



Heartbeat of Death

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Lamont Cranston (*the Shadow*)

Margot Lane (*Margot is pronounced "Margo"*)

Hepzibah Sefton (*miserly old woman, mistress of Sefton estate*)

Louise Sefton (*Hepzibah's sister*)

Paul Sefton (*their 26-year-old nephew*)

Dr. Cunningham (*the Sefton family physician*)

Adam (*elderly caretaker, speaks with a slight Middle-European accent*)

Announcer

Music (theme . . . under the following)

Shadow: Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows. (*Laughs—"Hahaha-a-ah" in a spectral crescendo*)

Music (up and under . . .)

Announcer: The Shadow, who aids the forces of law and order, is, in reality, Lamont Cranston, wealthy young man-about-town. Several years ago, while in the Orient, Cranston learned a strange and mysterious secret . . . the hypnotic power to cloud men's minds so they cannot see him. Cranston's friend, Margot Lane, is the only person who knows whom the voice of the invisible Shadow belongs to.

Music (up and out)

Announcer: Today's drama, "Heartbeat of Death," is about a man who was almost buried alive, a run-down estate filled with evil and hate, and the steady thumping of a beating heart. It will begin in just a moment, but first . . .

(Pause for commercial)

Announcer: And now the Shadow and "Heartbeat of Death."

Music (up and out for . . .)

Announcer: Not so many years ago, the Sefton estate was the pride and joy of its owners. Occupying the whole of a small island connected with the mainland by a private causeway and bridge, its hundred acres of broad rolling hills and wooded knolls were well cared for, and the sounds of happy voices filled the air. . . . But the Seftons fell on evil days . . . strange maladies twisted and distorted their minds. . . . And now the neglected acres have grown wild and sinister, and the wind howls through the cracks and fissures of the crumbling old house. . . .

Sound (wind howls, boards creak, shutters bang)

Announcer: As our drama begins, miserly old Hepzibah Sefton lies in her bed. But she is not thinking of her money, secreted in a dozen hiding places. Her mind is filled with strange, grotesque forms and weird shadows. And as she struggles to come out of the darkness, she screams . . .

Hepzibah: *(Shrilly)* No! . . . No! Don't do it! . . . Don't let them do it!

Paul: Aunt Heppy, please! No one's going to hurt you.

Hepzibah: They want to murder me! I know! I *know*!

Louise: Heppy, no one's here but Paul and me. . . . You've been having a nightmare.

Hepzibah: I saw them . . . all around me! . . . Monsters trying to kill me!

Paul: *(Helplessly)* She keeps saying that . . . over and over again. What'll we *do*, Aunt Louise?

Louise: I don't know, Paul. She sounds delirious, but her forehead seems cool, and . . .

Hepzibah: *(Cuts in) (Terrified)* No! Don't touch me!

Louise: Darling, it's only me.

Hepzibah: *(Suspiciously)* Who are you?

Louise: Don't you know me? I'm Louise—your sister. This is Paul—your nephew.

Hepzibah: You're lying! You're imposters . . . both of you! You've done away with Louise and Paul . . . and now you want to kill *me* and take my money. . . . But you won't, you hear? You won't!

Louise: Hepzibah, *look* at me . . . carefully. Don't you know me?

Hepzibah: (*Pauses, then uncertainly*) Are you—are you really Louise? Yes . . . yes, I see you now. . . . You've come back, haven't you?

Paul: We've been here all the time, Aunt Heppy. Your imagination has been playing tricks on you again. . . . I'm going to get Dr. Cunningham.

Hepzibah: No! I don't want him in the house. I'm afraid of him. He's after my money, *too*.

Paul: (*Fading*) I'm going to get him . . . whether you like it or not. You stay there, you hear? You stay right in bed. Don't move.

Louise: (*Softly*) He's right, Hepzibah. You *do* need a doctor.

Hepzibah: I need someone—yes . . . but not a doctor. I need someone to protect me.

