

# **THE TRIPLE TRAIL**

Maxwell Grant

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## CHAPTER I. A MESSAGE OF MOMENT

IT was a dull, sullen morning. Brooding clouds hung low over the New Jersey countryside, threatening to add new deluge to downpours that had fallen in the night. The hillside town of Droverton was blanketed beneath a gloomy pall of mist.

The morning letter carrier shouldered his nearly emptied sack and glowered up at the threatening sky. His route had taken him completely through Droverton. One more call; then he could head back for the post office. He was wondering if he would make the return trip before new rain commenced.

Pacing along a gravel sidewalk, the mail carrier thrust his hand into the bag and produced a half dozen letters. He checked them to make sure; all were addressed to Stanton Treblaw. The last stop on the route.

Funny old duck, Stanton Treblaw. That was the carrier's opinion, despite the fact that he had seldom met Treblaw in person. Musing as he strode along, the mailman recalled Stanton Treblaw as a white-haired

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individual with a reddish, rounded face.

"Foxy Grandpa!" That was the nickname the town boys had given Treblaw. The postman chuckled as he thought of it. The name suited; for if anyone looked foxy, Stanton Treblaw was the man. Worth plenty of money, Treblaw was, even if he did seem goofy, living in an old mansion that looked like a haunted house.

The carrier had reached Treblaw's. He stopped at the long walk that led up to the old house. His fists tightened a bit as he entered the grounds. The place was spooky all right, even in daylight. Funny, the carrier thought, how it always seemed like eyes were watching from that house.

The postman shuddered as he reached the front of the gloomy building, with its cracked stone walls. Then, with an air of bravado, he tapped with the big brass knocker that hung on the front door. Whistling to keep up his spirits, he began to count over the letters in his hands.

Two pieces of mail puzzled the postman. One was a long envelope that bore an English stamp, with the postmark "London." It wasn't the first letter that Treblaw had received from England.

And here was another envelope that resembled ones which the postman had seen before. It was from New York; but on the back it carried a large dab of sealing wax, impressed with a crown-shaped seal.

Intent on his study of the mysterious letter, the postman was not looking up when the big door opened. It was the sound of an advancing footstep that made him swing about to face a tall, dry-faced serving man who had responded to the knock.

The postman started as though he had seen a corpse. With nervous motion, he thrust the letters into the servant's hand; then, as the tall man blinked suspiciously, the postman muttered something about the rain, turned about and strode quickly away from the house.

Glancing back as he reached the gate, the postman saw that the door had closed. Yet he still felt that sensation of watching eyes. He stared toward a window where dull red curtains formed a somber mass. They looked suspicious, those curtains, as though they had been the hiding place of a lurking watcher.

Raindrops began to patter. The postman shifted away from the gate; then, as the shower increased, he started off on a jog, using the downpour as an excuse for fleeing from a neighborhood that he did not relish.

RED curtains had concealed a watcher. Within the old house, a man was standing behind those very drapes that the jittery letter carrier had observed. This watcher had been looking for the postman's arrival. He had seen the letters in the carrier's hand.

This spying man was young, but crafty-faced. He looked like a private secretary; pale in countenance, almost self-effacing in manner. The room in which he stood was half study, half office. Filing cabinets and a battered safe vied with antiquated chairs and tables to produce a composite appearance.

Footsteps in the hall announced the servant's approach. The young man stepped away from the window and glanced mildly toward the door as the servant entered.

"Mail, Baxter?" he questioned.

"Yes, Mr. Wickroft," replied the servant, extending the letters. "All for Mr. Treblaw."

"I shall take charge of them, Baxter."

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"Very well, Mr. Wickroft."

The secretary waited until the servant had left. Then, with gleaming eyes, he began to sort through the letters. He stopped when he saw the envelope with the London postmark. He studied it as the postman had. Then he came to the letter with the crown-impressed seal.

Wickroft's lips pursed. His hands dropped the other letters on a table. Holding the sealed envelope beneath the light, the secretary betrayed unmistakable eagerness. He looked anxiously toward the door of the room.

Suddenly he dropped the red-sealed letters with the others. He stepped away from the table, trying to appear nonchalant, just as another person entered the room.

The arrival was Stanton Treblaw. The old man fitted the postman's mental description. His shocky white hair formed a tousled mass above a rotund face. But Treblaw's expression was not a benign one. The old man was glaring as he entered.

"Where is the mail, Wickroft?" he demanded, in a wheezy voice.

"Right here, sir," returned the secretary. "I placed it on the table —"

"And failed to inform me that it had arrived?"

"I was just about to do so, Mr. Treblaw. I was coming into the dining room to tell you —"

"Baxter saved you the trouble." Treblaw's tone was testy. "Well— is there anything of importance in the mail?"

"A letter, sir"—Wickroft paused hesitatingly—"one from Signet —"

He broke off. Treblaw had seen the letter. With crab-like gait, the old man was making for the table. Pouncing upon the sealed envelope, he ripped it open and yanked out the message from within. His quick eyes scanned typewritten lines. Tossing back his shaggy head, Treblaw delivered a cackly laugh.

"I've won!" he cried. "I've won, Wickroft! Signet has come through with the proper offer!"

"Twenty-five thousand dollars, sir?"

"Thirty thousand! Better than I wanted. Here, Wickroft, read it for yourself."

THRUSTING the letter to his secretary, Treblaw seated himself behind the table. His sharp eyes glistened as they watched Wickroft read. The secretary smiled wanly and passed the letter back to Treblaw.

"Properly signed," remarked Wickroft, pointing to a dab of sealing wax at the bottom of the letter.

Treblaw nodded. That circle of wax, imprinted with a crown, was the letter's only signature. It matched the impression that was on the envelope.

"Sit down, Wickroft," ordered Treblaw, his tone quiet. "I want to talk with you."

"Very well, sir."

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As the secretary seated himself, Treblaw studied the crown–signed letter. At last the old man laid it aside; then spoke in a quiet, steady wheeze.

"Wickroft," he declared, "I have shown you the other letters that came from Signet. I have mentioned their importance to you. I expect you to keep this matter to yourself."

"Certainly, sir," responded the secretary.

"The first communication came some weeks ago," proceeded Treblaw. "In it, this man who calls himself Signet offered me five thousand dollars for certain old manuscripts that are in my possession."

"I recall that, sir."

"I ignored Signet's letter. He wrote again, offering me ten thousand dollars. I let the matter pass. He went to fifteen thousand; now he has suddenly doubled his offer to thirty thousand."

"You intend to sell him the manuscripts, sir?"

"Certainly. And yet they must be worth far more than Signet offers. Because those manuscripts, Wickroft, bear testimony to the authenticity of certain art treasures. Masterpieces, Wickroft, that should bring a full million dollars if proven genuine!"

"I remember that you mentioned that fact, Mr. Treblaw."

The old man chuckled. He shook his shaggy head as if in disapproval of his own action.

"I might hold out for more," he decided. "Signet is unquestionably a man of great wealth. But, after all, Wickroft, what right have I to make unfair demands? I purchased those manuscripts for a thousand dollars. Signet is offering me a tremendous profit. I was ready to deliver them for twenty–five thousand. He bids thirty thousand."

A pause. Treblaw was reflective. Then he added:

"Of course, I took on the expense of an investigation. I paid Burson, Limited, of London, to find out if supposed art treasures had been purchased abroad. Their investigators discovered that certain objects had been purchased."

"But they failed to learn the name of the purchaser," reminded Wickroft.

"Of course," acknowledged Treblaw. "But that is evidence that Signet was the purchaser. Signet; a man who seeks to hide his true identity."

Another pause. Treblaw picked up the rest of the mail from the desk. Wickroft eyed the action.

"There's another letter, Mr. Treblaw," remarked the secretary. "One from England. From Burson, Limited, perhaps."

Treblaw found the envelope. He opened it and read the letter within. Wickroft watched the old man's gleaming eyes. Then came a shrug of stooped shoulders as Treblaw thrust the letter into his pocket.

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"Nothing important," said Treblaw. "Merely an acknowledgment of my last letter. A statement that Burson, Limited, will appreciate any further business that I give them."

Rising from his desk, the old man handed the Signet letter to Wickroft. He drew a briefcase from beneath the table and placed it where Wickroft could reach it.

"Add this Signet letter to the others," ordered Treblaw. "Put them all in my briefcase. The correspondence from the Burson file, also."

As Wickroft started to his task, Stanton Treblaw pressed a button on the wall. Baxter arrived in response to the call.

"My grip, Baxter," ordered Treblaw. "Pack it at once. Summon the cab from the depot. I am leaving in fifteen minutes. For New York, Baxter."

The servant departed. Old Stanton Treblaw chuckled as he watched Wickroft pack papers into the briefcase.

"For New York," repeated the old man. "There to comply with the instructions from Signet. A happy trip, Wickroft. One that will net me close to thirty thousand dollars."

RUBBING his long, claw-like hands and cackling with unrepressed glee, Stanton Treblaw strolled from the room. Wickroft completed the packing of the briefcase and laid the bag in readiness.

Ten minutes later, Baxter entered. He picked up the briefcase and took it out into the hall. A toot of an automobile horn sounded from in front of the house. Wickroft listened; he heard the front door open and close.

Peering from between the dull crimson curtains, Wickroft watched Stanton Treblaw fare forth into the rain. The old man was carrying the briefcase; Baxter was accompanying him with the grip; and the servant was also holding an umbrella to shield his master from the downpour.

Stanton Treblaw entered the dilapidated taxi that had come from the Droverton depot. Baxter thrust the grip in with his employer. The old car pulled away; Baxter watched it, then turned about and came slowly back toward the house, bringing the umbrella.

Wickroft let the red curtains come together. He chuckled in an evil tone as he stepped away from his lookout post. The secretary's face was not pleasant. His mild mask was gone; craftiness alone dominated his features.

For Wickroft had no further reason to veil his true expression. He had watched Stanton Treblaw start forth upon a trip that was to bring an evil climax.

## CHAPTER II. WICKROFT TALKS

ONE hour had passed since Stanton Treblaw's departure. Wickroft was still in the room with the crimson curtains. Seated at a table, the secretary was going over cards in little filing boxes.

This was Wickroft's regular morning routine. After the mail had been read and answered, Treblaw invariably left the secretary alone. The old man had hired Wickroft for the job of classifying a huge collection of letters and manuscripts.

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As a rule, Treblaw went for a walk in the morning. This procedure left the house in charge of Wickroft, Baxter and Anna, the cook. On days when it rained, Treblaw remained indoors, but usually stayed in an upstairs room. Hence Wickroft was never disturbed in his morning routine.

Something in the secretary's sly attitude showed that he counted on the fact that he was left alone. He had peered from the curtains in a manner that indicated usual procedure.

Moreover, he betrayed a satisfied expression because of Treblaw's absence. It was plain that Wickroft was waiting for something to occur; that he felt he ran no risk in stealthy practice while his employer was absent from the house.

But at the end of the full hour, anxiety began to register itself on Wickroft's countenance. As he handled the filing cards, the secretary looked occasionally toward the telephone that rested on a corner table.

Fifteen minutes more ended Wickroft's work with the files. Rising from the table, the young man began to pace the floor. His lips were twitching nervously. His eyes were more troubled than crafty as they turned to look at a big clock on the wall.

Then came an expected sound: the ringing of the telephone bell. Pounding to the corner table, Wickroft seized the instrument and raised the receiver to his ear. He waited for a dozen seconds. Then he spoke.

"HELLO..." Cautiousness filled Wickroft's voice. "This is the residence of Mr. Stanton Treblaw..."

A pause. Then a low, steady voice responded. Its tone was obviously disguised.

"It's all right, chief," informed Wickroft. "The old boy's gone out. No chance of him cutting in on the upstairs phone."

"Gone out?" came a growl over the wire.

"Yes." Wickroft's tone was eager. "Not for a walk, though. It's raining heavy out here. He's gone to New York, chief."

"Signet?"

"You guessed it, chief. Another letter this morning. Thirty grand is the offer. I'll give you the details."

"Go ahead."

"The letter was like the others," spoke Wickroft, in a low tone. "It told Treblaw to bring the Cellini manuscripts to New York. Goliath Hotel—an ad in the Classic—same details as before. But this time, the letter offered thirty thousand dollars."

Wickroft paused. There was no response. Anxiously, Wickroft queried:

"Did you get that, chief?"

"Yes,"—a growl over the wire—"keep on. I'm listening."

"Treblaw packed," resumed Wickroft, "and he headed out for New York. He's going through with the deal. That means he'll be at the Hotel Goliath."



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Again, Wickroft paused. Hearing nothing, he was about to put another query; then, fearing that it would annoy his chief, he proceeded.

"I was right about those manuscripts not being here," asserted Wickroft. "The old man didn't take anything with him except the Signet letters and the Burson file. It's a sure bet that he's got the Cellini stuff buried somewhere in New York.

"There's nothing out here that's worth much. But he's never said anything about a safe-deposit vault. Maybe one of his friends has the manuscripts. Tilton, maybe. But that's only a guess.

"He'll have to shoot straight with Signet, though. Because the letters told him to have the manuscripts ready. To put the ad in the Classic and to either expect Signet or wait for a reply. Like a return ad. You know the details."

Again, Wickroft paused. This time he could think of nothing further to say. The growled voice came across the wire:

"What else?"

"Nothing much," returned Wickroft. "Only one thing: A letter from Burson. I didn't get a chance to read it. Treblaw stuck it in his pocket and never gave it to me to file. But it wasn't important. Just a reply to Treblaw's last letter, when he paid their bill for investigation. They said they'd be glad to have further business from him. That's all."

AS Wickroft paused, a checking statement came across the wire. The voice at the other end was severe; almost accusing.

"You said that you did not see the Burson letter. Yet you have told me its contents."

Wickroft's face twitched. He had heard this sharp, checking tone before. It worried him.

"I didn't explain it right, chief," he protested, nervously. "Honestly, I didn't see the letter—the Burson letter, I mean. It was the old man who read it; but he mentioned what was in it, see?"

Wickroft paused. Beads of perspiration were forming on his forehead. He was afraid that this cold-toned chief did not believe his statement. He wanted a response; he received silence instead.

"Did you hear me, chief?" queried Wickroft, anxiously. "You understand now, don't you?"

"I understand." The growled response was almost sarcastic. "Remember, though, what I expect from you."

"I know, chief," blurted Wickroft. "I'm playing straight. I know what happens to double-crossers. I'm on the level! Honestly!—on the level —"

"See that you keep that way," came a growled admonition. The interruption made Wickroft quiver. "Go ahead. What else?"

"Nothing, chief," responded Wickroft; "All I want to know is what I'm to do now. It's all set for you to get those letters. They're worth a million, Treblaw says, to the man who can use them. Like this Signet. But if you go after them, that leaves me here —"

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"Remain where you are," came the cold interruption. "You are safe. You know nothing. You will hear from me later."

"All right, chief. I'll play it through. But—but if —"

This time a click was the interruption. The man at the other end had terminated the call. Wickroft stood aghast; then, with shaking hand, he hung up the receiver.

SETTING the telephone on the table, Wickroft began to pace the room. Anxiety had replaced his satisfaction. His lips were moving as he mumbled to himself. But as he continued his solitary reasoning, the treacherous secretary began to regain his crafty smile.

"You are safe. You know nothing."

Automatically, Wickroft repeated his chief's assurance. The words, half aloud, gave him courage. After all, Wickroft's position was a most tenable one.

The tool of a master crook, Wickroft had never met the chief who ruled him. Until some months ago, Wickroft had been a legitimate secretary, skilled at classifying collections.

Then had come a mysterious telephone call. An offer of easy money if he would play a crooked game. Wickroft had accepted it. Coming into the employ of Stanton Treblaw, he had been ready to aid in theft or robbery.

Treblaw's collection of letters and manuscripts had proven of comparatively small value, so far as Wickroft could see. Then had come the messages from Signet.

Treblaw, taking Wickroft in his confidence, had spoken of other manuscripts—ones of high value—that the old man kept elsewhere than in this house. Signet wanted an old manuscript. One that had been written by Benvenuto Cellini; one of several such scripts that mentioned art treasures not discussed in Cellini's famous autobiography.

Wickroft, responding to regular calls from the chief who had bribed him, was quick to pass along the information. While Treblaw dickered with Signet; while the old man had British investigators studying the European curio market, Wickroft had been keeping a supercrook posted on the game.

At last the payoff was due. Treblaw had decided to deliver. The old collector had gone to New York. There he would pick up the manuscript that Signet wanted; there he would negotiate with the would-be purchaser.

The game was out of Wickroft's hands. The secretary chuckled as a frown erased itself from his brow. The chief was right. Wickroft, back here at Droverton, could pretend that he knew nothing. Even if the Signet messages came to light, along with the Burson correspondence, Wickroft could pretend that Treblaw had conducted these secretly. That would be a logical story; one that would pass muster.

Smugly, Wickroft smiled. His period of vigil had ended. His crooked chief would do the rest. The only cloud that formed upon Wickroft's face was due to another thought. Wickroft was wondering how great his reward would be.

There was no link between himself and the master of crime. Did that mean that his chief—a man whom he had obeyed without meeting—might let him down when it came to a share of the spoils?

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The idea troubled Wickroft for a few moments. Then he recalled payments that he had already received: Cash, in letters that had come to his old address in New York. He had been worth money then; surely he would be worth more, now that he had delivered the goods.

Besides that, Wickroft saw how he could make trouble for the master crook. Even without jeopardizing his own position. Suppose the deal went through—with Treblaw losing his thirty thousand dollar prize. Suppose the unknown crook dropped Wickroft cold. What then?

Wickroft smiled. He realized that he could trump up some story. Talk of bribery that he had not accepted. Hazy clues that would start the law on the trail of the master criminal. All the while, with no direct link between himself and the supercrook, Wickroft could play the part of a faithful secretary to Treblaw. A helping aid; not a traitor.

The smile broadened as Wickroft stopped beside a curtained window and peered through at brilliant sunshine which had supplanted the morning's rain. He was confident that his criminal chief would deliver him his share. That would be the only wise policy.

Wickroft chuckled as he drew the curtains open. He turned off the electric light and returned to the filing table. Resuming work in the clear illumination of daylight, the traitor became methodical in his task. He could afford to wait; to continue his inconspicuous part while men of crime were dealing with Stanton Treblaw.

### CHAPTER III. THE SHADOW ENTERS

THE same rains that had deluged the town of Droverton had brought heavy damage to low-lying New Jersey areas. Cloudbursts had flooded valley towns and the New York newspapers were proclaiming the fact with large headlines.

In the office of the New York Classic, a young man was banging on a typewriter, writing a final story that summarized the destruction in the storm-swept districts. He finished with a string of asterisks across the bottom of the page; then yanked the paper from the machine and handed it to a copy boy.

That done, the young man picked up a newspaper that had just been left on his desk. It was the bulldog edition of the Classic, off the press five minutes ago. Settling back in his chair, he passed up the front page and began to look through other portions of the tabloid.

This young man was Clyde Burke, reporter for the Classic. The rewrite of the storm news had been given him as a last assignment for the midnight edition. With his work done, Clyde was more interested in a story that he had written during the afternoon.

That story dealt with crime. Clyde Burke was usually detailed as a police reporter. Crime interested him more than storms. There was a double reason for the fact. Clyde Burke was not only a reporter on the staff of the Classic. He was also an agent of The Shadow.

Clyde's work carried him into the underworld. As a newspaper reporter, he was immune from the usual feuds of mobdom, so long as he minded his own business, which Clyde appeared to do. Secretly, however, the reporter kept tabs on crook movements and passed his findings along to The Shadow.

Clyde was always alert in The Shadow's service. To him, The Shadow was a leader who commanded complete obedience. Battling against crime, The Shadow was a mysterious power who held the balance in

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favor of the law. Clyde, like others, was doing his part to aid that mighty task.

Thumbing pages of the Classic, Clyde looked for other news items. Like all newspaper men, he knew that a story frequently had another story behind it. If he needed inside dope, he could get it from his fellow reporters. It was his policy to go through each edition while still hot from the press. On page thirteen of the bulldog, Clyde Burke stopped with a puzzled frown. The Classic conducted a personal column which happened to appear upon this page. Usually, the items were trivial. But this time, Clyde had spotted a rare one. He read it carefully:

SIGNET: Terms agreeable. Am waiting at G. Ready for reply. T.

Tucking the newspaper under his arm, Clyde arose and strolled over to a telephone booth in the corner. It was a pay station that a nickel-saving city editor had introduced for reporters who wished to make personal calls. That suited Clyde; for the call that he intended to make could not go over the regular switchboard.

Dropping a coin in the pay box, Clyde dialed a number. He waited for a few moments; then heard the click of a receiver, followed by a quiet voice: "Burbank speaking."

"Burke," said Clyde. "In the Classic office. Just been reading the bulldog. Listen to this. In the personals."

Pulling the newspaper into view, Clyde read off the advertisement. Burbank acknowledged it; then gave an order to stand by. Clyde hung up and strolled back to his desk. He noted the time as he did so. Half past eight. The early bulldog edition would not be on the street until shortly before nine.

Slouching in his chair, Clyde stared out through the window and watched the flicker of Manhattan's evening lights. Burbank, contact agent of The Shadow, was relaying the call to the master sleuth. Orders would be forthcoming. Of that, Clyde Burke was sure.

SOMEWHERE in Manhattan, a bluish light was glimmering upon the polished surface of a table. Long-fingered hands were at work, sorting clippings and report sheets. The Shadow was in his sanctum, preparing campaigns against crime.

A glittering bulb from the wall announced a call to the sanctum. The Shadow's hands stretched forth and plucked earphones. A voice came over the wire:

"Burbank speaking."

"Report."

The Shadow's tone was a whispered command. Burbank's quiet voice continued. The Shadow's right hand appeared beneath the light, writing words upon a sheet of paper. The earphones went back across the table.

A soft laugh from the darkness just beyond the light. The Shadow had received Clyde Burke's relayed message. His keen eyes were analyzing the item that had come from page thirteen of the Classic.

Three points impressed The Shadow. The name "Signet"; the letter "G"; and the letter "T." Beneath the copied advertisement, the long hand began to write inked statements of deduction.

The Shadow's first finding was an obvious one: namely, that "Signet" was an assumed name, intended to cover the true identity of the person to whom the message was addressed. The logical supposition, therefore, was that "T" also hid an identity; one, however, that Signet would recognize.

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Logically, T should have had an assumed name of his own, instead, he had resorted to a simple initial. This showed that T, in all probability, was the actual initial of the sender. Being known only to Signet, the single letter was a sufficient cover for the identity of the sender.

Someone with a name that began with T. A hopeless clue in an ordinary message. But The Shadow saw a point that offered a further finding. That was the letter G. T was waiting at G.

Had the message been signed by an assumed name, the letter G might have meant some designated spot, taken from a list that both persons had available. But the signature T showed that this was not a regular form of correspondence, T had used an initial to cover his own name. Therefore, G was an initial that covered another name.

G might be the initial letter of a city or a town; it might be some spot in New York. The Shadow leaned to the latter conclusion; his assumption was based upon the fact that the Classic, a tabloid newspaper, had little circulation outside of New York City.

Logically, T was in New York; and so was Signet. G must be a place in the city. With T waiting there, ready, G should be some spot where Signet could find him at night as well as at day. Probably a hotel.

Inked writing faded. Such was the way with The Shadow's inscribed thoughts. His pen contained a fluid that vanished after drying.

Hands reached for earphones. Burbank responded. In whispered tones, The Shadow issued instructions to Clyde Burke.

That done, the master sleuth returned to his former work. Whatever the import of the message from "T" to Signet, there was nothing to indicate a menace. The Shadow was putting Clyde to work on a preliminary investigation.

THIRTY minutes later, Clyde Burke strolled into the lobby of the Hotel Goliath. Newsboys were already shouting from the street while they flourished early copies of the Classic. Clyde strolled toward the manager's office.

From Burbank, Clyde had received a list of New York hotels that began with the letter G. These had been arranged in order of importance. The Shadow had decided that two men—Signet and T—who wished to meet quietly would naturally choose a larger hotel. The Goliath was by far the most important in the list of those beginning with G.

Arriving in the manager's office, Clyde introduced himself and displayed his reporter's credentials. Then, in an easy, assuring tone, he explained the pretended reason for his business.

"There's a rumor about that Lord Calderon is in New York," stated Clyde. "Just over from London; they say he's slated to be the next British ambassador."

"Coming here to the Goliath?" questioned the assistant manager, an eager smile on his thin face.

"The rumor didn't say that," admitted Clyde, "but it's a cinch that if Lord Calderon is in New York, he's stopping at some hotel. That's why I'm going the rounds for the Classic. Just on a chance that the rumor is correct."

"Lord Calderon hasn't registered here."

## THE TRIPLE TRAIL

"You can't be sure of that. He would probably be traveling under an incognito. They say he always uses a name other than his own."

"But you have no idea of what name he might be using? If Lord Calderon should be here, we would, of course, wish to give him special attention."

"That's just it," nodded Clyde. "I knew you'd be glad of the tip. And if he is here, I'll see that other reporters don't find him. I'll ship them off on a bum steer while I get an exclusive interview."

"But how can you find him?" questioned the assistant manager.

"Well," mused Clyde, "if I could see the guest list—particularly those who registered today —"

The assistant manager came to his feet. He shoved a box of cigars in Clyde's direction, waddled from the office and returned after a visit to the desk. He placed a typewritten sheet on the desk.

Clyde studied it. He jotted notes.

"Too bad," remarked the reporter, after a short while. "None of these names look like an incognito for Lord Calderon. Maybe he's stopping somewhere else. Maybe the rumor's phony. But keep a lookout for his nibs.

"Long gray mustache"—Clyde made a gesture to indicate the adornment—"and he wouldn't get rid of those handlebars on a bet. You'll know him if you see him. Well, I've got to barge along." Clyde paused to light a cigar that he had taken. "Twenty more hotels tonight. Hope I'll see you later."

Strolling from the office, Clyde left the hotel and headed for a drug store to put in a telephone call to Burbank. His visit to the Goliath had given him nine names for a starter. That was the number of new guests whose names began with T. On the list was the name of Stanton Treblaw.

IN his sanctum, The Shadow received a call from Burbank. Over the wire came the names that Clyde Burke had gained from his visit to the first of the G hotels. The Shadow wrote down the names in ink that did not fade.

Studying the nine, The Shadow paused at the name of Stanton Treblaw. It was one that he had seen before. Hands moved from beneath the light; a glimmer came from the corner of the black-walled room. The Shadow was referring to one of his many files.

The corner glimmer ended. The Shadow returned through darkness to the table. He put in a call to Burbank, gave brief whispered instructions to the contact agent; then extinguished the bluish light.

A soft laugh sounded in darkness; after that a swish. Silence followed.

The Shadow had departed. He had found a trail that commanded his attention. He had learned that Stanton Treblaw, listed as a collector of rarities, had left his secluded New Jersey domicile to visit Manhattan.

