

THE UNSEEN KILLER

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I. PLANS COMPLETED

"THAT'S Trip Burgan –"

"The gambler, eh? He looks like a big shot, all right."

"Looks like one? He is one. Riding easy on the dough he's taken in –"

The comments were audible to "Trip" Burgan as he strolled through the lobby of the Hotel Revano. A cold smile appeared upon the gambler's lips. The expression changed, however, as Trip entered the elevator and turned toward the door. Those who could still see him from the lobby observed an emotionless countenance.

The term "poker-faced" applied to Trip Burgan. His sallow visage was one that maintained a fixed appearance. Only his eyes were shifty; but Trip had gained the habit of changing his gaze in a natural fashion that proved deceptive to those who observed it.

The cold smile reappeared when Trip stepped from the elevator at the sixth floor. This showed that the

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gambler had not forgotten the comments from the lobby loungers. Those statements were to Trip's liking, particularly the reference to the fact that he was "riding easy." For Trip, retired from active practice at the gaming table, had been seeking to establish that very impression.

Arriving at a doorway near the end of a corridor, Trip inserted a key and turned the lock. He stepped into a thickly furnished living room, just as a thick-set man bounded up from a chair to see who was entering. A sheepish grin showed on the fellow's thick-lipped face.

"Ought to have known it was you, Trip," remarked the man, apologetically. "Guess I was kind of half asleep here in the chair. You clicking the key woke me up."

"All right, Chuck," returned Trip, in a brusque tone. "Well, what's doing? Is he here yet?"

"Crofton?"

Trip Burgan's eyes narrowed. His face formed a scowl that made Chuck shift uneasily. The hard-faced fellow began to stammer apologies for his blunder. Trip cut him short.

"Listen, you mug," spat the gambler. "Forget that name. Understand? You've never heard of Miles Crofton. He's never been here. Get it?"

"Sure, Trip but when I'm talking to you –"

"Let me mention the name if anybody does." Trip paused abruptly to fling aside hat, coat and scarf. Then, reverting to his original question, he snapped: "Well, is he here?"

"Sure," returned "Chuck." "In the next room. I showed him in there about fifteen minutes ago."

"All right. I'm going in to see him. If anybody asks for me, I'm busy."

WITH that admonition, Trip Burgan opened the door to the next room and entered. He closed the barrier behind him.

Across the room, which was one of the bedrooms of Trip's apartment, a man was standing at the window, looking toward Broadway, half a block distant. The visitor turned when he heard Trip close the door.

Miles Crofton formed an odd contrast to Trip Burgan. Both men had expressionless faces; but there the likeness ended. Where Trip looked the part of a crafty schemer, Crofton had the appearance of a deliberate thinker.

Though Crofton's countenance betrayed no emotion, his whole bearing was one that would inspire the confidence of associates. It was not until Trip delivered a slight grin that Crofton relaxed. Even then, his facial expression did not lose its seriousness.

"Had to give Chuck a call-down," remarked Trip, as he waved his visitor to a chair. "I told him never to mention your name, not even to me; but he forgot it when I came in. He won't do it again, though."

Crofton nodded.

"Well," queried Trip, "what's doing up at the professor's? Everything set?"

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"For to-night."

"Yeah?" exclaimed Trip, when he heard Crofton's matter-of-fact statement. "Say! That's the ticket! I didn't think he was going to pull the stunt until next week. What made him set it ahead?"

"Findlay Warlock came in to see him."

"Still singing his hard-luck song?" questioned Trip. "How he's counting on the prof to come through with the new invention?"

"Yes," replied Crofton. "Warlock talked while I was working in the lab. Professor Lessep told him that the new apparatus was ready. Warlock persuaded him immediately to make the test to-night."

As Crofton paused, his stolidness impressed Trip with the idea that something might be wrong. Poker-faced, the gambler studied his visitor; then questioned:

"Don't you like the idea? Aren't you set for it?"

"I'm ready," replied Crofton seriously. "It was something Warlock said that bothers me. Just before he left, he told Professor Lessep that he's invited the police commissioner."

"Great!" exclaimed Trip. "Say that's going to spread the thing wide! Plenty of publicity –"

"Perhaps too much," interposed Crofton.

"How come?" questioned Trip.

"To begin with," replied Crofton, "the commissioner may be suspicious of the whole experiment. After it goes through supposing there's no hitch he may start an investigation of my past."

"What if he does? What'll he find out? War hero soldier of fortune stunt flier –"

"That part's all right. But he may learn that I was a pal of Rouser Tukin."

"How? You kept in the clear when Rouser pulled that bank job. A couple of cops got killed, but Rouser was bumped in the fight. He's not around to talk."

"They're still looking for some of the mob."

"But they haven't found them. Anyway, who's going to blab your name? Nobody's got anything on you."

"You never can tell what some stool pigeon has heard. Listen, Trip: I don't want this thing to stir up too much hullabaloo right at the start."

"It won't." Trip seemed positive. "But you're wise to look at it that way, Crofton. You'll have to lay low in a hurry. But that's all set. The hide-out's ready. Steer there as soon as you leave the prof's."

"The hide-out," repeated Crofton. He indulged in a slight chuckle. "It seems funny, calling it a hide-out. It's necessary, though. All right" he shrugged his shoulders "we can take a chance on the commissioner. Maybe he won't make any trouble up at Lessep's."

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"He's a dumb egg," assured Trip. "The old commissioner, Ralph Weston, might mean something. But this guy Wainwright Barth well, maybe he's as cuckoo as Professor Lessep. He won't get wind of anything."

"He might trace you, Trip –"

"How?"

"Through Professor Lessep."

TRIP BURGAN arose and stalked over by the window. The fading afternoon light revealed an ugly twist to his lips as the gambler faced Miles Crofton.

"The old prof won't blab," asserted Trip. "It would queer him if he did. I slipped him dough when he needed it. If it wasn't for that, this new invention would be listed as a flop along with the others."

"What's more, I've been playing a steady game. I picked this hotel because it wasn't too cheap nor too ritzy. Just the place where a guy like myself would stop if he had retired. Nobody's got anything on me."

"I fixed it so you got in with the prof as his assistant. But what if he says so? I'll deny it; he'll have no proof to back it up. He'd only put himself in trouble."

"But that's not all. After you fade out, I'm going to keep away from where you are. Chuck Galla fixed the hideout. He'll have his own men planted there after you move into the joint to–night. If the bulls begin to quiz me, Chuck will keep away from here and I'll play dumb."

"If the prof begins to weaken, we'll find out about it soon enough. There'll be a way to handle him. You're not seeing me any more; and I'm not seeing you" Trip paused to deliver a slight grin "in fact, nobody's seeing you. It looks to me like we're all set."

"We are." Crofton rose as he spoke. "I just wanted to sound you out, Trip. I've been studying Professor Lessep at close range. I feel sure that he won't crimp the game. As you say, it would queer him worse than any one else."

"But I wanted to make sure that you weren't overconfident. It may sound funny for me to say that, after the risks I've taken to grab off coin. But I've always studied consequences and given them their full value, even when everything looks like a set–up. That's why I'm still alive."

"The weak link lies between you and Professor Lessep. There's always a weak link. My policy is to look for it. I wanted to be sure you saw it. You've seen it and you'll be ready for it. That settles the matter. The commissioner won't worry me."

Crofton strolled toward the door that led to the living room. Trip followed. He stopped his visitor with a low–voiced question. This time it was Trip who expressed concern.

"You're sure the apparatus will work?" he questioned. "The old prof won't get excited and bungle it?"

"Not a chance," returned Crofton. "We tested it after Warlock left to–day. Lessep has it timed to the exact second. I've taken your word for it that the prof will keep mum. You can take mine that he won't slip when he works his experiment."

"There'll be no worry after to–night," assured Trip. "Listen, Crofton. In a pinch, you can blow in on the old

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prof. End the whole game before he makes up his mind to blab. Let him know that he's got plenty to lose –"

Crofton was nodding as he opened the door. Trip broke off so that Chuck would not hear the finish of the sentence. Solemnly, the ex-gambler shook hands with his visitor. Then Trip opened the door, peered into the hall and gave Crofton the signal to stroll forth.

AS soon as he had closed the door Trip Burgan turned to Chuck Galla. Trip made no effort to suppress the enthusiasm that he felt. His hard lips widened; he showed an elation that amazed his underling.

"Give the gang the tip, Chuck," ordered Trip. "We're going to cover the hide-out, beginning with to-night."

"You mean Croft –"

Trip laughed as Chuck caught himself before completing Crofton's name.

"Crofton's the guy," informed Trip. "He's going in there. But nobody's going to see him go in; and nobody's going to see him when he comes out. That's why I told you to fix the hide-out the way I described it.

"We're in the big dough, Chuck. You'll get plenty by the time we're through. The best of it is that we can sit back while Crofton's doing the work. All we've got to do is cover up. Make it easy for him."

Chuck looked puzzled.

"Can't figure it, eh?" chuckled Trip. "Well, you haven't heard anything yet. We're playing the old professor for a sap, to begin with. If the thing works well, after to-night, it will be a cinch. Crofton bringing in the gravy –"

"But the bulls –"

"They'll never find him." Again a chuckle from Trip as he spoke. "They can't find him. Nobody can find him after to-night."

"Give me the low-down, Trip."

"All right. Listen."

Chuck sat down, still puzzled. Trip began to speak in a steady, convincing tone. As Chuck listened, his eyes began to blink. He looked at Trip, wondering if the gambler had gone insane.

But Trip's persuasive voice belied all madness. In spite of himself, Chuck began to be convinced. Doubt became bewilderment. In turn, bewilderment changed to amazement. But with amazement came belief.

Nodding mechanically, Chuck was sitting upright in his chair when Trip completed his statements and his orders. The gambler's hand clamped upon the underling's shoulder. Chuck arose; Trip moved him toward the door.

"You've got it now," declared Trip, steadily. "So keep it in your noodle, where it belongs. You're in on something big, Chuck. Get going. Fix things at the hide-out."

With an effort, Chuck snapped out of his trance. He left and took an elevator to the lobby. Dusk had settled when Chuck Galla came out into the street. The lieutenant started away at a steady pace.

But as he walked along, Chuck mumbled to himself. He was repeating words that he had heard from Trip. Chuck was strengthening his conviction that the impossible could be true.

For from Trip Burgan, Chuck Galla had learned the details of new plans for crime. He had heard a plot that had seemed incredible; a scheme that all the power of the law could not combat.

CHAPTER II. FROM THE CONFERENCE

A GROUP of men was gathered about a long conference table. Situated in an office high in a Manhattan skyscraper, they commanded a complete view of the Times Square district. Dusk had settled over the metropolis. Blinking signs flashed their intermittent glow into the ruddy sky above the city. But the sight meant nothing to these men. They were concerned with the misfortunes of the Centralized Power Corporation.

At one end of the long table was a solemn-faced, gray-haired man. Benign of countenance, he held an attitude of friendship. Glumness, however, was imprinted upon his features. He could not shake off the pall of gloom that had captured him. This was Findlay Warlock, president of the corporation.

Stockholders represented by men seated on both sides of the table – had once looked to Warlock as master of their fortunes. But that had been before the advent of disaster. Warlock, no longer a leader, had been supplanted by the man who now sat at the other end of the conference table. This was Marryat Darring, recently appointed as executive secretary.

In contrast to Warlock, Darring was a man of rugged vigor. Black-haired, keen-eyed, dynamic in every action, the executive secretary was tracing the events that had led to the crash of Centralized Power. Stockholders listened while he spoke; their nods showed their unanimous approval of Darring's findings.

"Centralized Power," the black-haired man was saying, "was an ill-advised project. Its very inception predicted its ultimate failure. The company planned the building of a huge dam in a district where there was no concentration of population.

"Mr. Warlock, as president, advised the step in the belief that the region would expand once the power project had been completed. We all agree that Mr. Warlock is a man of vision. In this instance, however, he was a man of too much vision.

"He looked ahead to the establishment of industries; to the growth of cities all produced by the magic of power development. Instead of following the old rule of producing a supply to fill a demand, he adopted the policy of believing that a demand would arise as a result of the supply."

Darring paused; he looked about at the approving nods which continued. Even Warlock had joined in the approbation. The president was admitting the truth of the statements which the executive secretary had made.

"Despite those mistakes," resumed Darring, in a modulated tone, "Centralized Power might have achieved its organizer's hopes. It is not my province, gentlemen, to make too severe a criticism. I say that the project was ill-advised. I do not state, however, that it was impossible of attainment, so far as the basic idea was concerned.

"The real mistake came when Mr. Warlock, convinced that his dreams would become realities, advised the purchase of land that was offered at outrageous prices. He also bought out the options and rights of smaller concerns that had gained claims upon that territory.

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"Then, as the colossal blunder, he permitted the award of contracts that were set at war-time figures. In brief, he allowed the expenditure of several million dollars that could very well have been saved. Am I correct, Mr. Warlock?"

"You are," responded the gray-haired president, in a wheezy voice. "I must state, however, that the estimates proved that these extravagances would be repaid eventually –"

BURSTS of indignation came from stockholders. Warlock slumped pitifully in his chair. Accusing voices sounded in his ears. It was Darring who silenced them with a powerful rap upon the end of the table.

"One moment, gentlemen!" roared Darring. "This is no time for spitefulness. Accept Mr. Warlock's statement at its true value. He admits extravagances, but" Darring's tone eased as his eyes moved about the silenced group "he also states a fact when he declares that the heavy expenditures would have been absorbed by the completion of the project.

"In a nut-shell, gentlemen, Mr. Warlock is free from condemnation. His were errors of omission, not of commission. He believed he still believes that his expenditures would have been justified. We can not take issue on that point."

Warlock smiled gratefully as he heard these statements. Antagonism faded as the stockholders were swung by Darring's persuasion. Though their faces remained glum, they gradually began to coincide with Darring's assertions.

"The real failure of Centralized Power," resumed the executive secretary, "lies in the matter of riparian rights. As I said a moment ago, Mr. Warlock's error was one of omission. He neglected to obtain full information on a subject that was vital to the success of Centralized Power.

"A few months ago, certain directors of this company became alarmed by the high expenditures that Mr. Warlock had instituted. They urged my appointment to the position of executive secretary. I went into all matters in detail I must say, gentlemen, that Mr. Warlock spared no effort to aid me in my investigation, even though it was a reflection upon his handling of the company management."

Warlock nodded approvingly. Stockholders, toned down by Darring, looked sympathetically toward the president. They recalled that Warlock, himself, was a heavy stockholder in the company. He, too, was losing a fortune.

"Thanks to Mr. Warlock's cooperation," declared Darring, "I was able to make a thorough study of matters as they stood. Aided by my experience as receiver for certain defunct power companies, I went deeply into the entire affair. In fact, I started from the beginning. I wanted to learn about the water supply that the great Centralized dam was to hold.

"Every one else Mr. Warlock included had taken the riparian rights for granted. I took nothing for granted. Almost at the start of my survey, I uncovered the astounding fact that all the streams from which Centralized Power expected to store up water were controlled by other interests.

"There we had it. A huge dam, half built. Contracts calling for equipment. New property options to be exercised. All for a project that was doomed to failure because the one needed element, water, was not obtainable. There was but one course to take. Empowered as executive secretary, I suspended further construction of the dam.

"Since then, I have been actively engaged in my investigation. I find that we are confronted by an absolute

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dilemma. We must either abandon our entire enterprise, calling it a complete loss, or we must buy out all the companies that hold riparian rights. That would mean a cost that could never be absorbed."

THE truth of Darring's statements seemed obvious. Haggard-faced, the stockholders looked from one to another and shook their heads.

There was only one who seemed unperturbed by the situation. This was a tall, silent personage who was seated midway at the table. Turning toward Darring, he spoke.

"Let me introduce myself," he said, in a quiet tone. "My name is Lamont Cranston. I have but recently returned from abroad, to find that my broker had purchased shares of Centralized Power securities. Though my holdings are not proportionately large, I am as interested as any one present regarding the ultimate fate of this corporation. What do you propose, Mr. Darring, as the best solution?"

Darring faced the speaker. He observed a keen, chiseled countenance that was almost masklike in appearance. An aquiline nose, steady, burning eyes these were the predominating features of Lamont Cranston's visage. Marryat Darring recognized that he was dealing with a person of importance. He spoke frankly.

"There is no exact solution," admitted the executive secretary. "But of the two courses that I have mentioned, I should suggest the first. A petition for bankruptcy would be our method to abandon the enterprise."

"No! No!" exclaimed Warlock, coming to his feet. "We must raise more money, gentlemen! Enough to buy out the other interests –"

"And to burden ourselves," put in Darring, "with expenditures that would certainly result in even greater loss."

Warlock subsided. Cranston again took up the matter with Darring.

"The newspaper reports," stated Cranston, "mention the names of three promoters who profited heavily through the formation of the Centralized Power Corporation. Suppose, Mr. Darring, you give us a statement of their present status."

"I shall," responded Darring. "The three men in question are Nathaniel Hildon, Peters Amboy and Wallace Norgan. They are the ones who sold property to Mr. Warlock. They also turned over the stock of the subsidiary companies that Centralized Power absorbed. They had options on many contracts.

"Unquestionably, those three have profited heavily through Centralized Power. By suspending operations, I have stopped their gain. If we go into bankruptcy, our remaining funds will be required to make them further payments.

"If we continue, we will require more money to meet the debts that Hildon, Amboy and Norgan have saddled on us. Such payments will have to be made before we can begin to buy out the companies that hold riparian rights. All that means further loss."

As Darring paused, Warlock arose. The gray-haired president was trembling with suppressed anger. His wrath, however, was not directed toward Darring. Warlock's fury had been fanned by the mention of the three promoters.

"They were swindlers!" cried Warlock. "The three of them. Hildon, Amboy and Norgan! Those parasites

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have fattened themselves with the funds that we have invested in Centralized Power!"

"But you met their demands," reminded Darring.

"I met them in good faith," declared Warlock. "Despite their exorbitant terms, I believed that we could make our project pay. It is this question of riparian rights that has ruined us; and I am convinced that those scoundrels are in back of it. Another scheme to bleed us!"

"Yet you advise our continuance?" questioned Darring.

"Only if we can first bring those rogues to justice," returned Warlock. "Make them disgorge their ill-gotten millions. Regain the funds that are rightfully our own –"

"ONE moment," interposed Darring, with a wave that curbed Warlock. Then, to the stockholders: "Gentlemen, if we could prove these accusations against Hildon, Amboy and Norgan, our case might be different. But it is impossible to show actual conspiracy on their part.

"I have visited them, with Mr. Warlock. All have denied any knowledge in this matter of riparian rights. All of their sales and contracts were legal. None of them involved the matter of water supply. Moreover, they take the stand that if the president of Centralized Power knew nothing about the situation that existed, why should they be expected to have such knowledge?"

"I argued with them from another angle. That of exorbitant charges on property, options and contracts. There, again, I was balked by the previous actions of our president. Hildon Amboy Norgan all three pointed out that Mr. Warlock had invested in turbine motors that had proven worthless. Hence his payments to them for actual property and materials delivered were not out of keeping with his system of management.

"No, gentlemen, the most that I can hope to do is to induce Hildon, Amboy and Norgan to waive certain claims which they still hold upon our company. That, at least, would benefit the stockholders. But I can not accomplish such a result while Mr. Warlock insists upon denouncing them as scoundrels."

A momentary silence. Then a stockholder made a motion that Marryat Darring be empowered to treat with the three promoters on the matter of waiving the existing claims. The motion was seconded and carried. Then came a motion for adjournment. It passed; the meeting ended. Warlock approached Darring.

"You were right," said Warlock to the secretary. "I have been tactless in my dealing with those three. You know as well as I that they are thieves; but you have sense enough not to mention it."

"Exactly!" replied Darring, with a smile.

"But their reference to Lessep was uncalled for," resumed Warlock. "I made an appropriation for his turbines, I admit. But the money was for experimental purposes. Had the turbines proven practical –"

"Unfortunately," interrupted Darring, "Professor Lessep has a bad record so far as his inventions are concerned. He, more than the promoters, can be said to have swindled you. I saw those turbines, Warlock. They were hopeless. You have made a great mistake, Warlock, in giving credit to the ideas of an eccentric inventor like Melrose Lessep."

"You are wrong, Darring. Gentlemen" Warlock turned to the departing stockholders "I call you to witness! Would it restore some of your faith in me if I proved that Professor Lessep is a capable inventor?"

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"Yes," came a reluctant response.

"Very well," announced Warlock. "To-night, at his laboratory, Professor Lessep intends to perform an experiment in the devisualization of solids. I intend to witness it. I feel that Mr. Darring and others should be present."

"It does not concern the corporation," objected Darring. "I told you that long ago, Warlock, when you first mentioned this new invention of Lessep's. Devisualization of solids has nothing to do with turbines."

"But Lessep's success to-night can justify my belief in his inventive genius. It will prove that I was not unreasonable in spending money on his turbines."

"What do you think, gentlemen?"

Darring's question brought nods from the stockholders. They seemed to agree that Warlock needed vindication. Darring turned to the president.

"In response to your request," he said, "I shall attend to-night's experiment. I would suggest, also, that two of the stockholders be present in addition to myself. Two or more –"

One man volunteered. The others, however, pleaded previous engagements. It was then that Lamont Cranston stepped forward, just as Findlay Warlock was making another remark.

"The police commissioner will be there," Warlock was saying. "I have invited him in the belief that Lessep's experiment may be of use in crime solution. If any one else –"

"I shall be present," came Cranston's quiet interruption.

The impromptu meeting adjourned. Stockholders went their separate ways. Warlock and Darring departed together, intending to have dinner; then to go to Lessep's. They invited Cranston; but he declined, stating that he would meet them at the laboratory.

ON the street, Lamont Cranston hailed a taxi. He ordered the driver to take him to the exclusive Cobalt Club. As the cab rolled along, Cranston leaned back in the cushions of the rear seat and laughed softly through immobile lips.

A strange whisper, that repressed mirth! Yet it told a story of its own. It revealed the true identity of this personage who wore the masklike countenance of Lamont Cranston; it marked a secret purpose a design of The Shadow!

For this was not the real Lamont Cranston. The actual man who held stock in Centralized Power was still abroad. Guised as Cranston, The Shadow had attended the stockholder's meeting to gain first-hand information of the swindle that he knew must lie behind the corporation's failure.

As Cranston, he had heard something that interested him as The Shadow. Professor Lessep's experiment one that involved crime solution was a project that might concern The Shadow in the future.

Police Commissioner Wainwright Barth dined nightly at the Cobalt Club. Barth was a friend of Cranston's. He would be pleased to learn that Cranston had returned from abroad; glad to know that his friend was also invited to the affair at Lessep's. They would go there together, once they had met at the Cobalt Club.

Wainwright Barth considered The Shadow to be a myth. That was the occasion for The Shadow's laugh. For to-night, the police commissioner would have the honor of accompanying The Shadow in person to an event that promised unusual developments.

Yet even The Shadow, at this moment, did not suspect the strange doings that lay in store. Chance was leading him to a happening that was destined to have amazing consequences. The Shadow was approaching the beginning of a trail that would bring astounding crime!

CHAPTER III. THE EXPERIMENT

"HERE we are, Cranston."

The commissioner's car had pulled up in front of an old, moldy-looking house on the upper East Side. Brick-fronted, with white steps cracked above a grimy sidewalk, the place did not seem fitting as the abode of a prominent scientist.

Wainwright Barth stared askance as he viewed the grimy windows, where dull light trickled through crimped shades. The commissioner was a man who considered wealth important; and this first sight of Professor Lessep's house made him lose stock in his preconceived impressions of the inventor.

Standing on the curb, Barth turned a ruddy, beakish face toward Cranston. Staring through pince-nez spectacles, the commissioner voiced a disapproval that sounded much like an apology.

"I've never seen this chap," said Barth. "Heard of him, only. Professor Melrose Lessep. Come to think of it, his reputation is a bit unsavory. However, he may be a genius, and I have promised to attend his experiment. Let us enter."

Barth rang the doorbell. The barrier was opened by the professor himself. A tall, wild-eyed man, with a huge shock of unkempt white hair, Melrose Lessep appeared deserving of the title "eccentric." Yet he was keen in recognizing the visitor who stood on his doorstep.

"The commissioner!" exclaimed Lessep, in a crackly voice. "I am right? Yes? And a friend with you. Come in, gentlemen. This way. To my parlor, where the others await."

Lessep led the way through a dingy hall, then into a musty parlor that had evidently been opened for to-night's event. One dozen men were gathered in the little room; among them, Findlay Warlock and Marryat Darring. It was Warlock who sprang forward to greet Barth. The professor made a bow and retired into the hall.

"The laboratory is in there," explained Warlock wheezily, pointing to a door at the rear of the room. "The professor's assistant is busy arranging the apparatus. They will call us when they are ready."

Barth nodded. The presence of men of prominence offset the drab surroundings. Warlock introduced Darring. Barth shook hands with enthusiasm. He had heard of Darring, for the man had accomplished remarkable results in handling the affairs of bankrupt corporations. He knew of Darring's connection with the Centralized Power Corporation.

"Warlock has told me of his misfortunes," remarked the commissioner. "From his description of the circumstances, it looks like a swindle on the part of the promoters. What is your opinion, Mr. Darring? Have you —"

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"Matters are still undecided," interposed Darring, in a cautious tone. Then, with a glance about him, he made a nudge toward the corner. "I think we have some reporters here to-night. It would be best to keep them off the subject of Centralized Power."

Barth followed Darring's gaze. He recognized two men as reporters. He smiled, for he knew them to be newshawks of little consequence. Evidently the morning newspapers had not counted on Lessep's experiment as good meat for a story.

"Warlock has faith in Lessep's inventive genius," explained Darring, in an undertone. "Personally, I think the professor is a faker. He sold impractical turbines to Centralized Power. That is why I am here to-night."

"I hope that Lessep succeeds in this experiment, whatever it is. Warlock calls it 'solid devisualization' or something of the sort. The term is new to me. My sympathies are with Warlock, for the failure of Centralized Power has been a blow to him. If he can prove that Lessep is a capable inventor, it will strengthen his position with the stockholders."

"As for the other matter, Warlock has probably told you all the details of the case. Unfortunately, it offers no opportunity for prosecution. Unless" he broke off, while still keeping his wary eye upon the corner "ah, here come the reporters. Probably to interview you, commissioner."

Darring was right. The two reporters had sauntered from the corner. In the accepted journalistic fashion they introduced themselves to the commissioner and began to press him for statements regarding Professor Lessep. Barth pleaded ignorance and replied that he would talk after the experiment.

At that moment, the rear door opened; Professor Lessep stood framed in the brilliant light of the laboratory. Wearing a white gown and beckoning with a scrawny finger, he invited his guests to enter the room beyond.

The reporters headed in that direction. Barth looked for Cranston. Finding his friend close by, the commissioner joined him and they entered the lab.

KEEN eyes gazed from the immobile countenance of Lamont Cranston. The Shadow was prompt to note the arrangement of this room which they had entered. Whatever his reputation, whether genius or madman, Professor Melrose Lessep had certainly fitted up a most remarkable laboratory.

The room was some thirty feet in length. At the near end, where the group had entered, were a dozen folding chairs, arranged against the wall. Beyond were numerous contrivances. Some looked like electric motors of odd design. Others were light projectors of curious shape. One machine appeared to be a squat camera.

The windows on the right side of the room were shuttered. Illumination came from bluish bulbs in the ceiling. At the far end of the room were two doors, both opened. One showed an extension from the rear hallway; the other revealed a little office at the right.

Between the doors, and just beyond the center of the room, was the most striking object in the laboratory. This was an upright cabinet, more than six feet high and three feet square, mounted upon a square base that measured five feet in each direction.

Most curious was the fact that cabinet and base were both constructed almost entirely of glass. The framework alone was of chromium-plated metal. It formed a skeleton in which the sheets of plate glass were set.

The square base, metal rimmed, was mounted upon four slender legs of shining metal. This raised the bottom

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of the cabinet two feet above the floor. The professor, beckoning, invited all comers to inspect the apparatus. The two reporters led the march.

"Be careful," warned Lessep, in his crackly tone. He opened the glass door that formed the front of the cabinet. "You may step inside if you please; but remember that the substance is breakable. Be careful."

While the examination was going on, a young man came from the little office and took his stand beside Professor Lessep. Steadily, with almost indifferent gaze, he looked about at the persons present. This was Miles Crofton. Like the professor, he was wearing a white gown.

"My assistant, Mr. Crofton," introduced Lessep. "He is to play an important part in to-night's experiment. Seat yourselves, gentlemen. Please. We are delayed a trifle already. Please be seated."

