romine went inside suspicious beer joint. Am continuing surveillance."

Burbank gave the address of the Columbus Avenue spot. The Shadow acknowledged the report and hung up. The glow in his deep-set eyes indicated satisfaction.

He consulted a small Manhattan directory and verified his suspicion. The beer joint on Columbus Avenue, where Romine had gone, was directly behind the swanky home of Dwight Nugent on Central

Park West!

Lamont Cranston left the Cobalt Club. He drove across town and headed along the shabby neighborhood of upper Columbus Avenue. He parked his car a block away from his goal.

Cliff Marsland was not aware of this. Hidden in a convenient doorway, Cliff was too busy keeping an eye on the beer joint where Romine had gone to notice anything else.

His first warning that he was not alone in the dark doorway was a whisper of sibilant mirth behind him.

Marsland turned quickly. The eyes of the black-cloaked figure seemed to burn like live coals. There was urgency in The Shadow's single word:

"Report!"

Marsland had nothing new to divulge. Romine was still in the beer joint. The black coupe was parked nearby. The Shadow was not surprised. Two more words were curtly uttered:

"Stand by!"

The Shadow drifted backward into the darkness of the house where Marsland waited. Marsland returned his steady gaze toward the avenue.

PRESENTLY, farther down the street, a slouching figure moved from a tenement alley. A peak cap shaded a low forehead and furtive eyes. The man walked quickly, with his hands in his pockets. He sidled into the beer joint across from Marsland's doorway.

The Shadow's disguise was good. It was not only a matter of clothing; it was a difference in expression caused by the trained ability to control facial muscles. The Shadow's eyes seemed small and beady. His shoulders sloped narrowly. He had a dry cigarette cough like the faint rattle of sandpaper.

The barman in the beer joint took a quick sidelong glance at his furtive customer. He figured him O.K. The Shadow bought a beer, used the reflection of the bar mirror as a guide.

There was, as The Shadow had anticipated, no sign of Sam Romine. A few loungers stood along the bar; a few more sat silently at alcove tables. There was only one place where Romine could have ducked.

The Shadow mentally decided upon the closed door of the washroom at the rear.

He didn't go near it. He ordered another beer, drained it, paid his bill, slouched out the front exit into Columbus Avenue.

He drifted back along the avenue.

He chose a dark flight of steps leading downward to a tenement cellar. The cellar was deserted. The tough guy vanished into darkness. When he reappeared at the cellar's rear exit, a complete change had taken place.

The cloaked figure of The Shadow replaced the beady-eyed disguise of the thug for which The Shadow no longer had need.

Through a dingy backyard The Shadow glided, keeping close to the ground. The late afternoon had faded into dusk. It was ideal for The Shadow's purpose. He scaled a rickety fence and gained a narrow rear alley.

Another fence allowed The Shadow to quit the alley for the backyard behind the Columbus Avenue beer joint.

He saw that the window of the washroom gave access to this rear yard. It was closed. But The Shadow was certain that Sam Romine had slipped through that opening awhile earlier. He was even surer of the route that had been taken by this cunning henchman of an unknown supercriminal.

The fence that separated the beer joint's yard from the rear of Dwight Nugent's property was unusually high. It was topped by a row of sharp steel spikes. Evidently, Nugent had not enjoyed the shabby proximity of the property in his rear. He had taken measures to protect his privacy.

The Shadow didn't believe that Romine had scaled Nugent's high fence. It was a difficult climb. Besides, there was the risk that someone at a rear window along Columbus Avenue might notice him.

Crouched in the darkness at the base of the fence, The Shadow searched for Romine's trail. It was not a hard one to find. In the weedy earth at the bottom of the fence was a dark square of flat flagstone. There was no stone path nearby. No reason at all for a single flagstone to rest so oddly in the earth at the foot of Nugent's high fence.

The Shadow tested the stone with patient tugs of his gloved fingers. On the third edge that he tested he met with success. The flat stone pivoted upward. A short earth tunnel was disclosed. It permitted easy passage below Nugent's fence.

Unseen, The Shadow advanced through the dark, landscaped gardens at the back of Nugent's ornate house. He noted that all its shades were drawn, all the windows dark. He studied those windows a long time, particularly the windows that paralleled the sloping roof of a rear shed.

What he saw made The Shadow climb noiselessly to the shed roof.

THE shade of one of these windows had been hastily lowered. There was a slight gap at the bottom that didn't match the other windows. The Shadow divined that he would find the sash unlocked.

He was correct. The window lifted easily. Raising the dark shade for an instant, The Shadow's robed figure slipped behind it. Then, shade and window closed.

The Shadow used extraordinary care not to make the slightest sound in his survey of this seemingly empty mansion of a man in Washington. Occasionally, the tiny gleam of his torch blinked. But mostly, he proceeded in darkness.

He found no sign of a human being from the ground floor to the roof. Sheeted furniture and covered pictures testified to the fact that the house had been allowed to lie idle by the mysterious Albert Thomas, who had rented it.

Approaching a shaded front window, The Shadow peered cautiously outward. Across Central Park West he could see the gray stone wall of the park. On the sidewalk side of the park wall, a man was seated, apparently slumped in a doze.

Harry Vincent was still loyally on the job of watching Nugent's house from the front.

Suddenly a faint sound returned The Shadow's attention to the interior of the house he was investigating. The noise sounded like the scrape of a falling shovel against concrete. It came from directly below The Shadow's feet.

Someone was in the cellar!

Quietly, The Shadow glided along the basement hall to the cellar door. He tried the knob gently. It moved easily. But the door itself remained immovable.

A key projected from the keyhole on the side where The Shadow stood.

The cellar door was solidly bolted on the inside!

The Shadow didn't waste time on a vain effort to move the inner bolt from its hidden slot. Turning, he glided toward a telephone he had observed on his previous inspection. A quick lift of the receiver revealed a steady dial tone.

The Shadow dialed a number. Almost at once he heard the voice of Burbank.

To Burbank, swift orders were given. The Shadow hung up, vanished into blackness. He waited.

Soon the telephone began to ring. It rang steadily. It kept on ringing.

The dim sound of that peremptory phone bell penetrated to the cellar. A quick clatter of feet sounded on the cellar stairs. A bolt clicked; the door opened. Sam Romine, swearing with impatience, raced to the phone.

"Is that you, boss?" Romine called eagerly.

He received a strange reply.

"Hello! Levy's Delicatessen? I want three cans of tomato soup, a half pound of sliced salami, a box of salted crackers, some -"

"Wrong number!"

Romine banged down the receiver with an oath. Burbank's froggy voice had done a nice job of fooling the exasperated crook. Romine hurried back to the cellar.

He was unaware that The Shadow had preceded him there, was watching him from the heart of blackness.

ROMINE hurried to the front of the cellar. An opening showed in the dusty masonry wall. It was the lower end of a coal chute that connected the cellar with a small manhole cover in the sidewalk outside.

But Romine's interest was not in the coal-chute opening. There was another opening a few feet to the left of it, in the same masonry wall. A couple of stones had been pried loose from their cement bed in the wall.

An earth passage was visible.

The loose earth on the cellar floor showed that this tunnel had been dug fairly recently. It seemed to lead straight ahead in a horizontal line under Central Park West.

The sight of it puzzled the watchful Shadow. He knew that the deep, double-level tunnel of the Eighth Avenue subway ran north and south below Central Park West. A passage dug beneath the sidewalk and the street level outside would run squarely into the side wall of the subway!

There was nothing for crooks to gain by digging such a passage. The moment they broke through the subway wall, their earth tunnel would be almost surely discovered.

The Shadow inched cautiously forward through the cellar darkness to learn the answer to the riddle.

Romine had dropped to his knees. He wriggled headfirst into the earth passage. He crawled out of sight.

The Shadow, flat against the dark cellar floor, peered into the opening. He saw at once that it was not a long passage. He could hear Romine grunting, several feet ahead. Then, suddenly, Romine was no longer flat on his belly. He had risen to his feet.

His feet lifted upward out of sight!

The Shadow realized what was happening. A vertical shaft gave access to some concealed exit above. Romine was apparently emerging on the sidewalk directly in front of the home of Dwight Nugent!