To The Shadow, this was a matter of more than passing interest. Faring from his sanctum, The Shadow was on his way to visit Stanton Treblaw.

## CHAPTER IV. THE MENACE STRIKES

SIMULTANEOUSLY With The Shadow's departure from his sanctum, a man was alighting from an elevator on the twenty-fourth floor of the Hotel Goliath. Though well dressed, this individual did not look like a representative guest of the fastidious hostelry.

Pasty-faced, with drooping lips, the fellow had the countenance of a dope fiend. His eyes, furtive and restless, had watched the elevator operator with suspicion. In leaving the car, the visitor had sidled out in a manner that had kept his face from the operator's view.

Moving through a silent, carpeted hall, the pasty-faced man found a stairway and ascended to the twenty-fifth floor. He moved sneakily along a hall, stopped in front of a door marked 2538, and scratched at the barrier instead of knocking.

The door swung inward. The pasty-faced man stepped in to face a brawny, square-jawed fellow who eyed him glaringly. As soon as the door had closed behind them, the big man growled angrily.

"What's been keeping you, Crawler?" he demanded.

"This." "Crawler" yanked a copy of the Classic from his overcoat pocket. "They ain't been sellin' it more'n ten minutes. I had to take a squint through the pages, like you told me, Duster."

"You found the ad?"

"Sure." Crawler opened the paper at page thirteen. "Here it is, Duster. To this guy Signet."

"Duster" took the newspaper. He leered in ugly fashion as he noted the wording of the advertisement. He handed the copy to Crawler and told him to pocket it.

"That means we're all set?" questioned Crawler.

"It means this mug Treblaw has what we want," acknowledged Duster. "Whatever it is we're after."

"Ain't the chief told you yet?"

"He wised me to snatch whatever papers the old bozo has in his room. Providing the ad was in the Classic. That covers the job."

"Let's go, then."

Duster shook his head. He drew a chair over by the door and ordered Crawler to climb up and look through the transom. When Crawler was on the chair, Duster spoke.

"See that door over across?" he quizzed. "No. 2537?"

"Yeah. Is that Treblaw's room!"

"No. The old guy is next door to us, in 2536. But I've got a couple of gorillas over there in 2537. The mugs nearly queered the lay!"

## THE TRIPLE TRAIL

"How come?"

"One of them stepped out about ten minutes ago. Let the door slam behind him when he was coming over here to see me. Hadn't been in here five seconds before old Treblaw opened his door and stuck his nose out into the hall."

"You saw him, Duster?"

"Yeah. Through the transom. The old geezer must have heard the door slam. He looked up and down for a couple of minutes."

"Did he see you?"

"No, I had the light out. I waited about five minutes; then I sent the gorilla back where he belonged. Told him to tell his pal to lay low until I called for them."

"You think old Treblaw's wise?"

"I think he's worried, Crawler. That's all. But it means we've got to handle this smooth. That's why I was sore about you blowing in late. If you'd come ten minutes ago, we'd have been better off."

Duster motioned Crawler down from the chair. He produced a key and handed it to his companion.

"Sneak in on him, Crawler," ordered Duster. "This pass-key is good for any door in the whole joint. I'll follow up with the gorillas. But you pull the sneak."

Crawler nodded. He pushed the chair away from the door and, began to open the barrier. He motioned for Duster to extinguish the light. Duster complied.

Crawler started to edge into the hall. Suddenly he stopped. He grabbed Duster's arm. The two peered from the blackened room.

THE next door had opened. Stanton Treblaw, attired in slippers and dressing gown, was stepping into view. In one hand, the old man was holding an empty glass pitcher.

Duster and Crawler saw Treblaw look about. Then they watched the old man waddle down the corridor and make a turn to the left.

"Get going," growled Duster. "There's an ice water faucet down by the elevator. He's gone to fill the pitcher. Now's your chance. Slide in."

Crawler ducked quickly into the hall. The door of Treblaw's room was closed. Crawler inserted the pass-key, turned it and made a hasty entrance. He shut the door carefully behind him.

Duster had edged back into 2538. He was on the chair again, peering through the transom. He saw Treblaw reappear, his pitcher filled with water. He watched the old man unlock the door of 2536 and enter.

Dropping from the chair, Duster moved from his own room. Sneaking across the hall he tapped on the door that hid the waiting mobsters.



## THE TRIPLE TRAIL

STANTON TREBLAW, back in his own room, was placing the water pitcher on a bureau. The old man was holding the pitcher in his left hand; his right was resting in the deep pocket of his dressing gown.

Treblaw's face was cunning. It bore an expression that had often worried Wickroft. Peering in sidelong fashion, Treblaw was watching the door of a closet, using the bureau mirror to observe the reflection. With his left hand, the old man poured water into a glass that rested on the bureau.

The gurgle of the liquid indicated that Treblaw was occupied. Slowly, the door of the closet began to open. The figure of Crawler came into view. Unarmed, the pasty-faced crook was ready to spring forward upon his prey. Treblaw's eyes glistened their reflection from the mirror. The old man set down the pitcher and started to reach for the glass. Then, with a sudden twist, he swung about. His right hand snapped out of the dressing-gown pocket.

The old man's claw was gripping a .22 automatic. Puny though the weapon was, it caused Crawler to stop short, his pasty face aghast. The swiftness of Treblaw's action had told the crook that he faced an enemy who would not quail.

"Thought I was napping, eh?" wheezed Treblaw, glowering at Crawler. "Waiting for a chance to come in here. Well, I gave you the opportunity. Now let's hear what you have to say about it!"

Crawler had raised his hands. Remembering what Duster had said about the door across the hall, he knew that Treblaw had suspected the presence of the gorillas. The old man had made the trip with the water pitcher in order to learn if a prowler on this floor chanced to have a pass-key to the door of this room.

It was plain from Treblaw's words that the old man thought he had trapped the person who had slammed the door across the hall. It was that fact that made Crawler parry. A smart crook despite his stupid look, Crawler was quick to see a way out.

"Give me a chance, bo," he whined. "Look—I ain't in here with no gun. I'm broke and out of luck. Ain't had nothin' to eat. The cops was going to grab me for panhandlin'. I was just trying to grab a few bucks."

The plea was convincing. Crawler looked the part of an underfed panhandler. It was true that he held no gun. The man's pretense that he was a petty thief seemed an open admission of trivial guilt. Treblaw, however, was not wholly sure.

"Who sent you here?" he snapped suddenly.

Crawler blinked as he eyed the ready .22. He pretended puzzlement as he faced Treblaw's glare.

"Nobody sent me here," he pleaded. "Honest, boss, I'm talkin' straight. I just sneaked into this hotel because it looked like maybe I could get some easy dough —"

"Did you ever hear of Signet?" snapped Treblaw. "Does that name sound familiar?"

"Sigmund?" questioned Crawler, still feigning much bewilderment. "Sigmund who?"

"I said Signet," repeated Treblaw. Crawler shook his head.

"Very well," decided Treblaw, testily. "This is a case for the police. Move back into that corner. I'm going to call the house detective."

## THE TRIPLE TRAIL

IT was then that Crawler played his ace. The crook had figured that Duster and the gorillas were by this time in the hall. He knew that they had another pass-key. But he did not dare to risk an attack on Treblaw. The old man seemed too ready with the little automatic. Crawler tried subterfuge.

With hands above his head, he backed off beyond the corner, heading toward an opened window. As Treblaw followed him with the gun, Crawler whined a final plea.

"Don't call the house dick," he whispered. "He'll hand me to the cops. It'll be the Island for me—an' I can't go there. I'm a hophead, boss. I got to have snow. If you call the dicks, I'm jumpin' outta this window! I ain't foolin'!"

Crawler had shifted; he was raising one knee to the window sill. His gesture looked genuine.

Keen-eyed, Treblaw watched to see what the man intended to do. Crawler did look like a drug addict. But Treblaw wanted further proof.

Crawler, seeing that, swung sidewise from the window, balanced almost for a drop.

His eyes wild, he was staring at Treblaw. And in gazing at the old man, Crawler could see beyond, to the outer door that Treblaw had forgotten as he viewed a man who seemed desperate enough for suicide.

"I mean it, bo!" wailed Crawler. "I'm jittery! I can't hold out! I gotta have snow! No foolin'—"

Inches would have sent Crawler tumbling to the street, so closely was he balanced on the sill. As a final touch, the crook let his eyes wander to the telephone as if a move by Treblaw toward the instrument would be a final signal for the jump.

The outer door clicked open. Treblaw did not hear it. His sharp eyes, however, saw a rustle of the window curtains against Crawler's quivering hands. Instantly, Treblaw suspected a draft from the door.

Forgetting Crawler, the old man wheeled.

DUSTER was lunging in, upon him. The big crook was brandishing a huge revolver; but did not fire the weapon. Instead, he delivered a swing for Treblaw's head.

Dropping back with his remarkable spryness, Treblaw aimed to fire at the crook.

Crawler, lunging in from the window, landed upon the old man's back and tried to grab his arm. Sinking, Treblaw tried for new aim. Duster drove his revolver downward. The weapon crashed hard against the old man's skull. At the same instant a mobster, piling close behind, thudded Treblaw's drooping head with a blackjack.

"Douse the glimmers!" ordered Duster, swinging toward the door.

The second gorilla had closed the barrier. He pressed a light switch. The room was in darkness save for a corner floor lamp that threw light upon the rack that held Treblaw's heavy grip.

Crawler was already in that corner. Pawing through the bag, the pasty-faced crook was snatching out the odd papers that he could find.

## THE TRIPLE TRAIL

Duster growled to the gorillas. They began to rifle Treblaw's clothes while Duster looked through table and bureau.

The whole work required less than a minute, Duster using a flashlight as he edged away from the corner lamp. Crawler came over and shoved a batch of papers into Duster's hands. The big crook chuckled. He thrust the documents beneath his coat; then looked at Treblaw's body, obscure in the gloom of the floor.

"Scram!" he ordered Crawler and the gorillas. "Like you came in. From other floors. I'm following. I'm calling the chief; and I'm leaving this stuff where he can get it."

Crooks followed their leader's bidding. Duster was the last to leave the room. He wiped the doorknobs to remove finger prints; then used a handkerchief as he closed the door on departing.

Silence followed in the gloomy room. Three minutes passed; then came the ting-a-ling of the telephone bell. That continued for half a minute; then the ringing ceased.

Stanton Treblaw, sprawled upon the floor, had made no attempt to answer it. For men of crime had carried their brutal work to the limit. Those bashing blows had been more than stunning. Stanton Treblaw was dead.

### CHAPTER V. NEW VISITORS

THE murder of Stanton Treblaw had been accomplished rapidly. Fifteen minutes after Crawler had joined the crew in the Hotel Goliath, the last of the killers had departed. Duster, strolling from the lobby, was holding the stolen papers tucked beneath his coat.

The mobleader chose the same drug store that Clyde Burke had used to call The Shadow. Finding a vacant booth, he dialed a number. A gruff, disguised voice answered. Duster was talking to the same man who had called Wickroft that morning.

"Job's done, chief," informed Duster, tersely. "Yeah, got the whole batch here with me... Well, here's a bunch of letters with red seals on them... Some letters that say Burson, Limited..."

Duster paused. Sharp questions were coming over the wire. Duster examined the papers beneath his coat.

"No, we didn't find nothing like that, chief," he protested. "Just these letters... No, there wasn't any old manuscript or whatever you call it. Sure we went through the room. Say, I had the gorillas grab the dough that was in his pockets. To make it look like they were after jack. Sure, we went through the geezer's suitcase.

"Listen, chief. I'll go back there, but it won't be no use, I'm telling you... What's that? Don't go back? All right, chief, you're boss... Sure, I'll leave these papers where you said..."

Hanging up, Duster walked mumbling from the phone booth. He showed an ugly scowl. Apparently he had failed to get what the chief was after. Yet Duster was positive that he and his men had made a thorough search.

FIVE minutes after Duster's departure from the drug store, a young man entered the pretentious lobby of the Hotel Goliath. Clean-cut, he looked the part of a guest of the establishment. This arrival chose a lobby chair from which he could eye the elevators.

The newcomer was Harry Vincent, an agent of The Shadow. While Clyde Burke was still visiting other

## THE TRIPLE TRAIL

hotels, Harry had been ordered here by Burbank. It was Harry's job to be about until The Shadow reached the hotel.

Harry knew that Treblaw's room was on the twenty-fifth floor. He was to keep a chance outlook on any visitors who might apparently be going to see Treblaw.

Harry's routine was simple. He made notes of persons who entered the elevators. Then he watched the dials to see which cars stopped at the twenty-fifth floor. This was not a haphazard plan. On the contrary, Harry found it quite effective.

Harry was watching merely for possible visitors to Treblaw's room. That enabled him to eliminate most of the persons who entered the elevators. Traffic was not heavy at this hour; only a few cars carried men who looked like they might be going to see the old collector. Those particular cars did not happen to stop at the twenty-fifth floor.

It was not until ten minutes after his arrival that Harry scored a hit. He saw a tall, shrewd-faced man stride through the lobby, glance about and enter an elevator. He caught a glimpse of bushy brows and a short, close-clipped mustache. The man was looking around as though suspicious of watching eyes.

Harry studied the dial; it swung steadily along and finally stopped at No. 25. The tall man had been the only passenger. It was possible that he had gone to see Stanton Treblaw in Room 2536. Harry sat back and waited.

THE tall, mustached visitor had actually picked the destination that Harry Vincent suspected. Up on the twenty-fifth floor he had left the elevator and was making his way along the hall to Treblaw's room.

Arriving there, the tall man looked about to make sure that no one was approaching. Methodically, he tapped lightly on the door. No response. The man tried the knob. He stepped into the gloomy room.

As he closed the door behind him, the visitor spied Treblaw's body. Calmly he stepped forward and surveyed the corpse. He noted the pool of blood about Treblaw's head and stooped closer to be certain that the old man was dead.

Satisfied on that point, the man stepped past the body and began to rummage through the grip. He found no papers. Moving across the room, he inspected drawers in table and bureau. Returning, he felt about the dressing gown that Treblaw was wearing; then searched the old man's clothes.

No result. The tall man's teeth gritted audibly in the stillness of the room. He made a last futile search of the grip, even to the point of tapping the lining. Then, with a disappointed grunt, he swung about and went from the room, leaving the door unlocked behind him.

IN the lobby, Harry Vincent was still watching the elevators. The spot that Harry had chosen was close by a pillar; in fact, it formed one of the most secluded portions of the lobby. Hence Harry was startled when he heard a voice close beside his chair; a whispered tone that gave one commanding word:

"Report!"

It was The Shadow. Harry knew that his chief had arrived.

Without turning, Harry spoke in a low voice, giving a brief description of the man who had gone up to the twenty-fifth floor. Harry caught a whispered instruction. He nodded his understanding. Then, as he still watched the elevators, he saw a figure swing into view.

## THE TRIPLE TRAIL

The Shadow had stepped from beside the pillar. His back was toward Harry, so the agent had no chance to glimpse The Shadow's face. Attired in street clothes, The Shadow appeared as a tall man who walked with easy stride. He was carrying a thick briefcase.

Harry watched him enter an elevator. The door closed; The Shadow had not turned around.

Just as the elevator started upward, Harry noted another dial hand stop at the twenty-fourth floor. A pause; then the second elevator came down. When the doors clanged open, Harry saw the mustached man step forth. The fellow appeared both nervous and hasty in action.

Rising from his chair, Harry started toward the main door of the hotel. The pillar sheltered him momentarily; quickening his pace, Harry gained the door before the other man. Stepping to the sidewalk, The Shadow's agent raised one hand to his coat lapel.

A taxicab shot forward from the other side of the street. It jammed into the space in front of the hotel, beating a cab that was coming up from a hack stand. The tall man had arrived from the hotel; he wanted a cab and he picked the first one.

Harry gave another slight signal. The driver yanked the door open. The tall man stepped aboard.

The driver of the second cab was leaping to the street, ready to start an argument. The doorman sided with him; together they began to argue with the fellow who had stolen the fare. Their protests had no effect. The chiseling driver sped away with his passenger, leaving the others bellowing after him.

Harry Vincent smiled as he strolled away. The driver who had muscled in to snatch the tall passenger was Moe Shrevnitz, one of The Shadow's agents. He had defied the ethics of taxi-driving to cut in ahead of a cab that was waiting in the stand. But his motive had been an important one.

It would be Moe's job to note just where his fare went. Later, Moe would report to Burbank, who would pass the word along. For Harry, following The Shadow's order, had tipped Moe to grab that mustached suspect.

Harry, himself, would have a report to make. For he had noted distinctly that the dial of the downcoming elevator had stopped at the twenty-fourth floor; not at the twenty-fifth. The man with the mustache must have descended one flight by a stairway, before entering the elevator.

MEANWHILE, The Shadow had reached the twenty-fifth floor. In the lighted corridor, his face showed as a hawk-like countenance. Keen eyes peered from either side of an aquiline nose as The Shadow followed the turn of the passage toward Room 2536.

Some strange aftermath of crime must have gripped that still corridor in psychic sway. For The Shadow became surprisingly alert as he neared Treblaw's door. Stopping at 2536, he dipped his hand into his pocket and drew forth a black glove which he slipped on his right hand. His left set the briefcase against the wall; then dropped beneath the coat that The Shadow was wearing.

Carefully, The Shadow opened the door. He paused upon the threshold. His keen eyes had spied Treblaw's body on the gloomy floor. The Shadow's gaze turned toward the opened door of the closet; then to the open window where curtains were swaying gently.

Picking up his briefcase, The Shadow entered and closed the door behind him.

## THE TRIPLE TRAIL

His first object of inspection was Treblaw's body. While he stooped above the dead form, The Shadow donned a second black glove. His finger tips touched Treblaw's battered head. The Shadow could see that the man had been slugged, as well as blackjacked.

Carefully, The Shadow raised Treblaw's shoulders. He spied an object beneath them. He drew it forth; Treblaw's automatic. The Shadow inspected the .22, found it unfired and replaced it where he had discovered it.

Standing in the center of the room, The Shadow visualized how death had come. His picturization, though lacking in slight details, was correct in important points. The open door of the closet indicated where someone had been hiding. The pitcher; glass filled with water; the mirror—all were proofs of Treblaw's ruse to trap a lurking foe.

The Shadow, upon entering, had noted the rustle of the curtains. He realized how Treblaw had been trapped; he could see the old man forcing a prisoner toward the window, only to become alarmed by the motion of curtains when the door of the room was opened.

The room bore token of an extensive search. The Shadow began one of his own. Partly opened drawers in the bureau; disturbed objects in the table drawer—these showed that the assassins had been after something that Treblaw might have hidden.

The Shadow knew that murder had involved a band; that death had been accomplished before another visitor had come here. That excluded Harry's suspect from an actual part in the killing; nevertheless, it was possible that the man might have been here afterward.

That thought caused The Shadow to eye the door. Ever alert, he had been watching the barrier at intervals; now he peered intently, as though expecting it to open momentarily. At last The Shadow laughed—softly, but grimly.

There was no proof that Harry's suspect had come to this room; yet the agent's description of the fellow proved that he had been in a hurry. The possibility that the mustached man had come and gone caused The Shadow to make a prompt change in plan.

Already he had lingered a full dozen minutes. There was no use for further stay. Stepping away from Treblaw's body, The Shadow moved to the door and started to open it. He paused suddenly; instead of turning the knob, he twisted the lock below it. He waited intently.

The knob clicked. Someone was trying the door from the opposite side. Voices in the hall; then pounding. Calls and footfalls. More men were arriving.

While these noises sounded, The Shadow was whipping open the briefcase that he carried. From it, he was drawing a mass of blackened cloth, along with a slouch hat.

Someone had suspected trouble in Room 2536. An alarm had been given. Hotel detectives and police were about to enter the death room.

And The Shadow, arrived too late to prevent fiendish murder, was trapped upon the scene of crime!

## CHAPTER VI. THE LONE TRAIL

A KEY turned in the lock. The door of Room 2536 swung open. A big shouldered man stared into the dully-lighted room. Behind him were two others, one in uniform.

"Look!" The gasp came from the first man, a house dick. "There— near the window!"

The fellow was pointing to Treblaw's body. As his companions pressed him, he advanced unsteadily and reached the spot where the dead man lay. The second dick and the policeman peered over his shoulder.

"Dead!" ejaculated the first dick. "Say—that call we got wasn't phony. This man's been murdered —"

He paused suddenly. A sharp interruption had come from the second house detective. Moving back from the body, this fellow had chanced to glance toward the door. There he had seen a moving shape in black.

The Shadow, shrouded in a corner of the room, had started a stealthy progress toward the door, hoping to depart while the trio remained astounded at sight of Treblaw's body. The second dick, turning squeamishly, had spied the cloaked form as it neared the door.

"Get him!" exclaimed the second dick, to the officer beside him. "Get him!"

Suiting action to his own words, the dick sprang toward the moving shape. The Shadow wheeled. Coming in to meet his opponent, he caught the dick's body in a flying grip that hoisted the fellow halfway to the ceiling.

The policeman was spinning forward. Anticipating the move, The Shadow hurled the struggling detective squarely against the bluecoat. Bowled over by the human missile, the cop went sprawling on the floor, with the dick rolling upon him.

The Shadow's surge did not stop. Coming forward with his swing, he encountered the first dick rising from beside Treblaw's body. A gloved fist swept through the gloom. It clipped the dick's chin and dropped the man to the floor.

Clearing Treblaw's body, The Shadow reached the window. His tall form swung through the opening, then disappeared with a surprising suddenness. He was gone before any one of the three men could spot the direction of his flight.

The policeman was coming to his feet. Looking about, he saw the two dicks rising—one rubbing his chin; the other holding his head in dazed fashion. Seeing no sign of the assailant, the officer dashed toward the door. He reached the corridor and headed toward the elevators. No one in sight.

Puzzled, yet realizing necessity for action, the policeman drew a whistle and blew a shrill blast that sounded throughout the entire floor.

An elevator opened. A puzzled operator looked out. The policeman bawled orders. The operator nodded, closed the door and dropped toward the ground floor to spread the alarm.

The officer headed back to the room. He found one detective with a drawn gun; the other was calling the desk.

THE tall, stepped walls of the Hotel Goliath were ornamented terraces that rose to a height of thirty stories.

## THE TRIPLE TRAIL

The upper steps of the mammoth building were set in too far to be viewed from the street below.

Hence no one from beneath caught sight of the beetle-like figure that was following a precarious upward course. A black blotch against the dulled front of the great building, The Shadow was performing the act of a human fly.

On occasions, The Shadow scaled difficult walls with the aid of suction disks that gave him a firm grip against the surface. He was performing his present ascent without the suction devices. He did not need them, thanks to the cornices and facings that were ready to hand. In fact, his climb lessened in difficulty as he neared the summit of the building.

The Shadow's course brought him to the topmost parapet—a high wall that surrounded the central portion of the roof. Mounting this, The Shadow encountered a low, spiked fence. Beyond it were clusters of cedar trees, set at intervals.

Scaling the fence, The Shadow dropped between the parapet and a clump of cedars. There he divested himself of cloak and hat. He unrolled his flexible briefcase and inserted the black garments. He left the briefcase by the wall and sauntered from the cedars.

The roof formed a promenade; half a dozen persons were standing by open portions, looking out over the city. The air was chilly at this height; hence the crowd was small. No one observed the tall personage who stepped in from a spot beside the wall. Unchallenged, The Shadow strolled toward a doorway that led inside.

This was an enclosed solarium that served as the hotel library. A dozen persons were about; the few who noted The Shadow's entrance took him to be another guest. As he seated himself beside a table, The Shadow noticed that the stairway door bore a huge lock.

A smile appeared upon the thin lips of the mask-like face. No search for a fugitive would be made up here. The Shadow looked toward a table in the corner where a librarian was seated. A telephone bell was ringing. The librarian answered it.

Finished with his call, the librarian stepped from his table. A bespectacled individual, he hemmed and hawed to attract attention. Then, as people looked toward him, he made an announcement.

"There has been some trouble downstairs," explained the librarian. "The police are looking for a fugitive. He could not have come up here. But the elevators are being watched. If anyone wishes to go downstairs, I shall summon a special elevator to take them to the lobby."

A few persons expressed the desire to leave. The librarian put in a prompt call. An elevator arrived, and descended with half a dozen passengers, all checked by a policeman who came with the elevator.

The Shadow remained, reading a magazine that he had taken from the table.

A quiet hour passed. At length the librarian made a new announcement. The search had been given up; elevators could be used as desired. The Shadow waited a while longer, then strolled out on the roof to find it totally deserted. Reclaiming his briefcase, he returned to the solarium and took an elevator to the lobby.

LATER, The Shadow reached his sanctum. His presence was made manifest by the sudden appearance of the bluish light in the corner of the room.



## THE TRIPLE TRAIL

The Shadow reached for the earphones. He knew that reports should be ready; Burbank's voice responded to The Shadow's call.

"Report," came The Shadow's order.

"Report from Burke," informed Burbank. "He has just left the Hotel Goliath. Interviewed Detective Joe Cardona regarding the murder of Stanton Treblaw."

"Proceed."

Burbank's voice gave details that fitted The Shadow's own examination of Treblaw's room. The type of murder; the fact that the room was rifled—these had been observed by inspecting officers. The police theory was chance robbery.

"The surgeon's statement," declared Burbank, "sets the time of death at a few minutes after nine o'clock. At quarter past nine, someone put in a call to Treblaw's room. It was not answered. At quarter of ten, a call came to the hotel desk, from outside, advising an investigation of Room 2536.

"Two house detectives and a policeman went there. They encountered an unknown assailant, who escaped. A search failed to uncover him. It is believed that he made a get-away before the alarm was given."

A pause. The Shadow responded: "Report received."

"Report from Shrevnitz," announced Burbank, promptly. "He took a man from the Hotel Goliath to the Doswind Apartments on Fifty-fourth Street. Ten minutes running time. Noted the bell that the man pressed. Examined it later.

"The name is Tully Kelk. Vincent paid a later visit to the same apartment house. Kelk lives on the third floor, Apartment 3 F. Vincent can arrange to occupy Apartment 3 G, now vacant, across the hall."

"Reports received," pronounced The Shadow. "Instructions: Vincent to occupy the apartment at the Doswind. Shrevnitz to remain in that vicinity. Burke to cover headquarters."

"Instructions received."

"Marsland to conduct investigation in the underworld, to gain information concerning movements of mobsters who might have had part in the Treblaw killing."

"Instructions received."

The bluish light clicked off. The sanctum was in darkness.

But The Shadow's work had not yet finished. He, too, was faring forth to make investigations of his own. He knew that new clues might be found in the confines of the underworld.

DOWN at detective headquarters, Clyde Burke and other reporters were talking with a stocky, swarthy-faced man who sat behind a battered desk. They were worrying Detective Joe Cardona, acting inspector in the Treblaw case.

