

THE VEILED PROPHET

Maxwell Grant

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THE VEILED PROPHET

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CHAPTER I. MAN ABOUT CRIME

RALPH JORCOTT settled himself in a corner of the half-filled subway car and casually began to read an evening newspaper. The headlines pleased him; they referred to crime.

Not merely one crime, but a dozen; all belonging to a mysterious wave that had swept New York. Crimes that were particularly baffling, because the police were totally unable to trace the real perpetrators.

Jewel thefts, robberies of art treasures, stock swindles, and other specialties had been executed in clockwork fashion. Every time the police centered on one trail, new crime occurred elsewhere. Obviously, different hands were at work, for no crime produced a direct link to any other.

To the credit of the police, they had come uncommonly close to stopping some of the crimes. But, in every instance, the law had managed to capture only a few small-fry hoodlums, who had been hired for cover-up work.

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Such prisoners could not tell who the important crooks were. Moreover, the time wasted in capturing the small fry had allowed the real criminals to escape.

The situation made Ralph Jorcott smile.

Though Jorcott looked like anything but a crook, he could have told why crime was riding high. Not that he had taken any part in recent criminal activities; in fact, Jorcott could not have identified any of the perpetrators.

It simply happened that Ralph Jorcott, dapper and rather handsome, intended to make his debut as a criminal this very evening. Smooth of manner, attired in a faultless Tuxedo, Jorcott looked like a man about town. Actually, he was a man about crime.

The subway local jolted to a stop at Jorcott's station. Leaving the train, the young man drew a key from his vest pocket, used it to unlock a metal locker provided for packages, one of many in a corner of the station platform. The package that Jorcott found was squarish and not large, but he handled it very carefully.

Coming up to the street, Jorcott looked for a cab. When one came cruising in his direction, he hailed it. In the cab, with the package resting on the seat beside him, Jorcott looked from the window. He saw a car move away across the street.

Perhaps it was his imagination, but Jorcott would have sworn that he saw a face peer toward him from the rear of the departing car. A face that had no features; simply a blank, hidden by a gauze that formed a silver veil!

His brief glimpse of the veiled observer did not perturb him; on the contrary, it gave him encouragement for his coming enterprise. The dapper man was chuckling as his cab drove westward.

After a dozen blocks, Jorcott alighted. Dismissing the taxi, he reversed his direction on foot, the square box tucked carefully beneath his arm.

Large mansions loomed in the darkness beyond a small park. They were pretentious, old-fashioned buildings, gloomy relics that still served as residences for the wealthy, for this area was secluded and therefore highly prized.

Picking the house he wanted, Jorcott strolled from the shelter of the trees, crossed the street, and entered a narrow passage that led him to a side door. He was drawing another key from his pocket; when he tried it in the lock, the door opened.

THE house was deserted. Massive pieces of furniture, covered with large sheets, looked like crouching ghosts huddled in their shrouds. But Jorcott wasn't disturbed as he picked his way to the front hall. He was handling a flashlight cautiously, and taking care not to drop the box that he carried under his arm.

Inside the big front door, Jorcott saw an envelope lying on the floor. It was one that had been dropped through the mail chute; sight of it brought a satisfied intake of Jorcott's breath. Placing the box carefully on the floor, the man of crime opened the envelope.

It contained a sheet with typewritten instructions, the very data that Jorcott expected; but what pleased him most was the odd symbol that served as a signature. It was shaped like a double crescent. The note read:

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First room on left at top of stairs. Second panel to right of window. Up, right, up, left down, up, left. Combination alternating left and right: 3 – 6 – 1 – 1 – 9.

The note tucked in his pocket, the box again beneath his arm, Jorcott moved toward the stairs. He felt a momentary chill, as though a whispering breeze had filtered through the house; then, with a short, gritted laugh, he continued on his way.

Reaching the room mentioned, Jorcott placed the square box on a table. Referring to the note, he found the panel mentioned; it was one of many such oblongs in the oak-walled room. Using a handkerchief to avoid fingerprints, Jorcott pressed the panel upward. It gave. He followed directions further.

The thing that struck Jorcott as particularly clever was the point where the panel was pressed down, then up. It seemed like a retraced move, but it was not. As the panel came down, Jorcott felt it move inward a fraction of an inch. Pushed up, it found a new niche, important to the process.

As he slid the panel to the left, a spring clicked. The oblong swung open on hidden hinges, and Jorcott saw that its inner side was faced with metal. More important, however, was the glister that came from a cavity within the wall. There, Jorcott saw the chromium-plated dial of a safe.

Still using the handkerchief, the gentleman crook used the combination given in the note. The safe door swung open, showing a goodly store of contents, in currency and bonds. Jorcott's hand moved forward eagerly in the light. Then he restrained himself.

Turning to a fireplace across the room, he crumpled the note with the double crescent signature and set a match to it. While the paper blazed he hovered in front of the fireplace, to shield the light.

He could hear the paper crackle as it burned, each spurt of flame was accompanied by a tiny puff. Odd sounds, those, ordinarily unnoticeable when paper burned. But the fireplace magnified them, disturbing the silence of the paneled room.

For the first time, Jorcott felt nervous. He fancied that he heard other sounds – a creaking from the stairway, a creeping in the darkness. When the paper had turned to ashes, he strained to listen.

The sounds must have been his imagination. It was magnified, like the noise of the burning paper. Stooping, Jorcott flicked the ashes with his handkerchief, destroying all traces of the typewriting and the crescent symbol.

Back at the table near the safe, the crook unwrapped the square package. It contained a wooden box, with a switch. Taking bonds and currency from the safe, Jorcott appraised them roughly as he wrapped them in the paper. He estimated the haul at more than sixty thousand dollars.

Jorcott wasn't surprised that such a sizable sum had been left in a closed house.

The money, like the house, belonged to Handley Farnum, a millionaire. Hidden in a modern safe behind a secret panel backed by steel, the funds should have been doubly secure. So they would have been against ordinary robbery. But this crime, as Jorcott could testify, was anything but ordinary.

It would be another mystery for the police when Jorcott was through with it.

HAVING bundled the cash, Jorcott left it on the table and picked up the wooden box. He pressed the switch; a mechanism began to tick.

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Placing the box in the safe, Jorcott used the ash-smudged handkerchief to close the door and twirl the combination. Shutting the camouflaged panel, he gave it a push to the right to hold it in place.

Jorcott chuckled.

He had thirty minutes for departure, far more time than he actually needed. After that, there would be a blast; a big one, loud enough to bring, the police.

They would find a jagged hole in the wall, the remnants of Farnum's safe and the panel that hid it. They would think that some crook had blown the safe to get the swag; as a result, there would be a man hunt in this vicinity.

But within fifteen minutes – a mere half of the time allotted him – Ralph Jorcott would be in his favorite taproom, only a dozen blocks from here. He would be ordering a drink, chatting with friends; in brief, he would be establishing a perfect alibi.

Jorcott glanced toward the window. A half block away he could see the smudgy bulk of a warehouse. That was where the police would be, on the watch for tonight's crime.

These crimes, maneuvered by the supercrook who used the signature of the double crescent, were particularly clever. Arrangements were always made for the police to be near at hand, but never in the right place.

As he gazed from the window, Jorcott chuckled again, this time with the thought that he had added his link to a chain which others had begun. It would be another case of perfect crime.

Jorcott was looking in the wrong direction.

Light from the window spread a hazy glow upon the table where Jorcott had laid the newly wrapped package. The loosely packed bundle now contained sixty-thousand dollars, instead of a wooden box loaded with a time bomb. It represented Jorcott's only reason for a criminal visit to the Farnum mansion.

The package was at Jorcott's elbow. He regarded it as safe as if it had been in his own hands. All that he had to do was turn about and pick it up. But other hands were on the move, while Jorcott's lingered.

They crept from gloom, those black-gloved hands, as if they were detached things that had materialized within the enshrouding darkness. Unseen, unheard, their owner had crept into this room while Jorcott was at work. He was plucking crime's spoils from the overconfident crook.

The hands grasped the package, lifted it and gave a deft backward toss that landed the bundle in the bend of a waiting elbow. There was a swish in the darkness, as the figure wheeled away. Gloved hands were again on the move, as hidden lips whispered a sibilant laugh.

Jorcott whipped about from the window, saw that the package was gone. With a stifled snarl, the crook reached for a revolver; his other hand, already holding a flashlight, pressed the switch. At the same instant, Jorcott was greeted by a glare from another electric torch.

What he saw stiffened him. The race with the flashlights was a draw, but Jorcott had been beaten when it came to the matter of a gun. He was staring into the muzzle of a weapon already drawn – a .45 automatic that looked as formidable as a howitzer.

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The flashlight clattered from Jorcott's frozen fingers. He hadn't time to find his gun. Both his hands came up to shoulder level as he stared into the darkness.

For Jorcott had seen more than the looming gun muzzle. Behind the .45 was a figure cloaked in black, with features hidden by the brim of a slouch hat except for two burning eyes that carried a bore as sharp as a bullet's.

A crook at heart, Ralph Jorcott knew the identity of his superfoe. He had been trapped, while engaged in lawless enterprise, by a fighter whose very presence spelled death to crime.

The Shadow!

CHAPTER II. THE BLASTED TRAIL

LONG minutes had passed – minutes that were torture to Ralph Jorcott. The man was no longer a gentleman of crime; he was a wilted figure, backed against the very wall where he had opened a secret panel.

The Shadow had moved across the room. He was standing near the door; reached by the flickery light, his figure was vaguely visible. Jorcott could see the gun muzzle, constantly directed toward him. Calmly waiting, The Shadow was wearing the crook down.

No system could have been better. Words were unnecessary. The Shadow had divined Jorcott's game, and had turned it to his own advantage. He knew that when Jorcott began to talk, the crook would speak rapidly and tell plenty.

With twenty minutes gone, Jorcott's chance for an alibi was ended. Even then, he might have retained his bravado but for another element. In the silence of that room, Jorcott fancied that he could hear a steady ticking from the infernal machine that he had buried in the wall safe behind him.

To The Shadow, the time element was unimportant. He was leaving all worry to Jorcott. Every time the criminal shifted restlessly, The Shadow put him back in place with a gesture of the automatic. The Shadow's own position was a distant one; only Jorcott was in danger, and the crook knew it.

The dim light showed beads of sweat glistening on Jorcott's forehead. Drops began to streak his face, running down toward the Tuxedo collar that was already wilted. At last, his nerves snapped. He licked his parched lips, began to stammer frantic words.

"It's not my fault... not my fault!" Jorcott repeated the statement ardently. "I'd been in other rackets: fake oil stocks, things like that, a long while ago. I thought they'd been forgotten!"

Breaking off, Jorcott hoped for a response from The Shadow. He fancied that he heard a whispered laugh; nothing more. Time was getting shorter. Jorcott hurried his plea.

"Then I got a letter," he declared. "Blackmail, that's what it was! Telling me my past would be exposed unless I followed orders. It wasn't money that the blackmailer wanted. He said that I'd have to go in for crime."

This time, Jorcott did hear a laugh, one that carried a world of significance. It meant that a master crook, termed a blackmailer, had chosen an excellent tool in Jorcott. The fellow's face had lost its gloss; it showed a ratlike expression in the flickering light.

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"You're wise to the game," argued Jorcott. "You're The Shadow, the one person who could see through it. The brain has been working on a lot of fellows like me, making us each stage a crime and hand over the dough to him. Only –"

Jorcott hesitated. The Shadow spoke for the first time. His sibilant words had an accusing ring, as though voicing the very thoughts in the crook's mind.

"Only you supposed that crime would produce reward," declared The Shadow. "A crook by choice, you preferred to take the course offered you rather than give facts to the police."

There was a pause, then The Shadow's tone again.

"The brain you mention," stated The Shadow, "is unquestionably a man who has delved into many pasts. You were surprised, Jorcott, when you learned that he knew yours. You did not guess that my own records contained similar facts.

"I have been checking on careers like yours. This meeting is not the result of chance, but of design. Your path happens to be the first that I have crossed in this campaign. I trust that it shall be the last."

A FLOOD of recollections swept Jorcott's mind. He remembered the taxicab that had been outside the subway station, realized that The Shadow must have posted it there. He recalled the creeping sounds that had accompanied the faint crackle of the burning letter, knew that they must have announced the advent of The Shadow.

All of Jorcott's props were falling out from under him. It wasn't a case of bluffing The Shadow. The crook was reduced to the lone hope of offering some shred of information. Caught in crime, he could expect no mercy unless he confessed all that he knew.

The Shadow inserted prompting words:

"The letter –"

Jorcott's brain was thrumming. The Shadow had seen him burn the all-important note, the one that bore the signature of the double crescent! In mentioning an earlier note, Jorcott had revealed only a preliminary fact. He had to tell more.

"I don't know who sent it," pleaded Jorcott. "It told me how to find the safe; how to open it. I had to go through with it, because I was threatened if I didn't. But I don't know who sent it –"

The crook was holding out. He didn't want to mention the thing that really counted, the matter of the symbol that served as a signature. A fleeting recollection was responsible for Jorcott's hesitation.

He recalled that glimpse of a face veiled by silver gauze. Wilted though he was, Jorcott still had crooked instincts. He was banking on the chance that a master criminal might somehow help him.

The Shadow's tone jarred Jorcott into reality:

"Time is very short –"

It was more than a guess. The Shadow had analyzed Jorcott's worry correctly. Time was short. Only a few minutes of the precious half hour remained. His back against a wall that threatened doom, the crook could

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hear the imaginary ticking like the beat of drums.

"I'll tell everything!" gasped Jorcott. "Everything that I know! The notes were signed by –"

He interrupted himself with a gulp. It should have been a hopeless one, but it wasn't. In the sound, The Shadow detected a hidden reason. His keen sense of hearing spliced itself, to detect other noises than the frantic loudness of Jorcott's voice. The Shadow became a blur of blackness as he wheeled in the doorway.

Two figures lunged from the stairs. They came with guns, swinging them like bludgeons. The arrivals were outside crooks, members of a cover-up squad posted to make sure of Jorcott's departure. Wondering why they hadn't seen him, they had entered the house to look for him.

Along with Jorcott, they had found The Shadow!

They were too late, those thugs. Before they could complete their drive, The Shadow was between them. He was in the darkness of the hallway, wielding guns of his own, smashing off their stokes. Jorcott was lunging forward from the wall, hoping to add his weight to the struggle.

Like his would-be rescuers, Jorcott miscalculated The Shadow's brain-work.

Crooks didn't come in slugging, instead of shooting, unless they preferred silence. Recognizing their choice. The Shadow offset it. As he slashed with his guns, he pressed the triggers. Tongues of flame ripped through the hallway. The bursts of the automatics were magnified, becoming loud roars.

The thugs started shooting as they dived, but their action was unwise. Chance for stealth ended, they thought that they were taking the proper method. They were wrong.

Whirling into darkness, The Shadow was no target: but they proved easy prey for the quick-shooting fighter. Picking them by their gun spurts, The Shadow withered them with bullets. Howls greeted Jorcott as he neared the hall.

Frantically, Jorcott turned and dived in the direction of the window, hoping to crash through and take a headlong plunge to the ground below. He was a quick thinker, Jorcott; in the middle of his dash, he realized that he was putting himself in sight against the background of the window.

Jorcott veered to the wall, stopped to grab up the table near the panel that hid the wall safe. He made a quick side step into the darkness.

Blindly, but with ardor, Jorcott flung the table, the hallway door his target. He saw the scaling missile cross the path of flickering light toward the blocky darkness beyond. The Shadow must have spied it coming just as it completed its long arc, for Jorcott heard shots rip out, accompanied by a splintering of the table.

Instinctively, The Shadow was firing at the flying piece of furniture, unable to tell, in that brief glimpse, whether or not Jorcott was driving with it. The cloaked fighter wanted to clip the gentleman crook, to capture him alive and make him finish his statements.

But Jorcott hadn't accompanied the table. He had swung back toward the paneled wall. Hearing the clatter of shattering woodwork, the crook was sure that he had delayed The Shadow temporarily. Jorcott turned, to spring toward the window.

Unfortunately, he had delayed himself, in a permanent fashion.

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The time limit was ended. As Jorcott's shoulder brushed past the secret panel, the whole wall burst with one devastating blast. The ticking machine that Jorcott had planted was loaded with TNT.

FLAYED by chunks of metal that fanned out like shrapnel, Jorcott was hoisted bodily from the floor. A topsy-turvy figure in a spreading sunburst of engulfing flame, he was hurled across the room, crashing against the brick hearth of the fireplace.

The force of the concussion staggered The Shadow, even though he was outside the shattered room. Reeling in the hallway, he was floored beside the thugs that he had dropped with bullets.

Slow in coming to his feet, the black cloaked fighter fancied that he felt the house shudder, even when the effect of the explosion had passed.

Gushing flame had ignited chunks of broken panels. Like scattered kindling, the bits of wood were setting rugs and chair cushions ablaze. Groggily, The Shadow guided himself by the light and entered the smoke-filled room. He found Jorcott lying by the fireplace, a crumpled, twisted shape.

Jorcott's chance to talk was gone. His skull was as broken as his limbs and body. Lips, contorted into a grotesque smile, were forever frozen. Hope of escape had given Jorcott that grin; doom had struck so suddenly that the crook had lacked time to lose it.

The death of Ralph Jorcott ended The Shadow's present trail. It was blasted, that trail, like the criminal who lay on the floor. The explosion, intended to cover up Jorcott's part in crime had done even more. Crime's blast had postponed The Shadow's chance of uncovering a supercrook.

Only a minute before, Jorcott's brain kind teemed with recollections of a master criminal whose features were obscured by silver gauze. Jorcott could have told The Shadow certain facts regarding that overlord of crime, the strange, veiled prophet who knew the details of future evil, because such deeds were of his own design.

Though Jorcott's information would have been incomplete, it was the sort The Shadow needed. Any leads to crime's master brain could have proven valuable. One point had been of particular importance: namely, Jorcott's delivery of the stolen funds. With the crook captured, alone, with the swag, The Shadow could have forced the trail to its proper conclusion.

As matters stood, The Shadow was back almost at his starting point. He had stopped crime, disposed of thugs, and gleaned a few slim facts. But those were small results compared to The Shadow's actual aim – a meeting with the veiled master, whose baffling ways of crime had so far defied all detection!

CHAPTER III. OUT OF DARKNESS

THE shrill notes of police whistles brought The Shadow to motion. He expected such sounds, they were in keeping with the situation. Unless police had been in the offing, the thugs in the hallway would not have been so anxious for a silent struggle.

However, the whistles were very close; too close to suit The Shadow, and too numerous. The gunfire must have brought the police from wherever they were, at least two minutes before the explosion occurred.

One penetrating whistle echoed through the house, indicating that its owner had entered the side door, which Jorcott had left unlocked. Reaching the hallway, The Shadow heard clumping sounds below, knew that the law's invasion was at hand.

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By the dying light of a burning rug, The Shadow found the bundle containing Farnum's funds. He had dropped it while battling the pair of thugs.

There were snarls from the stairway, whither the crooks had dragged themselves. Wounded, their guns lost in the fray, the pair could do no more than vent spite upon the black-cloaked conqueror who had bested them.

The police were on the stairs. Rather than waste time in explanation, The Shadow chose an exit. Crossing the paneled room, he extinguished the burning rug by smothering it with another that had not caught fire. The deed ended all flames; the rest had burned out rapidly.

Reaching the window, The Shadow took the route that Jorcott had wanted to use. Raising the window, he swung across the sill, caught the sash and brought it downward as he dropped. He landed in agile fashion in a courtyard.

With The Shadow tumbled the bundle of swag. Stooping, he reclaimed it. He had a good reason for carrying along the spoils of thwarted crime.

He wanted the police to learn the real set-up; namely, that the blast had been arranged as a cover-up of a crime already committed. Should the stolen wealth be found on the scene of crime, the law might suppose that it had been grabbed following the explosion. Wounded thugs would probably testify that they had rifled the shattered safe, and then met The Shadow; for they were part of the cover-up game.

Sooner or later, the package would reach the police; but, when it did, The Shadow intended to leave no doubt that it had been taken before the blast. When The Shadow met with planted evidence, it was always his policy to nullify it.

His task on this occasion was to prove more difficult than he anticipated. He met with opposition the moment that he started to pick his way from the courtyard.

Guarded though it was, the tiny beam of The Shadow's flashlight was spotted from an alleyway. Instantly, the glare of a much larger light sliced in his direction. The Shadow was spotted against a silvery circle that formed a full moon on the wall behind him.

Instinctively, he dived forward, below the level of the glare. Guns roared, their bullets smacking the wall that the cloaked fighter had left. The quickness of the fire, plus the raucous shouts accompanying the shots, told that the attackers were crooks who had recognized their archfoe.

The Shadow had run into the main cover-up crew, posted to draw the police along a false trail!

TWO factors saved The Shadow. These crooks were capable trigger men, and they had gained the edge. But they did not reckon with The Shadow's speed on the offense, nor the unique defensive measure that it introduced.

Whipping out an automatic as he dived, The Shadow took the fall on one shoulder, jounced upward on his elbow as he struck. His gun shoved ahead of him with a trip-hammer action, he was actually shooting as he landed.

His other arm thrust the square-shaped bundle in front of him. Though fair-sized, the package did not offer complete protection, but it served well.

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Dousing the light the instant The Shadow opened fire, crooks sped their own shots low, in front of their lone target. They were hoping to clip The Shadow with ricocheting shots. Any bullet, bounding from the cement, could prove deadly if it landed home.

Amid the roar of guns, The Shadow could hear the zing of bullets; but mobsters were doing more than listen to The Shadow's fire. They were taking leaden slugs from the fast-sputtering muzzle of the cloaked fighter's automatic. Their flashlights were gone, but The Shadow took spouting guns as his targets and scored direct hits on their users.

Then came a break in The Shadow's favor, one that ended the stubborn barrage that threatened him. A window was smashed out from a floor above, and police began to fire at the men in the alley. The officers were shooting from the paneled room in the Farnum mansion.

Who the crooks were, why they were shooting, did not concern the police. They knew simply that the men outside were enemies, and treated them as such.

With the crooks in flight, The Shadow rolled to his feet, gathered up his package and ducked to a sheltered edge of the alley, as the police sprayed flashlights toward the spot where he had been.

Chunks of lead thumped the cement. They were bullets, three of them, falling from the bundle that The Shadow carried. The slugs were misshapen from their contact with the paving; all had been ricochet shots, stopped when they drove into the thick bundle of loot.

Any one of those bullets, had it reached The Shadow, would have produced the effect of a dum-dum, spreading mushroom fashion when it hit. The Shadow's stratagem had proven its worth.

More battle was to come. As he hurried through the alley, seeking to overtake the fleeing crooks, The Shadow heard the whining sirens of approaching police cars. He ducked away from glaring headlights, only to be spotted by scattered crooks.

They opened a wild fire and The Shadow returned it, this time on the move. He was weaving through a side alley, blasting with a fresh gun, keeping the bundle pressed against his chest.

Here again was danger from ricochets, for crooks were firing at angles into a brick-walled alley. Direct shots, however, were beyond their ability, for The Shadow was jabbing bullets far too close for their comfort. Like rats, the crooks took to whatever holes or passages that they could find.

Then came the bad break that nearly ruined The Shadow's triumph. Backed into the side alley, he met a wall too high for him to reach the top. The blackness was complete; while probing for an exit from the cul-de-sac, The Shadow struck against a large ash can. It clattered.

There were shouts from the mouth of the blind alley; not from the scattered crooks, but from arriving police. Enough shots had come in their direction to make them think that all had been directed toward them. They were taking it for granted that anyone among these alleyways was an enemy of a murderous sort. With deadly battle under way, the only policy was to shoot first and investigate afterward.

Locating the ash can by its rattle, one officer fired, shouting for others to do the same. Five seconds later, four guns were combing the blind alley with low shots, calculated to bring quick results. The bluecoats heard the ash can topple with a heavy clatter, come rolling toward them. Smoking guns still aimed, they illuminated the alley with their flashlights.

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All that they saw was the bullet-dented ash can rolling lazily toward them from a blank, brick wall. It didn't occur to them that their shots could hardly have started so large an object in motion; that the progress of the ash can had been initiated by a kicking foot that overturned it.