When the group had obeyed the injunction, the professor stood for a moment with quick-blinking eyes. Then, leaving Crofton by the cabinet, he went to the door that led into the hall. He closed it with a clang that revealed its metal surface. Then, solemnly, Lessep drew a big bolt that locked the door.

He walked to the door of the little office, closed it, and shot a similar bolt. Then he stalked to the door through which the throng had come from the parlor. He closed this barrier, showing a metal inner surface, and pressed home another bolt.

"We must not be disturbed," chuckled the professor, with a peculiar smile. "That is why I have made the doors fast bolted. When I work herein, with my capable assistant, we keep the doors fast bolted that none may enter."

The professor walked back to the cabinet, where Crofton was awaiting him. At that moment, a telephone bell began to ring. The sound, coming from beyond the door that led to the little office, was barely audible.

"Shall I answer it, professor?" questioned Crofton.

"No!" returned Lessep, testily. "I do not wish disturbance. Let it continue to ring. It will stop soon. We must make ready with my experiment."

CROFTON nodded. He and the professor moved two different machines up beside the cabinet. Looking toward the walls, the witnesses saw a dozen different floor plugs from which current could be supplied. Crofton produced several lengths of wire, each with plugs on both ends. The professor began making attachments. He needed more wires. Crofton brought them.

The telephone ceased ringing before Lessep had completed his arrangements. Wires ran from floor plugs to machines. Others stretched from one machine to corners of the cabinet. The rest were left dangling from the second machine, for later use.

Nodding busily, Lessep decided that everything was ready. He spoke to Crofton. The young man removed his white robe. Underneath, he was wearing an outfit that looked like an aviator's garb, except for its color, which was black. As Crofton stepped into the cabinet, it was apparent that his shoes were fitted with heavy rubber soles.

The professor produced a helmet. Crofton donned it. Then he put on dark brown gloves, made of thick rubber. Cautiously, he stepped into the exact center of the cabinet. The professor closed the glass door. The observers could see the man inside.

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Lessep pressed a switch on the hooked-up machine. Crackly sounds came from the glass walls of the cabinet. Flickers of light flashed from the connections. The sides of the cabinet and the glass base began to turn misty.

There was something insidious in Professor Lessep's manner as the old man turned toward his audience. A profound hush had been created; now it was broken only by the buzz of the motor and the dying crackles from the glass. In a high pitched, fanatical tone, the professor began to speak.

"I have found it!" he exclaimed. "The secret of devisualization! Through this experiment I shall make a solid appear as a vapor. A solid a living solid!

"Look to that cabinet. What have you seen there? First you have seen glass. Then, inside, a man. What do you see now? A vapor like steam a vapor from the air."

The walls of the cabinet were frosting. Crofton's form was almost obscured from view. Chuckling, the professor waited until the misted glass had totally hidden his assistant. Then he consulted a clock dial upon the machine.

"You see vapor," clucked Lessep, turning to the silent group at the end of the room. "That vapor is air, which I have made to show itself by the application of heat. You understand? You see air which you could not see before and later you will see that air no longer.

"But a little while ago you saw a man inside the cabinet. You can not see him now. Why? On account of air. Air, which is vapor, surrounding him. I have made a man unseen, by surrounding him with air of a certain sort.

"Now comes my secret" the professor paused and wisely tapped his forehead "which I have formulated here in my brain. If air, when like a mist, can hide a solid form, why can not air, when it is no longer mist, still hide that form?

"It is impossible? That is what you would say. But I shall show you different. Far different. The vapor that you see is on the walls of the cabinet only. But the air inside that cabinet is possessed of the same power.

"That air alone will hide the solid form. That air which you can not see! You can not see it nor can you see what is within it. The vapor has done its part. It is no longer needed. But it will take a while to go. I shall not try your patience by forcing you to wait."

WITH hurried, almost frenzied speed, the professor bobbed about the cabinet, detaching wires. He turned off the buzzing machine. He attached the connections from the second motor. All the while, the silent watchers were staring at the whitened walls of glass, for the sides of the cabinet had become completely frosted.

Ready, with one hand upon the new motor, Professor Lessep raised his other hand and lifted an impressive forefinger. Leaning forward, prophetic with his garb and hair of white, the old man spoke in his odd, crackling tone.

"He is within that cabinet," announced the professor. "This man who has been willing to take the risk of my experiment. Science owes much to him to Miles Crofton. He is a man who has taken great risks; but none to equal this.

"He can come out only by that door which you see in the front. I shall have him open that door; but he must stay within the cabinet. For at this moment, my friends, no living eye could see Miles Crofton. He is devisualized! Within air that hides him and all that he may carry within that space. Not until I use the second

process will he come back to view."

The professor paused. Still holding his fixed position, he turned his eyes toward the cabinet and waited amid complete silence. Then he spoke:

"Open the door of the cabinet."

A pause. The door trembled. Then, impelled by some force, the white, frosted barrier swung outward.

Staring spectators blinked; the only eyes that were steady were those of The Shadow the optics that peered from the countenance of Lamont Cranston.

Where the dark-garbed form of a man had been, whiteness alone came to view. The sides, the top, the base of the cabinet these showed with their coating of thick frost, a solid walled interior.

The cabinet, itself, was empty! Professor Lessep's fantastic experiment had fulfilled his strange prediction. Miles Crofton had vanished from human sight!

CHAPTER IV. CARDONA SPEAKS

TRIUMPH showed on Lessep's face as the old professor stepped forward from the motor. A peculiar awe lay over the little audience that had witnessed the evanishment of Miles Crofton.

The telephone began to ring again from beyond the door of the adjoining office. Professor Lessep gave it no heed; nor did the persistent ringing break the spell that had come over the assembled group.

With sharp, steady gaze, the white-haired inventor surveyed the spectators. He was ready for a challenge; for quizzical expressions; but none came. It was not until his gaze reached a certain point that the professor became perturbed.

There, Lessep's stare encountered the burning glare of eyes far sharper than his own. Those were the orbs that peered from the visage of Lamont Cranston. All others seemed bewildered; they were looking toward the frosted cabinet. But this one member of the audience had chosen the professor as his visual target.

Lessep alone saw the focused brilliance of those eyes. They were the eyes of The Shadow. They troubled the old man in his triumph. They carried a challenge that brought a quiver of fear to the professor's wasted frame.

As suddenly as if he had received a shock from one of his own machines, Lessep sprang sidewise toward the cabinet. Shaking a scrawny hand toward the opened door, he issued a new statement that came amid the muffled ringing from the telephone bell in the office.

"He is standing there!" exclaimed the professor. "Within the glass walls of the cabinet! Yet you can not see him. Sharp though your eyes may be" wildly, Lessep paused to catch the gaze of The Shadow's burning optics "you can see nothing!

"Yet he is there! Miles Crofton, in the flesh, stands in the center of the cabinet. Held within walls of glass. Encased where he cannot escape. Still solid, yet surrounded by an aura that renders him unseen. An invisible mist, about a living form. I shall prove it!" With that, Lessep thrust his right hand into the cabinet. He moved it about, as though touching an invisible form. The action was impressive.

Commissioner Barth, straining forward, sought to make out a living shape, but failed.

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"You may step forward –"

Professor Lessep stopped short in his statement; then betrayed a look of alarm. He had half withdrawn his hand from the cabinet; now he was thrusting it in again. Wildly, the professor grappled into the opened space, this time encountering nothingness.

"He is gone!" shrieked the old man. "Out of the cabinet. Stay where you are, until I find him. Crofton! Crofton! Where are you?"

THERE was no response. The professor leaped back to his new motor. He pressed a switch. Lightninglike flashes crackled through the cabinet. The odor of ozone charged the air. The ringing of the telephone bell had ended. This new sound alone pervaded the room.

"He has left the cabinet!" shrilled Lessep, above the crackle of electricity. "He had no right to do so. Stop him wherever he may be! Look to the doors stop him there, by the door to the parlor –"

Men were coming to their feet. In response to the professor's plea, they swung as one toward the door that Lessep had indicated. It offered the logical avenue of departure, that door through the front of the house.

"The bolt!" cried Lessep. "The light switch! Watch them" the professor was swaying as he leaned heavily upon his buzzing motor "watch them before before –"

The admonition came too late. While those nearest the door were staring, the bolt of the door was drawn back, as though plucked by an invisible hand. The knob turned. The door swung open. Then, as the barrier wavered, the light switch was pressed upward. It clicked. The room was plunged in blackness. An instant later, the door closed with a sudden slam.

Men were groping blindly for the wall. The light switch was beyond the corner of the room, a hard spot to locate in the darkness. The crackle of the motor continued, with the professor's voice shrilling above it. Then, after moments that seemed interminable, the switch was found. It clicked. Startled men blinked in the light.

Most of the persons present were clustered along the wall or by the door. There was one exception. The tall form of Lamont Cranston had moved in a different direction. Staring toward the cabinet, Professor Lessep saw this one visitor almost beside the frosted apparatus.

Lessep had turned on more power. He motioned wildly with his hands, his gestures signifying for Cranston to stay away from the cabinet. Calmly, the tall witness watched; then others turned in the same direction.

Electric sparks were crackling against glass panes. They were knifing their way through frosted whiteness. Icy mist was fading. The walls of the cabinet were becoming clear. As silent men stared, they saw the glass sides regain their original clearness. The cabinet and its base stood as transparent as they had been at the beginning of the experiment.

Lessep turned off the motor. Sagging above the machine, he pointed toward the unbolted door, where Commissioner Barth stood facing him. The commissioner, bald-headed, yet austere, had backed against the closed barrier, determined that no one else should leave.

"Bolt the door!" suggested Lessep, gasping.

Barth complied. The professor then glanced all about the room. Others followed his gaze as it wandered from door to door. The exit to the hallway was bolted, as before. So was the entrance to Lessep's little office. With

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a broad sweep of his hand, the professor invited a complete search. He began to detach the wires from his motors.

HALF quivering, men began to look about. Wainwright Barth boldly approached the glass cabinet. He was followed by the two reporters, who tapped the transparent panels and looked at each other in puzzled fashion.

Findlay Warlock, in a high state of excitement, began to join in the inspection. The others were a bit slower; yet they gained encouragement as they proceeded.

Lessep, suddenly subdued, kept on coiling wires. At times he looked up. He encountered the steady gaze from Cranston's eyes. He blinked and looked away.

By the door, Lessep saw the rugged form of Marryat Darring. Where Cranston's eyes had been challenging, Darring's were skeptical. Lessep faced their gaze; he saw an unbelieving smile appear upon Darring's lips. The old man responded with a glare. Then Commissioner Barth's arrival proved an intervention.

Barth had satisfied himself that the room was empty. He was also sure that no one could have made exit from it, except by the door that he had seen open and close. Faced by the incredible, the bespectacled commissioner demanded a statement from Professor Lessep.

"Tell me, professor," ordered Barth. "Did this man Crofton actually attain a state of invisibility?"

"Yes," assured Lessep. "In the exact manner that I explained. The experiment worked perfectly, commissioner. It is a case of total devisualization. Indeed, it amazed me."

"How so?"

"Because I had never before attempted the devisualization of a living object. The atmospheric state that I created has adhered to Crofton's form. You saw him go out the door. You saw him press the light switch. Did you catch one glimpse of his actual form?"

"Not one."

"Ah! It is too bad."

Barth looked perplexed. Warlock, enthused by the success of the experiment, could not understand the professor's sudden turn. Both wanted an explanation. Lessep gave it.

"It is too bad," he cackled, gloomily, "that I should have spoken so much to Crofton. I told him that the experiment would be complete. More than that, I said that his risk would be great because he could lose his devisualized state only through the application of the rays from the second motor.

"I meant it as a warning, commissioner, a warning that Crofton should have heeded. But now I fear that he took it in a different sense. Could it be that he had some reason? So it seems. But he gave me no reason to think that he would wish to remain unseen."

"You mean," questioned Barth, anxiously, "that this man Crofton will not be visible again until you have subjected him to the second treatment?"

"Exactly so!" assured Lessep, glumly.

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"It seems incredible!" declared the commissioner. "Beyond all belief –"

"It is a hoax!" The interruption came from Darring. The black-haired man had approached the cabinet. "Don't let it worry you, commissioner. A man can't vanish into thin air."

"But we have seen it," stated Barth. "The man could not have walked from the cabinet without observation."

"Except in the darkness."

"I was at the door. I gained that post immediately after the lights went out."

"The other doors?"

"They are still bolted."

HANDS in pockets, Darring strode over to examine the doors that the others had already inspected. He found them tightly bolted. A bit puzzled, yet still skeptical, Darring came back. He looked toward Lamont Cranston, as though seeking assurance from the one other person who did not stand convinced.

"What do you think of it?" he inquired. "Do you share my view, Mr. Cranston? A hoax?"

"It is no hoax," put in Warlock, suddenly. "You are unfair, Darring. I call upon the commissioner to support me when I say that this experiment was fairly conducted and proves Professor Lessep's claim."

"Incredible though it appears," decided Barth, "we are faced by the definite fact that a man has vanished. I am forced to agree with Mr. Warlock. This is no hoax."

The reporters were quick with their pencils. They wanted a further statement. Barth, a little flustered, began to polish his pince-nez spectacles, after carefully removing them from the bridge of his nose.

"A statement?" queried the commissioner. "Hm–m–m. It might be best to hear others first. By the way, Cranston, what is your opinion of this experiment?"

"I am interested in the subject," came the quiet response. "I should like to know from Professor Lessep why Miles Crofton was chosen for this experiment in devisualization."

"For two reasons," returned Lessep, promptly. "First, because he had proven to be a competent assistant. Second, because he was a man who had undergone many hazards. He had been an aviator, a soldier of fortune –"

"How did he happen to come into your employ?"

"I advertised for an assistant who understood electrical appliances. I specified that I would need a man who would take unusual risks –"

"And Miles Crofton responded?"

"Yes."

Before another question could be asked, a sudden pounding broke out from the door that led into Lessep's parlor. For a moment, Commissioner Barth was startled. Then, adjusting his pince-nez, the official smiled

wisely.

"Perhaps Miles Crofton has returned," he decided. "Remain as you are every one. I shall answer this knock."

Barth strode to the door and unbolted it. The barrier opened. In stepped a stocky, swarthy-faced man, with two others close behind him. Barth stood astonished. This was Detective Joe Cardona, the ace from headquarters.

Cardona looked about the room; then turned to nod to Barth.

"Called you from headquarters, commissioner," said Joe. His right hand was half out of his pocket; it was plain that his fingers clutched a gun. "No answer, so I came up here. Told Markham to call you later."

"We heard the bell ring," returned Barth. "But neither call was answered by any one —"

"I see." Joe was looking about the group as he made the interruption. "Which one of these men is Miles Crofton?"

"Miles Crofton?" exclaimed Barth. "Why why Crofton is gone. Did you want him?"

"Yes," responded Cardona, grimly. "For murder!"

CHAPTER V. THE QUEST BEGINS

IT was midnight. The lights were on in Commissioner Barth's office. The high official was holding council. Present was a select group that had accompanied him from Professor Melrose Lessep's laboratory.

Barth had chosen this spot for a consultation with Joe Cardona. He had insisted that his friend Lamont Cranston come along. Findlay Warlock, as the patron of Professor Lessep, had also been invited. Warlock, in turn, had requested the presence of Marryat Darring.

"The facts of the case," summarized Barth, as he sat importantly behind his mahogany desk, "are these. A man one Miles Crofton is at large. He has disappeared completely from human sight. Professor Melrose Lessep, the person responsible for this disappearance, attributes it to a process that he has termed 'devisualization.'

"Our repeated search has given more and more substantiation to the professor's claim. His cabinet, his laboratory, his office and his bolted doors have added mute testimony to his assertion. Four of us were witnesses to Crofton's disappearance. Two of us myself and Warlock have admitted that devisualization must be the answer to Crofton's departure.

"You, Cranston, have simply reserved opinion. For the present, we may regard your view as neutral. As for you, Darring, you hold to the belief that the whole affair was a hoax. Yet you have not produced any evidence to support your claim."

"None," interposed Darring, testily, "except that of common sense. You can't make a man vanish, unless there's a trick to it. I've got to see something more tangible."

"We are dealing with a scientific matter," asserted Barth, reprovingly. "The professor's theory of devisualization has merit. Many facts, scientific ones, have been discovered that are quite as incredible as this one.

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"However, we can resume this portion of the discussion later. What concerns us as much as Crofton's disappearance is the matter of Crofton himself. Cardona, let us hear your exact statement once again, in reference to Miles Crofton."

"Well," declared Cardona, gruffly, "I'm only following a tip, as I said before. We've been looking for the crew that worked with Rouser Tukin. Hadn't been able to trace any until to-night."

"Down at headquarters I got a phone call from a stool pigeon. Fellow that's been A-1 reliable, the little I've used him. Just had a couple of minutes to put me wise to something, he said. So I listened."

"His story was that Miles Crofton was in with Rouser. What's more, he swore that Crofton was the fellow who killed one of the policemen. Didn't say where he got the dope, this stoolie didn't, but he promised more next time he got in touch with me. But he told me where Crofton was. Said the guy was working for an inventor named Melrose Lessep. What's more, the stoolie said the commissioner was going to be up at Lessep's to-night."

"Your man was remarkably well informed," observed Barth, dryly. "You yourself did not know where to reach me, at first."

"That only proves the stoolie knew his stuff," returned Cardona. "I called the Cobalt Club; they told me where you were. So I called you, commissioner. Getting no reply, I started up, leaving Markham to keep calling you."

"We know the rest," declared Barth. "Therefore, we are safe in saying that a killer, an unseen killer, is at large. We can not hold Professor Lessep culpable. There is no way in which he could have known of his assistant's past."

"But we must begin at once!" Barth thumped his fist upon the desk. "We must spare no effort in tracing this dangerous man. That is why I gave a full statement to the newspapers. The Unseen Killer is at large. It is up to you, Cardona, to find him."

"You can't track a man you can't see," objected Joe. "It's easy enough to get pictures of Crofton, but what good will they be? If this wild stuff is on the level if the guy's lost to sight how are you going to grab him?"

"That must be determined," replied Barth, sagely.

Cardona waited for a further statement. None was forthcoming. The commissioner had propounded an unanswerable riddle.

A THIN smile showed upon the lips of Lamont Cranston. It was unobserved by the others.

"Where are you going to start?" quizzed Cardona. Then, answering his own question: "The professor looks like the best bet to me. If it wasn't for him, we'd have Crofton right now. The way I figure it, commissioner, the professor is responsible."

"Professor Lessep has committed no crime," objected Barth. "His experiment was scientifically conducted."

"If one can regard a hoax as a scientific experiment," put in Darring. "I should think that the law could deal with the perpetrator of a hoax."

"The professor has proven his sincerity," declared Warlock, hotly. "This attempt to damage his reputation is

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unfair. It is not his fault that Crofton took criminal advantage of his invention."

"We are back to the same point," decided Barth, in an irritable tone. "Unless we can come to a definite agreement on this matter, we will arrive nowhere. I am willing to bring pressure upon Professor Lessep, provided that it can be done in a reasonable manner."

"No pressure is necessary," insisted Warlock. "Professor Lessep was quite willing for people to witness his experiment. He even set it in advance of the date originally scheduled. He offered no objection to making his demonstration under rigid conditions."

"I have it!" exclaimed Darring, suddenly. "We can settle this matter very easily. Why not have the professor repeat the experiment?"

Cranston's smile remained immobile. The suggestion had come at last. Darring had struck upon the obvious solution, the logical way to learn whether or not the devisualization system would stand a thorough test.

"Excellent!" said the commissioner. "That, at least, would establish one point, namely: whether or not your cry of 'hoax' is a fair one, Darring. But it offers a danger, besides."

"What is that?"

"The possibility of putting a second person into the realm of the invisible. One is bad enough."

Joe Cardona nodded at the commissioner's statement. The detective added an opinion of his own.

"I'm supposed to track one fellow that I can't see," he declared. "Why double the odds against me?"

"My suggestion," remarked Darring, "could produce the opposite effect. If devisualization is a genuine process, it can be used to advantage."

"How so?" inquired Barth.

"By choosing the proper person," replied Darring. "Detective Cardona, for instance. Why not dispatch him into the invisible?"

"Jove!" exclaimed Barth. "You've struck it, Darring. The effect would be tremendous!"

"It wouldn't help me trace Crofton," objected Cardona, in an uneasy tone.

"But it would give you a marvelous advantage," argued Barth, with enthusiasm. "Furthermore, it would settle all this controversy. Of course, Cardona, I shall not insist that you take on this task –"

"I'M game," interrupted Joe, "but it sort of gives me the creeps. It don't sound real. I'll take a chance on it, though, if the professor will stand for the deal."

"I think I can persuade him to do so," put in Warlock, a bit troubled. "He might object; but I think that he would listen to my arguments. I have sponsored this invention, in a sense. Let me communicate with Professor Lessep in the morning."

"Very well," agreed Barth. "A request from you, Warlock, would be better than an order from me. For a beginning, at least. Arrange for an experiment to-morrow night, with Cardona as the subject. If you fail, I

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shall handle the matter."

"This experiment business works both ways, don't it?" queried Cardona. "I mean the professor can bring a man back to sight, just like he can put him away?"

"So he claims," stated Barth. "That was precisely what he intended to do with Miles Crofton; but the fellow made an escape in the midst of the experiment."

"Have no qualms," assured Warlock. "The professor is thoroughly reliable. I feel sure that you will encounter no danger when you visit his laboratory to-morrow night."

"Agreed," added Darring, mildly sarcastic. "You won't have much to worry about, Cardona."

"Why not?" questioned the detective, seeing significance in Darring's tone.

"Because," predicted Darring, "the professor will have some excuse for postponing the experiment. The thing is a hoax, I tell you. He will not dare to repeat it except with some person of his own choosing."

Warlock began to protest. The commissioner interrupted him. He wanted no further controversy. Blinking in owlish fashion, Barth delivered his decision in the matter.

"All will be settled to-morrow night," he declared. "We shall rely upon Mr. Warlock to persuade Professor Lessep to undertake the new experiment, using Cardona in the test. If Warlock fails, I shall threaten Lessep with arrest unless he proceeds.

"We shall all be present to witness the result. Then we can fairly judge the circumstances. We can decide whether Mr. Warlock's faith in the professor is justified; or whether Mr. Darring's skepticism is correctly founded.

"Personally, I incline toward Warlock's belief. You, Cranston" Barth turned to his silent friend "appear to be somewhat in accord with Darring. That balances the committee. With Cardona as the chosen subject for the new experiment, we have every advantage. Let us adjourn until to-morrow."

ONE hour after the meeting had ended in the commissioner's office, a sharp click sounded in a blackened room. A bluish light threw shaded rays upon a table in the corner. Long, white hands appeared upon a polished surface. The Shadow was in his sanctum.

A soft laugh from hidden lips. Producing pen and paper, the hands began to work. While the left steadied the sheet beneath the light, the right began to draw a floor plan of Professor Lessep's laboratory.

Blue-inked lines faded. Such was the way with The Shadow's writing. Then came carefully written words; and all the while, traces of the soft, mocking laugh. The Shadow was reviewing the bizarre events that had taken place in the professor's lab.

The Shadow could see the real reason behind the episode at the professor's, so far as Lessep himself was concerned. The old inventor's reputation had been none too high. He had needed an astounding success to restore faith in his genius. He had scored the result that he required.

A living being banished out into the unknown! What a triumph for Lessep! Hoax or reality either had achieved the same result. Lessep had paved the way to tremendous publicity. That, as The Shadow saw it, was the professor's game.

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"Miles Crofton."

The Shadow's hand inscribed the name of Lessep's assistant. Here was another factor. At the outset of the experiment, Crofton had figured purely as the subject whom Lessep had chosen. The Shadow, present in the guise of Lamont Cranston, had seen no reason to interfere with the professor's game.

Joe Cardona's arrival had been the startling factor. The detective's accusation of Miles Crofton had changed bewilderment into consideration. Yet this fact fitted into the scheme of things. Miles Crofton wanted for murder there was a tie-up that would bring Professor Lessep's experiment into front-page headlines.

It transformed Miles Crofton from a prank-player into a menace. Instead of being a missing assistant, the man had become an unseen killer. The bigger the news, the better from the professor's standpoint.

Viewed from that aspect, Cardona's tip from the unnamed stool pigeon looked like more than a coincidence. But The Shadow had passed from his consideration of Professor Lessep's peculiar interests. He was studying the part played by Miles Crofton.

It was quite conceivable that the assistant would have agreed to work with the professor. Crofton's startling disappearance had added a touch of real drama to the events in the lab. But would Crofton have agreed to go forth branded as a murderer?

The Shadow's laugh was a negative answer. No matter what Crofton's present situation might be, the charges against him were dangerous. The cry of "murderer" had made him a hunted man. Cardona's timely-gained tip might prove a boomerang to the missing assistant.

Coincidence? A double cross by the professor? The action of some new player in the game? These were questions that concerned The Shadow. They brought a new laugh from his lips; a burst of sardonic mirth that was creepy in its tone. They told of a definite purpose.

HANDS stretched across the table. Earphones clattered from the wall. A tiny bulb glittered from the blackness, telling of telephonic connection. Then came a quiet voice:

"Burbank speaking."

"Instructions to all agents" whispered The Shadow.

The weird voice continued through the sanctum, hissing its sibilant tones, while Burbank, The Shadow's contact man, listened at the other end of the wire. The Shadow's tones ended. From the receivers came Burbank's final response:

"Instructions received."

Earphones slid back. The bulb went out. A click; the bluish light was extinguished. Amid the darkness of the sanctum came an eerie laugh that died with lingering echoes. The Shadow had departed. But while the law was lingering, he had taken up a quest.

Miles Crofton was the man The Shadow wanted. Agents of The Shadow would locate him. Visible or invisible, Lessep's assistant would be found; for The Shadow had seen possibilities that had escaped the law.

Whatever Miles Crofton's present state of being, the man would need a hide-out. A visible man, hunted by the police, would have to stay out of sight. An unseen crook would have to maintain a secret headquarters.

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"You can't track a man you can't see –"

Such had been Cardona's verdict. All had accepted it, with the exception of The Shadow. He knew that Cardona had made a misstatement. Laughing softly in the seclusion of his sanctum, The Shadow had pictured the difficulties of an unseen killer. Troubles quite as great as those that would surround a visible criminal.

Food, shelter, security Miles Crofton needed them. Whatever his game, he had probably prearranged those necessities. There must be other men who would aid him. Through them, Crofton could be traced. Agents of The Shadow would filter forth through the reaches of the underworld, seeking trace of a hide-out.

Keen had been The Shadow's finding. Yet his parting laugh, satirical in its mirth, had revealed a trace of levity. Although he had instituted a search for Miles Crofton, The Shadow had seen no need for haste. As yet, he considered menace lacking.

Seldom did The Shadow err in judgment. Even now, his calculation was wrong only so far as time was concerned. In starting the man hunt, The Shadow had sensed possibilities of crime at some future time. Crofton, goaded by the fact that he was wanted as a murderer; might eventually prove dangerous.

Yet the menace was immediate. Already crime was planned. It would strike with a suddenness that would prove startling even to The Shadow. For the threat of an unseen killer was backed by the machinations of an evil brain.

CHAPTER VI. THE PROFESSOR BALKS

AT eight o'clock the next evening, Commissioner Barth's car pulled up in front of the residence of Professor Melrose Lessep. Three men alighted from the machine: Wainwright Barth, Joe Cardona and Marryat Darring.

They ascended the cracked stone steps. The commissioner rang the bell. After a short interval, the door opened.

Professor Lessep, shock-haired and wild-eyed, stood viewing his visitors. A broad smile appeared upon the inventor's lips.

"Ah! Good evening!" exclaimed Lessep. "Come in, my friends. At once. Mr. Warlock has been here this half hour, expecting your arrival. Come. Into the laboratory."

The visitors divested themselves of hats and coats, which they hung on a rack in the hall. Lessep led them through the parlor to the laboratory door. There he paused to rap. There was no response until Lessep knocked louder than before. Then came muffled footsteps. A bolt was drawn; Findlay Warlock admitted them.

"I was looking about," said Warlock, in a wheezy, apologetic tone. "I wasn't sure that I heard you knock."

"Quite all right," assured the professor. "You see, gentlemen" his tone was uneasy "I was not certain who might be at the door. I did not like to leave the laboratory. So Mr. Warlock said that he would bolt the door while I was making sure that the proper visitors had arrived."

"What did you do when Warlock arrived?" questioned Barth, a bit suspiciously. "You had to leave the laboratory open then, didn't you?"

"No," replied the professor. "I had not opened the laboratory before his arrival. You see" he waved his hand

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toward the door that led into the rear hall "there is a lock also on that door, as well as a bolt. I have the key to open it. It is only when we are inside that I keep all the bolts closed."

Barth nodded. He could see the closed bolt on the far door. The door to the office was also bolted. Lessep had shot the bolt of the door through which they had entered.