"You want my theory," growled Cardona, studying the faces before him, "so I'm giving it to you. But remember—it's not final. We've got two facts to work on. Treblaw was killed about nine o'clock. His place

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was rifled; but when they found the body, some guy was still there. Close to an hour later."

"How do you figure that happened, Joe?" quizzed Clyde.

"I'm coming to it," stated the detective. "There must have been a couple of guys after Treblaw. One got in there and bumped the old man. Then he beat it and called back to make sure Treblaw was dead. Finding it clear, he went around to grab what swag there might be. That accounts for the first telephone call."

"Right."

"Well, the second guy shows up. Figuring he's due there, the first bozo called the hotel, just to crimp the other man's game. He did it right enough; the second bird nearly got nabbed for what the first one did."

"Then you're not looking for the man who got away?"

"I'm looking for the man who murdered Stanton Treblaw. So far the motive looks like robbery. I've called Treblaw's home in Droverton, New Jersey. I'm going out there tomorrow to find out more. That's all I've got to say for tonight."

Cardona thumped his desk, arose and strode from the office. An ace sleuth who worked on hunches, Cardona had hit one good guess tonight: namely, that the person who attacked two house dicks and a policeman was not the murderer of Stanton Treblaw.

But outside of that one feature, Cardona's theory lacked merit. The ace detective would have been astounded had he known that the final visitor to Treblaw's room was The Shadow!

Oddly, The Shadow, too, was working on a theory which involved a double visit. His view of Treblaw's body had convinced him that a squad of killers had murdered the old collector. But The Shadow was also taking into account the arrival of a second person after Treblaw's death; one who was already playing a cunning part in the scheme of things.

That man was Tully Kelk, who lived in Apartment 3 F at the Doswind Apartments on Fifty-fourth Street. As yet, the trailing of Kelk constituted The Shadow's only clue. But with it for a start, the master sleuth saw possibilities that had not dawned upon Detective Joe Cardona.

For Harry Vincent, agent of The Shadow, was now close by to keep tabs on Tully Kelk, while Moe Shrevnitz, taxi driver extraordinary, was available to take up any trail that Kelk might give.

From these two aids, The Shadow was expecting prompt developments that would lead to an ultimate solution of committed crime. For The Shadow, like Joe Cardona, could play hunches on occasion. And his present hunch was that Tully Kelk had provided an important clue in the complicated chain of crime.

## CHAPTER VII. TWO MEN MEET

AT SIX o'clock the next afternoon, Harry Vincent was seated in his new apartment reading the evening newspaper. These furnished quarters at the Doswind had proven quite comfortable; and while engaged in vigil, Harry was posting himself on the latest details of the Treblaw case.

Detective Joe Cardona had been to Droverton that morning. He had issued a statement to reporters: namely, that Treblaw had left his home the day before for a short trip to New York.

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According to the testimony of the old man's servants, Treblaw had attached no significance to his journey. Nor had he carried any items of great value. So far as the Droverton aspect was concerned, there seemed no reason why anyone should have slain Stanton Treblaw. The old man had lived a quiet, secluded life. All his affairs were in order. He had apparently had no enemies in the world.

Cardona had learned the names of distant relatives who might come in for a share of Treblaw's moderate estate. That constituted the ace sleuth's only gain from his visit to Stanton Treblaw's home.

Harry had just completed his reading of these details when he caught a slight sound from the hallway outside of his apartment. Moving softly to the door, he listened to departing footsteps. Opening the door, he peered through a small space and spotted Tully Kelk heading for the stairway.

Closing his door, Harry went to the window. He could see Moe Shrevnitz standing beside his parked cab. Harry gave no signal. He knew that he could count on Moe. Watching, he saw the alert cabby spring suddenly into his vehicle and drive up to the apartment entrance. Peering cautiously, Harry caught a glimpse of Kelk stepping into the cab.

Moe pulled away. Harry went to the telephone and made a call to Burbank. The contact man received the brief report. Harry's vigil was ended until Kelk's return.

MEANWHILE, Moe's cab was rolling toward a ferry, connecting with a railroad on the Jersey shore. Moe, shrewd-faced and quick thinking, was making good time in response to Kelk's order. He knew that his passenger must be in a hurry to catch a train on the Jersey side; but he was anxious to learn the exact destination. Moe grinned as he figured, a way to gain that information.

When they reached the ferry, Kelk alighted, hurriedly paid his fare and entered the ferry slip.

Moe swung the taxi into a parking space and slid from his seat. He followed Kelk's course and peered into the big waiting room just in time to see Kelk go through the gate. Moe saw the man displayed a ticket.

A gong sounded to announce the departure of the ferryboat that Kelk had caught. Moe walked into the waiting room and approached a lone ticket window. He spoke to the man behind the wicket.

"Fellow with a mustache," remarked Moe. "Just bought a ticket. Did he take the ferry?"

"Guess he did," replied the ticket agent. "That's what he was after."

"Left a package in my cab," stated Moe. "I just found it and came back to catch him. Where was he going to?"

"He bought a ticket to a town called Droverton," returned the agent. "One day round trip, so he ought to be back. Where did he come from?"

"An apartment house up on Fifty-fourth Street," replied Moe. "Guess he lives there. I'll drop the package there when I go back that way. They ought to know about him."

Sauntering from the station, Moe went to his cab. He looked in back just in chance that Kelk had actually left something. Moe saw a crumpled copy of an evening newspaper that Kelk had been reading. Evidently Kelk had sent someone out for it, for Moe had not seen him leave the apartment during the day.

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Both Harry and Moe had reported that Kelk must have a servant, although they had not spotted one. Chief evidence to that was the fact that Kelk had gained entry by ringing on the doorbell night before, when he had returned to his apartment.

Moe lost no time in making a report to Burbank. The shrewd taxi driver knew that he had scored an ace in learning that Kelk had headed for Droverton, the town from which Treblaw had come.

Moe was right in that conjecture.

Not long after he had reported to Burbank, a swift roadster entered the Holland Tunnel en route from Manhattan to New Jersey. Shortly afterward, the same car was flashing along the Pulaski Skyway.

At the wheel was a hawk-faced driver whose eyes seemed fire-like as they gazed from above the big car's wheel. The Shadow was on his way to Droverton.

DUSK Settled over New Jersey. The town of Droverton, situated on the east side of a hill, was covered with an early darkness. Intermittent street lamps glistened from shaded thoroughfares; they ended abruptly near the limits of the town.

The old Treblaw mansion formed a looming hulk in the increasing darkness. Dull lights from second-story windows only added to its ghostly appearance. On the very outskirts of Droverton, this building seemed a somber guardian of outer darkness—a melancholy structure that might have been mourning the death of its lamented master.

A black splotch glided beneath the illumination of the final lamp-post. Then that blot marked with darkness. A faint swish sounded in the settling thickness. An unseen form moved toward the dusk-enshrouded house.

The Shadow had arrived in Droverton. He was reconnoitering about the old house, knowing it to be the objective that Tully Kelk must have chosen for a secret visit.

Coming into the very shroud of the stone-walled building, The Shadow skirted a corner on the side that housed Treblaw's study.

Gloved hands tried a window sash. It moved upward under pressure. Fingers felt the woodwork; The Shadow made a prompt discovery. The window had been jimmied loose. Not a difficult task, for the frame was old and had splintered easily. This discovery, however, produced intense caution on The Shadow's part.

Silently, the hidden investigator raised the sash and entered. Thick blackness loomed straight ahead; The Shadow's hands moved cautiously. They encountered the thickness of draperies. Gloves came from hands; long fingers felt the velvet. The Shadow found an opening and spread it the mere fraction of an inch.

Light greeted The Shadow's gaze. He was peering into an oddly furnished room—Treblaw's bizarre study, with its filing cabinets amid antiquated furnishings. But The Shadow found chief interest in the sole occupant of the room. He saw a tall; mustached man looking in a filing cabinet.

Tully Kelk: he fitted Harry Vincent's description. It was Kelk who had jimmied the window. He had followed by turning on the light; now he was going through Treblaw's records in a manner that showed methodical procedure.

Minutes passed while The Shadow watched. Kelk finish with one drawer and went to another. His face was wearing a perpetual scowl. His countenance was sallow in the yellow light. It was obvious that Kelk was

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finding disappointment in his search.

Ten minutes passed. Kelk was working on a third drawer.

The Shadow, ever silent behind the curtain, thrust one hand beneath his cloak. The muzzle of an automatic came close against the curtain. The Shadow had seen an approaching need for the weapon. The knob of the study door was turning.

Kelk had not noticed it. He was closing a filing drawer; careless of the noise he made. It was not until the door was actually moving inward that Kelk sensed approaching danger. He swung quickly toward the door; then leaped behind a metal filing cabinet. Pulling a gun from his pocket; he leveled it across the top of his improvised fortification.

At that moment, another man leaped into the room. It was Wickroft. Pale-faced, the secretary was pointing a gun of his own; and he was covering the exact spot where Kelk had been. Sudden consternation swept over Wickroft's face as he saw himself staring into a gun muzzle from atop the filing cabinet.

"Drop it!" came Kelk's order, in a tense snarl.

Wickroft's revolver thudded to the floor. The secretary raised his hands and backed stupidly against the door. It swung shut, cutting off the only means of retreat.

Behind his curtain, The Shadow changed the aim of his automatic. He had covered the door to begin with; now that tables had turned, he was pointing for Kelk. But the sallow man did not intend to open fire on Wickroft.

Kelk stepped from behind the filing cabinet. He laughed contemptuously as he still covered Wickroft; but his tone did not indicate malice.

"Who—who are you?" stammered Wickroft.

"A friend," returned Kelk, suavely. "Just here to look about. Just seat yourself, over here where I can watch you, while I proceed."

"But—but —"

"Don't worry. Unless I find something wrong, you will have no cause to fear me. I said that I was a friend."

"A friend!" echoed Wickroft. His eyes glittered suddenly. "You mean — you mean —"

Wickroft paused, stammering. Kelk was in the center of the room, his back toward the curtains. The Shadow could not see the intruder's face, but he did observe the sudden eagerness that came over Wickroft's countenance.

"Chief!" exclaimed the secretary. "I—I didn't think you'd be coming here! Not after—not after I talked to you over the phone. I— I thought you believed me when I swore I was on the level."

"Honest, chief. I told you the truth, both yesterday and today, but I couldn't talk much this morning. I was worried on account of that detective being here. Listen, chief, I haven't pulled a double cross."

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As The Shadow watched, Kelk quietly pocketed his revolver. Stepping toward the far door, while Wickroft watched, trembling, Kelk picked up the secretary's gun and handed it to Wickroft with a smile.

A happy gleam showed on Wickroft's lips. Fumbling, the secretary pocketed his weapon and stammered: "You—you believe me, chief?"

"Certainly," responded Kelk, still smiling. He motioned to a chair. "Sit down. We'll talk it over."

Wickroft nodded as he obeyed. He took the chair that Kelk had indicated, on one side of the big table. Kelk, in turn, seated himself in Treblaw's accustomed chair.

Face to face, these two who had figured in the circumstances surrounding Treblaw's death were ready to confer on a matter that concerned them both, while The Shadow watched from behind pulled curtains.

### CHAPTER VIII. THE NEW OBJECTIVE

SEATED in the big chair, Tully Kelk produced a pack of cigarettes. He offered one to Wickroft; then lighted his own.

Wickroft was nervous; he failed to get a light until his third match. Looking up, the secretary saw Kelk watching him with a sour smile.

From his hiding place behind the curtains, The Shadow observed the faces of both men. He could see how Kelk was studying Wickroft and keeping the pale secretary troubled. Despite Kelk's assurance that he believed Wickroft's statements, there was something in his manner that showed lingering doubt.

Wickroft was anxious to speak. Yet he hesitated, waiting to be questioned. Kelk remained thoughtful for some moments, still continuing his careful scrutiny of the secretary. At last he began proceedings.

"I believed you, Wickroft," said Kelk, slowly, "both yesterday and today. Yet it seemed to me that you were—well, let us say a trifle incoherent. A bit uncertain of yourself."

"I was," admitted Wickroft, nodding. "But I was sort of overanxious, chief. Yesterday, I was worried for fear you wouldn't call me up. On account of what I told you before—that old Treblaw used to stay in the house rainy mornings; that there was a chance of him cutting in on calls."

"I would have taken care of that," returned Kelk, with a smile. "Treblaw's voice would not have been difficult to recognize."

"I knew that," agreed Wickroft. "You could have pretended you had a wrong number; and the way you always talk over the telephone would have fooled the old man. But this was a case of your call getting through; because there was no way I could reach you. Listen, chief; if I only knew how to get you —"

"I prefer my own arrangements," snapped Kelk. "Let us drop that subject, Wickroft. If I prefer to keep my identity concealed from you, that is my own business. Your job is to take orders when you get them."

"I understand that, chief."

"And you're not to worry about when you will hear from me. You admit that yesterday you were jittery because you didn't know whether or not I would call. Today, your trouble was the fact that a detective named

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Cardona came here to question you regarding Stanton Treblaw."

"Yes, chief. But I stalled him. I knew I was safe. I didn't tell him a thing. He was talking to Baxter and the cook when you called up; but I had to cut it short and I couldn't talk too much. The detective might have breezed in here any minute."

"I suspected that, Wickroft. Particularly after I read the evening newspaper. Cardona told the reporters that he had been here. Don't worry"—Kelk raised a hand as Wickroft started to speak—"because he learned nothing. I compliment you on that, Wickroft."

The secretary looked pleased. Kelk, however, still eyed him steadily. Then, leaning across the table, Kelk spoke firmly.

"I CAME here, tonight," he declared, "for two reasons: First, to see what I might find in Treblaw's files. Second, to contact you; to give you a chance to explain yourself."

"To explain myself?" echoed Wickroft.

"Exactly," stated Kelk. "To let you repeat the garbled facts that you have already given me; to see if they jibe correctly and fit in with circumstances."

Wickroft nodded. He puffed at his cigarette and remained thoughtful as he faced Kelk's gaze. Then, steadying, he began his testimony.

"It's easy this way, chief," declared Wickroft. "I was nervous over the phone. It seemed hard to make myself properly understood. Try to give me a break and understand that I'm on the level."

"Granted."

"All right, chief. Yesterday, Treblaw got his last letter from Signet. The one offering the thirty thousand dollars. Treblaw told me he was going in to deliver. He also received a letter from Burson, Limited, saying that they thanked him for his business. He took both letters with him."

"I understand," stated Kelk. "But make yourself quite clear, Wickroft. You saw both of those letters?"

"I read the one from Signet," replied the secretary, "but not the Burson letter. Treblaw put it in his pocket, not in the file. He must have torn it up and thrown it away. That's why you didn't find it in with the Signet letters and the Burson file.

"You seemed upset about it when you called me this morning, chief. The way you talked, it sounded like you were making a point about that odd letter being missing. I thought maybe you didn't believe me when I said that the letter came in from the Burson outfit. But I'd already told you that Treblaw said the letter was unimportant; and I knew it was from the way he stuck it in his pocket."

"You should have made yourself more plain, Wickroft," interposed Kelk, in a mollified tone.

"I did my best," insisted Wickroft. "But I was all upset because you hadn't found the Cellini manuscript along with the rest of Treblaw's papers. Then when you started to talk about a missing Burson letter—like you were tripping me up—I began to be worried."

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"Forget it, Wickroft. I was anxious, also. That manuscript is worth plenty of money to me. I intend to acquire it. I came here in hope that it might still be here."

"But I told you, chief, that I've searched —"

"Sometimes searches fail. After all, if Treblaw didn't have the manuscript with him, he must have left it somewhere. I wanted to check on your reports, Wickroft."

"You won't find anything in those files, chief. What's more, I've had plenty of chance to search the house today, looking through old boxes and what not. Now that Treblaw's dead, that's my natural job as his secretary. The manuscript isn't here."

Kelk pondered. We began to nod slowly as indication that he believed Wickroft's statements. The secretary was encouraged.

"I AGREE with you, chief," said Wickroft, "that Treblaw should have had that manuscript with him. I told you I thought he was going to pick it up in New York. From some lawyer; or a safe—deposit vault; maybe from old Tilton."

"Quite logical," agreed Kelk. "Since he intended to deal with Signet—as the ad in the Classic proved—he should have had the manuscript on hand."

"But he didn't," put in Wickroft. "And if his room was watched as good as you said it was, there wasn't any chance for him to have met Signet."

"Quite true, Wickroft. Treblaw's death was, let us say, arranged shortly after the first edition of the Classic appeared upon the street. Signet could not have seen Treblaw for the simple reason that he could not have known that Treblaw was ready."

"That's the way I figure it, chief. And the only answer is that Treblaw didn't have the manuscript with him. Maybe he was bluffing Signet. Sounding him out for a starter."

"I am inclined to agree with you, Wickroft. We are getting somewhere at last. Our problem now is to guess where the manuscript might be. You have mentioned Tilton. You are sure that Tilton is the best bet?"

"Absolutely, chief! I mentioned Tilton yesterday; I told you about him again this morning. I've been to his place; I know the size of his collection. You remember what I told you about Treblaw leaving some items with Tilton, a long time ago —"

"I remember. The manuscript could be with them."

"Yes. But it would mean blowing Tilton's safe to look for it. You said you could arrange that."

"I have arranged it,"—Kelk was smiling as he spoke—"but I would prefer a more subtle method. It would be better, Wickroft, to induce Tilton to part with the manuscript voluntarily. Assuming, of course, that he has it."

"How could that be done, chief?"

"By a visit to Tilton. So far, Wickroft, you stand clear of suspicion. You are arranging all of Treblaw's affairs. What would be more logical than a visit by yourself, to Tilton's residence. A simple inquiry concerning items that Treblaw may have left with his old friend?"



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Wickroft sat nonplused. He saw the effectiveness of Kelk's scheme; but he was appalled by the part that he would have to play. As a passive actor, Wickroft was capable. Straight bluff, however, frightened him.

"Come, Wickroft," assured Kelk, smoothly, "you have nothing to fear. Suppose we go into New York tonight. You can call at Tilton's home; I shall be there to back you."

"You'll be with me, chief?" questioned Wickroft, eagerly. "Ready to help me put it over?"

"I shall be close at hand," stated Kelk. "We can arrange that on the way in. Come, Wickroft,"—Kelk paused to glance at his watch—"we have just time to catch the next train. A brisk walk to the station."

"All right, chief." Wickroft came to his feet. "I'll get my hat and coat and tell Baxter that I'm going into the city. You can come out the front way with me. Baxter won't know it, he's up on the third floor. Just how,"—Wickroft looked quizzical—"did you get in here, chief?"

"I jimmied the side window," answered Kelk.

"Better lock it up," suggested Wickroft, "while I'm talking to Baxter. Turn out the light and meet me in the hall."

RED curtains moved imperceptibly as The Shadow silently raised the sash beyond and glided into the outside darkness. Gloved hands lowered the sash; The Shadow clung to the blackness beside the house wall. He heard Kelk lock the jimmied window.

The Shadow moved through the night. He reached the street, traveled one block toward and stopped at a secluded place where he had parked his big car. He waited there a few minutes; then came the approaching footsteps of two men on the opposite side of the street. Kelk and Wickroft, heading for the station.

The Shadow waited until they were out of earshot; then he started the motor of the car. Purring softly, the big machine rolled toward the nearest corner.

From a distance came the whistle of a locomotive, a banshee wail that sounded eerie in the darkness of the countryside. The Shadow's laugh came as a low, creepy challenge, whispered from unseen lips.

Motor throbbed as the big car opened up. The Shadow swung into a through route that would lead him to the Skyway; thence into New York. Tully Kelk had arrived ahead of The Shadow in the race to Droverton; but the return trip would produce a different result.

Starting ahead of the train, The Shadow had the edge. He was familiar with the name of Tilton. It was one identified with Treblaw. For Stanton Treblaw and Silas Tilton, fellow collectors of rarities, had been friends.

The aftermath of murder had become a new objective: the residence of Silas Tilton, in Manhattan. The Shadow, like Kelk and Wickroft, had chosen Tilton's as his goal. He would be there and ready before the other two arrived.

## CHAPTER IX. THE STAGE SETS

A TAXI stopped before an antiquated brownstone house. A tall passenger stepped forth, spoke to the driver and then turned toward the old building. The cab pulled further down the street.

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A street lamp revealed the arrival's face. Hawkish, almost mask-like, it was the same countenance that The Shadow had worn on his visit to the Hotel Goliath.

The Shadow had arrived at the home of Silas Tilton. Ascending the steps, he rang the doorbell. A husky servant responded. The Shadow announced himself as Mr. Lamont Cranston. The servant ushered him into a hallway.

On the right was a vacant, darkened parlor, its gloom increased by heavy curtains that hung in the wide doorway. The servant had gone toward the rear of the house, evidently to a private sitting room where Tilton bided his time.

"Mr. Lamont Cranston?" The Shadow heard the question in a quavering voice from beyond the hall. "Tell him to come in to see me. At once, Perkins."

That voice was evidently Tilton's. Perkins reappeared immediately, bowed and conducted the tall visitor to the sitting room. As he crossed the threshold, The Shadow found himself faced by a wizened, stoop-shouldered man.

Beady eyes glimmered through thick spectacles as Silas Tilton thrust out a claw-like hand to his visitor. Waving his guest to a chair, Tilton began to speak in a friendly quaver.

"This is indeed a pleasure," said the old man. "It is a long time since I have seen you, Mr. Cranston. Well do I remember the long discussion that we once held on the subject of the Westcar Papyrus."

"And its translation," smiled The Shadow, "with the reference to King Khufu."

"One of the most interesting of all existing papyri. A most illuminating manuscript, in my opinion. I regard it as one of the prize possessions in the British Museum."

"All types of manuscripts interest you, Mr. Tilton. Have you increased your collection recently?"

"No, Mr. Cranston. But I believe that I may make some additions shortly. Perhaps I may be asked to make an offer for the collection of my unfortunate friend Treblaw."

"Stanton Treblaw? The man who was murdered last night?"

"The same. I suppose you read about his death in the newspapers. Poor Treblaw. He stopped in here to see me yesterday. Unfortunately, I was out."

Tilton paused to remove his spectacles and wipe them; then, in his quaver, he resumed:

"I had some manuscripts that belonged to Treblaw. They were in a box in my safe. He came here to obtain them."

"And was forced to leave them?"

"No. Perkins had the combination; he opened the safe for Treblaw."

"And Treblaw took the manuscripts?"

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"Yes. He remarked to Perkins that they were of little value. But for that chance statement, I would have informed the police concerning them. Doubtless they were stolen by the rogues who murdered Treblaw."

"What were the manuscripts?"

"I do not know. That is why my information would be of no value to the law. I dislike notoriety, Mr. Cranston; and I could see no purpose in mentioning that Treblaw had been here."

PERKINS appeared as Tilton concluded this statement. He came with the announcement that Mr. Wickroft was calling. Tilton did not recognize the name. Perkins added that Wickroft was Treblaw's secretary.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Tilton. "That is true, Treblaw did have a secretary; but I had forgotten the chap's name. Show him in, Perkins." Then, as he saw his present guest rising, Tilton added. "What? You are leaving, Mr. Cranston?"

"I just happened to be riding by," returned The Shadow. "I dropped in to pay my respects; and to express the wish that we might meet again."

"Certainly," quavered Tilton. "You are always welcome, Mr. Cranston. It has been good to see you. Come again."

Wickroft entered. Tilton shook hands with him; then introduced the arrival to Cranston.

The Shadow bowed and departed, leaving the two together. Perkins ushered him to the door. The Shadow turned the knob himself; as he opened the door, he dropped his hand.

Fingers pressed a wedge-shaped object into the latch. The action was unnoticed by Perkins. A smile showed on thin lips as The Shadow went down the steps and heard the door close behind him. He strolled along to the parked cab and entered it in silent fashion.

From a bag on the floor of the cab, The Shadow removed black garments. He slipped a cloak over head and shoulders, added the slouch hat to his head, then whispered:

"Report."

Moe Shrevnitz started. Sitting behind the wheel, he had not noticed The Shadow's arrival. Then, recovering from his surprise, the taxi driver leaned close to the window and spoke in cautious tone.

"One guy went in," he stated. "Then another sneaked in after him. The first fellow must have opened the door for him."

The Shadow understood. While Perkins had gone to announce Wickroft, the pale-faced man had admitted Kelk. The latter must have chosen the empty parlor for a temporary hiding place. There was a thin door between Tilton's parlor and the sitting room; Kelk could be listening there.

"Report received," whispered The Shadow. "Instructions."

"Ready," declared Moe.

"Signal Marsland and Hawkeye when they arrive," ordered The Shadow. "Tell them to inspect about the house. Stand by for emergency."

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"I've got it," acknowledged Moe.

The Shadow glided from the cab. He became a phantom shape as he progressed toward the house that he had so recently left in the guise of Cranston. Flattened against the front door, The Shadow stood invisible. He worked at the knob.

The wedge had almost completely eliminated the efficiency of the latch. It had caught very slightly; and The Shadow's shifting of the knob was sufficient. The tremble of the latch freed it.

The Shadow edged through the door as he opened it. Gloved fingers plucked away the wedge. The Shadow closed the door noiselessly.

THE front hall was gloomy. Silently, The Shadow glided past the doorway of the parlor, confident that Kelk, concerned with conversation from the sitting room, would not note his passage.

He reached the end of the hall. There he picked a short extending alcove from which to listen. The door of the sitting room was ajar. The Shadow could hear Wickroft talking to Tilton.

The secretary had not yet gotten to his point. He was talking about Treblaw's death, bemoaning the fact that he had lost a benevolent employer. Half a dozen minutes passed while this continued. Then Wickroft edged to the subject.

"I have thoroughly classified all of Mr. Treblaw's manuscripts," he declared. "The files are complete. And yet I remember that Mr. Treblaw once spoke of other items that were apart from his collection. I came here to find out if you knew anything about such manuscripts, Mr. Tilton."

"Ah, yes," rejoined Tilton. "Fortunately, Wickroft, you came to the right place. Unfortunately, you came too late."

"You mean, sir –"

"That Treblaw once left some manuscripts with me. Only a few, you understand; they could have been scarcely more than folios. For they were contained in an envelope of only, moderate size."

"What were the manuscripts, Mr. Tilton?"

"I do not know. I placed the envelope in a box in my safe. Treblaw told me that they were not of great value. He left them here so that he could pick them up when he next came to New York. But that was quite a while ago."

"And you have those manuscripts?"

"No. Treblaw came for them yesterday afternoon. Perkins, my servant, gave him the envelope."

"And you are sure they were of little value?"

"So Treblaw said. But he might have minimized their importance, to prevent my worrying about their safety. However, Wickroft, now that you have come here, I think that we should take a look to make sure that Treblaw actually removed the envelope."

"But if Perkins gave it to him –"

## THE TRIPLE TRAIL

"Perkins merely opened the safe and showed the box to Treblaw. Perkins replaced the box in the safe."