THEIR flashlights roved upward, too late to see a cloaked figure rolling across the top of the ten-foot wall.

Using the high ash can as a stepping-stone, The Shadow had not only hoisted himself above the level of the low barrage; he had also found a quick way of crossing the wall that formed his only obstacle.

Guns were still talking as spreading police encountered fleeing crooks, who offered fight whenever they were cornered. The battle was progressing all about the warehouse half a block from the Farnum mansion. Meanwhile The Shadow, still clutching the shielding bundle of swag, was literally weaving a course between the warring factions.

Pot shots in the dark were useless. Increasing in numbers, the police had the diminishing crew of crooks on the run. The thing to do was to block off the flight of the routed thugs. Such a process would serve a double purpose, as The Shadow's whispered laugh foretold, when he reached a silent street away from the area of battle.

A large limousine was parked there, with a very nervous chauffeur sitting behind the wheel. Entering from the other side of the car, The Shadow closed the door silently. Dumping the bundle on the seat, he picked up a speaking tube.

The Shadow's tone was quite different from the sinister whisper that Jorcott had heard. He spoke to the chauffeur in a casual, leisurely tone:

"Drive around the block, Stanley. We seem to have run into trouble. It would be best to avoid anything unpleasant, unless —"

Stanley was starting the car, when he heard the word "unless." He didn't like it at the finish of the statement. He had heard his employer, Lamont Cranston, speak that way before. There were certain types of trouble that Mr. Cranston seemed to like, if he ran into them.

Warily piloting the limousine around the corner, Stanley wondered why it was that Mr. Cranston so often attracted trouble. If Stanley owned a few million dollars, like his employer, he would prefer to stay at home, or in the quiet preserves of the sumptuous Cobalt Club, where Cranston was a member.

But it wasn't that way with Cranston. He liked to go to odd places; to leave the car and take long strolls in dangerous neighborhoods. Yes, Cranston had a penchant for picking trouble. Even the simple order to drive around the block worried Stanley. It might mean more trouble.

In fact, it did.

As the big car swung another corner, the chauffeur saw three thuggish-looking men come spilling from the low roof of a garage. Bounding like rubber balls, they jumped into a coupe that was parked close at hand.

Stanley was veering to the other side of the street, applying the limousine's brakes, when he heard Cranston's voice through the speaking tube.

"Those men are desperadoes," announced Cranston, calmly. "We must halt them, Stanley. Drive in front of them and force them to the curb."

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Whatever his shortcomings, Stanley was an excellent chauffeur. Moreover, he had learned from experience that Cranston meant orders when he gave them.

Pressing the accelerator, Stanley spurted the limousine past the starting coupe. He was veering toward the curb, when he heard the cool order through the speaking tube:

"Cut in closer, Stanley. Much closer –"

Grimly, Stanley yanked the steering wheel with all his strength, before Cranston's order was completed. If his boss wanted a first-class crack-up, Stanley could supply it. He was in a mood to go the limit, rather than receive criticism later.

The cars locked. Stanley heard the crash of a big fender, the shatter of a lamp, the smash of a door, representing about eight hundred dollars in damage to the expensive limousine. But the coupe, much lighter and of a far cheaper make, went half to pieces as it collided with the limousine.

LIKE a big dog punishing a wayward pup, the limousine scooped the coupe across the curb and knocked it toward a building wall. In the midst of the terrific clatter, Stanley heard shouts, saw angry, ugly faces in the other car. Rolling about in their tossed coupe, the thugs were poking runs in sight.

Dropping low behind the wheel, Stanley gave added impetus to the brake pedal. The limousine's jolt was broken as it hit the wall, but the coupe rocketed ahead and struck with a crash that telescoped it. Stanley heard a lot of explosive sounds that he took for bursting tires. Some of them were gunshots.

The mobbies weren't aiming at Stanley. They were trying to clip a cloaked passenger in the rear of the limousine. But they didn't have a chance to bag The Shadow, not while the dashboard of their car was coming into their laps, and their heads were smashing up against the turret top of the coupe.

Only one gun was properly aimed: The Shadow's. He did not have to fire it. He saw his opponents fly about and settle in a packed heap on the floor of their sagging car, compressed in a mass of wreckage.

Opening the door of the limousine, The Shadow picked up the package of stolen funds from the seat beside him. He tossed it through the diamond-shaped opening that had once been a square window in the side of the coupe.

With a deft move, he whipped off cloak and hat, rolled guns inside them, and stowed the lot in a sliding drawer that he pulled from beneath the limousine's rear-seat.

Police cars were speeding up. Sliding the door shut, The Shadow sprawled himself in the rear of the limousine, his head on the floor against the battered door, his feet on the seat.

As the officers arrived, Stanley popped out from behind the wheel and began to babble about Mr. Cranston.

The chauffeur's worry was sincere. Opening the rear door of the limousine, the police found Stanley's employer, apparently stunned. They saw a hawkish face, its features masklike and very pale. They were trying to revive the accident victim, when other officers arrived and looked into the smashed coupe.

A swarthy, stockily built man soon was in the picture. He was Inspector Joe Cardona, ace of the Manhattan force. He stopped at the coupe first, ripped open a bundle that a policeman handed him.

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Rounding the rear of the limousine, Cardona found Cranston seated on the car step, his head tilted back against a fender. Cranston's collar was open; he still looked groggy. Cardona recognized him at once, for Cranston was a friend of the police commissioner.

"Good work, Mr. Cranston," complimented Cardona. "Too bad you had to wreck your car to stop those crooks."

"They were getting away, inspector –"

"Yes," interposed Cardona, grimly. "Getting away with plenty! All this dough, that they'd snatched from Farnum's house before we got there!"

Cardona stepped away to take care of other duties. Had he remained, the ace inspector might have heard the whispered laugh of The Shadow, uttered by the lips of Lamont Cranston!

CHAPTER IV. MATTERS OF COINCIDENCE

RALPH WESTON, police commissioner, was a brusque, self-important individual whose ways were frequently an enigma, even to himself. After office hours, the commissioner spent much of his time at the exclusive Cobalt Club, where he often chatted on matters of crime with his friend Lamont Cranston.

Talk of crime usually seemed to bore Cranston, which was why Weston harped on the subject so much. For the commissioner was always at his best when he was boring someone, although he didn't realize the fact. It was just one of those things that even his best friends couldn't tell him about.

Of late, Commissioner Weston had avoided discussion of crime. He seemed to be irked because of the recent crime wave. But in back of Weston's mood, The Shadow had recognized something deeper. Something that no amount of subtle persuasion had managed to draw out. The Shadow was sure that the commissioner held some valuable key to the crime wave, but was fumbling all opportunity to use it.

Unfortunately, as Cranston, The Shadow could not put questions point-blank. If he did, he knew that Weston would become a clam. Best results were always obtained by appearing disinterested in what the commissioner had to say. It was a rule that offered no exception.

On this night, however, The Shadow had definitely cracked the ice. As Cranston, he had put himself into the foreground, by actually participating in a stroke against crime. It was only logical that he should sit in on the conference which followed, between Commissioner Weston and Inspector Cardona.

The three were in the grillroom of the Cobalt Club, where Weston was listening intently to Cardona's report of the Farnum robbery. The report completed, Weston turned to The Shadow, with the brisk comment:

"Quite a coincidence, Cranston, that you should have been driving by at the very time the trouble occurred."

"Coincidences do happen," was Cranston's even-toned reply. "In fact, I can think of one that was even more remarkable."

"What, for instance?"

"The fact that Inspector Cardona was on hand," returned The Shadow, in the same calm tone. "His report shows that he was near Farnum's house, with a squad, when the robbery began."

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Momentarily, Commissioner Weston looked uneasy. Then a broad smile spread itself beneath his short-clipped, military mustache.

"In view of your services, Cranston," confided Weston, "I feel that we can take you into full confidence. It was not just chance that placed Cardona there tonight."

For once, an expression of surprise seemed to register itself on the ordinarily immobile features of Cranston.

"This is not the only time we have been close to crime," continued Weston. "But it is the first occasion on which we have found a real perpetrator, such as Ralph Jorcott. A good friend has been giving us valuable information in advance."

"A good friend?"

"Yes," nodded Weston. "Unfortunately, we do not know his name. He is something of a prophet, where crime is concerned; but he simply identifies himself with a symbol shaped like a double crescent."

From his pocket, Weston produced a folded note. Spreading it, he displayed typewritten lines, followed by the symbol that he had mentioned. The Shadow read the note.

Crime moves again tonight. Post your men at the Apex Warehouse. Keep strictly under cover and you will learn all. Should further information be obtained you will be notified.

To emphasize the importance of the note, Weston produced others, that referred to earlier crimes. In each case, the informant had steered the police to a vicinity where crime had actually occurred.

As Weston put it, the notes had been highly instrumental in aiding the law to round up thugs connected with the crimes, although the actual cases still remained unsolved.

The notes did not interest The Shadow as much as the symbols did. Noting that his friend was examining the double crescents quite closely, Commissioner Weston chuckled.

"All from the same man, Cranston," he assured. "We have had handwriting experts check them. Microscopic tests show that the symbols are as much alike as any signatures made by one person."

Cranston's eyes had taken on a faraway stare, as though seeking to pierce some veil of the past. His lips were expressionless, as he spoke:

"You should have shown me these notes before, commissioner. They may mean much more than you suppose."

It was Weston's turn to look surprised.

"The double crescent," declared The Shadow, "is the seal of Mokanna, one of the greatest impostors of all history. The man who has adopted it is as great a rogue as the original Mokanna, who was also called the Veiled Prophet."

THE term struck Weston forcibly; and Cardona was likewise impressed. The notes were exactly suited to it. They were prophecies – veiled ones – that told much of crime, but never enough. That point hadn't quite occurred to the listeners, until Cranston introduced it.

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"Mokanna flourished in the year 800," recalled Cranston. "He was the greatest criminal of his period. He had a powerful hold upon his followers, and used them to defy the law of that day. His dupes believed that he could do miracles."

Weston and Cardona were leaning forward, gripped by fresh perplexities. They were beginning to see a link – an ominous one – that they had not previously suspected.

"To trouble the Mohammedan authorities," continued Cranston, "Mokanna created an artificial moon, which he claimed would swallow the star of Islam. He was termed Shazenda Mah, which means the Moon Maker, and he used this seal in all his proclamations.

"I would say that the modern Mokanna, whoever he may be, is quite as competent as his ancient namesake. There is a legend that Mokanna hid his features behind a mask of silver gauze. He was the Veiled Prophet; his hidden purpose was crime. The same applies to the sender of these notes."

It was Cardona who first voiced agreement with The Shadow's theory, while Weston was still staring in amazement.

"Mr. Cranston is right, commissioner!" exclaimed Joe. "We were dubs not to see it! This guy Mokanna has been giving us bum steers, putting us where we thought we could smash crime, but never close enough."

"And meanwhile," added The Shadow, quietly, "he has been threatening men like Jorcott, making them deal in specialized crime. Something went wrong tonight; otherwise, your headquarters squad would have stayed around the warehouse long after Jorcott's job was done."

Cardona took up the argument from there. Referring to his report sheets, he pointed out that the swag had been found outside of Farnum's; that Jorcott must have emptied the safe before he blasted it.

Joe's theory was quite muddled; he supposed that Jorcott had slipped the funds to other crooks, to take to Mokanna. The ace inspector knew that The Shadow must have broken the game, but he was mixed on the details. Nevertheless, the main point stood proven.

Moreover, Cardona had made a thorough inspection at Farnum's and had found burned paper in the fireplace. The unidentified ashes certainly could have been a note, Cardona argued; one that Jorcott had received from Mokanna and later burned.

"Humph!" interjected Weston. "Why should he have kept the note so long?"

"Perhaps he needed it," suggested The Shadow, in a speculative tone. "It might have contained the combination of Farnum's safe."

"That's a real hunch!" exclaimed Cardona. "Say – maybe Mokanna put the bee on some guy who works for Farnum, and made him cough up the combination."

"In which case" – Cranston's lips showed the faintest of smiles – "Jorcott was providing an alibi for another of Mokanna's dupes, as well as himself."

Quite convinced, Commissioner Weston was anxious to provide some valuable suggestion of his own, rather than have Cranston and Cardona take all the credit. Weston struck upon an idea. He summoned a waiter, told him to bring a telephone.

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When an extension had been connected to the grillroom, Weston made a long-distance call to Handley Farnum, who happened to be in Florida.

Five minutes' chat was all that the commissioner required. Hanging up, he turned to his companions.

"You're right, both of you," asserted Weston. "Farnum tells me that his secretary, a fellow named Gorgan, received a long-distance call an hour ago, and skipped to Cuba."

The Shadow arose. His face, calm in its disguise, looked very solemn. Weston was particularly impressed by the inscrutable expression upon Cranston's hawkish features.

"Look into the past, commissioner," came the calm-toned voice. "Investigate such persons as Gorgan and Jorcott. You will find, I am quite sure, that they had something to hide. That is how Mokanna gained his hold upon them.

"From the past, you may obtain some clue to the future, which promises new crimes planned by the Veiled Prophet. If you learn of others who may be under Mokanna's sway you can move against crime in your own way – not in the fashion that Mokanna directs."

STORMILY, Weston announced that he would make all these facts public, and thus spike Mokanna's game. He was making a prediction of his own, claiming that dupes galore would come to the police and tell their stories, once that they knew the law was on Mokanna's trail.

All the while, The Shadow retained his faint smile. He knew that Weston was underrating the powerful hold that the Veiled Prophet maintained over his helpless human tools. Nevertheless, The Shadow considered the law's next move a good one. It might produce some leads that could not be otherwise obtained.

Gradually, the commissioner calmed. It was then that his placid friend, Cranston, remembered something else.

"Regarding the seal of Mokanna," remarked The Shadow, "the reason that it makes an excellent signature is because of the way it is formed. To be inscribed correctly, the two crescents should be drawn with a single line, never lifting the pen from the paper. Our modern Mokanna apparently knows the system."

As he spoke, The Shadow picked up a pencil and made a rapid, twisted stroke across the back of Cardona's report sheet. The result was a double crescent, perfectly interlocked, like the symbol that formed the signature on the notes.

When he left the grillroom The Shadow looked back from the doorway, to see Weston and Cardona, busy with pencils, trying to duplicate the mysterious seal of Mokanna.

CHAPTER V. THE PROPHET SPEAKS

MORNING produced big headlines in the newspapers, all referring to broken crime. The police had scored a signal victory in smashing robbery at Farnum's. The crime was pinned on Ralph Jorcott, the crook who had died while attempting to cover his misdeeds.

But that was not the most sensational disclosure. The law had linked Jorcott's crime to others, and had branded them all as the schemes of a master mind who masqueraded under the name of Mokanna, the Veiled Prophet.

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Openly, Commissioner Weston admitted that he had been misled by notes received from Mokanna, wherein the Veiled Prophet had pretended to aid the law. But such trickery had been detected; the ways of Mokanna were known.

All persons were warned to be on the watch for messages bearing the symbol of the double crescent; any recipients of such notes were requested to inform the police immediately.

Commissioner Weston confidently expected an influx of Mokanna's dupes. As the day progressed, he was totally disappointed. Not a single person called headquarters to furnish any information or produce letters bearing the ominous seal.

A note did arrive in Weston's office, but it came by mail, addressed to the commissioner personally. Like the other samples in the law's possession, it came from Mokanna himself, giving a lead to another coming crime.

At first sight of the thing, Weston fumed; but when he showed the note to Cardona, the inspector studied the envelope and pointed to the postmark.

The letter had been mailed at nine o'clock, an hour before the explosion at Farnum's. Evidently, the Veiled Prophet had been planning a new crime before an old one was completed. After Jorcott's failure, it had been too late for Mokanna to recall his next prediction. The fact sweetened the law's victory of the night before.

Commissioner Weston did not make the new note public. The proper course was to act upon it, first. Thus, the evening newspapers simply picked up the morning stories, with no recent embellishments. Even the smartest reporters did not guess that more news might break before the day was over.

Though the public, generally, acclaimed the facts that the law revealed and considered the Mokanna menace under control, grave doubt was expressed in certain circles, particularly among men of wealth. In fact, the Veiled Prophet was the sole topic of conversation at more than one fashionable dinner table.

Such was the case in the home of James Marden, a wealthy Midwesterner who had been living in New York for the past six months. Marden seldom talked of anything but business; tonight, he had broken his rule and was discussing Mokanna.

MARDEN was a man of dignified appearance, firm-featured and gray-haired. But his face bore deep lines that denoted worry; his shoulders seemed stooped with care.

There were times when his gray eyes became casual, as though masking thoughts behind them. At other moments, Marden became sharp of gaze, particularly when they centered on another speaker.

On Marden's right sat a solemn, crab-faced man, whose shoulders formed a hunch that made his roundish head seemed pocketed between them. His eyes were sharp, too, like gimlets; his lips had a habit of tightening whenever he had finished speaking.

As a weigher of words, no man was better qualified than Jabez Densholm, consulting attorney. Densholm seldom talked much when dining with a client, and he happened to be Marden's attorney.

Opposite Densholm was Howard Garnstead, well-known financier. Garnstead was older than Marden, but his face looked younger; his shoulders, though slightly stooped, did not appear weighed down. Garnstead's mild smile was matched by twinkly eyes; of the three men, he seemed to be enjoying life the most.

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The fourth member of the group was Gale Marden, niece of the stony-faced Midwesterner. She was a girl in her early twenties, dark-haired, and with deep brown eyes that combined intelligence with loveliness.

Her roundish, well-molded face was one of individual charm. She seemed totally unconscious of her beauty, as she listened to the conversation.

"The police speak of this Mokanna as if they know him," boomed Marden. "But how far can that carry them? Who is he – where can he be found – how can his crimes be stopped? Those questions require immediate answers, to give us real security."

Densholm opened his lips to speak, then pursed them. Observing that Garnstead was about to speak, the lawyer decided to listen.

"You treat the thing too seriously, Marden," declared Garnstead, in a mild tone. "True, Mokanna seems to be choosing wealthy men as targets. But there are many wealthier men than you in New York; men who are better known, also."

"Yourself, for instance –"

"Agreed," interrupted Garnstead, with a smile. "But I have my share of gray hairs, Marden. A full crop of them. I do not intend to have them whiten because of a rascal called Mokanna."

"Suppose that Mokanna entered your house," argued Marden, "and blew it half apart, as he did at Farnum's. How would you feel about it, then?"

"I am not a fool, as Farnum was. When I go away from home, I leave servants in the house."

"Servants are not to be trusted. Farnum's secretary turned out to be a crook."

"Again, the fault was Farnum's. My servants are all trustworthy. They have been in my employ for years."

Finding that he was getting nowhere with Garnstead, Marden swung to Densholm and asked the lawyer's opinion of Mokanna. Densholm responded with a shrug of his hunched shoulders.

"My advice is to forget the fellow," said Densholm, in a crisp tone. "Let the police worry. It is their business."

"And meanwhile," retorted Marden, "I suppose that Mokanna should be free to do whatever he chooses?"

"Why not?" queried Densholm. "It is merely giving him more rope. No crook of Mokanna's boldness ever failed to hang himself."

Marden settled back in his chair. Gale watched him anxiously, until his features relaxed into a relieved smile. Oddly, the smile worried her far more than the anger that her uncle had displayed.

For some reason, James Marden was taking the Mokanna matter very much to heart, and his niece wondered why. Gale could only explain it by the fact that her uncle had worried over many things during the past month.

She remembered telephone calls that he had made, sometimes at odd hours, always behind the closed door of his upstairs study, in a muffled, guarded tone. Sometimes, when he suspected that she had overheard him, he told Gale that he had been calling Densholm on certain legal matters. But that struck the girl as illogical.

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Marden's present business affairs were not at all tangled. He was in New York endeavoring to promote a new rubber factory, which would involve the backing of financiers like Garnstead. So far, he had made more contacts than he needed, and was arranging the purchase of a rubber plantation already operated by an American corporation.

It was simply a case of acquiring a majority holding of stock in that corporation, and from all that Gale had heard, present stockholders were quite willing to sell.

PERHAPS Marden noticed Gale's puzzled look. He gave a rumbly laugh as he rose from the table, with his guests. As they were strolling from the dining room, Marden discounted the Mokanna matter.

"Your optimism reassures me," he told Garnstead. "I suppose it is ridiculous to worry about Mokanna. As for you, Densholm" – with a chuckle, he turned to the lawyer – "you actually gave me free advice. Quite a departure from your usual rule."

Gale had preceded the others to the hall. The doorbell was ringing; the girl reached for an evening wrap that lay on a chair. Her uncle stepped forward to help her put it on.

"I suppose that's Freddy Kellick," said Marden. "Well, Gale, have a good evening. But try to be in by three o'clock."

"And look out for Mokanna," warned Garnstead, with a genial smile. "Make sure that Fred Kellick is not the Veiled Prophet, in disguise."

"Regarding Kellick," added Densholm, dryly, "you might advise him to keep out of brawls. Sometime he will show up in night court once too often."

Outside, Gale was greeted by a handsome man of about thirty, whose sporty roadster was waiting at the curb. Fred Kellick was wearing a Tuxedo, twirling a derby in one hand and holding a cane with the other.

"Hello, playboy!" laughed Gale. "What is the program for this evening?"

"Let's drop in at the Club Zodiac," suggested Fred. "I want you to see the place. It's got horoscopes all over the walls, with pictures of scorpions, and goats."

"Do they tell your fortune?"

"For two bucks," said Fred, seriously, "a gypsy will look into a teacup and tell you things you already know. But as for revealing the future, that's supposed to be illegal."

They were in the car, rolling out from the side street, as Gale thought over Fred's last remark. Then, soberly, the girl said:

"I'm looking for a man who can really tell the future."

"How about me?" queried Fred. "I can promise you happiness, fortune, anything. All wish, provided that –"

"Provided that I'll marry you. Table that for the next meeting of the lodge."

"Then who is it that you're looking for?"

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"Mokanna!"

Fred nearly drove through a traffic light. Jamming the car to a stop, he threw an incredulous look in Gale's direction.

"Uncle Jim is worried, Fred," declared the girl, soberly. "He talked of nothing else but Mokanna all during dinner. He seemed to be sounding out opinions; just why, I couldn't understand."

"I don't blame him," said Fred, starting the car forward. "Your uncle is trying to promote a big business deal, isn't he?"

"Yes. He's practically completed it."

"Well, all right," declared Fred, shrewdly. "Just suppose Mokanna swipes a lot of cash from some chap who has promised to buy stock in your uncle's company. That would hurt things, wouldn't it?"

"I suppose that's it," replied Gale, slowly. "Yes, that's why he talked so warningly to Howard Garnstead."

"Was Garnstead at your house for dinner?"

"Yes," answered Gale. "And I wouldn't be surprised if he would back the company. No wonder poor Uncle Jim is worried!"

FRED thought the matter over. They were nearing the Club Zodiac, looking for a parking space, when he spoke quite seriously along the same subject.

"Listen, Gale," he said. "I've got nearly half a million stowed away, where Mokanna or no one else can grab it. If the deal flukes with Garnstead, I'll back your uncle – and no strings attached."

There was generosity in Fred's tone; it actually made Gale feel tearful. Then they were entering the Club Zodiac, a place of gaiety, where the fanciful decorations exceeded the girl's expectations. Fred slipped a ten-dollar bill to the head waiter; he and Gale were conducted to a table close beside the dance floor.

"While we're waiting for the floor show," declared Fred, "look over the decorations. See that one over there – the Sign of Cancer, with the picture of the era? It's my favorite. The crab reminds me of old Densholm, your uncle's attorney."

"Speaking of Mr. Densholm," laughed Gale, "he had a message for you. He suggested that you keep out of night courts."

"Don't worry," returned Fred. "I'm through with slugging snooty head waiters. Those fellows have cast-iron jaws; they're too hard on the knuckles. It's easier to give them ten bucks when you want a good table, instead of offering an argument. After all, they've got to live, though I've never figured out why –"

Fred stopped abruptly. He was looking at a table across the floor, where he recognized two faces. Leaning close to Gale, Fred confided:

"Speaking of night courts reminds me of police. Right over there are Exhibits A and B of the New York force. The fellow with the whisk-broom mustache is Commissioner Weston. The deadpan next to him represents his No. 1 boy, Inspector Cardona."