Louise: *Protect* you! (*Alarmed*) What do you want with your cane, Heppy? . . . Where are you going?

Hepzibah: I'm going to phone Mr. Cranston. *He'll* help me.

Louise: No! Stay in bed, Hepzibah. I won't let you walk to that phone.

Hepzibah: Get out of my way, Louise! . . . This is a heavy cane, and . . .

Louise: (*Cuts in*) No, I won't . . .

Hepzibah: (*Cuts in*) . . . I know how to use it . . . (*Effort of hitting*) like *this*!

Sound (body hit with cane)

Louise: (*Screams*)

Sound (body falls with a thud)

Hepzibah: (*Laughs crazily*) I'm still a match for you . . . for all of you!

Music (bridge and out)

Hepzibah: They tried to stop me, Mr. Cranston. . . . They didn't want me to phone you. But I fooled them. Oh yes . . . I fooled them!

Cranston: Miss Lane and I were glad to come, Miss Sefton.

Hepzibah: You're so kind. . . . I wasn't even sure you'd

remember me. It's been so many years since we've seen each other.

Cranston: Of course I remembered you!

Margot: You said—you said someone was trying to kill you?

Hepzibah: Oh yes. They're always trying to get rid of me. . . .

Cranston: Who, Miss Sefton?

Hepzibah: All of them. My sister Louise for one. . . .

Margot: Oh no! She was so sweet—so hospitable. She met us at the door . . . took us right up here to your room.

Hepzibah: (*Stubbornly*) Louise has always hated me . . . ever since we were children. My nephew Paul is worthless, penniless, a wastrel—just waiting to inherit my money. Then there's Adam, the hired man, and Dr. Cunningham. One of them wants to kill me.

Cranston: But what makes you think so?

Hepzibah: I can tell. I can see them watching me . . . waiting for a chance.

Cranston: You're quite sure you're not imagining all this?

Hepzibah: Imagining?! . . . Look at these bruises on my head!

Margot: Lamont, those bruises are real!

Cranston: Yes . . . and apparently caused by some heavy, blunt instrument.

Hepzibah: Look at my arms . . . swollen, discolored.

Cranston: When did that happen?

Hepzibah: The other day. I don't know how. I was walking in the fields. . . . Suddenly something struck me. When I came to, I was lying in bed, horribly beaten up and bruised. . . . They told me Adam had carried me in.

Margot: And you didn't see anyone attack you? . . . didn't hear any sound?

Hepzibah: No. They're clever—my murderers . . . too clever. (*Terrified*) I'm afraid, Mr. Cranston . . . terribly afraid. *Please* . . . you must help me. You *must*.

Cranston: We'll do what we can, Miss Sefton . . . I promise you. Right now, I think you should get some rest. Come along, Margot.

Margot: Mr. Cranston's right, Miss Sefton. You lie back and try to sleep. We'll be around the house somewhere.

Hepzibah: (*Fading*) Yes . . . sleep. Now I can sleep. Now I

don't have to listen for the footsteps of my murderer!

Sound (door closes)

Margot: Poor old thing. She's really terrified.

Cranston: Yes. I—I wish we could do something for her. . . .

Cunningham: (*Cuts in, off mike*) I'm afraid you can't, sir.

Margot: (*Gasps*)

Cranston: I beg your pardon?

Cunningham: Sorry. . . . I didn't mean to startle you. Just happened to overhear what you said. Nothing you can do for the old girl. I'm the only one who can do anything.

Cranston: Really?

Cunningham: Yes. Cunningham's the name—Dr. Cunningham, family physician. No point in your hanging around here. I'll walk you down to your car. . . .

Sound (footsteps down stairs then on marble floor under the following)

Cunningham: Nobody's trying to kill old Heppy. It's all in her mind.

Margot: Really? She sounded so frightened. . . .

Cunningham: Family trait . . . vivid, morbid imaginations. Suspect everyone.

Cranston: She's pretty badly bruised, doctor. *That's* not her imagination.