"And it was empty –"

"Empty, but locked. Perkins did not open it; he simply brought the key down here to my desk. Ah, here it is."

Old Tilton had risen while speaking. Reaching in a high, old-fashioned desk, he produced a small brass key. Motioning to Wickroft, Tilton started from the room. Wickroft followed.

WHEN Tilton opened the door into the hall, it came in front of The Shadow's alcove. Tilton left the door open. Peering past the edge of the barrier, The Shadow saw Tilton lead the way up the front stairs. The Shadow waited.

Listening, he heard footsteps that came directly overhead. This was proof that Tilton kept his safe in a room almost above the sitting room. The Shadow made no move. He was expecting signs of Kelk. They came.

Floor boards creaked. Kelk came cautiously from the front parlor, his sallow face appearing saturnine in the gloom of the hall. Stealthily, the mustached man moved up the stairs. Then his steps ceased. The Shadow knew why.

On the second floor, as on the first, Kelk had ducked into some hiding place. He intended to wait at close quarters while Tilton and Wickroft inspected the old man's safe. The stage was set.

The door of the sitting room moved. The Shadow glided from the alcove. With amazing stealth, he reached the stairway and began an upward course.

Scenting the possibility of some dire emergency, The Shadow had taken up the trail of the three who had gone ahead of him.

## CHAPTER X. NEW CRIME BREAKS

WHILE The Shadow had lingered in anticipation of Kelk's advance, Tilton and Wickroft had reached their goal on the second floor. They were in a large room that reminded Wickroft of Stanton Treblaw's study.

The walls were lined with huge box-like files—the repositories for manuscripts in Tilton's large collection. The rest of the furniture consisted of old-fashioned chairs and tables, except for a large, ancient safe in the corner of the room.

Tilton's gnarled fingers had turned the dial. The front of the safe was open.

Wickroft, trying to appear indifferent, was looking about. He noted a second door in this room; one that was in the rear wall. He and Tilton had come in through a side entrance from the hall.

"Here is the box," quavered Tilton, drawing a small metal case from the safe. "I fear that it is empty."

He shook the box as he spoke:

"Yet the envelope may still be within," added the old man. "Perhaps Treblaw did not take it. Perchance it is wedged inside this box."

## THE TRIPLE TRAIL

Applying the key, Tilton unlocked the box. He placed the object on the table and raised the lid. The box was empty; only painted metal showed within. Tilton started to turn to Wickroft; then, suddenly, he gasped and pointed straight ahead.

The old man was facing the rear door of the room. That portal had opened. Framed within it was a big, rough-faced fellow whose evil visage wore a murderous expression. The man looked like a killer; in fact, he was one.

Duster had come to Silas Tilton's. Behind him were his henchmen—Crawler and the same two gorillas who had aided in the murder of Stanton Treblaw.

"Stick 'em up," growled Duster.

Tilton and Wickroft obeyed. The old man backed away from the box; Wickroft, trembling, shrank toward a corner. Though he recognized who these invaders must be, he realized that he must play a part of victim, along with Tilton.

"Get the box, Crawler," ordered Duster. "You mugs"—this to the gorillas—"move in and get busy with that safe."

Men advanced, guns in hands, while Duster covered. Crawler, a leer on his dopey face, set one hand upon the box, then peered into the interior. Seeing it empty, he started to turn toward Duster. The swing brought his eyes in the direction of the door to the hall. Crawler stopped short; he uttered a fierce gasp:

"The Shadow!"

THE master of vengeance had arrived. Peering through the crevice of the door, The Shadow had spied the situation. He had swung the door inward without sound. He stood upon the threshold, ready with looming automatics.

"Get him!" snarled Duster.

Crawler leaped forward, aiming; gorillas spun about with ready guns. Pointing to kill; these fighters were out to get The Shadow, seeking no mercy for themselves if they failed in their maddened quest. They deserved no quarter; they received none.

Automatics blasted spurts of flame. Stabbing bullets came from The Shadow's guns while mobster fingers still sought to tug revolver triggers.

Crawler, with a wild yelp, went leaping high into the air; then flattened face foremost to the floor.

One gorilla staggered; his revolver barked a wide shot as he fell. The other made a dive for the door where Duster stood, firing wildly as he fled. Alone of all the mob, Duster managed to dispatch shots at The Shadow.

The big leader was better as a slugger than a marksman. His revolver came down and up with each shot; always behind in its aim. For The Shadow, as he blasted bullets at men of crime, was swinging inward from the door, fading from Duster's aim.

A bullet staggered the last gorilla. The Shadow's left-hand gun swung straight for Duster. The automatic barked; but the bullet never reached its mark. The gorilla, coming high in agony, sprawled squarely upon Duster just as The Shadow fired. It was the underling who received The Shadow's well-intended slug.

## THE TRIPLE TRAIL

The gorilla sagged. Duster, wide-mouthed, stood as a dumfounded target for The Shadow's next shot. Again, luck saved the big murderer. As a weird laugh came from The Shadow, Wickroft sprang into sudden action.

With surprising boldness, the treacherous secretary leaped straight for The Shadow. He came plunging squarely upon the black-clad fighter. His pummeling arms beat down The Shadow's wrists.

Grappling with his cloaked foe, Wickroft fought like a fiend. He and The Shadow locked in a sudden struggle. Duster, at the door, emitted a loud triumphant snarl as he aimed for The Shadow's blackened shape.

Here was his chance to kill, with steady aim. Duster leveled his gun; but he fired an instant too late. The Shadow, knowing the menace, had whirled struggling with Wickroft. The traitor's body came as a shield between The Shadow and Duster.

Bullets found Wickroft's body. Sagging, Wickroft would have fallen to the floor but for the grip that The Shadow still retained. An automatic muzzle shoved up beneath Wickroft's limp arm. Flame tongued toward Duster; a bullet sizzled past the big crook's head.

Wildly, Duster dived for the doorway. Again The Shadow fired; his second bullet skimmed Duster's shoulder. The big man fled headlong. Dropping Wickroft's body, The Shadow sprang forward in pursuit.

A shot came from the hallway door. The Shadow wheeled as the bullet whined close by his ear. Tully Kelk had entered. He had fired at The Shadow, alone save for Tilton, who was cowering by Wickroft's body.

The Shadow aimed with swiftness and precision. But his automatic was slow in its reply. Kelk had counted upon one shot alone; he was diving for cover the moment after he had delivered it. The Shadow's bullet zipped inches wide as Kelk's long figure sprang beyond the door to the hall.

SHOTS from the rear of the house; The Shadow paused in his pursuit of Duster; he headed out along the path that Kelk had taken. He saw the front door closing. He continued down the stairs.

Kelk was gone when The Shadow reached the street. A passage between two houses across the way was the path that he had chosen. The Shadow did not pursue.

Instead, he stood in darkness. He heard new shots in back of the house. A pause; then figures came scudding through. The Shadow hissed a sharp command. Two men stopped beside him. Cliff Marsland and Hawkeye—agents whom The Shadow had summoned.

"Report," whispered The Shadow from darkness.

"It was Duster Shomak," returned Cliff, half out of breath. "Hawkeye recognized him. We opened fire; but he managed a get-away. A patrol car's coming."

"Go with Shrevnitz," hissed The Shadow.

Cliff and Hawkeye hurried to the taxi. The cab pulled away. While he watched it, The Shadow heard sirens from the rear street; then shrill whistles. The police were on the job.

Swiftly, The Shadow crossed the street and merged with the blackness of the opposite passage.

Two minutes later, a patrol car rolled up to the front of Tilton's house. No signs of trouble there. Two policemen leaped out; one spied the open front door of the house. The two entered.

## THE TRIPLE TRAIL

Shouts from the back. Other officers were coming in from the rear. They joined their comrades; the group headed upstairs as they heard a quavering call. They arrived in Tilton's study. Perkins had joined his master. The servant had been on the third floor; he had come down after the gunfire. The two were supporting the dying form of Wickroft. Crawler and two gorillas had died in the fray; but Wickroft, though mortally wounded, was still alive.

"The chief!" gasped Wickroft. "He—he double-crossed me. I—I was here—here—for a blind but he—he didn't tell me."

"Who's the chief?" demanded a policeman.

"I—I don't know," returned Wickroft. "Tall—tall, with a mustache. Dark face. Smooth—smooth when he talks. He wanted—the manuscript. The Cellini —"

The gasp was final. Wickroft's body slumped. The traitor rolled dead as Perkins loosed his hold upon the sinking shoulders.

New crime had struck tonight. Men of murder had come here to kill and rob. The Shadow had met them; beating down odds, he had prevented their work of evil.

Wickroft had died with Crawler and two gorillas. Yet The Shadow had disposed of tools alone; he had not managed to stop Duster Shomak, the murderous mob leader who had headed the violent raid.

Nor had he disposed of Tully Kelk. The mustached man had made a rapid flight. By swiftness, Kelk had evaded the law; the only clue to his identity lay in the dying words from Wickroft's lips!

## CHAPTER XI. CRIME DISCUSSED

AT ten o'clock the next morning, a limousine stopped in front of Silas Tilton's brownstone home. Other cars were parked there already; the chauffeur of the limousine was forced to draw up behind them. That done, he alighted and opened the rear door of the limousine. He spoke to a languid passenger who was half dozing in the back seat.

"This is our destination, Mr. Cranston," stated the chauffeur.

The passenger sat up. A slight smile appeared upon his thin lips. He stepped leisurely from the cab, looked about and pointed down the street.

"Park over there, Stanley," he told the chauffeur, "and wait for me. I do not believe that I shall be here long."

With almost idling gait, The Shadow ascended the steps and rang the same doorbell that he had approached the night before. But his manner today was different. He was carrying his pretended guise to the limit—ready to play the full part of Lamont Cranston, millionaire who took life comfortably and without hurry.

The Shadow's ring was answered promptly. Not by Perkins, but by a bulky chap who was obviously a plainclothes man. He growled a challenge; The Shadow responded by quietly naming himself as Lamont Cranston. The dick nudged his thumb inward.

"Go on upstairs," he remarked. "The commissioner said to send you up."



## THE TRIPLE TRAIL

Strolling up to the second floor, The Shadow found a group of four persons assembled in Tilton's filing room. Tilton himself was there; also Perkins, the butler. Detective Joe Cardona was also present. The last man of the group was a dynamic, military-looking man who wore a sharply pointed mustache.

This was Police Commissioner Ralph Weston. The important official swung about as The Shadow entered. Recognizing the hawk-like face, he advanced with extended hand. For Ralph Weston acknowledged Lamont Cranston as a friend.

"HELLO, Cranston," greeted the commissioner. "I'm glad you finally arrived here. We've been discussing last night's business."

"Which I was fortunate enough to avoid," returned The Shadow, in an easy dry tone that suited the character of Cranston. "I saw the account of the battle in the morning newspaper. Unfortunate, Mr. Tilton,"—he turned to the old collector—"that your guest was slain in the struggle. What was the chap's name? Wickford?"

"Wickroft," corrected Weston. "But there was nothing unfortunate about that, Cranston. The fellow was a crook."

"Indeed! That is surprising news. I saw nothing to that effect in the morning papers."

"We managed to keep it from the press, until after we looked into the case. We couldn't suppress the fact, though, that Wickroft was Stanton Treblaw's Secretary. And the newspapers have scented a link between the two cases."

"Most interesting, commissioner."

A pause. Weston turned to Cardona. He asked what questions the detective had. Cardona turned to The Shadow.

"I had a hunch, Mr. Cranston," he said, "that you might have spotted something wrong hereabouts. Mr. Tilton tells us that you left just after Wickroft arrived. Did you notice anyone lurking about outside?"

"No one," replied The Shadow.

"Did this man Wickroft look at all phony to you?" quizzed the detective.

"I saw him for only a few minutes," replied The Shadow.

"Then," added Joe, "there's nothing you observed that might help us?"

The Shadow did not answer the question. He looked about the room for a moment; then responded:

"Perhaps I might recall something if you would first tell me exactly what occurred after my departure. It would enable me to visualize the circumstances."

"An excellent thought," put in Weston. "Well, Cranston, we are dependent entirely upon one witness—Mr. Tilton. It appears that he brought Wickroft to this room, to examine a box that had once contained manuscripts belonging to Stanton Treblaw.

"While they were here, four men came in by the rear door. They covered Tilton and Wickroft. Then shots broke out from the side door. Those shots were aimed at the crooks."

## THE TRIPLE TRAIL

"By whom?" inquired The Shadow, casually.

"By an unknown rescuer," stated Weston. "By a personage whom Tilton described as a being in black. As you perhaps know, Cranston, the police now recognize the existence of a cloaked fighter who styles himself The Shadow. From Tilton's description, it must have been The Shadow who made the rescue."

"Most interesting!" exclaimed The Shadow. "But it was unfortunate that this rescuer should have allowed Wickroft to be slain."

"I told you that Wickroft was a crook," retorted Weston. "He proved that fact by trying to overpower The Shadow. But he lost out in the struggle."

"And how did the battle end?"

"One of the ruffians escaped." It was Tilton, now, speaking for himself. "Then a mustached man bobbed in at the door. He fired, at the rescuer—this person the commissioner calls The Shadow—and fled after delivering one wild shot."

"And The Shadow?" inquired The Shadow.

"He pursued the mustached intruder," declared Tilton.

Another pause. Then Weston summarized.

"Of the three dead crooks," he declared, "we identified one as a man called Crawler Clane. We have an idea that the thug who escaped was Duster Shomak, an associate of Crawler's. But as to the identity of the mustached man—there we have no clue. We simply suspect him as being the real leader of the raid."

A quizzical expression appeared upon the countenance of Lamont Cranston. The commissioner explained.

"Wickroft made an ante-mortem statement," he said. "He spoke of a chief whose name he did not know. He gave a brief description that fitted with Mr. Tilton's sketch of the mustached man who fired the last shot at The Shadow."

"Any opinions, Mr. Cranston?" put in Cardona, as Weston concluded.

"Nothing that gives me any new light on my observations," answered The Shadow. "You say that you have gained no clue to the name of the man who appeared at the door?"

"None at all," stated Weston. "But we have an idea what the fellow was after."

"Treblaw's manuscript?"

"Yes, Wickroft mentioned the name 'Cellini' just before he died. Mr. Tilton thinks that he referred to the manuscript that Treblaw left. Some authentic work of Benvenuto Cellini's, here in this safe."

"Left it here?"

"Until two days ago. Then he came and took it away while Mr. Tilton was not here."

"Then it was stolen from Treblaw's room in the Hotel Goliath?"

## THE TRIPLE TRAIL

"Hardly, because if the crooks found it there, they would not have come for it here."

Another pause; then Cardona asserted himself.

"Here's what it looks like," declared the ace detective for the benefit of all listeners. "This manuscript you've been talking about must have been worth something. Am I right?"

"A fair sum," interposed Tilton. "There are a number of Cellini manuscripts in existence. It all depends on which one Treblaw may have owned."

"Well, it was worth something, anyway," decided Cardona. "And crooks murdered Treblaw but didn't get it. So they came here, thinking he had left it in your safe, Mr. Tilton. They'd have murdered you, if it hadn't been for The Shadow."

Tilton nodded soberly.

"And what we've got to find out"—Joe rammèd a fist against the top of the filing cabinet—"is who that one guy was. The fellow with the mustache. I'd give plenty to know that fellow's name."

"Perhaps," began The Shadow, "you might —"

He paused. A telephone had begun to ring. Cardona answered it; then handed the telephone to The Shadow.

"For you, Mr. Cranston," informed the detective; "Cobalt Club Calling."

"I told them they could reach me here," acknowledged The Shadow; then, taking the telephone, he stated: "Mr. Cranston speaking."

"Burbank," came a quiet voice.

"PROCEED," ordered The Shadow.

"Report from Vincent." Burbank's tones, almost silky, could not be heard away from the receiver. "Kelk has returned to his apartment. Admitted by the servant who remained there. Vincent is on duty."

"Very well," said The Shadow. "I shall call him when I come to the club. Thank you."

Hanging up the receiver, The Shadow assumed the slight smile that befitted Lamont Cranston.

"A friend of mine has just returned to town," he remarked. "I shall have to see him shortly. Well, commissioner, I'm sorry that I could be of no appreciable service."

Behind his nonchalant mask, The Shadow had been thinking keenly. Kelk had disappeared after last night's episode. The Shadow had been on the point of leading to a discussion that might have produced a police search for the missing man.

But Harry's report that Kelk was back at his apartment indicated that the mustached man intended to remain in New York. Under those circumstances, The Shadow preferred to keep his own watch on Kelk, without interference from the police.

## THE TRIPLE TRAIL

The Shadow was about to take his leave. He was already shaking hands with Weston when a plain-clothes man suddenly appeared at the door of the filing room. The Shadow turned with the others.

"What is it?" questioned Cardona of the detective.

"Fellow out here to see you," replied the dick. "Looks like an Englishman. Says he came up from headquarters when he couldn't find you there."

Cardona looked at Weston, who nodded. Joe sent the plain-clothes man to bring in the visitor. The Shadow, a look of interest on his face, decided to remain.

For The Shadow, keen in his study of an unusual trail of crime, had sensed that some new element was due to enter into the baffling game.

### CHAPTER XII. THE MAN FROM LONDON

THE man who entered Silas Tilton's filing room did look like a Britisher. He was brisk, well-dressed and of affable air. Keen-faced, but serious of expression, he bowed in greeting as he laid a walking stick aside and doffed a pair of gray kid gloves.

"Police Commissioner Weston?" he inquired. "And Detective Cardona?"

Both men acknowledged the greeting. The newcomer smiled in emphatic fashion and drew a wallet from his pocket. He produced a passport and other cards, which he gave to Weston.

"I am Dale Jurling," he announced, "formerly an investigator for Scotland Yard. Now engaged in private work; at present representing Burson, Limited, British investigators. These are my credentials."

Weston nodded. He handed the cards to Cardona, who examined them and returned them to Jurling. The visitor spoke again; his voice carried a definite London accent.

"I landed this morning from the Doranic," he stated. "Reading one of the dailies, I noticed the news concerning robbery attempted here. I learned, too, that Stanton Treblaw had been murdered.

"Sorry news, that. Jove! I wish I had chanced to arrive before the poor old chap made the mistake he did. I thought there would be trouble behind this bally Signet business."

"This Signet business?" questioned Weston.

"Yes," returned Jurling. "Those letters that Treblaw received, I suppose you have them? The originals, signed by a blighter calling himself 'Signet'?"

"This is news to us, Mr. Jurling," put in Cardona. "We've been looking for clues to Treblaw's death. But we've struck none."

"My word! You know nothing of the Signet correspondence?"

"Not a thing."

"I have copies down at my hotel. I should have brought them with me. Carbon sheets, of course, that Treblaw

forwarded to us. Also copies of our correspondence with the old fellow. With Treblaw; you understand."

"Tell us about these letters," queried Weston. "Who is Signet? And what has Burson, Limited, to do with Stanton Treblaw?"

"Suppose I sketch it for you," decided Jurling, poising himself upon a table. "The whole affair is really a simple one. It appears that Stanton Treblaw owned a manuscript that was the authentic work of Benvenuto Cellini, the celebrated Italian goldsmith."

"Listen to this, Cranston," said Weston, turning to The Shadow. "The break has come. Continue, Mr. Jurling."

"THE manuscript," stated Jurling, "referred to certain works of Cellini. For instance, the twelve silver statues that he was supposed to have made for the King of France. In his autobiography, Cellini mentioned that he completed but one of these. In the manuscript held by Treblaw, he states that he finished the other eleven."

"You mean," questioned Weston, "that Treblaw's manuscript was virtually an unpublished appendix to Cellini's autobiography?"

"Precisely," declared Jurling. "It was an authentic manuscript and it contained descriptions of other items that the goldsmith had completed."

"And the manuscript was of great value?"

"Of some value," returned Jurling, "as a manuscript alone. But you may picture for yourself how much that manuscript might have been worth to someone who chanced to discover the objects mentioned in it."

"Like the silver statues?" queried Weston.

"Exactly," replied Jurling. "Objects, which if pronounced genuine, would be worth a quarter million in English pounds—the equivalent of more than a million dollars in American money!"

There was emphasis in Jurling's pause. The smile on the man's face indicated that he was coming to a more important revelation. All listened intently. Weston and Cardona showed eagerness; Tilton stood amazed. The Shadow, holding his pose as Cranston, appeared curious.

"Someone," resumed Jurling, "uncovered those remarkable treasures of Cellini's. This person—we believe him to be an American of considerable means—wrote letters to Treblaw, offering to purchase the Cellini manuscript.

"Treblaw saw what lay behind the offer. He communicated with Burson, Limited, asking us to investigate the matter. We learned that certain art treasures—of doubtful origin—had been sold for small sums in certain European cities. We could not learn the name of the buyer; but we believed him to be Signet."

"Signet?" queried Weston. "Just who is Signet?"

"The chap that I have mentioned," returned Jurling. "The unknown purchaser. He signed his letters to Treblaw with a daub of sealing wax, impressed with a crown signet."

"And how much did he offer for the Cellini manuscript?"

## THE TRIPLE TRAIL

"Fifteen thousand dollars, according to the copy of the last letter that Treblaw sent us. Perhaps he offered more later. But the point was this: the letters told Treblaw to come to the Hotel Goliath and to await Signet there. To place an advertisement in the New York Classic, that Signet would know that he was ready."

"Call the Classic, Cardona," ordered Weston. "Get that reporter Burke on the telephone. Tell him I want to talk to him."

Cardona went to the telephone.

"MY assumption," went on Jurling, "is that Treblaw received a new and better offer from this chap Signet. I believe that Treblaw intended to deliver the manuscript."

"And was murdered instead," inserted Weston, grimly. "Tell me, Jurling, do you think this fellow Signet could have been capable of the killing?"

"No," admitted Jurling, "I do not. Yet I may be wrong, commissioner. In my opinion, if Signet had intended murder, he would have made a grand gesture to begin with, instead of trying to purchase the manuscript for the paltry five thousand dollars that he offered in his first letter."

"How does that strike you, Cranston?" asked Weston.

"Quite logical," agreed The Shadow. "Particularly in light of the raid here at Tilton's."

"What has that to do with it?"

"It shows the entrance of mob violence. Crooks in the game, rather than a man who is a bona fide purchaser of art treasures."

"Jolly well put," chimed in Jurling. "This chap Signet would have stolen the art treasures, had he been a scoundrel. I believe some rogues must have caught wind of the Signet correspondence."

"Wickroft!" exclaimed Weston.

"Wickroft?" questioned Jurling. "Treblaw's secretary? The man slain here last night?"

"Wickroft was in with the crooks," explained the commissioner. "He proved that by trying to aid them in the brawl that took place here. Wickroft, dying, said something about his chief. But he was unable to give us the man's name —"

Joe Cardona, meanwhile, had been growling at the telephone, at the same time trying to listen to what was being said. At last the detective had put the call through. He interrupted Weston.

"Burke's on the wire," said Joe. Weston took the telephone.

"Burke," he declared, impressively, "this is Police Commissioner Weston. What I am about to tell you is a confidential matter. Do you understand?"

An affirmative reply must have come from the other end, for Weston proceeded.

"We are looking for an advertisement in a recent edition of the Classic..." Weston paused. "Yes... Probably in the personals... Addressed to Signet... That's right; if you find it, bring it to me at once... No, not to my office."

## THE TRIPLE TRAIL

To the home of Silas Tilton."

Completing the call, Weston swung to Jurling.

"I WANT to see those letters," declared the commissioner. "The copies that you brought from London. We know who one of the crooks was, among these slain here last night. He was called Crawler Clane and we believe his pal, Duster Shomak, was the leader of the raiding mob.

"But we're out to get the big shot, whoever he is. And if we can trace this man who calls himself Signet, we may get a new slant on the case. But how are we going to communicate with him?"

Jurling stroked his chin.

"I don't see how Signet could have that manuscript," he stated. "I was under the impression that it might be here, judging from the reports that I read in today's journals."

"It was here," put in Tilton, "but Treblaw took it, the afternoon before he was killed."

"Perhaps Signet has it then," suggested Jurling. "Suppose we put another advertisement in the Classic—assuming, of course, that one has already appeared. Signet might snap the bait."

"If he does not have the manuscript," injected Weston.

"Precisely," agreed Jurling. "And that would inform us of an important fact."

"As well as giving us contact with Signet."

"Contact." Jurling smiled. "An excellent term, commissioner. I hope that you will agree that contact is best."

"Instead of actual arrest?"

"Yes. After all, if we could approach the chap peaceably, we might learn most. He is no bounder. His correspondence shows him to be a gentleman."

"An excellent suggestion, Jurling. Suppose you obtain those letters from your hotel. Take Detective Cardona with you and return promptly, in case Burke arrives here."

"Burke is the journalist?"

"Yes, but one who will wait for his story. Then we will arrange plans as we have already discussed them. The facts regarding Signet will be kept from the newspapers. We will try to contact Signet."

"And if we succeed?"

"The work will rest with you and Cardona. I prefer strategy to blundering."

"Well termed, commissioner." Jurling turned to Cardona, "Are you ready, old top? Shall we go?"

"Sure," agreed Cardona. "At what hotel are you staying?"

"The Tolberc."

## THE TRIPLE TRAIL

"We'll make the round trip in half an hour," declared Joe, to Weston.

The two men departed. Lamont Cranston arose from the chair that he had taken. Again, he shook hands with Ralph Weston.

"You are leaving, Cranston?" demanded the commissioner. "Just as the trail is getting warm?"

"I have my appointment," reminded The Shadow. "Perhaps I shall call you later, commissioner."

STROLLING from the house in leisurely fashion, The Shadow walked to his limousine and entered it. In the easy tone of Cranston, he ordered Stanley to drive him to the Cobalt Club.

The limousine rolled away. Its lone passenger sat staring idly from the window. But The Shadow's mask-like countenance wore a thin, fixed smile. Weston was right; the trail was getting warm, thanks to the chance appearance of Dale Jurling, British investigator. But The Shadow was thinking far ahead. He was seeing along the trail, with its odd bypaths. He was fitting facts that he had noted; recalling observations that he had made. The Shadow was formulating plans that were his own.

### CHAPTER XIII. THE SHADOW'S TRIANGLE

BLUE light glowed in The Shadow's sanctum. Beneath the glare, hands were at work. Agents had reported at the end of the day. The Shadow was reviewing their findings.

Clyde Burke had gone to Tilton's. The reporter had brought along a copy of the Classic that carried Treblaw's ad. Receiving Commissioner Weston's confidence, Clyde had been allowed to read the carbon-copy letters that Dale Jurling had brought from his hotel.

A conference had followed. Examination of the Signet correspondence showed that Treblaw was to expect a reply ad. None had been inserted in later copies of the Classic. The inference was that Signet had learned of Treblaw's death; therefore he had not replied.