The Shadow listened at the mouth of the horizontal passage from the cellar. Soon, he heard a rhythmic sound. The click of a man's heels sounded against a sidewalk. The sound increased. The man was heading straight toward the spot where Romine was evidently hidden.

Whispers followed. They were brief, cut short quickly.

The Shadow ducked as he heard Romine returning. The thug made plenty of noise. He seemed to be dragging something. When he emerged at last in the cellar, The Shadow, watching invisibly, saw that Romine was dragging a large suitcase made of light airplane fiber.

The crook snapped it open, examined the bag's contents. It seemed a crazy sort of reward to go to all that trouble about. The bag was stuffed with packets of ordinary newspaper!

But Romine's shrill chuckle was a sound of glee. His muttered words were triumphant:

"Swell! Wonderful! It works like a charm. Now all we got to do is reverse it."

He picked up the suitcase, hurried with it to the cellar staircase. The Shadow did not follow Romine yet. He was still not completely sure of the potentialities of that earth passage.

A swift, forward wriggle carried him through the horizontal tunnel to the vertical shaft. Standing upright, he climbed aloft by means of rough cleats. He found himself inside what looked like a hollow metal post.

A panel showed that there was an easy way to open that post. Moving it slightly ajar, The Shadow peered.

He was staring into the open air of Central Park West! The post was one of the two large, ornamental newel posts at the foot of the brownstone stoop that led to Dwight Nugent's front door!

The mystery of the swift transfer of the paper-stuffed airplane bag was now explained.

ACROSS the dark avenue, the drowsing figure of Harry Vincent was dimly visible on a bench outside the stone wall of the park. He was covertly watching the front stoop, but he was unable to see the lurking figure of The Shadow inside the hollow post.

The Shadow retreated swiftly. Racing from Nugent's cellar, he returned below the high fence that protected the rear of Nugent's property. His delay had wasted little time.

Sam Romine was still in the rear yard of the beer joint on Columbus Avenue. He didn't notice the cloaked figure of The Shadow, because his attention was directed toward the washroom window. The window was now open. The face of the barkeep was grinning outward at Romine.

"O.K. You got it?"

"Yeah. Let's see how fast I can work the switch."

Romine swung the heavy suitcase through the washroom window. The barkeep stood it on the floor. Romine wriggled in through the window, grabbed the bag, retreated with it to the backyard.

"How long?" he asked.

"Twenty seconds," the barkeep replied.

"Swell!"

Romine hid the suitcase behind a scraggly bush in the backyard that was not far from the washroom window. Then he climbed back through the window and closed it behind him.

The Shadow faded, too. He didn't go near the hidden suitcase. He had future plans for that decoy bag!

Presently, Cliff Marsland, patiently watching from his post on Columbus Avenue, saw Sam Romine emerge from the beer joint. Cliff stiffened, prepared to leave his hidden spot. The Shadow's quiet monosyllable restrained him:

"No!"

The Shadow was after bigger game than Sam Romine. Marsland, to his surprise, was relieved from further duty. He waited until Romine drove away in his black coupe. Then he left the doorway.

The Shadow was already gone!

A few minutes later, Harry Vincent, dozing on his bench outside the park's stone wall on Central Park West, heard a whispered command. It came from the park behind him.

As Vincent turned his head, blazing eyes topped the dark level of the wall.

"Report!"

Harry described what had happened as far as he was able. He had seen a pedestrian with an airplane bag halt briefly at the foot of the brownstone stoop opposite. Harry had been unable to identify the man because of the darkness and the way he kept his face averted. Heavy automobile traffic had added to Harry's troubles.

But he had noticed one significant thing.

The pedestrian no longer had the suitcase when he had faded down the entrance of the nearby subway station. Harry had expected to find the suitcase parked on the stoop, left there for someone else to pick up later.

But a quick trip across the avenue had shown the stoop empty and no sign of the airplane bag.

The laughter of The Shadow held an ominous note. Whispered orders told Harry Vincent what to do.

The Shadow retreated backward into the dark shrubbery within the park. Harry went across Central Park West to his parked car.

He drove rapidly away to carry out detailed instructions.

CHAPTER XII. KILLER'S DOOM

HANSON BARTLEY'S face was strained. He spoke in a low voice:

"Gentlemen, I thank you for rallying so promptly at my call. Here is the note which I found in my apartment just a few minutes ago. Someone must have slid it under the door."

He passed the note to Peter Verne. It was printed in soft lead pencil. Verne read it and passed it to Dr. Sutton. Sutton handed it to Lamont Cranston.

The note contained terse instructions to Bartley as to how to pay over the fifty-thousand-dollar half of Cranston's hospital donation.

Bartley had already assembled the money in cash. The note ordered him to pack the cash in his suitcase. The suitcase was to be taken to a certain bar-and-grill on Columbus Avenue. Bartley was to order a beer at the bar. If nothing was said to him by the bartender he was to carry his suitcase into the washroom at the rear, place it on the floor, return to the bar and order more beer.

After a half-hour's wait, Bartley was to go back again to the washroom. There he would find a package left in the place of his money satchel. The package would contain the master poison stolen from Dr. Sutton's cancer laboratory!

Sutton's face was grim after he read the note.

"It's a damned swindle!" he growled. "The criminal has no intention of returning the poison. It's his stock in trade! If he gave it back, he'd lose his power to keep on bleeding Mr. Bartley indefinitely on the threat of ruining the hospital by more poison attacks!"

The Shadow did not comment on Sutton's obvious remark. He was staring at the suitcase in which Bartley had packed the crisp packages of cash. The suitcase was a piece of modern airplane luggage. It was an exact duplicate of the one which The Shadow had seen earlier in the possession of the crafty Sam Romine.

Bartley, noticing Cranston's scrutiny of the bag, mistook its significance.

"There is one thing I want you to know before we make any move," he said. "The money which you so generously contributed to Mercy Hospital is in no danger of theft. This cash comes from my own personal account. If it should be lost I prefer to bear the loss myself."

There were sympathetic murmurs from the others. Bartley turned toward Sutton.

"Have you found out anything definite concerning the present whereabouts of Dr. Riker?"

Sutton shook his head.

"Riker is not on ambulance duty tonight. He has been given time off. No one saw him leave the hospital - yet I have been unable to locate him inside. I have made guarded inquiries on every floor and in every department."

There was silence for a moment.

"I intend to fight this extortion racket," Bartley said. "It may be dangerous. Any of you are at liberty to withdraw now if you so desire."

"Count me in," Dr. Sutton said.

"Me, too," Verne said.

Lamont Cranston added his voice to the others.

"Very well. Let's go!" Bartley growled.

They descended in his private elevator. His car took them to the address on Columbus Avenue.

BARTLEY parked near the entrance of the beer joint. The Shadow waited to see who would assume leadership in the plan to nab the unknown blackmailer. Dr. Sutton was the one who spoke up.

"Suppose I go in first and buy a beer? It will give me a chance to look the place over."

No one objected. Sutton vanished inside the bar-and-grill. Five minutes later he was back in the parked car. He spoke with quick decision.

"I think I know the set-up. I managed to get a good look at the rear washroom where Bartley is supposed to leave the suitcase. Its window opens on a backyard. My guess is that the criminal plans to snatch that bag out the rear window while Bartley is waiting at the bar."

"Maybe the three of us better get to that backyard before Bartley goes in with his suitcase," Verne suggested. "Does that suit you, Cranston?"

Before The Shadow could reply, Sutton spoke again.

"I've got a smarter idea. The blackmailer undoubtedly expects us to try to nab him. He probably counted on us noticing the possibilities of that rear washroom window. In other words, he may be prepared for a double cross."

"How do you mean?" Verne asked.

"The criminal may have some way of getting past Bartley inside the barroom. He may be planning to walk out the front door while we're all looking vainly for him at the back. You see?"

It didn't seem quite clear, but The Shadow made no comment. Verne looked puzzled, but he didn't argue after noting Cranston's apparent agreement.

"Here's how we'll work it," Sutton said. "Cranston, will you guard the rear for us? Bartley will give you a gun, in case there's trouble. Verne, you and I will remain right here in the car to watch for developments. If the blackmailer tries a front sneak with the money we'll be out here to tackle him. If he tries the rear, Cranston can fire a warning shot and we'll rush to his aid. I think, in that way, we'll have a pretty tight cordon established. Agreed?"