"This is the key," remarked Lessep, producing the object. "But it will be necessary, I now fear, to have a new lock placed on that one door."

"Why?" asked Barth.

"Because," replied the professor, "there is another key which I do not have."

"Who has it?"

"Miles Crofton."

BARTH'S eyes blinked through the pince-nez. The commissioner was about to make a comment, when Lessep saved him the trouble.

"Ah, yes," affirmed the professor, in a troubled tone. "I have thought of what you wish to say. Crofton that ungrateful assistant still has access here. I was thinking about it, all this very afternoon. How he might even be here, watching me!"

As he spoke, the professor looked warily about. His eyes strained as though seeking view of an invisible object. Findlay Warlock nodded seriously.

"I had the same impression," he declared. "Alone here, during the past few minutes. That of unseen eyes –"

"It's ridiculous," Marryat Darring snorted the interruption. "Come, come! This is carrying a hoax too far. What about to-night's experiment? Are we going through with it, professor?"

"Certainly," replied Lessep, in a crackly tone. "If you so wish. It was at one o'clock this afternoon that I came into this laboratory, to work until five. Hardly had I been here before the telephone rang in my office. It was my good friend here, Mr. Warlock.

"I told him that I would do the experiment as wished. I worked on then until five o'clock. Then I went out and locked the laboratory behind me. After having dinner at the restaurant, I came back. But I did not again open the laboratory until Mr. Warlock arrived."

"The experiment is what interests us," declared Darring, impatiently. "The commissioner wants you to perform it with Detective Cardona as the subject."

"So I understand" Lessep paused warily, to look at Cardona "but it is very dangerous. I must tell you that beforehand. It is a risk –"

"I'm ready for it," interrupted Cardona.

"And we're ready to watch it," added Darring.

"We must wait for Cranston," remarked Barth. "He should be here shortly."

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"But that's no reason why the professor can't get started," interposed Darring. "How about hooking up those motors, getting the machinery ready?"

"Proceed, professor," ordered Barth, with a pompous nod.

Professor Lessep bowed. Methodically donning a white robe, he drew the glass cabinet from the far wall. Then he rolled up one electric motor and began to make attachments. It was while he was plugging in a cord that his face became troubled.

Leaning close to the motor, Lessep uttered a sudden exclamation. He blinked nervously as he looked up at the others; then made a sweeping motion with his hand, to indicate the screw-end of a bolt that projected from the machine.

"It is gone!" cried Lessep. "The connecting lever! The integral part of this machine. Some one has removed it without my knowledge!"

"How long ago?" quizzed Barth, sharply.

"Since after five o'clock," replied Lessep, seriously. "I remember; I made one examination of this motor before I left for my dinner. He has been here!" Lessep's voice rose shrilly. "Crofton has been here!"

"When?" demanded Barth.

"How could I know?" asked Lessep. "But I think maybe that I could guess. It must have been before one o'clock that he entered, with that key which he has."

"Why before one?"

"So that he could have listened while I heard word from Mr. Warlock. Then, after I had gone, at five o'clock —"

"He wanted to block the experiment," interposed Barth. "How much did you say over the telephone, professor, when you talked with Warlock?"

"A great deal. Too much, I fear."

"A fine stall!" The sarcastic comment came from Darring. "I predicted this, commissioner. I told you, last night, that the professor would find some excuse. He has hidden the lever himself, I believe."

"Look for it if you wish!" exclaimed Lessep. "Here; in the little office. Anywhere about."

"All right," agreed Darring. "What does the lever look like?"

"I shall show you." Lessep turned and led the way into the adjoining office.

It was a little room, plainly furnished. A filing cabinet in one corner; a desk in another. A single window, metal-shuttered, like those in the laboratory. These arrangements were revealed when Lessep pressed a light switch just inside the door.

The room was illuminated by the action, from a single light in the ceiling. Lessep went to the filing cabinet. There he turned on a hanging light. Under the increased glare, the professor opened a drawer; he found a

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photograph of the motor that was in the laboratory. He pointed out the lever in question.

Darring examined the picture.

"You have a better photograph," remarked Warlock. "Where is it, professor?"

"I must have left it in the desk," replied Lessep. "Let me see." He went to the desk and turned on another light. "Ah, yes. Here it is."

He brought the photograph to Darring, who had handed the first picture to Barth. Cardona was also looking on, when an exclamation came from Warlock, who had gone over to the desk.

"Here's a note for you, professor," announced Warlock. "Addressed in your name, with the word 'important' added. It hasn't been opened."

He handed the envelope to Lessep. Photographs were temporarily forgotten while the professor fumbled excitedly in opening the message. Lessep unfolded a sheet of paper. His lips began to quiver. The note nearly fell from his shaking hands.

Commissioner Barth seized the paper. He read aloud:

"To Professor Melrose Lessep:

"The missing lever is proof of my ability to thwart your actions. This letter is my warning. If you attempt to repeat your experiment in devisualization, you shall die. THE UNSEEN KILLER.

"It's typewritten," remarked Barth. "With the signature in red. This is a result of that newspaper story, Cardona. Those reporters termed Miles Crofton the 'Unseen Killer' and he has adopted the title. This constitutes a threat."

"All the more reason," put in Darring, "why you should proceed with the experiment, commissioner."

"I agree," declared Barth. "Come, professor. Let us search for that lever. Where would Crofton have hidden it? Here or in the laboratory?"

"He might have taken it with him," replied Lessep, in a quavering voice. "You may search if you wish, but I feel —"

"Crofton may still be here," suggested Warlock, in a troubled tone, as further words failed Lessep.

"Remember, the man is unseen. A search might bring serious consequences."

"Still a hoax," scoffed Darring. "What about a search, commissioner?"

BARTH nodded in agreement. The search began. The office was a simple task. Desk drawers revealed no traces of the lever, nor did the filing cabinet. Cardona lifted a covered typewriter from a small table, but did not find the lever beneath it.

Lessep was replacing his photographs in the filing cabinet when the others started out to search the laboratory. Only Darring remained, making a second search of the desk when the clang of a house-bell announced some one at the front door.

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Wainwright Barth stood momentarily startled. He was in the center of the laboratory when he heard the sound. Then he saw Professor Lessep come trembling from the office. The old man's face was pitiful.

"It's Cranston," reassured Barth. "Answer the door, professor. Warlock will go with you" then, as Warlock hesitated "and Cardona also. Come." The bell tingled again. "Do not keep Cranston waiting."

Barth led the way to the door and unbolted it. The professor went into the parlor. Cardona followed him promptly. Warlock hesitated; then remained. While he was standing beside Barth, Darring strolled up and joined them.

"It's Cranston," assured Barth.

Darring nodded. He stood beside the commissioner and waited, while Warlock nervously edged away. A full minute elapsed. It was one of increasing tension. Then Barth, whose ruddy face had begun to show a strain, smiled weakly in relief.

The professor and Joe Cardona were returning. With them was Lamont Cranston. Sight of his friend's calm face had eased the commissioner's worry. For Wainwright Barth, unconsciously, had begun to feel the presence of an unseen killer.

His forced belief in an invisible menace had brought Barth to a state almost as fearful as that evidenced by Melrose Lessep and Findlay Warlock. The arrival of Lamont Cranston, through some singular reason, brought Barth a renewal of confidence.

CHAPTER VII. THE KILLER STRIKES

COMMISSIONER WAINWRIGHT BARTH became dramatic as soon as the three men had entered the laboratory. He closed the door and bolted it. Turning to Cranston, he beckoned. Then he led the way to the motor which Professor Lessep had attached to the glass cabinet.

"Strange things have occurred here, Cranston," explained Barth. "An important connecting lever has been stolen from this motor. Apparently the theft took place after five o'clock this afternoon."

The commissioner paused as he saw Cranston nod. The new arrival was examining the bolt from which the lever had been removed.

"Professor Lessep had a photograph of the complete motor," resumed Barth. "If you wish to see it –"

"That is not necessary," came Cranston's quiet interruption. "I noted this motor very carefully last night. I recall the appearance of the part that is missing."

Professor Lessep blinked as he heard this statement.

Silently, Cranston turned away and looked at the second motor. One by one, he picked up loose cords that were plugged to it.

"Some of these have been changed also," he remarked. "See, professor? The ones with the special plugs are no longer here."

"The special plugs?" inquired Lessep. "You must be mistaken, Mr. Cranston. There were no special plugs. Those are merely for making electrical connection. They have no other purpose."

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"Two of them were different from the others," returned Cranston. "One which connected to the cabinet; the other to the floor socket."

"I never knew it," declared the professor. "All were standard cords and plugs. Of course, such items of electrical equipment differ in certain details."

"These had unusually long contact points." Cranston's tone was methodical. "I noticed them, particularly, after they were detached last night."

"But they are unimportant –"

"The professor is right," put in Barth. "Perhaps some of these cords were moved about; but no important parts are missing, Cranston. What we must find is that lever. Aid the professor, gentlemen, while he resumes the search. I want Mr. Cranston to see the note that was left in the office."

Lamont Cranston's keen eyes watched the professor's nod. Lessep started about the laboratory, with Cardona following him. Darring shrugged his shoulders; then joined in the search. Warlock appeared from the door of the little office. Seeing what the others were about, he entered into the hunt.

"Come into the office, Cranston," suggested Barth. "I want you to see exactly where the note was found. Here read it for yourself."

They entered the office. Only the ceiling light was on. Barth approached the desk, clicked on the hanging lamp and pointed to the spot where the note had been.

Cranston nodded. He finished his examination of the note; then began to open the desk drawers.

"Nothing of importance in there," said Barth. "Just carbon copies of letters a box of electric light bulbs –"

He stopped as he saw Cranston pick out a yellow sheet of paper. It was a carbon copy of some letter sent by the professor. Barth watched Cranston compare the yellow sheet with the note that had come from the Unseen Killer.

"Agate type," was Cranston's comment. "Not well lined. An old-style machine, evidently purchased second hand at a bargain price. Odd, commissioner, how some of these letters correspond –"

Pausing abruptly, Cranston turned to the little table that bore the covered typewriter. He whisked away the cloth covering and smiled slightly, as he stooped forward. Then he motioned Barth toward the machine.

"Notice anything, commissioner?"

"Nothing in particular –"

"The ribbon?"

Barth adjusted his pince-nez.

"Ah, yes," he said. "Two-colored half red and half blue. Not uncommon for –"

He looked up to see Cranston's smile; then noted the Killer's message, that Cranston was holding toward him. The red signature, in its capital letters, was directly before the commissioner's eyes. Barth uttered an

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exclamation.

"Examine the ribbon more closely," came Cranston's suggestion. "Particularly the red portion."

Another exclamation from the commissioner. Barth, close to the typewriter, noted blue letter-marks capitals imprinted on the red half of the ribbon.

"What do those letters spell?" queried Cranston, still holding his thin smile.

"The Unseen Killer!" cried the commissioner.

"WHEN the red portion of the ribbon is seldom used," reminded Cranston, "the keys invariably leave blue marks when they first strike it."

The others had arrived. Barth's shout had been heard in the lab. As they crowded up, four together, the commissioner turned and pointed to the typewriter.

"Mr. Cranston has made a discovery," declared Barth. "The threatening letter was typed on your machine, professor. Here, in this office!"

Lessep shook. He bent forward as the commissioner pointed out the marks on the ribbon. For a moment, the professor seemed worried and speechless. Then, gathering himself together, he spoke.

"This proves that Crofton has been here," declared the old man, solemnly. "Here, with his own unseen hands, he typed his warning. Even while we were first gathered in my laboratory, he could have prepared his terrible message."

"Hardly," came Cranston's quiet objection.

"Why not?" queried Barth.

"The note," explained Cranston, "was typed by some one who was alone in this office. Had any other person been present, the clicking of the keys would have been heard."

"Correct," agreed Barth. He made a calculation. "Then the message must have been typed between five o'clock and seven thirty, while the professor was out to dinner."

"Only if the Unseen Killer typed it," put in Darring.

"What do you mean?" inquired Barth.

"He means," came Cranston's steady response, "that you are accepting the note on the value of its typewritten signature. Mr. Darring, apparently, still holds to his opinion that Crofton's disappearance was a hoax."

"I do," declared Darring abruptly. "We came here for a second experiment. Professor Lessep has avoided it. In my opinion, this devisualization stuff is still hypothetical. Anybody could have typed that note. Whoever did type it could have been seen, as well as heard."

"I was here from one until five," declared Lessep solemnly. "I saw no one in the laboratory during those hours."

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"And you returned at seven thirty."

"Yes. With Mr. Warlock."

"And after that?" queried Barth, swinging to Warlock's way of reasoning.

"The two of us were here," affirmed Lessep, "until eight o'clock. Then I went out to admit you, commissioner. I left Mr. Warlock here alone."

"For about five minutes," interjected Warlock. "I was in the laboratory all that while. I heard no sounds of typing."

"This business is serious," announced Barth, glaring about the group. "Here is new evidence that can not be minimized. If this should be a hoax" he paused to nod approvingly toward Darring "I intend to treat it as an actual crime.

"Let us forget Miles Crofton for the moment. You were here, professor, four hours this afternoon. You could have typed that note. You could also have removed the parts from the machine."

Lessep began a protest. Barth silenced him with a fierce gesture. The commissioner then turned to Warlock.

"You were here also!" thundered Barth. "Alone, for five minutes. A short time yet sufficient to have done the work. Jove! This talk of an unseen man is maddening me. I intend to deal with those who are visible. Who else was in here alone?"

"I was," replied Darring, calmly. "While we were searching for the lost lever –"

"That was after the message was found," interrupted Barth. "After the lever was stolen. I mean before we discovered this note.

"Who else was here beside you two?" He glared at Lessep; then at Warlock. "Who else could have been in here?"

"Miles Crofton," replied Darring.

"MILES CROFTON?" spluttered Barth, in total surprise. "But but you, Darring, you were the one who termed it all a hoax. You claim that Crofton could not have become unseen –"

"I still hold my claim," responded Darring. "But do not forget, commissioner, that there was an interval between five o'clock and seven thirty, while neither the professor nor Warlock happened to be here.

"Neither you nor I could have been here during that period, for you met me at my office at five and we dined together. But Crofton could have come here. Not unseen, but visibly. Or he could have sent some one. Any one who had a duplicate key."

"That's right," admitted Barth. He mopped his forehead with a silk handkerchief. "This whole case is maddening. It brings us in circles, back to where we started. I don't know where it will end, unless –"

"Unless," completed Darring, in his skeptical tone, "the professor gives us proof that his devisualization is fact, not fancy. Just how long, professor" he wheeled to Lessep "would it require for you to replace that missing lever?"

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"Some time," responded Lessep, in a troubled tone. "It is a vital portion of the mechanism."

"How vital? Just what is the mechanical principle involved?"

"That is my secret," pleaded Lessep.

Darring looked hopelessly at Barth. The commissioner towered in indignation. He waved his hand toward the laboratory.

"Come, Lessep!" he ordered the professor. "This is no time for secrets. I shall guarantee protection to your invention. But unless you are willing to cooperate, I shall order your arrest."

THEY entered the laboratory, and formed a group about the first motor. Lessep reluctantly began to point out mechanical features of the device. His words became incoherent. Barth became brusque. Lessep pleaded.

"I am afraid," he declared. "Crofton is a menace."

"Proceed with your explanation," insisted Barth.

"It is useless," crackled Lessep. "So much depends upon the missing part. You would have to see it."

"We have seen the photographs," remarked Darring.

"Yes, professor," urged Warlock, suddenly. "Bring the photographs. Let us see them. They will do to illustrate the use of the connecting lever."

Lessep rubbed his chin. At last he nodded. Turning from the group he entered the little office. Ceiling light and desk lamp had been extinguished. The professor turned on the ceiling light; then closed the door behind him.

Lamont Cranston was examining the tall glass cabinet. He had noted that its sides were attached by clamps midway on each edge. As he unfastened clamps at the sides, the rear wall pivoted on its upper and lower fastenings; then swung back into place at Cranston's touch.

"I really believe," Barth was saying solemnly, "that the professor's fears are justified. Accept my apologies, Warlock, for accusing you the way I did. Actually I was not accusing; I was merely speculating. I wanted to find some solution other than the obvious."

"The obvious?" inquired Darring.

"Yes, the obvious," stated Barth. "For here the incredible happens to be the obvious. It sounds impossible to think that a man could be surrounded by an atmospheric condition that renders him invisible. Yet analysis tells me that Miles Crofton is actually devisualized.

"Professor Lessep knows it. That is why he fears. He realizes that Crofton an unseen killer could strike him down with some invisible weapon."

"You are right, commissioner," spoke Warlock. "I knew that you would return to your first impression. It is the only sound explanation."

"Tommyrot!" ejaculated Darring. "Where is the proof? Lessep could furnish it by repeating his experiment.

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He has failed to do so. He removed that lever. He wrote that note.

"If Crofton is in the picture as an unseen killer why doesn't he strike? Why should a man in his position fail to follow up a threat? If Crofton –"

Darring never ended the sentence. From beyond the door of Lessep's study came the sudden muffled boom of an explosion. The laboratory caught the jar. The glass cabinet rattled. Those in the large room almost lost their footing.

WAINWRIGHT BARTH leaped to the door of the office and wrenched it open. With others close behind him, the commissioner was confronted by an outpouring of smoke that came from the corner by the filing cabinet.

Barth staggered back. Then, as the fumes were clearing, he led the way into the office. Lessening smoke enabled the commissioner to see Lessep's body, prone upon the floor. The filing cabinet was wrecked; the hanging lamp above it was shattered.

Lamont Cranston reached the professor's body ahead of the commissioner. His keen eyes saw that Melrose Lessep was dead. Barth, also realizing the professor's fate, turned to stare about the room. Darring had entered behind Cranston. Now Cardona and Warlock were coming in from the laboratory.

"The Unseen Killer!" cried Barth. "He has caused this. He was here – in this room –"

He looked toward the door, diagonally opposite the demolished filing cabinet. It offered the logical spot from which a person could have projected a bomb or a grenade without danger to himself. Wildly, Barth sprang to that spot, to find nothingness. He headed into the laboratory. Warlock, Darring and Cardona were close behind him.

Staring, the commissioner saw the door that led to the rear hall. It was unbolted and open. Barth pointed, excitedly. Cardona spoke.

"I opened the door, commissioner," said Joe. "In case there would be fumes from the office."

"You paved the way for Crofton's escape!" exclaimed Barth. "Had you kept the door bolted –"

"All our lives might have been jeopardized," put in Warlock. "He could have slain us as he killed the professor."

Back in the office, the tall form of Lamont Cranston stood above the body of Professor Lessep. There was no smile upon the firm, straight lips. Keen eyes stared the eyes of The Shadow.

The shattered front of the filing cabinet had resulted in chunks of wood upon the floor. Beside these were slivers of glass from the wrecked lamp. The Shadow looked upward.

Turning, he moved quickly to the desk in the other corner. The lamp was illuminated there, still swaying slightly from the concussion that had caused the professor's death. Rapidly, The Shadow opened a drawer. He saw the box of light bulbs; four in all.

One appeared to be burnt out. The Shadow removed it and closed the drawer. Resuming the slow motion of Lamont Cranston, he strolled into the laboratory to join the commissioner and the others.

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"Close the door to the office," ordered Barth, turning to Cardona. "No one is to enter there from now on. I shall take charge of the investigation. With Cardona's aid. The rest of you are witnesses."

HOURS later, The Shadow entered his sanctum. A click; the blue light glimmered. A hand arose and turned the bulb in its socket. The light went out. Motion followed in the darkness. Then, suddenly, light reappeared.

It was not from the bluish incandescent. The Shadow had screwed in the frosted bulb that he had brought from Professor Lessep's office. That bulb was not burned out. Though it had been in long use, it was still serviceable.

The Shadow's hand remained motionless beneath the bulb. Then fingers unscrewed the frosted object. Again the blue incandescent came back in place. The white bulb lay in view upon the table.

Keen eyes studied this souvenir that The Shadow had brought from the scene of crime. The left hand raised the bulb and held it. Then the right hand rose upward toward the lamp. Slowly, the fingers turned the bluish incandescent; then paused.

A final twist. The blue light went out. It came on again, as the fingers reversed their twist. Off on off on. The light glowed for a dozen seconds. Then a pressure of the switch extinguished it.

A soft laugh in the darkness. Then a swish. Weird, solemn echoes to hover in the gloom. For there was strange understanding in The Shadow's tone. The Shadow had gained a clue to crime.

Yet facts remained unexplained. The Shadow could see reasons for the death of Professor Lessep. He needed new links to complete the chain that would lead to a discovery of the motive. Reports from agents received to-night from Burbank had brought no word concerning the whereabouts of Miles Crofton.

The Shadow had gained theories; yet they conflicted. Those suppositions concerned the purposes of an unseen killer. Death had struck, almost in The Shadow's presence; nevertheless, it had left much to be explained.

Faced by one of the strangest situations that he had ever encountered, The Shadow was forced to wait. But in waiting, he would be preparing ready to balk the next stroke of doom.

CHAPTER VIII. AT WARLOCK'S

LATE the next afternoon, a large limousine swung westward on a street well north of Times Square. It came to a stop in front of a brownstone house that was old yet imposing in appearance. A chauffeur alighted and opened the door. Lamont Cranston emerged; then Police Commissioner Barth.

"Wait here, Stanley," said Cranston, to the chauffeur. "We shall not be long."

The chauffeur saluted. Cranston and Barth ascended the steps and rang the bell. While they waited, the commissioner made comment.

"Glad you happened in, Cranston," he said. "I didn't care to make this visit appear too much in the nature of my official capacity. Since you came with me, I can express my arrival in the light of a friendly call.

"I think it best to be diplomatic with Findlay Warlock. He is actually apart from these strange events that ended in Melrose Lessep's death. Yet it so happens that he is the one man who actually knew the professor –"

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Barth cut his sentence short as the door opened. A tall, withered-faced flunky gazed inquiringly at the visitors. Barth glanced at Cranston. The latter spoke.

"We have come to see Mr. Warlock," he said quietly. "Mr. Cranston and Commissioner Barth."

The flunky nodded. He ushered the visitors into a gloomy living room, where fading embers were glowing in a stone fireplace.

Barth looked about at dull oak-paneled walls. He shrugged his shoulders after the servant had left.

"Moldy old place, isn't it?" questioned the commissioner. "I wonder how Warlock happened to choose this house as a residence. I should think he would prefer to live at a hotel."

A nod from Cranston; but no reply. Footsteps were already coming from the stairs. Findlay Warlock appeared. He bowed in welcome to his guests; then invited them toward the hall.

"It's more cheerful in my study," he observed. "On the second floor. Shall we go up? Good. An odd old house" Warlock talked steadily as he led the way "and I suppose you asked yourselves the usual question: Why I chose it. The answer is simple." Warlock chuckled. "It was thrust upon me."

He paused in the upper hallway to open the door of the study. They stepped into a well-furnished apartment that was directly above the living room. Here was contrast. Paneled walls, but lighter in color. A cheery fire in the hearth. Everything spoke of comfort.

"Better than the living room, isn't it?" questioned Warlock, with a benign smile. "This study explains why I live here. A most comfortable sort of a room. This house, I understand, had been vacant for several years. A new purchaser took it over a few months ago and had it refinished; then decided to get rid of it.

"A real estate agent offered it to me at a surprisingly low price. So low that it would have been folly not to take it. I moved in here with Cluett, the servant who admitted you. I have found the house very satisfactory. It has a third floor, also. All refinished –"

"Quite interesting, Mr. Warlock," observed Barth, finding opportunity for an interruption. "But now that you have told us about the house, let us turn to the matter of Professor Melrose Lessep. My investigation of his death has brought no tangible results. I am particularly disappointed because his files show no record whatever of his devisualization apparatus.

"I have come here in hope to learn more regarding his invention. You were financially interested in the device. Surely you must have some papers pertaining to it. I do not suppose that you would have ventured money in the enterprise without first learning something about it."

"I have some of the professor's data," replied Warlock. "But unfortunately I do not think that it will shed much light on the matter. The most I can show you is the prospectus which Lessep originally gave me. It is here, in the wall safe, along with the file that concerns his turbines."

WARLOCK turned and went to the wall at the rear of the room. There, he opened a small safe that was set in the paneling. He drew out a portfolio, laid it aside; then rummaged about among loose papers.

"Very convenient, this wall safe," remarked Warlock. "It was installed by the previous owner. It makes an excellent strong box. I changed the combination to suit myself and it saved me the trouble of having one of the small safes shipped up from the office."

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"Could I see the papers?" inquired Barth.

"Certainly," replied Warlock. He brought over the portfolio and opened it. "Most of these deal with the turbines. Here are a few papers, though, that relate to the devisualization apparatus."

The commissioner examined the documents. He shrugged his shoulders and passed the papers to Cranston. Barth was obviously disappointed.

"Nothing but sketchy claims," he declared. "Not even worthy to be called a prospectus. I am amazed, Warlock, that a man of your judgment should have advanced money on so doubtful a proposition."

"I had faith in Lessep," explained Warlock. "I felt that the failure of his turbines had been a misfortune. He wanted to preserve secrecy about his new invention. That was why he gave me so little information concerning it. But he came here, several times, to tell me how his devisualization experiments were progressing."

"He came here?"

"Yes. With Miles Crofton."

"Ah! This is interesting. Why did he bring Crofton?"

"Because he had the greatest confidence in his assistant."

"Tell me," urged Barth. "Just what did you learn from either Lessep or Crofton?"

"Only that the experiment was succeeding," replied Warlock. "The professor said that he had partially devisualized small objects. He said that greater success was sure. Naturally, I discounted his statements. I felt that he might be over-enthusiastic, as he was with the turbines."

"But Crofton supported the professor's claims. Moreover, Crofton impressed me as a man of sound judgment. I told Lessep, of course, that I could advance no more money. That was because of the financial difficulties that I had experienced with Centralized Power."

"What was the reaction?"

"Lessep wanted no money. He said that other investors would respond as soon as his invention demonstrated its worth. That the cash that I had advanced would be increased a hundredfold."

"And Crofton?"

"He agreed with the professor. They were both convinced of success. That was why I was not surprised when the devisualization experiment succeeded the other night."

Barth nodded thoughtfully. Then he stared, eaglelike, through his pince-nez. He spoke seriously.

"WE found no plans of Lessep's apparatus," declared the commissioner. "The photographs seem insufficient. We can not replace that missing lever. Experts have examined Lessep's machine. They can not fathom its working."

"That is why I want to learn more about Lessep as an individual. I want to know all I can concerning his

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associates. But I have failed to uncover anything of importance. The same applies to Crofton.

"He Crofton seems to glory in his role of unseen killer. His past shows him to be an adventurer. The only stigma of crime lies in his association with Rouser Tugin. Yet even there, Detective Cardona has learned no more than he first gained.

"Underworld talk has it that Crofton knew Rouser. The two had been seen together. We have reason to suppose that Crofton aided Rouser in crime. But that is all. Until Cardona locates the stool pigeon who gave the original tip-off, we can hope for no more definite information."

"The stool pigeon is missing?" inquired Warlock, in apparent surprise. "I thought he intended to report to Cardona again."

"He has not done so," replied the commissioner.

"Who is he?" asked Warlock.

"Cardona wanted to keep his name a secret," observed Barth. "But I see no reason why I should not mention it here. The stool pigeon is an occasional informant named Lagran. 'Crazy' Lagran, they call him. One of the sordid characters who prowls the underworld.

"Crazy Lagran works from under cover. That is why Cardona did not press him. But since his tip-off, Lagran has kept completely out of sight, not even communicating with Cardona. This, I believe, may be attributed to the fact that the newspapers have dubbed Miles Crofton the 'Unseen Killer.' Cardona thinks that Lagran is afraid of Crofton."

"A logical supposition," decided Warlock.

A momentary gleam had appeared in the eyes of Lamont Cranston. The matter of the missing stoolie had not previously been mentioned by Commissioner Barth.

There was a rap at the door. It proved to be Cluett, the servant. The flunky announced that Mr. Darring had arrived and was waiting in the living room below.

"Tell him to come up at once," ordered Warlock. Then, to Barth and Cranston, he added: "I hope that Darring is bringing good news regarding Centralized Power. A receivership seems imminent. Our one hope is to salvage what we can from the wreck.

"I wanted to proceed with further operations; but I realize now that I was wrong. We are threatened by a lawsuit. Hildon, Amboy and Norgan leeches, the three of them intend to sue for unpaid claims. Their lawyer made a statement to the newspapers."

"I did not see it," remarked Barth.

"Here it is." Warlock scowled as he picked up an evening newspaper. "Pushed to the second page, probably because the Lessep case took up so much front page space. Read it, commissioner."