Gale was rather startled. "Why are they here, Fred?"

"I think I know why," returned Fred, in his confidential tone. "They've probably wised up to Goldy Chabro's racket."

"Who is Goldy Chabro?"

"The fellow who owns this place. He's using the Club Zodiac as a front for a gambling joint. Look – there's Goldy coming over to their table. I'll bet he's in a sweat!"

Gale was immediately intrigued.

"Will there be a raid?"

"There may be," replied Fred. "Too bad Mokanna isn't around; maybe the Veiled Prophet could tell us. Anyway, we'll stay awhile. I bet we'll see some fun."

In that prediction, Fred Kellick was making as good a prophecy as any that Mokanna could have uttered, considering that Fred's idea of fun was often something very violent. But Fred's statement was belated.

Already, the Veiled Prophet had spoken. It was the message from Mokanna that had brought the law to the Club Zodiac! But, on this occasion, the police were not the only ones informed regarding crime's forthcoming move.

Another man was approaching Weston's table. Fred Kellick recognized him as the commissioner's friend, Lamont Cranston, and pointed him out to Gale Marden.

Like the law, The Shadow was on hand to match wits with Mokanna, veiled master of crime!

CHAPTER VI. CRIME'S TARGET

GOLDY CHABRO, the bulky, genial proprietor of the Club Zodiac, was quite as worried as Fred supposed. His gambling den, located above the Club Zodiac, had been operating for a few weeks, reaping enormous profits from an exclusive clientele, and Goldy had counted on a two-month run, at least.

Finding Weston and Cardona as patrons, along with a sprinkling of detectives not recognized by Fred, Goldy was naturally very troubled. However, geniality was his favorite pose, and Goldy had always found it an excellent form of bluff. So he was smiling, more broadly than ever, when he approached the commissioner's table.

Relief gripped Goldy when Weston showed him the Mokanna note, which read:

Be at the Club Zodiac from nine to ten, on the lookout for unusual crime. Keep your men with you; on no account let them show themselves in the surrounding neighborhood.

Weston and Cardona exchanged smiles, as Goldy flopped into a chair and mopped his forehead with a big silk handkerchief. They regarded Goldy as a curious character. Though he loved horseplay, Goldy had a good eye for business.

Goldy's prosperous appearance proved his business ability. He went in for gold in a big way, hence his nickname. He wore gold cuff links as large as half dollars and thicker. His heavy watch chain looked like a

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lapdog's leash. His stubby fingers were weighted with massive, ornate rings. To top it, Goldy displayed an old-fashioned stickpin inlaid with a chunk of gold the size of a baby nugget.

But while Commissioner Weston talked with Goldy, Cardona began to wonder if the night-club proprietor went in for bracelets. For all Cardona knew, Goldy might have a few of them up his sleeve.

It was The Shadow who knew what was really up Goldy's sleeve. He had heard of the gambling joint that Goldy had opened. Through no invitation had been sent to Lamont Cranston, certain of his friends had been there and described the place to him.

Goldy Chabro was doing quite well with his swanky racket. Some of his finger rings were new ones, set with diamonds so large that Cardona mistook them for imitations. But The Shadow's eye appraised their actual value, along with diamond studs that Goldy was wearing in his Tuxedo shirt.

As Goldy stood, he was worth some thirty thousand dollars on the hoof. Perhaps that was why the gambler suddenly began to show new concern. No longer worried about his racket, he was troubled over himself.

"I don't like that note, commissioner," asserted Goldy, in a rasped tone. "If this Mokanna guy is coming around here tonight, it won't be safe for the customers."

"Don't worry, Goldy," assured Weston, dryly. "Mokanna never performs his crimes in person. At least, he has not done so, as yet."

"But he's got smart guys working for him –"

"Men smart enough to stay clear of us. These crimes never strike in the exact spot named by Mokanna. The fact that he wants me to be here proves that trouble is due somewhere else."

Turning to Cardona, Weston asked him for the map. Cardona was too busy to hear the question. Joe was drawing doodles on a folded sheet of paper. He had learned the trick of making the Mokanna seal with one continuous line.

Thinking that the commissioner would appreciate it, Cardona had reproduced the system in four stages, marking them with explanatory numbers to show the process.

"Look, commissioner –"

Weston snatched the paper angrily, showing total lack of appreciation for Cardona's efforts. Unfolding the sheet, he displayed a large map, which covered the neighborhood surrounding the Club Zodiac.

In four square blocks, there were at least four targets big enough to suit Mokanna. Pointing them out, Weston puzzled over the important question: Which one would the Veiled Prophet choose?

One place was a jewelry store; another, a branch bank. A millionaire's penthouse offered opportunity to Mokanna's liking. Weston completed the list by pointing out a theater and remarking that the box-office receipts might be big enough game for the master mind.

"OUR theory seems well established," declared the commissioner. "The Veiled Prophet picks his human tools by delving into the past. When he finds persons who have something to hide, he forces them to work for him."

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"It is obvious, therefore, that he must shape his plans to suit the capabilities of those workers. We can never be sure of what Mokanna will try next, since his schemes are dependent upon circumstance. Having branded the Veiled Prophet as a crook, we can, however, narrow matters down every time we near from him."

The commissioner was simply voicing statements that Cranston had made at dinner that evening. But what followed was Weston's own idea.

"We have placed headquarters men at each of the key positions," he declared. "Each squad will be on the watch for crime. We have come here ourselves, bringing detectives, in order to deceive Mokanna. There is a chance that some of his dupes are here as patrons, on the lookout for us."

Goldy's worryment ended. He shoved out a big paw, and Weston received it.

"Thanks a lot, commissioner," said Goldy. "From what you say, everything will be safe around here. Order anything you want. It's all on the house."

The Shadow watched Goldy stalk away, saw the bulky man enter a secluded office in the corner of the night club and close the door behind him. His eyes turning to the map, The Shadow checked on places close to the Club Zodiac.

There was a distant look in the gaze of Cranston. The Shadow was trying to picture the thoughts of another man: Mokanna.

The master crook could read the newspapers, like everyone else. Mokanna knew, by this time, that the police had learned his double game and would no longer limit themselves to his precise instructions. He would certainly have spies look over the situation before attempting crime tonight.

If Mokanna had chosen any one of the four targets that showed on Weston's map, he would certainly postpone crime this evening, rather than thrust an important man, of Jorcott's caliber, into the hands of the law.

But there was an element in Mokanna's method that The Shadow had studied out by checking over reports of past crimes. With each of his tip-offs, the Veiled Prophet had brought the police closer to the scene of crime.

Such policy was the very factor that had made the law trust Mokanna's messages, until The Shadow proved them false.

But Commissioner Weston, taking too much credit for himself, had overlooked the important detail. At this late hour, it was better to avoid the subject. The Shadow, formulating plans of his own, was well satisfied with the present arrangements.

There was just one place where crime might strike. One not on Weston's list. But The Shadow's calculation had it as a far more likely spot than any of the four that the commissioner had picked.

Choice of that goal was a tribute to the genius of Mokanna. But on this occasion the Veiled Prophet would be matching wits with someone other than the law. He would learn that The Shadow, too, was in the game; far more deeply than anyone supposed.

From the moment that he gained his inspiration. The Shadow began to play a careful part. As Cranston, he became bored with his surroundings. At last, with a dissatisfied shrug of his shoulders, he arose from the table.

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"Where are you going, Cranston?"

It was Weston who put the query. The Shadow's immediate answer was another shrug.

"Back to the Cobalt Club," he drawled. "This place is most uninteresting."

"But you should stay, Cranston," insisted the commissioner. "At any moment we may hear from one of Cardona's squads, reporting that Mokanna's men have entered a trap."

The Shadow gave one of Cranston's casual glances toward the chart that was spread on the table. He shook his head disparagingly, as he pointed to the four spots that Weston had marked.

"Mousetraps, commissioner."

For a few moments, Weston boiled. Then, deciding it was poor policy to show anger toward Cranston, he took refuge in an old quotation.

"Remember the proverb, Cranston," he said. "If you build a better mousetrap than your neighbor, the world will make a beaten path to your door."

"Rats won't," was Cranston's objection. "They are too smart for mousetraps. You happen to be dealing with rats, when you try to trap Mokanna's workers."

WITH that, Cranston strolled away, leaving the commissioner muttering something about "mice and men," only to realize that he had picked another quotation that did not allow for rats.

Just after Cranston had gone out, a waiter approached the table where Fred Kellick was seated with Gale Marden. Apologetically, the waiter said that Fred would have to move his car from in front of the Club Zodiac. Special parking regulations had been put in force in this area.

Fred took the news philosophically.

"I might have expected it," he told Gale. "The one night when I was lucky enough to find a parking space, this had to happen. I'll have to take the car to a garage, but I ought to be back" – he glanced at his watch – "within fifteen minutes. Soon enough to see the floor show."

Lamont Cranston was entering a cab when Fred Kellick stepped from the doorway of the Club Zodiac. His limousine being out of commission, Cranston preferred a cab, since his other cars were all high-powered sport models.

But there was another reason that caused him to choose this particular cab.

Once inside the vehicle, Cranston drew out a drawer from the rear seat, exactly like the special compartment in his limousine. As the cab rolled around the block, he was busy with garments of black. When a cloak had slipped over his shoulders and a slouch hat settled on his head, all traces of Cranston were gone.

The commissioner's friend had become The Shadow.

His route, moreover, was a remarkable one. The cab did not start off toward the Cobalt Club; instead, it made a complete circuit of the block and stopped at its original starting point, a hack space in front of a basement bookstore next door to the Club Zodiac.

The cab looked empty when it stopped. A minute later, it was empty. The interior darkness no longer held the cloaked figure of The Shadow. He had glided from the door on the curb side, to cross the gloomy sidewalk and merge with the blackness of the building wall.

However veiled the methods of Mokanna, they could be no more mysterious than the ways of The Shadow!

CHAPTER VII. HIDDEN CRIME

SEATED at a desk in his little office, Goldy Chabro was glowering at his rather ugly reflection in a mirror that hung above a small but modern safe. The mirror also showed a closet door in back of Goldy's chair. There was a light socket, with a frosted bulb, in the wall above the door.

It was a rather unusual place to have a light socket, but no one particularly noted it, except Goldy. The lamp was more than an ordinary one; it was a signal light, that told when an elevator was in use. The closet was actually an elevator shaft, offering access to the gambling room upstairs.

People who visited that den did not come through Goldy's office. Instead, they entered the basement bookstore next door and took the elevator from that level.

Up and down, they rode right past Goldy's office, except when they had a special reason to stop off. In that case, pressure of a hidden switch made the light blink rapidly, informing Goldy that he could expect a visitor.

The first signal that Goldy received was a buzz of his telephone. He answered it, gave a sullen growl.

"Nobody's to go out, Jake," declared Goldy. "I've told you that, just like I told Bevo that nobody's to come in."

There was a pause, while Goldy listened. Then:

"So they're grousing, huh?" he queried. "That's settled easy. Give everybody a double stack of chips... Yeah, tell 'em it's on the house. Say I'm a big-hearted guy that don't like to see his friends take it on the chin –"

"And listen, Jake. Have Klondike set the gaff on the roulette wheel... Yeah, the blower that breezes the ball out of the big-money pockets... When suckers play with my chips, I like to get 'em back –"

Goldy was about to hang up, when he heard Jake say something else. After pondering a few moments, Goldy assented.

"All right," he said. "Send Roy Ablam down. Any time that guy wants to lift a few markers, he's welcome to do it."

A minute later, the light began to blink. Goldy turned the knob of the closed door, which could be released from his side only, and let Ablam step from the tiny lighted elevator.

Roy Ablam was a sallow, sharp-nosed fellow, whose careless manner was actually well studied. His light-hued, wavy hair was slightly ruffled, his Tuxedo was only partly buttoned, and his black bow tie had a haphazard tilt. None of those touches happened to be accidental.

It suited Ablam to pose as a gentleman of wealth. He knew that members of the upper crust were frequently indifferent as to their appearance, although they wore expensive clothes. So Ablam found it good policy to be a trifle mussed. Otherwise, people might have suspected some catch behind his sleekness.

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Ablam had actually fooled Goldy for a while. As a result, the nightclub proprietor had acquired I O U's to the total of twelve hundred dollars, all bearing Ablam's signature. He was almost ready to write them off as a loss, when he learned that Ablam wanted to pay up.

Despite his present stress, Goldy couldn't resist the unexpected opportunity. There was a chance that it still had a catch. Goldy decided to sound Ablam out.

"I've got the markers here," he told Ablam, "but the question is: have you got the dough?"

With a nod, Ablam started to reach for his right hip-pocket. Goldy inserted a reminder:

"No checks!"

Ablam gave a sallow-lipped grin. Shifting hands, he reached to his inside pocket and drew out a wallet. From it, he counted out twelve hundred dollars, starting with fifties and winding up with ones. He hesitated, though, before handing the cash over.

"How about later?" he queried. "Will you take any more of my markers if I run short?"

"I always like a guy that pays up," returned Goldy. "Your I O U will be good up to three bills."

Calculating, Ablam decided that he could do a lot of gambling on a three-hundred-dollar credit. He passed his money over to Goldy, who crossed the room and opened the safe.

While Goldy was thus engaged, Ablam shifted his right hand back to his hip, gave a slight jerk, and waited.

Goldy turned about:

"Here are your gambling markers, Ablam –"

"Just drop them," inserted Ablam, his tone a snarl, "and start to reach – in a hurry!"

GOLDY'S head tilted up, his eyes saw an automatic bulging in Ablam's fist. Coming to full height, the gambler let his hands go above his shoulders. Motioning Goldy to a corner, Ablam moved toward the safe.

"You can't get away with this, Ablam," rasped Goldy. "Jake knows who came down here. Bevo won't let anybody out through the bookstore without my say-so."

"What if I went out that way?"

Ablam gestured toward the main door of the office, the one that led into the Club Zodiac. Goldy shook his head.

"You'd be spotted the moment you stuck your mug out through the door," he said. "You'd just be sticking your neck out, too."

"What if some of your waiters do spot me?" returned Ablam. "How are they going to stop me?"

"Easy enough," chuckled Goldy. "You picked the wrong night, Ablam. The joint is full of –"

Goldy caught himself. He didn't like the widening slit that represented Ablam's grin.

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"Full of coppers," commented Ablam, dryly. "That's just why I happened to pick tonight. Here, Goldy" – he drew a folded letter from his inside pocket – "take a peep at this."

Questioningly, Goldy unfolded the letter. He wondered what the bluff was, and decided to give it leeway. But his wonderment turned to true dismay when he saw the double crescent signature at the bottom of the typewritten note.

"From Mokanna!"

"That's right," nodded Ablam. "Read what he has to say. Then maybe you'll listen to reason."

The letter was addressed to Ablam, bringing up certain facts of the sallow man's past. It mentioned something that Goldy did not know; namely, that Ablam had worked with ring of confidence men.

According to the note, there was only one way for Ablam to keep Mokanna from giving the facts to the police. That way was to rob Goldy Chabro in the latter's own office.

While the letter rustled between Goldy's trembling hands, Ablam put his gun away and calmly began to remove bundles of cash from the safe. Stacking the money on the gambler's desk, Ablam totaled it and shook his head.

"Not enough," he said, ruefully. "Mokanna calls for fifty grand. Shed some of the jewelry, Goldy – those rings with the big rocks, and the fancy studs."

Laying the note on the desk, Goldy complied. His cherished rings thudded the woodwork dully. The big man's manner had changed; he was actually willing to pay. Like many others engaged in illegal practices, Goldy Chabro dreaded the very name of Mokanna.

"I'm licked, Ablam," Goldy admitted. "Mokanna is too smart for me. He knows I can't squawk. If the bulls grabbed you, they'd find out what's going on upstairs."

"Mokanna figured you'd see it that way," returned Ablam, in a confident tone. "You've got a lot of swell customers, Goldy, and they don't know yet what's up. If the bulls raid your gambling joint, your racket is through, and so are you."

Goldy nodded.

"So you'd better play ball," concluded Ablam. "In a couple of weeks, you can trim those stuffed shirts for all you've lost tonight. So just call Bevo and tell him to let me out."

His hand halfway to the telephone, Goldy hesitated. His face was anxious.

"And after that?"

"I'll tie you up. In ten minutes, you can knock the phone off the hook and yell for help. When the coppers show up, tell them that a masked guy robbed you and did a sneak out through the night club."

GOLDY managed a painful grin. Though a fifty-thousand-dollar loser, he would still have his gambling racket. Hearing his story, the cops would class him as a Mokanna victim, perhaps robbed by the Veiled Prophet in person!

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It would be another victory for Mokanna, staged under the very nose of the law. Weston, Cardona and the others wouldn't stay long at the Club Zodiac. They would start a man hunt for an unidentified criminal, a useless chase that would carry far from Goldy's premises.

Patrons of the gambling den would be free to stay or leave, as they might choose. As a victim of crime, Goldy Chabro would stand in well with the law.

As Goldy saw it, the thing to do was play ball, just as Ablam suggested, and thank the sallow crook for the kind favor which he had rendered in behalf of Mokanna.

Goldy placed his hands behind his back, so that Ablam could bind them. The sallow man reminded him that the call to Bevo came first. Goldy picked up the telephone, pressed a buzzer three times. There was no response, but the light blinked suddenly above the closet door.

"Bevo must be coming up," Goldy growled. "I'll tell him we're staging a phony stunt to get the bulls away from here."

Ablam showed no worry. He remembered how Goldy had gone pale while reading the Mokanna letter. When Goldy approached the elevator door, Ablam folded his arms, to appear indifferent while the gambler talked with Bevo. In a hurry to get the ordeal ended, Goldy was also off guard when he yanked the door wide.

The elevator was dark. For an instant, both men wondered why. Then darkness issued from darkness, as a black-cloaked figure wheeled into the light. Hidden lips gave a sinister, whispered laugh. Boring eyes burned from beneath a slouch hat brim.

Big automatics were looming – one toward Goldy, the other trained on Ablam. The Shadow had arrived upon this scene of strange crime, to nullify the latest of Mokanna's schemes!

CHAPTER VIII. CROOKS CHOOSE

SHEER bewilderment gripped Goldy Chabro and Roy Ablam, two rogues of a different sort, who had formed a curious and unequal partnership to commit crime between themselves. They had been thinking only of Mokanna, not The Shadow.

Faced by crime's superfoe, neither of the pair knew where or how he stood. They both realized, though, that they were in the thing together; a point that was to prove important throughout the coming interview.

They could feel their teeth chatter within their tight-lipped mouths. Already, they were agreed that they did not care to talk. But speech was unnecessary. The Shadow found out things for himself.

Gestures of his guns sent the pair to different corners, their hands raised. The Shadow stood at the desk, keeping his guns moving slightly. Neither man could see his eyes, for the hat brim had tilted downward. Each thought, however, that he was under close watch – until The Shadow laughed again.

With the whispered mirth, his head lifted. His hand pointed to the Mokanna letter. The Shadow had read it, unobserved. He knew the reason for the cash and jewelry that Goldy had placed beside the note.

The Shadow spoke.

His sibilant tones were strange; they carried accusation, yet with it a strain of understanding that promised hope. In summing up the facts of the crime, The Shadow repeated the very points that Goldy and Ablam had

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discussed so precisely that the pair began to believe that he had overheard them.

From that discourse, The Shadow offered terms.

"The law wants facts concerning Mokanna," he told Ablam. "It has promised protection to anyone who supplies needed information. Your course is plain: you must turn this letter over to the law."

"But the things it says!" gulped Ablam. "They'll be used against me!"

"Not if you produce the letter voluntarily," returned The Shadow. "The police will prefer to forget your former misdeeds. By showing amnesty in your case, they will encourage other dupes to shake off Mokanna's toils."

Ablam was nodding, half convinced. He heard a sibilant laugh, understood its unspoken meaning. Along with amnesty from the law, Ablam would also square himself with The Shadow. He realized the value of such a result, particularly because The Shadow, at this moment, was showing himself more powerful than Mokanna.

The Shadow turned to Goldy Chabro.

"It is the law's duty to curb gambling," spoke The Shadow. "Without evidence, the law has no case. Call your men upstairs" – a thin-gloved finger pointed to the telephone – "and order them to destroy the roulette wheels.

"The work will be done by the time you and Ablam have finished your talk with the police commissioner. Your special customers can depart unmolested. Your slate will be cleaned, Chabro. Keep it that way."

The terms had strong effect upon Goldy. The gambler realized that he would retain his money and other valuables, even though his chance for further illegal profits would be gone. Like Ablam, Goldy realized that he could depend upon The Shadow's protection against Mokanna.

Behind both frozen faces, numbed brains were clearing. The Shadow knew the thoughts that were flashing to those minds. He had analyzed Ablam and Goldy for what they were – outright crooks.

It was never The Shadow's rule to offer terms to such; but on this occasion, circumstances warranted it. By showing them how to throw off the shackles of Mokanna, The Shadow was scoring a stroke against the Veiled Prophet. Putting Ablam and Goldy on the straight path was worth the experiment.

All that The Shadow needed was a test of their sincerity, if they could display any. That issue was suddenly decided, but under conditions that The Shadow had not arranged.

FACED toward the closet door, Goldy and Ablam saw the elevator light begin to blink. From his angle, The Shadow could not observe the light in the mirror, for he was near the corner of the desk.

The closet door had not clicked shut when The Shadow moved away from it. In its present condition, it could be opened by an arrival, since it had no connection with the elevator's mechanism.

The Shadow was analyzing the expressions of anticipation registered by the men who faced him. He caught the significance, just as the door swung silently open behind him. At the same time, he noted a slight flickering from the mirror and guessed its reason, without seeing the reflection of the light bulb.

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Planting his left hand on the center of the desk, The Shadow vaulted it just as Ablam and Goldy launched forward shouting viciously. Both were pulling guns, thinking they had The Shadow temporarily helpless; but they were wrong.

The Shadow's flying feet, sweeping high, caught Ablam under the chin and lifted the sallow, lightweight crook in a long, backward sprawl.

Actually pivoting on his left hand, The Shadow swung his right toward Goldy's head and landed a glancing blow with his heavy gun. Finishing his vault with a tumbling twist, The Shadow landed on the far side of the desk.

A gun was ripping bullets from the opened door, its blasts too late. Swinging about, The Shadow laid his .45 across the desk to take quick aim at the thwarted marksman, who had fired three shots into space.

The door was slamming shut; The Shadow caught a momentary glimpse of a face that lacked features, for it was obscured by a silver gauze.

Then The Shadow's gun was talking, bashing bullets against the barrier that lay between him and Mokanna, the Veiled Prophet!

Like Mokanna's shots, The Shadow's were too late. Goldy Chabro had made that door bulletproof. Mokanna was away to safety, and in his brief appearance on the scene he had rallied two crooks to his cause.

Shaken but unstunned, Goldy and Ablam lurched for The Shadow as he turned to meet them. They had made their choice, and were pleased with it.

Goldy preferred to dispose of The Shadow and keep his gambling racket going, even though it might mean paying tribute to Mokanna. As for Ablam, he saw future rewards from the Veiled Prophet, in return for siding with his evil master.

Fighting with the fury of fiends, the two crooks locked with The Shadow. They bowled against the desk, overturning it. Ablam's letter fluttered to the floor, while Goldy's belongings slid to the carpet. The crooks thought that they were getting results; they didn't guess that The Shadow was endeavoring to take them alive.

The main door smashed open. In came Joe Cardona, leading a surge of detectives. Wrenching away from The Shadow, Goldy sprang toward the invaders. His gun had already delivered two useless shots fighting The Shadow, but he hoped to clip foeman with the rest.

They didn't give him a chance. Recognizing murder in Goldy's eye, Cardona and the detectives riddled him before he could fire.

One crook was gone, despite The Shadow's efforts to preserve him for the law. But Ablam was still in the cloaked fighter's clutch. The Shadow was wheeling him toward Cardona when new things happened.