Cunningham: Oh, *that!* . . . No, those bruises are real. . . . Old girl suffers from epilepsy.

Margot: Epilepsy!

Cunningham: Uh-huh. . . . Had a convulsive seizure just the other day . . .

Sound (front door opened, outdoor sounds, under . . .)

Cunningham: . . . while walking in the woods right beyond that hill. (*Snaps fingers*) Just like that, it hit her. Dropped in her tracks . . . shaking violently . . . stones all around her. Hurt herself pretty badly.

Cranston: And she doesn't remember a thing about it?

Cunningham: Typical. . . . Epileptics rarely recall their seizures. Adam found her—the hired man. . . . Brought her into the house. . . .

Margot: Do you think Adam . . .

Adam: (*Cuts in*) No!

Margot: (*Gasps*)

Cunningham: Adam!

Adam: You speak about Adam. . . . You tell lies! . . .

Cunningham: No, no. We weren't talking about you. I only said you found Miss Hepzibah. . . .

Adam: Yes, I found her . . . but I do not hurt her. I hurt nobody. Everybody try to hurt me!

Cunningham: It's all right, Adam. It's all *right*.

Margot: Well, Lamont . . . I guess we might as well be going.

Adam: (*Booms*) No! . . . You no leave here! . . .

Margot: Why not?

Adam: Big storm coming . . . dangerous . . . very dangerous!

Sound (crashing thunder)

Adam: You hear? Big storm . . . river rise . . . bridge collapse . . . you sink . . . you die. (*Fading*) Adam warns you . . . you must not leave! . . .

Margot: Good heavens! . . . What's wrong with him?

Cunningham: Adam? He's all right . . . except that he's in constant fear of being buried alive.

Cranston: Buried alive?!

Cunningham: It's a long story, Mr. Cranston. No sense in going into it now, when you're about to leave. . . .

Cranston: (*Pauses*) No, Dr. Cunningham. I don't think so. . . . There *is* a storm coming up . . . and this place gets more interesting by the minute. I think we'll stay awhile and see what the storm brings in its wake. . . .

Sound (several crashes of thunder)

Music (theme)

Announcer: We'll return to the Shadow in just a moment, but first . . .

(Pause for commercial)

Announcer: Now back to the Shadow.

Music (up and out)

Announcer: Unable to decide whether Hepzibah Sefton is really threatened with murder, as she insists, or is mentally unbalanced, Lamont Cranston and Margot Lane were considering whether or not to leave the Sefton island when a terrific storm broke and made their departure impossible. Now, as the hour approaches midnight, they and their hosts—Louise Sefton, her nephew Paul, and Dr. Cunningham—huddle around the fireplace, listening to the raging storm. . . .

Sound (thunder and howling wind)

Margot: Just listen to that, Lamont! It sounds like the end of the world.

Paul: Not quite, Miss Lane. We get these flash storms pretty often around here. . . . Has something to do with the topography of the land.

Cranston: I'm surprised the noise of the storm doesn't waken your aunt. . . .

Louise: Hepzibah may *be* awake, for all we know. . . .

Margot: Wouldn't she come down here, Miss Louise, if she were?

Paul: Aunt Heppy? Not on your life. She hates people.

Margot: (*Pauses*) It must be terribly frightening . . . cooped up in a little bedroom, suspecting everyone around is out to murder you . . . listening to strange . . . (*Breaks off*)

Sound (outside door flung open, wind roar up, door slammed shut)

Margot: (*Gasps*)

Louise: (*Gives a short scream*)

Paul: Adam! What's the idea? You're soaked to the skin. Where've you been?

Adam: The waters . . . rising higher and higher! . . . Soon there will be flood . . . and death . . . everywhere!

Louise: (*Sharply*) That will do, Adam! Go to your room.

Paul: (*Quietly*) Take it easy, Louise. He can't help it.

Adam: (*Fading*) Flood . . . death . . . and blackness. It is written in the stars. . . .

Cunningham: Poor fellow.