As Barth took the newspaper, the door opened and Darring entered. The black-haired man was surprised to see Barth and Cranston. He shook hands; then noted the newspaper that Barth had opened.

"The news hawks made a great furor over Lessep's death," remarked Darring. "Have you given them new

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statements, commissioner, regarding the Unseen Killer?"

"No," replied Barth. "I was just about to read the story that concerns Centralized Power. Mr. Warlock called my attention to it."

"You can tell us more, Darring," put in Warlock. "Have you seen the attorneys whom these three rogues have hired to sue us?"

"Yes," replied Darring. "I have come from their offices."

"Any luck?" questioned Warlock.

"On the matter of contracts, yes," returned Darring. "I convinced them that we would not have to go through with further construction work. By stopping that labor when I first took charge, I have saved Centralized Power Corporation a few hundred thousand dollars."

"Excellent!" cried Warlock. "But the options?"

"They can not be canceled," answered Darring. "It looks as though the corporation will have to sacrifice at least a half million."

The effect of this statement was surprising. Warlock's pleasantness turned to anger. Clenching his fists, the gray-haired corporation president paced across the room. Turning, he delivered imprecations.

"They are thieves!" he cried, furiously. "The three of them! Rascals who masquerade as honest men. All of a kind; Hildon Amboy Norgan. I denounce them! They have bled us for millions!"

"Which they deny," reminded Darring.

"They lie!" stormed Warlock. "They are rogues without scruples –"

"Which can not be proven."

Warlock stopped short. His fists unclenched; but his expression remained fierce. Finally, he relaxed entirely.

"You are right, Darring," he admitted. "They have us beaten. We are helpless, because we are honest. But mark my words: the fruits of evil can seldom be retained.

"They have been bold, those three. They have brazenly flaunted their crookedness into the eyes of the world. They glory in the fact that they have gained wealth which the law can not take away. Of course they deny that they have profited; but their denial is a mere gesture.

"They mock honest men, those three. They have made their gain. But there are others in this world others as grasping as those knaves. Others who may defy the law as well as circumvent it. Some time, some one may step forth to deprive them of their ill-gotten wealth."

Warlock became calm. His moment of rage had ended.

Darring produced a stack of papers; documents that he had brought from the lawyers. He remarked that they would have to be examined and approved by Warlock. Commissioner Barth spoke.

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"We must be leaving, Cranston," he remarked to his friend. "Good afternoon, gentlemen" Barth had turned to Warlock and Darring. "I hope that you will find some solution to the affairs of Centralized Power Corporation."

"Suppose I go along with you," suggested Darring. "I am due at my hotel. Mr. Warlock can study the reports without my assistance."

TWENTY minutes later, Marryat Darring alighted from Lamont Cranston's limousine at the entrance of a hotel near Times Square. The car continued on to the Cobalt Club. There, Commissioner Barth stepped forth. The limousine pulled away. Lamont Cranston, presumably, was going to his New Jersey home.

An order through the speaking tube changed that plan. Stanley veered left. He traveled east; then north. He parked on a secluded street not far from the deserted home of Professor Melrose Lessep. The rear door of the car opened. A blackened shape glided into darkness.

Garbed in hat and cloak, produced from a bag in the limousine, Lamont Cranston had become The Shadow. His course was untraceable. The next manifestation of The Shadow's presence came when the rear door of Lessep's laboratory opened under the action of a probing, picklike instrument.

A tiny flashlight glimmered. The motor with the missing part was absent. Also the glass cabinet. These had been removed for tests. But the second motor—the one that had played no part in the devisualization of Miles Crofton was still standing by the wall. The experts had left it here.

The flashlight glimmered on a cord with special, long-pronged plugs that The Shadow produced from beneath his cloak. Then the light went out. With a soft laugh, The Shadow approached the motor. The light glimmered while he made a wall connection. Then the flashlight went out to stay.

LATER, Stanley, drowsing behind the wheel of the limousine, heard the voice of Lamont Cranston through the speaking tube. His master had returned to the car. The limousine pulled out and rolled to a new destination. Again, The Shadow emerged.

Soon afterward, a light glimmered in The Shadow's sanctum. Gloved hands reached for the earphones. New orders went across the wire to Burbank. After that, blackness; then the departing laugh of The Shadow.

The quest for Miles Crofton was still on. To it The Shadow had added another task for his searching agents. There was another to be sought within the underworld. "Crazy" Lagran, the missing stool pigeon.

CHAPTER IX. DEATH DELIVERED

CULBERLY COURT was considered an exclusive residential district of Manhattan. There, a row of old-fashioned houses fronted on a quiet street. Quaint structures, like homes in a small town, they looked out of place, even in this low-built portion of the metropolis. That was why these houses commanded high prices. They were different.

At a distance, the Culberly Court houses looked alike. Close at hand, they differed. Each house had an areaway on both sides. Bay-windows, odd-shaped gables, little roofs above side porches; these were the individualities that gave distinction.

It was easy to pick out one particular house after having seen it before. Nevertheless, at night, that process required a careful inspection as one went by the row of residences. Hence people who came here by automobile often moved along very slowly, house to house.

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On the night following The Shadow's secret trip to Lessep's abandoned laboratory, a car appeared at the near corner of Culberly Court and began to perform the slow-motion routine. The chauffeur was trying to pick out a certain house. He knew that he could find it, because the house just beyond it was closed and boarded up.

Furthermore, the house that the chauffeur wanted had a green-glass transom just above the doorway. If the hall light happened to be on, the driver knew that he could spot the house very easily. The house that the chauffeur wanted was the home of Nathaniel Hildon.

While the car a limousine moved at its snail's pace, two impatient men were talking in the back seat. The glare of a street lamp showed their faces. Neither man was more than forty years old; both were keen-faced.

One, sallow and with bristling mustache, was Peters Amboy. The other, square-jawed and with bulldog countenance, was Wallace Norgan. They were talking in low voices and their tones were troubled. They did not want the chauffeur to hear their words. The partly closed glass partition aided their purpose.

"You called Hildon at eight?" Amboy was asking. "Are you sure, Norgan, that it was not later?"

"Exactly eight o'clock," replied Norgan. "Then again at nine. There was no answer."

"Yet he said that he intended to stay at home. He said that when we lunched with him."

"Yes. That is why I decided to come in from Long Island. After I reached town, I called your apartment, Amboy. I was glad to hear your voice."

"I don't blame you, Norgan. By the way, you brought your note?"

"Yes. That's why I asked you to have yours with you. We can not tell when the —"

The car had stopped. The chauffeur had alighted. As the man opened the door, a clock began to strike the hour of eleven. Norgan looked anxiously at Amboy. His friend whispered something. Norgan nodded.

"You had better come in with us, Jedrey," said Norgan, to the chauffeur. "I do not know how long we will be here."

"Very well, sir."

The chauffeur opened an iron gate and ascended steps to ring the bell. Light was shining through the green transom. Jedrey wondered, however, why this visit was so late. He had brought Mr. Norgan here often; but never so late as eleven o'clock.

Amboy and Norgan had joined the chauffeur and Jedrey had repeated his ring at the doorbell before there was any sign of an answer. Then locks turned; a woman's face peered past the edge of the door. Suspicious eyes recognized the visitors; the door opened to show a fat woman who looked like a servant.

Both Amboy and Norgan recognized Katy, the cook of the Hildon household. The woman was prompt with an apology for her delay in answering the door.

"SURE, it's you, Mr. Amboy," she declared. "And Mr. Norgan. I couldn't think who might be here at this late hour. With the butler away for the night, and me not thinking who might want to see Mr. Hildon."

"Mr. Hildon is at home?" quizzed Norgan, promptly.

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"Indeed, yes," returned Katy. "Ever since he ate the big dinner that I cooked for him, he has been upstairs reading in his own room. It's a wonder he didn't hear the doorbell before I did, sir. The light was shining under his door."

"He is awake then?" queried Amboy.

"I'm thinking he is asleep, sir," answered Katy. "But I'll go up to rap and find if he will wake up."

The woman waddled toward the stairs. Amboy and Norgan exchanged anxious looks. They drew in closer to the stairway, where Amboy made a remark:

"The telephone is located in Hildon's room –"

"Yes" Norgan's tone was anxious "but even if it didn't wake him, the woman should have heard the call from the third floor."

"Maybe her door was closed –"

"Wait here, Jedrey." Norgan turned nervously toward the chauffeur. "After we see Mr. Hildon, we will tell you how soon we intend to leave."

"Yes, sir."

"Mr. Norgan!" The call came from the top of the stairs. It was Katy, the cook. "Mr. Amboy!"

"Yes?" responded Amboy.

"The light is on, sir," called Katy, "under Mr. Hildon's door. But answer he does not. I've been pounding–"

Amboy started toward the stairs. Halfway up, he looked back. Norgan followed; then motioned to Jedrey to come along. The three men reached a door at the side of the house. They could see the light beneath. Amboy pounded. There was no response.

"You're sure he is in?" questioned Norgan, of Katy.

"Sure of it, sir," blurted the woman. "It was upstairs I was, but I would have heard had he gone out."

"Did you hear the telephone bell ring?"

"No, sir. Not this evening."

"He doesn't answer," said Amboy. He tried the doorknob. "It's locked seems to be bolted."

"We'll call the police," returned Norgan, grimly.

"The telephone is in Hildon's room," reminded Amboy.

"Who lives next door?" questioned Norgan, turning to Katy.

"Mr. Willings, sir," replied the cook. "He would let you use the telephone."

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"Let us go there," decided Norgan. "Jedrey, you stay here with Mr. Amboy."

WHEN the police car reached Hildon's, it was only a few seconds ahead of another automobile that had come from headquarters. Two officers of the radio patrol had been ordered to Number 58, Culberly Court; and Joe Cardona had started at the time the order was given.

The ace detective, at present an acting inspector, joined the uniformed men on the steps. Trouble at a spot like Culberly Court was sufficient to bring Joe on the job. Cardona was the first to enter the open door.

He found Peters Amboy and Wallace Norgan awaiting him. Norgan explained about the telephone calls while they were ascending the stairs. Joe nodded. At the top, he eyed Jedrey; then learned that the man was Norgan's chauffeur. Katy was also present; the detective nodded when told that she was the Hildon cook.

Cardona eyed the door. He knocked. He tried the knob. He noted the light that shone from beneath. Then he beckoned to the two officers from the radio car. They launched themselves against the door. The barrier cracked.

Joe motioned the officers back. He rammed his shoulder against the door for the final urge. The hinges had broken; Joe entered as the door swung loose at that side. The others peered through the opening. What Cardona saw, they saw.

In the center of a large bedroom lay Nathaniel Hildon. He looked tall and frail, sprawled like a toppled scarecrow. His face showed him to be a man of less than forty slightly younger than either Amboy or Norgan yet less robust than either of his associates.

Hildon's gaping face was staring upward. His eyes were bulged in death. There was no question as to the manner in which he had died. Purplish marks about his throat showed that the victim had been strangled by some powerful killer.

Yanking a revolver from his pocket, Joe looked warily about the room. The patrolmen, shoulders at the door had guns in readiness. Dropping to one knee, Cardona peered beneath the bed. The space there was vacant.

There was a closet in the corner. The door stood ajar. Cardona moved in that direction and peered in to find nothing but hanging clothes. He shook the garments. Satisfied that the closet was empty, he swung back toward the door through which he had entered.

The reason why the door had given at the hinges was because of the powerful bolt that barred it. The bolt was still shot. It proved that no one could have used the door as an exit. That meant a window. There were two of these; one at the side of the room, the other at the rear.

Cardona went to the side window. There the detective found something that perplexed him. The window was of the type that swung open on hinges. Those hinges were on the inside. Furthermore, the fastening consisted of a heavy bar that fitted over a bolt, with a wing-nut to hold it there.

The bar was in place. The bolt was topped by the nut, screwed tightly in place. A fastening at the side of the window was also firm. The window panes were large but unbroken. This window could not have been the exit. That left the one at the rear.

JOE could see a light from a rear alleyway, shining through the solid panes of the rear window. That was why he had picked the side window first; because he could not picture a killer foolish enough to choose the window where the light shone. But as he moved to the rear window, Joe was positive that it must have

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formed the avenue of escape. He stopped, more astonished than before.

The rear window was fastened like the side one. Catch at the side; bar on the sill; nut tight on bolt. As with the first window, no one could possibly have closed and fastened this one on the outside.

The cops at the door could see the blank look on Cardona's face when the sleuth turned back into the room. Rubbing his chin, Joe looked for some new hiding place. He gripped his gun more firmly. But this quest, too, was useless. There was not a single place other than beneath the bed or in the closet where any one could have hidden.

Then Cardona spied the telephone. He saw why calls had not been answered. Some one had wadded tissue paper about the bell, just beneath a small desk in the corner. Carefully, Cardona pulled away the wadding. He laid the paper on the desk.

Slowly, a grim look came over Cardona's features. Standing just within the door, the detective was viewed by Amboy and Norgan, who were peering past the watching cops. The dead man's friends saw Cardona pick up the telephone. Joe made a call and they listened tensely as they heard his words.

"Hello... Markham... Yes, Cardona... Up at 58, Culberly Court. Man murdered here. Nathaniel Hildon... Yes... Listen, Markham. Put in a call to the commissioner... Yes... You'll probably get him at the Cobalt Club..."

"Yes... Certainly. He'll want to come down here... Tell him it's murder. And tell him it's more than that... More than murder... Another job by the guy we're after... Miles Crofton... The Unseen Killer..."

Gasps from Amboy and Morgan. The two dropped back from the door. The patrolmen tightened fists on their guns. Joe Cardona's words had produced an electrical effect.

Already, Manhattan had rung with news of the Unseen Killer. Here was murder new crime that Joe Cardona could attribute only to the prowess of that same invisible fiend!

CHAPTER X. THE LAW AND THE SHADOW

ONE hour later. Commissioner Wainwright Barth was standing in the downstairs parlor of Nathaniel Hildon's quaint home. Present was his friend Lamont Cranston, who had come with him from the Cobalt Club. Also present were Peters Amboy and Wallace Norgan. In addition, Detective Joe Cardona.

The sleuth was glum. He had occasion to be, for Barth was reprimanding him, despite the presence of these witnesses. The commissioner had completed a survey of the dead man's bedroom. He had agreed that the Unseen Killer was again responsible for murder. That was why Barth was finding fault with Cardona.

"You should have profited by experience," chided the commissioner. "You were there, in the room. You had patrolmen at the door. Then you ordered them to conduct every one else downstairs. You were temporarily alone; worse than that, you left the door unguarded."

"Remember, Cardona, we are dealing with a physical being. Miles Crofton may be devisualized; but he is not dematerialized. If he slew Nathaniel Hildon as seems obvious he must have remained within that room."

"Your one chance was to hold him. To cleverly keep the doorway bolted. Instead, you opened the path. Like you unwittingly did at Lessep's. Our quarry has eluded us. Stupidity, Cardona. Stupidity."

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"I admit it," growled Joe. "When I saw the room empty, I took it for granted the guy was gone. The way he worked before well, it was like he became air. It seemed the same here. It kind of knocked me, commissioner, when I saw those bolted windows."

"Well, the mistake has been made," acknowledged Barth. "The evidence, every bit of it, points to the Unseen Killer. Nathaniel Hildon has lived in this house for three years. We have absolute testimony from these two gentlemen" he indicated Amboy and Norgan "that nothing unusual has occurred about this place. The cook says the same; also the butler, whom you called in from Brooklyn."

"Walls floors ceiling those could have been the only other modes of exit. They were solid. We are back again to the doors and the windows. All bolted. Any ordinary murderer would have been forced to leave door or window open."

"You can't close a bolt through solid woodwork. You can't push an arm through a window pane without breaking it. My verdict is the Unseen Killer. But this time he sent no warning."

The commissioner paused. He stared through his spectacles, looking first at Cardona, who nodded; then at Cranston, whose expression remained unchanged. During the momentary lull, Amboy whispered to Norgan, who nodded nervously.

Commissioner Bart had caught the whisper. He stared inquiringly. Norgan coughed and mopped his forehead. Then, in a rather strained tone, he spoke.

"NATHANIEL HILDON did receive a warning," he declared. "We intended to speak of it, Mr. Amboy and I, but we thought it best to wait until you had completed your inspection. You see, we –"

"A warning?" snapped Barth, querulously. "A warning to Hildon? What kind of a warning?"

"A typewritten message –"

"From whom?"

"The Unseen Killer."

Barth stood dumfounded. Then his eyes sparkled. Triumphantly, the commissioner looked toward Lamont Cranston. Then he asked, sharply:

"What became of that message?"

"I didn't see anything of it," put in Cardona. "I searched the room. If Hildon had it, the murderer could have lifted it."

"That is what he must have done," declared Norgan.

"How do you know?" demanded Barth. "Did you see the message, Norgan?"

"Yes," nodded the square-jawed man. "I saw it at noon to-day, when we had lunch with Hildon. So did Amboy."

A nod from Amboy corroborated this statement.

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"Explain in full," ordered Barth.

"To begin with," stated Norgan, still a bit nervous, "I must mention that Hildon was to an extent associated with Amboy and myself in certain business enterprises. The three of us are erroneously reported to have made a fortune at the expense of the Centralized Power Corporation."

"I have heard of that report," returned Barth. "You do not need to go into details regarding your enterprise. Proceed with the matter of the note."

"To-day," resumed Norgan, "each of us received a threatening message. All the notes were exactly alike. We met at luncheon and discussed them."

"You have such a message?"

"Yes. From the Unseen Killer."

"Where is it?"

"Here." Norgan produced a folded sheet of paper. Amboy did likewise. They passed the missives to Barth. The commissioner handed one to Cardona; then opened his and read aloud, while Cardona, nodding, acknowledged the identical wording.

Each message read as follows:

"A WARNING:

"You possess certain funds which represent ill-gotten gains. You are not alone. Two others share your spoils. They, too, are receiving warnings.

"All this wealth not one cent excepted must be delivered into my hands, intact. To pass me your hidden funds, you must first communicate with me.

"Issue a statement to the evening newspapers announcing that you have received a threat from me. Unless some such account appears by the final editions, one of you will be dead by to-morrow morning.

"THE UNSEEN KILLER."

"Well?" questioned Barth, sharply. "Why did you not inform the police of these threats? You have witnessed the result. Hildon is dead –"

"We thought the notes a trick," put in Amboy. "Some game, worked by enemies who have been trying to force us into admission of profits that we have not made."

"Or a blackmailer's scheme," added Norgan. "Possibly the work of a crank any one who might have read the newspaper accounts of the unseen murderer who slew Professor Lessep."

"So you decided to do nothing about it?" quizzed the commissioner.

"Exactly," admitted Norgan. "The three of us met, compared the messages that we had received and agreed to make this crank show his hand. We wanted no notoriety. We felt that we were safe."

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"I went to my home on Long Island; Amboy to his apartment. Hildon came here. Then, about eight o'clock in the evening, I began to worry. About Hildon. I felt that his position would be the least secure. This district is secluded."

"That is why you telephoned him?"

"Yes. At eight o'clock. No answer. I telephoned again. Still no response. I decided that servants must certainly be here, even if Hildon had gone out. So I drove in town and picked up Amboy. You know the rest, commissioner."

BARTH paced for a few moments. Then he paused to eye the two threatened men. Amboy and Norgan looked solemn. Barth adjusted his pince-nez.

"I predict," he said, wisely, "that you will receive new messages to-morrow morning. This Unseen Killer Miles Crofton possesses powers that are almost unlimited. We must draw him out."

"Notify me if you receive new threats. Then we will give him the statement that he wants. In the meantime, I shall place officers on guard at your respective homes."

"It seems obvious, after reading those threats, that the Unseen Killer did not want you to learn of Hildon's death until the morning. That is why he muffled the telephone bell. His entire purpose is now explained."

"Despite the fact that you gentlemen have sought to shun publicity" – Barth paused dryly "your names have appeared in print. Only yesterday, the newspapers carried an account of your proposed lawsuit against the Centralized Power Corporation."

"It is generally acknowledged that you gained profits through your transactions, even though the amounts may be exaggerated. By merely reading the newspapers, the Unseen Killer could have picked upon you two with Hildon as a trio of wealthy men."

Amboy and Norgan stood silent. Having summed the case as he saw it, Wainwright Barth made prompt arrangements. He detailed officers to accompany both men to their homes. He saw Amboy and Norgan leave. Then, accompanied by Lamont Cranston, Barth went upstairs for a final examination of the room wherein Nathaniel Hildon had died. After that, Barth departed with Cranston.

A CLOCK chimed four. It was the same clock that Norgan and Amboy had heard, hours before. Solemn strokes above the gloom that pervaded that isolated thoroughfare called Culberly Court.

Patrolmen heard it as they paced in front of the silent, almost ghostly houses that stood as relics of the past. The sound drifted to the alleyway at the rear of the old-fashioned homes. There, another patrolling officer caught the notes.

Blackness persisted from the shrouding trees of a parklike square across the way. Then came motion; inkiness detached itself from the gloom. A blot moved along the sidewalk, just within the area of a street lamp's light.

A hazy form glided across the thoroughfare. It moved past the house where the green glass glowed above the front door. The strange shape entered the obscurity of the side areaway between Hildon's home and the empty house that adjoined it.

Projecting ornamental bricks offered a hold for hands and feet. Eerily, a phantom figure scaled the wall close by a little alcove. Then the moving shape stilled. Batlike, it clung to the vertical surface.

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A policeman was coming through the areaway. His flashlight flickered. Its beam reached the wall; but not quite high enough to reveal that form. The light went on. The Shadow, motionless as night itself, remained undiscovered.

The weird form resumed its brief ascent. The Shadow edged sidewise past the corner of the alcove. He gained the roof above a small inset porch at the side of the house. Prone upon the slanting surface, he reached the window.

The Shadow was looking into Hildon's second-floor room. A hall light's rays filtered past the broken door. The dull illumination showed the death chamber. Furnishings were hazily outlined before The Shadow's gaze.

The Shadow, guised as Lamont Cranston, had viewed that room before. He had walked about within its walls with Police Commissioner Wainwright Barth. Together, they had gone over the ground covered by Detective Joe Cardona.

But now The Shadow was viewing the room from a new angle. He was outside, looking in, perched comfortably in a perfect hiding place beneath. The extended house wall hid him from the street in front. The porch roof kept him concealed from eyes below.

Darkness prevented a prying view from the alleyway at the back of the house. The next building its windows boarded could not have been an observation post. This little roof was the strategic spot from which to enter or to look into Nathaniel Hildon's bedroom. Any prowler could have chosen it as a vantage point.

Yet what had it to do with the murder of Nathaniel Hildon? Nothing, so far as Cardona and Barth had seen. A window, panes unbroken, fastenings intact within, could not have aided a visible killer to make his escape. As for the Unseen Killer to him the window was unnecessary.

A square window, measuring four feet in either direction. A stout vertical post from bottom to top. Gloved hands issued from the darkness; one pressed against each pane, while The Shadow's head, tilting a trifle to the right, took a position from which keen eyes could study all that lay within the room.

Hands dropped from the solid set panes. Edging backward, The Shadow produced his tiny flashlight. Blinking guardedly, the beam ran up around the window, down the center division, then to the porch itself. There, The Shadow's left hand moved idly. Fingers traced streaks in the grime of the roof. They crumpled a bit of dried, claylike substance. The light went out.

A patrolman passed by the side of the house. His footfalls clicked through the alleyway.

The Shadow's light blinked intermittently, close to the roof. Then it went out finally. The black-cloaked form edged from the roof and descended easily by the ladderlike bricks that lined the wall.

An officer on the front street failed to see the gliding form that issued from the alleyway. The Shadow crossed to the square. He merged with the blackness of the trees. His course was untraceable as he moved away from Culberly Court. It was not until he had gained a spot two blocks away that he gave another manifestation of his presence.

Then, gliding silently past the front of unpretentious houses, The Shadow laughed. A ghostly chuckle in the darkness; a touch of suppressed mirth that was grim. Turning to a sinister whisper, the laugh throbbed and faded.

Though his agents in the underworld still pursued a hopeless quest for missing men, The Shadow, himself,

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was making progress. He had learned facts about the Unseen Killer. He could wait until the morrow.

For Commissioner Barth was determined to bait the Unseen Killer. That course was to The Shadow's liking. Wealth was the criminal's aim. To obtain it, he would have to act.

Action by the Unseen Killer would bring him within The Shadow's range.

CHAPTER XI. THE BLACK BOX

THE next morning, both Peters Amboy and Wallace Norgan received new threats from the Unseen Killer. The letters came in the first mail. They were typewritten as before. They delivered the same ultimatum. A statement to the afternoon newspapers of death to one of the pair within twenty-four hours.

They communicated at once with Commissioner Barth. He ordered the statements to the newspapers. Already, headlines were telling of Nathaniel Hildon's death. The statements from Amboy and Norgan were boxed on front pages. They brought quick results.

At five o'clock that afternoon, Findlay Warlock, president of the fading Centralized Power Corporation, was surprised when he opened a letter that came in the late mail. It had been posted only a few hours previously shortly after the newspapers had carried their flash regarding the new threats received by Amboy and Norgan.

The note to Warlock was typewritten. It read as follows:

A REQUEST:

Two men, Peters Amboy and Wallace Norgan, are anxious to deliver funds into my possession. This can be facilitated if they put the moneys in a place of easy access.

There is a wall safe in your study. Would you cooperate by letting them put their funds in that strong box? Before 8:30 to-night. Lock the safe, but put the combination in an envelope and seal the flap of the envelope to the front of the safe. Let the envelope remain open.

At 8:30, open the doors to your study. All must leave the room, either going downstairs or remaining in the hallways. At 9:00 close the doors of the study.

Reopen them at 9:15. Do not reenter the room until 9:30. At all times, the doorways must be unblocked. Also doors to the house and ground floor windows must be left open.

Witnesses, police, interested parties all are welcome, provided only that the conditions are exactly fulfilled. I promise immunity to all who play fair. Treachery will mean DEATH.

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Cluett was present when Findlay Warlock received this note. Warlock had just come in from the office; Cluett was startled by the trembling that came over his master. He thought that Warlock had experienced a stroke.

Then Warlock recovered. He made a telephone call to the Melkin Hotel, was connected with Marryat Darring, to whom he blurted out the news. At Darring's advice, he then made a call to the police commissioner.

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Barth communicated with Peters Amboy and Wallace Norgan. Prompt arrangements were made. More wires buzzed. At eight o'clock all was completed. A group of men were assembled in Findlay Warlock's study.

POLICE COMMISSIONER BARTH had summoned Peters Amboy and Wallace Norgan. The two had arrived after a visit to an uptown bank, where they had gone to the safe deposit vaults. They had been accompanied by half a dozen detectives.

Marryat Darring was present, because of Warlock's call. Lamont Cranston was also there, thanks to the police commissioner. Barth wanted reliable witnesses who had seen the actions of the Unseen Killer on that night at Lessep's.

Joe Cardona and three detectives were in the study; besides these men, there were a dozen other dicks downstairs, including the six who had acted as guards for Amboy and Norgan.

"To-night," declared the commissioner, "we intend to deal with Miles Crofton, alias the Unseen Killer. He has imposed certain conditions that give us definite indications. They prove that our analysis of his power is correct. The man is devisualized. He can not be seen.

"I consider it good policy to meet his conditions. Otherwise, he may resort to new murder. At the same time, I am following this course purely as matter of investigation. I have not requested Amboy and Norgan to deliver up their funds.

"That is a matter that concerns themselves. I merely asked them if they were willing to cooperate; if they were desirous of turning over wealth to the Unseen Killer because of his threat. They answered that they were."

Barth turned inquiringly as he paused. He wanted corroboration from the men themselves. Amboy and Norgan were seated by a table upon which lay a large, black metal box.

"The funds are in this box," declared Amboy, solemnly, pointing to the container. "All the funds that the Unseen Killer wants."

"Every penny," added Norgan. "We are taking this measure to rid ourselves of the menace."

"Do you wish to state the amount in the box?" inquired Barth.

Amboy looked at Norgan, who shook his head. Norgan had been staring straight at Findlay Warlock.

"We have been accused of unfair profit," asserted Norgan. "Amboy and I discussed that matter this afternoon. Let the Unseen Killer gain what he demands. But we do not care to satisfy the curiosity of others."

"Very well," agreed Barth. "Do you wish to remain here or do you want to return to your homes, under guard?"

"We will stay," responded Norgan, "but we would appreciate the guards afterward. For to-night, at least."

"We can't forget Hildon's death," put in Amboy. "We won't feel safe until the twenty-four hours are up."

"That is settled," assured Barth. "I shall provide adequate protection for both of you."

THE commissioner arose and walked toward the rear wall, where the safe stood open. The others followed

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him. They formed a keenly interested group. Norgan placed the black box in Barth's hands. The commissioner inserted it in the wall safe.