Cranston accepted the gun that Bartley passed to him at a nod from Sutton. Slipping it into his pocket, Cranston walked quietly along the sidewalk, melted from sight down the same cellar stairway he had used to such good advantage earlier that evening as The Shadow.

But this time Cranston did not hurry through the blackness to the rear of the cellar. He had no intention of following Sutton's glib method of procedure. His eyes dropped to the gun that he had received from Hanson Bartley. He broke the weapon, examined it.

The sibilant laughter of The Shadow betokened amusement but no surprise. The gun was not loaded!

The Shadow waited, hidden by the dark overhang of the cellar stairway. His gaze remained on the parked car farther along Columbus Avenue. He saw Hanson Bartley get out with the suitcase. The honorary administrator of Mercy Hospital went nervously into the bar-and-grill.

Inside the joint, Bartley bought a beer at the bar. The barkeep gave him a sharp look, but said nothing. Having finished his beer, Bartley went to the washroom, left his suitcase there, came back to the bar, ordered another beer.

The barkeep continued to ignore him. Bartley looked at the big clock behind the bar. The slow passage of a half-hour began -

MEANWHILE, in Bartley's car, Verne and Sutton began an equally slow wait. Verne looked tense and worried. Sutton seemed more at ease.

But before two or three minutes had passed, it was Sutton who became suddenly worried. His face had turned toward the corner of Columbus Avenue, where a sidestreet cut eastward a couple of hundred feet behind the parked car.

He uttered a sharp exclamation. His hand tightened on Verne's arm.

"What's the matter?" Verne whispered.

"Riker! Dr. Riker! I just saw him!"

"Are you sure?"

"Positive!" Sutton cried in a low tone. "I couldn't be mistaken. He was wearing his hospital whites. He just ducked on foot past the corner. He's heading toward Central Park West!"

"Why should Riker go over there?"

"I don't know. I'm going to follow him and find out!"

"Wait a minute!" Verne objected. "I don't like the idea of staying alone in the car. Suppose -"

"You'll be all right. Just wait here and keep your eyes and ears open. I'll be back as soon as I can. Listen sharply, in case Cranston gets into trouble at the rear of the grill. If he does, he'll fire a shot as a signal. You've got a gun, haven't you?"

"Yes. But -"

"Fine! Promise me you'll wait right here!"

Without waiting for an answer from Verne, Dr. Sutton stepped quickly from the parked car. He hurried back to the corner, vanished around it in the direction of Central Park.

The Shadow, crouched on the dark slant of the cellar steps, where he had faded from sight, saw this abrupt departure of young Dr. Sutton. He matched Sutton's quick sneak with a swift fade-out of his own.

Profiting by Verne's backward stare toward the corner where Sutton had vanished, Lamont Cranston left his cellar shelter. He headed for the corner of Columbus Avenue - a block away from the street where Sutton had faded.

Around that corner, a car was waiting. Lamont Cranston stepped quietly inside, slammed the door. The

car started through the sidestreet toward Central Park West.

Its driver was Harry Vincent.

By the time the car reached Central Park West, a quick transformation had taken place inside the moving vehicle. Lamont Cranston's dapper figure was replaced by the black-cloaked form of The Shadow.

In The Shadow's hand was a suitcase. It was made of lightweight fiber designed for airplane luggage. Harry Vincent had purchased it according to specifications provided him earlier by The Shadow.

The suitcase was an exact duplicate of the one that Hanson Bartley had just carried into the beer joint. It also matched exactly the suitcase that Sam Romine had hidden in the backyard at the rear of the beer joint's washroom.

Vincent swung his car into Central Park West, coasted to a slow stop. He didn't turn off his engine.

The Shadow had already left the car. Moving swiftly through the blackness, he approached the wall of Central Park. He tossed his suitcase over the dark park wall.

An instant later, The Shadow followed.

His feet hit the soft turf behind the stone wall. Then he was again on the move. Hidden by the blackness on the inner side of the wall, he hurried through the underbrush and shrubbery that blocked his path. He knew exactly how to proceed. His reconnaissance earlier that night now came in handy.

When he again peered over the top of the park wall, The Shadow was directly across the street from the front of Dwight Nugent's mansion.

He uttered a sibilant whisper of mirth. He backed into the invisibility of a leafy covert. For a moment there was a faint rustling. Then, all sound died. Darkness and silence filled the small clearing inside the park wall.

ACROSS the avenue from the hiding place of The Shadow, a faint squeak sounded. It came from an ornamental newel post at the foot of Dwight Nugent's brownstone stoop.

A panel in the bronzed post had opened. Through that opening stepped a man. He carried in his hand a suitcase of airplane fiber. The man was Sam Romine. The suitcase was the one that Hanson Bartley had left in the washroom of the bar-and-grill on Columbus Avenue.

Romine cut quickly across Central Park West toward the stone wall that hemmed in the park.

With an upward heave, he sent his heavy money bag flying over the wall. He scrambled to the top of the wall to follow it.

But swift as he was, a half minute intervened between the fall of the bag and the cautious wall climb of Romine.

In that brief interval the suitcase that Romine had tossed over was picked up by The Shadow. The one which The Shadow had provided, with the assistance of Harry Vincent, took the place of Romine's.

It was a switch that could not be readily detected. Both were as alike as Siamese twins. The same manufacturer had built both bags. They were the same model, same size.

Grabbing the planted bag, Romine headed deeper into the park shrubbery. He seemed to know exactly where he was going.

The Shadow didn't follow at once. His flashlight pointed over the top of the park wall. A pale, blue glow was visible to Harry Vincent across the avenue. At once Vincent set his car in motion.

Again a suitcase changed hands in this deadly game of deception. This time the money suitcase of Hanson Bartley - the real one that had been left in the beer joint's washroom - passed from The Shadow to Harry Vincent.

It vanished in Vincent's departing car.

The Shadow moved into the park underbrush on the trail of Sam Romine. He divined at once that Romine was heading toward the park's automobile drive.

With his attention centered grimly on the dangerous thug somewhere in front of him, The Shadow failed to detect peril above his head.

From the thick branches of a tree, a dark figure launched itself silently downward at The Shadow!

The weight of a man struck The Shadow's shoulders with stunning force. He was thrown headlong to the ground and his attacker fell with him. Half stunned, The Shadow staggered to his feet.

His foe, counting on the paralyzing effect of his crashing assault from above, was ready for attack. Something that looked like a taped bar of metal swung upward. The man struck viciously at The Shadow's skull.

The Shadow's upraised arm took some of the force of the blow. But it filled his brain with a dazzle of flame. He dropped to his knees. Weakly, he pitched sideways, lay in a crumpled heap. The twist of his head and neck suggested that his spine had been broken.

The killer was sure of it. He turned and raced onward, in the direction Romine had gone. Still helpless from the blow, The Shadow had used trickery to save his life. He was still semiparalyzed. That was why he had pretended death.

But his dimmed eyes had recognized his attacker.

The man who had leaped murderously from aloft was the suave young cancer specialist, Dr. Sutton!

Sutton, convinced he had killed The Shadow, pressed onward through the darkness. He could hear the faint murmur of an automobile engine on the motor highway a hundred yards deeper within the park.

Elated, he moved with less caution. He bent downward to make a quick passage beneath a low-hanging bush. As he did so he was attacked as suddenly as he had struck at The Shadow!

A dark figure lunged at him.

A heavy palm choked off Sutton's cry. The murderer's other hand jabbed at the soft flesh of Sutton's throat.

The needle of a hypo pierced a vein. Into the pierced vein, liquid gold spurted under pressure.

The result was hideously swift. Dr. Sutton collapsed as if he had been shot through the heart.

He fell stone-dead under the black overhang of the bushes.

THE SHADOW moved ahead through the darkness from another direction. His skull still throbbed, but he was no longer dazed. He could hear the steady thrum of a parked car's motor. He was close to the

automobile driveway. Soon, by slightly moving a thick branch of foliage, The Shadow was able to see the car and Sam Romine.

Romine flung open the car's rear door. He tossed in the suitcase he was carrying. Then he leaped after the bag and slammed the door. The thug behind the wheel started the car away at a fast clip.