Cranston: You started to tell us about him, Dr. Cunningham . . . about his fear of being buried alive. . . .

Cunningham: Oh yes. You see . . . it almost happened to him once. In fact . . . it *did*.

Margot: He was . . . buried *alive*?

Cunningham: It was during the war. He was a sapper.¹ He and three other men were doing a demolition job on an enemy installation. They pulled it off all right, but something went wrong. The whole works blew up before they could get away. The other men died instantly. Adam was buried under the debris for three days. When the landing party dug him up, he was out of his mind.

Cranston: I'm not surprised.

1. *sapper*, soldier employed in the detection and disarmament of land mines.

Margot: Three days . . . on the verge of death. No wonder he's obsessed with . . . *(Breaks off as . . .)*

Hepzibah: *(Screams repeatedly, off mike)*

Margot: Lamont!

Louise: That's Heppy screaming!

Paul: Come on! . . .

Sound (chairs scrape, footsteps run up stairs)

Margot: *(Off mike)* Lamont! Wait for me! . . .

Paul: *(Yells)* We're coming, Heppy! . . . We're coming!

Sound (bedroom door opened)

Hepzibah: *(Screams)* Don't let him touch me! . . . Paul! . . .

Louise! . . . Mr. Cranston! . . . Save me!

Cranston: What happened, Miss Hepzibah?

Hepzibah: A man! I saw him . . . out there . . . just below my window. He was looking up. . . . There was an evil smirk on his face. . . . He was holding a knife.

Margot: Are you sure?

Paul: Adam! . . . Where's Adam? Maybe he . . .

Adam: *(Fading on, cuts in)* I am here. I know nothing. I see nothing. The lightning flashes. I hear screams. I look out my window. There is nothing in the garden . . . only trees.

Louise: *(Aside)* Poor Heppy! She's having another one of her horrible delusions. *(On mike)* I'll sit with you, dear. I'll watch over you. . . .

Hepzibah: No! I want no one here. No one. . . . I'm not afraid anymore.

Louise: But . . .

Hepzibah: *(Cuts in)* No one . . . not even Mr. Cranston or Miss Lane.

Louise: Very well. . . . If you'll follow me, Mr. Cranston, I'll show you and Miss Lane to your rooms.

Cranston: Thank you. . . . Miss Hepzibah, are you sure? . . .

Hepzibah: *(Firmly)* Good night, Mr. Cranston . . . and Miss Lane. And you too, Adam and Dr. Cunningham. You may all leave me.

Cast: *(Adlib good nights as they fade out)*

Hepzibah: *(Softly)* Paul . . . Paul. . . .

Paul: Yes, Aunt Heppy?

Hepzibah: You come back later when they've all gone to sleep. . . . I want to talk to you. . . .

Music (bridge and out for . . .)

Sound (cock crows in distance, knock on door)

Cranston: Yes? Who is it?

Margot: It's me, Lamont. Are you up?

Cranston: You bet. Come on in, Margot. . . .

Sound (door opens)

Cranston: I've been standing here at the window . . . filling my lungs with this wonderful air.

Margot: It's a beautiful day. You'd hardly know there'd been a storm last night. . . .

Cranston: Until you look outside and see all the damage. I'm not . . . *(Breaks off as . . .)*

Louise: *(Screams, off mike)*

Margot: Lamont!

Cranston: That's Miss Louise!

Louise: *(Off mike)* Help! Paul! Mr. Cranston! Miss Lane!

Cranston: Come on, Margot! . . . Hepzibah's room.

Sound (running footsteps)

Louise: *(Fading on)* Paul! Mr. Cranston! It's Heppy! Something's happened to her. Look!

Margot: I don't see anything.

Louise: She's gone! She's not in her room.

Paul: That doesn't mean anything. She's probably downstairs.

Louise: *(Frantically)* No, no! I've been downstairs . . . for an hour . . . cooking breakfast. She couldn't be down there. I've searched everywhere.

Margot: Perhaps she's gone out.