The strong box was a fair-sized one, with a metal-lined interior that was recessed slightly at the sides, top and bottom. The box, however, was plainly in view, even though its bottom was slightly below the level of the door.

Barth swung shut the metal front. He closed the door and turned the knob. The safe was locked. Warlock approached with an envelope. He bent back the flap and sealed it to the front of the safe. Then he produced a folded paper from his desk.

"The combination," he explained. "I typed it on this paper."

He inserted the folded sheet in the envelope. Only a corner of the paper protruded. As Warlock stepped away, Norgan moved up and started to take out the paper. Warlock shot out a hand; Norgan dropped the paper and it fluttered to the floor. Lamont Cranston picked it up and held it.

"Let me see that combination!" challenged Norgan. "That should be my privilege."

"Perhaps," retorted Warlock, "I have a right to see the contents of your black box."

"Not at all!" snarled Norgan, thrusting out his square chin. "That box is property that belongs to myself and Amboy."

"And the combination of this safe is mine," retaliated Warlock.

"Why quibble?" demanded Barth. "Let me decide this matter. Do you mind, Warlock, if Cranston or I see the combination?"

"No," returned Warlock. "But Norgan —"

"Open the paper, Cranston," interjected Barth. "We can assure Norgan that all is in order."

Cranston complied. Barth nodded when he saw the opened paper. Cranston folded it carefully and tucked it in the envelope. His long fingers pressed the envelope flat. His thumb finished the task by poking the paper out of sight.

It was nearing half past eight. Barth ordered the doors open. All left the room. While the others waited, Barth and Cardona conducted a brief tour of inspection. Warlock's study had three doors; one to a bedroom at the front, a second to a small hall at the rear. The third was the door to the main upstairs hall.

The commissioner stationed detectives one in the bedroom, one in the side hall; a third at the rear. He then dispatched a pair of dicks to the third floor. Speaking to the men about Warlock's study, he warned them not to block the doorways.

Leaving Cardona in charge, Barth ushered the other persons to the ground floor. They assembled in Warlock's gloomy living room. Barth stationed detectives at the door. Then he delivered an order.

"I shall go up and down at times," said the commissioner. "The rest of you must remain here with the exception of Cranston. I want him to do as he pleases. Perhaps he may be here when I am upstairs and vice versa. He and I can maintain contact with those above."

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So saying, the commissioner departed.

A CLOCK on the mantel struck the half hour. From then on, minutes were monotonously slow. Findlay Warlock paced about in front of the fireplace, pausing at times to glance suspiciously at Norgan and Amboy.

Those two were seated in large chairs, saying very little. At times, they resorted to whispered conversation. That was their only form of conversation.

Marryat Darring was less serious than the others. The black-haired man was smoking a panetela. At times, he strolled about, examining pictures on the wall. At other intervals, he rested his tall frame against the wall and blew huge rings from his cigar smoke.

Barth came downstairs at quarter of nine. He found Cranston seated quietly in the corner. He suggested that his friend go up and look about. Cranston complied. The dicks were on duty just as Barth had posted them. Cranston returned shortly afterward. Barth went upstairs again.

Nine o'clock. Lamont Cranston was standing in the doorway of the living room, between the hanging curtains of the broad portal. The clock was chiming the hour. From upstairs came the sound of closing doors. Then Barth arrived to announce that the study had been closed.

Nine fifteen. Barth had gone back. He came down to say that the doors were opened. Detectives on guard. No one had been seen; nor had any unusual sound been heard. Cranston went up; then came down. Barth ascended the stairs.

Nine thirty. A call from the commissioner. Detectives stepped aside. Following Lamont Cranston, the other four ascended. Joe Cardona motioned them into the study; then followed. The group clustered about the commissioner. But as Barth advanced toward the wall safe, he paused to motion the others back.

"I remember the combination," he said. "I shall open the safe; the rest of you can watch. I think that we shall find everything intact. This begins to appear as a hoax."

"One moment, commissioner" the quiet words came from the steady lips of Lamont Cranston. "It might be best to remove the envelope before you open the safe. Suppose I do that."

"Very well," decided Barth. "Take a look at the paper, just to make sure that it is the same as before."

As soon as Lamont Cranston's deft fingers had removed the envelope, Barth began to work on the combination. Cranston had opened the paper; his keen eyes had studied it before the commissioner had completed the turnings of the dial.

Then that same steady gaze was fastened on the front of the safe. The combination had given its final click. Very dramatically, Wainwright Barth stepped aside and pulled back the door. There was a smile on the commissioner's face. It vanished as his eyes stared blinking through the spectacles that fronted them.

Exclamations from others. A growl from Joe Cardona. Only Lamont Cranston remained silent as he, like the others, viewed the interior of the wall safe.

The black box was gone!

The Unseen Killer had made good his boast. His claim to complete invisibility stood substantiated. The wealth delivered by Peters Amboy and Wallace Norgan had vanished as completely as the devisualized

human form of Miles Crofton.

CHAPTER XII. DEATH FOLLOWS

ONE hour later. Findlay Warlock's home was deserted, save for the presence of the owner and his servant, Cluett. Flabbergasted, Commissioner Wainwright Barth had drawn off the bloodhounds of the law. He had departed, sulking because of the Unseen Killer's triumph.

Peters Amboy and Wallace Norgan had bewailed their loss. They had cried for further protection. Barth had granted it. Not only had he sent three detectives to guard each man, but he had put Joe Cardona in charge of Norgan's guards and Detective Sergeant Markham at the head of Amboy's.

Thus had Findlay Warlock's old-fashioned residence returned to its obscurity. It was no more than any other brownstone house. For Commissioner Barth was trailing the Unseen Killer; he could see no merit in keeping watch on places where the untraceable crook had been and gone.

Yet there was one who still found interest in Warlock's house. That one was The Shadow. As Lamont Cranston, he had spent very little time in taking leave of Commissioner Barth. After that, he had assumed his garb of black. Now he was returning to the scene of the Unseen Killer's triumph.

Warlock's house had high steps that showed a slight glister in a street lamp's glare. The Shadow had avoided that betraying means of entrance. All Warlock's doors were fitted with old-fashioned locks. Any one would do. So The Shadow chose an entrance to the basement, under the shelter of the steps themselves.

A black blob against the dull color of the door, The Shadow worked briefly with a special key. The door yielded. He entered and closed the door behind him. He found a flight of stairs that led up to the first floor.

At the top, The Shadow used his glimmering flashlight. He saw a flight of back stairs that went to the second floor. They terminated, The Shadow knew, in the little hall just behind Warlock's study.

The Shadow entered a room that led through to the living room. His light went out. Silently, through darkness, The Shadow neared the rear door of the living room. He paused. Slight sounds reached his ears.

Some one was in the darkened living room. Some one, prowling there. The intruder was trying to remain unheard. Only the keen ears of The Shadow could have detected the man's presence until an accident occurred.

A chair scraped and slid against the wall as the man in the living room made a blunder. There was momentary silence; then some cautious footsteps moving into the hall. The Shadow moved into the living room. He could hear the steps creaking toward the back of the hall.

Here was easy prey for The Shadow. In his silent fashion he could track the man who was lost in the darkness. He did not need to see a living form. Sound motion those were sufficient. But as The Shadow reached the door of the living room, he was forced to stop.

Some one was coming down the front stairway. To follow the man who had moved to the back of the house, The Shadow would have to step squarely into this arrival's path. The Shadow waited. The man from upstairs arrived, fumbled for a light switch and pressed it.

Peering from behind a curtain at the living room door, The Shadow saw Cluett. The servant's face looked anxious. Cluett must have heard the blundering sound in the living room. The Shadow saw him look along

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the hall. Cluett was too late. The first man had moved away.

Cluett stepped toward the living room. The Shadow faded swiftly. He whirled back into the rear room; then cut through to the back stairway to the second floor, just as Cluett turned on the living room lights.

The Shadow, however, had lost his opportunity to trail the real intruder. The man had gained a lucky break through Cluett's chance arrival. The Shadow decided to ascend the back stairs. He reached the little hall at the top. Listening at the rear door of the study, he could hear some one moving about within.

Cluett's footsteps came from the front stairs. The Shadow heard the man in the study pace across toward the side door. The Shadow moved to the turn in the hall. He saw Cluett arrive in the dim light of the second-floor hall. Then the side door of the study opened. Findlay Warlock appeared, attired in dressing gown.

"What are you doing, Cluett?" quizzed Warlock. "Were you downstairs?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why?"

"I thought I heard some one in the living room. While I was going into my own room, sir."

"Why didn't you call me?"

"I tapped at the door of the study, sir. But you did not respond."

"Humph. That must have been while I was in the front bedroom."

"I suppose so, sir. I didn't rap too hard; I feared that the sound might carry downstairs."

"You did not knock loudly enough to attract my attention, that is certain. What did you find in the living room?"

"Nothing, sir."

"I supposed that. Well, Cluett, curb your imagination after this."

WARLOCK went back into the study; Cluett to his own room.

The Shadow listened a few minutes; then moved to the rear door of the study, opened it and entered. The room was dark. Warlock had retired to the front bedroom. He had closed the door behind him.

The little flashlight blinked. Its tiny ray cleaved the darkness and settled on Warlock's wall safe. The Shadow approached. His gloved hand worked the combination. The front of the safe opened. The Shadow inspected the interior. The safe contained a few odd papers that Warlock had evidently replaced.

The light went out. The Shadow left the study and glided down the front stairs. He reached the living room. There, his light blinked intermittently as The Shadow moved along the wall. The light went out; The Shadow remained a full two minutes in the darkness. Then he moved away.

For his exit, The Shadow chose the rear door of the first floor. It opened from a kitchen. The door was locked,

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the key was hanging beside it. The Shadow used a skeleton key of his own. He unlocked the door, went through and locked the barrier behind him.

It was with apparent purpose that The Shadow kept to the darkness as he traveled away from Findlay Warlock's. Had he found some trail left by an outer visitor who had come to the old house? Or had some lurker waited there, to leave later by the rear door that The Shadow had taken?

Or had Findlay Warlock been the man in the living room? He could easily have reached the upstairs study before the arrival of either Cluett or The Shadow. This aftermath was odd, coming only an hour following the strange disappearance of the black box that had been placed in the upstairs safe.

A soft laugh in the darkness. It indicated that The Shadow, moving stealthily in his passage from Warlock's, had some destination known to himself alone. His course led southward after he was clear from the vicinity of the brownstone house. The Shadow was traveling in the direction of Times Square.

Mystery had fallen to—night mystery to others, not to The Shadow. He had seen an aftermath to the delivery of the wealth in the black box. He had traced some cross—current in the scheming of the Unseen Killer.

EVIDENTLY, The Shadow had decided that the invisible crook's work had been performed. The acquisition of certain funds was unquestionably the Unseen Killer's aim. He had gained what he wanted. Death no longer remained as a present motive.

But there was one man in Manhattan who did not share The Shadow's opinion. Up in his apartment, Peters Amboy was talking to Detective Sergeant Markham. In his discourse, Amboy babbled his fear of death.

Amboy lived in a high—class apartment known as Surinam Hall; and Markham had felt secure as soon as they had reached the place. Amboy's apartment was on the fourteenth floor. Stepping from the elevators, they had turned left; then right; and followed clear to the end of the corridor. There they had entered the last apartment on the right.

Markham had posted two detectives in the corridor. He and Amboy were seated in the living room, the third dick with them.

"He said he was going to kill one of us," Amboy was telling the detective sergeant. "One of us to die like Hildon died before morning. It worries me.

"You delivered your cash," reminded Markham. "That's what this Unseen Killer wanted, wasn't it?"

"Yes. But he may still be vicious. He can go anywhere he wishes. Invisibly. Perhaps —"

"He won't come here. Just the same, I'll take a look at the place. Then you can turn in and get some sleep. That's what you need, Mr. Amboy."

Markham made an inspection. The apartment was situated at the rear of the building. All the rooms had windows in the rear wall. First was the living room. From it extended a windowless hall.

Off the hall Markham saw a bedroom. Then a bath; finally, at the very end of the hall, a door to the left. Markham stepped in there and pressed a light switch set in the far wall. The room was half study, half bedroom.

"My own quarters," explained Amboy. "This is where I intend to sleep."

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"Only the one door," observed Markham.

"Yes," replied Amboy. "This is the end of the apartment."

"Why don't they have a window in this end wall then?"

"Because this is only one half of the building. There's another apartment beyond. Similar to this one."

"I see. Reached from the other side of the house, eh?"

"Yes."

Markham looked about. He asked Amboy to make sure that nothing in the room was disturbed. That established, both men left, Markham turning out the light. They went into the living room. There they sat and chatted.

Peters Amboy became less nervous during the progress of a half hour. Finally he decided to turn in.

Markham agreed to sleep in the empty bedroom, leaving the dicks in the living room. He walked along the hall with Amboy. He stopped, turned on the bedroom light and looked around.

Amboy kept on. When Markham reached the hall, the man was just stepping into the study at the end of the hall. Markham saw the door swing shut; it did not quite close. Hence the detective saw the light from the room when Amboy turned on the switch.

The detective sergeant turned to go back to the living room. Then he came to a startled stop. From beyond that partly closed door of the study came the boom of a gun shot. As Markham stood rooted, he heard a gasping choke; then the thump of a falling body.

MARKHAM sprang along the lighted hall. The dick from the living room came dashing up to join him. Together, they reached the study. Markham pushed the door open. He stared at the floor. There, five feet away, lay the sprawled form of Peters Amboy.

Markham advanced and stopped above the body. Amboy was dead. Looking about, Markham could see no one. The detective sergeant had drawn a gun. He spoke to the dick beside him, ordering the fellow to bring in the other detectives from the hall.

The dick hurried away. Rising, Markham moved slowly toward the door; then stood with revolver in hand. Two minutes later, the three-man squad joined him. Posting his aids, Markham stalked across the room and yanked open a closet door. The closet was empty.

Space showed beneath the couchlike single bed. No spot where a man could be concealed. Markham stepped over to Amboy's body. He thought he had the solution. Suicide. Amboy had been nervous. He looked for a gun, beside or beneath the body. He found none.

Blinking, Detective Sergeant Markham arose and stared at the dumfounded dicks. Like Markham, the members of the squad were wearing whitened faces. They formed a group that could swear to astounding murder.

Every man even the pair in the hall had heard the fatal shot. All had arrived through the only door whereby an exit could have been gained. Yet they had found no trace of the murderer nor any sign of the weapon he

had used.

Again, the Unseen Killer had delivered amazing death!

CHAPTER XIII. NORGAN SPEAKS

MIDNIGHT. Commissioner Wainwright Barth was standing in Amboy's living room. He was surveying a group of men who had come here at his call. Findlay Warlock, Marryat Darring, Wallace Norgan; last of all, Lamont Cranston.

"I'm glad you happened to call the club, Cranston," Barth was saying. "I reached Warlock at his home; Darring in the grille room of his hotel. Norgan, of course, was at his home, with Cardona guarding him.

"But I didn't know where to reach you. That is why I left the message at the Cobalt Club. Because I wanted you to be here also. Every one who was present at Warlock's should be here to learn the details of this new outrage by the Unseen Killer."

Barth paused as Joe Cardona entered. The detective had come from the death room at the end of the hall. Joe nodded to indicate that everything was ready. They formed a procession down to Amboy's study. They passed detectives in the narrow hall.

When they reached the death room, they saw Amboy's body lying on the floor. Markham and a police surgeon were on duty.

"I want you all to hear the reports," declared Barth. "Tell us exactly what happened, Markham."

The detective sergeant gave the details as he knew them. When he had finished, Barth mentioned another matter the fact that Markham had failed to cover the door after Amboy's death.

"I muffed it, commissioner," admitted the detective sergeant. "I remembered what you'd told me. We've got to figure that this Unseen Killer is around even when we can't see him. I figured wrong. That's all.

"Amboy had been jittery. Hadn't been out of my sight all evening. Perked up some, just before he came in here. Then boom! the shot comes all of a sudden. When I saw nobody in here, I thought that maybe it was suicide.

"It wasn't till after I looked for a gun that I knew I was wrong. By that time, the squad had come in; I'd been away from the door. The Unseen Killer could easy have made his get-away."

"Your frankness is commendable, Markham," declared Barth. "Well, gentlemen, you see before you the evidence of a crime more startling than the murder of Nathaniel Hildon. Here, the Unseen Killer committed crime almost under the eyes of watching detectives.

"Look about. I want you to fully realize the difficulty that he must have encountered. Here is this room, just as it was when Peters Amboy was slain. There is the body. Let us hear the surgeon's statement."

"Would it be all right, commissioner, if I moved one of these floor lamps?" The question came from the police surgeon. "If I can get it closer to the body, I can show the wound more effectively."

"Move one of the lamps if you choose."

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THE physician detached the cord of a lamp, pulling it from the floor plug. He carried the lamp to a spot only a few feet from the sprawled form of Peters Amboy. He carried the end of the cord to the wall switch.

There was a plug in the brass plate just beneath the switch. This plug was covered by a hinged brass disk, which the surgeon raised. He inserted the end of the lamp cord into the plug beneath. He turned on the lamp. A glow spread above Amboy's body.

"The wound was just above the heart," explained the doctor, in a methodical tone, stooping to indicate the body. "The range must have been about three feet. The man evidently staggered before he fell. It was impossible to tell exactly where he was standing when the killer fired."

"I might indicate that, commissioner," declared Markham. "But as the doctor says, it can't be exact."

"Show us," suggested Barth.

"We'll, he'd just turned on the light," said Markham. "I don't think the killer would have been mug enough to press the switch himself. So that puts Amboy here, to begin with."

Markham went over and placed his right hand against the wall switch. He did not click it; instead, he stood there, facing the wall. He held up his left hand.

"I'll give you the interval," he said. "As near as I can remember it."

He retained his position for a few moments; then lowered his left hand. Without turning, he spoke again.

"You see," he said, "I turned on this light about a half hour before Amboy did. That was shortly after he and I got into the apartment. I was looking around the place. So I can figure sort of what a man might do after turning on the light.

"He'd either look around" Markham turned his head to the left "or he'd turn around." He swung his body to the left. "This direction. Because he'd be coming into the room and the room is to the left.

"Now if he'd looked around, he couldn't have got plugged while he was standing here, because the bullet's in the front of him and he was facing the wall. Something would have had to make him swing. All right. Suppose we try it. I'll look around."

Markham stood in front of the switch. He swung his head to the left and began to blink his eyes.

"Suppose I'm Amboy," he said. "I can't see anything, because I can't see the Unseen Killer. But maybe I hear something. That's why I'm staring. I shy away" Markham swung to the left and began to withdraw, toward the right "and that lets him bump me through the heart.

"What happens then? Well, I stagger, but I've already got a start and like as not I'll keep going back. Up against the door. But Amboy didn't wind up against the door. So he didn't turn his head, to begin with. He turned his body."

"Logical," asserted Barth. "But if he –"

"I know what you're going to say, commissioner: If he turned his body, he'd have staggered back just the same. Well he must have done more than turn his body. He must have turned and started away." Markham paused again. He turned and started to walk. "Like this, out here, and the shot. That finished him."

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Barth nodded and looked at Cardona. Joe gave his approval of Markham's theory. It came rather unexpectedly, for Markham was not classed as an artist in deductive reasoning. Barth, however, could find no flaw.

"This comes within the time limit?" he questioned. "That is important, Markham."

"It just gets inside it," said the detective sergeant, "figuring that Amboy moved rather fast. He could have, because he was nervous. I think that clinches it, commissioner. I'll tell you why.

"Because the only other way Amboy could have landed where he did was if he'd stayed facing the wall and gone back like this." Markham went to the switch, stood there, then staggered back, stopping just before he reached the body. "But how could he have done that? The killer couldn't have been between him and the wall."

"How promptly did you arrive here?"

"As quick as I could make it. But I'm telling you something else, commissioner. I heard the shot. Then kind of a choke. After that, plop! So I know Amboy didn't do a lot of staggering. He got places quick and by the shortest route."

BARTH nodded approvingly. He motioned to the police surgeon, to indicate that the light was no longer needed.

The doctor turned off the lamp. Silent men watched him pull the cord from the wall. The little brass disk dropped shut with a click as it covered the plug in the wall plate. So hushed was the throng that the sound seemed loud.

Mechanically, eyes turned toward the body of Peters Amboy, that silent testimony to the power of the Unseen Killer. Only Lamont Cranston looked elsewhere. His gaze was toward the wall. His eyes, keen and burning, were the eyes of The Shadow.

Cardona and Markham questioned Barth; the commissioner gave them a nod. The body was to go to the morgue. That settled, Barth requested the other men to follow him. They went back to the living room.

"Peters Amboy is dead," declared the commissioner. "His murder has given us another insight into the ways of the Unseen Killer. Until now, that fiend has apparently governed himself by a code of his own.

"To-night, however, his demand was met. He sought wealth; he received it. Yet he slew as he did before. There seems to be no explanation for his crime. Why after that box was delivered should he have sought the death of either Peters Amboy or Wallace Norgan?"

As he asked the question, Barth turned toward Norgan himself. Norgan's face was pallid. It showed more than fear. It registered understanding. Norgan's lips began to quiver.

A strange smile showed thinly on the features of Lamont Cranston. The eyes of The Shadow saw the answer.

Marryat Darring, too, was looking toward Wallace Norgan. Then Findlay Warlock stared at the last of the three men whom the Unseen Killer had threatened. Despite the fact that Hildon and Amboy were dead, Warlock could not forget the antagonism that he had held toward them.

In Norgan, Warlock saw the last of a trio whom he had defined as thieves. Perhaps that was why

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he Warlock was the first person to blurt out the question that his companions would soon have asked.

"Maybe you can tell us something, Norgan," exclaimed Warlock. "Something that you failed to tell before. What was in that box that you left for the Unseen Killer?"

"I I talked with Amboy" Norgan's sudden stammer broke "and it was well, both of us who decided –"

"Decided what?" quizzed Barth, suddenly.

"About the box," gasped Norgan. "What we should put in it before we took it to Warlock's."

"You mean the box contained no funds?"

Norgan nodded weakly.

"What was in it?" demanded Barth.

"Blank papers," confessed Norgan. "The contents were worthless. We – we expected a trick –"

"So you worked one of your own without informing me."

"I know, commissioner. But but we feared the Unseen Killer. He might have been listening when we talked to you –"

"Amboy is dead," interposed Barth, solemnly. "We know now why he died. That, at least, brings us back to where we were."

"My life is still in danger," choked Norgan. "Hildon is gone. So is Amboy. If I –"

"We shall protect you to the utmost. You will be guarded at your home. Do not worry, Norgan, at least not for the present. Your two associates have died. But now that you have given us the truth, I feel confident that you will be safe until a new threat arrives. After that –"

Barth paused speculatively. Then he called Cardona. He told the detective what had happened. He placed Norgan under Joe's protection. Cardona called his squad together. Surrounding Norgan, they departed, taking Norgan to Long Island.

DETECTIVES remained in the apartment of Peters Amboy. Others were on duty in the corridor outside. They kept up a patrol between there and the center hall where the elevators stopped. Hours passed while these men of the law maintained their vigil about the place where death had struck.

They were on duty should the Unseen Killer return. They were to report any unusual event that might occur upon this floor. Hours passed; but nothing disturbed the monotony of the watch. That, however, was because one sleuth failed in his duty.

Not long after Barth and the others had gone, a figure appeared mysteriously from a stairway on the fourteenth floor of the apartment building. A detective had just paced to the elevator shafts. He had turned to go back toward Amboy's apartment.

It was then that a black-cloaked shape glided into plain view. Unseen by the detective, that phantom form moved past the elevators. The Shadow had returned, this time in his chosen guise of blackness.

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It was not surprising that the dick failed to see The Shadow. For the mysterious visitant did not head toward Amboy's apartment. Instead, he moved swiftly toward the corridor at the other side of the building. He reached an apartment at the end of a long hall.

There The Shadow's key probed a lock. The spectral arrival entered an apartment that proved to be deserted. It was similar in layout to Amboy's apartment; and The Shadow followed its hallway until he reached the last room. That chamber corresponded with the one wherein Peters Amboy had died.

A solid wall separated this apartment from Amboy's. Hence The Shadow had no need to control the whispered mirth that he uttered while his flashlight blinked about the wall. Detectives in the next apartment could not hear that subdued mockery that bore a touch of grimness.

The little flashlight ended its blinks. The Shadow moved silently back along the hall. He left the apartment and made his way through the corridor. The space by the elevators was temporarily deserted. The Shadow reached the stairway and slowly descended.

Later, a laugh in the night. Traveling from the scene of crime, The Shadow found occasion for his mirth. Peters Amboy had died through his own folly. By keeping secret the fact that the black box was stuffed, he and Wallace Norgan had made their great mistake.

Through that course they had not only lost the important protection of the law. They had also failed to keep the protection of The Shadow. That weird foe of crime had not met the Unseen Killer's move purely because he had not expected a double game from Amboy and Norgan.

But The Shadow had scored to-night. As in the case of Melrose Lessep; as in the death of Nathaniel Hildon, he had once again gleaned facts that were bringing him closer to final combat with the Unseen Killer.

CHAPTER XIV. THE SQUAWKER

WHEN Commissioner Wainwright Barth had assured present safety for Wallace Norgan, he had spoken in the hope of playing a waiting game. Barth believed that the Unseen Killer would do as he had done before: deliver a new threatening message to the last of the three men whom he had cowed with statements of impending death.

The Shadow had divined the course that Barth would choose. Suiting his own action to the trend of events, he chose also to play a waiting-game. Let another threat come; let Barth prepare. The Shadow would be ready.

To The Shadow, the death of Peters Amboy had merely postponed the inevitable. The Unseen Killer wanted certain funds. Wallace Norgan, alone, could deliver them. This time, Norgan would not balk.

Hence The Shadow, too, was playing a waiting game. His stroke would come after the Unseen Killer received the wealth that he sought. Then would be the time to trap the crook with the goods in his possession.

As yet, The Shadow's agents had been unable to find traces of any hide-out where Miles Crofton might be located. Nor had they tracked Crazy Lagran, the missing stoolie. Those were further reasons why The Shadow preferred to wait until the climax that he knew would come.

But the next morning brought no message to Wallace Norgan. The expected blackmail note was absent from the survivor's mail. The Unseen Killer, too, had decided to try a waiting game. He wanted to create an effect of suspense. That was a bit of subtlety that escaped Detective Joe Cardona.

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Joe was out guarding Norgan's home. He was the first to see the mail when it arrived. He put in a prompt call to Commissioner Barth, to tell him that no death note had been delivered. Barth fumed across the wire. Joe made a suggestion. It went through.

Commissioner Barth, at Cardona's urge, ordered the dragnet into operation. The bad lands were to be scoured for all traces of Miles Crofton, branded as the Unseen Killer. The dragnet was seldom advocated by Joe Cardona. But this was one time that the ace sleuth felt it might bring results.

Joe felt that he was after an untraceable person, so far as the man himself was concerned. But it had struck him strongly that some one might know facts concerning Crofton. Why not quiz every crook that the net brought in?

Moreover, Cardona knew of one specific person whom he wanted to locate. That was Crazy Lagran. The stoolie had handed him a prompt tip once. If Crazy could be located, there might be more coming. So the dragnet started while the Unseen Killer waited.

EVENING. Commotion in the bad lands. Rats of the underworld were keeping out of sight. They were dodging cops and dicks, keeping away from the joints. Some, scared from their hide-outs, had headed for parts of the city where they might elude the clutch of the law.

Those who remained within the scoured areas were furtive and skulking. They kept to alleyways. They dived for shelter on the slightest provocation. Even though they might be subjected to no more than a brief examination, they had no yearning for contact with the police. Quizzes were not to mobland's liking.

Yet, amid the patrol of the underworld, a select crew of tireless workers still kept up a steady task. These were the agents of The Shadow. Night after night they had been looking for Miles Crofton or Crazy Lagran. Even though the dragnet was at work, the aids of The Shadow kept at their job.

Clyde Burke, a newspaper reporter; Harry Vincent, whom no cop would pick as a crook; Cliff Marsland, whose knowledge of the underworld made it simple for him to evade the law. These were three of the men who were working for The Shadow. They kept on, confident that the police would pass them by.

But among The Shadow's reserve agents was a worker of another sort. This was "Hawkeye," a cunning-faced, crafty little fellow who had once yielded to ways of crime. Those days were past. Hawkeye was taking orders that came indirectly from The Shadow.

Hawkeye was the type of prowler whom the dragnet would pick up. He ran a risk, covering the districts where the police were hauling in the riffraff. But Hawkeye was smart enough to elude the ever closing mesh. His nickname was no misnomer. He could spot a bluecoat a mile away and a dick at half that distance.