First, shots sounded from the night club, indicating that Mokanna had sent thugs there. Cardona and his men hurried out to settle that trouble. They had hardly started before the elevator door burst wide. Flinging Ablam across the room, The Shadow leaped the desk again, to meet new attackers.

Mokanna must have gone down in the elevator, then sent it to the top, for the arrivals were the gentry who managed the roulette wheels upstairs. They were tough chaps – Jake, Klondike, and three others – but no match for The Shadow.

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Landing in their very midst, the black-cloaked fighter downed them with sledging blows, using one hand to ward off their strokes, while he swung his gun with the other. His arms were whirling like the blades of a windmill, clearing a space about him.

IN the midst of that brief fray, Ablam managed to stagger into the elevator and start it downward. As the car disappeared, The Shadow leaped to its top and rode down with it.

When it reached the basement level, Ablam scrambled out. Using the butt of his automatic, The Shadow shattered the elevator's thin wood-paneled top, wrenched away the thin bars of a metal framework, and dropped through.

Ablam was hurrying out through the bookstore. One big bookcase was open, like a door; in an opposite alcove, Bevo, the downstairs guard, lay bound and gagged, where The Shadow had previously left him. Sighting Ablam stumbling up the steps to the sidewalk, The Shadow pursued him.

Strife had already reached the street, started by brawlers who had surged from the Club Zodiac. Dodging strugglers, Ablam made for a passing taxicab, had almost reached it when The Shadow came in sight. Instantly, a shot spurted from the window of the cab.

The bullet took Ablam in the heart, rolled him back to the curb. Aiming for the cab, The Shadow saw the same veiled face that had dropped back into the elevator.

Then the cab was away, ahead of The Shadow's gunfire. Lost among other cars, it was off to safety, carrying the killer who wore the silver gauze.

Lacking time for new battle with The Shadow, and unwilling, perhaps, to run the risk of such a fray, Mokanna had disposed of Ablam, the tool who was no longer needed. The Veiled Prophet showed no mercy to followers who did not fulfill his instructions.

His own cab swinging into sight, The Shadow entered it, hoping to pursue Mokanna. But even Moe Shrevnitz, The Shadow's capable cabby and secret agent, could not work through the traffic jam that had piled up at the nest corner.

A pair of rattletrap cars, abandoned by their drivers, were the cause of the blockade into which other automobiles had pressed.

Doubtless, Mokanna had staged that trick to cut off pursuit. Finding the chase useless, The Shadow ordered Moe to reverse his course and head for the Cobalt Club. The police had taken over at the Club Zodiac; there was no need to return.

It was better that The Shadow should resume his guise of Cranston, to meet the police commissioner later and express surprise at all that had happened.

Among the refugees from the Club Zodiac was a lovely brunette, who looked very frail and forlorn as she shuddered in a sleeveless evening gown. Gale Marden had fled from the night club when the shooting started, but hadn't stopped to get her evening wrap at the check room.

Huddled near the doorway, Gale felt very helpless until she saw Fred Kellick's roadster swing in from the corner, where the traffic jam had cleared. She reached the car and sank to the seat with a grateful sob, while Fred slipped a robe around her bare shoulders.

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Still shivering, Gale heard Fred tell how he had found the garage filled and was driving back to hunt for a parking lot, when the route was blocked. Then, anxiously, he was asking what had happened at the Club Zodiac, and Gale was telling him the few details that she knew.

By the time they reached the old house where Gale lived, Fred had tuned in the roadster's radio, to pick up the latest news flashes. He and Gale heard details of the battle at the Club Zodiac, and learned that the law had triumphed.

The broadcast hinted that Mokanna had engineered the crime from which strife resulted. But there was no mention of the Veiled Prophet's brief appearance at the Club Zodiac. Nor was there any talk of a cloaked fighter who had dueled with the silver-masked supercreek.

Like Mokanna, The Shadow had taken his own course in the night, confident that he would meet up in the future with crime's Veiled Prophet!

CHAPTER IX. BEHIND THE VEIL

GALE MARDEN was dining with her uncle in the gloomy house where Howard Garnstead and Jabez Densholm had been guests the evening before. Gale was silent, meditative, and James Marden also was deep in thought.

Toyo, the Filipino who served as chef and manservant, kept moving silently about and finally disappeared.

It was Toyo's night off, and he was leaving for Bridgeport to stay with friends. When the Filipino took a trip to Bridgeport, he did not return until noon the next day.

James Marden smiled when Toyo had gone. Looking toward Gale, he straightened his lips and spoke in approving fashion.

"You must have arrived home quite early last night," said Marden. "Is New York beginning to bore you, Gale?"

"Somewhat," replied the girl. "Freddy wants me to go out again tonight, but I don't know that I shall."

"I think you should," declared Marden, soberly. "We won't be in New York much longer."

The girl's face showed surprise, and her brown eyes sparkled with interest. Marden raised his bowed shoulders and smiled again.

"I was out when you returned last night," he said. "After Garnstead and Densholm left, which they did quite promptly, I went to see a gentleman named Senor Jose Baroba."

"The man who owns the rubber plantations in Brazil?"

"Yes," nodded Marden. "Baroba has acquired a controlling interest in Amazonia Rubber, a corporation organized in the United States. He is willing to sell me the stock at par."

"How much will it cost?"

"The stock is worth a quarter million," replied Marden. "I am quite sure that Garnstead will finance the purchase."

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"You'll see Senor Baroba again tonight?"

Leaning back in his chair, Marden shook his head. His steely eyes showed a crafty glint.

"I was very noncommittal," he said. "I even doubted that he had the stock he talked about; at least, I gave that impression. Always a good policy, Gale – never to show your own hand until you are sure of the right cards."

Gale understood, and to some degree she approved. Business was a game, and a complicated one. It required bluff as well as tact. Though she disliked subterfuge, Gale considered it allowable. It certainly was not dishonest for her uncle to match wits with a man like Senor Baroba, the Brazilian rubber king.

Rising from the table, Marden picked up an evening newspaper, tapped it in approving fashion.

"Do you know, Gale," he remarked, "I think the police have drawn the teeth of this Mokanna chap. He may continue to bark, but he can no longer bite. However, it is better to wait and make sure."

Gale pondered deeply, after her uncle had left the dining room. She understood her uncle's moods, and could analyze them very capably. Last night, he had worried over the Mokanna situation. This evening, he laughed at any thought of the Veiled Prophet.

On the surface, that was logical. The police had broken Mokanna's sway. They had spiked a crime and learned many of its details. The law held a letter from Mokanna to a tool named Roy Ablam, ordering him to rob Goldy Chabro and make the gambler like it.

With both Ablam and Chabro dead, the letter found, and the robbery thwarted, the Mokanna menace looked very weak indeed. But it still didn't answer Gale's most perplexing question: How did the affairs of the Veiled Prophet concern those of her uncle, James Marden?

Gale wanted an answer, and decided to get it. Her face set with a determined expression, she left the dining room and went upstairs. The door of the study was ajar, the room was lighted. Gale stepped in, without knocking.

Her uncle wasn't there. On the desk lay a fat manila envelope, its flap open. Approaching, Gale saw that the envelope contained the green paper of stock certificates. Then her eyes widened in astonishment. In letters that curved like an ornamental arch, she read the name:

AMAZONIA RUBBER CORPORATION

The room seemed to swim. Gale remembered all that her uncle had told her. According to Marden, this stock was in the possession of Senor Jose Baroba, the wealthy Brazilian. Instead, the very certificates that he had mentioned were held by Marden himself!

GALE touched the envelope as though she expected it to burn her. Then, lifting it, she started to draw the certificates into full sight.

As she did, she saw a threefold letter on the desk, one that had been held flat by the manila envelope. Released, the bottom fold of the letter lifted lazily.

Gale saw typewritten lines – the finish of the note – but her eyes were too blurred to read them. Something else was more conspicuous: the signature. It wasn't written in her uncle's hand – the signature was a symbol.

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The double crescent of Mokanna.

Her uncle – the Veiled Prophet! Bewildered at first, Gale began to understand. Marden's worryment when Mokanna's sway was powerful, his glee when the strength of the Veiled Prophet waned – those could be shams.

Gale wanted to read the letter, but there wasn't time. Already she could hear footsteps on the stairs. Her uncle was coming up from the living room.

Frantically, the girl looked for a place to hide. The windows opened to a little balcony, but they were locked. A door leading to a rear room was bolted on this side. Pressing the letter flat, Gale dropped the envelope on it and hurried desperately into the hall.

Her own room was across the way, farther back. Gale reached it just as her uncle's head appeared at the top of the front stairs. Turning about, she pretended to be closing the door, and at that moment she heard the musical blare of an automobile horn outside the old house.

"It's Freddy!" exclaimed Gale. "I guess – well, I think I'll go out for a while, Uncle Jim."

Going downstairs, Gale was sure that she had covered her confusion very well. Meeting Fred Kellick at the door, she received her evening wrap, which he had picked up at the Club Zodiac.

Gale took the wrap upstairs. The trip gave her a chance for a quick glimpse of her uncle, for the study door was still ajar.

She saw Marden sealing the envelope, caught a flash of a white sheet inside it. Gale knew that her uncle had put the letter in with the stock certificates. Coming back from her own room, Gale met Marden as he stepped from the study.

"I'm going out," he said, "to see Densholm on some legal matters. If Garnstead telephones –"

He paused, smiling at his own forgetfulness.

"I'll call Garnstead myself," decided Marden. "I didn't realize that you wouldn't be here. Have a good time, Gale."

"I shall be home quite early, uncle," the girl said, soberly. "I am really very tired. Good night."

By the time that she and Fred had driven uptown, Gale felt miserable as well as tired. Thinking of her uncle in terms of Mokanna, she knew what the letter and the stock certificates could mean: New crime, the hidden work of the Veiled Prophet, otherwise James Marden, though the actual work would be thrust upon some poor dupe of the type of Ralph Jorcott or Roy Ablam.

Curiously, however, Gale could feel no sympathy for such tools. She was sorry for her uncle.

He was a kindly man, James Marden. For years, he had been a father to Gale. If he wasn't honest, he had certainly tried to be.

Perhaps it was because of Gale that Marden had sought greater wealth. She could blame herself, in part, if the world learned that James Marden was Mokanna, the Veiled Prophet of crime.

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Abruptly, Gale told Fred that she was ill, that last night's ordeal had been too much for her. Sympathetically, Fred turned the car about and drove back to the house.

Gale felt shaky when she went up the steps; she wavered while Fred was unlocking the door. He helped her into the hallway, where she smiled and said good night.

Fred departed, and Gale listened while his car drove away. She was too intent to recall that he had forgetfully pocketed her door key. Alone in the stillness of the old house, she wondered what to do next. At last, she went up to the study and turned on the light. She rummaged through desk drawers, looking for her uncle's revolver.

It wasn't there. In the back of one drawer, Gale noted bundles of money encircled by paper bands that bore the printed name of the Tribune Trust Co. – her uncle's bank. She pulled out the cash to look behind it for the gun, and noted that the money totaled ten thousand dollars, in bills of various denominations.

Probably, Marden had drawn the cash in preparation for a trip to Brazil; for he had intimated this evening that he and Gale would be going there after he closed the deal with Senor Baroba. But that puzzled Gale, for if Marden already had the Amazonia stock, why would he be going to Brazil at all?

THE question of the gun bothered Gale more. Straightening things in the desk, she turned out the study light and hurried downstairs. She was relieved when she found the revolver in a table drawer. It was an old-fashioned .32 that her uncle had brought from the Midwest. Gale recalled that he had obtained a police permit for it.

Deciding to leave the gun where it was, Gale started upstairs. She wanted to watch her uncle when he returned. Leaving the door of her room just wide enough so that she could peer out, she sat down to wait in the darkness. Then, she realized that she would need a complete alibi, if Marden found that she was in the house.

She had told her uncle that she was very tired and might come home early, but in that case she ought to be in bed. The thought worried her.

If fully attired, as at present, in an emergency she could flee from the house. To discard her clothes and wear a mere nightgown instead, seemed a risky course; nevertheless, it was the only way to avoid suspicion.

Gale began to undress. The increased pounding of her heartbeats frightened her. She felt that she was casting off more and more security with each succeeding garment. Her nerves were at a terrified pitch, when she heard a sound from far below. The front door had opened; her uncle had returned.

Completely petrified, Gale heard footsteps cross the lower hall and come directly to the stairs. Then, despite the chill that seemed to stay her heart thumps, the girl managed action. Already unclad, she slid into her nighties and reached the bed just as the footsteps sounded from the top of the stairs.

Face buried in the pillows, her hands as tightly pressed as her lips, Gale peeked sideways at an angle toward the door. Through the crack, she saw Marden pause and look toward her room. His eyes had a steely glint, his fingers were stroking his chin.

Gale was planning to pretend that she was half-asleep, should he knock at the door. If her uncle learned that she was home, she wanted him to know that she had gone to bed.

Still, she was much relieved when she saw Marden turn and enter his study. She heard his door go shut; then came a dull sound as he threw the heavy bolt.

Coming up to her elbow, Gale stared, her forehead wrinkled with worry. Her uncle didn't usually lock himself in his room. She was sure that something serious was afoot. Marden had a telephone in the study; she wondered if he intended to use it. Breath bated, she listened for any further sounds.

None came, yet Gale felt that this was the beginning of an ordeal. In that sunrise she was right. Before this evening ended, Gale Marden was to experience real horror, as great as any that her imagination could have created.

CHAPTER X. DEATH COMES HOME

COMMISSIONER WESTON was in one of his mysterious moods. A complacent expression on his broad face, Weston was riding in his official car, with Lamont Cranston a passenger beside him.

Inspector Joe Cardona was with them. At Weston's order, the swarthy police official was maintaining silence.

"You like adventure, Cranston," spoke the commissioner. "That's why I insisted that you come with me from the Cobalt Club. We are bound upon an important expedition."

Cranston's response was a casual shrug. A globe-trotter of considerable fame, he found his adventures in strange lands, not in Manhattan. At least, such was the impression that he made it a point to create.

The big car stopped in front of an apartment hotel. The passengers alighted, entered the building and took an elevator to the tenth floor, where they entered a sumptuous suite of rooms.

A bulky, black-bearded man arose to greet them; his dark eyes flashed with delight as he delivered a white-toothed smile.

"Cranston!"

The bearded man pronounced the name as if he had started to say "Caramba!" A moment later, The Shadow was receiving a violent handshake, while a great paw clamped his shoulder.

Actually, The Shadow hadn't an idea who the bearded man was. Still, he pretended to recognize him, for a very good reason. The guise of Cranston was one that The Shadow used by arrangement with its owner. The real Lamont Cranston was a world traveler, who seldom came to New York.

When Cranston's friends arrived in town, they often mistook The Shadow for the actual globe-trotter, and he always went through with the pretense. In the case of the bearded man, The Shadow promptly identified him as a Brazilian, and knew that he must be one of Cranston's friends who lived in Rio de Janeiro.

"Ah, you remember me, Cranston!" exclaimed the Brazilian. "You have not forgotten Jose Baroba! Tonight, when I have telephoned the police commissioner, I ask him if he happen to know my friend Cranston. Pronto! He bring you with him!"

While Baroba was simmering down, The Shadow gave Cardona an inquiring look. Feeling that he could speak at last, Joe undertoned:

"It's about Mokanna."

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Weston was chatting with Baroba, trying to get him to the point in question. Finally curbing his enthusiasm, Baroba became very solemn. He clapped his hands and called in booming tone:

"Alvaro!"

A dapper Brazilian entered the room. Baroba clapped a hand on the man's narrow shoulders.

"Alvaro is my secretary," said Baroba. "Once, very long ago, he made one bad mistake, which very nearly put him in the prison. But that is all forgotten, eh, Alvaro?"

The secretary nodded.

"This man Mokanna," continued Baroba, "he must know about Alvaro. Tonight, a messenger comes here with a package for Alvaro. It is from Mokanna, ordering that Alvaro should rob me. But Alvaro, he is honest. To me he gives the package."

Baroba produced a manila envelope. In it, he found a stack of stock certificates bearing the name of the Amazonia Rubber Corp. With the stocks was a letter bearing the double crescent signature of Mokanna. Weston read the letter avidly, then exclaimed:

"Why, these stocks are counterfeits!"

"Ah, yes, commissioner," returned Baroba, "and in the letter, Mokanna asks that Alvaro put them in my safe, and take the real ones. So, when I go back to Brazil – pouf! I find that I am swindled!"

"Who sold you the real stocks?"

"Some brokers. They are the ones that I would blame if Alvaro do as Mokanna order."

WESTON'S face showed triumph. He saw that Cranston, too, was impressed. Weston handed the letter to Cardona.

"We've got to trace that note," declared the commissioner. "It will lead us straight to Mokanna."

Cardona nodded. He was sure that the signature was the Veiled Prophet's own mark. But that didn't cover the case.

"We've seen letters like this before," declared Joe, "and they didn't get us anywhere. Say" – the inspector swung suddenly to Baroba – "what about the real stocks you've got? What did you intend to do with them? Take them back to Brazil?"

"Unless I sell them," replied Baroba. "But the one man who wish to buy" – he shrugged – "I expect him tonight, and he do not come."

"Who was he?"

"Senor Marden. He call up, saying he must see his lawyer, Senor Densholm, and afterward he will come here. But I have heard no more from Senor Marden."

Cardona's fingers seemed to snap of their own accord.

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"James Marden!" exclaimed Joe. "The fellow that's trying to promote a gigantic tire corporation! He wants these stocks, but he isn't going to buy them –"

"Which means," added Weston, catching Cardona's hunch, "that Marden intended to acquire them through Alvaro. In that case –"

"Marden is Mokanna!"

It was Cardona who made the final statement. Reaching for the telephone, Cardona called headquarters and ordered a squad to meet him. He didn't have to wait for Weston's approval; Joe knew that he would get it.

"If Marden is at home, commissioner," declared Cardona, "we'll bring him in. But he may be over at Densholm's, like he told Baroba. If you call Densholm –"

"I'll have Baroba call him," inserted Weston. "If you don't find Marden, inspector, telephone me at once."

Soon after Cardona left, Baroba was talking to Densholm, while Weston stood by, making gestures. In his voluble style, Baroba was talking too much. Weston made a grab for the telephone, too late.

"But I must see Senor Marden!" exclaimed Baroba. "It is because he may be Mokanna –"

At that point, Weston managed to yank away the telephone and clamp it on its stand. He felt suddenly resentful because Cranston, as Baroba's friend, had not intervened earlier, for Cranston knew the Brazilian's ways better than Weston did.

But when the commissioner looked around, he found that Cranston had departed. It was Alvaro who explained his absence. He said that Senor Cranston had gone back to the club, leaving word that he would come to see his friend Baroba after all the excitement was over.

Excitement was due to begin at Marden's house.

Gale Marden had just realized that she was beginning to get drowsy. Rousing herself, the girl became alert. Nerves tense, she fancied that she heard creeping sounds, but they didn't come from her uncle's study. They seemed to be downstairs.

Reaching for her slippers, Gale decided that they would be a handicap. Barefooted, she stole from the room and stopped by her uncle's door.

There were no sounds from within, so Gale decided that he must have gone downstairs. She continued to the stairway. There she stopped, listening for noises. Hearing none, Gale descended.

Trembling, she approached the living room. Looking through the curtains, she stifled a gasp and sank back to the steps. The thing she had glimpsed was enough to terrify anyone.

A face that was not a face; a silvery, moon-shaped visage above a crouched figure by the table in the far corner of the living room!

Mokanna, the Veiled Prophet!

IN her horror, Gale forgot how hapless she was. Oddly, the thing that heartened her was her recollection of the link between Mokanna and James Marden. She pictured her uncle, wearing a mask of silver gauze,

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plucking the revolver from the table drawer, to set out on deeds of crime.

Gale's spell of drowsiness must have been a deep one; otherwise, Marden could not have left the study without her hearing him. But Gale was suddenly glad that things had happened this way. It would be better to confront Marden while he was Mokanna. She knew that her uncle cared for her; he might listen if she told him all.

Bravely, Gale approached the curtains, stood ready to sweep them apart and let the background of the hallway light reveal her. She was glad that she was wearing a nightgown; her uncle would really believe that she had come home and gone to bed, totally unsuspecting his complicity in crime.

Rut when Gale faced the corner by the table, she almost gave way to hysterical laughter.

The glow of a street light shone through the window. It showed a bulky chair, a table lamp beyond it. The chair back had the shape of shoulders; the lamp's shade was roundish and silver-hued.

Viewed calmly, the combination looked exactly like a chair and a lamp. What a fool she had been to mistake those objects for a human shape!

Hysterics past, Gale would have given a genuine laugh, except for sounds that she heard when she approached the table. She stood motionless near the window, shapely and shimmering as her whole body trembled again and the nightgown caught the wavering light from the street.

Someone was creeping through the house, moving up to the second door, but not by the front stairs. The sounds that Gale heard came from a rear flight that led up from the kitchen.

There was a door at the back of the living room. Her uncle could have gone through it, suspecting that Gale had come down by the front way. By this time, he might have reached his study.

The girl listened as the creeping ceased, hoping to hear the closing of a door. It didn't come, but that meant nothing. Marden would naturally have shut it silently.

Perhaps, by this time, he knew that Gale was watching him. That could explain why he had come down to the living room. On sudden impulse, Gale pulled open the table drawer. The light from the street showed it empty.

Gale probed with trembling fingers, hoping to feel the touch of cold metal deeper in the drawer. Her search was futile.

The revolver was gone!

Bravely, Gale decided that the time for spying tactics was past. There was nothing to do but go upstairs and confront Marden immediately. The fact that he had a revolver did not deter her.

This latest proof that her uncle was Mokanna was the sort of thing that made Gale value her own life very little. The shame of being Mokanna's niece made her wish that she could be the murderer's next victim.

Gale scarcely felt the stairs, as she trod upward. She knew that she might have time to dress and be ready for flight, before baiting her uncle in his lair. But if she yielded to that impulse, she would probably turn coward and avoid the meeting.

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Deciding to remain just as she was, Gale stepped boldly to the study door and raised her hand to knock.

As though that movement had started it, a telephone bell began to jangle within the room. Gale listened, heard her uncle's voice, gruff enough to carry through the door.

"Hello –" Marden gave a laugh, as though he recognized the speaker. "Yes, I'm still here... What's that?... The police! You say they suspect that I'm Mokanna!

"Ten minutes ago?" Marden's voice became a groan, then suddenly went savage. "I see! You gave them time to get here. You believe as they do, that's why you called me too late!"

The next instant, as Gale remembered it, was a very, very long one. The thing that happened jarred her recollections, made the interval seem eternal. The sound that concluded that moment was to remain as a horrified memory.

A gun blasted within the room. Though muffled, its burst sounded tremendous to Gale. It was followed by a clatter of the telephone, the scrape of a chair, then the thudding of a body, with the chair's overturning noise following like a wave of echoes.

Gale was shrieking as she hammered at the door. There were other sounds that she did not notice, even though they came from many places. She was screaming the name of her uncle, forgetting his crimes in the thought that he was lying dead beyond the bolted door.

Then, so swiftly that it left her breathless, she was spun about by a long black arm that swept her from the door and stifled her screams in one rapid action.

The girl was in the clutch of a figure cloaked in black, whose burning eyes met hers, while hidden lips issued a whispered decree for silence!

CHAPTER XI. PROOF OF GUILT

IN her frenzy, Gale hadn't time to recognize that The Shadow was a friend. He had come from the front stairway he couldn't have been in the study when her uncle died. Reason should have told her that the command of the black-cloaked invader was important.

But Gale couldn't reason at that moment. She felt that the whole world was her enemy. With a fury far beyond her normal strength, she wrenched half free and managed to shriek again.

Instantly, she was whirled across the hall. Her pink-clad form produced a kaleidoscopic effect against the blackness of The Shadow's cloak. A moment later Gale was gone, spinning through a doorway which happened to be her own.

Men were battering at the big front door; it was yielding under their smashes. But that wasn't the direction in which The Shadow turned. He pivoted toward the rear of the hall, a gloved hand whipping a gun from beneath his cloak. The automatic blazed while on the draw.