Weston had decided to put another ad in the Classic. A copy of it, forwarded by Clyde Burke, was lying on The Shadow's table. It read:

SIGNET: Terms agreeable. Am waiting for reply. T.

This T did not mean Treblaw. It referred to Tilton. Dale Jurling had suggested that if Signet had read of Treblaw's death, he would also have learned of the affray at Tilton's. He would infer that Tilton actually possessed the Cellini manuscripts. This suggestion of Jurling's had led to the phrasing of the ad.

A report from Harry Vincent: Tully Kelk was still in his apartment at the Doswind. Harry had seen Kelk's servant. The fellow was a melancholy-looking sort. He had gone out shortly after nine o'clock this evening, to return with an early copy of the Classic. Thus Kelk had probably seen the new advertisement to Signet.

Cliff Marsland's report from the underworld: No trace of Duster Shomak. The mobleader was probably hiding out somewhere, waiting for new orders from his chief. Thus Duster remained as a doubtful but dangerous quantity in whatever might lie ahead.

The Shadow pushed reports aside. A sheet of white paper came into view. On it, The Shadow traced an indelible triangle; one that he surveyed steadily. Then, in the center of the diagram, he inscribed the name of Stanton Treblaw.



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Crime had involved Treblaw. The old man had died; his manuscript was missing. A double hunt was on, Police were searching for a murderer; they were also looking for the vanished manuscript. Two persons were already involved in the chain of circumstance. The Shadow wrote one name at the left point of the triangle: "Tully Kelk."

Briefly, The Shadow began notations of the part that Kelk had played. Kelk had bobbed suddenly into the picture on the night of Treblaw's murder, arriving in the Hotel Goliath shortly after crime had been accomplished.

There he had undoubtedly searched for the Cellini manuscript. He had not found it. His next step had been a visit to Treblaw's home, where he had conducted a secret search prior to Wickroft's entrance.

Possibly Kelk had not wanted Wickroft to know that he had come there. It was likely that Kelk mistrusted Wickroft, despite the loyalty that the secretary had sworn. However, Kelk, finding his presence discovered, had proceeded with a smooth game. He had indicated that he was glad to come face to face with Wickroft; and he had made the man believe it.

Tilton's was the next logical step. Kelk had shown good method in inducing Wickroft to go there. He had found out—by using Wickroft as his proxy—that Tilton did not possess the manuscript. From that moment, Wickroft had been of no further use to Kelk.

Then the raid had struck—unexpectedly and with viciousness. The entrance of The Shadow had saved old Tilton; but in the battle, Wickroft had died. A most desirable result, from the standpoint of Wickroft's chief. For Wickroft, squealer and weakling, was out of the way and could do no further harm.

Kelk was still waiting in New York. His position was apparently secure. The law had found no trail to him. Kelk thought that he had eluded The Shadow. It was obvious that Kelk did not have the manuscript; and it was also plain that he planned to get it. Kelk would be heard from again.

THE SHADOW wrote another name at the right point of the triangle: "Dale Jurling." Here was a man whose openness stood as direct contrast to Kelk's stealth. Jurling had come directly to Commissioner Weston. He had furnished facts regarding the death of Stanton Treblaw.

Working with the law, Jurling had mapped out a definite course. He, too, was seeking some trace of the Cellini manuscript; and he had given proof of its immense value. Joe Cardona had joined Jurling in the quest. Who, then, had the missing manuscript? Someone, certainly, whose exact identity was as yet unknown. To indicate that person, The Shadow placed an X at the top of the triangle. Then, on another portion of the paper, he inscribed a second three-sided figure.

He used no names on these points. Instead, he reduced three persons to factors. At one corner of the triangle he marked the word: "Criminal." At a second corner; he wrote: "Investigator." At a third point, he placed the title: "Signet."

There stood the facts. A curious triangle that showed the situation plainly. The chain was best studied in reverse. The Shadow began with Signet.

Who was Signet? Obviously, a person who fitted the description Dale Jurling had given. A man of means who had found art treasures abroad. Items, like the eleven silver statues, that he thought were genuine works of Benvenuto Cellini.

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He had acquired these and other art objects, probably at reasonable prices. Then he had wanted proof of their authenticity. He had learned somehow that Stanton Treblaw owned an unpublished Cellini manuscript. Perhaps he had gleaned that fact from some European collector. He had offered Treblaw a high price for the folio. His final offer had been accepted.

It seemed doubtful that Signet could have acquired the manuscript from Treblaw. Yet, unless Signet held the manuscript, who did? That was a puzzling point; nevertheless, it brought a soft laugh from The Shadow. The master had gained an important inkling.

Finished with Signet, The Shadow took up the matter of the investigator. Stanton Treblaw had paid Burson, Limited, to look into the matter of recently purchased art treasures. The list that Burson had sent him corresponded, presumably, with items mentioned in the Cellini manuscript.

Dale Jurling had come to see Commissioner Weston; he had produced carbon copies of the letters between Treblaw and Burson. The final letter of the lot—corresponding to the one that Treblaw had read and later disposed of—was merely a brief "thank-you" note from Burson, Limited, to Treblaw. This fact was mentioned in Clyde Burke's report.

That letter should have closed the Treblaw matter, so far as Burson, Limited, was concerned. Yet Dale Jurling had come to New York and was here in reference to the Signet matter. His ship, the Doranic, had left Liverpool prior to the murder of Stanton Treblaw.

In fact, Burson, Limited, had never received a copy of the last Signet letter, with its offer of thirty thousand dollars. The answer, then, as The Shadow saw it, was that the British investigating firm had suddenly decided that the matter was not closed.

It was not surprising that they had sent an investigator to New York. This was an unusual case, this Signet business. But it was odd that they should have sent their man without notifying Treblaw that he was coming. Briefly, the last carbon letter held by Jurling did not jibe with the circumstances.

Did Jurling suspect more than he had stated? It was probable. Jurling had dealt frankly with the police; but he had also pressed the point that Signet should be contacted, not arrested. Weston had agreed; Jurling was satisfied.

But to The Shadow, the existing circumstances offered new thoughts as he studied the investigation point of the new triangle. He believed that Jurling was holding back certain facts and would not announce them until Signet had been discovered. Again, The Shadow laughed.

LAST of all, The Shadow studied the criminal point of the triangle. The method of crime was obvious. Wickroft, planted at Treblaw's, had chanced to learn of the Cellini manuscript that Signet wanted. He had informed his chief; Treblaw's murder had been accomplished. Yet killers had not found the manuscript.

Until that time, the crime master had made no open move. But the failure to gain the manuscript had warranted new action. Close after Treblaw's death, Tully Kelk had come boldly into the picture.

Kelk was certainly determined to get that manuscript. His daring proved it. Coming suddenly from cover, the sallow-faced man had pursued a speedy but dangerous course. He had entered Treblaw's room shortly after the old collector had been murdered. He had gone directly to Treblaw's house, to check on Wickroft. He had marched the secretary in to Tilton's. He had remained there while mobsters raided; and had not fled until he had seen Wickroft dying on the floor.

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This was a game that called for a superplotter. Kelk had exhibited those qualifications. At the same time, he had left too much to chance. His tendency to accept doubtful hazards was a paradoxical point.

To The Shadow, Kelk's actions revealed a definite phase of the sallow man's game. He could discern that Kelk was holding a trump card that he had not yet played. Kelk would be ready to use it in a pinch. Apparently, the man was a lone worker by inclination.

This insight into the ways of Tully Kelk gave The Shadow all he needed for the final point of the triangle. A white hand plucked up the paper from the table. The sheet crinkled as The Shadow crushed it. A laugh came from the darkness.

A pause. A new sheet came into view. Upon it, The Shadow wrote a name in ink. It was the baffling title: "Signet." Beneath the name, The Shadow inscribed the outline of a crown.

Name and token faded. Again, The Shadow laughed. He had found two members of the important triangle: Kelk and Jurling. He wanted to discover the third. He knew that his quarry was somewhere in New York.

There was significance in The Shadow's laugh as he thought of the third name. A paper rustled to the table. It was the guest list of the Hotel Goliath, which Clyde Burke had eventually forwarded for The Shadow's records.

The Shadow began to cross out names. He eliminated many as he went down toward the bottom of the list. He stopped almost at the end of the column; There he read the name: "Montague Verne."

This guest had registered from London, England; His room number was 1472. He had come to the Hotel Goliath the very day that Treblaw had registered there. Was there significance in the fact? The Shadow believed so.

For a final laugh whispered as an invisible hand clicked off the bluish light. Strange mockery filled the blackened room. Quivering echoes faded with the departing swish of The Shadow's cloak.

A new day was due. Before it was ended, The Shadow would find the one man whom he wanted to complete the triangle that surrounded the affairs of dead Stanton Treblaw.

## CHAPTER XIV. THE MEETING

LATE the next afternoon, a dapper man strolled into the lobby of the Hotel Goliath. He stopped at the desk, inquired for the key to Suite 1472 and asked if any mail or telephone calls had been received for Mr. Verne. The clerk's reply was negative.

Montague Verne strolled aboard an elevator. Standing there, he appeared to be a middle-aged idler who was bored with life. Verne was difficult to place. He might have been an Englishman; or he might have been an American who had traveled extensively abroad.

His demeanor, however, showed him a man of the world. His face, rugged in outline, was drooping in its features. His profile, which showed as he turned toward the side of the elevator, possessed a definite bluntness.

The elevator traveled up to the fourteenth floor. Verne paused to obtain a drink of ice water after he had left the elevator. The faucet was close beside the elevators; as he drank, Verne noted a mail chute also. He pulled

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some picture post cards from his pocket and dropped them down the chute.

Verne strolled to 1472. He unlocked the door and stepped into the living room of a small suite. He closed the door behind him; then turned around and stopped in surprise.

He was facing a tall intruder who was standing in a corner of the room.

STARTLEMENT registered itself but momentarily on Verne's face. Regaining his composure, Verne studied the personage before him. He saw a countenance that was impressive. The tall stranger had a hawk-like visage that maintained the solemn expression of a mask.

Verne calmly placed his hat upon a table. He pulled a tabloid newspaper from his pocket and laid it there also. Nonchalantly lighting a cigarette, he turned to the corner and asked: "Well, who are you!"

A faint smile showed on thin lips. The Shadow responded quietly.

"My name," he stated, in an even tone, "is Lamont Cranston. Perhaps you have heard the name before."

Verne's eyes lighted momentarily. Then the dapper man shook his head.

"Can't say that I have, old top," he remarked. "Let me see. Cranston, you say. Lamont Cranston —"

"A friend of Silas Tilton."

"Silas Tilton?"

A quiet laugh from The Shadow's thin lips.

"Come, Verne"—it was the tone of Cranston—"you have read the newspapers. In fact, you have just laid a copy of the Classic on the table. I suppose you have read the advertisement that appeared in today's edition. The one addressed to Signet. Do you intend to answer it?"

Verne looked chagrined. Then he shrugged his shoulders and formed a drooping smile.

"Yes, I've read the newspapers," he admitted. "I know who you are, Cranston. You were mentioned as a guest at Tilton's, who left just before trouble started there. But tell me: how did you guess that I was Signet?"

"Quite simply." The Shadow's face still held its knowing smile. "That is, I learned enough to suppose that someone staying at the Hotel Goliath might be Signet."

"You have seen the correspondence that I conducted with Stanton Treblaw?" Verne was parrying with an artful fashion. "The original letters, signed with my seal?"

"I have learned their contents, from copies of the originals."

"Indeed! Then you know why I am in New York?"

The Shadow, in the manner of a leisurely host, waved Verne to a chair. Chuckling, Verne sat down. The Shadow did the same. He spoke in Cranston's methodical tone.

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"I know this," stated The Shadow. "I know that Treblaw's correspondence concerned the matter of an authentic manuscript written by Benvenuto Cellini; one that mentioned important art treasures."

"That is true," admitted Verne.

"I know also," resumed The Shadow, "that the possessor of those treasures needs the manuscript and would pay far more for it than he offered Treblaw."

"Agreed," chuckled Verne. "I think I understand, Mr. Cranston. You have the manuscript. That is why you sought me. You know that I am Signet and am willing to pay high. Am I right?"

"You are wrong," returned The Shadow. "I do not have the manuscript."

"But Silas Tilton has it then."

"Perhaps. Perhaps not. I am not Tilton's agent. I have come here, Mr. Verne, merely to offer you my services. I believe that new crime is due. I should like to prevent it."

"How can you do that?"

"By obtaining possession of the manuscript and turning it over to the proper authorities."

"AN excellent idea, Mr. Cranston," laughed Verne. "But you have come to the wrong quarter. You know quite well that I do not have the Cellini manuscript. Someone else holds it—as this Classic advertisement indicates."

"Possibly," suggested The Shadow, "the advertisement in the Classic is a blind."

"For what purpose?" queried Verne.

"To learn where you are," returned The Shadow.

"An excellent theory, Mr. Cranston," declared Verne, slowly. "One that may be correct. Then, again, someone who has the manuscript may have decided to communicate with me. I think that I shall know the real answer by midnight."

"You intend, then, to reply to the advertisement."

"I do. I shall put my reply in the first edition of the next issue. The one that will be on sale at nine o'clock this evening."

"Inviting T to visit you?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Here."

Verne was both emphatic and frank in his statement. He watched his visitor's face. The Shadow's immobile countenance told nothing. Verne dropped his cigarette in an ash tray. He leaned forward in his chair.

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"MR. CRANSTON," he stated, "you are an outsider in this affair. Nevertheless, I do not resent your intrusion. It is evident that you are a man of high standing; and that you have actually come here to offer me aid as well as advice.

"I can assure you that I am a man of integrity, that my motives in seeking the Cellini manuscript are fully in the interests of justice. I have made my plans. I have merely been waiting for some opportunity to push them.

"For the last two days, I have been ready to advertise in the columns of the Classic. But I bided my time, feeling that it would be best to wait. Now that a message to Signet has again appeared in print, I feel that the move should be made."

The Shadow made no response. Verne waited a moment; then continued.

"I can assure you, also," he declared, "that the Signet correspondence was fair and above-board from the very start. Some criminal element came into it. How, I do not know. Should I learn the identity of Stanton Treblaw's murderer, I would lose no time in bringing the fiend to justice.

"Apparently, some of those who aided in the killing were eliminated in a strange battle at Silas Tilton's. But there is a brain behind the game; the real criminal is still at large. It is my hope that he will eventually be apprehended."

Another pause. Then The Shadow spoke, quietly.

"Do you believe," he questioned, "that the arch-criminal holds the Signet manuscript?"

"I do not know," returned Verne. "But I do know that it would be valueless to him unless he could also acquire the newly uncovered art works of Cellini. To gain those treasures he must find Signet. In brief, he must come to me."

Verne paused emphatically; then added:

"I am the key to this entire matter. If the criminal does not hold the manuscript, he will spy upon me. If he does have the manuscript, he may spy, or he may come openly to dicker. In either event, I shall have a chance to watch for him."

"Without protection?"

"Hardly so. I am not an old man, like Treblaw was. Nor am I unsuspecting. Nor have I placed myself in a bad spot. Treblaw was not murdered until the criminal thought that the time was ripe. That same criminal will make no attempt to attack me until he knows where I have placed the Cellini treasures."

"And when he learns that fact?"

"He will not learn it, you may rest assured of that."

VERNE arose. He stepped past a huge wardrobe trunk and placed his hand on the knob of the door that led to the hall.

"I trust, Mr. Cranston," he said, with a smile, "that you will not consider me impolite in requesting your departure. In fact, to assure you that I appreciate your friendship, I am informing you that it would be to our mutual interests for you to leave.

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"I feel confident that you will not mention this interview to anyone. That you will be courteous enough to permit me to proceed with my present plans without interference that might cause me trouble.

"In return for your favor, I shall promise you this: if, at any time, I need your immediate aid, I shall call upon you. And as soon as I have found a light at the end of my complicated trail, I shall inform you."

The Shadow bowed in Cranston's fashion. He extended his hand to Verne.

"You can reach me at the Cobalt Club," stated The Shadow. "And between now and tonight, Mr. Verne, I should advise you to stay in this room, or to inform the hotel management that you wish none of the servants to enter."

"You mean that you came in while the room was being put in order?"

"Yes. And I remained here. I decided that it would be the best way to meet you privately."

Verne chuckled.

"Thank you for the suggestion," he said. "And do not forget our arrangement, Mr. Cranston. I may have been over frank in admitting that I am Signet. But I judged you to be a man who would keep the matter confidential."

Again, The Shadow bowed. Verne opened the door. His visitor departed. Verne waited until The Shadow had passed the turn of the corridor; then he closed the door of 1472.

But Montague Verne failed to see the new smile that fixed itself upon the firm lips of Lament Cranston. He failed also to hear the soft whisper of weird mirth that came from those same lips.

The Shadow had completed the triangle. He had found the third man in the game. He had studied Verne; he had learned more than the dapper man had told him. The Shadow's findings fitted with his theories.

The Shadow could see the end of complications. He could foretell the climax that was coming to the triple trail of crime. The Shadow knew all!

## CHAPTER XV. THE CELLINI MANUSCRIPT

THE SHADOW, when he left Verne's suite, did more than smile in anticipation of the future. As soon as he had passed that turn in the corridor, he quickened his pace to a long, swift stride.

Passing the elevators, he swept along another corridor, reached the door of a room and opened it. The Shadow stepped into a suite that was similar to 1472. Here he performed an immediate action.

Moving into the bedroom of the deserted suite, this personage who looked like Lamont Cranston, opened a briefcase and brought out blackened garments. In quick, efficient moves, The Shadow donned cloak and hat. Gloves slipped over hands; a key glimmered suddenly in The Shadow's fingers.

Approaching a door of the bedroom, The Shadow unlocked it with silent precision. He opened the barrier cautiously; then glided into a bedroom beyond. This room was gloomy; for it had but one window that caught little of the dull afternoon light. But there was a brighter room beyond it; one in which someone had added the illumination of a desk lamp to aid the fading light of day.

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The Shadow glided to the door of the lighted room. There he paused, peering through the crack of the opened door. He observed Montague Verne seated at a desk with paper and pencil.

The Shadow had returned to Verne's suite. He had previously gained access to the suite that adjoined it; one that had an entrance from another corridor. Thus there had been purpose in The Shadow's mild departure.

Rather than overplay the part of Cranston, he had chosen to come back as The Shadow, to see exactly what Verne intended to do, now that his surprise interview had been completed.

VERNE was apparently writing an ad for the personal column of the Classic. He was going through with his statement to The Shadow. Yet Verne appeared troubled as he worked. He tore up one scrawled sheet of paper; then began another.

A pause. Verne arose from his chair and stared at the big wardrobe trunk. It was closed, with a formidable lock; one that Verne evidently thought was pick proof. For the man, when he drew a key from his pocket, ended his worryment with a shrug of his shoulders. He went back to the desk.

There the dapper man busied himself with his item for the Classic. He tore up a second sheet of hotel stationery; then began on a third. This time he seemed satisfied. He folded the sheet and sealed it in an envelope.

Lifting a telephone from the desk, Verne called for a bell boy. That done, he lighted a cigarette, puffed nervously, then arose and approached the wardrobe trunk. He was just starting to unlock it when there was a rap at the door.

Verne admitted the bell boy, handed him the envelope, then dug in his pocket and produced a ten-dollar bill. He tendered the money with the envelope.

"Do you go off duty soon?" he asked.

"About six-thirty," replied the bell hop.

"Soon enough," decided Verne. "As soon as you finish your shift, jog down to the office of the New York Classic. Take the envelope with you; give it to the want-ad department."

"What's in the envelope? An ad?"

"Yes. For the personal column. Don't forget that fact. Pay for the advertisement with this ten-dollar note and keep the change for yourself. Good enough?"

"Plenty good," grinned the bell boy.

Verne chuckled. He waited until the bell hop had gone. Then he returned to the trunk. Slow at first, he showed haste—almost eagerness—as he unlocked the big wardrobe. He yanked open a drawer and brought out a stack of envelopes.

Watching from a six-foot distance, The Shadow saw Verne draw one envelope from the packet. A smile showed on Verne's face. Then the man drew a folded folio from the envelope and opened it.

Ragged paper—a frayed and withered parchment. Yet as Verne unfolded it, The Shadow could see the huge letters of an antiquated penmanship. Near enough to actually observe embellished words, The Shadow



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observed all that he required.

The paper that Verne had taken from the trunk was the missing Cellini manuscript!

A SATISFIED chuckle from the lips of Montague Verne. The Shadow was fading across the bedroom as the dapper man replaced the folio in its envelope and put it back into the trunk.

A drawer slammed shut. Then came the closing of the trunk itself.

Verne stepped into the bedroom and turned on the light. He was too late to discover The Shadow. The weird observer had glided through the door into the next suite. Already, his key was noiselessly turning the lock.

Montague Verne had played a game of bluff. This man who had identified himself as Signet had proven to be a cagey customer, despite his assumed frankness. Verne had believed that he had fooled the visitor whom he had found in his room. He had not.

The Shadow had seen through the game; for The Shadow had come here in the belief that Verne actually had the manuscript. That was a point that figured in the new theory which, as yet, had occurred to no one save The Shadow.

Others—even the participants in the Signet medley—were misconstruing facts. But The Shadow had placed everything in its proper position. He had fitted the puzzle together. Only one piece had remained; and The Shadow had seen where it belonged.

Verne had the manuscript, That was the cap-stone to The Shadow's well-built structure. The Shadow had remained watching Verne merely to gain this absolute proof that his theory was correct.

In the suite next to Verne's, The Shadow doffed his black garb. He placed the garments in the bag that had contained them. He thrust the bag itself upon a closet shelf. Again guised as Lamont Cranston, The Shadow strolled out into the corridor.

His work was not finished. The Shadow walked along in the direction of Verne's room. He was confident that the man would not be coming out. Verne's room opened in the middle of a long hall. The Shadow went to the nearer end. He used a pick to open the lock of a door.

He stepped into an unoccupied room. Unlatching the door, The Shadow stepped back into the hall, closing the barrier behind him. He went to the far end of the hall, walking softly as he passed Verne's door. There The Shadow found another empty room, which he left with door unlatched.

After that, The Shadow strolled to a stairway, descended a few floors and took an elevator. His lips—the lips of Cranston—retained their fixed smile. The Hotel Goliath was well-suited to The Shadow's coming purpose. Scarcely more than half the rooms were occupied at this season; hence The Shadow had discovered empty ones where he wanted them.

A young man was seated in the lobby when The Shadow arrived there. It was Harry Vincent, reading an evening newspaper in the chair beside the pillar.

With the easy stroll of Cranston, The Shadow passed the spot where Harry sat. His hand came from his pocket; an envelope skimmed a four-foot course and plopped against the front of Harry's newspaper.

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Harry opened the missive. He read a coded statement that faded as he completed his perusal. Folding the newspaper, Harry went aboard an elevator and rode up to the fourteenth floor. He took a corridor, and finally entered an unlocked door. Harry had arrived in the suite that adjoined Verne's. This was to be his post until he received new word.

TEN minutes later, a tall stroller entered the lobby of the Doswind Apartments. The Shadow drew a key from his pocket, unlocked a barring door and took an elevator to the third floor. Still disguised as Lament Cranston, he entered Apartment 3 G, which Harry Vincent had formerly occupied.

The Shadow had changed places with his agent. Leaving Harry to watch Verne's suite at the Goliath, The Shadow intended to keep tabs on Tully Kelk, in 3 F. Coming in through the lower door. The Shadow had seen Moe Shrevnitz's cab parked, waiting. That was proof that Kelk had not gone out.

Until tonight, this post would serve as a temporary sanctum; wherein The Shadow would receive reports from Burbank. Then would come the time to move. The Shadow would be ready.

For The Shadow's plans, loosely formed at first, were tightening. His location of the Cellini manuscript in the possession of Montague Verne, had placed The Shadow in sight of his final goal.

### CHAPTER XVI. THE LAW PREPARES

IT was half past eight that evening. Four men were gathered in a little office that formed a portion of Police Commissioner Weston's apartment. Weston himself was there. His companions were Joe Cardona, Dale Jurling and Clyde Burke.

The reporter had been the last to arrive. With him he had a copy of the Classic; fresh from the press. It was open to the page of personals. Weston was reading an advertisement that Clyde had pointed out:

S. T. Ready for interview. Meet me G 1472.  
Final offer still stands. SIGNET.

The reference to G 1472 was obvious. It could mean only that Signet was at the Hotel Goliath, in Room 1472. Weston commented on that fact.

"Treblaw was ready at G," remarked the commissioner, referring to the ad that had opened printed negotiations. "Evidently Signet is picking up that same letter to designate the Hotel Goliath. But what about this S. T., as an answer to our message? We only signed it T."

"S. T. for Stanton Treblaw," stated Cardona.

"But surely," declared Weston, "Signet, whoever he is, must know that Treblaw is dead."

"S. T. could mean Silas Tilton," said Jurling.

"That's right," agreed Weston. "Yes, of course. Signet must think that he has heard from Tilton. He could logically suppose that Tilton has the Cellini manuscript."

"I'll call the Hotel Goliath," put in Joe Cardona. "To find out who has Room 1472."

"I wouldn't do that," objected Jurling. "It might spoil our plans."

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"How?" quizzed Joe.

Jurling turned to Clyde Burke.

"When is this journal of yours on sale?" he questioned. "At what hour?"

"About nine o'clock," returned Clyde.

"Then," decided Jurling, "it would be unwise to make any step until after that hour. It must appear that we have observed the advertisement in a normal fashion; that we have seen it in a newspaper regularly on sale."

"Quite right, Mr. Jurling," agreed Weston. "Your task will be sufficient when you meet Signet under conditions that he would naturally anticipate. Indeed, I am wondering just how you will broach the matter of your visit, inasmuch as you will not bring the Cellini manuscript."

"I HAVE a plan for that," stated Jurling. He ran his right hand through his curly, light-colored hair. "First of all, I shall call at his room in the Hotel Goliath. Detective Cardona will be with me, of course. I shall announce myself as a representative of Stanton Treblaw."

"A good beginning," nodded Weston.

"With me," resumed Jurling, "I shall have the carbon copies of Signet's correspondence. That will prove my status, when I show it to Signet. It will open the path to talk about the manuscript."

"You have the correspondence with you?"

"No. It is back at my hotel. We can stop there on the way and pick it up."

"Which is going to delay us," objected Joe Cardona. "Look here, Jurling, if we're going to see Signet—"

"We should not arrive too soon," interposed Jurling. "The commissioner has agreed upon that. My word, old top"—he spread his hands as he gestured toward Joe—"we can't jounce in on this chap Signet while the clock is still chiming nine!

"We must give him to half after the hour, at least. Better, I should say, to wait until ten o'clock. Then we must arrive in affable fashion. Signet will sheer away if we break in like louts instead of calling upon him in gentlemanly fashion."