Hawkeye was working on the outskirts of the bad lands. There was method in his process. Not only had he finished searching the depths of the underworld; he also knew that here he could rove more effectively while the dragnet was in operation. Hunch-shouldered, shifty of gait, Hawkeye had a way of slipping into alleys that made him as elusive as a prowling cat.

There were others of Hawkeye's ilk; but he was far more clever than the average. On this night, Hawkeye spied several who were using his own shifty plan of fringing the Tenderloin. Stationed at the entrance of an alleyway, he watched various figures shamble past. Suddenly, Hawkeye became alert.

He had spotted a pasty-faced passer. The fellow looked like a dope; but he wasn't. He was known in the bad lands as "Fox" Cullis. His nickname meant that he knew much and kept it to himself. Fox, apparently, was

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edging away from the dragnet's range.

Hawkeye had spotted Fox twice within the past four days. On both occasions, he had tried to get hold of the fellow; but Fox had slipped from view. Hawkeye had a reason for wanting to talk to Fox. If any one knew where Crazy Lagran might be, Fox would be the person.

Hawkeye edged from his alley. He sneaked after Fox and saw his quarry duck into a narrow street. Then, up ahead, he spotted Fox turn between two buildings. An artful dodge; but one that did not escape Hawkeye's quick vision. Hawkeye followed Fox's path.

He was closing in on the pasty-faced shambler. Calculating, Hawkeye wondered what method would be best to use when he overtook the man he wanted. Fox's reputation for knowledge was equaled by his known capability for keeping matters to himself. Would Fox talk without persuasion?

Hawkeye grinned to himself. If persuasion proved necessary, he would use it. The job was to grab Fox before the fellow reached the next street. Hawkeye stole forward more rapidly. Then he stopped short.

The unblinking glare of a bull's flashlight had opened up from the other end of the passage between the buildings.

DESPITE his native cunningness, Hawkeye was caught squarely in the searching beam. He dived into a protecting angle of the wall just as a shout came from up ahead.

Another call responded. It came from the street that Hawkeye had left. A second glare issued from that direction. Footsteps came from both ends of the passage. Hawkeye growled to himself. It was the dragnet.

With all his artfulness, the crafty agent had been trapped in a spot that the cops had decided to search. They had caught a glimpse of his figure. They were on their way to drag him from the hole where he had found momentary shelter. It was a tight spot. One that Hawkeye did not like.

He did not fear a quiz. A few nights in a cell would be followed by discharge. But his usefulness to The Shadow would be ended during the time when it was most needed.

Footsteps were coming closer. Hawkeye edged further into the niche, found a little blind space beyond and crouched to avoid the approaching lights.

Then a thought struck him. He remembered Fox Cullis. Fox had not gotten clear of this trap. Where was Fox? Hawkeye guessed the answer. Fox must have heard sounds from the street ahead. He had dived for cover before the lights appeared.

Fox was here, in this cul-de-sac, crouching somewhere close at hand. Hawkeye had an idea. He edged along the wall of the building behind him. Finding a flight of old steps, he crept across them and huddled in a space between the steps and the wall.

Then came light. The glare of a cop's flash flooded the blind passage. It showed the steps behind which Hawkeye was hiding. It also picked out two old ash cans, near the other wall. A second cop joined the first. They made for the ash cans. They yanked the objects away.

The glare showed Fox, cringing helplessly. An officer chuckled as he recognized the pale face. Fox Cullis was small fry but it was smart business to trap as good a dodger as he was known to be. The policeman pulled his captive up into the light.

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"You're coming along," he growled. Fox nodded.

"Any of your pals here?" quizzed the second cop.

"I ain't got no pals," whined Fox. "I was just comin' through here for a short cut –"

"Never mind. Stay where you are while I look around."

Hawkeye huddled closer to the steps. He had hoped that the search would end with Fox. The cops had only seen one guy in the alley. Just like a dumb flatfoot to want to make sure.

It looked like Hawkeye's strategy was done, when voices sounded from the outer end of the space. The searching cop turned.

A stocky man had come into the light. It was Detective Joe Cardona. Acting inspector for the present, known to be the man behind the dragnet, Joe was the big boy as far as the cops were concerned.

THE policeman who had grabbed Fox Cullis was not going to miss out on his credit.

Forgetting further search, the bluecoat turned and gripped Fox's arm. He pulled the pasty-faced prowler into the light, dragging him up for Joe's inspection. Cardona nodded and grinned.

"So they got the Fox, eh?" he questioned.

"I ain't done nothin', Joe," whined Fox. "You ain't goin' to pull me in –"

"We're looking for others like him," put in the cop.

"How about it, Fox?" asked Joe, dropping his gruffness. "Anybody with you?"

"Honest, Joe. There ain't."

"All right."

Hawkeye grinned again. Fox had not heard him come in here. For Fox would not have made a negative answer had he known a brief search would prove him wrong. This was a break. It became a better one when Cardona ordered the cops to douse the glims and move out from the cul-de-sac.

The officers obeyed, puzzled. When they were gone, Hawkeye listened intently.

"Fox," said Joe Cardona, in the darkness, "I'm going to give you a chance to go your way."

"T'anks, Joe –"

"Wait a minute. They're going to take you up to the precinct; but you'll be out inside an hour if you talk straight right now."

"I don't know nothin' –"

"Can that. Listen. You know Crazy Lagran."

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"Sure I know Crazy; but I ain't –"

"Wait up. You're one bird that knows enough to keep his mouth shut. That's why I'm talking to you. Do you know what Crazy is?"

"I t'ought he was a good guy –"

"He's one of my stools. You knew that, didn't you?"

There was a pause in the darkness. Then came Fox's half-reluctant reply:

"Yeah. I knowed it."

"All right." Cardona spoke quietly. "Then you know that Crazy's not going to mind seeing me. He's hiding out somewhere; but not because I'm looking for him. That wouldn't be reasonable. I want to know where Crazy is. So I can talk with him, confidentially."

"Uh–huh."

"All right. Where is he?"

Fox considered. Then came his reply, lowered to a tone that Hawkeye could barely hear.

"He's up over Mosey's hock shop," whispered Fox. "I knowed he was a stoolie, Joe. So I ain't squealin'. But don't tell him I told you where he was. Then he'd know that I knowed he was a stoolie. See?"

"I get it. Don't worry."

"I ain't doin' nothin', Joe. You said that –"

"I said you'd be loose in an hour. You will. After I've taken a look over at Mosey's. Why's Crazy hiding out?"

"I don't know. Some mugs must have wised up to him bein' a stoolie. Honest. I don't know nothin' more."

"All right. Come along."

Lights blinked as Joe took Fox out to the cops. The acting inspector gave brief orders. The bluecoats started away with Fox Cullis. Joe Cardona followed.

Hawkeye came out of his hiding place.

When he reached the next street, Hawkeye had luck. The police were nearly out of sight. Close at hand was a dumpy cigar store. Hawkeye ducked in and found a telephone in an obscure corner. He put in a call – one that would reach The Shadow. Then Hawkeye slid out into the street and moved back through the very space where he had made his lucky escape.

MEANWHILE, Joe Cardona had moved swiftly. Taking the direction opposite that chosen by Fox's captors, the ace had headed toward Mosey's hock shop. Joe had never thought of it as a hideout. The old hock shop had gone out of business. It was a black, deserted building near a corner and to all appearances it was boarded up. A fine spot for a hide-out.

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Ordinarily, Joe Cardona might have moved slowly on a special trip through this district. But to-night the dragnet was his cover. If skulking crooks spied him, they would think that he was merely checking up on the routine instituted by the law.

Nevertheless, the detective slowed his pace as he neared the vicinity of Mosey's old pawnshop. He strolled down the street where the place was located. He stopped a moment and noted the doorway that led upstairs. Walking further, Joe crossed the street and returned.

When he reached the doorway, he edged up against it. He tried the knob and found that the door was locked. Not only that; it was well locked. Joe paused; then looked down the street. He remembered something: Mosey's brother lived near here. Joe left the doorway.

He found the house he wanted. He rang the bell and was admitted. A blinking, bald-headed man recognized the visitor. Joe explained what he wanted. Mosey's brother produced a key. He shook his head as he handed it to Joe.

"You won't find anybody up there," he said. "I ain't been in the place because there ain't been any need to go. Maybe somebody else has got a key. But I ain't seen no lights in the house."

Cardona decided to look anyway. He went back to the door beside the hock shop. He unlocked the barrier and ascended a flight of dusty steps, using a flashlight cautiously. On the second floor, Joe saw doors on both sides of the steps. He noted a light under one. He scraped his shoe softly and waited.

It made a slight sound just the type that a person would want to investigate but might not fear. A bolt was drawn. More light arrived as a peaked face peered out into the hall.

Joe Cardona stepped forward. The man ducked; but Joe caught the door with his foot and shouldered his way into the room.

The only window was covered with a drawn shade. The dull illumination came from an oil lamp. But the light was enough to show Joe the face of the man whom he had trapped. It gave the other fellow a look at Cardona, also.

The peaked man's hands had gone up. Now they lowered. The fellow grinned weakly. Joe Cardona's response was a pleased grunt. He had found the man he wanted, Here, in this hide-out, he was facing Crazy Lagran, the missing stool pigeon.

CHAPTER XV. TWISTED TRAILS

CRAZY LAGRAN'S hide-out bore all the signs of an improvised headquarters. The oil lantern was standing upon a broken soap box. A battered army cot, covered with ragged blankets, was in a corner of the room. A rickety folding chair was the final article of furniture.

His first surprise over, Crazy grinned sheepishly. He slouched across the room and parked himself on the edge of the cot. He made a gesture toward the folding chair, an invitation for his visitor to be seated.

Joe accepted. He took the chair and watched Crazy roll a lopsided cigarette.

"Well?" quizzed Cardona, eyeing the stool pigeon steadily. "What's the idea?"

"Dis hide-out?" parried Crazy.

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"Yes," nodded Joe.

"I had to duck," declared Crazy, earnestly. "Honest, Joe. I was scart. After I seen de poipers –"

"When was that?"

"De day after I give you de tip–off. I was readin' about Crofton. I knowed I'd better lay low."

"Why didn't you give me another call?"

"I was scart."

Cardona watched the stoolie puff at his cigarette. Crazy, in turn, eyed the ace detective. The stoolie became uneasy. He shifted a bit; then began an explanation.

"It was dis way, Joe," he affirmed. "You know de way I work. I ain't no ordinary stoolie. I look for de real dope, don't I? You know what I told you onct. Just leave me go my way an' slip you news when it's hot –"

"I know," broke in Cardona. "Get back to Crofton. Where'd you get the tip about him?"

"I knowed de guy onct. Dat was all. Den I hears he was wid Rouser. I meets him on de street Crofton an' he figures me a pal. Tells me he's workin' for dat professor guy."

"When was that?"

"De day I called you. Well, after dat, I ducks out. Figurin' on findin' somebody knowin' more about Rouser. See? Den de poipers blows de woiks. I ducks in here."

"On account of Crofton?"

"Sure. Dey call him de Unseen Killer, don't dey? Ain't he liable to be figurin' dat I did de squealin'? Him bumpin' off dem big guys say, Joe I don't want him to know where I am."

"How did you get in here?"

"Had a key. From a mug dat used to work for old Mosey. Mosey forgot about it. Dis fellow made some extra keys."

"Who is he?"

"Aw, lay off, Joe. I can't squeal on no guy dat's helped me out. Dis guy drops in an' gives me de newspoipers. I see what's been goin' on –"

"But you couldn't get out long enough to tell me where you were."

"I was scart, Joe."

"Well, you look it. But what about to–night? Why didn't you let yourself get grabbed by the dragnet?"

"Wid dat guy Crofton runnin' around? He could plug me in de middle of a police court. I ain't tellin' nobody nothin', Joe. Nobody."

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"Except the guy that slipped you the key to this place. What about him?"

"He's a regular, Joe. But I can't tell you who he is. Say ain't I in enough of a mess? Tellin' you about a guy like Crofton? Well, dis friend of mine ain't done nothin'. So why should I –"

"LOOK here, Crazy." Cardona arose as he spoke. "I've had enough of this stall! If you think you're getting anywhere by trying to hold tack on what you know, you're making a bum guess! I've been looking for you a long while. Now I've found you, you're coming clean!"

"Honest, Joe –"

"You're talking like a phony. You've got the inside on a lot of stuff that you're going to spill. Maybe you know more about Crofton than is healthy for you. Well, you'll squawk just the same.

"Don't worry about Crofton. He's forgotten you for the time. If you thought he was coming after you, you'd have been on your way long before this. Here's my proposition. Take it or leave it. Spill what you know, right here, or come along to headquarters."

"Don't pinch me, Joe!" blurted Crazy. "I ain't safe nowhere but here. I ain't safe when you're here. Gee, Joe, if dey –"

He caught himself. But Cardona had noted the slip. He nodded wisely. Crazy edged back upon the cot.

"So there's somebody else in it, eh?" quizzed Cardona. "Well, we're getting somewhere. Other mugs in the racket with the Unseen Killer? Just the birds I'm looking for. Who are they?"

"It isn't dem, Joe. It's de Unseen Killer I gotta watch out for. I ain't kiddin'. He's liable to be snoopin' in here right now."

"Who are these other birds?"

Crazy hesitated. He looked toward the closed door. He licked his lips; then stared at Cardona. Leaning forward on the cot, he began to talk.

"Say, Joe," he pleaded. "I wanta get out of it. I pulled a boner. No foolin'. Listen: I'll give you de name of de guy you want; but get me away clear before you do anythin'. See? It'd be curtains –"

"From him?"

"Maybe from him, if he thought I was pullin' de double cross. Maybe from de Unseen Killer. Dat's what de guy tells me de guy you want to know about. He says 'Watch out for Crofton' an' it sounds like he means it –"

"Who's the guy?"

Crazy paused before mentioning the name. He was intent. So was Cardona. Neither noted the door from the hallway, slowly opening. Nor did they see the muzzle of a shining revolver as it edged through the space. It was not until the gun had stopped its motion that Crazy happened to glance nervously in that direction. The stoolie came up from the cot.

"Stop him, Joe! De Unseen Killer is comin' –"

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AS Crazy voiced the second phrase, the revolver spurted flame. The boom of the weapon sounded through the room. Smoke curled from the muzzle. Crazy Lagran's lips spread silently. The stoolie sprawled forward from the cot. He plopped hard upon the floor.

Yanking his police gun from his pocket, Cardona sprang for the door. The revolver muzzle went quickly out of sight. Joe yanked the door open and thrust himself into the darkness, boldly seeking the unknown slayer. A flashlight came out in the detective's left hand. Joe pressed the button.

The gleam spread along the hall, toward the stairway. Joe stood startled. No one was in view. Then he heard a sound almost behind him. He wheeled. Before he could bring the flashlight into play, an arm came swinging through the darkness. Joe tried to ward off the blow.

It was a glancing stroke on the side of the head. Cardona staggered. He lost his flashlight. A foot kicked it into the room where Crazy's body lay. Cardona, staggering like a drunken man, still held his gun. It was of no service. Dizzy, Joe sprawled at the head of the stairs. An evil laugh came from the darkness.

Joe's assailant moved over and crouched above the detective's form. Half groggy, Cardona was trying to rouse himself. He gripped for the man in the darkness. He tried to raise his gun. Then the fellow had passed him. Blindly, Joe turned.

Crazy's killer jabbed a gun muzzle against Cardona's ribs. He was about to fire. Weakly, Joe thrust out an arm and encountered a living form. Then came a sound from the hall at the head of the stairs. Cardona's enemy looked up.

A window was moving upward. Some one was moving in from outer darkness. The window showed in dim outline; beyond it, only a strange blot of blackness. Dropping, the man on the stairs forgot Cardona. He aimed for the window and fired twice.

In response came the bursts of an automatic. High shots that whistled over the head of Crazy's killer. They were enough. Wildly, the man on the stairs dived downward. At the bottom, he yanked open the door and leaped out into the street.

A flashlight blinked a tiny circle at the head of the stairs. Keen eyes saw Joe Cardona. The detective was coming to his senses. A soft laugh token of The Shadow. Keenly, The Shadow saw into the room where Crazy Lagran lay dead.

The stoolie killed; Cardona coming to life. No reason for The Shadow to remain. Too late to prevent Crazy's death, he had arrived in time to save Joe Cardona. Sweeping past the detective, he reached the street. There was no one in view, but The Shadow heard the shrill of a police whistle. Evidently the last shots had been heard. Swiftly, The Shadow took to the night.

ONE block away, Hawkeye was on the move. Again the hunch-shouldered agent was taking up a trail. For Hawkeye had come to Mosey's hock shop. While The Shadow had entered by the rear wall, Hawkeye had been out front.

Hawkeye had seen a man come lurching from the doorway by the hock shop. He had taken up that trail. Right now he was less than half a block behind a thickset man who was heading through the darkness.

Hawkeye's quarry reached the nearest avenue. He started to walk along at a rapid pace. He like Hawkeye could hear whistles; the whine of a siren. They were too close for comfort. The fellow kept moving.

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Hawkeye looked about in anxious fashion. His eye spied a taxi parked near an "el" station. Hawkeye grinned. No cab would be here as a rule, especially when the dragnet had this district on the go. Hawkeye hurried to the cab.

Leaning in by the driver's seat, he blurted quick words. A nod came from the shrewd-faced man behind the wheel.

The cab shot forward as Hawkeye dropped clear. Ducking into a doorway, Hawkeye watched the vehicle head up the street.

The man at the wheel of that cab was Moe Shrevnitz, another of The Shadow's emergency aids. Cruising about the bad lands, Moe had been helping in the search for Miles Crofton's hide-out. Moe had happened to be at the spot where Hawkeye needed him.

The cab rolled along easily. It passed the thickset man who was pacing up the avenue. Moe jammed the brakes and swung over by the curb.

"Taxi?"

Moe saw the man nod. He caught a glimpse of a hard face. He opened the door. His fare clambered aboard. He growled a destination:

"Hotel Revano."

"Where is it?" questioned Moe, leaning close by the window.

The man gave the address. Moe nodded. All the while, his right hand, on the seat beside him, was scrawling the name Hotel Revano upon the top sheet of a handy pad. Moe straightened up. He released the emergency brake. His hand yanked the paper loose and crumpled it.

The cab swung out from the curb. The ball of paper went spinning clear, unnoticed by the growling passenger. One minute later, the cab had turned a corner. But Hawkeye was coming up. He had seen that wad of paper fall.

It took Hawkeye just four minutes to get to a telephone. He put in a prompt report of Moe's cooperation. Then he strolled out from the little store where he had found the phone booth. Wisely, Hawkeye headed away from the bad lands.

MEANWHILE, Moe was driving for the Hotel Revano. He made good speed at the start, getting clear of the district that he knew his fare wanted to forget. But after that, Moe picked his streets badly. Traffic crossing avenues; thoroughfares half barricaded with repair work these increased his running time.

The passenger was peeved by the time they reached the hotel. He paid Moe the fare and walked into the lobby, growling as he went. Moe leaned from his cab and waved to the door man. The uniformed attendant approached.

"Say, buddy," volunteered Moe, "I'm sorry for you. If all the guys that come here are like that cheap skate, your job must be tough."

"How much did he tip you?" asked the doorman.

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"Not a jit," returned Moe.

"What did you do?" questioned the hotel attendant. "Take him five miles out of his way?"

"No. Why?"

"That guy usually hands out a tip. Maybe he was sore about the way you drove him. Maybe he was just in a hurry."

"Him? That cheap guy? Say I guess I'm lucky to have got my fare out of him. He don't look like a bird with dough."

"Guess again," laughed the door man. "That's Chuck Galla. Friend of Trip Burgan, fellow that lives here."

"Trip Burgan?"

"Yeah used to be a big-time gambler. Got money and hands it out pretty free, too."

"That don't sound bad. I guess maybe this guy just forgot the tip. Well, that's the way it goes. Say, buddy, there's two taxis here at your stand already. Think I'll get a break if I fall in line?"

"Sure. There ought to be some cab calls any time now. Better roll in while you can."

Moe backed his cab. As soon as he was in line, he scrawled out the information that he had received. He tore the paper loose and folded it with one hand. Then he settled behind the wheel and waited.

Not long. Alert though he was, Moe failed to hear the rear door open. His first inkling that any one had entered the cab came when a soft hiss was voiced through the window by Moe's ear.

The taxi man lifted the folded paper. A gloved hand plucked it from his grasp. The door on the street side of the cab opened softly. Blackness emerged; the door closed. Moe's job was done.

The Shadow had called Burbank. He had learned Hawkeye's news. Moe's dallying had enabled The Shadow to reach the Hotel Revano a few minutes after Chuck Galla.

Joe Cardona had found a trail to Crazy Lagran. That trail had ended with Crazy's death. But there, The Shadow had entered. Through his agents, he had gained where Cardona had lost.

Already The Shadow knew the name of Crazy's murderer. He had learned the identity of Chuck Galla; he had located Trip Burgan, the big shot whom Chuck was serving. The man hunt in the underworld had brought results at last.

CHAPTER XVI. TRIP'S ORDERS

TRIP BURGAN was standing by the window of his inner room. Cigarette between his lips, the ex-gambler was staring out toward city lights.

Chuck Galla, seated in a chair, was watching him. The underling had broken the news of Crazy Lagran's death.

"So Cardona never lamped you, eh?" inquired Trip. "Well, that's one good point. But you should have bagged

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Crazy before Cardona got there."

"How'd I know Cardona was coming in?" queried Chuck.

"I told you to watch the dragnet," retorted Trip. "If you'd had your eyes wide open, you'd have done better."

"It wasn't the dragnet, Trip. There wasn't nobody else near there. Say if the bulls had been around the hideout, I'd never have made no get-away."

Trip considered this statement. He stared from the window, thinking. Chuck began to feel uneasy as he watched his chief. Seated with his back almost to the door, Chuck kept waiting for Trip to turn in from the window.

Motion from the doorway. The door itself was moving. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, it opened inward until its edge provided a space a fraction of an inch in width. Trip did not see it. He was looking from the window. Nor did Chuck, who was watching Trip.

Blackness seemed to creep in from the opening. Long, splotchy blackness that stretched across the floor. A flattened blot took on the sinister aspect of a hawk-nosed silhouette a perfect profile that became motionless upon the floor.

"I was lucky, Trip," admitted Chuck, suddenly. "But I used my noodle being lucky. That's what counts. For all Cardona knew, it might have been the Unseen Killer that bumped Crazy."

Trip chuckled. The thought pleased him. He swung in from the window. Facing his lieutenant, Trip failed to notice the profiled blackness on the floor.

"Then out in the hall," resumed Chuck. "That's where I headed. Across the hall. All Cardona could have seen was the barrel of my gat. Well, when he piled out, I had him. He went right past me toward the stairs, like I figured.

"When he turned, I slugged him. Knocked him cold there, in the dark. Then I" Chuck paused momentarily "well, I beat it, leaving him on the stairs. He'll have something to talk about."

"You mean he'll figure it was the Unseen Killer?"

"Right he will."

"Good!"

A pause. Then Chuck, emboldened by Trip's approval, put a question that had evidently been perplexing him.

"Say, Trip," he said, "this racket's got me beat. The way it's switched around, I mean. Why don't you give me the whole lay?"

"You've got it, haven't you?"

"Sort of halfway. That's all. First you fix up a ritzy hide-out for this bird Crofton. He ducks in there and he ain't any too soon. That Unseen Killer stuff sure started quick enough. Of course it don't matter with Crofton, since that professor fixed him so nobody can see him. But just the same, it was a good bet for him to have his headquarters."

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"That's plain enough. You've got that much through your noodle. Go on; let's hear what's biting you."

"Well, then you tell me to get hold of Crazy Lagran. To tip him off he'd better hide out. Up over Mosey's. I'm Crazy's pal."

"And then?"

"Well, it goes on. Crofton does his stuff. Boy, how he does it! They're kind of woozy over at the hide-out, never seeing no sign of him. Just sticking food and messages in that little living room of his. Not knowing when he's in or when he's out."

"We've discussed that. Get to your point."

"I'm thinking about Crazy. He's in that dump hide-out of his. Then the dragnet hits. You tell me to go down there and bump him off if they close in. And you tell me to do it right. So it'll look like the Unseen Killer got him. Why was that?"

"Because Crazy tipped off Joe Cardona about Crofton. That's why."

"Then what was the idea helping Crazy to hide out?"

"So we would know where he was."

"All right. And then I bump him for the finish. That's what I don't get."

"Why not?"

"Why didn't you have Crofton bump him? Crazy was scared of the Unseen Killer. Crofton could have –"

"Crofton can't bother with small stuff," put in Trip. "It looked like a cinch for you. It was an emergency, anyway. I see what's got you mixed up. Listen: let me explain."

Trip strolled halfway across the room. Facing Chuck at close range, he spoke as follows:

"CROFTON pulls his stunt. He gets his hide-out. He stays there and goes when he wants. He's got his jobs to do. He had to get the old professor. He had to bag those two other guys: Hildon and Amboy. He's after dough. When he gets it, the cut comes to me.

"In the meantime, right after he slides out from the prof's, Crofton knows that somebody squealed on him. About him being with Rouser Tugin. That's plain, ain't it?"

Chuck nodded.

"All right," resumed Trip. "Crofton knows it's Crazy Lagran. Says so in one of those notes he sent me. He don't want to bother with Crazy. So I'm to get the guy. But it don't look so hot, killing Crazy. I see a better way.

"The old hokum. Crazy don't know I'm working with Crofton. So I tell Crazy through you that I've got a hideout for him. Get him worried when he calls me up. Worried about the Unseen Killer. Crazy ducks into the hideout over Mosey's. He's there to stay.

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"Then comes the hitch. Crofton bumps Hildon; then Amboy. He don't want to bump Norgan if the guy will cough over the dough. See? But he decides to give him an extra day to worry. Instead of Norgan getting a note this morning, he gets one to-morrow morning. See that?"

"Sure."

"Well, it was foxy. But Cardona, like a sap, decides to run the dragnet. Why? Because he's dumb. Thinks he can catch a guy he can't see. Well, that puts us in a jam on account of Crazy. He had to be bumped before the bulls located him.

"So I put you on the job. You did it. And the only fault I had to find at first was that you didn't bump Cardona. But maybe it's just as well you didn't, because Cardona will think it was Crofton and it will have him buffaloed. There's the whole story, Chuck."

Chuck nodded. Then he began to scratch his head. Finally he delivered a wise, knowing grin.

"All right," he said. "If Crofton won't bother with small guys, why was he down there at Mosey's? What was he doing checking up on me?"

"Crofton at Mosey's?"

"Sure. When I bumped Crazy."

"You saw Crofton?"

"How could I have seen Crofton?" queried Chuck. "Nobody can see him the way he is now, can they?"

"I don't mean did you see him," growled Trip, in a tone of annoyance. "I mean, did you see anything odd happen anything that must have meant Crofton was around?"

"Yes. I was going to rub out Cardona, while he was lying groggy on the stairs. Then I hear something I look up there's a window opening."

"Where?"

"Top of the stairs."

"What did you do?"

"Without thinking, I used my gat. Then a couple of slugs come my way in a hurry. That's when I ducked."

"But you saw no one?"

"Not a person."

Trip scowled. He paced over by the window. He turned and eyed Chuck narrowly. He knew that his lieutenant had told facts. Trip spoke steadily.

"That wasn't Crofton," he said. "He wasn't out of his hide-out. Listen, Chuck, and keep it under your hat. I'll tell you who was there at Crazy's hideout. The Shadow."

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"The Shadow!" Chuck shifted half up from his chair.

"Sit down," ordered Trip. "Yes, The Shadow. That's another reason why Crofton should have pulled his last job to-night. Got the swag to-night, instead of waiting until to-morrow. That's the one trouble with this game. It's too good.

"You can't tell what's going to happen when The Shadow works in. Well it means one thing. Crofton's hide-out closes up. By to-morrow night."

"On account of The Shadow?"

"Yes. The dragnet is bad enough. Especially if it keeps on. But you can tell when it's getting hot or cold. You can't tell about The Shadow, though. Look here, Chuck, you're sure you weren't spotted down there at Mosey's?"

"Not a chance."

"Well, I'm not taking it for granted. You slide out of here pronto. Stay away to-night, and don't go close to Crofton's hide-out. Understand?"

"Sure. Where'll I stay?"

"Up at the Lyceum Hotel. That's a quiet place. Then in the morning, grab a cab and go down to Crofton's hideout. Talk with the boys. Then leave. Come up here in the afternoon."

"What then?"

"You'll find out. I'll talk to you then."

TRIP nudged his thumb toward the door. Chuck arose. The door was closing, so slowly that the eye could scarcely notice it. It was tight shut when Chuck placed his hand on the knob. Chuck opened the door and entered the living room, Trip following.