Shots answered, wild ones. The Shadow's laugh was sinister, challenging, as he drove toward the end of the hall, pumping away with his big gun. Men were tumbling down the rear stairs off around the corner of the hall, and The Shadow was in pursuit.

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Cardona and his squad heard the gunfire as they broke through the front. They dashed through the lower hall, to see guns spurting in the kitchen. Before they could join in the fusillade, the fight had carried outdoors.

Wounded thugs rose for battle, as the officers reached an alleyway. Cardona and his men were forced to riddle them. Then, from the next street, they heard the roar of a fleeing car, followed by a burst of shots. After that came a long peal of mocking mirth.

The laugh of The Shadow!

The taunt reached the top of its crescendo and shivered into vague echoes that seemed to cling to the surrounding house walls. Cardona waited, half expecting The Shadow to return. Then, convinced that the cloaked fighter had gone, Cardona spoke to a detective sergeant standing near him.

"Those were Mokanna's men," affirmed Joe. "Come here to help their chief make a getaway. The Shadow must have shown up ahead of them. I only hope he stopped Mokanna."

Upstairs, Gale Marden was coming out of a daze. Everything was blurred; she wondered why she was reclining on the floor, her head propped against a bureau drawer, when she should have been in bed. Or should she be in bed? Why wasn't she at the Club Zodiac?

Gale realized suddenly that she was confusing recent gunfire with that of the night before. The light from the hallway told her that she was in her own room; and she recognized that the shrill sounds outside the house were police whistles.

Recollection returned in a flood.

Gale remembered the fighter in black. He had saved her from men who had come up by the back stairs while the police were breaking in through the front door. She could understand why the thugs had tried to kill her. They had heard her screams, and probably thought that she knew too much about Mokanna. Maybe Gale knew more than they did.

She was convinced that her uncle was dead. She was glad that the police had arrived, to take over the grim task of viewing his body. Already, Gale could hear men entering the house; rising, she stole to the door and peered toward the stairs.

Below, she saw Joe Cardona and recognized him. Hurriedly, Gale put on slippers and kimono and stepped out into the hallway to meet the police inspector.

From Gale's solemn expression, Cardona guessed what had happened. His tone was sympathetic when he learned that the girl was Marden's niece. When Gale pointed out the door of the study, Cardona listened, then asked if the room had another door. Gale nodded; the door was around the corner of the back hall.

Cardona tried the second door, found it bolted like the first. Putting detective on duty there, he went to the door opposite Gale's room and began to break a panel. Peering through the splintered space, Cardona turned to Gale.

"You'd better go back to your room, Miss Marden," he said. "I'll tell you when you're needed."

Carefully, Joe Cardona reached through the broken panel, and found the bolt. He made sure that it was tightly in place, then drew it. Opening the door, Cardona stepped to the room of death. He looked across to the rear door, saw that it was bolted, glanced at the windows and noted that they were locked.

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Then Joe stooped beside the body near the desk.

IT was a positive case of suicide. James Marden had died instantly, from a bullet in his right temple. Beside his right hand, sprawled like a big star on the floor, lay the death gun his fingers could no longer clutch. It was the .32 that Marden kept in the table downstairs.

On the desk was a note scrawled in longhand; beside it a pen, still blobbed with ink. The note was brief; instead of the signature of James Marden, it bore the mark so recently attributed to him – the symbol of Mokanna.

The note read:

Rather than face exposure as a criminal, I am talking a course that may seem cowardly. At least, my misdeeds belong to the past. If I am never heard from again I shall be forgotten.

Desk drawers were open. In the top one, Cardona found specimens of Marden's handwriting that matched the sample on the desk. He also found an unsealed envelope that interested him. Its contents were more illuminating than Cardona expected.

From it dropped old newspaper clippings, with a folded sheet that proved to be a copy of an old police record. Cardona was looking at photos of James Marden taken twenty–five years before, and bearing a different name, that of Kirk Lurbin.

The name struck home. Once Cardona had read up on the Lurbin case. The man in question was an embezzler, who had staged a clever jail break while serving a ten–year term. He had enlisted in the army during the World War and had been traced to France, where he had been reported killed in action.

So Marden was Lurbin!

Cardona didn't wonder that he had turned to crime again, under the protection of his new name. One thing pleased Joe, however. He felt that this would soften the burden for Gale when she learned that the man who had masked as Mokanna was not her actual uncle.

For the present, Cardona decided not to disturb the girl. People began to arrive. Commissioner Weston came with Senor Baroba, bringing along Lamont Cranston, having stopped for him at the Cobalt Club. A man with a crabby look and manner introduced himself as Jabez Densholm, Marden's attorney.

When Densholm mentioned that Marden had conducted negotiations with Howard Garnstead, Cardona called the financier. Garnstead arrived, solemn–faced and saddened, to view the body of a man that he had supposed to be a friend.

His inspection complete, Cardona sent Marden's body to the morgue. It was going out to the dead wagon, when a young man drove up in a sporty roadster and begun to ask about Gale. He turned out to be Fred Kellick. Cardona sent him upstairs to the study.

Soon afterward, Cardona knocked at Gale's door. The girl appeared, attired in a dark dress that had the appearance of mourning apparel. She shuddered as Cardona conducted her to the study, but Joe reassured her by telling her that the body was gone.

Encouraged by the sight of friends, Gale told her story in a low, sobless tone. She produced linking evidence, when she told of seeing the stock certificates and the Mokanna note on her uncle's desk earlier that evening.

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But she explained that she hadn't been able to regard those things as proof that Marden was Mokanna, even though she suspected it.

No one blamed Gale for her course, after she had continued with her testimony. On the contrary, they showed real admiration for her bravery. She mentioned the gun, and declared that Marden must have gone downstairs for it without her hearing him. She identified the revolver when Cardona showed it to her. It was the gun that checked with the police permit.

Then Gale remembered the telephone call.

"Someone tried to warn my uncle," she expressed. "Only, whoever it was, warned him too late. Wait – I think I can remember nearly all that my uncle said."

SLOWLY, the girl repeated Marden's end of the telephone conversation, almost verbatim. It was Commissioner Weston who decided:

"One of Mokanna's dupes must have learned that we were on the trail. That would account for the call."

"It might," put in Densholm, dryly. "However, such was not the case. It happens" – the lawyer displayed a withery smile – "that I made the call in question."

"By what right?" demanded Weston, hotly.

"I was Marden's attorney," reminded Densholm. "I had a perfect right – a duty in fact – to inform him that I had heard from Senor Baroba."

"But you were obstructing the law!"

"Not at all! According to Gale's testimony, Marden accused me of notifying him too late. I was helping the law, commissioner."

Weston fumed a while, then returned to his previous point. He argued that Densholm's action had prevented the law from taking Marden alive.

"I don't agree," returned Densholm testily. "The fact is, I thought that Marden would face the music. Since he chose suicide, he would have committed it anyway. But if your men had stormed this room, commissioner, he might have killed a few of them first."

The commissioner subsided. Tactfully, Cardona changed the subject, by showing Gale the suicide note, then giving her the documents that proved her uncle to be Kirk Lurbin. As Cardona put it, his name of James Marden was a masquerade, just like the title of Mokanna, the Veiled Prophet.

It was difficult to judge the effect on Gale. She seemed bewildered, yet she retained a certain calmness. After all the things that had occurred this evening, Gale was evidently willing to accept anything that happened. Then, slowly, the girl asked: "Where did you find this?"

Cardona pointed to the desk drawers. Gale looked puzzled.

"Which drawer was it in?" she questioned. "The one with the money?"

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The surprise was turned on Cardona. He wanted to know what money. When Gale mentioned ten thousand dollars, drawn from the Tribune Trust Co., Cardona began to ransack the drawers again. Not finding the cash, Joe pondered.

"Marden must have stowed it downstairs when he got the gun," decided Joe, "unless he slipped it to those pals of his, so they would help him in his getaway. Wait, though, maybe it's still in this room."

Cardona began a search. Finding no ordinary hiding places, he hammered the walls. They were entirely solid, and covered with wallpaper of a simple pattern that could not possibly hide a secret panel.

Joe pulled up the rugs and found that the flooring was solid, too. He concluded his useless hunt by banging the ceiling from the top of a stepladder.

After that, Cardona went downstairs. He was still hunting for the cash, without success, when all the others had gone. Last to leave were Commissioner Weston and his friend Lamont Cranston. They rode in the official car. When Cranston was dropping off at the club, Weston remarked:

"Well, Cranston, we've cracked the Mokanna case. With James Marden dead, we've heard the last of the Veiled Prophet. Remember the old saying: 'He who laughs last –'"

Despite the commissioner's assurance, his was not the last laugh. As Weston's car drove away, a low tone of whispered mirth issued from the lips of Cranston.

The last laugh was The Shadow's, but it did not carry triumph. It was a grim tone; one that foreboded future problems. The law could claim a victory, if it chose; but not The Shadow.

He was still on the trail of Mokanna, the Veiled Prophet, whose ways of crime were as well-masked as his face, with its gauze of silver!

CHAPTER XII. GALE SEEKS ADVICE

THREE days had passed. Days of headlines and radio flashes that maddened Gale Marden. The girl was living in the seclusion of her college club, where everyone was sympathetic, but her curiosity made her seek to learn what was happening in the outside world.

Everything seemed to center about Mokanna, the Veiled Prophet. The law was tearing his past apart and finding it identical with that of James Marden, who wasn't himself, but Kirk Lurbin. As a Jekyll and Hyde, it seemed that the so-called Marden was unique.

Investigation revealed the full facts of his fraud. Having escaped prison years ago, Lurbin had enlisted in the army, under an assumed name of course. His buddy had been the real James Marden, Gale's true uncle. Their company had been shot to pieces, the remnants captured.

Marden had come back from prison camp. But it wasn't the real Marden who had returned. It was Lurbin, masquerading under his buddy's name. He had learned enough of Marden's life to manipulate the fraud, and he had been clever enough to avoid the one man who could have exposed the swindle.

The one man in question was Marden's brother, Gale's father. The false brother had shown up at the funeral when Gale's father died, never before.

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It was afternoon when Gale Marden stopped at Densholm's office, to discuss legal affairs. The crab-faced lawyer received the girl with a smile that was actually sympathetic. He noted that Gale was dressed in black, but he made no comment on the fact. Densholm usually let other people tell him anything that he wanted to know.

Gale began with a simple statement: "I have come to talk about my uncle."

"Your real uncle?" inquired Densholm. "Or the false one?"

"The man I knew as my uncle," returned Gale, firmly. "I prefer to still consider him as James Marden. Is it agreeable with you?"

"Quite. I, too, knew him as James Marden."

"Then perhaps you will agree with me," declared Gale, decisively, "when I maintain that he did not commit suicide. I believe that my uncle was murdered!"

Densholm's eyes went narrow.

"I testified against him." Gale's voice choked. "I believed him to be crooked. But I don't believe it any longer. He was safely established as James Marden.

"He didn't have to travel across the country to help a homeless niece who wasn't his own. But he did it" – the girl was sobbing – "and it showed him to be a kindly man. He was trying to forget the past, and to build an honest future."

Densholm was used to handling women who cried in his office. His dry tone was capable of absorbing tears. In brittle fashion, he quoted facts to dispute Gale's theories. The girl's best arguments were battered down the moment that she presented them. She left the office somewhat in a daze, angry instead of tearful.

Densholm pressed a button. A drab-faced man arrived. The lawyer wrote some notes on a memo pad and handled the paper to the fellow.

"Keep an eye on Miss Marden, Clarry," said Densholm, in his dry tone. "She has some ideas which might prove troublesome. I would like to know how far she goes with them."

After leaving Densholm's office, Gale went to see Howard Garnstead. The financier was at home in his lavish uptown apartment, which occupied an entire floor, with some extra rooms to take care of an overflow of servants.

In Garnstead, Gale found a sympathetic listener. He heard her story without interruption. Gale began with the theory that her uncle's death was murder; when she saw that Garnstead was impressed, she supplied what she considered evidence.

"Uncle Jim couldn't have gone downstairs," Gale insisted. "I was really awake all the while that I was in bed. Enough awake to have heard him. If he didn't go downstairs, how did he get the revolver?. I'm sure that he couldn't have picked it up when he arrived home. He came upstairs immediately.

"What's more, I saw a man downstairs, in the living room. A man who wore a silver-mask; at least, he must have, because his face was like a blur. Besides, there is the matter of the money.

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"I'd like to know what happened to the ten thousand dollars that my uncle drew from the bank. I'm sure that the murderer could have taken it."

WHEN Gale had finished her statements, she realized certain weaknesses, particularly her emphasis of the point that she had seen a masked man – presumably her uncle's murderer – in the living room.

But she kept silent, because she saw that her words had taken effect with Garnstead. He was seated with half-closed eyes, trying to picture the incidents that she had described.

"I should like to accept these things as facts," declared Garnstead, at length. "In themselves, they have merit. The difficulty is that they conflict with known details. For instance, the suicide note, and the fact that your uncle was found dead alone in a room with no possible outlet except doors and windows that were locked on the inside."

"But if you could believe –"

"I could almost believe them, at present," interposed Garnstead, "because I really considered your uncle to be a man of integrity. But there are other persons who could not be convinced, without stronger evidence."

"Do you mean the police?"

"I do," acknowledged Garnstead. "You must back your arguments, Gale. If there is any way in which I can help you, I shall always be ready. Meanwhile, I would advise you not to mention your opinions to the wrong people."

Gale spent the rest of the afternoon moving her few belongings from the college club to a tiny apartment that she had rented furnished. At six o'clock, she called up Densholm at his home. Encouraged by her success with Garnstead, she tried again to convince the lawyer.

Densholm proved very testy. He didn't seem to care if Gale cried across the telephone. He let her talk awhile, then spiked her arguments with a statement that he evidently regarded as a clincher.

"You forget that I was also a witness to your uncle's suicide," snapped Densholm. "I talked with him over the telephone, just before he fired the fatal shot. In fact, I actually heard the gun when it was fired!"

Finishing the telephone call, Gale paced the apartment angrily. She hated Densholm; more than that, she mistrusted him. She wished that he hadn't made the telephone call that he talked about, and it suddenly struck her that he might not have done so.

Facts backed by proof!

What proof could Densholm give that he had been on the telephone when her uncle died? None, except his own unsupported word. Suppose that he had lied –

The very thought was an inspiration. It didn't matter who had called up. Anyone could have been instructed to make a telephone call and talk to Marden on the chance that Gale would overhear it. In claiming the call as his own, Densholm had done more than enter the picture as a witness.

He had given himself an alibi!

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Perhaps it was Densholm who had been in the house, creeping about downstairs. But that didn't answer the question of murder. Someone would have had to be in the locked study when the death shot ended Marden's life. It followed, therefore, that the person in question must have known a way out.

The thought that Densholm could be fitted into the theory, gave Gale a new determination. Ever since Garnstead had mentioned the need of new evidence, Gale had been thinking of paying a visit to the old house which, at present, was quite empty and unwatched. Her mind was made up. She would make that visit this very evening.

Gale's plans were interrupted by the arrival of Fred Kellick. He came to take Gale to dinner, as he had done each evening since her uncle's death. They dined at a quiet little restaurant, where Gale found the atmosphere soothing.

She felt very grateful to Fred. He had dropped his playboy mood entirely, and was doing his utmost to ease Gale's grief. He was a different Fred; quite different from anything that Gale could have imagined.

Gale wanted to talk to him, to tell him of her belief that deep mystery lay behind her uncle's death. But she resisted the impulse.

Fred's complete reversal of behavior left Gale a bit troubled. If he could show himself so different on such short order, there might be other phases in his character. Gale wanted to analyze the new Fred before taking any step.

Besides, Fred was helpful, too helpful. If he learned of her coming plan, he might want to aid it; or he might raise objections to the course. Either would be bad.

WHEN they finished dinner, Gale decided to go back to her apartment. They rode there in a taxicab, and Fred said good night at the door. His tone was very earnest when he declared:

"If there's anything I can do for you, Gale, anything at all, just let me know. If you have any plans –"

Gale's brown eyes were steady, as she interrupted him. She said that she had no plans whatever, and she studied Fred closely, to see if he believed her. His eyes were steady, too, keener than Gale had ever noticed them to be. Then, abruptly, Fred repeated his good night and left.

Immediately, Gale prepared for her trip to the old house. She didn't have to change her clothes, for her black dress was perfect for such an expedition. She had a flashlight, which she put in her handbag. She had no gun, but she could see no reason why she would need one.

The most important item was the key to the house, a duplicate that Gale had found. She hadn't asked Fred for the key that he had forgetfully kept the other night; such a request might have informed him of her plan.

When she left her new apartment, Gale noticed a door across the hall. It belonged to another apartment that had also been vacant until today. Gale frowned suspiciously, then decided that it was merely a coincidence that someone else had moved into the apartment house on the same day that she had.

Outside, Gale took a car. Looking across the street, she glimpsed a drab-faced man who shifted out of sight into a doorway. A trifle worried, Gale looked into other doorways as she passed. Through the window of a little cigar store, she saw a man who reminded her of Fred Kellick; then she laughed at her own imagination.

If this kept up, she'd be suspecting everybody as a spy. Why not begin with the cab driver? The thought was whimsical; it soothed Gale's nerves. She looked at the driver's identification card, which was posted in the cab. His photograph showed a rather peaked face; with the picture was the name Moe Shrevnitz.

Neither the face nor the name struck Gale as the sort that would belong to a spy. She gave the driver an address in the next block to her uncle's house, and settled back to think of other people. Gale considered three names: Densholm, Garnstead, and Kellick.

Gale felt that her suspicion of Densholm was foolish. The lawyer had probably forgotten her entirely after dismissing her theories as childish. She was quite sure that Garnstead had forgotten her temporarily, for the financier had many matters that pressed. But he would remember her problems readily enough should she find new evidence and take it to him.

As for Fred, there was no doubt that Gale was constantly in his mind, but he wasn't thinking in terms of unsolved mystery.

That summed it up. Gale decided that three persons, and no more, had been concerned with her affairs. Vaguely, the girl recalled the cloaked fighter who had saved her from disaster the night of her uncle's death. But she decided that The Shadow belonged to the past.

Gale Marden was to change that opinion. She was to learn that The Shadow was a being of the present – and the future!

CHAPTER XIII. SNARE OF DEATH

THE old house seemed grim and ghostly. The impression almost overwhelmed Gale, from the moment that she had entered and locked the front door behind her. It was a place of cavernous depths, ready to swallow her into its darkened maw.

Paused inside the door, Gale tried to analyze the reason. She had grown used to this house; it shouldn't frighten her. But she began to wonder, thinking that perhaps she should have sensed this terror long ago, when she and her uncle first took the house.

It might have had sinister qualities from the start, things that she hadn't detected because of ignorance.

It was odd that James Marden should have taken the house at all, though Gale kind never considered it that way before. When the Mardens had come to New York, the house had been waiting for them.

Gale knew that her uncle had rented it from someone, but she had been somewhat surprised because he hadn't taken an apartment, instead.

His choice of neighborhood had puzzled her, too. This district was neither pleasant nor convenient. Other houses in the block were falling into decay. This house had one merit only: Marden had rented it cheaply. But that was curious, too, for he had never been a penny pincher.

Her thoughts stabilized by these reflections, Gale used the flashlight to pick her way toward the front stairs. Her footfalls clattered like the rattle of hail; they seemed to bring echoes from every empty room.

Remembering how softly she had prowled the house before, Gale promptly removed her high-heeled shoes and tucked them under her arm. That made it better; still, the stairs creaked under her stockinged feet, causing her to pause often on the way to the second floor.

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Gale blamed it on the flashlight. She had been used to better illumination – perhaps that was why she had moved about so softly in the past. Reaching the study, she felt trembly; she didn't like the way that darkness kept creeping up behind her.

Groping to the windows, she pulled down the shades; then found the desk lamp and tugged the cord. The room immediately lost its horror. Properly illuminated, it was the room that Gale remembered – her uncle's study, with everything as it used to be, except for the main door with its shattered panel.

Realizing that light trickled through the space and could be seen in the hallway, Gale took a curtain from the front of an open closet and draped it over the door. She closed the door, wedging the curtain in place.

The door had a lock, but there was no key in it, so Gale simply threw the bolt, as her uncle had done. Feeling more secure, she began to probe the desk drawers, wondering if the missing money could have slipped down behind them.

She was kneeling beside the desk, her arm thrust into the depths, when silent action occurred at the door.

A black-gloved hand crept in through the shattered panel, emerged from the drape, and silently drew the bolt. The hand disappeared; the door itself came open and closed again, curtain and all. With that process, the room received another visitor – a silent figure, cloaked in black.

Faced toward the desk, The Shadow watched Gale complete her useless hunt for the money. Then, in a low, calm whisper, he spoke:

"Good evening, Miss Marden."

There was something in the tone that saved Gale from fright. The whisper, well-modulated, seemed more like a thought than a spoken voice. Though startled, Gale felt gripped by a recollection of the past. Still kneeling, and gazing toward the desk, she nodded slowly.

The Shadow repeated his greeting. This time, Gale came to her feet, stared toward the door. Momentary horror passed, as her eyes met The Shadow's. Recognizing the being who had once rescued her, the girl became quite calm.

ALMOST before she realized it, Gale was pouring out her story as ardently as she had told it to Howard Garnstead. She was mixing facts with theories, discussing the mystery of the death gun, the silver-masked face that she imagined she saw in the living room, everything else that she thought might prove her claim that Marden had been murdered.

All the while, The Shadow listened silently, though his eyes spoke understanding. It never occurred to Gale that she might be making a grave mistake, telling all this to an unknown intruder. The longer she talked, the more she accepted The Shadow as a friend.

Her case completed, Gale paused. Then, ruefully, she queried:

"But how can any of this help? My uncle wrote that suicide note and signed it with the Mokanna symbol. Handwriting experts have checked on both and say that neither is a forgery. Besides, there is no possible way in which a murderer could have left the room."

Despite herself, Gale was refuting her own theories. She had argued with Densholm, elaborated with Garnstead. But the lawyer had antagonized her, while the financier had shown sympathy. The Shadow was

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different. He seemed to accept everything at actual value. To be honest with herself, Gale had to admit the other side of the case.

Having done so, she sank into a chair and buried her face in her arms. Her cause was shattered by her own admissions. Even a friend like The Shadow could not help her. Gale felt humiliated because she had been foolish enough to come to the old house on a blind quest.

Then came The Shadow's sibilant tone: "The suicide note was unfinished –"

"Unfinished?" Gale's head bobbed up. "But... but what can you mean?"

"It may not have been a suicide note at all."

The Shadow spread a paper on the table. It was a newspaper clipping, an exact copy of Marden's note. Reading it, Gale realized that there should have been more. In fact, the note did not mention suicide, nor did it name specific crimes that Marden had committed. The Shadow emphasized those points.

"Perhaps your uncle planned flight," The Shadow told Gale. "That could have been the 'course' that he mentioned."

"Flight!" echoed Gale. "That's why he drew the money from the bank! He'd talked of going to South America –"

"Because he feared exposure," inserted The Shadow, "as Kirk Lurbin – not as Mokanna."

It fitted perfectly. Gale was elated to find her theory supported, until a distressing thought struck her. Looking at the printed copy of the death note, she asked:

"What about the signature?"

"When Mokanna murdered your uncle," declared The Shadow, "he saw the unfinished note and regarded it as useful. Mokanna had already planted evidence, and found a chance to clinch it. The note had no signature, so Mokanna added the crescent symbol himself."

The simplicity of the thing amazed Gale. It had been a master stroke by the Veiled Prophet. Always an opportunist, Mokanna had been up to form when he took advantage of that situation.

"Mokanna found the gun downstairs," concluded The Shadow. "He brought it here and murdered your uncle with it. After that crime, he signed the note and took the money. In its place, he left –"

"The Lurbin evidence!" Gale blurted. "My uncle must have been one of Mokanna's dupes!"

"A dupe who refused to commit crime," The Shadow defined. To Gale, the statement seemed a tribute to her uncle. "So Mokanna disposed of him," continued The Shadow. "To murder, he added another crime – that of branding James Marden as the Veiled Prophet. Pressed by the law, Mokanna was anxious to end that game."