The Shadow had expected Romine to meet his unknown employer with the loot. That hope was now dashed. The Shadow, unwilling to tip his presence, allowed Romine and the chauffeur to get away.

The man he was after was Sutton!

Cutting back through the underbrush, The Shadow sought for a hint of Sutton's trail in the darkness. He moved in widening circles over the black turf.

Suddenly, his foot stepped on something soft and limp. He knew what it was before he bent down.

The limp hand of a dead man!

The cautious blink of The Shadow's torch disclosed the horribly contorted face of Dr. Sutton.

It was instantly clear to The Shadow what had caused his quick death. He could see the same signs on Sutton that he had seen on the unfortunate Kupper, in the receiving room at Mercy Hospital.

The facial contortion of strychnine - the cherry-red skin from prussic acid - the enormously enlarged eye pupils from atropine!

A small droplet of liquid gold on the turf below Sutton's head completed the grisly picture.

Dr. Sutton had been killed by the master poison that he, himself, had created!

The unknown killer had vanished. But several yards away, The Shadow picked up a crumpled scrap of paper that turned his eyes to frozen ice.

It was a torn corner from an ambulance slip. Enough of the printed heading showed to indicate that the slip had come from Mercy Hospital!

The Shadow pocketed his clue. Swiftly he left the park. Garbed once more in the role of Lamont Cranston, he hurried through the dim sidestreet that led westward to Columbus Avenue.

CHAPTER XIII. CREATURES OF DARKNESS

HANSON BARTLEY finished his fourth glass of beer. He watched the slow hand of the bar clock touch the half-hour mark.

He rapped on the bar with a coin to attract the barman's attention. The barman seemed to have forgotten Bartley's existence. So did the three or four tough-looking characters who sat drowsing over half-consumed beers at alcove tables.

Bartley's coin rap roused the barman from his solitary glass polishing. He said with a slight grin, "Yes, sir!" and took the money. Bartley didn't like the man's grin. There was mockery in it.

Bartley pretended to hesitate as he turned to leave. He walked slowly back to the rear washroom.

What he saw drew a gasp of astonishment from him.

His suitcase was exactly where he had left it. It stood in the center of the floor, opposite the closed washroom window.

Bartley's astonishment changed to dismay. The criminal had evidently suspected a scheme to trap him. Like a wary animal, he had refused to nibble at the bait. To Bartley it appeared that the criminal threat against Mercy Hospital was now redoubled.

With a quick, nervous step, he carried his suitcase out the front door. It did not for an instant occur to him that a clever switch had been made.

Peter Verne looked puzzled as Bartley appeared on the dark sidewalk of Columbus Avenue and got into his car.

"What happened?"

Bartley explained the disappointing stalemate. He shrugged unhappily.

"I think the criminal lost his nerve. We're right back where we started. I don't know what to do now."

He noticed, suddenly, that Verne was alone with him in the car.

"Where is Dr. Sutton? I thought he was going to wait in the car with you?"

Verne told about Sutton's hasty departure soon after Bartley had entered the beer joint.

"Sutton claimed he saw Dr. Riker. Said he saw Riker sneaking past the corner toward Central Park West. He hasn't come back yet."

"What about Lamont Cranston?"

"Haven't heard a peep from him," Verne said. There was uneasiness in his voice. "He's probably still hanging around in that damned backyard behind the grill."

He bit off a nervous oath.

"Looks like our whole scheme has gone to pot. Maybe you better go back and notify Cranston that it's no soap."

"You go," Bartley said. "I'll guard my suitcase."

Verne nodded. He opened the car's door. But before he could start toward the black cellar steps where Lamont Cranston had faded from sight a half-hour earlier, he was spared the necessity of hunting for him.

LAMONT CRANSTON emerged quietly from the cellar entrance. He walked with a calm step toward the parked car.

"Not a thing happened," he reported. "Not a soul showed up in the rear."

He allowed his gaze to move to the suitcase on the floor of Bartley's car. He pretended amazement.

"I say! Have you still got it?"

Bartley repeated what he had told Verne. The hasty departure of Dr. Sutton was also reported.

"Well, at any rate, we've saved the money," Cranston said.

His tone and the direction of his glance did what he hoped it would. It induced Hanson Bartley to release the catch of the suitcase and open the lid.

At once Bartley uttered a sharp cry that was echoed by Verne. The Shadow pretended to be as nonplused as his two companions. He stared at the useless wads of newspaper stuffed in the money bag.

"Gone! It's been switched! How in the name of Heaven -"

Anger vibrated in Bartley's voice. But Verne looked frightened.

"I think we're up against something too tough to be fooled with any longer," Verne whispered. "We'd better do now what should have been done in the first place. We ought to go straight to the police!"

"We can't!" Bartley snapped. His face was stubborn. "That's the one thing I've been trying to avoid. Publicity of that sort will ruin Mercy Hospital!"

"Publicity, hell!" Verne rejoined. "You've already lost fifty thousand dollars! If you keep trying to fight this thing alone you'll lose more! What do you think, Cranston?"

Lamont Cranston sided with Verne. But he counseled delay.

"Why don't we keep quiet until I've find out what's happened to Sutton? It might be more sensible to wait until we hear from him. He may bring us definite news concerning Dr. Riker."

It wasn't pleasant to have to hide the fact that Sutton's poisoned body lay dead in a thicket of Central Park. But there was reason for The Shadow's duplicity. His voice was persuasive. In the end, Verne and Bartley accepted his advice.

They dropped Verne off at his residence. Lamont Cranston shook hands with Bartley outside the Cobalt Club.

Bartley returned to his private apartment at the hospital.

IN a dimly-lighted room astonishingly close to Mercy Hospital, Sam Romine uttered a triumphant chuckle.

"O.K., boss! Everything ticked on the dot."

The man to whom Romine spoke stood away from the narrow cone of light that illuminated an airplane suitcase. His face remained in obscurity.

"Open it up! Let's have the dough!" he rasped.

The next moment, he uttered an oath of rage. He stared over Romine's shoulder at a jumbled mass of newspaper packets in the stolen bag.

"You - damned - fool!"

Romine quailed at the suppressed fury in those cold tones.

"They crossed us! Bartley must have switched the bags, somehow!"

"Wait! Think! Did you obey my orders? Every single one?"

"I sure did." Romine related his movements. "I still don't understand how Bartley -"

"Shut up, stupid. Bartley doesn't know his nose from his elbow. There's only one person on earth who could have pulled this wise stunt."

The man's voice was like a thin, icy thread as he cried:

"The Shadow!"

Sam Romine shook his head obstinately. "It couldn't be. The Shadow is dead! Tip Nazo and me riddled him with machine-gun slugs in the East River. The Shadow and that damned taxi driver of his are at the bottom of the East River."

"That's what he wants us to think, dope! Now listen. Let me talk."

The vicious murmur of the boss hissed at Romine's ear. His perfect extortion scheme had been ruined by trickery. The initial attempt to bleed Hanson Bartley of fifty thousand dollars had flopped. Only the death of The Shadow could prevent a repetition of that flop.

"I'll tell you why The Shadow is going to be easy to kill," the icy whisper continued. "He's stupid enough to be honest! Unless I'm mistaken, The Shadow will return secretly tonight to Mercy Hospital. With him will be the real suitcase that he wangled away from you. He will seek to return the extortion money to Bartley. And that's going to be just too bad for The Shadow!"

"How?" Romine muttered. "I don't get the scheme."

"No? How does this idea sound to you -"

Romine's eyes widened as he listened to the purring words. He began to chuckle harshly.

"Pretty damned good," he whispered.

"Good? My friend, it's perfect!"

THE hospital apartment of Hanson Bartley was dark. Silence filled the darkness. The silence was only briefly disturbed by a slight sound at the lock. Presently, the door opened.

The Shadow slipped inside.

A .45 gleamed in one of his gloved hands. The Shadow had no intention of using the weapon. Its sole purpose was to cow Bartley into silence in case he was tempted to yell an alarm at sight of the black-cloaked intruder.

The Shadow's other hand held the suitcase that had been carried away from Central Park in the car driven by Harry Vincent. In it was Bartley's rescued fifty thousand dollars.