"All right," agreed Joe, somewhat surlily. "But if I had charge of the shebang, I'd grab this bird Signet and quiz him. He knows what we want to find out; that is, he knows something. We don't know what we're going into. If we had a squad—"

"Preposterous, Cardona!" snapped Weston. "Jurling has shown you the tactful method in which this should be handled. You are running no risk of trouble in a reputable hotel like the Goliath."

"But what about posting some men down in the lobby?" demanded Cardona. "Or better still, upon the fourteenth floor? The Goliath's a big place. They won't be noticed."

"What do you think, Jurling?" questioned Weston. "That would be a precaution that should not interfere."

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"How many men do you propose to take to Signet's floor?" asked Jurling. "And where would you intend to place them?"

"A pair of good men by the elevators," returned Cardona, "wouldn't be a bad idea, if you leave that to me; let me handle the squad end of the business."

"It sounds quite all right, commissioner," interposed Jurling. "Detective Cardona is efficient. He should understand the methods of discreet protection."

"Very well," decided Weston. "Post your men, Cardona. Have them there about ten o'clock. The time when you and Jurling arrive."

Cardona nodded. Jurling smiled.

"It is approaching nine," he remarked. "Suppose we start out to my hotel. You can call headquarters while I am assembling my copies of the Signet correspondence. After that, we can lounge about until the zero hour."

"Which will be ten o'clock," reminded Weston.

"Ten o'clock," agreed Jurling.

The two men, prepared to leave. Clyde Burke looked toward Weston. The commissioner smiled.

"You can stay here, Burke," he said.

"This will be where the first reports will come. I don't want you going up to the Hotel Goliath."

"All right," agreed Clyde. He glanced at his watch. "I'm going out to grab a sandwich and a cup of mocha. After that, I'll be back, commissioner."

"You are not to call the Classic office while you are out," reminded Weston. "This affair is not yet news, Burke."

"I understand. Don't worry, commissioner. This is my night off. I'm working on my own on this job."

CARDONA and Jurling had left. Clyde followed. Outside of the apartment house, he headed for a little restaurant, half a block away. There Clyde got to a telephone. He put in a call to Burbank. His report finished, Clyde ordered a ham sandwich on rye with a cup of black coffee.

It was not far from Weston's to the Hotel Tolberc, where Jurling was stopping. Jurling and Cardona arrived there within a dozen minutes after their departure. Joe went into a telephone booth while Jurling headed upstairs.

Finished with his call to headquarters, Cardona paced about until Jurling reappeared. The Signet correspondence formed a circular bundle that projected from Jurling's pocket. Cardona commented upon its bulk.

"I went back after I had started for the elevator," said Jurling. "Thought it would be a jolly good idea to bring along that other lot of letters."

"The ones between Treblaw and your firm?"

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"Yes. They are in with the batch. I have my credentials also." Jurling tapped his wallet pocket. "I fancy that this Signet chap may want to be shown, as you express it here in the States. Well, old badger, did you make the arrangements at headquarters?"

"Yeah. I picked some good men for the job. They'll be on hand. It'll be safer that way, Jurling."

"You seem to anticipate trouble from this unknown Signet person."

"I'm not risking more trouble at the Goliath. Like that night when Treblaw was murdered. We chased all through the hotel looking for a suspect. If we'd had a first-class squad on the job, we'd have nabbed the fellow."

"These men of yours, Cardona. You are sure they will not make themselves conspicuous?"

"You won't see them, Jurling. And if you don't, knowing that they're on the job, Signet won't."

"Righto!" Jurling chuckled as he glanced at his watch. "Quarter past the hour of nine. A while yet, Cardona. Come, let's have a cup of coffee. We can chat until quarter before ten."

Jurling led the way into the Tolberc coffee shop. He and Cardona sat at the counter and gave their order. They talked but little as they waited. Joe Cardona had become laconic. Dale Jurling seemed to have gained some of the same tenseness that was gripping the detective.

For their mission tonight was an important one. As representatives of the law, these two were prepared to visit the man who well might hold the clue to the murder of Stanton Treblaw.

## CHAPTER XVII. OTHER FACTORS ENTER

"MARSLAND speaking."

Cliff Marsland was talking over the telephone to Burbank. Ensnconced in a telephone booth in an East Side drug store, Cliff was delivering a nine-fifteen report. He caught Burbank's response.

"Duster Shomak dodged again," informed Cliff. "Hawkeye thought he had his trail... Yes, down at the Black Ship... Yes, Duster must have been looking for some helpers. Some smooth boys hang out down there.

"No, it doesn't look like he's barging around for a crew of dumb gorillas... I don't get his game, but it looks like a foxy one... No chance of trailing him now..."

Cliff paused. Burbank's voice spoke steadily.

"Instructions received," announced Cliff.

Hanging up abruptly, Cliff left the booth and walked to the street. He started off at a brisk pace; at the entrance of an alleyway, another figure sidled along beside him. It was Hawkeye, a hunched-up, stoop-shouldered little man whose eyes glittered under the glare of a street lamp. Hawkeye was an agent of The Shadow. Cliff shot a look at his companion.

"You'll do," approved Cliff. "That new suit of yours will pass you where we're going. Step on it, though. There's no time to stall."

## THE TRIPLE TRAIL

"What's the lay, Cliff?" piped Hawkeye.

"I'll spill it when we're moving," returned Cliff abruptly.

The two reached a parked coupe. Cliff took the wheel. Hawkeye clambered aboard. The car shot forward, wheeled around a corner and swung along beneath the bulk of an elevated structure. Cliff was heading on a swift, northwest course.

IN Apartment 3 G at the Doswind, The Shadow, still guised as Cranston, was standing by the outer door. Watching through a narrow space, his keen eyes saw a melancholy man coming from the stairway. Kelk's servant.

The fellow had gone out five minutes ago. He was returning now; with him, he was carrying some bulldog editions of the morning newspapers. The Shadow watched the man enter 3 F. Thin lips breathed a soft laugh. The Shadow had received Clyde Burke's report, through Burbank. In return, he had sent instructions for Cliff Marsland. With ten o'clock as the zero hour, The Shadow had been counting on a break which he felt sure would come. That break had arrived.

Kelk must have seen the ad in yesterday's Classic. Hence he had probably been waiting to see if a reply was given. He would find that reply within a few minutes.

A buzz from the corner of The Shadow's room. It was the apartment telephone, a private line. The Shadow had muffled the bell with a silk handkerchief. He answered the buzz. It was Burbank, relaying Cliff's report, adding that he had forwarded the required instructions.

As The Shadow hung up the receiver, his keen ears caught a stir from the hall. Easing to the door, The Shadow was in time to observe Tully Kelk going down the hall. The Shadow waited a few moments; then followed.

When The Shadow reached the street, he saw Moe Shrevnitz pulling up to the curb. Kelk was about to enter the cab. Moe, muffled, was scarcely recognizable. There was no chance that Kelk would remember him as the jehu who had driven to the ferry. Moreover, Moe had a trick of changing license cards inside his cab so that the same driver's photograph never appeared twice for the same customer.

Kelk growled a destination. Moe leaned close to the window as though he did not catch it. Kelk repeated. Moe nodded.

"Hotel Goliath, eh?" Moe's voice was a trifle loud. "All right, boss. We'll make it quick."

Moe's repetition of the destination was for the benefit of the tall stroller who happened to be passing. The Shadow, pacing in leisurely Cranston style, caught the corroboration. Moe's cab turned a corner.

The Shadow hailed a passing cab. Springing aboard, he gave the driver orders to take him to the Goliath. The second cab sped along. Resting back in the seat, The Shadow indulged in a soft, guarded laugh.

Moe Shrevnitz had been tipped off to his part tonight. Despite his assurance to Kelk, Moe did not intend to make a quick trip to the Goliath. Instead, he was heading for a detour that would bring him into traffic.

Thus The Shadow was riding ahead. With half past nine close at hand, he would arrive at the Goliath no later than twenty minutes of ten. But Kelk would not reach there until at least fifteen minutes before the hour; perhaps later.

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Minutes were destined to be important tonight. By minutes only, The Shadow would get ahead of Tully Kelk. In turn, Kelk would be minutes ahead of Dale Jurling and Joe Cardona. A strange race was in progress— and only The Shadow knew it.

THE SHADOW'S cab pulled up in front of the Goliath. Peering across the street, The Shadow saw a parked coupe. He recognized it as Cliff Marsland's car. The coupe was empty. Paying the cab driver, The Shadow lounged into the lobby of the hotel. He took an elevator and rode upward.

Two operators began to talk just after The Shadow's car had ascended. One was leaning from his elevator to beckon to the other.

"See them mugs that went up with me?" questioned the first operator. "Looked like tough guys. I let 'em off at the fifteenth. They said sixteenth first, then changed it."

"Tough guys, nothin'!" retorted the second operator. "I'll bet they was gumshoes from headquarters. Like a couple I took up to the fifteenth, too."

"Yeah? What're they doing here?"

"Don't ask me. All I know is one of the house dicks got a call from headquarters, sayin' there'd be some plainclothes men here tonight —"

The operator broke off as another man came through the hotel lobby. It was Duster Shomak. The mobleader strolled into a car. Well dressed, he passed as a guest, despite a roughness of his face. Duster gave no floor. He simply rode upward.

TEN minutes of ten. Outside the hotel, Joe Cardona had arrived with Dale Jurling. The two had stopped before entering. Jurling was finishing a cigarette.

"See anything of my men?" questioned Cardona.

"Not yet," admitted Jurling, "but I'm not surprised."

"Why not?"

"Maybe they're already inside."

"Maybe. Maybe not. They might be watching for us to go in. But don't worry. They'll be by the elevators when we go into Signet's."

"Then they must still be outside."

Jurling spoke with assurance. He looked toward the corner and watched a slow-moving, clustered crowd, trying to discern faces that might strike him as those of plain-clothes men.

Cardona had turned with Jurling. Hence neither saw Moe Shrevnitz's cab pull up near the hotel entrance.

Tully Kelk was fuming at Moe's slow trip here. Alighting, the mustached man thrust the exact change into Moe's hand, then headed for the revolving door into the hotel.

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Moe grinned. Pulling away, the taxi driver spied Joe Cardona. He wondered what the ace detective was doing here. For Moe knew Joe by sight. The detective's business, however, was none of Moe's tonight. Moe's job was done. He had delayed Kelk.

As he parked, Moe saw Jurling fling away a cigarette; then turn toward the lobby door, with Cardona following. The two men entered. Still watching, Moe saw a couple of other men detach themselves from the crowd near the corner.

"Dicks," muttered Joe. "I'd bet five to one on it."

Together, the new pair entered the Hotel Goliath. Moe Shrevnitz saw a vacant space in the hack stand and edged the cab into it. Might as well be ready here, even though his regular job was ended.

For Moe, as an agent of The Shadow, was trained to be observant and to use good judgment when on his own. Moe had a hunch that The Shadow had entered the Goliath ahead of Kelk. That seemed the logical answer to the order that had called for a delay.

Moe counted. The Shadow, Kelk, Cardona and another; two dicks beside. Plenty. And maybe there were others also; men who might have arrived ahead. Trouble was brewing, as Moe Shrevnitz saw it.

Yet the taxi driver wore a canny smile as he waited outside the Hotel Goliath. Trouble and The Shadow; not trouble for The Shadow. Such was Moe's opinion, based upon past experience. For The Shadow, when trouble bobbed his way, had the ability to let it fall upon those who rightfully deserved it.

## CHAPTER XVIII. TABLES TURN

MONTAGUE VERNE was seated in the living room of his little suite. Attired in dressing gown, calmly reading a book and smoking a cigarette, the man who had called himself Signet was apparently oblivious to brewing danger.

The big wardrobe trunk was locked. The door to the little bedroom was a trifle ajar. The door to the hall was locked. Verne seemed to be giving it no concern.

Someone rapped at the door. Verne arose and went to answer. He turned the knob. The door swung inward. Tully Kelk stepped into the living room and closed the door behind him. It did not latch; but neither Kelk nor Verne noticed that fact. The two men were too intent upon surveying each other.

From the moment of the meeting, sudden challenge was apparent. It was plain that the two men had never met. Yet each seemed ready for a struggle. It was Kelk who gave the first utterance: an ugly laugh.

Verne looked quizzical. Then, in a firm but tense voice, he demanded: "Just who are you?"

"My name is Kelk," came the reply. "Tully Kelk. One you've never heard before."

"Allow me to introduce myself," returned Verne. "My name is Montague Verne. My residence, London. I have been expecting a visitor. May I ask if you are the man?"

"Maybe." Kelk's retort was ugly. "That will develop after we have talked a while."

The two men had reached the center of the living room. Verne, fingers dipped in dressing-gown pockets, was



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as quizzical of expression as before. Kelk, scowling, was holding his fists half clenched.

Neither noted the door to the bedroom. The barrier had moved a trifle. From it, keen eyes were watching—eyes that looked like blazing coals set in a background of absolute inkiness.

The Shadow had come in from the adjoining suite. His objective had been those rooms where Harry Vincent was keeping vigil. From the moment of his arrival, The Shadow had been ready to approach Verne's living room.

He had heard Kelk's rap. He had glided forward at the moment when Verne was answering the door. Spying Verne and Kelk intent, The Shadow remained, a silent witness to what appeared to be an impending conflict.

IT was Verne who picked up the broken trend of conversation. Extracting a cigarette from the pocket of his dressing gown, the dapper man struck a match and blew a puff of smoke in Kelk's direction. Then he spoke, calmly.

"I presume," he said, "that you have read the advertisement that I inserted in the Classic. You have arrived quite promptly, Mr. Kelk. Therefore, I suppose you understood the significance of the advertisement."

"I understood it," growled Kelk.

"May I ask then,"—Verne spoke in a mildly curious tone—"if you have brought the document that I expected?"

Kelk's laugh was almost a snarl. Verne looked surprised.

"Come, Mr. Kelk," he insisted. "Surely you knew that I expected you to bring that item—that we might discuss the price."

"If you mean the Cellini manuscript," returned Kelk, "you are wide in your guess that I want to sell it."

"You wish to buy it then?"

"I intend to get it. From whoever has it. That's why I'm here, Verne."

Kelk's eyes were glowering. His fists were tighter than before. It was plain that if he intended violence, he would use brute force alone. Taking one step toward Verne, Kelk rasped:

"Not only do I intend to get the manuscript. I have come to take it from the man who has it! From you!"

Verne drew his cigarette from his lips. He raised his brows in an expression of surprise.

"From me?" he questioned. He shook his head with a slight laugh. "My word, old man! Why do you suppose I placed that advertisement in the Classic? I put it there because I wanted the Cellini manuscript —"

"You tried the ad as a blind," interrupted Kelk. "A game of bluff, to cover up the fact that you already had the manuscript. I saw through the bluff. That is why —"

KELK had been edging forward; he was almost jaw to jaw with Verne. Breaking his sentence, Kelk made a leap. His long arms shot upward; his hands sped for Verne's throat.

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But with Kelk's spring, Verne acted also. Shifting swiftly backward, the dapper man snapped his right hand from his dressing gown pocket. A stub-nosed revolver glimmered from his fist.

A quick shot would have stopped Kelk. But Verne, twisting backward, did not fire. Then his opportunity was gone. Kelk, instead of stopping at sight of the weapon, came on with a fierce dive. His left hand caught Verne's right wrist. Verne's hand went upward.

Kelk, stronger of the pair, sent Verne reeling against the wardrobe trunk. He yanked Verne's right arm down. The stubby barrel of the revolver cracked the top of the trunk as it arrived at the end of a swift sweep.

The gun bounced from Verne's grasp. It went glistening through the air, bounded from the wall and scudded across the floor toward the outer door. Kelk made a twist to dive after it. That gave Verne opportunity.

Though smaller than his antagonist, Verne was wiry. He showed his pluck as he countered, coming back at Kelk with a fury that the invader had not anticipated. To The Shadow, watching, Verne seemed to climb straight for Kelk's shoulders. With an upswing of his forearm, Verne caught Kelk's chin.

Kelk staggered. Verne grappled. The two swayed back and forth, then lost their footing and rolled upon the floor. They struggled fiercely, but they fought fair, each man striving to win by straight combat.

The Shadow, watching, waited.

Somehow, The Shadow had expected a struggle of this sort from the moment that he had witnessed the beginning of the fray. He let the conflict continue; but his gloved hand, pressed against the doorknob, was opening the barrier in readiness for intervention.

Whoever won the fray would find The Shadow prepared to deal with him if occasion demanded such a course. Already the black-cloaked figure was looming in the half-opened doorway. But neither Kelk nor Verne caught sight of the spectral entrant.

Like wrestlers, they were struggling for new holds, Kelk's strength offset by Verne's elusiveness. For a dozen seconds the combatants were rigid, straining to the limit. Then came the break.

Verne broke Kelk's grip and shot a quick fist for the tall man's jaw. The blow was glancing. Kelk's free hand caught Verne's throat and gripped it. Verne, half risen from the floor, emitted a gasped gurgle. Kelk, with a twist, sent the dapper man sprawling. Before Verne could rise, Kelk was to his feet.

Right hand free, Kelk shot it to his coat pocket. Out flashed a revolver as Verne, on hands and knees, was crawling for his own gun. A rasp from Kelk. Verne stopped. Kelk, back to the outer door, was covering him.

KELK had Verne helpless. The dapper man knew it. He stopped short in his crawl.

The Shadow, watching, was ready to prevent Kelk's shot, should the mustached man attempt to fire. He was also ready to stop any brutal blow that Kelk might deliver to his trapped foe.

But Kelk was satisfied to hold Verne covered. Puffing, his face livid from the efforts of the fray, Kelk waited, content so long as Verne made no move. Then, his breath regained, Kelk delivered a sharp command.

"Get up!" he ordered. "Unlock that trunk. No funny business, or I'll drill you! I came here, Verne, for a showdown. I'm going to get one!"

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He paused. Verne was rising slowly, with hands stretched upward.

"A showdown," repeated Kelk. "You can guess who I am, Verne. You know why I'm here. I've been hiding out, waiting for this chance. I've dodged the law —"

Kelk broke off suddenly. He whirled away from Verne, who was backed helplessly against the wardrobe trunk. Gun ready, Kelk was swinging for the outer door. But his move had come too late.

Brawny shoulders had lunged against that barrier. With the in-swinging door came the hurtling figure of a stalwart, stocky man. Detective Joe Cardona, lunging in at the crucial moment, was here to end Kelk's triumph.

Joe's stroke worked. His quick hand caught Kelk's wrist and shoved the man's gun hand upward. Kelk went staggering back against the wall; his head jounced there with considerable force. Kelk slumped. He lost hold of his gun.

As the revolver clattered to the floor, Cardona made a grab for it. Kelk, with a fierce snarl, tried to come back for new combat. A sharp voice stopped him short.

Staring weakly toward the door, Kelk saw Dale Jurling, covering him with a revolver.

Jurling had followed Cardona in. He held Kelk helpless and the sallow man knew it. Feebly, Kelk raised his hands; then began to sway, groggy from the thud that his skull had received.

Cardona caught the tall man and spilled him into a chair. Kelk's chin slumped to his chest. Panting, he attempted no further fight.

Jurling was watching Kelk, still ready with leveled gun. Verne was back against the wardrobe trunk, his elbows lowered to the top. Verne was smiling, now that the tables had turned. He recognized these arrivals as representatives of the law.

In turn, Cardona and Jurling had instantly seen that Verne was the proper occupant of this room. His attire proved that fact. Verne was the man whom Cardona and Jurling had come to see. His open declaration by means of the Classic ad had given him a proper status.

All three—Cardona, Jurling and Verne—were watching Kelk subside. Their eyes were away from that door to the bedroom. None saw the barrier closing, inch by inch, until only a crack remained.

The Shadow had found it unnecessary to intervene. Now that Jurling and Cardona had arrived, the stage was set as he had desired it.

Again, The Shadow was standing by.

### CHAPTER XIX. SIGNET SPEAKS

"LOOKS like we helped you out, fellow," remarked Joe Cardona, turning to Montague Verne.

"You did," returned Verne, with a smile. "I take it,"—he eyed Joe, then Jurling—"that you are representatives of the law?"

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"That's right," nodded Cardona. "From headquarters. I'm Detective Cardona. Handling the Treblaw case as acting inspector."

"Excellent," declared Verne. "You are the very man whom I wanted to see, under the circumstances as they have now developed." He looked toward Jurling; then inquired of Joe: "This is one of your men?"

"Yeah," returned Cardona, shortly. He shot a wise look at Jurling. "We had a hunch that something might be wrong here. We saw your advertisement in the Classic. You're Signet, eh?"

"I have used that name," replied Verne, with a smile. "Circumstances forced the part upon me. My real name is Montague Verne. I would have revealed that fact long ago, but for the untimely death of Stanton Treblaw. Whether wisely or unwisely, I took certain duties upon myself. I knew that Treblaw had been murdered because of a certain manuscript that he possessed. I believed that clever bluff could coax forth the master criminal who had ordered Treblaw's death.

"The man showed himself tonight. There, in that chair,"—Verne indicated Kelk—"you have the person who was out to get the Cellini manuscript. His name—at least the name he gave me—is Tully Kelk."

Joe walked over to the chair, where Kelk was slouched in half-dazed fashion. Gripping the man's chin, Cardona pushed it up so that the light fell full upon Kelk's sallow countenance. The detective chuckled.

"He answers Tilton's description of him, all right," declared Cardona. "Mustache and all. This is the man we've wanted, Mr. Verne. Maybe you should have called in the law before we got here; but the way things worked out, I've got no kick."

KELK began to move his lips. Cardona watched him; then, seeing that Kelk was recovering from his daze, the detective produced a pair of handcuffs and snapped them upon the prisoner's wrists. Joe turned to Verne.

"What else can you tell us?" he asked. "Do you know anything about this manuscript that this crook was after?"

"Yes," smiled Verne. "But first, let me ask how much you have already learned. You seem to be familiar with the Signet correspondence. Am I right in believing that you found copies of the letters among Stanton Treblaw's files?"

"We found copies of the letters, all right," chuckled Joe, with a wise glance toward Jurling, who was silent. "We know that you wanted that Cellini manuscript. It looks like the manuscript is all we've got to uncover now, outside of some small fry who worked for this fellow Kelk here.

"Give me a line on what happened before we came in. What was Kelk's gag? Has he got the manuscript somewhere? Was he trying to dicker with you?"

"Kelk does not have the manuscript," returned Verne. "If he and his murderers had taken it from Treblaw, they would not have attacked at Tilton's."

"That's right," agreed Joe. "Then who —"

"One moment," interposed Verne. "I have something important to tell you; but first, let me ask you about the advertisement that appeared in yesterday's Classic. It appeared to be from Silas Tilton, an indication that he had some manuscript of Treblaw's."

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"And that's why you answered it, eh?" questioned Cardona. "I'll tell you about that ad, Mr. Verne. Commissioner Weston ordered it put in the newspaper. We figured this Signet business ought to be sifted. We were bluffing you with the ad. Then you turned around and bluffed this guy Kelk. Pretty good, all the way through.

"But if Kelk hasn't got the manuscript, what was his idea in coming here? Did he figure it would be a good idea to bump you? He looked ready to rub you out when we blew in."

"Kelk came here," declared Verne, slowly, "because he believed that I might have the manuscript. After all, there was a possibility—in Kelk's mind—that Treblaw could have actually completed his sale of the manuscript to Signet.

"From the moment that he entered, Kelk was demanding. He took the attitude that I did have the manuscript in my possession. He wanted to unlock this wardrobe trunk, believing that the manuscript might be inside."

"I get it," nodded Joe. He looked at Kelk, who was now sitting up, staring, as he listened. "Well, it was a long shot for him to play, but I guess he was working on the same theory that we had. Find Signet, was our motto. Hear what Signet has to say."

A snarled chuckle from Kelk. Cardona swung about.

"HEAR what Signet has to say!" snorted Kelk. "That's right! Hear what he has to say. Give him a chance to talk, why don't you? Look here"—Kelk came to his feet—"there's been too much of blundering. Like this!"—he gesticulated with the handcuffs—"Snapping these clamps on me before you've given me a chance to talk!"

"You'll get your chance." Cardona shoved Kelk back into the chair, then added, with a growl: "Don't worry about Mr. Verne, here. He's going to talk to us, all right, while you listen. Get it?"

"Go ahead." Kelk chuckled as if amused. "Let Verne talk. Maybe he can tell you who has the Cellini manuscript. I'd like to hear him give that bit of information of his own accord."

Settling back in his chair, Kelk glared at Verne in a mocking fashion, as though challenging the dapper man to talk. Verne smiled.

"Detective Cardona," said Verne, in a sincere tone, "sometimes a man may carry bluff too far. When he does, it is often difficult to explain his actions afterward. Kelk thinks that I am in such a position.

"In a sense, I am. Nevertheless, I believe that I can handle everything to your full satisfaction. I told you that this prisoner, Kelk, bounded in here with the idea that I had the Cellini manuscript in my possession.

"Oddly, Kelk was right. I do hold the Cellini manuscript. It is where Kelk thought it was." Verne was producing a key as he spoke. "In this wardrobe trunk. I intend to deliver that important document into your hands." Verne started to unlock the trunk.

Kelk bounded to his feet, with a warning cry.

"Watch him!" exclaimed the prisoner. "Watch out for treachery! He may have a gun in there!"

"Sit down!" roared Cardona, again thrusting Kelk back into his chair. "Go ahead, Mr. Verne."

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Verne had unlocked the trunk. Only Jurling, gun in hand, was watchful. From the door, Jurling saw Verne dip his hand in a trunk drawer and bring out a long envelope. As Verne opened the envelope and produced a frayed document, Jurling lowered his gun and stepped eagerly forward.

"This," declared Verne, handing the folio to Cardona, "is the missing Cellini manuscript."

JOE began to examine the parchment-like sheets. He nodded as he read words in the Italian language. He passed the folio to Jurling—who eyed it eagerly, then shot a puzzled stare at Verne.

"He had it!" The elated cry came from Kelk, again on his feet. "He had it, as I thought! He has produced it! You fool, Verne, you fool!"

Kelk paused in his outburst to deliver a mad chuckle. Then, to Cardona, he exclaimed:

"I can talk now! Listen to me! But first unlock these bracelets. And watch Verne—at all cost—because his game is up!"

Jurling shouldered forward. Holding the manuscript in one hand, he indicated Kelk with the other. Jurling spoke steadily to Cardona.

"Let's take the prisoner out," he suggested. "We have the manuscript; that is proof of Mr. Verne's bona fide status. Kelk is the man you want. Take him down to headquarters, while I go over to the commissioner's. Verne can come with me."

"Hold it, Cardona!" broke in Kelk. His tone was a frantic appeal. "Don't make a blunder. I can talk now; I want to talk. I have statements to make—ones that I can prove. I can tell you my real part in this chain of circumstances."

"We know your part, Kelk. You're the crook behind it."

"Not at all!" There was something firmly decisive in Kelk's pause. "I can prove who I am. You know my right name: Tully Kelk; but I have used another title. I am Signet!"