Louise: The doors are all bolted . . . from the inside.

Cranston: Then she must be in the house somewhere. . . .

Louise: Her window . . . don't you see? It's wide open!

Paul: What are you getting at, Aunt Louise?

Louise: I—I don't know. Someone could have gotten in with a ladder. . . . Or she might have climbed out onto the ledge and . . . Mr. Cranston, we've *got* to do something. We've got to find her before . . . *(Sobs convulsively)*

Cranston: Margot . . . take care of Miss Louise.

Margot: Of course. *(Fading)* Come along, Miss Louise. . . . Everything's going to be all right.

Paul: What are you going to do, Mr. Cranston?

Cranston: Call the police.

Sound (phone lifted off cradle)

Cunningham: *(Fading on)* What is it? What's happened?

Paul: It's Aunt Heppy, Dr. Cunningham. She's disappeared.

Cranston: *(Exclamation of disgust)*

Paul: Something wrong, sir?

Cranston: No dial tone. The phone's dead. The storm must have torn down the line.

Cunningham: This is terrible, Mr. Cranston. We've got to stop her before she gets too far away. In her condition there's no telling what she'll do.

Cranston: I don't think she'll get very far.

Paul: Why do you say that?

Cranston: Look out the window. See the bridge?

Paul: (*Shocked*) It's collapsed!

Cranston: Yes . . . exactly as Adam predicted. We can be sure of one thing—Miss Hepzibah is either still in the house or somewhere on Sefton Island.

Cunningham: But *where*?

Cranston: That's what we've got to find out. This is a strange old house, doctor . . . undoubtedly full of secret passageways and camouflaged hiding places. We're going to search every nook and corner of it . . . and then, every inch of the estate. We're going to find Miss Hepzibah . . . dead or alive.

Music (theme)

Announcer: We'll return to the Shadow in just a moment, but first . . .

(Pause for commercial)

Announcer: Now back to the Shadow!

Music (up and out)

Announcer: Neurotic, miserly old Hepzibah Sefton, convinced that someone is out to murder her, has disappeared from her bedroom. Lamont Cranston, sure that she could not have left the grounds, organizes a search of the estate—enlisting the aid of Paul, Dr. Cunningham, and Adam, the hired man. . . . But the hours pass, and there is no trace of Hepzibah. The search is renewed after lunch and again after dinner. With the phone lines down and the bridge to the mainland collapsed, there is no way of getting outside help. Finally Cranston and Margot Lane give up and return to the living room to wait for the others. . . .

Margot: I can't understand it, Lamont. She must be around somewhere. . . .

Cranston: It's a big estate, Margot. It will take a long time to comb every inch of it.

Margot: We've got to notify Commissioner Weston. There

must be some way of crossing the water and getting to a phone!

Cranston: Oh, I could get across all right. But the family—Louise and Paul—they've begged me not to bring the police in . . . yet.

Margot: That's ridiculous! You can't let their family pride stop you. . . .

Cranston: I know that. I'll have to do it whether they like it or not. . . . If nothing turns up by tomorrow morning . . .

Margot: (*Cuts in*) You think anything will?

Cranston: I hope so. Somebody in this house had something to do with Hepzibah's disappearance. And I think I know who it is.

Margot: What?! . . . Well, why don't you accuse him openly . . . make him tell the truth?

Cranston: Because it's only a suspicion, Margot. And the most important thing to find out now is where Hepzibah is. If she's *not* found, no charge can be brought against anyone. There must be a body before . . .

Margot: (*Cuts in with a gasp*) A body! You mean? . . .

Cast: (*Adlib conversation as they fade on mike under the above*)

Cranston: (*Quickly*) Quiet, Margot! . . . Here they come.

Cunningham: Ah, I see you're back already, Mr. Cranston. Gave up before we did, eh?

Cranston: I wouldn't say I've given up, doctor . . . just taking a breather.

Paul: We might as well give up. We'll never find her. . . .

Louise: Why do you say that, Paul?