"Stick out here for a few minutes, Chuck," suggested Trip. "I'll be back. Just want to make a telephone call."

He picked up the phone and carried it into the bedroom. He closed the door so the extension wire ran beneath. Chuck sat down to wait in the dim-lighted living room. He stared toward a bookcase in the corner.

There was a space between the far end of the bookcase and the wall. Staring in that direction, Chuck noted a peculiar blackened patch that reminded him of a head and shoulders. The blackness did not move. Chuck forgot it when Trip returned a few minutes later.

The gambler set the telephone on a table. He nodded for Chuck to leave. The lieutenant arose and went out through the door of the apartment. Trip smiled and gave a light chuckle. Only in private did he relax his poker face.

Then the ex-gambler went back into the inner room, closing the door behind him. He did not take the telephone. He evidently did not intend to make another call. Silence followed. Then blackness moved.

The Shadow emerged from beyond the bookcase. Tall, spectral, he stood like a living apparition. Eyes beneath his hat brim glowed like coals as they stared toward the door through which Trip Burgan had passed.

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Then came a strange laugh one that was almost a voiceless shudder. It was confined within the walls of the little living room. The Shadow wheeled. He turned and left by the door that Chuck Galla had taken.

By his eavesdropping, The Shadow had gained the definite information that he had sought. He had learned who was aiding Miles Crofton, so far as the establishment of a hide-out was concerned. He knew that Chuck Galla was going to the place to-morrow; he knew where Chuck could be watched in the meantime.

More than that, however, The Shadow had been able to fit Trip Burgan's statements into the picture that he had already formed concerning the Unseen Killer. Where Trip had talked to Chuck with limitations, The Shadow had understood all.

The telephone call that had followed the conversation. Trip's final O.K. to Chuck, just before the underling left. These were the final points. The Shadow's plans were made. By tomorrow night, he would be ready with an amazing counterthrust against the Unseen Killer's schemes.

CHAPTER XVII. FORCES CONVERGE

THE next morning, Wallace Norgan received a new threat from the Unseen Killer. It was a typewritten message that came in the first mail. Its terms called for a repetition of the scene at Warlock's. This time, Norgan would have an opportunity of his own to deliver the wealth that the Unseen Killer wanted.

The note specified an announcement to the newspapers after arrangements were made to use Warlock's safe the second time. It also stated that unless Warlock had changed the combination, a note would not be necessary on the front of the safe.

Joe Cardona was not at Norgan's when the new note arrived. But half a dozen dicks were there; they put in a prompt call to Commissioner Barth. He called Warlock; found the corporation president willing to go through with the new arrangement; and then sent Norgan's statement to the newspapers.

The Unseen Killer!

His name, mentioned by the press, had stirred the underworld. Throughout the district where the dragnet had been working, furtive, husky voices were speculating regarding the prowess of crimedom's newest product.

"A guy you can't see –"

"De bulls ain't got a chanct to snag him –"

"A big shot –"

These were the expressions made by those who still roved free. To-night, those same speakers would be dodging the law, for the dragnet would work again. Yet crooks had no antagonism toward the Unseen Killer, despite the trouble that his deeds had caused them. They were all for him.

Not only in the bad lands. Elsewhere, men of criminal tendencies were speaking of the Unseen Killer in terms of praise. One spot where his name was whispered was a small cigar store on Ninth Avenue, an ordinary-looking place in a quiet district.

One man behind the counter. Two loungers in front. Beyond them, a door that led into a small pool room, where men were playing at two tables. This was a place that The Shadow's agents had failed to uncover during their prolonged search; it was also one spot that the dragnet had not located.

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The cigar store and the pool room were the "front" that covered Miles Crofton's hide-out. From the pool room, one could step into a little hallway that showed stairs leading to the second floor. Crofton had a complete apartment on that upper story.

One exit only. That was the path from the hallway through the cigar store. The shop and the pool room remained open late each night. Men were constantly on duty. The fellow behind the counter; the loungers in and out; the habitués of the pool room all were under the command of Chuck Galla.

These were no ordinary gorillas whom the police could spot. They were crooks from out of town; men whom Trip Burgan had imported. He had chosen them well, carefully eliminating any who might have been known in and about Manhattan.

The police had failed to suspect these men. So had The Shadow's agents. Trip Burgan, himself, had no record other than his gambling past. Thus no one not even Hawkeye had gained the needed trail, until last night.

Then had come the relayed leads. Fox Cullis had opened the way to Crazy Lagran; from Crazy, the trail had continued to Chuck Galla. Finally it had reached Trip Burgan. After listening to Trip and Chuck, The Shadow had reversed the course. He had ordered men to watch Chuck Galla.

That was last night. This morning, Chuck had come to the combined cigar store and pool room. He had gone upstairs; come down again; then left. Chuck was coming back again, later. That much was known to The Shadow.

MORNING had passed. Afternoon was waning. Men in the cigar store were alert. One of the squad was standing by the door, looking out into the street. He saw a huckster pushing a dilapidated fruit cart along the avenue.

"That guy's never been in this block before," growled the watcher. "First time I've seen him around."

"What of it?" queried the man behind the counter, taking a look for himself. "He ain't the first pushcart peddler to try this territory."

"Business ain't so hot around here."

"Tell me anywhere that it's likely to be good for one of them guys."

The loungeer shrugged his shoulders. He nodded. The man behind the counter was probably right. Furthermore, he was boss while Chuck Galla was not around.

"All right, Hobey," decided the loungeer. "I guess the pushcart guy's all right. But what do you think of that bird across the way?"

Hobey leaned over the counter. He looked across the street. He saw an antiquated truck pulled up in front of a lot where workmen had torn down an old building. A huge African, attired in overalls, was picking out chunks of wood and heaving them aboard his truck.

"Him?" questioned Hobey. "Say you have gone bugs! First it's a pushcart man that bothers you. Next it's a fellow clearing out junk from an old house. Can't nobody do any work in this block without you worrying?"

"You remember what Chuck said about —"

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"He told us to watch out for snoopers. Them guys ain't snoopers, are they?"

"I guess not, Hobey."

"All right then."

The lounge decided that Hobey was right. He turned away from the window and forgot the men in the street. But in his first suspicious impression, the fellow had been correct. Both of those men outside had come here for a purpose.

The pushcart man was known as Pietro. The big African bore the name of Jericho. Both were special agents of The Shadow. This morning, Hawkeye had spotted Chuck Galla taking a cab outside the Lyceum Hotel. Hawkeye had popped into Moe Shrevnitz's taxi. They had trailed Chuck.

Pietro and Jericho had taken up guard duty, Pietro first, off and on during the day. With waning afternoon, Pietro was soon to go off duty. Jericho, coming up with his old truck, was taking on the job.

Dusk was settling. A telephone rang behind the counter in the pool room. Hobey answered it. He spoke in short sentences. When he hung up, he looked toward the loungers and gave a low-voiced order.

"Chuck's coming down," he informed. "Maybe Trip will be with him. Guess they want to talk with that guy upstairs. You birds are to ease out. Tell the boys in the back room."

"All right, Hobey."

Jericho's truck had pulled away by the time men were sauntering from the cigar store. Pietro, passing for the last time, spied them but gave no indication. The huckster kept along to the end of the block. But he had counted the slouchers as they began to take their places in doorways and other secluded spots along the line.

When Jericho's truck came rattling back for another load of rubbish, it passed the pushcart man. Pietro made a sign; Jericho grinned and nodded. He kept on until he reached the old building across the avenue from the cigar store.

While he loaded more junk, Jericho was conscious of lurkers in the dark. He kept at his work, knowing that they would not bother him. This load would go to an old garage, two blocks away, where Jericho was dumping the stuff. The African knew that Pietro had already headed for that old garage. A message was on its way to The Shadow.

MEANWHILE, other of The Shadow's watchers were on the alert. Hawkeye was standing across the street from the Hotel Revano, awaiting the appearance of Chuck Galla and Trip Burgan. For Hawkeye had seen Chuck enter, half an hour before.

The two men came out. Hawkeye spotted them and flicked a cigarette into the gutter. Moe Shrevnitz, stationed in the hack-stand space, was prompt with his cab. He shot up in front of the door.

Neither Trip nor Chuck had asked the doorman for a cab. Apparently they had intended to set forth on foot for a few blocks. But Moe's timely appearance made them change their minds. They stepped into the cab. Trip growled an address on the East Side.

Moe repeated it aloud. His voice was clear from the front seat, for he had opened the window beside him. Trip and Chuck heard Moe's repetition of the destination. So did Hawkeye, slouching across the dusky street.

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Moe pulled away.

Hawkeye headed for a telephone. He put in a call. Like Pietro, he was relaying information to The Shadow. Through Burbank, these messages would reach their goal The Shadow's sanctum.

After phoning, Hawkeye headed out, grabbed a cab and made for the same destination that Trip had given Moe.

SOME twenty minutes after leaving the Hotel Revano, Moe Shrevnitz's cab stopped beneath the overhanging structure of an elevated line. Trip and Chuck alighted. Trip paid Moe. The two headed into an old clothing store.

Moe swung his cab around the el pillars and parked on the opposite side of the street.

Soon a slouching figure came up beside the taxi. It was Hawkeye. The little fellow asked a quick question. Moe pointed out the clothing store. Hawkeye shambled across the street and went by the lighted front of the emporium. Seeing no sign of the men he wanted, Hawkeye found a courtyard at the side of the store and went through.

A blind alleyway was at the rear. There, Moe heard voices. He made out the shape of a rakish touring car. As he crept forward, he discovered that there were four men in the machine. Two gorillas in front; Trip and Chuck in the back.

A growled order from Trip. Hawkeye heard reference to the cigar store on Ninth Avenue. He edged back to the passage just as the touring car began to move. Lights blinked on. The car was on its way. Hawkeye headed back to find Moe.

IN the meantime, Moe had gained another passenger. Some one had entered his car from the darkness beneath the elevated. Moe had heard a hissed order to cruise about the block. He knew who was in his cab. The Shadow.

Hawkeye, scurrying through the space beside the clothing store, saw Moe's cab shoot away. The little man grunted angrily; then decided upon a course of his own. A report call; after that a quick trip to Ninth Avenue.

He waited for a few moments, though, to see if Moe would return. The taxi did not show up.

There was a reason. As Moe's cab had turned the corner, keen eyes had spied a touring car swinging from an alley. The Shadow had spotted it as a mobster-manned machine. He had hissed a new order to Moe. The taxi driver had taken up the trail.

Thus were forces converging. Trip and his minions; The Shadow and his agents; both groups were heading toward the spot where men of both sides were already on watch. Events were due in the vicinity of Miles Crofton's hide-out!

CHAPTER XVIII. THE SHADOW'S STROKE

THE rakish touring car had reached its destination. It was evening by this time. The machine was parked almost unnoticed in front of the little cigar store, where only Hobe remained on duty. Chuck Galla alighted alone.

Chuck looked along the street. He saw a taxi stopping more than a block away. The driver got out and went

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into a hash house. Chuck was not suspicious.

A rattling truck came jouncing along the avenue and pulled up across from the cigar store. An electric street light revealed the figure of a huge African. Chuck watched the man go to a pile of debris and began to pick up chunks of lumber.

That meant nothing to Chuck. The whole district seemed clear. Chuck entered the cigar store. While he pretended to make a purchase, he spoke in a low tone to the man behind the counter.

"I'm going in the back room, Hobey," he informed. "You turn out the lights, like you was closing the joint, see?"

Hobey nodded.

"Trip's coming in," resumed Chuck. "He don't want nobody to see him. So you slide out as soon as you douse the glims. We're going up to talk with Crofton."

Again a nod.

"Crofton's going out with us," added Chuck. "So you move around with the mob and keep them posted. If anybody starts anything, hand it back. We don't want to be bothered when we travel."

Chuck walked into the deserted pool room. He turned out the light that he found there. Groping in the darkness, he made sure that rear windows were locked. These opened on an alley. Chuck moved back into the cigar store.

Hobey had turned out the lights. He had gone outside. Staring from the front window, Chuck could barely discern the shape of the touring car. The sidewalk between the automobile and the store front was completely dark. Chuck did not see Trip alight.

It was the opening of the door that told him his chief had arrived. Chuck spoke in the darkness. Trip answered with a low growl that formed a question.

"You told Hobey?" he asked.

"That Crofton was leaving?" questioned Chuck. "Sure. I told him that."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing."

"Didn't wonder why the guy was going with us?"

"No."

"All right. Let's go up."

They made their way into the hall; then up the stairs. They reached the top. Trip tried the latch on a window that opened above the alley. It was locked.

"Come on."

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Trip groped to a door. He rapped. A nervous voice answered from the other side. It was Miles Crofton.

"Open up," whispered Trip. "It's me Trip with Chuck."

"All right."

THE door opened. The two men entered a pitch-dark room. They left the door ajar behind them. It was then that something occurred near the end of the hall. The window-latch began to move. Under the impulse of a prying wedge of metal shoved between the portions of the sash, it was being unlocked from the outer side.

The Shadow had left Moe's cab. He had come along the alleyway. He had chosen this mode of entry to reach the second floor above the cigar store. The window opened. The Shadow's shape obscured the slight light that came from that direction.

Then The Shadow edged to the wall. Men were coming from Crofton's apartment. The Shadow could hear their whispered conference. He made out the identity of each speaker, although the three were completely in darkness.

"It's the best way, Crofton," Trip was saying. "Chuck's told the gang that you're going out with us. You do go out with us. They'll remember it."

"But without the hide-out?" questioned Crofton. "It's going to be tough for me –"

"We've got a better place," interposed Trip. "With two new guys to keep watch."

"These other mugs were getting stale," put in Chuck. "Squawking about their job. Said it gave them the willies, looking out for a guy they never saw."

"This is the first chance we've had to talk together," reminded Trip, again speaking to Crofton. "I know you've been doing some worrying, even though you're sitting pretty."

"Not so pretty as you think," retorted Crofton's voice. "Try it yourself if you don't believe me. Listen, Trip, there's plenty to talk about right here, before we start."

"The car's out front," explained Trip. "The sooner it moves away the better. We can talk while we're riding. Listen, Crofton: I wised Chuck to the real lay, over at the apartment. The two guys that we picked to go to the new hide-out are no dummies.

"We've got to talk about a lot of things in a mighty short space of time. So let's get going and chin about it while we're on the way. Come on you head downstairs first and go right out to the car. Chuck and I will follow."

Crofton grunted an agreement. Footsteps creaked and bodies jostled as they reached the head of the stairs. The Shadow was close against the wall as he heard the trio pass. Then came Trip's voice from the head of the stairs.

"Blink a light, Chuck," ordered Trip. "Just to make sure it's all clear up here. Shoot it when –"

Before Trip could complete his sentence, instructing Chuck to wait for a few moments, the lieutenant obeyed the order. He clicked the button of a flashlight and shot the rays toward the edge of the window, intending to sweep it along the wall until it revealed the door that they had just left.

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A chance action; but one that produced a startling result. A gasp came from Chuck Galla's lips. His flashlight stopped short, revealing a form against the wall.

Trip, staring into the gleam, put words to his henchman's cry.

"The Shadow!"

THE response was a shuddering laugh. A second flashlight clicked in The Shadow's hand. Trip and Chuck were carrying revolvers ready. They swung their weapons upward. The muzzle of an automatic loomed from The Shadow's fist.

Glare to glare; gun to gun; The Shadow was dealing with murderous fighters. It was a battle to death two to one in favor of the foe. The Shadow's automatic thundered. Quick shots stabbed toward the crooks as the tall black form whirled sideways.

Revolvers answered. Bullets zipped amid the crackles. Fast, at close range, the battle was a grim one. Trip and Chuck were dropping toward the steps as they fired; but their action was less timely than The Shadow's swift twist. By split-second precision, The Shadow had outdone his foemen. Chuck Galla gave a venomous cough and went sprawling to the floor. A cry came from Trip Burgan as the gambler staggered on the stairway.

A fierce laugh; burst from The Shadow.

While revolver shots had whistled wide, slugs from the automatic had taken toll. The Shadow had dropped Chuck Galla with a death bullet. He had clipped Trip Burgan. Yet Trip was still a fighter.

Staggering crazily down the stairs, clutching at the rail with a wounded left arm, Trip kept on firing toward the top. Chuck's light had fallen.

The Shadow's had clicked out. It was a battle in the darkness. Stabs from the revolver; flashes from the automatic.

Half sprawling at the bottom of the stairs, Trip managed to dive into the cigar store. He staggered toward the front, bearing up despite new wounds, determined to give the alarm.

From above, The Shadow was sweeping downward, hot on Trip's trail.

OUTSIDE, men had heard the shots. The two gorillas in the front of the touring car had swung toward the cigar store. They were trying to make out what was happening. Then, before their eyes could distinguish objects in the thick darkness, they heard some one scramble into the car beside them.

"Get going!"

It was Miles Crofton's voice. The order was given with fervor. A mobster turned; then his fellow crook grabbed his arm. Some one else was coming from the cigar store. They could barely see a man who faltered toward the car.

"Get him!" It was Trip. "Get him The Shadow! Get going before he comes –"

Trip sprawled. The driver of the touring car shot the car into gear. It started from the curb. It did not go far. At that instant, a big man came bounding from across the street. It was Jericho. Wrenching open the front

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door of the touring car, the huge African yanked the driver from behind the wheel.

The fellow swung a gun, viciously. It whizzed an inch past Jericho's ear as the big man hoisted the gorilla over his shoulder. Then, with a powerful lurch, Jericho sent the gangster head-first to the paving. The gorilla rolled over and lay still.

The second man was at the wheel, aiming for Jericho. The African was an open target. He was springing forward to deal with this new enemy. Jericho might have been too late to stop the shot; but some one else was in time.

A gun barked from the old truck across the street. The gorilla slumped by the wheel. Jericho yanked him clear as two men came bounding from the truck. The first was Cliff Marsland; the other Harry Vincent.

The two had come up in Jericho's truck. They had been waiting, hidden, for this moment. Cliff had dropped the second gorilla with a well-aimed shot. Two mobsters eliminated, he piled into the darkened rear of the touring car.

Instantly, Cliff was locked in a terrific struggle. Some one had risen to meet him. Harry could see Cliff's shoulders lunging against a foe beyond. To aid Cliff, Harry piled in through the door.

All this in brief seconds. Astounded watchers, lurking in doorways, had been nonplused by the rapidity of action. Coming to life, they opened fire toward the touring car; toward Jericho.

The African dived for his truck. It was the best move. As he reached cover, he drew the fire. Then, before the marksmen could spot their quarry, they learned of a new enemy. A fierce laugh sounded from a spot just outside the cigar store. Flashes appeared with the booms of automatics.

The Shadow!

CROOKS accepted the challenge of the hidden foe. They fired for those stabbing targets. The Shadow, on the move, was drawing their fire. Close by darkened building fronts, he was eluding the evil sharpshooters.

He was doing more. He was picking living targets. He was pulling shots away from the touring car where Harry and Cliff were still wrestling with a foe that grappled as fiercely as a fiend.

Then, whirling rapidly up the avenue, came Moe Shrevnitz's cab. Speeding in zigzag fashion, Moe lay half crouched behind the wheel. With a terrific skid, the taxi whirled about in the middle of the street, while crooks began to aim toward it. Moe leaped from the cab and gained the front seat of the touring car.

Crooks leaped from their hiding places. Maddened, they wanted to get The Shadow. They wanted to stop the departure of the touring car.

They were too late. The rakish machine shot forward. Moe looked quickly over his shoulder, to see Cliff and Harry struggling with an enemy who was obscured beneath them. He kept on, while bullets whistled through the top of the car.

The Shadow was again drawing the shots of crooks. Men were sprawling from his bullets.

Hobey, still in a doorway, shouted a wild command. He wanted to concentrate the fire; for The Shadow had dropped back to a doorway of his own. Crooks wheeled. As they met the challenge of the automatics, a new fire came to The Shadow's aid. A wizened face thrust itself from the interior of Moe's abandoned cab.

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Hawkeye had joined the jehu before Moe's mad arrival. A sharpshooter in his own right, Hawkeye was gunning for crooks.

Caught flatfooted by shots from two directions, the last of the imported mobsters took to flight. All save Hobey. He thought that he had found The Shadow's range. He fired across the street. His bullet flattened against a brick wall. An answering report from an automatic. Hobey rolled from his doorway.

Hawkeye was out of the cab, firing at two mobsters, the last of the tribe. One sprawled. The other turned to aim past Hawkeye. An automatic roared. The last crook fell. Turning, Hawkeye saw The Shadow.

A hissed command. Hawkeye leaped into the front seat of the cab. Whistles sirens cops were coming up from the block below. With a mocking laugh, The Shadow entered the cab.

Hawkeye, an improvised taxi driver, stepped on the gas. The cab shot away.

WHEN officers arrived, they found only dead and wounded crooks. Those who were still alive could do no more than utter incoherent gasps. Then, from the back of the rickety truck came Jericho.

Feigning fright, the big African talked with chattering teeth. Fighting mobs. Crooks against crooks. That was his story. The police believed it. Some had come and gone in the taxi, Jericho said. Others had started trouble in the cigar store across the way.

But Jericho told no more than that. He gave no mention of the touring car that had sped away before the departure of the cab. His story told, Jericho went back to his truck. The cops told him to wait around a while.

As he waited, Jericho pondered. He shook his head doubtfully. He knew that The Shadow was all right; but he was thinking of the men in the touring car. Harry Vincent and Cliff Marsland; the assailant whom Jericho had not seen.

Two against one; Moe at the wheel. The odds had been with The Shadow's men. Yet Jericho feared that they were not enough. He was sorry that he had not gone along, for he had witnessed the power of the enemy.

Mentally, Jericho could picture the tables turned. Cliff and Harry staggered by swift blows. Moe going down beneath a grasping clutch. The touring car stalled in darkness. An enemy escaping while agents of The Shadow lay helpless.

Jericho could only hope that his fears were false. Impatiently, he waited for the police to send him on his way.

CHAPTER XIX. DEATH RESUMES

THE new note from the Unseen Killer had specified a repetition of the procedure that he had previously prescribed. Wallace Norgan was to place all the required funds in Findlay Warlock's safe or suffer the penalty of death.

Worried, Norgan had decided to go through with it. Commissioner Barth had agreed not to interfere with the Unseen Killer's action. Shortly before eight thirty, the commissioner had arrived at Warlock's accompanied by Joe Cardona.

Findlay Warlock and Marryat Darring were already there. Norgan arrived very soon, under the guard of six detectives, headed by Markham. With him, Norgan had a box that was larger than the one which he and

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Amboy had brought.

Norgan opened the box to display actual securities. He removed them from the box in bundles and carefully arranged the stacks inside the open safe. Others stood away, watching him. The task completed, Norgan himself closed the safe and turned the knob.

The group went downstairs, leaving Joe Cardona in charge under the same conditions as before. No message had been required in an envelope. Warlock had not changed the combination. Doors to the study were left open. At nine o'clock they were closed. At nine fifteen, they were reopened.

It was almost nine thirty. That was the time specified for a return to the study. While waiting for the dead line, Commissioner Barth began to pace about. He stopped in the middle of the living room to eye the others.

Warlock was seated placidly before the fire. Darring was leaning against the wall. Norgan was nervously resting in a corner. Barth made an anxious comment.

"I left word for Cranston," he declared. "At the Cobalt Club. I wanted him to be here. I wonder what is keeping him?"

Barth would have been amazed had he known. To-night, Lamont Cranston had been temporarily nonexistent. But The Shadow had been in action. He had found it more important to visit Ninth Avenue than to come to Findlay Warlock's.

The Shadow knew that Norgan would be safe, so long as he actually delivered the funds. Moreover, The Shadow knew that Norgan would not welch to-night. The Unseen Killer was too potent an enemy to bait for a third time.

Nine thirty. Time for the doors to open above. Wallace Norgan, suddenly restless, arose and walked from the living room. Barth had not posted a detective in the hall to-night. Norgan started upstairs.

"Call him back," ordered Barth, suddenly, as he glanced toward the clock. "It's not after nine thirty. We must not clip the time too close."

Marryat Darring responded. He strode from the room and ascended the stairs in Norgan's wake. When he reached the open door of the study, he found Norgan comparing watches with Cardona.

"Nine thirty," announced Norgan. "I have followed the conditions. I am going in."

Before Cardona could stop him, Norgan pressed past and hurried into the study. He crossed the room and reached the wall safe. He began to unlock it. Warlock had openly mentioned the combination at the time the funds had been placed within.

Cardona had followed Norgan. Darring was close behind Joe. They saw the door come open. A snarl from Norgan. The wall safe was empty! As with the black box, the real wealth had been removed.

WILDLY, Norgan began to reach about inside the safe, pressing his hands against the walls, bottom, top, and sides. He seemed to be looking for something other than his purloined wealth.

Had the man gone mad? Cardona looked at Darring, who shook his head in a puzzled manner.

Norgan wheeled. Excitedly, he pushed his way past the other men. He started for the door; when he reached

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the hall, he began to shout for the commissioner. Never pausing, he dashed down the stairs, heading for the living room.

Darring turned and hurried in the same direction, anxious to know what had happened.

Cardona was about to follow; then he paused to bark instructions at the dicks who were stationed outside the doors. The Unseen Killer had grabbed a bundle of big dough. Joe did not intend to meet with new criticism for negligence. It was bad enough to have had Norgan in the study, opening the safe on his own. But, after all, the cash had been Norgan's.

Downstairs, Wallace Norgan had reached the living room. His square-jawed face was hideous with rage. There was no semblance of fear remaining. Wainwright Barth stood amazed. So did Findlay Warlock.

"The money is gone!" shouted Norgan. "All my wealth! The safe is empty, commissioner. I have been tricked!"

"Tricked?" questioned Barth. "You knew what happened to the box you put there before. The Unseen Killer —"

"A double cross," sneered Norgan. "The Unseen Killer is not alone in this game. Some one is working with him. You can arrest his pal."

"His pal?"

"Yes." Norgan pointed to Warlock. "There's the culprit. He knows what happened to my millions."

"I?" parried Warlock.

"You!" accused Norgan.

"What do you mean, Norgan?" quizzed Barth. "Have you found some evidence?"

"No," jeered Norgan, "I've lost some. The case and securities weren't all that I put in that box. I put in something else unnoticed something that proves my —"

"Look out!" gasped Warlock, pointing.

Norgan swung about. Barth turned. The shining muzzle of a revolver had come between the edge of a curtain and the side of the doorway. Before Norgan could spring forward, the gun belched flame.

Wallace Norgan sagged. Like men stricken with paralysis, Barth and Warlock stood motionless, stunned by this new tragedy. The gun barrel was pulled from sight. The only evidence of its echoing shot was the form of Wallace Norgan, dead upon the floor.

THEN came a shout from beyond the curtains. From the foot of the stairway, out in the gloomy hall, some one was putting up a cry for aid. The voice was that of Marryat Darring. It carried triumph despite its tone of partial terror.

"Help me!" was Darring's call. "Help me! I've got him! The Unseen Killer!"

A gun thudded on the floor as Barth and Warlock sprang past Norgan's body. Outside the doorway, the two

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men stood astounded. So did another witness Joe Cardona, coming down the stairs.

Marryat Darring was engaged in a desperate struggle with an invisible foe. With hands clutching at a throat that could not be seen. Darring was lurching back and forth. His body twisted, his legs sagged.

With a sudden choke, Darring dropped one hand to his own throat. He tugged to release invisible fingers. He succeeded. Throwing his arms about a form that no one could view, he shouted a warning to Joe Cardona, who was suddenly springing down the steps.

"His gun!" exclaimed Darring. "I can see it where he dropped it on the stairs –"

Joe stopped suddenly to reach for the weapon. At that instant, Darring went hurtling sidewise. His hands dropped; his arms spread out. He slumped and tottered under the force of an invisible blow. With a futile clutch for an escaping enemy, he sprawled on the floor.

Cardona was blocking the stairway. Barth and Warlock were in the hallway that led to the back of the house. The one opening was the front door, that stood wide. That was by order of the Unseen Killer, part of the conditions that he had proposed.

"Get him!" cried Darring, coming to hands and knees. "That's the way he went!"

Darring grabbed for the gun on the floor. Cardona yanked a revolver also. Darring fired through the front door. Joe did the same. They listened. There was no evidence of success. Detectives came dashing in from the street.

Darring came tipsily to his feet. He was weakened by his struggle. Still gasping, he spoke of the encounter that had been his lot.

"I heard the shot!" he exclaimed. "Just as I came down the stairs. I sprang for the curtain. He locked with me. I could feel his hands, his wrists, the gun. I wrenched at the revolver that I felt. It fell to the floor."

"I saw the gun," nodded Warlock, "when the Unseen Killer fired the shot."