MOVING away from the desk, The Shadow looked around the room. Gale guessed his purpose; he was looking for the secret outlet that the police had failed to find: One would have to exist, to bear out The Shadow's statements.

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But Gale felt her hopes fade. If ever a room had been tapped from top to bottom, it was this one. Cardona had seen to that while searching for the missing money.

The Shadow stopped at the broken door. He pressed the bolt shut; recognizing from experience that it was insufficient, he produced an oddly-shaped pick and used it to turn the lock, without benefit of key. After that, he began to probe the entire room.

Walls passed muster, so did the locked windows. Gale noted that The Shadow went lightly over the spots that Cardona had examined most thoroughly, but it did not occur to her that he might have been present, in another capacity, the night when the police inspector had been at work here.

She was impressed, by this time, with The Shadow's uncanny ability at everything he undertook. When he stopped at the rear door of the room, Gale could tell, by his softly whispered laugh, that he had discovered something.

The girl took her shoes from the desk where she had placed them. Putting them on, she started across the room.

At the clatter of the high heels, The Shadow turned suddenly about, motioned quickly for silence. Gale advanced on tiptoe. The Shadow still maintained his listening attitude.

Gale caught the sounds that he heard. Creeping sounds from the front stairs; not of one approacher, but of several. The footsteps reached the front hall door. Breathless, Gale watched the hanging curtain stir.

Stubby fingers pushed through, and drew the bolt. The knob turned, but the door did not yield. The Shadow had locked it, Gale remembered.

Then, in place of the withdrawn fingers, something bulgy pushed against the curtain, poking through the broken panel of the door. Gale knew that it must be a gun muzzle; somehow, it struck her as bulkier than a revolver.

A machine gun!

Gale gazed anxiously at The Shadow, then looked toward the rear door where they stood. That door had a bolt, no lock. But the bolt was actually rusted into place, for the door had never been used. It might be difficult, even for The Shadow, to draw that bolt without a sound. Even a slight grating noise could mean death.

Murderous servers of Mokanna had learned that Gale was in the house, and were sure that she had reached the study. All that they wanted was a clue to her position in the room, and the machine-gun muzzle would loose a spraying hail of death.

Doom, not only to Gale Marden but to The Shadow, whose destruction would be an unexpected bonus for Mokanna's servitors!

The Shadow's thoughts were swift. Silence was priceless at this juncture. The crooks probably figured that Gale would try escape through the rear door. The draped gun muzzle had a veer in that direction. But The Shadow was recalling another night when silence had been valued – by Mokanna.

In murdering Marden and making an escape, Mokanna must have used this door without the slightest noise. The rest of the room was solid; for that matter, the door was, too.

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But The Shadow had already calculated upon a remarkable possibility; something so ingenious, that he had guessed it purely through a process of elimination.

It was worth a try. Running his fingers up the side of the door frame, The Shadow dug deep. Each hand encountered a hidden catch, one on each side of the doorway, near the top. The Shadow pressed.

Noiselessly, astonishingly, the entire doorway turned on hidden pivots in the center, offering a double avenue of exit to the rear hall!

No secret panels were necessary to the device. The room had simply been fitted with a revolving door frame, which included everything: top, sides, sill, and the door as well. There were cracks where the baseboard and the wallpaper met the frame, but those were natural with any doorway.

The mechanism was noiseless, because Mokanna had arranged it before Marden ever occupied this old house. It had been a device for future use, like so many things that the Veiled Prophet employed.

GALE was ready to dart out through one side of the bisected opening, when The Shadow gripped her. Lifting the girl from her feet, he swept her through the other side of the half-turned doorframe, so that there would be no clatter from her heels.

Crouched in the hallway, Gale saw The Shadow turn back toward the secret opening. Reaching through, he gripped the long cord of a floor lamp, that extended from a plug near the trick doorway. As he yanked the cord, he swung the doorframe shut and dropped deep in the hallway, beside Gale.

They heard the muffled crash of the lamp. Men in the front hall had heard it, too, and located its position in the room. Instantly, the machine gun began its rat-tat-tat, and the gunners did not stop when they had blasted the wall where the lamp had fallen.

Shots were ripping everywhere through that vacated room, filling it with a deadly deluge that would have doomed all victims who remained within the snare!

CHAPTER XIV. FIGHT BRINGS FLIGHT

As the machine gun's clatter died, The Shadow turned toward the rear stairs, which were quite close by, and listened for sounds from below. There were none – evidently all the members of Mokanna's picked crew were in the front hallway on the second floor.

Calmly, The Shadow told Gale to start down the stairs and go out through the kitchen door. She was to be on the watch, however, for lookouts. If she spied any she was to wait somewhere until The Shadow followed. Knowing the house well, Gale would find such a process to be easy.

Her goal was to be the rear street; there she would find a waiting cab that would take her home to her apartment. Once in the cab, she would be safe; she wouldn't have to wait for The Shadow.

Those instructions briefly put, The Shadow turned and moved toward the corner that led into the front hall. Gale felt momentarily fearful, realizing that he intended to attack an entire squad of gunmen. Then, realizing that he had routed a mob that other night, she lost her qualms and began her cautious trip below.

As The Shadow neared the front hall he could hear the snarl of angry voices, followed by the cough of revolver shots. Crooks had pushed away the curtain, to peer into the study. Seeing nothing of a victim, they had decided that Gale must have fallen out of sight beyond the desk.

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But they were anxious to make sure, hence the revolver shots. The thugs were blasting the lock of the main door, smashing it apart with bullets.

The door gave. As crooks shouldered into the study they heard a sound, not from the room but from the hall that they were about to leave. The one sound that they had not anticipated.

The laugh of The Shadow!

Strident in its mockery, the dread mirth shivered into echoing taunts that told the crooks they had failed. Frantically, the snarling mobsters decided that their only chance of safety was to meet the black-cloaked foe. His laugh told that he was somewhere in the hallway, but the killers didn't guess how close The Shadow actually was.

He drove among them the moment that they wheeled. Their machine gun put aside, they were forced to rely upon revolvers, some half-emptied, others half-drawn. Five in number, the gunmen were beaten almost as soon as they began.

There were muffled shots, as the nearest pair met The Shadow. Those coughs came from the cloaked fighter's gun. Seeing the pair sprawl, the rest blazed wildly at the spot where they thought The Shadow was. But the cloaked foe had vanished like a puff of smoke.

The Shadow had flung those sprawlers sideways and wheeled across the hall. He was at the wall by the doorway, driving in on the crooks who were craning to look for him!

In a way, the method was too good. The three thugs weren't in the doorway when The Shadow reached it. His ghostly disappearance was too much for them. The trio had turned and dashed through Marden's study, to reach the door to the rear hall.

They didn't know the trick of the revolving doorway. That was Mokanna's own prize secret, that he had intrusted to no one. He had been particularly careful not to give any clues to his identity or methods to small-fry workers who indulged in gunplay.

Men like Jorcott or Ablam were the only ones who could have revealed anything about the Veiled Prophet. These gunners, products of the underworld, weren't in the same class as Mokanna's gilt-edged dupes.

But they did know that there was a rear door to the study, bolted on the inside. A yank of that bolt and they would be clear of The Shadow, free to take the back stairs that Gale had followed. They actually believed, as they fled, that they might overtake the girl and slay her, as Mokanna had commanded.

The Shadow had taken care of that contingency. When the fleeing thugs reached the rear door, they stopped short. It was bolted, but not from their side. In some strange manner, the door had been barred against them from the rear hallway.

THEY hadn't time to guess the answer.

In using the trick doorway, Mokanna had been careful to pivot it exactly as he found it. A door bolted on the outside would have given the device away.

But The Shadow had no reason to preserve the secret. On the contrary, he had seen an advantage in leaving the doorway reversed, so he had done it.

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As a result, the crooks were caught in their own snare. They were in a room that had only one easy outlet, the route through the front hall. That exit was no longer easy. The Shadow had reached it, a gun in each fist. He was ready to wither foemen who refused to surrender.

The capture of these thugs would be valuable, if only to learn the scant facts that they knew about Mokanna. A few other killers had known a little, but they chanced to be the badly wounded ones from former battle, men who had died before statements could be forced from them.

Here were three rats, as neatly cornered as The Shadow could want them. Men who should surely realize their helpless position and talk under The Shadow's capable methods of persuasion.

Instead, the trio did the unexpected.

Without the slightest semblance of a passing signal among them, they acted with mutual accord. They turned from the door that they couldn't use and surged for The Shadow, shooting as they came.

One gunner lunged ahead of the others, but not by design. He simply happened to have the longest legs, which proved, in this case, to be a disadvantage. He took the first dose of slugs that mouthed from The Shadow's gun.

The others were finding their aim as they cleared the plunging body of their pal. But they were shooting at a blank doorway. The Shadow had wheeled back into the hall, hooking an edge of the doorway with a gun.

He'd give them bullets, if they needed such a dose, or hard-sledged blows if such proved preferable. He was banking, too, on the slight chance that they might surrender.

There was something else that The Shadow took into consideration. Other men were lurking on the front stairs. The Shadow had detected them, though they hadn't come into sight. In his present position, facing forward in the hall, he could handle those reserves if they tried to aid their harried pals.

The thugs from the study didn't stop to look for The Shadow. Instead, they drove madly for the front stairs. Aiming, The Shadow delivered a taunting laugh that threatened trouble if they did not stop. He expected them to wheel, and either shoot or surrender. Instead, they dived down stairs.

From the way they pitched forward, it was evident that they were clearing men who crouched there. Starting ahead, The Shadow was prepared to settle the intervening gunners and stop the fleeing men before they could yet outside. His gun's were trained right toward the top of the stairs, ready to drop the reserves who poked in sight.

But they didn't come into sight at all. There were scuffling sounds well down the stairs that gave the impression of an upward lunge suddenly halted. Then, over the stair top, came two missile's that looked like pineapples. Instead of bullets, the crooks were using grenades.

The Shadow didn't see the roundish objects until they were in mid-flight, for the only light came from the study and the stair top was quite dim. He might have blasted a single pineapple with a bullet; he had performed such marksmanship in the past. But winging two, one high, the other low, was a task that time did not allow.

Instead of shooting, The Shadow whirled. Escaping a missile that almost grazed his shoulder, he dived across the hall into Gale's room, kicking the door shut as he finished his trip flat on the floor.

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There was no explosion from the hall. Instead, the missiles gave a puffy sigh when they struck. The Shadow could hear a spatter against the door; it was changing to a crackle when he reached his feet. Yanking the door open, The Shadow was met by a roar of rising flame.

The things hadn't been grenades; they were incendiary bombs, loaded with compressed chemicals that had sprayed in all directions. One bomb had landed in the middle of the hallway, spreading fire that instantly gobbled the carpet and ate into the walls. The other had landed at its intended mark, the doorway to the study.

Spattering throughout that room, the flaming chemicals had found immediate fuel. Desk, furnishings, books, and scattered papers were going up in fire that threatened to consume the entire room immediately. A holocaust was in the making, and it was too late for The Shadow to prevent it.

Mokanna's design, a conflagration that would destroy the old house and thus dispose of the evidence – in the form of the revolving doorway – that would clear the blemished name of James Marden!

THE SHADOW made no effort to block Mokanna's scheme. The thing had gone too far; there would be other ways to clear Marden's reputation. Better ways, particularly since Mokanna would think that his scheme had succeeded. Nor was The Shadow anxious to be trapped in a house of flames while he might be needed elsewhere.

Avoiding the mass of fire that cut off his path through the hallway, The Shadow reached the window of Gale's room and opened it and dropped to the courtyard below. He was rounding the back of the house when he heard a girl's shriek.

Gale had started for the rear street; she was safely on her way, when lurid light from the old house showed her position. Guided by the flickering flames, a man had leaped in to block her.

Gale was struggling with her antagonist when The Shadow saw them. The girl's face was turned away, but he spied the features of her foe.

A drab face, rendered livid partly by the man's own forceful effort, partly by the ruddy flare that dyed his features. The Shadow had never seen that face before, but it was one that he would not forget.

The fighter happened to be Clarry, the fellow who took instructions direct from Jabez Densholm.

The Shadow's laugh, rising above the roar of flames, gave Gale encouragement. It drove Clarry to desperation, particularly when he saw the being who had laughed.

Dropping Gale, Clarry made a rapid dive for shelter, while the girl, seeing a gesture from The Shadow's gun, promptly dashed along her route to the rear street.

Clarry had boxed himself badly. He would have been easy prey for The Shadow if others had not intervened. Halfway to Clarry's shelter, The Shadow heard shouts from the back door of the burning house.

Men were coming out through the kitchen, four of them. Two were the fugitives who had come from the study; the others were the bomb-throwers who had been on the stairs.

One of the latter pair had picked up a bomb that he had previously stowed in the kitchen. Hearing his companions yell, he turned to hurl it at The Shadow, instead of chucking it back into the house.

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The Shadow fired, the fellow sagged. Instead of shooting, the others scattered. The fire bomb landed just inside the kitchen door and went off with a flame-producing puff.

Wheeling to avoid the spray of fire, The Shadow lost his opportunity to deal further with the crooks. They had scattered to holes like rats, where they would soon be routed out. For The Shadow could hear the whine of police sirens mingling with the clangor of approaching fire engines.

Clarry was gone when The Shadow looked for him. The drab man had found a chance for escape. Thinking in terms of Gale, The Shadow headed for the rear street, knowing that the hoodlums would not try to follow, for they would expect him to be lurking along the route.

At that moment, Gale had spotted the cab that The Shadow mentioned. She was starting toward it, from a sheltered doorway, when a man sprang forward savagery. Gale didn't yell; she clawed at a face in the darkness, tried to dodge a gun that was slugging at her head.

The cabby saw the struggle and sprang to render aid, giving a shrill whistle as he came. The man with the gun gave a sudden grunt as they wheeled out into the light. Pocketing his weapon as the cabby tried to grab it, he muttered:

"Say – I didn't know it was a girl."

"Yeah?" began the cabby. "Well, if –"

Gale interrupted with a cry of recognition. She had seen the man's face, recognized the handsome features of Fred Kellick. Half through fright, she let herself snuggle into the protection of his arm.

"It's all right," Fred told the cabby, with a grin. "I happen to know the lady. It was just a mistake. Is your cab available?"

The cabby looked past Fred, toward a figure that had just emerged from darkness, but was lurking very close to it. He caught a signal – a green flash from a tiny light.

"Yeah," said the cabby. "Only, I don't take fares that lug gats. Chuck that heater in the front, and I'll let you come along with the lady."

Obligingly, Fred tossed the gun alongside the driver's seat. The cab, with its passengers, started away. At the wheel, Moe Shrevnitz was speedy enough to avoid the arriving police cars.

A strange laugh whispered from the gloom, as The Shadow took his own path off into the darkness.

CHAPTER XV. THE KEY FROM THE PAST

CRIME at the old house was easily explained by the law. The police had a name for it: robbery. It was simple enough, the way that Inspector Joe Cardona analyzed it.

It all hinged on Marden's ten thousand dollars. The missing money had been mentioned in the newspapers. Marden had probably hidden it in some spot that Cardona hadn't uncovered; or, for that matter, he might have destroyed it.

Cardona had made a good search, but had been hampered by the assumption that Marden, otherwise Mokanna, might have used the money to pay off helpers before committing suicide. Apparently, that hadn't

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happened. Mokanna's mobbies had come to the old house last night in search for the cash.

Maybe they'd found it, maybe they hadn't. They could have quarreled after they found it, or they might have fought because some thought that others had picked it up while they weren't looking. Their particular breed of mobbies had a habit of acting that way. They liked to set fire to houses, too, to cover up their tracks.

So Cardona called the whole thing a battle among ghouls who had come to rob the dead. It closed the Mokanna case. In fact, the crimes of the Veiled Prophet had been written off before.

Cardona's opinions were the only ones the newspapers printed, because there were no objectors. The police had done a good job, ridding New York of the Veiled Prophet, and last night's little ripple was merely a proof that the crime wave had really ended.

But Gale Marden was angered when she read the newspapers, late in the afternoon. She knew that she could dispute Cardona's theories.

However, The Shadow had advised against it. Gale had received a telephone call from her rescuer, rather a mysterious one, that had been relayed through to her. From his whispered tone, and his mention of certain incidents that he alone could have described, she knew it was The Shadow.

The Shadow made it plain that silence was the only policy. Mokanna would be made to show his hand; The Shadow guaranteed it. He suggested, however, that Gale learn what she could about the old house; how her uncle had happened to take it. That meant a visit either to Densholm's office or Garnstead's apartment.

Of the two, Gale preferred to see Garnstead. She waited until dusk; then, when Fred Kellick called at her apartment, she suggested the trip to Garnstead's, on the pretext that the financier wanted to ask her about some transactions that he had held with Marden.

Fred had his car; they started out. Soon, a taxicab took up the trail.

During the ride, Fred repeated the apologies that he had made the night before and made them more emphatic.

"Honestly, Gale," he said, "I wasn't trying to mix in your business. I was afraid that something would happen to you, like it almost did."

"In that case," returned Gale, stiffly, "you might tell me just how you happened to know where I had gone."

"I saw you ride by in a cab," explained Fred, "while I was buying cigarettes in a cigar store. So I went back to your apartment house and asked the doorman if he knew where you'd gone. The address he gave me was pretty close to the house."

Gale remembered that there had been a doorman on hand when she drove away. In her excitement, she might have shouted at the cabby with the peaked face, whose name she did not remember. Gale hadn't even noticed Moe on the return trip.

She had another question for Fred.

"Since you have a key to the front door of the old house," she said, "what were you doing in the back street?"

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"Haven't you read the newspapers?" parried Fred. "Crooks were around, weren't they? Wouldn't I be smart enough to figure they might show up, if a dumb police inspector thought the same? You didn't go right to the house; so neither did I. It was best to look around a bit first."

Gale could have said more. She might have remarked that Fred had nearly completed the real job that the crooks set out to do; namely, that of murdering her. But she didn't want to chide him too much for mistaking her identity in the dark.

It was natural for him to think that any prowler would be a thug. Besides, Gale remembered The Shadow's injunction to say nothing about crime's real purpose.

THEY reached Garnstead's. Gale left Fred waiting in the car, and went up to see the financier. There was anxiety in Garnstead's kindly eyes as he clasped the girl's hand warmly.

"I was going to call you, Gale," he declared. "I'd begun to worry about you, since reading the newspapers. You had said that you might go to the old house –"

"And I did," interjected Gale, abruptly. "I was just lucky enough to get out before the crooks arrived there."

Garnstead's face registered astonishment. Gale felt that she had taken an excellent step. She could tell Garnstead just enough to obtain his aid in the coming campaign, without disclosing the really vital details.

"It was just another coincidence," declared the girl, "but there have been too many coincidences, Mr. Garnstead. I'd like to know, for instance, why my uncle took that house in the first place."

"What bearing could that have on the case?"

"It might be important," insisted Gale. "Why, crooks have walked in and out of that house as if it belonged to them!"

"Which it might have," returned Garnstead, "if your uncle happened to be Mokanna."

"But we agreed that he might not be."

"I know." Garnstead's chin dipped to his rising hand. "In that case, Gale, it would be peculiar, your uncle taking a house in such a decadent neighborhood. Perhaps Mokanna arranged it."

"That's what I think," insisted Gale. "But how – and through whom?"

Garnstead answered by calling an efficient-looking secretary. He told the man to bring the file that contained Marden's letters. When it arrived, Garnstead thumbed through the correspondence, shaking his head.

"I heard very little from your uncle," he told Gale, "until after he arrived in town. These letters mention nothing about the house. Wait, though! Here's something!"

He plucked a memo from the file. It was one that the secretary had made after receiving a phone call from Marden. Gale's uncle had called certain friends, to tell them that he wanted to sublet the house when he left for South America. He wanted them to know, in case they he'd friends who were interested.

"Here's the name of the real-estate agent," declared Garnstead. He pressed a button for the secretary. "Hugh Van Loden, Talleyrand Building. I'll ask Freeland what he knows about him."

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Freeland was the secretary. When he arrived, Garnstead showed him the memo. Freeland remembered it, and also supplied facts regarding Van Loden.

"Van Loden runs a rather shady business, sir," the secretary declared. "He's the man who tried to sell estates in Florida with half the acreage under water."

"I remember," nodded Garnstead. "But I still don't recall the name of Van Loden."

"He was operating under the name of a company, sir, but he was listed on the circular as New York representative."

"We received a lot of those circulars, didn't we?"

"We're still getting them," acknowledged Freeland, "but I don't file them, sir."

Garnstead dismissed the secretary. Lips pursed, the financier considered matters a short while, then smiled.

"I'll have Freeland call Van Loden tomorrow," he told Gale. "I'll bring the rascal here, on the pretext that I'm interested in Florida real estate. If you want to meet him –"

"I'd like to," put in Gale, eagerly.

"Then come here," said Garnstead. "I shall let you know the time of the appointment. But he may prove difficult, unless you can confront him with some facts."

"I think I can produce some questions," returned Gale, wisely. "Some very definite ones, that may jar Mr. Van Loden."

Garnstead did not ask what the questions were. Gale's confidence impressed him on its own merits.

THE girl departed and rejoined Fred in the car. They drove off, to dine at their usual restaurant.

The Shadow's taxicab followed, but without its cloaked passenger. One of The Shadow's secret agents, Harry Vincent, took up the trail instead.

Coming from the shelter of the big apartment house, The Shadow had spied something that caused him to flash a departure signal to Moe. The something was a man across the way, whose face showed plainly as he stepped out from cover after Gale had gone. The Shadow recognized the drab visage of Clarry.

Trailing the fellow, The Shadow gained prompt results. The trail led directly to Densholm's office, where Clarry found the crab-faced lawyer still at his desk.

Densholm was too busy to pay attention to Clarry at once; hence The Shadow had time to enter a little anteroom and cross to the door of the private office before their conversation began.

The Shadow was peering through a crack of the inner door when Densholm popped his head up and demanded:

"Well?"

"The girl went to see Garnstead," reported Clarry. "She was there about twenty minutes."

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Densholm's eyes went half shut.

"She went to find out about Van Loden," he said. "I was afraid of that, Clarry."

"But why didn't she come to see you, Mr. Densholm?"

"Because she mistrusts me," returned Densholm, with a crisp laugh. "I suspected that much, yesterday. If you'd only handled her last night, Clarry, when you had the chance, instead of letting that pup Kellick rescue her."

Clarry began to mouth excuses. Densholm silenced him. Up from his desk, the attorney paced the office.

"She should have come here," he sneered, "if she wanted to learn about Van Loden. But she wouldn't have found out all that I could tell her. But don't worry, Clarry" – Densholm's tone told that he wasn't worrying, on his own part – "we'll handle this our own way."

The Shadow was gone when Densholm and Clarry left the office. He became Cranston, and went to the Cobalt Club to have dinner with Commissioner Weston and listen to boasts about the law's competent handling of the Mokanna menace.

Having finished a long dinner with Fred, Gale had him drive her back to the apartment, on the usual excuse that she was tired; a true one, considering the excitement that she had undergone the night before. When Fred left, Gale wanted to call The Shadow immediately, through the number that she knew would reach him.

She decided it would be better to wait a short while; so, to kill time, she went into her bedroom and undressed. Attired in a kimono, Gale came back to the living room and picked up the telephone, without bothering to look from the front window to see if Fred's roadster was gone.

She dialed a number. A methodical voice came across the wire:

"Burbank speaking."

Gale had been told that Burbank was the contact man. She asked for The Shadow. After a short while, the call was relayed through. Gale gave The Shadow full details of her chat with Garnstead, and told him about Van Loden, the man whose name The Shadow had learned already.

Garnstead's offer to co-operate, by making an appointment with Van Loden, was news that The Shadow appreciated, particularly as it was something that Densholm did not know about.

Fred Kellick heard portions of Gale's call. Fred's interest in this case went deeper than Gale supposed. He had played a hunch that she was going to call someone. That was why he was waiting in the outside hall, catching words that came through the partly opened transom above the door of Gale's apartment.

