

ATOMS OF DEATH

Maxwell Grant

Table of Contents

<u>ATOMS OF DEATH</u>	1
Maxwell Grant.....	1
<u>CHAPTER I. WORD TO THE SHADOW</u>	1
<u>CHAPTER II. CRIME'S VANGUARD</u>	5
<u>CHAPTER III. THE BLIND TRAIL</u>	9
<u>CHAPTER IV. THE INTERVIEW</u>	12
<u>CHAPTER V. THE MIDNIGHT STROKE</u>	17
<u>CHAPTER VI. SHADOW'S STRATEGY</u>	20
<u>CHAPTER VII. THE DECISION</u>	25
<u>CHAPTER VIII. THE SHADOW'S THRUST</u>	28
<u>CHAPTER IX. DOUBLE FACES DOUBLE</u>	33
<u>CHAPTER X. BRUCE DUNCAN'S STORY</u>	37
<u>CHAPTER XI. THE SHADOW'S VIGIL</u>	42
<u>CHAPTER XII. CLIFF'S PROPOSITION</u>	49
<u>CHAPTER XIII. CRIME COMES THROUGH</u>	52
<u>CHAPTER XIV. THE FALSE THRUST</u>	56
<u>CHAPTER XV. LUKE MAKES A DEAL</u>	62
<u>CHAPTER XVI. CRIME STRIKES AGAIN</u>	67
<u>CHAPTER XVII. THE TRAP SPRINGS</u>	72
<u>CHAPTER XVIII. AGENTS CHOOSE</u>	78
<u>CHAPTER XIX. THE WAY IS PAVED</u>	82
<u>CHAPTER XX. THE NEW PREY</u>	86
<u>CHAPTER XXI. HANDS FROM THE DARK</u>	90
<u>CHAPTER XXII. WITHIN THE HOUSE</u>	93
<u>CHAPTER XXIII. JARK TRIUMPHS</u>	99

ATOMS OF DEATH

Maxwell Grant

This page copyright © 2001 Blackmask Online.

<http://www.blackmask.com>

- [CHAPTER I. WORD TO THE SHADOW](#)
 - [CHAPTER II. CRIME'S VANGUARD](#)
 - [CHAPTER III. THE BLIND TRAIL](#)
 - [CHAPTER IV. THE INTERVIEW](#)
 - [CHAPTER V. THE MIDNIGHT STROKE](#)
 - [CHAPTER VI. SHADOW'S STRATEGY](#)
 - [CHAPTER VII. THE DECISION](#)
 - [CHAPTER VIII. THE SHADOW'S THRUST](#)
 - [CHAPTER IX. DOUBLE FACES DOUBLE](#)
 - [CHAPTER X. BRUCE DUNCAN'S STORY](#)
 - [CHAPTER XI. THE SHADOW'S VIGIL](#)
 - [CHAPTER XII. CLIFF'S PROPOSITION](#)
 - [CHAPTER XIII. CRIME COMES THROUGH](#)
 - [CHAPTER XIV. THE FALSE THRUST](#)
 - [CHAPTER XV. LUKE MAKES A DEAL](#)
 - [CHAPTER XVI. CRIME STRIKES AGAIN](#)
 - [CHAPTER XVII. THE TRAP SPRINGS](#)
 - [CHAPTER XVIII. AGENTS CHOOSE](#)
 - [CHAPTER XIX. THE WAY IS PAVED](#)
 - [CHAPTER XX. THE NEW PREY](#)
 - [CHAPTER XXI. HANDS FROM THE DARK](#)
 - [CHAPTER XXII. WITHIN THE HOUSE](#)
 - [CHAPTER XXIII. JARK TRIUMPHS](#)
-

CHAPTER I. WORD TO THE SHADOW

MANHATTAN formed a changing scene to the man who watched from his window. Dusk was settling over the metropolis; twinkling lights had appeared upon streets and in buildings. Myriad points of illumination were offering man's combat to the approaching gloom of night.

To most observers, this would have been an assuring spectacle. To the man at the window, it was the opposite. He saw those lights as pitiful spots that could only temper darkness; not overpower it. His eyes, as they looked toward the street below, spied deep, shaded patches, where grim blackness already reigned.

Lurking spots. Places where enemies might be waiting. The far-off glitter of Times Square, already glowing against the sky, was one district that might offer safety by its glare. But Times Square was distant from this young man's lookout. Intervening spaces would have to be traversed should he begin a dash for those far-off lights that shone like a beacon of safety.

ATOMS OF DEATH

The street was five stories below. Its darkness became more ominous the more the young man watched it. Fading sunlight showed the man's face pale at the window. A keen face; a firm face – youthful, yet haggard. It was tension, though, not fear, that held the man in its grip.

Turning from the window, the watcher looked about the room wherein he stood. Although he had been watching lights, the young man had avoided using them in the room itself. The furniture that loomed in the dusk of the room was typical of a moderate-priced hotel.