Paul: You know as well as I do, Aunt Louise, there are a million places she could be around here . . . caves and old wells, swamps and . . .

Adam: (*Cuts in very loudly*) No!

Margot: (*Gasps*)

Adam: Not lost in cave or well. Buried . . . buried alive!

Paul: Adam, stop it!

Adam: Buried alive . . . trying to breathe . . . trying to turn . . . to get out . . . getting weaker and weaker . . .

Louise: (*Cuts in*) Stop it, Adam! Do you hear? Stop it! Go to your room!

Adam: (*Pauses*) Yes, yes . . . I go.

Sound (door closes)

Cunningham: It always happens. Every time something goes wrong, Adam goes haywire.

Cranston: It's a horrible thought . . . being buried alive. . . .

Paul: (*Shudders*) I'd rather not think about it.

Cranston: I remember a ghastly story I read not long ago . . . about a family that was wiped out in London's great plague while the father was away. That is, everyone *thought* the whole family was dead. They were buried in a common graveyard. . . . When the father returned home, he insisted on removing the bodies to a private burial ground. They opened one of the coffins . . .

Paul: (*Cuts in*) And? . . .

Cranston: The body had turned almost completely around. . . . It was twisted and distorted . . . as though it had been struggling to get out, and . . .

Margot: (*Cuts in*) No!

Cranston: . . . The insides of the coffin were scratched, and there were wood scrapings under the corpse's broken fingernails.

Margot: How horrible! . . .

Paul: How—how could such a thing happen? How could anyone mistake a—a living person for a corpse?

Cranston: Many times, Mr. Sefton, even a doctor has difficulty in determining whether a person is really dead. For example, catatonics² (kat'əton'iks) become rigid. Their heartbeats are too faint to be heard. . . . They look as though rigor mortis had set in. Isn't that so, Dr. Cunningham?

Cunningham: Yes . . . it sometimes happens.

Louise: (*Weakly*) Please . . . please . . . someone help me to my room. I—I feel faint.

Cunningham: I'll help you, Louise. Here . . . let me take your arm.

Cranston: Margot, you better run along too. And here—here's a list of questions I'd like you to ask Adam.

Margot: But, Lamont, I . . .

Cranston: (*Cuts in sternly*) Please, Margot . . . just take the paper. It's self-explanatory.

2. *catatonics*, persons afflicted with a condition characterized by mental stupor and muscular rigidity.

Margot: All right, Lamont. . . .

Sound (footsteps go off, door closes)

Paul: Buried alive! I—I can't get that story out of my mind.

How do people ever think up such gruesome plots?

Cranston: That one wasn't thought up, Paul. It really happened.

Paul: No! I don't believe it. . . .

Cranston: Then I guess you don't take much stock in the other story either.

Paul: What other story?

Cranston: There's a legend that a murderer who leaves his victim while he's still alive . . . carries around with him forever the sound of the dead man's heartbeat.

Paul: No, no! That's impossible!

Cranston: Is it? . . . You know, Paul, we don't really hear with our ears. We hear with our minds. A murderer's brain can produce sounds that no one else can hear, thundering . . .

Sound (heartbeat comes on softly under the following)

Cranston: . . . like the surf on the shore.

Paul: And the murderer hears that sound forever?

Cranston: (*Softly*) No . . . only until he closes his victim's eyes.

Paul: I don't believe it. I don't . . . (*Breaks off as . . .*)

Sound (heartbeat becomes much more audible)

Paul: What's that?!

Cranston: I beg your pardon?

Paul: (*Terror-stricken*) Don't you hear it?

Cranston: Hear what?

Paul: (*Terrified*) That—that sound . . . that throbbing! It sounds like . . . (*Stops short*)

Sound (a few more heartbeats)

Cranston: Like what, Paul?

Paul: N—nothing. It was nothing. Just my imagination.

Good night, Mr. Cranston. . . .

Cranston: Good night, Paul. (*Ironically*) Sleep well.