He glided to the dark bedroom of the hospital's honorary administrator. He reached toward the bed to awaken the sleeping man.

His touch found nothing but a rumpled pillow. The bed was empty!

The Shadow uttered no sound of surprise. He turned from the empty bed. He made a swift tour of the apartment.

Not a single spot escaped his eye. With his vision attuned to the darkness, The Shadow satisfied himself that the entire apartment, like the bed, was empty.

He went back to the bedroom. The condition of the bed and the dimly visible furniture brought a sibilant whisper of mirth from The Shadow's lips. The set-up suggested unmistakably that Bartley had been surprised in his bed, attacked, kidnapped!

His pajamas lay crumpled on the floor. All his clothing was missing. Captors had seemingly forced Bartley to dress, and had hurried him away. Fairly recently, too!

The Shadow's laughter deepened as his glance swung back to the money suitcase he had sought to return. Under cover of the dark, he placed the suitcase inside the bedroom closet of Hanson Bartley, turned the key of the closet door on the outside. He dropped the key into his pocket.

He was ready now to turn on the bedroom light.

But he was careful about the way he did it. The bedroom doorway was close to a wall switch that controlled the light. The Shadow crouched outside the threshold as his hand reached along the inner wall for the electric switch.

The blaze of the ceiling light and the swift closing of the bedroom door occurred simultaneously.

In the darkness of a short corridor, The Shadow darted for Bartley's bathroom. He opened the bathroom window slightly at the bottom.

He peered outward.

The dark bathroom concealed his presence. His eyes were able to see easily into the dimness of the courtyard below.

It was the grassy court between two hospital wings. Down in that court - it seemed years ago now - The Shadow had first noticed a dangling rope hanging from an opened window of Dr. Sutton's cancer laboratory.

A figure was dimly visible below. The figure was staring upward at the sudden brilliance of Bartley's bedroom.

A quick flash of light glowed from the grass. One - two! A signal had been sent from a tiny flashlight. The direction of the gleam suggested where the unknown lookout expected an answering flash.

A reply came from a window farther along the hospital wing!

Having familiarized himself with the hospital set-up in his capacity as a trustee, The Shadow was able to identify that room.

It was the sleeping quarters of Dr. Riker, the dark-complected young ambulance surgeon!

THE moment the reply signal showed at Riker's window, the figure below began to retreat swiftly across the courtyard grass. Crouched low, he seemed to be heading for a point midway between the two wings of the building.

Suddenly, he halted. His crouched figure dropped flat against the black turf.

The Shadow waited. Nothing happened.

Then The Shadow realized why no further movement was visible. The thug was gone!

He had apparently vanished downward into the earth!

The Shadow was faced with a double choice. Either he had to go downstairs and investigate the crook who had disappeared so magically in that grassy courtyard - or lose no time going after the man who had signaled from the window of Dr. Riker's room.

The Shadow did not hesitate. He chose the latter course.

But he did not attempt to reach Riker's room through the hospital itself. To do so he would have had to traverse corridors that were open to the public. There would be nurses on post, and orderlies, too. All of them were on the alert for trouble since the strange death that had disrupted the calm existence of Mercy Hospital.

The Shadow decided on a swift roof journey.

Having extinguished the light in Bartley's bedroom, he stepped out on the broad sill of the window. A strong, pliable rope, produced from beneath The Shadow's robe, was tossed expertly upward toward a cornice projection of the roof.

The loop missed in the darkness. The Shadow re-coiled his rope. He tried again.

This time his aim was successful. The loop fell properly around the projection, was tightened by an expert at rope climbing.

The Shadow mounted steadily upward.

Darkness shrouded his suspended figure. His black cloak merged with the blackness of the wall. From the top-floor window to the roof was relatively a short distance. The Shadow's gloved grip caught at the cornice.

It moved higher, secured a better hold. With a quick exertion, The Shadow chinned himself. He knifed the upper half of his body inward to safety.

An instant later, with the rope recovered, The Shadow darted on tiptoe across the roof. He was careful to make no sound that might be audible to anyone lying awake in one of the rooms below.

His goal was a shadowy blur at the other end of the wing. This was the housing of an automatic elevator shaft that served the needs of the hospital employees who were quartered in this wing. There was a roof exit from the elevator. Doctors and nurses used it to visit patients who, in the daytime, occupied convalescent deck chairs in the warm sunlight.

A glassed light in the shaft door glowed like a small red ruby. The crimson glow indicated that the automatic elevator was now in use. Whoever had flashed the signal from Dr. Riker's window was now rapidly descending!

The Shadow's sibilant laughter indicated no worry. He watched the red bulb in the shaft's paneled door. The moment it went out, The Shadow pressed the roof button in order to return the car aloft.

THE length of time it took for the empty elevator to ascend told The Shadow where Dr. Riker had alighted. He had gone all the way down to the ground floor. He was undoubtedly already out a courtyard window, racing across the dark turf to rejoin his pal who had vanished so suddenly.

The Shadow again did the unexpected. He did not pursue Riker as yet. He alighted from the elevator at the top-floor level.

Moving invisibly along a dimly-lighted corridor where the hospital personnel slept, he approached the

door of Dr. Riker's room.

The door was not closed and locked, as it normally should have been. It stood ajar.

The room's interior was dark. The Shadow entered. He was not surprised to find the room empty.

His quiet tug pulled down the shade on the window. The glow of The Shadow's flashlight sent a tiny beam of brightness through the darkness.

Riker's bed looked as tumbled as the one in Bartley's bedroom. But Riker had not been asleep. His pajamas lay neatly folded on a chair. He had been fully dressed before he had left this room.

The torch of The Shadow swept from the bed to a table. On the table was a damp ring. It was a circular mark evidently left there by a bottle. The ring was tiny, indicating a small bottle. Its color brought a whisper of mirth from The Shadow's lips.

It was bright gold.

The master poison stolen from Sutton had been hidden in Riker's room! Some of it had been transferred from the stolen bottle to a smaller one!

The Shadow traced the whereabouts of that larger bottle. It was easy to do. A few drops of the golden liquid were visible on Riker's floor, at the edge of the carpet. The Shadow moved the rug edge, located a loose board in the floor.

Lifting the board, he withdrew the bottle of Sutton's master poison!

CHAPTER XIV. THE DEVIL'S OVEN

THE SHADOW'S reaction to his sinister find was a strange one. Laughter twisted his lips. It was not a sound of triumph. Mockery filled it.

The Shadow's easy success in uncovering the master poison had warned him not to expect too much. Crooks, bent on outwitting The Shadow, had meant him to find that bottle!

A glance at the pasted label confirmed his suspicion. It was marked: Experiment 278-B. But it was not the inked notation that verified The Shadow's hunch about trickery. There was a slight indentation at the label's lower left corner.

The Shadow, himself, had made the faint mark with a thumbnail. He had done so when he had tested the bottle he had examined earlier in Dr. Sutton's cancer laboratory.

This was the fake bottle left by an unknown criminal in place of the real master poison!

The Shadow made a final test. He tried out the "poison" on living tissue.

In a corner of Riker's room a canary hung from a metal bracket. The Shadow removed the cloth hood placed over the cage at night. Gently, He scooped the drowsy canary into the hollow of his hand.

He used a small medicine dropper. He released the bird inside the cage and closed the small door. The canary hopped swiftly from perch to perch, twittering excitedly as if nothing had happened.

Nothing had! If the golden fluid had really been Sutton's master poison, that canary would have died with the speed of lightning!

The "clue" was a gag! Like the clue of the flashlight signal from the stealthy figure down in the courtyard, it was designed to encourage The Shadow into hasty pursuit.

The Shadow accepted the challenge!

Descending to the ground floor in the automatic elevator, he emerged cautiously into a side corridor of the hospital.

At this hour of the night only a single light burned in that long stretch of hall. There were no nurses on duty because it was not a public corridor. The Shadow glided swiftly along its somber length, his eyes veering toward each window that he passed.

He was not surprised to find that one of these windows was open at the bottom. He studied the rough stone surface of the sill. A small piece of white thread was dimly visible. It had apparently been torn loose by a rough projection of the stone.

It was a thread from a suit of hospital whites.