A glower showed on Cardona's face. Jurling snorted his disdain. Oddly, it was Montague Verne who took Kelk's part.

"Let him try to prove that statement," suggested the dapper man, to Cardona. "I should like to hear what he has to say. I may be able to furnish testimony of my own after Kelk has spoken."

"But you are Signet," put in Joe. "You've given us the Cellini manuscript we searched for."

"I inserted the Signet advertisement in the Classic," stated Verne, in interruption. "I have played the part of Signet temporarily, because I have been working in behalf of justice. But I am not actually Signet."

"He admits it," snapped Kelk. "Hear him? Now will you listen to me?"

Joe turned to Jurling—who looked puzzled, then began to shake his head. Again Verne intervened, pointing to Kelk's handcuffs.

"Remove them," he said to Cardona. "Give Kelk the chance he wants. It can do no harm."

Verne's request was almost an order; yet Cardona did not resent it. This sudden twist of circumstances had given Joe the inkling of a hunch. Pulling a key from his pocket, the ace unlocked Kelk's handcuffs.

FROM beyond the inner door of Verne's living room, a soft whisper sounded. It did not reach the ears of the tense group. That whisper—a laugh—was audible only to the personage who uttered it.

Tangled threads were loosening. Facts were coming out. Statements were to be made by men who were, themselves, puzzled. Oddly, no one in Verne's living room knew all the truth.

For each had certain facts known to himself alone; and each had failed to fully uncover the other's game. One living person alone could have explained it all. Only The Shadow knew!

## CHAPTER XX. THE FIRST PART

"I AM SIGNET!"

Tully Kelk made that statement with emphasis as he rubbed his chafed wrists. He looked from man to man. From Cardona to Jurling; finally to Verne.

"I am Signet," repeated Kelk, "and this is proof of it. The ring that I used in signing my correspondence to Stanton Treblaw."

From his vest pocket, Kelk produced a signet ring which he handed to Joe Cardona. The signet bore the raised impression of a crown. Joe saw tiny dabs of red wax in its crevices. The ring had undoubtedly been used as a stamping seal.

Yet Joe remained a bit perplexed. He had seen none of the original letters; only copies brought by Jurling. Kelk noted Cardona's puzzlement. He spoke again.

"I have further proof," he stated. "Identifying cards in my pockets; bills of sale for art treasures. But first, let me tell my story. All that will come later."

"Go ahead," suggested Cardona.

Like Kelk, Joe was now eyeing Verne with some suspicion. The dapper man, leaning against the wardrobe trunk, appeared quite unconcerned. He was smiling easily.

"I have always been interested in the works of Benvenuto Cellini," stated Kelk, "not only in the example of his goldsmith's art, but also in his literary efforts. I have pored over Cellini's autobiography time after time, reading between the lines of his story.

"For instance, Cellini told how he was once supplied with silver by the King of France, in order that he might make twelve statues: six Roman gods, and six goddesses. But Cellini relates that he finished the Jupiter only; and also made a silver vase. These objects were delivered to the king.

"Cellini's explanation that he made the statue larger than intended, thus using a good portion of the silver, was one that I could not believe. Cellini was frequently underpaid; he might have made the statue somewhat larger as an excuse to get more silver for himself instead of the money that was not forthcoming.

"I believed that Cellini made all twelve statues; but delivered only the Jupiter. The king was deceived by the

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silver pretext but furnished no more of the precious metal. Thus Cellini was left with eleven silver statues, which he was forced to dispose of elsewhere than in France."

Kelk paused; he studied his intent listeners, then resumed:

"Suffice it to say that my belief was correct. In Europe, I uncovered five statues which looked like survival of Cellini's work. I purchased them by proxy. I paid little more than the actual value of the metal for them; for the owners did not suspect that they were Cellini's.

"I acquired other objects, also. Many of Cellini's known works have been melted down; any treasure that could be proven as Cellini's craft would bring a huge price. But I needed that proof, and I could gain it only by finding mention of these objects, their dimensions and their values, in some unpublished manuscript of Cellini's.

"Cellini wrote cagily in his autobiography. He frequently avoided direct facts, probably in fear that the full details of his life, when published, might bring trouble upon him. But Cellini, by nature a braggart, would hardly have failed to record those adventures that he had kept from his accepted life story.

"So I sought Cellini manuscripts. I found some and purchased them. But they did not contain the facts I wanted. I learned of the manuscript which Stanton Treblaw owned. I talked with a professor who had read portions of it. I knew that it contained the details I wanted."

Again, Kelk paused. He smiled slightly, for he was coming to the matter of his correspondence with Treblaw.

"I AM a man of wealth," stated Kelk. "I am unknown here in New York; but I am recognized as a millionaire in California, where my home is situated. I was willing to pay high for Treblaw's manuscript; but I saw no reason why the old collector should gain exorbitant profit at my expense. So I wrote to Treblaw, as Signet, instructing him how to contact with me. He was to come to the Hotel Goliath; then insert an advertisement in the Classic.

"I was living at an apartment house called the Doswind. I saw Treblaw's advertisement shortly after nine o'clock, for my servant had been buying the early editions as soon as they appeared. I decided to contact Treblaw that night. I called the hotel, learned his room number and had them ring him."

Something dawned on Joe Cardona. The detective remembered that a call had come for Treblaw and had not been answered.

"Receiving no reply," resumed Kelk, "I became worried. I decided to come to the Goliath in person. I did; and knowing that Treblaw was in Room 2536, I went directly to his room. The door was unlocked. I entered after rapping. I found Treblaw dead; the room was rifled.

"I was somewhat stunned. I left there in a daze. Back at my own apartment, I decided to call the hotel. I did so, advising them to send people to Treblaw's room. The next day, I read of the murder in the newspapers."

"That was when you should have called the police," stated Cardona. "Go on, Kelk; now that you've started, we'll hear you out."

"I had no clue to the identity of Treblaw's murderer," returned Kelk. "I did not even know if Treblaw had the manuscript with him. The afternoon newspapers mentioned that you, Cardona, had gone to Droverton. I saw a notation concerning Treblaw's secretary, a man named Wickroft.



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"A thought struck me. Perhaps the manuscript was still at Treblaw's home. I went there. I found easy access to a room on the ground floor. I began a search through Treblaw's files, and was interrupted by Wickroft's unexpected entrance."

Verne was becoming tensely interested. Looks of partial understanding were showing on the faces of Cardona and Jurling. The latter, in particular, was eyeing Kelk with keen scrutiny.

"WICKROFT was yellow," chuckled Kelk. "I parleyed with him; and in his nervousness, he talked too much. I saw at once that he was crooked; that he must have been a traitor to Treblaw."

"He began to blab and I found out promptly that he was the tool of some master criminal. Apparently he had taken orders only by telephone; for when he called me 'chief,' I realized that he thought I was the master crook, at Treblaw's to check up."

"I played Wickroft perfectly. From his conversation, I learned that the big crook was after the manuscript but had not found it. I learned also that here was a possibility of the manuscript being in the possession of Silas Tilton."

"I saw a marvelous opportunity. Pretending that I was actually Wickroft's chief, I ordered the man to visit Tilton. I went with him; Wickroft let me into the house. I listened in on his conversation with Tilton. The two went upstairs. I followed."

"And then?" demanded Cardona, as Kelk paused.

"Then," replied Kelk, "the raiders entered. I was in a front room when I heard the roar of guns. I made for Tilton's filing room. I fired at some strange fighter who was garbed entirely in black. My shot was wide. I dived for cover to escape so formidable a foe. I fled."

"Where to?"

"I stayed at a hotel that night. I read new accounts in the newspapers the next morning. Believing myself safe, I returned to my apartment. I have been there since, bewildered, afraid to reveal myself because I knew that desperate criminals might be seeking me."

"Wickroft was killed in that raid at Tilton's," remarked Joe Cardona. "It looked like you framed him."

"I did not," assured Kelk. "I knew that Wickroft had already spoken to his real chief about Tilton's. It appears that the master crook had arranged that raid on his own. Wickroft and I came in on it."

"And Wickroft blabbed a description of you."

"He did! I am not surprised. He probably thought that I—the man he took for his chief—had put him on the spot. But let me finish my story."

Kelk paused a moment, to recall the plan that he had formulated after the affray at Tilton's. Then he nodded. He remembered his exact impressions.

"I REALIZED," he explained, "that if the crooks had managed to get the manuscript—either in that raid, or afterward—they would have to acquire my art treasures also. So I waited, hoping that the police investigation would bring quick results."

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"I figured that the crooks might advertise to Signet, for the master mind must have learned much from Wickroft. I watched the Classic. Last night, I read an advertisement addressed to Signet. I did not answer it.

"I looked in the Classic again this evening. Imagine my amazement when I saw an answer signed Signet! I thought it over; then I decided that the master crook must have seen the request advertisement also.

"Naturally, by replying as Signet, he could bring the owner of the manuscript to him. G 1472 meant this hotel room. So I came here, intent upon meeting the man in person. I found this fellow Verne alone"—Kelk shot a glance toward Verne—"and began to talk with him. Not having the manuscript, I decided to capture him. As a bluff, I charged him with having the manuscript already. I scored a hit."

"You did," admitted Verne, quietly. "But I never thought that you were Signet; I thought you were the big crook, here to uncover Signet."

"Wait a minute," challenged Cardona, suddenly. "You've changed your tune, Verne."

"Yes," added Jurling, ranging up with his revolver. "You are the scoundrel that we want. Trying a bit of a bluff yourself, eh?"

"What do you think, Mr. Kelk?" asked Verne, turning to the sallow man. "They were about to take you away a prisoner when I spoke in your behalf."

Cardona stopped Jurling just as the light-haired man was about to clap a hand upon Verne. Kelk was pulling papers from his pockets. He handed them to Cardona.

"These will identify me," said Kelk. "I see that you now recognize that I am Signet, But about this chap"—he turned to study Verne—"I confess that I am puzzled. He is right when he states that he spoke in my behalf.

"I like fair play. I gained my chance to talk because of Verne's insistence. As I recall it, he mentioned that he had some further testimony of his own. Why not let him give it?"

"All right," decided Cardona.

The detective had drawn a revolver and was keeping an eye on Verne. Pocketing Kelk's credentials with his free hand, Joe motioned Jurling back. Jurling retired toward the outer door. He was holding a revolver also. Kelk strolled across the room and sat down.

Still leaning against the opened front of the wardrobe trunk, Montague Verne smiled in confident fashion. Kelk's part in past episodes had been explained. Kelk was Signet without doubt. It was up to Verne to state his own identity.

Facing three men who looked like inquisitors with their steady gaze upon him, Montague Verne began to relate the circumstances that had caused him to play the feigned part of Signet.

And The Shadow, from his hidden watch-post, remained to hear new revelations that his findings had told him would be forthcoming.

## CHAPTER XXI. THE SECOND PART

"LIKE Kelk," stated Verne, "I have credentials. I shall produce them after I have told my story. I am a private

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investigator, who was concerned with the matter of the Signet correspondence.

"Acting in the interests of Stanton Treblaw, knowing that the old collector was on the point of accepting a Signet offer, I wrote him a confidential letter. I told him that I intended to be in New York; that I would stop at the Hotel Goliath.

"I added that it would be wise for him to keep this fact secret from every one; to destroy my letter immediately after reading it. I assured him that I would be ready in case of any emergency."

"When did you arrive in New York?" quizzed Cardona, suddenly. "Where did you come from to begin with?"

"I came from London," replied Verne, "and I reached here the same day as Treblaw. I waited about, here in my room, in case I should hear from him that first night. I fell asleep and knew nothing about the commotion here until the next morning.

"I was amazed when I read the morning journals and learned that Treblaw had been murdered. But something amazed me even more that day. There was a letter for me at the desk. A long envelope. I opened it; inside I found Treblaw's Cellini manuscript.

"Here is the envelope,"—Verne removed the object from his pocket — "and you will observe that it was not left at the desk. Instead, it was posted and came to me by mail. The postmark shows midnight."

Cardona grunted.

"I read the Classic the morning following Treblaw's death," resumed Verne. "His advertisement to Signet was still in print. I had not read it in the early edition; I did not know then that the Classic of one day could be bought the night before.

"Well, here I was, holding the manuscript, with Treblaw dead. What was I to do? Inform the police? Hardly, for it seemed my own concern at the moment. I decided that I should wait. I held a remarkable trump card.

"Who had killed Treblaw? Signet? No. I knew too well that Signet must be a man of means; one who could certainly meet Treblaw's price. Still, I was certain of nothing, except that Treblaw had managed to get the manuscript to me. He must have foreseen some menace.

"Then came news of the affray at Tilton's. I still waited; and all the while, one thought was bobbing through my brain: What would Signet do now that Treblaw was dead and the manuscript missing?

"I kept noting the column in the Classic. Last night, I was puzzled by the appearance of a new advertisement to Signet. Someone—T, like Treblaw, or Tilton—wanted to communicate with him. Was the advertisement a hoax? I was determined to learn.

"So I resolved to pass myself as Signet. I inserted a response to the inquiry; then I waited here, with a revolver handy, to see if some chap decided to take the bait that I had offered. You know the rest, gentlemen. Mr. Kelk came to see me."

VERNE ended so abruptly that the listeners were taken aback. The dapper man's story was effective because of its simplicity. But it was one that needed support other than Verne's own word. Verne himself recognized that fact.

"May I obtain my credentials?" he inquired, of Cardona

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"Where are they?" returned the detective.

"In the top drawer of this trunk," replied Verne.

"I'll get them," suggested Cardona.

The ace sleuth used his left hand to yank open the drawer that Verne had designated. Joe picked out a wad of papers. They were bound with a rubber band; a yellow sheet showed on the top of the stack.

"Look at that paper first," stated Verne. "It is a copy of the letter that I sent to Treblaw, telling him that I would be at this hotel."

Cardona pulled the yellow paper loose. He read its lines.

"You sent this from London?" asked Joe, in surprise. "Before you left England?"

"It was mailed from London," returned Verne, "coincident with my departure. The letter was sent by the concern which I represent. A house that takes charge of private investigations. The original letter, of course, was on their own stationery; but it was signed by myself —"

"One moment, Cardona," broke in Dale Jurling, stepping forward. "This man is dangerous! Let me have those papers"—he tried to pluck the packet from Cardona's hand—"before Verne tries some other ruse to deceive us."

Cardona pulled the stack of papers from Jurling's grasp. Swinging, Joe saw Jurling's face. The man's light countenance was flushed with anger and excitement. A change had come over Dale Jurling.

"Who is this fellow?" demanded Verne, speaking to Cardona. Verne, too, was noting Jurling as the latter backed away. "He does not look like one of your headquarters men."

"He is a British investigator," growled Joe. "Comes from an outfit called Burson, Limited. He says —"

"Burson, Limited!" interposed Verne, excitedly. "That is the house I represent! Those credentials that you hold are proof of it! We were handling the Signet investigation for Stanton Treblaw! Look at my papers—learn for yourself —"

JURLING, still backing, had placed his hand upon the doorknob. His face wore a scowl. As Cardona remained rooted, Jurling suddenly started to yank the door open.

Cardona, thinking that the blond man was out to make a get-away, sprang after him, ready to level his gun should Jurling make a move with the weapon that he held.

Verne also started forward. Kelk came to his feet. Anxious to aid Cardona, they were ready to overpower Jurling before he could escape. But the three men were all making the same mistake. Flight was not Jurling's plan.

As the door came open, Jurling twisted away to divert Cardona's aim. Joe brought up his gun; but he did not fire. He was stopped by a snarl from the door. There, lunging in, came Duster Shomak; behind him a bulking mobster.

Both were wielding revolvers. Their weapons covered Cardona; Kelk and Verne as well.

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Reinforced by these henchmen, Jurling rasped a command as he raised his own gun. Cardona, Kelk and Verne came up with their hands, backing away from the foemen who had trapped them. Joe's revolver clattered as he dropped it to the floor.

"Stand where you are!" snarled Jurling. "The first of you who moves will get a blast from the smoke-wagons! You've got your mitts up—be sure you keep them up. Listen, while I talk."

Duster Shomak had eased the door shut. He had edged to one corner of the room; the gorilla who was with him had taken another corner. Dale Jurling stepped between; he chuckled in ugly fashion as he noted how completely he and his underlings held their victims at bay.

Momentary silence came after Jurling's evil sneer. An insidious pall lay over that room. The scene had changed with surprising promptitude. The stage was set for another quick act in this odd drama.

It was a sight to witness; and there were eyes that viewed the setting. The eyes of The Shadow. For the cloaked master stood beyond the slightly opened door at the inner corner of the room.

The Shadow had anticipated this change of front on Jurling's part. But he had left action to Cardona and the others, counting upon them to use swift judgment. Cardona—Kelk and Verne as well—had failed in the crisis.

The Shadow had wanted Jurling to speak. He had seen Jurling to be the real crook; he had wanted the rogue to give his own story. That would have given the law the record that it needed to close this amazing case involving the murder of Stanton Treblaw.

Kelk had told his story; so had Verne. It was Jurling's turn; and Jurling should have been made to confess, backed to the wall by Joe Cardona. But Joe had flubbed the deal; in a twinkling, the tables had shifted.

THE muzzle of an automatic was black against the corner of that inner door. The Shadow had covered Jurling from the instant that the man had shown readiness to flee. But when the door had opened to reveal Duster and the gorilla, The Shadow had gained no chance to fire. Joe Cardona, leaping forward and then stopping, had come directly into the path of The Shadow's aim.

It was fortunate that Cardona had not put up a futile fight. The Shadow, from his ambush, could have delivered a devastating blast to the crooks; but the odds would have been bad for Joe Cardona. The ace, however, had shown good wisdom in dropping his gun to back away.

As it now stood, Jurling and two thugs were holding a trio of helpless men. Disdain was registered on Jurling's face. Duster and the gorilla looked contemptuous. Jurling had expressed his wish to talk. That fitted directly with The Shadow's own arrangements.

He was willing to let Jurling speak. Not only because the man would reveal his own evil doings, but because passing minutes would throw Jurling and his minions off their guard. The succession of events had twisted from The Shadow's control, but the scene was coming back again to the way that he had willed it.

No laugh from The Shadow's hidden lips. Not even a whisper told the satisfaction that the master fighter felt. Burning eyes alone declared The Shadow's intensity; and those optics, back from the edge of the inner door, were unviewed by Jurling and his two tools.

The Shadow saw a look of stupefaction on the face of Joe Cardona. No wonder. The ace detective was thinking of all that had happened here. Astounding changes had occurred within the room where men had

met.

The triangle had changed in incredible fashion. Three men involved. The first, a supercrook; the second a man of wealth who called himself Signet; the third an investigator, representing the British house of Burson, Limited.

The field had looked plain when Cardona had viewed it. Joe had picked Tully Kelk as the evil brain. He had accepted Montague Verne as Signet. He had believed that Dale Jurling was the bona fide investigator.

Then had come the astounding shift. Parts had changed like the glittering shutter of a kaleidoscope. Three actors in the game; three men of differing purposes. Each had assumed an unexpected role.

Tully Kelk was not the crook. He had openly declared himself to be Signet; he had proven his claim. Montague Verne, no longer Signet, had announced himself as the real investigator from England. Dale Jurling, the fraudulent investigator, had seen his underpinnings dropped. He had encountered a dilemma.

With only three legitimate parts in the game, two had been taken by their owners. Signet was found; the investigator was known; Jurling had been left holding the bag. He had only one role to play. His own. He was proven a crook by every circumstance.

Kelk's tale was told. Verne's story also. Each of those two had stated, logically, his reasons for playing another's part.

Jurling was now to be heard from; and it was plain that the supercrook would tell the truth. For Jurling, backed by his henchmen's guns, would not be making a forced confession. His words would be the utterances of a triumphant fiend.

The Shadow had judged this triangle. He had considered parts that men were playing. He had inscribed no names upon his final outline. He had kept the real identities within his own keen brain.

Ready to add his own climax to the final scene, The Shadow, invisible witness, intended to hear Dale Jurling speak. Though he knew it not, Jurling, supercrook, was about to give a confession for the benefit of a merciless judge.

### CHAPTER XXII. THE THIRD PART

DALE JURLING had pocketed his short-barreled revolver. Backed by the big guns of his two henchmen, the arch-crook felt that he needed no weapon of his own. Jurling's scowl was gone; instead, his face wore its usual openness. But that expression, in itself, was menacing, now that the fiend had shown his hand.

"We have had some interesting statements," remarked Jurling, with a sarcastic chuckle. "We have learned the motives that actuated Kelk and Verne in their methods. It remains only to explain how someone with a thinking brain could act.

"Yes, I refer to myself. I played a clever game. That is, if one can call outwitting fools an evidence of cleverness. For it appears that I was dealing with duffers from the start. With dubs, who played more dumbly than I had originally hoped."

Jurling paused to study Kelk and Verne. Both stood stolid. Then the crook looked at Cardona. Joe was sullen. The crook laughed.

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"This business of the Cellini manuscript," he remarked, in brisk fashion, "was something that I encountered through luck. Wickroft was a man whom I had posted with Stanton Treblaw, in hope that he might uncover something. He did.

"The Signet correspondence looked like a gold mine, right from the start. Treblaw talked to Wickroft. When I called Wickroft, at intervals, I learned about the Signet letters. I also learned that Burson, Limited, was conducting a European investigation for Stanton Treblaw.

"I wanted that Cellini manuscript. Wickroft did not know where Treblaw kept it. But I knew that Treblaw would have it with him when he was ready to dicker with Signet. Treblaw was coming to the Hotel Goliath. So I came here a while ahead.

"I lost the key to my room; at least I pretended to,"—Jurling chuckled—"and they used a pass-key to let me into it. I sent the bell boy for some ice water; I took an impression of the key while he was gone. The duplicate that I obtained from the impression could open any door in the hotel."

Jurling took a few satisfied paces. He swung about, faced his victims and resumed:

"I WAS set for Treblaw. Duster, Crawler and two gorillas posted themselves after the old man registered here. Crawler came up with the tip-off—Treblaw's ad in the Classic—which looked like proof sufficient that the old man had the manuscript with him.

"They bumped Treblaw when he came back with a pitcher of ice water. Crawler was waiting for him, thanks to a duplicate key; the others barged in and the job was done. They grabbed the genuine Signet letters and the correspondence from Burson, Limited, which was in a file.

"But they didn't get the Cellini manuscript." Jurling's tone had become a snarl. "The old man didn't have it. Duster called me and I knew that he had failed. He left the other stuff where I could get it.

"I was not fool enough to come to the Hotel Goliath on my own. I waited until the next day. Then I called Wickroft. I knew Wickroft was no double-crosser; but I figured he was yellow and needed fear to keep him working right. That's why I made him squeamish when I growled at him over the phone."

Again Jurling found occasion to laugh. He paused in his statement; then leered at the three helpless listeners.

"Wickroft said the manuscript might be at Tilton's," resumed Jurling. "I sent Duster and the mob to get it. They encountered a fool fighter who calls himself The Shadow. It was blotto for Crawler and the two gorillas.

"I was puzzled about Wickroft being there. It was good that he took the bump from Duster. It didn't give him a chance to talk, although he didn't know much to begin with. I figured that he had simply picked up the cracked notion that he might help me out by calling on Tilton.

"It left me on needles, though, about the manuscript. I decided that Tilton might possibly have it. I remembered the Burson investigation. I figured I could pass as an Englishman. I had all of the letters from Burson, Limited, except the last one. I made carbons of the lot, faked a final letter of no consequence and breezed in on the police commissioner. Big as life, right there at Tilton's, I gave my own name and said I was from Burson, Limited. The commish fell for the line; and so did you, Cardona."

Another chuckle; then Jurling added:

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"But Tilton didn't have the manuscript. I didn't figure that Signet had it, either, because he wouldn't have had a chance to contact Treblaw. My men had killed Treblaw too soon after the first ad appeared – the one that Treblaw himself put in the Classic.

"I wanted to find Signet, though, anyway. Either to make a deal with him when I landed the manuscript or to force him to hand over the treasures that he had bought up at junk prices.

"Since I had the police with me"—Jurling snorted as he looked at Cardona—"I decided to invoke the law in my hunt for Signet. I brought you here alone with me, Cardona; and I had my men planted to come in at the payoff. So I could talk terms with Signet when I knew him."

Smiling, Jurling drew the Cellini manuscript into view. He studied it; then looked at Tully Kelk.

"I THINK we'll snatch you, Kelk," decided Jurling. "We'll take you where we can keep you for a while and make you spill the news about where you're keeping that Cellini junk. You'll find it good business to talk, when I put on the heat.

"As for you two"—he eyed Verne and Cardona—"I'll arrange a little finish that will look good in print. A story for that goofy Classic reporter who's waiting down at the commissioner's."

Jurling's smile showed the formulation of what he considered to be an excellent plan. He decided to outline the details. As a beginning, he strode over to Cardona, plucked out the detective's handcuffs and clipped one catch on Verne's left wrist. As an afterthought, he clamped Verne's right wrist also.

"Here's how it happened," chuckled Jurling. "Cardona and I came here to find Signet. Joe decided he wanted to go in alone. He found Verne. Put the bracelets on him. Sounds good, doesn't it?"

"Well, that's just the start. Next step, Cardona calls me. Verne, despite his handcuffs, gets that little gun of his from his dressing-gown pocket." Jurling picked up Verne's gun; it was lying on the floor. "He shoots Joe down while I'm coming in, see?" Jurling pointed to Cardona's revolver that was on the carpet. "So I have to shoot Verne myself. With my own gat."

"That's the story I'll tell"—Jurling's voice became a fierce growl, resembling the one that he had used when phoning Wickroft—"the story that I'll tell when those dumb dicks come in from the elevators. The stage will be set then. I'll be the big hero at the finish. The man who tried to save Cardona."

Jurling paused to let his words sink in. Joe Cardona glowered. The detective could see how perfectly the story would jibe. It would go over with Commissioner Weston, if played right.

And Jurling was a man who could play it. He proved that by his next statement.

"ACTUALLY," declared Jurling, "I'll bump you, Cardona, with Verne's gun. Then I'll plug Verne with my own. It won't hurt if my fingerprints are with Verne's on his gun. I'll hand Verne's gun to the dicks, myself, when they come in.

"It's a sweet gag! A chat with the commish; then back to my hotel. After that, I'll take it on the lam with all that correspondence of Treblaw's that I have at my hotel. The original Signet letters will make good souvenirs to go with this Cellini manuscript." Jurling swung to Duster.

"Take Kelk," he ordered. "Shove him in one of those empty rooms down the hall. Bind him, gag him, then come back to report. After that you can go in and stay with Kelk while I loose the fireworks here."



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"What'll we do after that?" asked Duster.

"Wait until you hear from me," ordered Jurling. "You can dope Kelk later and haul him out. There's no rush. Nobody's going to know that anything happened elsewhere than in this room. But by the way—when you take Kelk across the hall, tip the other boys off to lay quiet, too."