Sound (door opens and closes, then opens again)

Margot: Did I do all right, Lamont?

Cranston: Fine, Margot. It sounded perfect . . . exactly like a heartbeat.

Margot: Next time you slip me a note with instructions on it, please make them a little clearer.

Cranston: I didn't have much time for fancy writing. . . .

Margot: I don't understand what this is all about. You said you knew who was responsible for Hepzibah's disappearance, but you didn't know where she was. . . . Do you know now?

Cranston: No, Margot, I don't. But the Shadow will . . . before the sun rises.

Music (bridge and out for . . .)

Sound (clock chimes two)

Paul: *(To himself)* Two o'clock in the morning. . . . I'll never fall asleep—never again as long as I live. Why did Cranston have to tell me those awful stories about people being buried alive . . . about hearing heartbeats until . . . *(Stops short as . . .)*

Sound (heartbeat, faint at first, then louder)

Paul: *(In a terrified whisper)* No—no, it can't be! That sound, those heartbeats! No, no, no! I'm imagining it. *(Pauses)*

Sound (heartbeat continues steadily)

Paul: I must be going mad! I can't be hearing anything, and yet . . . I've got to do something! . . . I've got to stop it! My shoes . . .

Sound (scuffling of person dressing hurriedly)

Paul: My trousers . . . a jacket . . . a light . . . must have a flashlight. Here. . . .

Sound (floor creaks, door opens slowly, footsteps creak softly down stairs under the following)

Paul: Close the eyes—that's what he said. Close the eyes, and the heartbeats stop. Good—the front door. . . . I made it! . . . No one heard me. Now . . . if I can just get to the barn. . . .

Sound (front door unbolted, running footsteps on soft ground, then barn door is swung open)

Paul: *(Panting)* All right . . . so far. All right . . . *(Breaks off as . . .)*

Sound (heartbeat very loud now)

Paul: There it goes. Louder . . . pounding . . . pounding! . . . The pickaxe . . . where's that pickaxe? . . . Got to dig up the flooring and . . . Here it is! Now . . .

Sound (pickaxe striking wood floor)

Paul: *(Effort of using axe)* I'll put an end to that pounding! I'll stop you, Aunt Heppy. I won't let you

torment me for the rest of my life. I'll close your eyes . . . and silence your heart. . . . There! The first plank's loose . . . and the second . . .

Sound (heartbeat continues, very loud)

Paul: (*Frantically*) Stop it . . . do you hear? Stop that pounding, you old miser, before everyone else hears it! Can't you . . . (*Stops short as . . .*)

Shadow: (*Laughs*)

Paul: Who's that? Who laughed?

Shadow: The Shadow. (*Laughs*)

Paul: What shadow? There's no one here . . . no one but me.

Shadow: You're wrong, Paul. There is another one . . . under the flooring . . . dead.

Paul: No, no. That's not true! . . .

Shadow: Isn't it? Listen. . . .

Sound (heartbeat)

Paul: You—you hear it too?

Shadow: The Shadow sees all and hears all.

Paul: You lie! Only the murderer is supposed to . . . (*Stops short*)

Shadow: Yes, Paul . . . the murderer. You've convicted yourself. . . . Why did you do it?

Paul: I had to! She made me do it. . . . Hoarding her money, hiding it away in secret places, refusing to give me more than a few paltry nickels and dimes at a time . . . goading me, laughing at me . . .

Shadow: (*Cuts in*) What happened?

Paul: I stole her money. I found out she had a bank account, and I forged checks. The bank never discovered it. I'm very clever at forging. But *she* found me out. Trust her to find out. . . . She was going to have me arrested . . . going to cut me off without a penny and have me thrown into jail. . . .

Shadow: So you killed her. . . .

Paul: It was easy. She was so weak. It was nothing to strangle her. I was so sure she was dead. . . . When everyone was asleep, I carried her out here to the barn . . . and buried her. The rain washed away my footprints. I was safe . . . at last.

Shadow: Except for . . . the Shadow.