The Shadow was certain that a man in a hospital uniform had squirmed across that sill a few moments earlier. But he was also certain that the white thread presented a lying picture!

One end of it had been neatly cut with a pair of scissors or a sharp knife. Again The Shadow was being handed an easy clue. A criminal, afraid that The Shadow might lose the trail, was deliberately making sure that The Shadow continued in quick pursuit.

The Shadow obliged!

HE glided across the grassy courtyard outside the corridor window. He headed toward the spot where he had observed, from above, the strange disappearance of the lookout thug.

He didn't have to search very long to understand how it was possible for that sly thug to vanish with such ease. The Shadow's exploration led him to a circular plate of metal sunk neatly in the clipped expanse of surrounding grass.

It was a manhole cover!

Lifting it, The Shadow disclosed a black, circular shaft that led downward into darkness. The metal rungs of a vertical ladder indicated that workmen probably used this shaft for inspection and repair.

The Shadow descended, lowering the manhole cover noiselessly into place above his vanishing head. The glow of his electric torch blinked briefly at the bottom.

He understood at once the nature of the underground conduit in which he found himself.

Large, insulated pipes ran to left and right through this tunnel that connected the hospital wings. The type and the thickness of the insulation showed it to be asbestos. These pipes carried steam, generated in the hospital's power room. Like most institutions of its kind, Mercy Hospital generated its own electrical and steam energy.

The Shadow's brief torch flash told him in which direction his two wily predecessors had vanished. A few tiny clods of soft earth showed that the trail led to the left. That they had been dropped purposely, The Shadow did not doubt. Walking on grass overhead, the criminal had no real reason for picking up those innocent-looking clods of dirt on his shoes.

It was a tight squeeze to crawl through the conduit beneath the faintly warm line of the asbestos-covered steam pipes. But it was not an impossible trip. Workmen used it for repair jobs in the conduit. The pipes led to the cellars of various wings.

The Shadow crept onward toward what was undoubtedly a death trap.

He intended to enter that trap!

Soon he reached the end of the conduit. The steam pipes slanted upward, disappeared through a sealed and insulated hole in a masonry foundation wall. Below the spot where the pipes vanished was a small metal door.

This door led to a small inspection chamber where the various valves and gauges that controlled the flow of steam were located. From the inspection chamber, The Shadow knew, another door led inward to the cellar of this particular wing of the hospital.

The Shadow stiffened himself for peril. It would probably come in the form of a silent attack. The roar of gunfire inside that hollow inspection chamber might raise disagreeable echoes, bring prompt investigation.

Sticking to his role of an over-eager dupe, The Shadow opened the metal door with a quick push. His flashlight sent a beam across the floor of the inspection chamber.

The pale face of a man was disclosed. It was the missing Hanson Bartley!

HE lay on the concrete floor in a stiffened huddle. Ropes were tightly bound around his wrists and ankles. A gag covered his mouth. His eyes stared at The Shadow in shining terror.

Over the trussed captive the floor was a horizontal nest of steam pipes. The Shadow's gaze did not once lift to those pipes. Crawling swiftly forward from the underground conduit, he bent over the helpless body of Hanson Bartley.

From above his head, something dropped like a looped filament from a spider's web. It was a garrote cord! It circled The Shadow's bent head, began to tighten around his throat.

The unseen killer found an unexpected obstruction to an easy job of strangulation. The gloved hand of The Shadow was within the death circlet of the cord!

Expecting attack from above, he was ready. His defense was as swift as the murder attack. A jerk pulled the hidden man on the pipe above into view.

There was a knife flash as the killer saw his murderous trick countered. The knife swept viciously at The Shadow's throat.

The knife did not slash through The Shadow's jugular vein. An expert at jujitsu, The Shadow had already applied powerful leverage.

The assassin flew forward over the bent head of The Shadow. With the knife still clutched tightly, he had no time to save himself. He struck on the concrete floor with a meaty thud.

He lay there without movement.

The Shadow watched alertly, suspicious of a possum stunt. But the sight of a crimson thread trickling from beneath the limp carcass of the crook revealed that a grim piece of justice had taken place.

In falling with the knife clutched in his hand, the thug had landed heavily on the blade of his own weapon. The point had been driven deeply into his vitals.

He was dead!

A quick scrutiny identified the criminal face to The Shadow. The fellow was a professional killer, a henchman of Sam Romine's. His name was Tip Nazo.

The sudden appearance of a black-cloaked phantom, followed by the death of Nazo, terrified Hanson Bartley. He cringed as The Shadow again bent over him.

The whisper of The Shadow's lips at the ear of the honorary administrator of Mercy Hospital slowly changed the man's glare of terror to a gleam of hope. Bartley realized that The Shadow was not an enemy, but a friend.

He nodded, to show that he understood, and would obey the orders of The Shadow.

When his gag was removed, Bartley uttered no betraying sound. His cupped whisper at The Shadow's ear revealed that Bartley had been kidnapped by a criminal dressed in a suit of hospital whites. His abductor had also worn a surgical mask that covered his face to the eyes.

"Dr. Riker!" Bartley's trembling lips whispered.

The Shadow did not reply. He removed his black cloak and broad-brimmed slouch hat. Bartley obediently donned them.

From the dead Tip Nazo, the peaked cap and the expensively tailored coat were swiftly removed. Transferred to The Shadow, they produced a sinister effect. The facial muscles of The Shadow helped to emphasize that effect. His face seemed to sharpen under the cap's visor. In the semidarkness, Tip Nazo seemed to live again.

The dead gangster, now wearing the discarded coat of Hanson Bartley, was left dying face downward. Cords on his ankles and wrists helped to simulate a helpless "Bartley."

Ready to match murder trickery with trickery of his own, The Shadow rapped loudly on the metal door that gave access from the inspection chamber to the hospital cellar.

"O.K.!" he growled. "I got him!"

THE door opened cautiously. From the darkness of the cellar a face peered. It was Sam Romine.

Romine grinned as his ugly eyes took in the fake picture at one swift glance. He could see the trussed "Bartley" still huddled where he had been placed as Shadow bait. He could see "The Shadow" collapsed on the floor, in the custody of "Nazo."

Romine gave his supposed henchman a quick hand to help drag the captive "Shadow" into the cellar. Bartley, in his borrowed cloak and hat, pretended complete unconsciousness.

A single dim bulb burned in the high, whitewashed ceiling of the cellar. The Shadow, protected by his role of "Nazo," was able to send a lightning glance about the cellar.

He could see the bulky masses of machinery along the walls. The pale hue of the whitewashed walls showed no window openings. The cellar was completely underground.

The machines that The Shadow saw were huge dryers, ironers, washing machines. Fed by electric

power, they took care of the mountain of soiled cotton and linen that came from the beds and tables at Mercy Hospital. The cellar housed the hospital's laundry.

An oath of triumph drew The Shadow's gaze toward the center of the room. A figure was standing there, dressed in hospital whites. Over his face was a surgical mask that swathed him to the eyes. Those glaring eyes gleamed with a hell-flame of delight. The voice behind the surgical mask was muffled.

"O.K., Romine! Get a move on, Nazo! Drag him over here!"

The real Shadow, helping Romine drag the black-robed Bartley forward, had a swift chance to see what the masked criminal intended.

Almost at his elbow was a huge metal cylinder mounted on concrete posts. It looked like the boiler of a locomotive. Steam fed this metal monster, not electricity. It was the hospital's sterilizing chamber!

Into that riveted cylinder went all the hospital garments worn by physicians and nurses and orderlies. There they were made germ-proof by live steam forced from a hundred interior vents under terrific pressure.

The masked criminal opened the circular door of the sterilizing boiler. Rows of empty racks and shelves were disclosed. There was ample room inside for the full-length body of a human being.

The masked man chuckled. He made a grisly little joke:

"Let's show The Shadow what's cooking!"

Afraid to risk Bartley's life by premature gunplay, The Shadow pretended to obey. He tugged at one of the limp arms of the black-cloaked "victim," while Romine tugged at the other. Hanson Bartley was dragged forward, his legs trailing across the concrete floor of the cellar.

Suddenly, The Shadow pressed Bartley's wrist in a signal. At the same time he jerked the "unconscious" victim upright to his feet.