But Fred Kellick wasn't quite as smart as he supposed. He kept watching Gale's door, when he sneaked toward the stairs after the call was ended. He didn't notice the door across the way. It opened a trifle; a watching eye saw Fred's departure.

Even Gale would have been surprised had she known who occupied the apartment opposite. In calling The Shadow, Gale imagined that Burbank, the contact man, had his headquarters a long way off. Instead, he was right across the hall.

Burbank was doing double duty. Not only was he The Shadow's contact, he was in charge of the special post that The Shadow had arranged as a special vantage point, from which he and his aids could strike at any new enemies who threatened Gale Marden!

CHAPTER XVI. THE MAN WHO RETURNED

IT was morning and the Florida–York Express was leaving Trenton for its speedy trip across New Jersey, into Manhattan.

A sallow, sharp nosed man with an inverted smile was seated in the luxurious lounge car. He had finished breakfast, and expected nothing unusual to happen during the last stage of the run.

The attendant approached him with a telegram, asked if he was Mr. Van Loden. The sallow man nodded, tipped the attendant, and opened the yellow envelope.

It wasn't a telegram that he found inside. It was a folded sheet of white paper, that startled him even before he opened it. When he spread the paper, his eyes were riveted, not by the message but by the double crescent signature.

Hugh Van Loden read the message. He tore the paper into tiny shreds, stepped to the observation platform and scattered the fragments to the wind. Returning to the lounge, he thought things over.

Van Loden had believed that Mokanna was dead. But this letter proved otherwise, by its contents as well as its signature. Van Loden wasn't particularly surprised. He was one man who could understand why someone other than Marden might have been Mokanna.

The more he thought it over, the more ridiculous his former belief seemed. He should have known, all along, the scheme that the Veiled Prophet had in mind.

Like other dupes of Mokanna, Van Loden had a bad past. His questionable transactions in real estate happened to be just within the law, but some of his former enterprises were not. Who Mokanna was, Van Loden did not know; but Mokanna knew all about Van Loden.

As a result, Van Loden had worked to save his own hide, without anticipating a reward. There would be others who would do the same when they knew that Mokanna was alive again. Only one man had failed to heed the threats that the Veiled Prophet made to those supposed to serve him. That one man, as Van Loden could guess, had called himself James Marden.

With Marden's death as an example, the power of Mokanna was stronger than ever before, but in Van Loden's case it had become sugar–coated. The Veiled Prophet was giving him more than a chance to hide his past; he was offering him a cash reward if he went through with certain instructions.

When the train reached the Pennsylvania Station, Van Loden went into a phone booth and made some calls. He picked up a parcel check that was stuck underneath the shelf of the phone booth, and used it to get a package from the baggage room. After that, Van Loden did some riding in a taxicab.

All the while, his situation was perfect. He had been in Florida when the Mokanna business blew up – or seemed to do so – and only the Veiled Prophet had known when the real–estate man intend to return to New York. Van Loden had a habit of making his trips at times that suited himself, without ever telling anyone else, except Mokanna.

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It was close to noon when Van Loden reached his office, without the package. It was a tiny office, used for mail more than anything else, but very few letters awaited Van Loden and none of them were important. Fearing investigation by post office authorities, Van Loden had quit using the place as a regular mailing office.

Ten minutes after Van Loden arrived, the telephone bell rang. Van Loden's odd smile was quite pronounced as he answered the call. He had a good idea who it would be: Howard Garnstead. The Mokanna message had warned him that he might receive such a call, and had told him what to do about it.

The call was from Garnstead, and Van Loden talked very politely to the financier; but, all the while, he stalled. He sneered in pleased fashion when he learned that Garnstead had been trying to reach him all morning, and he made it evident that he wasn't particularly interested in selling any real estate.

But Garnstead was persistent, as Van Loden had been told he would be, and finally the real-estate man begrudgingly remembered some Florida property that might suit the financier. He agreed to call at Garnstead's apartment that evening.

Dipping in his desk, Van Loden brought out a lot of blanks and advertising folders. He found some large maps and began to figure out a nice purchase for a man of Garnstead's wealth, one that was partly land, but mostly lake.

UP until the time when Van Loden reached his office, The Shadow had been unable to gain a trace of the fellow, but from the moment of arrival, everything that Van Loden said was overheard by Burbank.

The contact man had changed locations; turning his apartment over to Harry Vincent, Burbank had installed himself in an office near Van Loden's.

With a mike planted in Van Loden's office and a receiver at Burbank's end, the situation was very pretty. What made it even better was a tapped telephone wire, that enabled Burbank to hear both ends of the call from Garnstead and report it to The Shadow.

Clarry heard only half of it. The drab man had been hanging around the building all morning. He was outside the office door when Van Loden talked to Garnstead. Clarry wasn't disappointed, however, at hearing only Van Loden's end of the chat. He had learned all he needed to report to Densholm.

Coming back to her apartment after lunch, Gale decided to call Garnstead. She found out that he had been trying to reach her with good news. He had talked to Van Loden, and had arranged the appointment. He repeated the entire discussion, from notes that Freeland had taken while listening on an extension.

To a degree, Gale was worried. She didn't like the slow way in which Van Loden had taken the bait. She mentioned it to Garnstead, but he said it didn't bother him. Tricky land agents like Van Loden were apt to stall; they liked to feel out customers.

"I handled the rascal the best way," assured Garnstead, "though I must admit it went against my grain to take his chatter. His talk nearly amounted to an insult."

"What about this evening?" inquired Gale.

"I can keep him occupied," Garnstead chuckled. "I shall rather relish listening to his sales talk. But it would be better to come early. When can I expect you?"

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"I'm having dinner with Fred, as usual. But I might be able to get to your apartment by half past eight."

"That will be soon enough."

The call ended, Gale repeated the details to herself, so that she could repeat them exactly to The Shadow. She was reaching for the telephone, when its bell began to ring. It was Garnstead, calling back.

"I just heard from Densholm," he informed. "He wants to come here this evening."

"Densholm?" queried Gale. "Does he know about Van Loden?"

"He probably knows that the fellow rented the house to your uncle, but I don't think he knows about my appointment."

"Then why is he coming?"

"He claims that it concerns my unfinished transactions with your uncle," explained Garnstead. "Such is probably the case, since Densholm was your uncle's attorney. I thought it best to say that he could come, on your account."

"On my account?"

"Exactly," replied Garnstead. "If we can force Van Loden to yield any clue to your uncle's innocence, it would be good to have Densholm on hand. He is one man who should certainly be willing to help us clear Marden's name, once he is no longer skeptical."

The logic impressed Gale. She thanked Garnstead, and commended his foresight. Soon afterward she called Burbank, at a new number that he had given her, and stated all the details. Burbank related the data to The Shadow.

IN a black-walled room, where the only light came from a bluish bulb that shone on a polished table, The Shadow was going over stacks of records and newspaper clippings.

He was looking into the past of Hugh Van Loden, as he had done with others who served Mokanna, the Veiled Prophet.

The room was The Shadow's sanctum, his secret headquarters somewhere in Manhattan. It was from here that he had begun his campaign against Mokanna, by checking on the activities of persons who seemed eligible for the schemes that the Veiled Prophet instigated.

From data in his own files, The Shadow had traced Ralph Jorcott on the night the polished crook had tried to rob the home of Handley Farnum.

There were details, too, concerning Roy Ablam, another of Mokanna's tools who had died in harness. But Hugh Van Loden was a difficult man to trace. He had evidently managed to hide his earlier misdeeds very neatly. Mokanna must have relied on guesswork to begin with, in bringing the real-estate operator into the fold.

It was so with most of Mokanna's dupes. Hard men to pin down, except by dint of painstaking investigation, which the Veiled Prophet had made a specialty over a long period. Having a lead to Van Loden, The Shadow was getting some results, but not the ones he most wanted.

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He was trying to find some lead to other dupes, through Van Loden, and there were no such leads. What Van Loden could tell, no one else could except Mokanna himself. Therefore, much depended upon the showdown that was to take place at Garnstead's this evening.

A tiny light flickered from the wall. In response to the gleaming bulb, The Shadow picked up earphones. It was Burbank's signal; the contact man reported what he had heard from Gale. The Shadow checked it with Burbank's own report of the tapped conversation between Garnstead and Van Loden.

There was one new point – the fact that Densholm had pushed into the situation; that the lawyer would also be in on the evening's conference. That fact brought a whispered laugh from The Shadow, a tone that stirred strange echoes from the black walls.

The Shadow had foreseen a move from Jabez Densholm. Through his tool, Clarry, the crabby attorney had delved into various matters more deeply than Howard Garnstead or Gale Marden supposed.

By arranging to call on Garnstead this evening, Densholm had shown craft. But behind Densholm's excuse for the visit, The Shadow saw the real purpose.

Densholm was thinking in terms of Van Loden. He knew a lot about Van Loden, though the latter knew little about Densholm. It wouldn't be difficult for Gale to convince Densholm that her uncle was not Mokanna. The question was whether or not Densholm would let witnesses know that he was so convinced.

The bluish light clicked off. A sibilant laugh quivered through the solid darkness; its tone had a grim touch. The set-up seemed too perfect to The Shadow. It was the sort of situation that could produce an unknown factor.

In the hours to come, it would be The Shadow's task to trace the loose link in the chain; to counteract the stroke whereby Mokanna, the Veiled Prophet, intended to insure his past misdeeds against discovery by the law.

CHAPTER XVII. THE VEIL LIFTS

THOUGH The Shadow's deep-hidden sanctum was a spot of total darkness, daylight still persisted through Manhattan at the time the cloaked investigator left his abode. It was midafternoon and Fred Kellick was coming back from lunch, which always took him from twelve until three.

Despite his playboy attributes, Fred ran a business and a profitable one, though it could almost be called a hobby. Fred was a dealer in rare prints, chiefly of the early American period, and he handled many worthwhile transactions in his little office near Wall Street.

Most of Fred's customers were brokers, or others who worked in the financial district, and they usually dropped in after the stock exchange closed. As a result, Fred wasn't in the office a great deal until three o'clock.

He simply left the place in charge of Miss Blaney, a gum-chewing stenographer who took advantage of Fred's absence to call on friends in neighboring offices.

Miss Blaney happened to be in when Fred arrived. She had been across the hall and had heard the elevator stop at Fred's floor. As soon as Fred entered, the stenographer waved toward a stack of packages that lay on the table and informed him, without missing a chew:

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"Those came."

Fred nodded. He had a couple of packages under his arm, including one that looked like a wrapped shoe box. He added his bundles to the rest, told Miss Blaney to call a messenger and send them all to his hotel.

Miss Blaney nodded. Fred always sent bundles home by messenger, but she always waited in case he came in with more.

Sitting down at a typewriter, Fred wrote a few brief notes, and signed them while Miss Blaney was calling the messenger. Fred usually typed his own letters, if they were short ones. He had just sealed the envelopes, when Miss Blaney remarked:

"Don't like it."

Fred was puzzled for a moment; then, noting that the girl was looking at the typewriter, he laughed.

"I think it's a bum machine, too," he said. "But when they called up and insisted upon delivering one on trial, I couldn't see any objection. You've been using it?"

"All morning. Terrible!"

"When the salesman shows up, tell him to take it away. He'll probably be here before five."

From Fred's statement, it seemed that he did not intend to stay. Miss Blaney looked surprised, because this was the period when he usually stayed in the office. Then she remembered something quite important.

"Been to the bank?"

"A fine time to ask me," Fred growled, "after the bank is closed. You should have reminded me at noon. No, I forgot to go to the bank, so I didn't get those special prints from the safe-deposit vault." As he spoke, Fred eyed a key that he brought from his pocket. "So if Harrison drops in, tell him I'll have them tomorrow."

Fred stalked out, just as the messenger arrived. The messenger stared after him, wondering why he hadn't spoken, as he usually did. Miss Blaney explained it tersely:

"In love."

APPARENTLY, the guess was right. After leaving the office, Fred made a trip straight to a florist's shop. He always sent flowers to Gale. He had started with violets and had graduated to lilies of the valley. Today, he felt that the time was right for a perfect red rose.

Maybe Gale would dine a little longer after receiving such a flower; perhaps she would even go somewhere this evening, with a red rose to encourage her. Fred found the rose that he wanted. The florist drew it from a vase, and inquired:

"The card, Mr. Kellick?"

"Here it is," Fred replied. He selected a sealed envelope from the bunch he carried, and handed it to the florist. "Mind if I use the writing desk a few minutes?"

"You're quite welcome, Mr. Kellick."

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Fred addressed a few envelopes that he had forgotten to type. Affixing stamps to them, he left the florist's shop, while the clerk was busy at the telephone discussing the merits of orchids with some persistent customer.

Fred was looking back at the table where the rose lay with the envelope, when he bumped into a stout man who was coming into the shop. A few apologies, and Fred was on his way.

He went directly to the building where Van Loden's office was located. There, Fred indulged in tactics that Clarry had used earlier. He strolled past Van Loden's door, listening for any sounds. When he heard footsteps coming from beyond the door, Fred moved out of sight around a corner.

Van Loden came out and locked the door behind him. Fred sneaked up a stairway to the next floor and flagged a descending elevator. Van Loden stepped into the same car when it stopped at the fourth floor. Reaching the street, Fred followed him on foot, a wise distance behind. Van Loden walked about three blocks, stopped in front of a motion-picture theater, and finally decided to go in and see the show. Fred gave a smile, and started away. A cab pulled up beside the curb, and Fred decided to take it.

Glancing at his watch, he noted that it wasn't yet four o'clock. Having checked on Van Loden, as far as present circumstances warranted, Fred resolved to go back to the office and spend a few hours. As he rode, he noted the cabby's license card, with the man's name and picture on it.

Neither belonged to Moe Shrevnitz. But it happened that Moe was driving the cab. He had been posted to watch Van Loden, and had trailed him to the theater by following in the cab. Seeing Fred as a potential passenger, Moe had switched cards from the front seat. Dropping one trail, he had thus taken up another.

WITH dusk, a shrouded figure entered the office where Burbank had his present headquarters. The contact man was seated facing a switchboard, his features turned away from the light. He heard a whispered tone behind him:

"Report!"

Burbank reported. The only news came from Moe. Earlier, the cabby had taken Clarry to Densholm's office. His present report simply stated that Van Loden had gone to a movie, and that Fred, who he'd been on hand to trail him, had gone back to his own office. At present, Moe was stationed at a hack stand outside the theater.

The Shadow considered the report. It meant the entry of a person that he had not expected: Fred Kellick. Not that The Shadow had eliminated Fred from the situation; far from it.

He had kept Fred very definitely in mind, from the time of his chance absence during the fray at the Club Zodiac, through his appearance the night when Gale visited the old house, and up to the time when Fred had listened in on the girl's telephone call.

However, The Shadow had not expected Fred to push himself into the picture. It was plausible, of course, considering Fred's expressions of concern for Gale. Fred might, very naturally, have decided to check on Van Loden. At the same time, the act might mean that Fred had checked on certain other persons, too.

From Burbank's window, The Shadow scaled to Van Loden's office – a simple process, considering that the side wall of the building had cornices and ornamental decorations. The wall was too dark for outside observers to detect the black blot that crawled upward in the fashion of an immense beetle.

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Van Loden's window proved easy. Inside the office The Shadow began an intensive search, on the chance that Van Loden had unwisely left some clue to certain activities. A long chance, but one worthy of investigation.

However, it proved barren. The Shadow's tiny flashlight blinked on many papers, but none of them revealed facts that he did not already know.

As The Shadow was turning toward the window, he heard heavy paces halt outside Van Loden's door. Something slithered in through the mail chute, but The Shadow gave it no immediate attention. He was watching the bulky figure that he could see outlined dimly, through the frosted panel.

The figure moved away; it spread with an accordion effect. The Shadow recognized that the bulk was produced by a postman's bag. This was the time for the last mail delivery; the thing that had come through was a letter for Van Loden.

Reaching the door, The Shadow crouched in darkness and used his tiny flashlight. The envelope was a long one, not too well sealed. The Shadow opened it deftly but slowly, without destroying the flap. He spread the letter that he found inside.

It was from Mokanna. It read:

You will hear from me this evening, after you have finished with Garnstead. If you bluff things through, you will receive the full ten thousand dollars. Cash that you can pass anywhere, the money that belonged to Marden, intact as I took it.

The signature was the genuine Mokanna mark; the typing checked well with the former notes. The Shadow had a photo static copy with him, and was thus equipped to compare the two.

He replaced the letter in the envelope, and sealed it. Flashlight extinguished, he returned to the window and descended to Burbank's office.

Ready to leave, The Shadow informed Burbank of his destination, with a single word:

"Densholm's."

THE same mail that had brought a letter to Van Loden, also produced a piece of mail for Inspector Joe Cardona.

At his desk in headquarters, Cardona opened a small, square envelope that bore a two-cent stamp. It was a local letter, sent by someone who was careful when it came to spending pennies.

Cardona did not find a note. Instead, he picked a calling card from the envelope. The card bore the name of Frederick J. Kellick. Cardona scarcely noted the name at first. The writing on the card made him boil. It said:

SWEETHEART: Will call you from the hotel by six thirty. Hope you like red roses.

Taking a grip that could have choked a bull, Cardona prepared to tear the card in half. He stopped, glared at the card again.

If this was a joke, he wanted to talk to the joker. He began to mutter the things that he would say. Then it struck him that the thing might be a mistake.

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If a mistake, why had the card been sent to Cardona? Only because the wrong envelope had been mailed to him. It occurred to him that he might have an even better reason for talking to Fred Kellick.

Joe recalled Fred's name. He was the fellow who had shown up at Marden's, the playboy who was sweet on Gale. That brought Cardona's mind back to the Mokanna situation, and he remembered something else. Those tricky messages that the Veiled Prophet sent to the police had always been posted in New York City, bearing two-cent stamps not three-cent ones.

An odd thing, this flare-up of a case that Joe had considered closed. The inspector began to thumb through old reports, to find the name of the hotel where Fred Kellick lived.

He preferred to do that, rather than telephone Gale Marden. Besides, Cardona did not know Gale's present address; she had moved after the Mokanna case was washed up.

Fred Kellick knew Gale's address, which was proven by the package delivered at her apartment soon after Cardona received his letter. Opening the florist's box, Gale smiled when she saw the red rose that Fred had sent her.

She opened the square envelope that came with it, knowing that Fred usually wrote some brief message on his card. But the card that Gale saw bore no handwriting. It was typed, and bore an ominous signature:

My mission is not ended. I belong to the living not the dead. Why I have again revealed myself, you will learn.

The card that bore the symbol of Mokanna fluttered from Gale's fingers as her lips opened wide, to remain as frozen as her gaze!

CHAPTER XVIII. THE DOUBLE QUEST

MOKANNA!

The name echoed through Gale's thoughts like the twang of a discordant harp string. A thing of the imagination, yet real.

Fear of the Veiled Prophet gripped the girl more fiercely than any emotion that she had ever known; temporarily, it obliterated even her trust in The Shadow.

From fear came fury.

Gale hated Mokanna, and justly so. His crime against her uncle was threefold. He had revealed the past that James Marden had tried valiantly to live down; he had murdered Marden, and made the deed appear a suicide; finally, most heinous of all, Mokanna had laid the blame for his own crimes upon the dead man.

If ever a person had motive for revenge, that person was Gale Marden. Her fright forgotten, Gale saw red. Crimson blurred her vision everywhere she looked, until her eyes turned upon the rose.

Its redness was real. The color of blood – her uncle's blood! The deep hue that Mokanna preferred for his victims. Thorns scratched the girl's fingers as she seized the flower and flung it across the room.

Gale did not feel the thorns, but she saw the blood-red of the scratches. Light treatment from Mokanna, but the note from the Veiled Prophet threatened more – perhaps death.

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Gale liked the word: death.

It would be death for Mokanna not for her. She had counted upon revenge for her uncle's murder, and she would get it. Her very weakness was her strength.

Gale's mind jumped to swift, well-formed conclusions. Fred Kellick was Mokanna; she should have known it from the start. She'd told Fred too much about her uncle's business, all along. She had played right into his hands the night of Marden's death.

No wonder Fred had worn the masking veil when he sneaked into the house, using her key instead of the simpler route through the poorly locked back door. He had sent his men to murder her the night she went to the old house. That failing, he himself had tried to kill her.

But he had worn the mask the first time, so that Gale would not recognize him. On the second occasion, he had not found time to put it on before the cab driver had intervened. So Fred had pretended that it was all a mistake.

A mistake!

Plucking the card from the floor, Gale smiled grimly. This was really a mistake. One thing that Mokanna would never do, voluntarily, was to reveal his identity. Fred must have intended this card for someone else; his own should have come to Gale.

The girl reached for the telephone, then decided not to make a call. This was her affair, not The Shadow's. He might advise to wait until after the conference with Garnstead. But Gale would have none of that policy.

She was sure that The Shadow was checking on Jabez Densholm, the man who had known most about Marden's affairs. But the chance that Densholm was the Veiled Prophet was completely out, when gauged by the facts that Gale had just learned.

Gale could settle the Mokanna question, while The Shadow persisted with his blind trail. Settle it, and let The Shadow see the results. Fred had made a slip; therefore, Gale could handle him alone. She could get to his hotel first, and find the gun that he unquestionably kept there.

Eyes ablaze, Gale snatched up hat and purse. She started from the apartment; crumpling the Mokanna card, she flung it to a corner. As it fell, Gale realized its value as evidence. It was lying face up when she reached it. Gale stooped near the door of the opposite apartment.

THE slam of Gale's own door had brought Harry Vincent to his watching post, just in time to see Gale reach for the card. He couldn't read the typing, but he spied the vivid symbol of Mokanna. Then, with a quick flaunt toward the stairs, Gale was gone.

Harry hesitated, just too long to follow her. He realized, suddenly, that Moe's cab wasn't outside, as it should be ordinarily. But his decision to remain was best, for this situation demanded a prompt report to The Shadow.

Calling Burbank, Harry described Gale's wild departure and mentioned the Mokanna message. By that time, Harry remembered a most important clue. He told Burbank that Gale had received a florist's box, ten minutes before. Such a box meant Fred Kellick.

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Harry knew that Burbank's relay to The Shadow might be a simple matter. At present, it was more complicated than Harry imagined.

The Shadow, it happened, was in a darkened office, working on the combination of a very troublesome safe. The office was Densholm's; the lawyer had gone out to dinner. The Shadow was taking his time, because he still had a few minutes to spare.

The safe came open. The Shadow's flashlight showed a variety of interesting bundles, including some stacks of currency. But he was after something else, a packet which he found. Inside were stocks that The Shadow immediately recognized; they bore the name of the Amazonia Rubber Corp.

Fraudulent stocks, like those that Senor Baroba had uncovered through his honest secretary, Alvaro. The same sort of 'goods' that Mokanna had delivered to Alvaro, in arranging the frame-up against James Marden.

The letters, too, were important. As he spread them out, The Shadow observed that every one was signed with the genuine double crescent that marked the evil hand of the Veiled Prophet.

A low laugh whispered back to The Shadow's ears from the hollow walls of the safe. The mirth was his own. The Shadow had learned Densholm's secret and was prepared to deal with the crafty lawyer as soon as the proper occasion came.

With the fade of echoed whispers, there was a buzz from across the room. It was the telephone bell, which The Shadow had muffled. Waiting, the cloaked invader heard the buzzing stop. Thirty seconds ticked past; the buzz began again.

The call was from Burbank.

It was a simple, but effective, system that The Shadow had devised; the trick of calling a number, hanging up, and dialing again. The buzz, cut short, then repeated, was a method that no ordinary caller would use.

The Shadow waited long enough for Burbank to supply another halt. With the third buzz, the cloaked figure closed the safe door, not quite shut, and moved across the office to answer the phone.

Methodically, Burbank delivered Harry's report. The details told The Shadow much more than Gale's destination, and her purpose. The instructions that he gave were in a tone as calm as Burbank's. They provided for rapid measures, of the sort that only The Shadow could instigate.

Leaving the telephone, The Shadow turned back toward the safe. He was halfway there, when a sound reached him. It came from the little anteroom. Creeping on toward the safe, The Shadow analyzed the chances.