Paul: No shadow can stop *me*. I'll finish what I came here to do and . . .

Shadow: (*Cuts in*) Stop, Paul Sefton! You've done enough gruesome things for one day . . . or for a lifetime.

Paul: You can't stop me. No one can!

Shadow: Drop that axe, Paul.

Paul: Not till I've found you, Shadow, and killed you too. . . . Where are you?

Shadow: You can't hurt me, Paul. Drop the axe, I say!

Paul: No! You're here . . . *someplace*. Here? . . . Here?

Sound (axe swishes and hits wood)

Shadow: Be careful, Paul. That axe is sharp!

Paul: Ah, here! (*Effort of wielding axe*) Here, then!
(*Effort*)

Shadow: Look out for that plank! You're tripping on . . .

Paul: (*Screams*)

Sound (body falls with a thud)

Shadow: Don't move! You've fallen on the blade of the axe.

Paul: It doesn't matter. I'm done for. All the Seftons are done for! We're no good . . . any of us! (*Pauses, then whispers*) It's gone! I didn't get to close the eyes . . . but the sound of Heppy's heartbeat . . . (*Weakly*) it's gone.
(*Dies*)

Shadow: Yes . . . it's gone. You'll never hear another heartbeat again, Paul Sefton—not even your own. . . . The Shadow knows. (*Laughs*)

Music (up and out for . . .)

Announcer: We will return to the Shadow in just a moment, but first . . .

(Pause for commercial)

Announcer: Now back to the Shadow.

Music (up and out)

Sound (car motor up and under the following)

Margot: I'll be happy, Lamont, if I never see the Sefton estate again. . . .

Cranston: It won't be known as the Sefton estate much longer. With old Hepzibah and Paul both dead . . . I don't imagine Louise will be staying on. . . .

Margot: I—I just don't understand it, Lamont. How could Paul have been taken in by our beating-heart ruse?

Cranston: Just remember, Margot . . . things weren't exactly normal at the Seftons'. . . . Old Hepzibah, epileptic and neurotic . . . Adam, plainly obsessed . . . and Paul, carrying around the guilty knowledge of the terrible thing he had done. . . .

Margot: So you took the cue from Adam, and told them about the heartbeats. . . .

Cranston: I made up the whole story. I figured that whoever had done away with Hepzibah could be driven to the point of taking another look at her. . . .

Margot: It was lucky you noticed that gourd on the mantel in the living room. . . .

Cranston: Yes. . . . It was hollow and just about the size of a human heart.

Margot: I did exactly what your note said. . . . I sneaked the gourd from the mantel when no one was watching, and tapped out the beats from the basement . . . under the hot-air register in the living room. And then at the Shadow's signal, I did it again under Paul's bedroom register. . . .

Cranston: For a moment, the Shadow thought Paul had spotted you in the corner of the barn, but he was too frightened to notice you. . . .

Margot: Lamont . . . you suspected all along Paul had done away with Miss Hepzibah. Why? . . .

Cranston: Simple. . . . After she disappeared, when everyone was searching the house, I searched his room. The legs on one pair of his trousers were soaked from the knees down. Paul was with us in the living room when the storm broke. With all the doors bolted from the inside, it seemed pretty obvious that he had taken her out *during* the storm and had come back in. . . . What I wanted and *had* to find was the corpus delicti³ (kôr'pəs di lik'tī).

Margot: So a simple little gourd . . . made to sound like a beating heart . . . drove Paul to his grave.

Cranston: No, Margot. . . . It was a *real* heart that drove Paul to his death . . . his own. First it made him steal . . . then it made him kill . . . and in the end, it betrayed him.

Music (up and out)

Announcer: Listen again next week—same time, same station—when the Shadow will demonstrate that . . .

Shadow: The weed of crime bears bitter fruit. . . . Crime does not pay. The Shadow knows. . . . (*Laughs*)

Music (theme—up and out)

THE END

3. *corpus delicti*, body of a murdered person.