A GUN gleamed. The fake Nazo uttered a yell of rage. He sprang close to the fake Shadow in a fierce tussle to grab the gun. It was impossible to tell in the dim light which of them was really pointing that gun aloft.

A scarlet streak spat in an upward slant toward the bulb in the ceiling. The shattered light bulb exploded into glass dust. Blackness filled the cellar.

Romine grabbed in the darkness for his own gun. He lay badly jarred on the floor, where a shove had sent him sprawling. His gun jerked into his hand. Explosions hammered from it toward the spot where he had last seen "The Shadow" fighting fiercely with "Nazo."

Other explosions sent scarlet streaks through the darkness. The masked supercriminal was trying to aid Romine to cut down their escaping captive.

The slugs roared harmlessly above the two men who had precipitated this deadly game of blindman's buff. The Shadow and Bartley had both dropped flat to the floor at the instant the ceiling light was extinguished.

They separated swiftly.

Bartley headed on hands and knees for the protection afforded by the blur of an electric washing machine

near the wall of the cellar.

The Shadow faded swiftly toward the tiny inspection chamber where Tip Nazo had made such a botch of his strangle-cord job.

"Lights!" Romine screamed. "Turn on another light!"

The masked man was already at a wall switch. Before he could turn it on, an ominous sound made his fumbling hand hesitate.

The mocking laughter of The Shadow was raising an eerie, spine-tingling echo in the blackness!

It was followed by a shrill cry from Sam Romine:

"Damn his soul - I've got him!"

The laughter of The Shadow had sounded close to Romine's blinded back. Romine whirled the moment he heard it. He ran full tilt into a human body!

Romine staggered as the figure collided with him. A yell of rage burst from his lips. He clubbed wildly with the butt of his gun, felt the impact of a skull beneath his blow.

The victim of his slugging slid inertly to the floor.

It was then that Sam Romine had uttered his savage cry of delight to the supercriminal fumbling halfway across the cellar at the light switch.

Another ceiling bulb glowed suddenly. It revealed the proof of Romine's success.

At his feet lay the body of The Shadow. Blood from the gun butt of Romine showed in a lagged, crimson furrow, where his torn scalp had been laid open.

The masked man sprang forward in a monkeylike leap. He seized one of the limp, trailing arms. Romine grabbed the other.

Together, they dragged their black-robed victim to the circular door of the steam sterilizing chamber.

Headfirst, The Shadow was shoved inside. The cylinder door closed with a clang. The masked criminal sprang to the control lever.

A strange, humming roar became dimly audible. It was like the dulled hum of an enormous electric fan.

Within the sealed cylinder, live steam was spurting from a hundred open vents. The needle of the pressure gauge climbed. So did the temperature needle.

Sealed inside that searing hell of live steam was The Shadow's body!

CHAPTER XV. CRIME'S REWARD

FOR five hideously long minutes, the thrumming vibration of death roared inside the steel cylinder.

Sam Romine's mouth gaped in a merciless grin. The eyes of the criminal in the white hospital suit glinted like ice chips above the concealing blur of his surgical mask.

Presently the masked man busied himself with the mechanism of the death chamber.

The roaring rumble inside the big cylinder diminished. The needles of the indicator gauges began to drop. Steam pressure moved toward zero. The blood-red heat indicator slowly returned to normal.

Valves released the imprisoned steam. No longer invisible at the high temperature of live steam, it spat in a white plume from a petcock at the rear of the cylinder.

The masked man worked the mechanism that controlled the cylinder's airtight door. His voice was like the rasp of a file.

"Drag out The Shadow!"

Romine reached in, grabbed at the victim's shriveled leather shoes hauled the black-robed corpse out.

The Shadow's body dropped to the cellar floor.

It was hideously cooked. Its face was puffy-red, swollen horribly. The Shadow's black slouch hat lay beside the dead body. Shrunken by the terrific heat, it looked scarcely larger than a doll's hat.

Romine chuckled. He kicked idly at the shrunken hat with his toe.

But his amusement was not echoed by his companions. The masked man had bent over the body. He uttered a choked cry. His eyes above the white blur of his surgical mask bulged like the eyes of a crazy man.

His victim was not The Shadow!

The masked man's choked exclamation rose to a yell of rage. Even in death the steam-cooked face of the corpse proclaimed that trickery had robbed the criminal of his real prey.

The dead man was Tip Nazo!

Sam Romine recognized Nazo too. Paralyzed by the discovery, he stood motionless at the shoulder of his enraged chief. He saw death in the eyes that glared at him above the surgical mask. Romine quailed at the glitter of those accusing eyes.

He started to bleat a hasty denial of any guilt for the horrible mistake that had been made.

A sound behind both men spared Romine the necessity of thinking up a quick alibi.

Sibilant laughter from the living Shadow was making an eerie echo in the dimness of the laundry cellar!

The masked criminal whirled. Gun in hand he glared toward the spot where that mocking mirth seemed to come from. He could see nothing except the dark outline of an enormous drying machine.

He fired into the darkness. The thwack of his bullet was lost in the explosive roar of the gun.

Nothing happened.

Flanked by the watchful Romine the masked criminal began a cautious advance.

The jeering laughter of The Shadow whispered again!

THIS time it came from an entirely different spot. Invisible to his foes, The Shadow was making swift moves in the darkness. He was grimly maneuvering to separate Romine and the masked man in order to make sure of capturing the latter alive.

His plan worked. Rattled by the will-o'-the-wisp mirth that shifted location so rapidly, the two crooks began to spread apart.

The Shadow's shrewd plan of attack was spoiled by Hanson Bartley!

Hidden from sight after his quick crawl to safety Bartley had regained some of his lost nerve. He misjudged the situation. He thought that The Shadow was in deadly peril.

He sprang to his feet from beneath the protective overhang of an automatic washing machine. His gun blazed at the sinister figure in hospital white.

Nervous haste ruined his aim. The slug spat harmlessly past the shoulder of the ducking criminal.

Sam Romine's gun replied. He had an easy shot at the exposed body of Bartley. But, unlike Bartley, he was too eager to kill to be accurate on his aim.

His bullet struck, but it was not a mortal hurt. Wounded in the thigh, Hanson Bartley fell to the dark floor of the cellar.

Romine raced closer to fire the finishing slug.

The crash of The Shadow's .45 ended Romine's murderous rush. It was fired at a difficult angle than the spot where The Shadow had faded. It missed Romine's chest, ripped in a slanting furrow across his ribs.

But though it was only a flesh wound, the impact of that heavy-calibered bullet spun Romine around. He hit the floor as if kicked by a mule.

Bartley, retrieved from death, tried vainly to rise. He saw the white-clad master criminal race across the darkened cellar for safety.

"Get him!" Bartley screamed to the invisible figure of The Shadow. "Don't let Riker escape!"

His cry went unanswered.

The goal of the fleeing criminal was a small metal door in the base of the cellar wall. It led to the inspection chamber for the steam pipes. Through it, the masked man intended to crawl to the conduit that carried the steam pipes underground to other wings of the hospital.

A manhole cover would afford a final desperate exit to the open air.

The fleeing killer didn't reach the conduit. He didn't even get into the inspection chamber. When he flung its metal door open he found himself facing the blazing eyes of The Shadow!

Twin .45s emphasized a softly spoken command:

"Surrender - or die!"

For an instant the masked man hesitated. Then, abruptly, all the fight went out him.

The gun dropped from his nerveless fingers. Helpless before the threat of twin automatics, his body slumped in acknowledged defeat.

From the dim cellar area came a thin cry from the wounded Bartley.

"Did you get him? Did you nab Riker?"

"No!"

There was ironic amusement in The Shadow's reply. His gaze seemed to pierce the white surgical mask of his panting captive. He asked quietly:

"Don't you think it is time that you identified yourself properly - Mr. Verne?"

As he spoke he leaned slightly forward, ripped the mask from the face of his foe.

THE SHADOW'S action proved the truth of his words. Peter Verne glared haggardly at The Shadow.

It was hard to recognize him. The normally quiet and self-assured expression of Verne's eyes had changed to a malignant stare. Hate contorted his mouth. All the repressed viciousness of the hypocritical hospital trustee was now revealed.

"All right! So you've got me!" Verne rasped. "Give me one last break. Pull that damned trigger of yours! Put a bullet into me!"