Someone could have entered without The Shadow's hearing him, during the chat with Burbank. That person, however, could have heard The Shadow's whisper, despite its guarded tone. It could hardly be Densholm; The Shadow had timed the lawyer's dinner hour quite accurately.

Here was a game in the dark; one that would ordinarily be to The Shadow's liking, but which at present could prove disastrous. The Shadow had come to Densholm's office on one quest, only to be informed of another which was more vital. Delay might prove costly to The Shadow, valuable to Mokanna.

THE SHADOW drew back the glove from his left hand. Deliberately, he tapped his hand against the safe dial. There was a sharp click, as the large gem of a finger ring contacted the metal. The exact spot from which

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the sound came could be detected, even in the darkness.

Instantly, a flashlight sparkled; with its glare came an aiming gun muzzle, held by a figure lunging in from the doorway of the anteroom. Crouched by the safe, The Shadow was a thing of wheeling blackness, a living target that couldn't get away.

The attacker fired as he drove in at an angle, right into the midst of the black thing that lunged to meet him. He didn't notice The Shadow's sudden change of shape. Head on, the man from the other room met the mass of black.

Thudding the floor without a groan, the attacker lost gun and flashlight. The clang of a misspent bullet seemed to echo above his stunned form. A whispered laugh stirred the darkness, as The Shadow came around past the wide-open door of the safe.

In wheeling, The Shadow had swung the safe door open with a pair of hard-gripping hands, his shoulders full behind them. He had timed the action to the man's drive; the door was in full swing when the shot was fired.

Not only had the bullet flattened against a blocky square of heavy metal, but the attacker had done the same. A head-on collision with a safe front was enough to fell the stoutest attacker.

The man on the floor was Clarry. There wasn't time to truss him up and hide him. The Shadow had to be on his way; it was easier to take Clarry along.

Shutting the safe door, The Shadow twirled the combination. Hoisting Clarry's light frame, he pushed the stunned man out through a window to a low roof that adjoined.

Following, The Shadow handled Clarry in featherweight fashion. He reached the roof edge, spoke to Moe Shrevnitz, who had his cab parked in an alleyway below. The cab had a sliding sky-view top; Moe shoved it open.

Swinging Clarry over the edge, The Shadow let him dangle by both hands, then dropped him accurately into the cab's rear seat, where Moe broke the fellow's short fall.

Moe was regaining the wheel when The Shadow dropped into the cab beside Clarry. The swift driver was away at The Shadow's order.

The cloaked fighter was off on the second half of a double quest which concerned the future of Mokanna, the double-crossing master mind whose symbol was the double crescent.

The speeding cab passed Jabez Densholm two blocks from the building. The lawyer didn't even notice it go by. He returned to his office, found the door latched, as Clarry had closed it, and went directly to his safe.

Densholm didn't notice the dent near the top edge of the door. He was busy turning the combination. He found the packet that The Shadow had examined, gave a croaky laugh as he tucked it into his inside pocket.

It was well that Densholm did not know that line Shadow had paid a visit to his office. Otherwise, the crafty attorney might have made different plans for the evening.

Confident that the identity of the Veiled Prophet could still be attributed to an innocent man, Densholm was prepared to move with care. He was not the man to be tricked, not Jabez Densholm.

In fact, Densholm's plans were so well set that he feared no one – not even The Shadow!

CHAPTER XIX. DOOM POSTPONED

WHEN Gale Marden reached Fred's hotel, she had regained a definite calm. A very strange calm, that would have puzzled persons who knew her well. But it did not disturb the clerk on duty at the desk. He knew Gale by sight, but was no one to judge her moods.

Gale's tone was very sweet when she asked if Mr. Kellick had arrived. When the clerk said no, Gale inquired if he had received any messages.

The clerk found one, from Mr. Van Loden. A phone call, that had come earlier in the day. Hearing the name, Gale stiffened. She watched the clerk put the memo back in the box. Gale wanted to ask for it, as further evidence, but decided that the clerk would remember Van Loden's name.

She seemed rather rueful when the clerk turned toward her. Mr. Kellick had called her, she said, stating that he was sending some flowers. They hadn't come, so she kind called the florist, who said that they had gone to Fred's hotel.

The clerk accepted the story, because he remembered that quite a few packages had arrived and gone up to Fred's room. Whereupon, Gale put a very guileless request.

"I'd rather that Fred" – she caught herself – "rather that Mr. Kellick did not know about the mistake. He might blame it on the florist, who was really very concerned about the matter."

The clerk understood. He didn't like to be blamed for mistakes, himself.

"So, if you'll let me have the key," suggested Gale, "I can get the flowers and be wearing them when Mr. Kellick arrives."

Armed with the key, Gale reached Fred's room. She ignored the packages, to look for the gun. She found it, unloaded, in a table drawer. Another search produced cartridges. Very calmly, Gale loaded all six chambers of the revolver.

She didn't feel that she was making a mistake. The card with the flowers, the fact that Van Loden had phoned, were two important items proving Fred to be Mokanna. Still, the more proof the better, and the packages might yield some. Laying the gun aside, Gale began to open them.

One package, about the size of a shoe box, did not rattle when Gale unwrapped it. She found a brown bundle inside, tore through the inner wrapping. Her eyes didn't see red, they saw green. The green of currency.

With a sharp gasp, Gale examined the paper bands that encircled the cash. They bore the imprint of the Tribune Trust. This was the money stolen from her uncle!

It checked to exactly ten thousand dollars, and the bills, as Gale remembered them, were of the same denominations as the ones that she had counted on the fateful night of her uncle's death.

Turning over the brown paper that formed the inner wrapping, Gale found a typewritten label attached. It was addressed to Hugh Van Loden.

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The whole thing fitted perfectly. Van Loden was the man who had arranged the revolving doorway in the old house while it was being remodeled, before her uncle took it. Van Loden, therefore, was the one man who could produce actual evidence that Mokanna had prepared the snare long in advance.

If Van Loden talked, the law would accept the theory that Marden had been murdered. Again, the hunt would be on for Mokanna, the Veiled Prophet.

This was a case where reward was necessary. Fred Kellick, otherwise Mokanna, had taken this money from a safe-deposit vault, where he had placed it after murdering James Marden. It was the safest of all money, the sort that Van Loden would accept without question as the price of permanent silence.

Gale picked up the gun. She stationed herself beside the table, aiming the weapon straight toward the door. Passing moments increased her determination. The click of Fred's key in the lock would be his death warrant.

The end of the Veiled Prophet! A fate that even the master mind of Mokanna had failed to foresee!

OUTSIDE the hotel, a police car was halting near the door. The stocky figure of Joe Cardona stepped to the sidewalk. Flanked by a pair of wise-looking detectives, Cardona began to look for possible exits.

He wanted to make sure that Fred Kellick would find no means of escape when the going became too hot. He was debating, too, whether he should form a committee of one to welcome Fred, or wait outside and drop in after the man reached his room.

Apparently, Cardona's choice was made before he knew it. A taxicab had passed the police car and was rounding the corner to the usual entrance. In that cab was Fred Kellick, coming home a quarter hour late.

Between a customer at the office and a traffic jam on the street, Fred was not as punctual as he usually was when he had a dinner date with Gale.

Fred saw the police car and recognized Cardona. Otherwise, he would have gone directly into the hotel. But he told the driver to slow up, just as the cab passed the corner. Glancing back, Fred lost sight of the police car and gave a shrug.

But the cab was still moving slowly. The quarter minute that it lost was enough to change Fred's destination. A big limousine had wheeled into sight; half a block behind it, a speeding cab hurtled into view.

The limousine was Lamont Cranston's; its driver, Harry Vincent, had reclaimed the car from the repair shop upon receiving recent instructions from The Shadow. Recognizing Fred, Harry poked the limousine in front of the cab, in a fashion that Stanley had used on another night.

There wasn't a crash. The taxi driver was going slow enough to avoid one. But he began to argue with the man in the chauffeur's cap who had blocked him off from the hotel door.

Chafing at the delay, Fred thrust money into the cabby's hand and reached for the door on his right, intending to step out to the sidewalk.

Right then, Moe's cab arrived. Its door swung open; a lithe, black-cloaked figure reached the step of the other cab and overtook Fred with a long reach through the window. Two gloved hands choked Fred's throat, drew him back into his cab.

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As Fred slumped on the seat, one hand relaxed. It opened the left door of the cab, reached around and gained another grip. Fred's figure did a funny squirm, half out through the door.

Releasing Fred's throat entirely, The Shadow stepped back and gave the new victim a toss into the rear of Moe's cab, where he landed beside Clarry.

Harry had parked the limousine, while ignoring the shouts of the angered cabby who had brought Fred to the hotel. Stepping from the big car, Harry announced with dignity that he was going to summon an officer to settle the dispute. The snorting cabby looked around for Fred; hoping he'd serve as a witness.

But Fred was gone, in Moe's cab. While it was pulling away Harry jumped into it, unnoticed by the cabby on the sidewalk, who would have thought it very funny that the chauffeur had taken a cab to find a policeman.

Harry's part as a chauffeur was over; In the cab he drew a gun, to keep Clarry and Fred under supervision when they stirred. The cab was on its way to a new destination ordered by The Shadow.

As for The Shadow himself, he had staged a perfect black-out. He had gone somewhere, very swiftly. He couldn't have entered either doorway of the hotel, for both were too well lighted, even for his cloaked figure to escape detection. There were other routes The Shadow could have chosen, however; several of them.

MEANWHILE, Cardona decided not to linger outside. Striding into the hotel, he flashed his badge on the astonished clerk and demanded to know if Fred Kellick had come in. While the clerk was shaking his head, Joe called for a key to Fred's room.

The clerk was trying to stammer something while he handed over the key, but Cardona silenced him with a growl. Joe wanted to have a look at the room before Fred returned; the less time wasted in argument, the better. He left a detective with the clerk and went upstairs.

When he reached the room, Cardona took a good look along the hall. Fred's room was the last in the line; there was an inside fire tower just beyond it. Probably the spot that Fred would duck for, in a pinch. Cardona decided to call the desk and have one of the detectives come up to guard the outlet.

With that, Joe inserted the key in the lock. On a hunch that Fred might have returned without the clerk's knowledge, Joe reached for a gun at the moment he yanked the door wide.

A living hurricane hit Joe Cardona.

It came from the fire tower, that sweeping figure, with the blackness and whirl of a tornado. Hooking Joe with a sideward wrench, the human twister flung him clear across the hall. Cardona went down with a sideward dive that landed him shoulder-first upon the floor.

As he rolled, Cardona heard the crack of shots, had a recollection of gun flashes, that ended in a galaxy of stars when his head thumped the opposite wall of the hall. Somebody was blasting shots right through the open space where Cardona had shown himself.

Having failed to clip the man in the doorway, the sharp shooter bounded toward the hall, intending to blast Joe as he rose, groggily. But the black-clad avalanche, which Cardona recognized must be The Shadow, had by that time reversed its course.

Before Gale Marden could recognize that Cardona wasn't Fred, before she realized that Joe hadn't dived but had been hurled aside, The Shadow came driving in upon her. His charge was low, beneath the level of her

pointing gun, but he finished it with an upward swoop.

One of Gale's shots hit the top of the doorway. The next chopped a hole in the ceiling. The third – the last in the gun smashed a window. The reason for the curious behavior of the bullets was Gale's backward somersault.

The girl struck a big couch, headfirst; her gun went from her hand as she tried to stop a downward slide. She twisted to keep from hitting the floor face-first. Her head thumped and she settled quietly, very much bewildered.

Cardona found his gun. He looked for the door, thought for a moment that it was shut, for the space was blotted from sight. Then darkness seemed to melt away, gliding off in one direction, which happened to be toward the fire tower.

Seeing the lighted room, Cardona strode in, rubbing his head, while he looked for the foe who had tried to kill him.

Joe thought he was still dizzy, when he saw a girl seated on the couch, with her head on the floor, her trim legs over the couch back. She saw Cardona, too, and blinked as she tried to tilt her head about.

Rolling from the couch, the girl came to hands and knees, while Cardona approached to help her up. He recognized Gale Marden.

"I didn't try to kill you!" exclaimed Gale. "I mistook you for Fred Kellick!"

"You wanted to kill him?"

"Yes." Gale's reply was firm. "You won't arrest me, when you find out why."

She found the crumpled card that had come with the flowers. Cardona scanned it; looked toward the table when Gale pointed to the money. Joe's nod was so expressive that Gale began to blurt out other facts, without waiting to be questioned.

"You're right," put in Cardona gruffly, as the girl paused. "I'm not going to arrest you, Miss Marden. I'm going to help you – to help you get Mokanna!"

In from the hallway, from the direction of the blackened fire tower, came a whispering token of approval – the laugh of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XX. THE FINAL CHALLENGE

SEATED behind the big desk in the office of his elaborate apartment, Howard Garnstead was listening to Jabez Densholm. The attorney was talking about verbal agreements, which he termed contracts, that had been arranged between Garnstead and Marden.

All the while, Garnstead listened with a tired smile, his eyes half closed. At last, when the crabby lawyer paused to give the financier a chance to argue, Garnstead said:

"These matters are really closed, Densholm. You know it as well as I. At most, they amount to only a few thousand dollars, covering preliminary expenses. I am quite willing to pay, on one condition."

"Which is?"

"That the money go to Gale Marden, not toward legal fees. I am quite sure that James Marden paid you enough to take care of these added services."

Densholm glowered. Garnstead's willingness to close the matter in Gale's favor left the lawyer with no further chance to stall for time. At that moment, however, Freeland entered to announce that Mr. Van Loden had arrived.

Seeing Densholm fumbling for papers in his brief case, Garnstead understood. Obliging, he remarked:

"You'd better stay awhile, Densholm. I think my coming interview will interest you. In fact, I might need legal advice before I have finished."

Soon, Van Loden had the floor, and the sallow man was pouring out a lovely story regarding Florida property. Seeing Freeland motion from the doorway, Garnstead nodded. Then:

"I know enough about your land," he said. "Enough, Van Loden, to know that half of it is water! I'm not interested in raising alligators to sell their hides. But wait" – he was rising from his desk – "here is someone who would like to meet you."

Van Loden turned to see Gale Marden. He had never met the girl before, but when Garnstead introduced her by name, Van Loden looked shaky. Shakier still when a second visitor appeared with Gale, one whose arrival surprised Garnstead and Densholm as well.

Intrigued by the situation, Garnstead rose to the occasion. He introduced the man:

"Inspector Cardona."

Promptly, Joe took the floor. He bore down upon Van Loden with a host of accusations. Snatching a pad from Garnstead's desk, Cardona drew a diagram, of the revolving doorway in the old house, exactly as Gale described it. Van Loden gulped.

"I found it the other night," whispered Gale to Garnstead. "It's what I meant, when I said I was sure –"

"Good girl!" inserted Garnstead. "I was quite sure that you could back your claims with evidence."

"Why didn't you tell me?" snapped Densholm, drawing close. "As your uncle's attorney, I had a right –"

A howl from Van Loden interrupted. Cardona had just produced the packet containing ten thousand dollars, with the crook's name on it. Joe was flashing the memo sheet that told of Van Loden's call to Fred.

From then, Van Loden actually poured his confession.

"I fixed the old house," he admitted. "I had to do it. Mokanna had the goods on me. The workmen who helped were in it, too. I don't know their names, but Mokanna had them under his thumb. I think they wound up in the river, both of them.

"That's the way Mokanna did things. Only, I did my best to be useful. I figured I stood in right with him. He offered me ten grand to help him tonight, but that wasn't why I went through with it. If I hadn't –"

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Van Loden halted, the room echoing with the high shriek of his voice. He looked around in sheer terror, as though he expected the walls to split and disgorge the masked figure of the Veiled Prophet.

"Don't worry," Cardona told him. "We've got Mokanna's number. They're looking everywhere for Fred Kellick. Go on with what you were saying. So Mokanna framed James Marden –"

IT was Gale who interrupted. With a sharp cry, she pointed to the door. It had opened; on the threshold stood Fred Kellick, very rumpled and very glary. Behind him was a drab-faced man, whose face Gale seemed to remember.

"You're right!" snapped Fred. "Mokanna did frame Marden! I ought to know. Mokanna tried to frame me today!"

Cardona was covering Fred with a gun, when the drab man intervened. Recognizing him, Cardona exclaimed:

"Say, Clarry, how did you get in this?"

"I'm working for His Nibs, over there," said Clarry, with a gesture toward Densholm, who sat in crab-faced silence, his hands drawn up like claws. "At least, I was. We'll come to that later, Joe. You'd better hear Kellick first."

Cardona explained that Clarry was a private detective of excellent repute. Looking from Clarry to Densholm, Joe was wondering about the tie-up between them. He knew, however, that he could be sure of Clarry.

"I'm supposed to be Mokanna," announced Fred, indignantly. "The fellow who never makes mistakes. Yet you think I was sap enough today to get a couple of notes twisted, bringing the trail straight to me."

"I've been talking to The Shadow, or, I ought to say, he's been talking to me. Do you know where I'd be right now if it wasn't for The Shadow? I'd be dead! If The Shadow hadn't flagged me, I'd have walked into those bullets that Gale shot at you, Cardona. I reached the hotel ahead of you."

It was Joe's own experience that made the facts strike home. The whole cleverness of the scheme was amazing. Instead of seeking to preserve the illusion that James Marden had been Mokanna, the real Veiled Prophet had switched the blame.

It could come out that Marden was innocent, because Fred was to become the culprit instead. Slain by Gale, he would have been unable to refute the evidence against him. As for Gale, she would have received some punishment for her deed, much to the pleasure of the real Mokanna.

Since Fred was alive to talk, he did. He remembered points that could be proven. How he left the envelope with his card on the desk at the florist's with the rose, where another customer must have switched it while the clerk was answering a planned call.

He told of the typewriter left at his office on trial, one that would probably show the same type as Mokanna's messages. He recalled extra packages at his office, ones that he hadn't bothered to look over at the time. Fred was showing plainly that various of Mokanna's dupes had been at work to frame him.

It was dawning on Gale that Fred couldn't have been guilty. His story of following her to the old house was one that she had actually checked; and, fairly considered, it showed his innocence.

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He could hardly have arranged for men to go there and trap her, in such a short time-space; if he had done so, he would have been a fool to follow and run the risk of being seen.

Whenever the real Mokanna had moved in person, it was done with the utmost stealth, on missions of such purpose that they needed the skill of the Veiled Prophet himself. Mokanna was the sort who would have slain both Gale and the interfering cab driver in back of the old house.

"The Shadow talked to me, too," declared Clarry, "down at Van Loden's office. "Say" – he swung to Van Loden – "you weren't supposed to go back there, were you?"

"No," admitted Van Loden, "I wasn't."

"The Shadow figured this right, then," said Clarry, passing Cardona the note that had come through Van Loden's mail chute. "Van Loden was to be a goat, too. This was mailed to him, so you could find it tomorrow. As sure proof that Kellick was Mokanna."

GALE was thinking in terms of Mokanna. Convinced that Fred wasn't the Veiled Prophet, she wanted to know who was. Her gaze swept the room, fell upon Jabez Densholm.

"There's Mokanna!"

Densholm was pulling something from his brief case as Gale screeched. She thought it was a gun; it turned out to be the envelope that The Shadow had examined at Densholm's office. The lawyer opened it.

"I am glad that Marden's name is cleared," he said. "It enables me to disclose the proof of his innocence that I have been holding all along. Marden was Mokanna's dupe, but he kept the letters that the Veiled Prophet sent him.

"They are all here, for Marden trusted me and placed them in my hands. Here is one telling him to take the old house. He thought it best to do so, not knowing that the place was a trap. The final letter ordered Marden to take these stocks to Baroba's and switch them for the genuine."

Gale remembered that letter, though she hadn't read it; for it was the one that had been with the false stocks on her uncle's desk. So he had taken them to Densholm!

"I knew all about Marden's past," declared Densholm, "because he trusted me. He intended flight, not suicide, and I was to clear things while he was gone. But when Mokanna ordered actual crime, we agreed it would be best to do nothing. We thought that the law had Mokanna on the run.

"Instead, Mokanna sent duplicate stocks to Alvaro, and framed Marden therewith. I recognized that Marden's death might be murder, but it was better to keep silence. I had you watched, Gale, by Clarry, to keep you from getting into harm."

Clarry was nodding corroboration. He explained how he had tried to rescue Gale at the old house. For the first time, Gale remembered him.

"The Shadow looked these over," Clarry told Densholm, pointing to the Mokanna letters. "He knows you're all right. He says that with the speed things happened, Mokanna must have been closer to the game than you were. You didn't know that Miss Marden was going to the old house. Whoever did –"

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Gale had swung about; so had others. Fred Kellick and Jabez Densholm were out of it; with their elimination, only one man remained who could possibly have known the cause that Gale had undertaken in behalf of her dead uncle.

Howard Garnstead!

The gray-haired financier had pressed a buzzer. Doors were flinging open in the sides of the room. Servants were shoving into sight with guns, but they were beaten to the draw. A challenging laugh sounded from the doorway in the center, where Fred and Clarry had entered.

Mocking mirth, The Shadow's challenge to Mokanna!

Behind The Shadow were his agents. As intervening figures flattened to avoid the fray, The Shadow and his capable squad opened fire on the flanking followers of Mokanna. Smug crooks withered; but, from the floor, Gale saw Garnstead dive behind his desk.

It was Cardona who spotted his destination – the interior of a huge fireplace. With one yank of a hidden lever, Garnstead dumped the flaming logs down through the floor. The bottom of the fireplace dropped forward; the back came down. The flip-flop action opened a hole right through the wall!

GARNSTEAD was through the opening, a few of his followers after him, including Van Loden. They took bullets, all of them, as they went, with the exception of Garnstead, who was shielded by those behind him; Cardona was shooting below the desk, when he saw the hinged blockade flip up again.

The Shadow was gone. He had headed downstairs to cut off the flight, wherever it came out. Some of his agents followed; the rest supported Cardona, who was opening the fireplace. In the room beyond, Cardona found a door that led to a stairway.

They headed down, to musty depths. In the cellar Cardona dashed along a passage, toward a larger room. The sound of a laugh reached him from the other end. The Shadow had found the outlet, and was blocking off Garnstead!

A staggering horde appeared with guns, driven back by The Shadow's greeting fire. Cardona and Clarry met them with bullets, and two of The Shadow's agents, guns reloaded, joined in the fire. The wave of Mokanna's men subsided, leaving a lone figure swaying in its midst.

The figure was Garnstead's. He was his gray-haired self no longer. He was Mokanna, the noted Veiled Prophet, his face covered with silver gauze. He had brought those trappings with him from the secret room, either to encourage his own men or to disconcert his enemies.

Cardona was leaping forward to grab the Veiled Prophet. With snakelike speed, Garnstead dropped his wounded pose. Instead of aiming for Cardona, he turned in the opposite direction, to shoot at a cloaked figure that had come into sight.

It was Mokanna against The Shadow. Cardona was sure that the cloaked fighter held the edge; but, oddly, Garnstead's gun seemed to speak first. With the shot, the Veiled Prophet swayed; he was toppling when The Shadow's bullet whizzed past the spot where he had been.

Garnstead was dead when Cardona ripped the silver gauze from his face. Remembering Cranston's talk on the subject of the original Mokanna, Cardona had a hunch.

THE VEILED PROPHET

"He sacrificed his followers," spoke Cardona, pointing down to Garnstead. "When he saw that death was sure" – Joe was thinking of The Shadow's aiming gun – "Mokanna ended his own life. It was suicide."

"Not suicide," put in Clarry. "It was Van Loden."

Cardona looked, saw the last of Mokanna's dupes subsiding with a death grin on his face. Mortally wounded, Van Loden had saved a shot for the evil master who had betrayed him.

The Shadow's laugh echoed through the vaulted passage. It carried no regret because he had been deprived of the death shot. Rather, the mirthless tone seemed to approve the deed of Van Loden, who, in dying, had made some amends for the deeds of life.

But the laugh, as it trailed and faded, told more. Sinister, sibilant, its throbbing echoes marked fulfillment of the doom that The Shadow had promised to Mokanna, Veiled Prophet of crime!

THE END