"I got it," acknowledged Duster.

Jurling covered Cardona with Verne's gun. He drew his own revolver also, so he would have it ready to shoot down Verne. Duster and the gorilla moved over and jabbed their smoke-wagons into Kelk's ribs. With a sour smile, the mustached man allowed the pair to march him out into the hall. The door closed.

Jurling was holding Cardona covered. Verne, with his handcuffs, knew that a fight was hopeless. They had made no desperate move to aid Kelk, for it was obvious that he would be safe for the present. Kelk's fate was being reserved until after he had an opportunity to blab about where he had stored the Cellini treasures.

"We're waiting a few minutes," chuckled Jurling. "As I said before, there is no rush. The future is as good as done. Too bad I have to rub you two out; but you're saps and you deserve it.

"You showed some traces of brains, Verne, when you sent that letter to Treblaw, telling him you would be here and to keep the fact quiet. He never spoke to Wickroft about it. I even thought that last Burson letter was of no consequence. Treblaw must have destroyed it on the way in here.

"Don't keep eyeing those credentials of yours, Verne. I'm taking them from the table before the dicks get here. You were very helpful, Cardona, leaving those two gumshoes clear out by the elevators. They'll be winded by the time they make that long dash after they hear the shots.

"Do you know, Verne"—Jurling was sarcastically reflective—"you had a piece of luck when you received that manuscript in the mail. I know how you happened to get it, now that I recall something that Duster told me.

"Old Treblaw got a hunch that Duster's gorillas were watching him. He even came out into the hall to look around. He went in his room again; then he came out in his dressing gown with an empty pitcher. He went to get ice water.

"Do you know what the old fox did? He addressed that long envelope to you, put stamps on it and carried it under his dressing gown. All he had to do was drop it in the mail chute, right alongside of the ice-water tap."

Jurling chuckled. He was watching Cardona while he talked, keeping the fuming detective covered with Verne's gun.

"How's that for deduction?" jeered Jurling. "Hit it on the nose, didn't I, gumshoe? Cardona—Joe Cardona—ace of the force. You couldn't have thought that out, could you?"

"Say—the only break you dubs really deserved was the one that came at Tilton's. When The Shadow barged in and stopped a killing. But he was a flash in the pan. The Shadow. Bah! He can handle rods, maybe, but he's brainless.

"Why didn't he show up again? Why didn't he find you, Verne, before Cardona and I got here? Why didn't he spot Kelk, if he was so smart? He had a bead on Kelk out there at Tilton's but he flivved. The Shadow flivved!"

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MONTAGUE VERNE was staring straight at Jurling. Through Verne's mind had flashed a sudden thought. The visitor who had come that afternoon—the hawk-faced personage who had introduced himself as Lamont Cranston.

Someone had come here ahead of the others: someone who had promised aid in time of need. Verne's lips phrased an incoherent mumble. Why had he passed up the chance to talk to one who could have helped!

"I was surprised, myself," scoffed Jurling, "when I found out that a real Burson investigator was here; that Verne was the man." Jurling was talking to Cardona. "That was a bad break for me; but I was the first to see it. I beat you to it, Cardona.

"I've beaten all of you; and I've bluffed The Shadow. Left him at the post. The Shadow—just another bugaboo. Too bad he isn't here to see this payoff."

Jurling leaned back against the wardrobe trunk. His hands were ready with their revolvers, each gun set for its job.

Cardona and Verne looked into the barrels; their hopeless eyes stared beyond. As Jurling spoke again, each of his intended victims saw motion past the crook's shoulder. The door to the bedroom was opening.

"Too bad The Shadow isn't here," repeated Jurling. "I could give him some pointers. Two pointers"—he chuckled as he moved his guns— "two pointers, like these. Pointers that he would remember."

Jurling paused suddenly as he noted a change in expression on the part of Joe Cardona. The detective's lips, though grim, seemed smiling. Verne's, too. Their eyes were no longer straight toward Jurling's guns.

With weapons ready, Jurling made a quick short turn of his head. His own eyes shot toward the door of the inner room. A gasp froze on the crook's lips. A weird, mocking whisper came throbbing to Jurling's ears.

Dale Jurling was staring squarely into the looming muzzle of an automatic. The big mouth of the .45 was less than six inches from the bridge of his nose. A black fist held that gun.

And above were eyes that burned like living coals. Eyes that were all that Jurling could see of a hidden face that lay between the upturned collar of a cloak and the protruding brim of a slouch hat.

Dale Jurling, crook extraordinary, had gained an answer to his wish. The Shadow had arrived upon the scene of doom!

### CHAPTER XXIII. THE SHADOW'S TURN

WHEN Dale Jurling had covered Joe Cardona, the detective had dropped his gun. For Joe had realized that he was faced by a dangerous foe. Now it was Jurling's turn to face a gun muzzle. The crook was holding two revolvers. Joe expected to see both fall; but they remained in Jurling's hands.

For the supercrook, faced by The Shadow, had lost all power of action. As he looked into the yawning mouth of The Shadow's .45, Jurling was unable even to loose his fingers. He held his rods; but they were as useless as toy pistols.

The Shadow's hand moved forward. The muzzle of the automatic pressed squarely against Jurling's forehead. The crook gasped and quivered. This time his guns went clattering. He was like a mechanical figure, its hands

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actuated by pressure upon a hidden spring.

Cardona and Verne made no move. They, too, were rigid. Their rescue seemed unbelievable; The Shadow's mastery was such that action on their part would have been superfluous. They heard The Shadow laugh.

With whispered mockery, The Shadow withdrew his gun from Jurling's head. The crook's forehead retained a round impression from the muzzle of the .45. The red circle remained as an accusing badge—a mark of Cain that branded Jurling a murderer. A sign of doom, imprinted by The Shadow.

The Shadow's gun hand moved slowly sideways. Jurling, promoted by the commanding gesture, backed away from the trunk and sidled toward the center of the room. The Shadow, coming forward, reached the strategic spot that Jurling had occupied.

The lighting of the room was entirely that of table lamps and wall brackets. Though the illumination had made faces plain, it did not reveal The Shadow's countenance. For the position that The Shadow had taken brought him beneath a wall light. His slouch hat blocked the glow and rendered his visage obscure.

The Shadow spoke; his voice gave a whispered order. Joe Cardona pulled the handcuff key from his pocket. As he had previously released Tully Kelk, so did he now unlock Montague Verne. All the while, The Shadow's gaze was steady upon Dale Jurling, who was near the center of the room.

Seeking to regain his bravado, the crook had made an effort to face his ominous foe. But though his trembling had ceased, Jurling had failed to lose the expression of fear that lay upon his face. Bold while he held the upper hand, the crook lacked courage once that he was trapped.

Jurling had derided The Shadow; in return, he had been treated to a sinister mockery. The tones of The Shadow's vengeful laugh had not yet faded from the snared crook's ears. Then The Shadow spoke.

"PARTS have been played," pronounced The Shadow, "and now those parts are ended. Parts that were intended to deceive—and failed."

As he spoke, The Shadow stood motionless. His right hand held the automatic; his left was pressed against the front of his enshrouding cloak. Both fists were gloved; his form was a shape of total blackness.

Across the floor stretched a streak of darkness, the shadow of The Shadow. The blot ended in a hawk-like profile that seemed emblazoned upon the floor. Just beyond it was Jurling, as motionless as the being who had balked him.

"Those parts revealed themselves," resumed The Shadow. "Tully Kelk, despite his actions, was obviously no man of crime. He placed himself under my suspicion. His visit to Treblaw's home cleared him.

"Kelk bluffed Wickroft. I viewed the two in conference. By sending Wickroft to Tilton's, Kelk gave another proof of his integrity. If Kelk had wished Wickroft dead, he could have slain him at Treblaw's."

The logic of these words was plain. To Joe Cardona, they revealed that The Shadow had entered the strange game soon after crime had begun.

"No man of crime," resumed The Shadow, "would have trusted Wickroft's death to chance. Had Kelk been the plotter, he would not have used two methods simultaneously. Wickroft, sounding Tilton in regard to the manuscript; raiders, entering the house to rob and slay; those were cross purposes. They showed Kelk free from guilt."

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The Shadow paused. His gaze was focused accusingly upon Jurling.

"The man of crime, to win, was forced into the light." The Shadow's tone was ominous. "Your game, Jurling, evidenced itself as soon as you appeared. The fact that Wickroft was your tool proved that you knew of Treblaw's dealings.

"You introduced yourself as an English investigator. You spoke of Scotland Yard—but showed no credentials to prove your old connection there. Instead, you produced cards that identified yourself with Burson, Limited. Cards that were easily faked.

"You spoke of letters. Carbon copies only. You dared not show the originals that you had gained by theft. You relied upon the surprising information that you gave to cover your opening ruse. But you overplayed when you insisted upon contacting Signet in the way that you suggested.

"That placed you under my suspicion. It proved that you were attempting a daring scheme. Kelk was bold enough to act almost as a man of crime. You were bold enough to almost cover the fact that you were a man of crime."

The Shadow paused ominously. He appeared to be listening for some sound outside the room. Hearing none, he added:

"Signet versus a master crook"—The Shadow's words were hissed— "and circumstances showed that Kelk was Signet; with you the man of crime. Someone else was necessary. The one who held the Cellini manuscript.

"In passing yourself as an investigator from England, you played a possible role. The only part that logically remained. Stanton Treblaw, fearing doom, would have entrusted his manuscript only to a representative of Burson, Limited.

"That fact appearing, this hotel became the spot where such a man would probably be. I learned of Montague Verne. I knew that he must hold the manuscript. I discovered that he intended to pass himself as Signet.

"That placed the climax here. This room became the rendezvous for all participants. Like puppets, they have performed their parts. The show is over."

Again came silence. The Shadow was listening.

Jurling realized why. The Shadow had heard all. He knew that Duster and the gorilla were due to return. The Shadow was awaiting their arrival in order that Tully Kelk might lie safe, though bound and helpless.

Jurling saw The Shadow's left hand move beneath the cloak. He did not sense the reason for the action; for Jurling's ears lacked the keenness of The Shadow's. But Jurling, frantic in his helplessness, could stand the strain no longer. With a wild gasp, he hurled himself forward upon the being in black.

THE SHADOW did not fire his automatic. Instead, he whirled as Jurling leaped. The crimson lining of his cloak flashed wide, giving a fleeting view of the tall, black-clad figure beneath it. The Shadow was swinging for the outer door. It was there that battle lay.

Jurling, missing in his leap, plunged against the open front of the wardrobe trunk, pounding the bulky object back against the wall. As he recoiled from the plunge, he had no chance to swing upon The Shadow.

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Joe Cardona and Montague Verne had leaped an instant after Jurling. Together, they fell upon the plotting crook, to overpower him and capture him alive. The Shadow had left the would-be murderer to the men whom Jurling had promised to kill in cold blood.

The door of the room had swung inward. Duster Shomak, catching the tumult of the sudden fray, was on the threshold, gun in hand. Again the big mobleader was face to face with The Shadow. This time the range was short enough for Duster's aim. It was his trigger finger, not his eye, that failed him.

As Duster's smoke-wagon flashed upward, The Shadow's left-hand automatic spoke with flame. Duster's finger faltered on the trigger. Snarling, the mobleader clapped his left hand to his chest. He wavered.

A revolver spoke from over Duster's shoulder. The gorilla who had come with the mobleader was opening fire, with Duster's body as a bulwark. The gorilla had a shield against The Shadow's aim; but The Shadow also found advantage in the fact.

He faded rightward as the mobster fired. One shot—another; both were wide. The gorilla, stretching for a third attempt, snarled in triumph as The Shadow swung into a corner. In his evil hope, the firing mobster did not realize that Duster's body was slumping.

The Shadow fired before the gorilla could deliver his third shot. A sizzling bullet skimmed Duster's dropping head. It found the henchman's form. The fellow staggered backward into the hall. The Shadow swept in that direction.

The Shadow had anticipated other enemies. Cliff Marsland's report had told him that Duster Shomak had been picking a formidable crew. The mobster's body half blocked the door when The Shadow reached it, for the crook had grabbed the door frame with one hand. The Shadow jostled him loose. The clipped gorilla sprawled.

"The Shadow!"

The cry rang out in the corridor. It came from opened doorways, where armed men were springing into view. The loudness of the shots had told these reserves that the door of Room 1472 was open. They knew that plans had gone askew.

Dale Jurling had prepared for trouble. His trip to his room at the Hotel Tolberc had been for a purpose that Joe Cardona had not suspected: from there, Jurling had made a phone call to Duster's hide-out.

Anticipating a squad of headquarters men, Jurling had ordered a good-sized mob on hand. These were the ruffians whom the elevator operators had noticed. They were all in ambush, thanks to Jurling's supply of master keys.

As The Shadow fired into the corridor, revolvers answered from rooms across the hall. One of four doors alone was closed. That was the room wherein Duster and his pal had stowed Tully Kelk.

The Shadow clipped one ducking mobster with an opening shot. Other bullets were wild, for crooks were diving and their own shots spattered wide of their blackened target. Then came new reports from a corridor that cut into this one. Cardona's two detectives were coming up.

Volleys from the rooms. One detective wavered, wounded. The other dragged him to safety.

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The Shadow's automatics boomed. Again, gleaming gats were swung in his direction. The Shadow whirled back into 1472, to escape the fusillade.

Cardona and Verne had overwhelmed Jurling. They had stretched the crook across the top of the wardrobe trunk. Joe had clamped the handcuffs to Jurling's right wrist. With Verne's aid, he was trying to snap the other bracelet. The Shadow saw this in his twist about; then, again, he was facing the door.

A triumphant yell from the corridor. Just as Cardona and Verne had forgotten all else in their hope of triumph over Jurling, so had the ambushed crooks thrown caution in their thirst for victory against The Shadow.

To a man, they thought that they had trapped their mighty foe. With the detectives out, nothing seemed present to stop them in their surge. They were piling out into the open; a dozen strong, ready to overwhelm The Shadow through sheer force of numbers.

Not one suspected The Shadow's ruse. They had no inkling that he, like Jurling, had prepared for trouble. It was not until the mob was completely in the corridor that The Shadow's answer came.

Doors swung open—one at each end of the long hall. These were the rooms that The Shadow had left in readiness. Up from one door came Cliff Marsland; Hawkeye sprang into view at the second barrier. Both aimed at a slight angle, for a common target; the space in front of Verne's room.

Each agent opened with a pumping automatic, loosing shots as fast as he could fire. Each had a second weapon ready to continue the barrage.

The foremost gorillas tumbled. Others twisted about in mad effort to escape The Shadow's gunners. Dropping to the floor, the trapped mobsters grabbed wounded men for shields and aimed along the corridors.

Doors slammed shut. Cliff and Hawkeye had completed their swift barrage. Mobsters, scattered, came bobbing up. They were met with a sardonic taunt that rang amid the final echoes of swift-loosed gunplay.

THE SHADOW was back. He was out in the corridor, new automatics in his fists, ready to beat these scattered foemen in the final fray. Spread from the door of 1472, the battered gorillas went diving for safety, firing madly as they fled.

Swinging, The Shadow delivered timely shots that made minions of crime falter in their aim. He clipped two mobsters who were diving back into rooms. He swung for others who were bounding down the hall. A trio darted into the elevator corridor, to be met by ready shots from Cardona's detectives.

Wounded gorillas, crawling weaponless, could fight no longer. In the corridor, The Shadow paused. Finished echoes told that the detectives had bagged the mobsters who had fled in their direction. The Shadow's laugh rang out again. It was a signal to Cliff and Hawkeye that their departure was in order.

Then, with a final sweep, The Shadow rushed back to the room that he had left. A dozen paces would give him the final sight he needed: Dale Jurling completely in the power of Joe Cardona and Montague Verne.

But in that room had come a change of conflict. At the very moment of The Shadow's approach, Dale Jurling produced an unexpected fight. His left wrist, almost in its bracelet, snapped free from Joe Cardona's grasp. Jurling's upcoming fist clipped the detective's chin.

As Joe dropped back, Jurling rolled from the trunk. Verne fell upon him; Jurling swept his right arm far and wide. The dangling handcuff landed squarely behind Verne's ear. The investigator staggered.

Diving for the floor, Jurling snatched a revolver in his right hand. Coming up madly, he swung toward the door. And as his aim came automatically into position, he saw the figure that he wanted.

The Shadow, returning, had stepped squarely into position as a target for Dale Jurling's fire!

### CHAPTER XXIV. THE LAST STROKE

LUCK had come to Dale Jurling. His lucky clip to Cardona's chin; his metallic slash at Verne; now the great opportunity. Pure chance had given him a bead upon the enemy who had brought end to his evil plans.

Death to The Shadow. That was Dale Jurling's thought as he held his revolver steady, at full arm's length. Half crouched, he formed a fiendish figure with the leer he wore. And dangling from his aiming wrist was the symbol of frustrated capture; that handcuff which had been clamped in vain.

The Shadow, swinging in from the door, had automatics in his fists. He had launched all but a single bullet in that torrent of scattered shots along the corridor. He had reserved one slug for a pinch; yet the emergency had caught him at a disadvantage.

For Dale Jurling had The Shadow covered; and Jurling was out to kill. Upon the floor lay Montague Verne, half-unconscious, while Joe Cardona had come to his feet beside the wardrobe trunk. Jurling would take care of him after The Shadow.

To Joe Cardona, the scene was one of dire circumstance. Jurling on the point of pressing trigger, glaring with a venom that told he would not miss. The Shadow, squarely in the center of the doorway; too far in to fade back, not near enough to spring upon his foe; with automatic too low to cover before Jurling fired.

The Shadow, more than once, had brought aid to Joe Cardona. He had saved the detective's life tonight; but that favor was no more than a repetition of previous deeds of rescue. It was Joe's instinctive knowledge of all he owed The Shadow that brought about the amazing stroke that followed.

Joe was swinging up as Jurling aimed. Half dazed from Jurling's fist, the detective was acting in mechanical fashion. While his eyes were viewing the conflict that threatened death to The Shadow, Joe's limbs were hurling him forward in a wild effort to stay Jurling's shot.

Jurling had not forgotten that Cardona might be in the game. With finger on trigger, the crook shifted his body, but not his aiming hand. With the shift he dropped straight backward, holding the perfect level of his gun. Cardona's leap was straight into an empty space. Moreover, it was short.

But as Jurling's finger snapped the trigger, Cardona performed the frantic action of a man bound on a futile plunge. He shot his right hand upward to grab the only object that he saw. Too short to grip Jurling's arm; Cardona's stretch was long enough to seize a mass of metal that sparkled before his bleary eyes.

The detective caught the dangling bracelet of the handcuff. He clutched it with a grip that death alone could have loosed. And with that grab, Cardona went sprawling headlong to the floor.

JURLING'S revolver barked. His shot came hard upon Cardona's grab. The crook's right wrist was jostled. His shot, wide and low, sizzled through a space no more than two inches in width—the gap between The Shadow's body and the right side of the doorway.

As he fired, Jurling went spinning to the floor, carried along by the weight of Cardona's heavy-set body. The

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two men were whirled in an amazing dive that came as The Shadow fired. Like Jurling, The Shadow missed. His aim, coming up toward the spot where Jurling was, found space where the sprawling crook had been.

That was not all. Neither Jurling nor Cardona had yielded grip. While Joe still clutched the handcuffs, Jurling retained the gun. The two rolled into the wall; grappling, they came up to their feet and staggered in a lopsided lurch toward the far end of the room.

The Shadow sprang forward to end the fray. A table was in the way. He seized it and swung it crashing to the wall. As the fighters whirled toward the wardrobe trunk, The Shadow picked his spot. Sweeping forward, he shot his gloved hands straight for Jurling's neck.

Again, luck saved the desperate crook. Verne, coming to his feet, was almost in The Shadow's path. As the cloaked rescuer swept to Cardona's aid, Verne stumbled forward. His body blocked The Shadow's drive.

Half-sprawling, The Shadow went staggering to the wall.

He had dropped his automatics beneath his cloak while watching the first action of the grapple between Cardona and Jurling. Unencumbered, The Shadow spun about to make a new leap for the crook. But Joe and Jurling had missed the big trunk; instead of striking it, they went plunging into the inner room of the suite.

The Shadow followed, seeking surging forms in darkness. He could see the splash of shining metal—gun and handcuffs—as the sweeping objects caught glimmering light from the living room. Then came a crash. Together, the two men drove head-on against the connecting door that The Shadow had left open to the farther suite. Cardona's head took the blow against the barrier. The detective slumped from the thump; his fingers lost the bracelet that they had clung to with such fierce tenacity.

Jurling, free and with gun, went driving on, while The Shadow followed, half a room's length behind.

Jurling was dashing through the empty suite. The Shadow, leaping over Cardona, saw the crook swing into the door beyond. There, as Jurling plunged forward with high-raised gun, a man came up to meet him. It was Harry Vincent, stationed here to guard The Shadow's exit.

HARRY held an automatic. He swung it hard for Jurling's shining gun – all that he could distinguish in the darkness of this outer living room. Metal clicked metal. Then came a new and furious grapple, with Jurling battling in renewed frenzy.

The Shadow, close upon the fray, could not distinguish which spinning man to take. A revolver shot burst the darkness; its stabbing flame directed upward. Jurling had fired. His bullet, deflected by Harry's clutch upon his wrist, found lodgment in the ceiling.

Then came an avalanche of blackness. The Shadow, like the thickness of the room itself, sprang forward in one gigantic leap that brought him squarely upon the shoulders of the struggling pair. Men slumped downward; then, as their bodies shifted, both Harry and Jurling reeled headlong to the darkened floor, The Shadow coming with them.

It was The Shadow's only course to end the fray. He had picked both combatants—his agent and his foe—as one.

In the roll, The Shadow was pinioned at the bottom of the heap. His swift fist caught a gun and clutched it. Twisting, The Shadow heaved upward and sent the two men staggering in opposite directions.



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On hands and knees, The Shadow clutched the gun that he had grabbed. He felt the flat side of an automatic. The snatch had given him Harry Vincent's weapon. Gripping the handle with a swift move, The Shadow swung about. Off toward the end of the room, he saw two forms silhouetted against the row of windows in the wall.

Reflected glow of Manhattan lights showed two stubborn combatants leaping forward for new fight. And from beneath the wide slashing arm of the rising figure on the left was dangling the telltale clue: the handcuffs that Dale Jurling was still wearing.

Coming in with fiendish zest to kill, Jurling was pouncing upon Harry Vincent. The Shadow's agent, game to the finish, was springing up to meet him. Alike in the darkness, the only quick guess to which was which lay in Jurling's telltale bracelet.

THE SHADOW fired a split-second before the two men met. His aim was for the wrist above the dangling metal; a shot intended to cripple Jurling's gun hand. The Shadow's aim was true.

A sizzling slug found metal. Jurling's arm went sweeping up. He sprawled to the floor with Harry upon him—losing his gun as he fell, regaining it as he groped madly on the floor. Felled by the force of The Shadow's shot and Harry's lunge, Jurling still had chance to use his gun.

For The Shadow's bullet had struck the one spot of protection upon Jurling's wrist. It had ricocheted from the band of steel that formed the bracelet of the handcuff.

Jurling's rolling twist had swung him to one side. Harry was fighting to bear him down. Jurling, half free, aimed across the room, knowing where The Shadow was located. He fired a blind shot.

In answer came the flame of the automatic. Harry and Jurling were upon the floor, below the level of the window. The Shadow's answering bullet was purposely high. It clipped a windowpane and delivered a shattered shower of glass to the courtyard many floors below.

Jurling fired at the spot where he had seen the first flash. The Shadow's response came from another location. A second window shattered. Jurling, fighting away from Harry, fired again. Then, with elation, the crook was free.

Harry Vincent had released him. Those window-shattering shots had been a message from The Shadow. For Harry, brought to reason by the clatter of the broken glass, knew suddenly that The Shadow would not normally fire high.

The Shadow wanted to know that Harry was clear of danger. That was the reason for his strange, misguided aim. And Harry, diving for the shelter of a table, was quick with his return cue. He spilled the table to the floor, just as Jurling's revolver delivered another chance jab of flame.

The Shadow responded on the instant. Jurling's shot from one side of the windows; the crash of the table falling at the other end were proofs that the combatants lay far apart. The automatic blazed from the inner darkness. Jurling, with a wild cry fired madly at the stab of light. The automatic barked again, four feet distant from the previous shot.

A brief pause. Then came another spurt of Jurling's revolver; almost with it, the flash of The Shadow's automatic. Echoes died. Something clattered to the floor by the window. A groan was followed by a cough.

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The duel in the dark was finished. Dale Jurling had tempted luck too long. His random shots, delivered at an ever-shifting target, had proven hopeless thrusts, but The Shadow's bursts had been promptly given.

The first shots, warning Harry to roll clear, had served as bait as well. They had beckoned Jurling into the final fray. He had even thought the odds were in his favor. The result had given him the doom that he deserved.

HARRY VINCENT, rising from behind the toppled table, was prompt at the sound of a hissed order. He headed for the door of the suite. Reaching the corridor, he dashed in the direction of a fire tower that lay down a passage close by.

Harry, like Cliff and Hawkeye, was clearing the vicinity, knowing that The Shadow would follow.

Some seconds after his agent's departure, The Shadow appeared at the door to the corridor. No one was in sight. People coming from below had naturally headed toward Suite 1472.

The Shadow stepped into the corridor. From his hidden lips came a rising laugh that finished with a shudder. Then The Shadow was gone, following Harry Vincent's course.

Through the corridor came the answer to that strident mirth; ghoulish whispers from the ends of the long, deserted hall. Walls had caught and held The Shadow's triumph laugh.

Joe Cardona heard those whispers as he arrived through from Verne's suite. As the final echoes faded, the ace detective pressed the light switch. He looked about. He saw Montague Verne, pale and shaky, coming in to join him. Then Tully Kelk, released from his bonds by house detectives.

Looking across the floor, the arrivals saw the prone form of the murderer who had fought and lost. Sprawled beneath the shattered window was Dale Jurling, the killer who had gained just death for himself.

Beside him lay the empty revolver; before him were his outstretched hands. Joe Cardona smiled grimly as he saw the murderer's wrists. One bracelet was no longer dangling. It was clamped to Jurling's left wrist.

The justice of it came home to Joe Cardona. First, Tully Kelk had worn those handcuffs tonight. Then the clamps had gone on Montague Verne. Both had been marked for death by Jurling.

But now the bracelets had clicked where they belonged. In gloom-enshrouded fight, The Shadow had been forced to deliver death to a killer. But he had remained long enough to complete the significant attachment of those handcuffs: the completion of a duty which Joe Cardona had begun.

To the detective, those handcuffs were a symbol. Clamped to dead wrists, they stood as a reminder that The Shadow would remember the timely aid that Joe had given in the moment when a master of crime had risen to victory's verge.

Detective Joe Cardona had received a parting tribute from The Shadow.

THE END