It was lying talk, intended to suggest complete despair. Unknown to The Shadow, Verne had one last murder trick up his sleeve.

It was literally up his sleeve! That was why he had allowed both his arms to dangle in apparent hopelessness at the moment of surrender.

Into one of Verne's cupped hands something small dropped while he talked. It was a "palm" gun. Verne's sidelong pose hid what was happening from the gaze of The Shadow.

Afraid to risk showing the palm gun for a single instant, Verne kept hand and weapon close to his thigh. The only movement he made was a swift upward flick of his wrist.

He didn't aim at The Shadow. The stab of his gunfire sent a small-calibered bullet whizzing upward at the ceiling directly overhead.

An insulated steam pipe ran its length across the ceiling. The slug pierced it.

Steam roared downward under terrific pressure.

The face of The Shadow was enveloped in a hissing white cloud. It seared his skin, blinded his suddenly-tight eyelids.

He staggered backward, one arm flung protectively in front of his face. It gave Verne a lightning chance to flee.

But Verne, desperate, preferred to kill rather than run. He saw a supreme chance to get rid of The Shadow. He flung himself forward in attack.

In his hand was a hypo. The slender needle struck at the soft flesh of The Shadow's throat.

The needle point did not puncture the skin. The Shadow's clutch caught fiercely at the murderer's wrist. He twisted it aside, tightened his bone-crunching grip.

Verne squealed in agony. The hypo fell to the concrete floor. The barrel of the plunger was smashed. A hideous little puddle of liquid gold spread in a thick, viscous mass.

Verne was like a madman now. He fought with tooth and nail, trying to tear himself free from The

Shadow. But at close quarters The Shadow took no more chances. The butt of his .45 landed with a jarring smash on Verne's skull.

The criminal collapsed to the floor. He lay there in an unconscious huddle with the whites of his eyes showing.

Handcuffs clicked on the limp wrists of the captive murderer.

HANSON BARTLEY was moaning in pain at the spot where he lay wounded from Sam Romine's bullet. The Shadow took a quick look at him, saw that he was not seriously hurt. Not far from Bartley, the rounded Romine lay unconscious.

The Shadow whirled. His face grim with purpose, he searched for still another man.

He found the prisoner he was seeking in a dark corner of the laundry cellar. Strong hands dragged a bound-and-gagged victim from a black hiding place under an enormous laundry tub.

It was Dr. Riker!

The Shadow released him with a few slashes of a sharp knife. Riker's dark, good-looking features were still paper-white with the fear of death. He could scarcely talk when The Shadow removed his gag.

"He kidnapped me - from my room. He meant to cook me alive - steam cylinder - after he finished you!"

The Shadow's sibilant laughter indicated that this was no news to him. He helped the faltering figure of the ambulance surgeon closer to the spot where the wounded Bartley lay.

Both men were stunned by the disclosure of Peter Verne's guilt. Their shock increased when The Shadow told them of the death of Dr. Sutton in Central Park.

The Shadow ordered Riker to talk. There was comfort and reassurance in the quiet tone of his voice. Riker wet his dry lips, began to whisper weakly.

Riker had suspected Dr. Sutton right from the start. He knew that Sutton was broke, badly in need of money.

"The poor devil lied when he told you that I owed him money," Riker gasped. "It was Sutton who owned me the money! The day I learned about the existence of the poison, I had gone to Sutton's laboratory to demand that he pay some of it back to me. Sutton had to tell me about that deadly, golden hell broth of his because I almost killed myself right before his eyes by wetting my finger to taste some of it. He pledged me to absolute secrecy. I agreed. I figured it was none of my affair that Sutton had discovered a poison as a by-product of one of his many cancer experiments."

Riker's trembling voice steadied.

"After the poison was stolen, I could think of only one answer. I figured that Sutton, heavily in debt, was trying to shake down Bartley with... with The Shadow's help. I thought the whole murder scheme was engineered by Dr. Sutton and... and The Shadow.

"I was sure of my suspicion when the drug room was raided by The Shadow and a hospital doctor wearing a surgical mask. I thought Sutton had emptied those three bottles in the dispensary room as a blind, then had escaped with the help of The Shadow!"

The Shadow's eyes gleamed. Events, hitherto confused, were now clearer.

It was clear that the drug-room raider had been Dr. Sutton! He had made a desperate effort to cover up the theft of his master poison. He had foolishly tried to confuse the police.

Later, Sutton had attempted to pin the guilt on Dr. Riker. He disliked Riker because of their love rivalry over a pretty blond nurse. His duplicity had cost the unfortunate Sutton his life.

The Shadow's head turned quickly. A groan had sounded nearby. Sam Romine had recovered consciousness from the impact of the .45 slug that had wounded him.

Romine's eyes were glassy as The Shadow bent over him.

Terror flicked into the confused eyes of the wounded thug. The Shadow increased that terror with measured words. They were not the truth but, to Romine, they seemed horribly so.

The Shadow stated that Peter Verne had confessed, saddling Romine with the murder glint of their pawn, Kupper. Verne had also, The Shadow intoned, named Romine as the killer of Dr. Sutton in Central Park!

Romine writhed in helpless rage.

"No!" he screamed. "Verne's a liar! He's not going to lay it on me. I... I'll squeal!"

He talked swiftly under the terror of a looming vision of the electric chair. The Shadow listened grimly. Every word Romine uttered was recorded for the benefit of the police by The Shadow's steady hand.

IT was a tale of patiently contrived devilry by a man of twisted genius. Peter Verne, no longer as rich as people assumed he was, had planned carefully to enrich himself by crime. He had entered Mercy Hospital in order to forge an airtight alibi. His annual health check made a convenient excuse.

Verne had left the hospital by way of the window of his private room. He decoyed Bartley to the empty home of Dwight Nugent - a house Verne had secretly rented under the name of Albert Thomas - and had made his extortion proposition. Unable to climb back to his hospital room by way of the window, Verne used an ambulance call to draw Dr. Riker away from the duty office at the ambulance courtyard. Thus, it was easy for Verne to get back unseen by doctors or nurses who could have blasted his "alibi."

Verne then sneaked aloft, stole the poison from Sutton's laboratory, left a fake bottle of gold-leaf particles suspended in alcohol. He left also a fake "burglar" rope dangling from Sutton's open window.

It was Verne who killed Kupper to end forever any chance of his talking later on!

By decoying the hall nurse away from her desk by a bell-ring from the room of another patient, Verne was able to slip unseen into his own private room. It took only an instant to dope his own blood-tonic medicine with chloral hydrate. Verne used just enough to drug himself without danger. It increased his alibi, made him seem to be a prospective victim of an unknown criminal.

Moreover, it gave Verne an excuse to refuse to pay his promised donation to the hospital - which, of course, he had never had any intention of paying!

At the Columbus Avenue beer joint, Verne had maneuvered to wait outside in the car with Dr. Sutton. He used a thug in the guise of Dr. Riker to lure Sutton to Central Park. That gave Verne a chance to trail Sutton and kill him after the unfortunate cancer specialist had tried to waylay The Shadow, under the mistaken impression that The Shadow was the real criminal.

By the time Bartley and Cranston had reached the parked car on Columbus Avenue, Verne was

innocently "waiting" for them. His testimony made things look tough for Dr. Riker!

Dr. Sutton had appeared guilty. Finding himself framed for murder, worried about money matters, he had become frantic. Thus his actions had seemed questionable. Instead of going to the police in the very beginning, which he should have, Sutton had tried to figure out things himself - and thereby involved himself deeper in the web.

The faces of Riker and Bartley were pale with horrified understanding when the confession of Sam Romine ended.

Romine told where the stolen bottle of the master poison had been hidden by Verne.

The Shadow would find better use for that strange golden liquid than an implement of crime. He was prepared to turn it over to the Rockefeller Institute for further research.

Dr. Sutton's amazing discovery had originated as a by-product of an honest experiment in cancer research. There was a worthwhile hope that, further purified and refined, it might very well turn out to be, in infinitesimal and rigorously controlled dosages, the medical world's long-awaited cure for the scourge of cancer.

Out of defeated crime might emerge a new hope for thousands of human sufferers the world over!

THE END