"I saw the flash," added Barth. "I think –"

He paused as some one entered. It was Lamont Cranston. He had arrived just in time to hear this testimony. Barth greeted his friend and began to give the details of the crime that had occurred. Cranston nodded, solemn-faced.

"The mystery is deeper than ever!" concluded Barth. "Miles Crofton is a fiend. Unless we find him, the Unseen Killer, we shall have no end to murder in the city –"

The commissioner broke off as a detective entered to hand a note to Joe Cardona. The ace opened it; while Barth stood puzzled, he saw an expression of amazement come over Cardona's face. Excitedly, Joe turned and handed the note to the commissioner.

"What is this, Cardona?" demanded Barth, before looking at the paper.

"A message, commissioner," returned Joe, grimly. "Read it. A message from The Shadow!"

CHAPTER XX. FROM THE SHADOW

"FROM The Shadow?"

Barth's tone was angered as well as skeptical. To the police commissioner, talk of The Shadow was absurd. Yet even as he gave indication of his wrath, Barth paused. He realized that The Shadow could be no more an incredibility than the Unseen Killer.

"Very well." Barth mollified his tone. "I shall read this message."

He adjusted his pince-nez. He looked at the paper. Then a scoffing smile appeared upon his lips. He handed the sheet back to Joe with a comment:

"You have a good imagination, Cardona."

The detective looked at the paper and blinked. It was blank. Joe gazed up to see Barth frowning. Angrily, the detective spoke.

"There was writing on this paper when I opened it," he said. "A message, signed by The Shadow and I read it. Even if the writing is gone well, that doesn't mean –"

"What was the message?" inquired Barth, testily.

"It said a box was coming," replied Joe. "To be delivered here. Its contents to aid us in solving crime. A box from The Shadow –"

Another detective entered. He spoke to Joe, meantime nudging his thumb over his shoulder toward the open front door.

"Two guys out there with a truck," informed the dick. "Got a box they want to deliver to Detective Cardona."

"Bring it in," ordered Barth. Then, noting Norgan's body, he added: "Take it upstairs to the study. Bring the men also. Markham" he turned to the detective sergeant, who was standing by "you take charge here while we go up."

The box went past the door. It was a large box, with a padlocked lid. It was more than four feet square and the delivery men staggered with their burden. Barth noted holes in the side of the box. His curiosity was aroused.

He ordered Cardona to bring Warlock and Darring upstairs. Motioning to Cranston, the commissioner invited his friend to join him. They reached the study, to find the delivery men standing beside their lowered burden, watched by two detectives.

"Where did you get this box?" demanded Barth.

"Found it on our truck," replied one of the delivery men. "Two fellows had put it there. They gave us ten bucks apiece to bring it around here. Said they were hiring another guy to go ahead with a note.

"Seeing as how it was going to a detective, we didn't see no reason not to bring the box. The guys looked all right. Talked like they were regulars. Couldn't see their faces close, though. It was dark where we had the truck."

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"Hold these men," said Barth to the detectives. "Take them downstairs to the kitchen and wait there until we call for you."

"Say," protested the second truckman. "We haven't done nothing –"

"Don't worry," assured Barth. "We may need your testimony. That's all."

"O.K. Say here's the key to the padlock. Them fellows gave it to us."

Dicks and delivery men departed. Barth eyed the box suspiciously; then ordered Cardona to stand ready with a revolver. Gingerly, the commissioner unlocked the box and raised the cover. He leaned forward; then stood staring.

Others approached. They, too, showed surprise. Inside the box, trussed and packed inside padded walls, was the huddled figure of a man. The fellow was gagged as well as bound.

Cardona put away his gun. He stooped beside the box. Lamont Cranston did the same on the other side. Together, they hoisted the huddled form out to the floor. As the man stared at them, Cardona pulled away the gag that half obscured his face.

"My word!" ejaculated Wainwright Barth, mopping his bald head. "It's Miles Crofton!"

"The Unseen Killer?" demanded Cardona.

"The same." Barth's surprised tone had changed to a note of accusation.

THE commissioner glared like a fierce eagle as he surveyed the captive. "Well, Crofton, we've got you. This means the chair for you."

"Cut these ropes," pleaded Crofton, anxiously. "I'll talk. I'll tell you everything. But listen, commissioner I'm not a killer –"

"Keep him covered, Cardona," interrupted Barth. "Have your bracelets ready while we release him from these bonds."

Three minutes later, Miles Crofton was leaning wearily in a chair, his wrists handcuffed behind him. Commissioner Barth was eyeing him with a perplexed gaze. He could not understand how Crofton, supposedly invisible, had come back to view.

Crofton saw the commissioner's puzzlement. He understood. Weakly, he delivered a grin. Then, with a sigh of relief, he shook his head.

"I'll tell you the whole story," he agreed. "Straight from the beginning. That is, all I know of it. I was double-crossed; that's all. I've been in a crooked game, commissioner, but murder wasn't my part."

"Proceed," ordered Barth.

"The whole thing started like a fake," declared Crofton. "It looked like a good game, though. I'd been a pal of Rouser Tugin's, but I wasn't in with his mob. That's something no one can ever hang on me. But I was pretty well worried when Rouser and his outfit ran into that mess. The time when Rouser was killed by the police."

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"I went to see a fellow named Trip Burgan. Used to be a big-shot gambler. Trip seemed like a good guy. Loaned me some dough and advised me just to lay low. Said this Rouser business looked bad, but if I watched myself, I could keep out of trouble.

"I believed him. I know it was a stall, now, but I didn't think that then. Trip knew how he could use me. That was all. First thing I knew, he sent for me. Said he had a chance for me to keep out of sight and make some easy dough. Both at once."

Crofton paused to look about. Expectant eyes were watching him. His listeners seemed to be impressed with his story. Crofton leaned back in his chair and resumed.

"It looked like a good racket," he declared. "Working for Professor Melrose Lessep. Here was the story: Lessep had a cock-eyed invention that wouldn't work. Trip had found out about it somehow. He gave Lessep some dough and said that they could fake it and sell more stock in the idea.

"I was to work with Lessep. Trip had the idea; Lessep and I doped out the rest of it. A fake clear through. The trick lay partly in the cabinet and partly in that second motor. Then there was special wiring in the laboratory walls."

A thin smile had appeared upon the lips of Lamont Cranston. His keen eyes showed that he had learned all that Crofton was about to say.

"When the prof frosted up the walls," explained Crofton, "I revolved the back panel of the cabinet. I stepped through, to the back of the platform. That was a cinch. Nobody could see through the panels while I was doing it. They were all misty.

"When he used the second motor, the prof shoved in cords that had long, pointed plugs. One made a special contact with the cabinet; the other made a special contact in a dummy floor plug.

"The prof pressed one button on the motor. That made the door of the cabinet open, like I was responsible. Then he did a lot of hokum all the while I was standing on the back ledge. Finally he shouted out to watch the door.

"That's when he pressed another gimmick. A special wire through the wall and into the door. It made the bolt move back automatically. Another push. The door opened. Then the prof touched the right button. It worked the light switch. Another pull made the front door shut."

"Amazing!" exclaimed Barth.

"WAIT a minute," objected Warlock. "You were still in back of the cabinet, Crofton."

"I'm coming to that," declared the prisoner. "In the dark, the prof pushed another one of his trick switches. It operated the bolt on the door into the back hall. That's how I made my get-away. When I closed the door, the prof swung the switch the other way. It shot the bolt again.

"Take me down to the lab. I'll prove all I've said. I worked plenty hard figuring out some of that trick stuff. The prof was stumped with a lot of it. But it worked fine the night we pulled it. The toughest part was finding enough time for the get-away."

"How did the professor know when you had made your escape?" questioned Barth.

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"He could hear the door close," replied Crofton. "He was listening for it."

A pause. Barth was stroking his bald head, utterly confounded by Crofton's story. It sounded true, particularly the offer to make tests in Lessep's abandoned laboratory.

"Now comes the double cross," asserted Crofton, suddenly. "Trip Burgan had a hide-out fixed for me over on Ninth Avenue. The idea was I'd have to keep out of sight or people might find out about the fake.

"Well, I hopped over there. A swell place apartment with three rooms guys to bring me everything I wanted. Only thing was, I couldn't let them see me. I was supposed to be invisible. Trip swore I'd have to play the game all the way.

"I look at the papers. They were brought up to my room. It kind of socked me when I found I was called the Unseen Killer. I sent a note to Trip. He sent back word to lay low. Somebody had squealed that I knew Rouser Tukin.

"Then I got a paper that told about Lessep being killed. Trip sent a note saying that he thought the prof had committed suicide. It looked worse than ever for me, and I knew murder was the game when I saw papers telling about Hildon and Amboy.

"But I couldn't make a move. Those gorillas Trip had a crew of them under the place I was living they would have bumped me if I tried to make a get-away. They were to rub out any guy that they found in the place. They'd never seen me. Since I was supposed to be invisible, they'd have plugged me for an intruder."

Crofton's voice showed strain. Thoughts of his recent ordeal were troubling him. It was with an effort that the man managed to conclude his story.

"To-night, Trip came to the joint," he said. "He and Chuck Galla. To take me away. I had to go. I was suspicious. I figured they were on the home stretch of their game and that they were going to rub me out, not needing me as a goat any longer.

"The dragnet was working. And they were scared of The Shadow. Well, just as we were going out, The Shadow showed up. Battled with Trip and Chuck. They had a car outside, with gorillas in it. I made for the car, figuring I'd rather bluff with the gorillas, even though they might be set to take me for a ride.

"Some fellows crowned those gorillas. Made off with the car, with me in it, two of them pinning me on the floor. One of them handed me a haymaker. I went out. When I woke up I was in that box and The Shadow was looking in on me."

"You're sure it was The Shadow?" challenged Barth.

"You bet it was," returned Crofton, in a positive tone. "Black cloak slouch hat all I could see was eyes. He talked to me and I listened. He knew everything, that guy. Said he was sending me to Joe Cardona. Told me if I talked, I'd come out all right. He'd do the rest in a pinch. Well, here I am."

Finished with his amazing tale, Miles Crofton closed his eyes and settled back wearily upon the cushions of the chair.

CHAPTER XXI. NEW DEDUCTIONS

A BUZZ of comments broke loose when Crofton's story was completed.

Crofton did not open his eyes, even though some remarks were criticisms of his statement. He was tired. He was willing to rely upon The Shadow to substantiate the story that he had given.

"A hoax!" exclaimed Findlay Warlock. "Professor Lessep was no swindler! This wild tale is an insult to his memory!"

"I doubted the professor," put in Marryat Darring, "but not my own senses. I struggled with the Unseen Killer myself. If Crofton was not my assailant, who was?"

"Murder has been done," announced Barth. "Only an invisible criminal could have accomplished those killings."

Joe Cardona made no comment. He was puzzled. Barth looked at him; the detective merely shook his head. The commissioner reiterated his previous statement.

"Only an Unseen Killer could have done these crimes. Lessep Hildon Amboy Norgan –"

"Odd deaths," came a quiet interruption. "Yet ones that do not belie Crofton's story."

Barth turned to Cranston. It was he who had spoken.

"Can you explain those killings?" challenged the commissioner.

"Possibly," rejoined Cranston, with a quiet smile.

"How?" demanded Barth.

"Lessep, to begin with," remarked Cranston. "No bomb was thrown at him. He died by a special device planted in his little office. One so clever that it passed unsuspected."

"How do you know that?"

"I found a used lamp bulb in his desk. I happened to try it. The bulb was not burned out."

"This is no time for a hoax!" cried Barth. "What did such a bulb have to do with Lessep's death?"

"It proved," returned Cranston, "that there must have been some purpose in its removal. For instance, a special bulb, screwed into the lamp above Lessep's filing cabinet. One that was left loose –"

"For what purpose?"

Cranston stepped across the room. He unscrewed a light bulb in its socket, leaving it loose. The others watched the demonstration, particularly Joe Cardona.

"Picture Lessep coming into his laboratory," remarked Cranston. "To get those photographs. The last act he was to perform. He tries the light switch" the speaker demonstrated "and no light results. He decides to remove the bulb, thinking it burned out."

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Cranston's long fingers began to turn the bulb. They stopped, apparently noting its looseness.

"A loosened bulb," he remarked quietly. "Lessep decides to screw it tight before removing it. He does so. Contact forms and –"

"He gets light," put in Barth, as the lamp came on.

"No," returned Cranston. "Not with the bulb that was placed there. That bulb was a bomb, its mechanism hidden by the frosted glass."

"Ready to blow when the current hit it!" cried Cardona. "That's the story, commissioner! I see it!"

"DID you suspect this at the time?" demanded Barth, speaking to Cranston.

"Yes," was the reply.

"Why, then," asked the commissioner, "did you fail to mention it?"

"Because I suspected all that Crofton has told us. I knew there could be no Unseen Killer. Deducting from that basis, I knew that Professor Lessep had himself taken the lever from his machine; that he had typed the threatening note found on his desk. Lessep was a fanatic. I could well believe –"

"That he planted the bomb himself? As a means of suicide?"

"Yes. At the same time it was possible that an enemy had placed the bomb. I suspected one of two men. Lessep was dead. It was best to wait."

"Why?"

"In case the real killer would show his hand. So that he could be trapped in actual murder."

"You should have advanced your theory, Cranston. Hildon Amboy Norgan –"

"All died through their own errors."

"How so?"

"The killer did reveal himself," explained Cranston, "by his first notes. To Hildon, Amboy, and Norgan. Had they acted sanely, and informed you of the threats, I would have told you what I had learned. But they were avaricious. They had gained wealth by legalized crime. They kept their secret. Hildon died."

"Can you explain his death?" demanded Barth.

"I have a theory," said Cranston, quietly. "A sound one."

"Of how a visible killer could have left Hildon's room?"

"Yes."

"How?"

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"By the side window."

"Impossible! It was locked on the inside. The panes were intact."

"Exactly. But suppose" Cranston paused and adopted a tone that was almost speculative "suppose some one had climbed to the porch roof outside the window. While Hildon was at dinner, the intruder could easily have chiseled away the painted putty that held one pane in place.

"Entering, leaving the glass on the roof, that man could have strangled a weakling such as Hildon. Then out through the window. The pane back in position. New putty, of the type that hardens rapidly. Quick-drying paint which –"

"That's the story, commissioner!" exclaimed Joe Cardona. "It's no theory. Mr. Cranston is telling you facts. That's why the telephone bell was wadded."

"The telephone bell?" queried Barth.

"Yes," replied Cranston, with a smile. "So Hildon's body would not be found until morning. It was found sooner; but not too soon."

"You're right," agreed Cardona. "I was too dumb to think of the windowpane. That stuff had time to dry anyway. Say maybe there's a lot of cracked putty on that roof –"

"There should be some," inserted Cranston, dryly. "Probably the murderer spread a cloth to catch most of it. But I advise you to go down there, Cardona. You will probably find traces now that you know where to look."

"CRANSTON," declared Barth, seriously, "this is something else you should have mentioned. Lives were at stake when –"

"Whose lives?"

"Amboy's and Norgan's."

"Not at all. Their wealth was at stake. They promised to deliver it to the Unseen Killer. That was why I waited. Had they delivered it two nights ago, the murderer might easily have been traced."

"You mean they tried to trick him then –"

"Exactly! That was fair, perhaps. But they played false with you as well."

"So they did. That's right. That's why Amboy died. But how –"

"I was interested at Amboy's," interrupted Cranston, quietly. "Detective Sergeant Markham gave us an excellent demonstration of how Peters Amboy might have died. But Markham was deluded by his belief in an invisible murderer.

"He mentioned perhaps you remember it that Amboy could have been killed while facing the wall. But he could not follow that theory because there was not sufficient space between Amboy and the wall.

"Yet Amboy did die while in that very position. The shot, commissioner, came through the wall itself."

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"Through the wall?"

"Yes. By way of the plug socket underneath the light switch. You remember it? The plug with the little hinged lid that dropped so easily into place?"

"I remember it," put in Cardona.

"Good," remarked Cranston. "Suppose, Cardona, that there is a similar switch and plug in the next apartment. Both on the same wiring. Picture a murderer stationed in the next apartment. A tricked murderer one who has found a box containing blank paper one who had planned this death beforehand.

"He comes to the empty apartment. He removes the light switch. He takes out the plug from Amboy's switch on the opposite side of the wall. He pushes a gun muzzle right through, into the darkened room on the other side."

"With the metal cap going up!" cried Cardona.

"Yes," agreed Cranston. "Then Amboy enters. He turns on the light. The murderer sees the glimmer. He fires at a man perfectly located. Back comes the gun. Down drops the metal plug cover –"

"And the killer fixes the whole works while Markham is looking at Amboy's body!" Cardona was excited. "All it took was nerve. Then a get-away from the empty apartment on the other side of the building!"

"Most amazing!" declared Commissioner Barth, sternly. "Yet it does you no credit, Cranston. A man has died to-night Wallace Norgan and you could have saved his life."

"Yes," admitted Cranston, in a solemn tone. "Unfortunately, I was too late in my arrival. I intended to be here, but" a slight smile "other matters detained me."

"Something more important than the saving of a human life?"

"Hardly" keen eyes turned to note Crofton, half asleep in his chair. To The Shadow, Crofton, honest but duped, was more valuable a man than Norgan. "It was a matter of choice, commissioner. However, I saw no danger for Norgan. If he had gone through with what he started, giving up funds that did not rightfully belong to him, he would not have died.

"But, apparently, he tried some trick. He blurted out the fact. That error cost him his life. Of course, had I been here, had I already revealed my theories –"

"Cranston," stormed Barth, "I extend you no thanks for what you have told us. We do not need your aid. Since you did not choose to speak before this, you can end your theorizing. I shall conduct the rest of this investigation."

"Very well." Cranston bowed slightly. "Suit yourself, commissioner. I believe that I have supplied enough information to enable Detective Cardona to furnish the rest. He is a capable man, Cardona. Given a clue, he seldom fails."

With that compliment, Lamont Cranston turned and strolled from the room. His footsteps faded in the direction of the stairs.

WAINWRIGHT BARTH fumed. Then he turned to Joe Cardona.

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"Bring Crofton with us," ordered Barth. "We are going downstairs into the living room."

Cardona roused Crofton. The others followed. In the living room, they found Markham, a police surgeon, and two detectives.

"Markham," said Barth, with sudden impulse, "hurry out and stop Mr. Cranston before he gets away. I want him to come back."

"Very well, sir."

Markham departed. Barth talked with the police surgeon; then ordered the prompt removal of Norgan's body. The corpse was taken out. Markham returned while it was on the way.

"Too late to catch him, commissioner," he said. "The limousine had gone before I got there."

"Too bad," said Barth, sourly. "All right, Markham. Go down to the morgue with the body. Send the other men back to headquarters. Something else, also. Call the Cobalt Club and leave word for Mr. Cranston to communicate with me here."

Markham departed. Barth turned to Warlock and Darring. He made a comment.

"I was hasty," he admitted. "We owe much to Cranston. I see now that he was right. He wanted to wait until the Unseen Killer gained the spoils. That he might see him trapped with the goods."

"This man" he indicated Crofton, half asleep in a chair "is obviously innocent. There is no Unseen Killer as such but there is an unknown killer. He is the man we want. Cranston has proven that fact for us. A man smart enough to simply stay out of sight, without actually being invisible. He is the man we want –"

"And the man we can get," put in Cardona.

"If Cranston can furnish us with further clues," decided Barth.

"We have enough," returned Cardona. "He knew that when he left. He didn't have to tell us any more. He told us that there was no Unseen Killer. Well, if there wasn't, how did –"

Cardona paused as a sharp voice spoke from a few feet away. The detective turned; so did two others: Barth and Warlock. They were facing Marryat Darring. The black-haired man had drawn a pair of revolvers. He held the trio covered.

"How did I fight the Unseen Killer in the hall?" demanded Darring, with a laugh. "That was your question, eh? I'll answer it. I didn't fight him. I faked it. I'm the man you want!"

Darring's face had taken on a leer. His game of crime revealed, the master crook was gloating with the evil that he no longer could conceal.

CHAPTER XXII. WEALTH REGAINED

"So it finally drilled through your head, eh?" questioned Darring, addressing Joe Cardona. "Filtered through the skull of the dumbest dick in the business."

"How long did you practice that act of yours?" retorted Joe. "Wrestling yourself, like you did in the hall?"

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"A long time," acknowledged Darring. "That was part of the game like the murders that I prepared. Trip Burgan was working for me. But I handled the killings myself.

"You're dumb, Cardona. But not so dumb as your boss, Barth. He pulled the prize muff, right here to-night, when he chased Cranston out. I wondered how long I could stall off while Cranston was here. But when he went, I felt easy.

"It will be curtains for the three of you, thanks to you again, commissioner. Sending Markham away with the corpse. Well, when he comes back again, he'll find four more."

Darring paused. He held the others helpless. They were bunched together, three of them, under the muzzles of his guns. The fourth, Crofton, was still handcuffed. He could make no move, though he was wide awake by this time.

"Those three swindlers had plenty of easy money," remarked Darring, referring to Hildon, Amboy, and Norgan. "I saw that as soon as I took up the executive job with Centralized Power. I knew that they were too smart to have left a loophole for the law.

"You, Warlock, were a fool. I knew that when I looked into Professor Lessep's turbine inventions. When you told me about his scheme for devisualization, I knew the man was crazy. But it gave me an idea.

"Through Trip Burgan, I framed things with the professor. Trip did the talking. Lessep did not suspect that I was in it. He went through with the fake demonstration. Crofton vanished, as he told you.

"I wanted an Unseen Killer. One that I could use as a blind. That's why I had Trip Burgan tell a man named Crazy Lagran to turn stool. So Crazy could get Joe Cardona on Crofton's trail. It worked."

Joe Cardona glared angrily. He saw the rest. Crazy had been paid to give the tip-off. It worked two ways. It made Crofton a hunted man, marked as a killer. It also kept Crofton silent in the hide-out that Trip had provided.

"The professor began to weaken," chuckled Darring. "I expected that. He kept calling up Trip. Something had to be done. Trip told him to ditch some of the apparatus. He did. I was with the rest of you. While we were looking for the missing lever, I put the bomb bulb in place.

"The professor did write himself that note at Trip's suggestion. Well, his death added another boost to the stock of the Unseen Killer. It also put Crofton in a worse light than ever.

"Then, I began. I knew all about Hildon's house and Amboy's apartment. I had been both places, talking over matters that pertained to Centralized Power. I mailed them death notes Norgan, too and they failed to answer. So I killed Hildon. As Cranston elucidated."

Another chuckle. Darring was relishing this talk. He feared no interruption. In sneering fashion, he resumed:

"Amboy and Norgan double-crossed me. I found the black box. Loaded with blank paper. So I headed for the empty apartment and finished Amboy. I had no plan for killing Norgan. I knew he wouldn't dare to welch.

"But I gave him an extra day to think it over. Cardona pulled something in the interim. The dragnet. That meant bumping Crazy Lagran. Chuck Galla did the job. Neat enough to make Cardona think he had bumped into the Unseen Killer."

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Darring paused a moment; then he glared venomously at Commissioner Barth who was blinking through his spectacles.

"You fool!" gloated Darring. "Cranston was right. Norgan should have been safe here to-night. But he tried some funny idea of his own – thinking that Warlock was behind the Unseen Killer's game.

"This house, that Warlock bought so cheaply, I fixed it and arranged its sale to Warlock. That's how he got the bargain. Why? So I could make it fit the Unseen Killer's game. Warlock was a good goat. I knew that if any one began to wise up like Norgan he would blame Warlock because this was Warlock's house. Look, you fools!"

BACKING to the wall, Darring pressed the back of his hand against a spot near the rear doorway. A panel opened with a click.

Three men stared. They were looking into the interior of Warlock's wall safe. There, before their gaze, were the securities that Norgan had placed in the wall of Warlock's study.

"A dumb-waiter once," laughed Darring. "It made a perfect elevator. The upstairs safe has a solid front. But in back, the interior slides up and down.

When this box is on the ground floor, another container is on the second.

"When this goes up, the other rides clear to the third floor. When they put the black box in here, I came downstairs and pressed the molding. One safe lining slid down; the other lowered into its place.

"The same thing happened to-night. But Norgan must have suspected something. That's why he raised the fuss. Come here, Warlock" Darring motioned with a gun "and take a look inside. Don't touch those securities. Just tell me if you see anything else."

Warlock obeyed. Advancing, he peered into the opening. He nodded, falteringly, then spoke in a strained, quavering voice.

"I see a gummed label," he informed. "It is attached to the side of this interior –"

"So that was Norgan's trick!" snorted Darring. "Thought he ought to mark the inside of the safe. He didn't find the sticker after the swag was gone. He came hustling down to tell the police commissioner."

With a wag of one gun, Darring forced Warlock back to where Barth and Cardona were standing.

"I came here after the black box," he chuckled, "that night they left it in the wall safe. Started for my hotel with it, in a cab. I opened the box on the way and found it empty. That's why I went to kill Amboy. But to-night, the swag is here. I knew it would be; that's why I finished Norgan, when he began to talk smart. Well, you know now that there's no Unseen Killer. That's why I'm going to kill the lot of you, before you –"

He stopped. His eye had caught motion by the door. Turning his head, Marryat Darring stared squarely into a pair of burning eyes. There, in the doorway, stood the figure of The Shadow.

THE black-cloaked intruder had given no warning laugh. Only Darring had detected his arrival. Barth, Warlock, and Cardona were staring at Darring. Covered by the killer's guns, they did not dare to move.

From his chair, Miles Crofton spied the figure at the door. He smiled weakly. The Shadow had made good his

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promise.

Crofton, alone, was a witness of the deeds that followed. He saw the sweeping move that Marryat Darring made. He observed The Shadow's response.

Darring wheeled. Instinctively, he sidestepped, as he swung both guns toward the door. At the same instant, The Shadow shifted across the doorway. Crofton caught a glimpse of automatic muzzles.

A terrific roar filled the room as revolvers barked and automatics thundered. Tongued flame quivered from metal muzzles; pungent smoke wreathed upward from the weapons. Four shots seemed to come as one. Crofton stared.

No other shots were fired. Marryat Darring, his face venomous, stood like a statue. The Shadow, like a frozen silhouette, was rigid in the hallway. Then came the aftermath. Darring sagged.

The crook's arms fell. Revolvers clattered to the floor. The self-confessed killer sprawled forward. His rugged frame spread out upon the floor. Marryat Darring fell dead on the very spot where Wallace Norgan's corpse had lain but a little while before.

A strange laugh throbbed through the room. Like a whisper from a tomb, it brought a chilling awe with its terrible mockery. Paneled walls flung back sibilant echoes. Miles Crofton saw The Shadow swing away. He caught the flash of crimson the lining of The Shadow's black-surfaced cloak.

Commissioner Barth sprang forward. He turned toward the hall. He saw no one. The Shadow had gone. Only the last vestige of a hissing echo seemed present in the room. Barth hastened toward the hall. Again, he was too late.

Joe Cardona was bending over Darring's body. He saw that the master crook was dead. Triumphant until the very last, he had met the death that he deserved. The man who had perpetrated the hoax of the Unseen Killer had gone, had paid the price of crime.

WHEN Lamont Cranston arrived at Warlock's house, a half hour later, he was greeted with a warm handshake by Commissioner Wainwright Barth. The official did not suspect the dual role that his friend had played. He knew only that Cranston had paved the way to the exposure of Darring's crimes.

Barth knew that some one Crofton said The Shadow had fired those shots from the hall. Whoever the deliverer, whatever his purpose, Barth was satisfied. Like Cranston, he held no grief for the three who had died: Hildon, Amboy, and Norgan.

Findlay Warlock had spread out the securities found in the lowered section of the safe. Wallace Norgan, fearing the Unseen Killer, had included all the spoils gained by himself and his associates.

Letters, agreements, options, together with cash and securities furnished proof of the game that the three had played. Shares of stock in companies that held riparian rights in Centralized Power territory were proof that the swindlers had planned their game long ahead.

Warlock's company could gain prompt settlement through this evidence. With funds returned; with stocks of other companies obtainable, the Centralized Power Corporation could reorganize to the benefit of the men who had honestly invested in its future.

Miles Crofton stood exonerated from all charges. Darring's statements, heard by Barth and Cardona, cleared

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him even of complicity in Melrose Lessep's hoax; for Crofton had been forced into the deal against his will.

To a man, those who had died had been engaged in illegal undertakings. But the greatest crook of the lot was the one who had led others to their destruction. Marryat Darring, truly the Unseen Killer, even though he had gained no fabled invisibility.

Challenger of the law, vulture who preyed on others of his kind, fiend who had even plotted the destruction of those who had done his bidding, Marryat Darring had met one master whose power he could not break. The Unseen Killer had failed before the might of The Shadow.

THE END