Hunted, avoiding enemies, the young man had chosen this haven. Here, while he awaited some development, he was seeking to give the impression that he was not in his room. His worryment, however, was indication that he felt his ruse was unsuccessful.

Stepping in from the window, the young man trod softly toward the door. There he listened, tensely, trying to catch any signs of movement in the hall. His ears, straining in the darkness, caught a slight, muffled sound that faded as he listened.

A foe? Or merely some chance passer? The listener did not know. But his breath came in a muffled hiss as he moved back toward the center of the room. The suspense had brought his nerves to a point where any noise meant danger. The solitude of the hotel room had quickened his imagination to an unreal pitch – held him on edge.

A telephone bell jingled from a table in the corner of the room. With a stifled gasp, the young man pounced upon the receiver. He raised the receiver from the hook; waited as the bell buzzed on; then spoke in a low voice:

"Hello... Hello..."

A voice across the wire. The young man sank to a chair beside the table. A sigh of relief came from his lips. He had recognized the tones of the speaker. He had at last made the contact that he sought.

"Hello..." Finding his voice, the young man spoke steadily. "Yes, this is Bruce Duncan... Yes, Harry, I called you five times... I see. You just returned to your hotel. Well, I'm mighty glad you got my message..."

"I didn't want to call you again. Because of danger... Yes, great danger... Don't ask for the details yet. I'll tell you all about it when I see you. But there's someone you must notify at once. The Shadow –"

Bruce Duncan broke off suddenly as he heard a warning word across the wire. He understood. Mention of The Shadow was unwise. Warily, Bruce looked around toward the closed door of his room. He chewed his lips as he realized the mistake that he had made. He had forgotten that there might be listeners in the hall.

A careful voice was coming over the wire. The friend at the other end was making statements of assurance. Bruce Duncan steadied. When he spoke again, it was in methodical fashion.

"Yes..." His voice was one of agreement. "It's best that I should get away from here... Before it is too dark... I understand. Yes, I can be there in just half an hour... Good... Leave that to me, Harry."

Hanging up, Bruce breathed with confidence. He looked toward the window and smiled, despite the fact that the sky had fully darkened. For he had found the solution to his problems. No long, hopeless trip to safety, only a short, circuitous dash that would end in a meeting with a friend.

ATOMS OF DEATH

Half an hour. The time was more than ample. But time, from now on, would be working in his favor, so Bruce thought. Listening at the door, the young man could detect no new sounds; but he still held a suspicion that enemies had been outside that portal.

There was safety in this room; there would be safety for a short while when he reached the outside air. But both would become too precarious if he waited too long. Ten minutes here; then it would be time for prompt departure.

HOLDING his watch as he stood by the window, Bruce Duncan surveyed his present position. Last night, he had escaped from a most threatening situation. He had come to this hotel believing that his trail would be unfollowed. He had decided to remain in hiding.

All had been well until noon today. Then Bruce had realized that he had underestimated the power of the foe that he had eluded. Lunching in the hotel restaurant, he had noted that he was under observation. Men who looked like hardened denizens of the underworld had spotted him.

Coming back to his room, Bruce had summed the present. He realized that this hotel – the Palladium – had been an unwise choice. Bruce had picked it believing that its obscurity would serve him. He had discovered, too late, that this isolated, run-down hostelry would be the very place where searchers would try to find him.

Men of evil had sought Bruce Duncan's life. The Shadow had thwarted them in the past. A strange, weird personage who fought for right, The Shadow was one who could never be forgotten. The closeness of new danger had inspired Bruce to seek The Shadow's aid again.

Bruce had known of but one way to reach The Shadow. Back in that dim past, Bruce had made the friendship of a man who he knew must be in The Shadow's service. That man was Harry Vincent; when Bruce had last seen him, Harry had been living at the Hotel Metrolite.

By reaching Harry; Bruce knew that he could reach The Shadow. He had made a call to the Metrolite and had learned that Harry was stopping there. But when Bruce had made his first call, he had been informed that his friend was out. Bruce had followed with four more calls throughout the afternoon. He had finished with leaving word for Mr. Vincent to call him at the Palladium.

Harry's call had come at last. Aside from Bruce's error in mentioning The Shadow, the conversation had produced complete results. Harry had pictured Bruce's present dilemma and had offered the best way out. It was not wise for Bruce to remain much longer at the Palladium Hotel; nor was a long trip advisable. The best plan was a rendezvous not too far distant.

Wisely, Harry had suggested a corner on Third Avenue. That thoroughfare lay east of the Palladium Hotel. By heading eastward, Bruce would spring a surprise on followers who would be expecting him to take a westward course. Moreover, the chosen meeting place was but ten minutes distant. Allowing more time, Bruce would be able to double back on his tracks.

The total space of thirty minutes would be ample for Harry Vincent. Bruce had a hunch that it would enable other friends to be with Harry. Moreover, it meant that Harry might have time to communicate with The Shadow. That thought brought a soft chuckle from Bruce Duncan.

Darkness was The Shadow's habitat. Night increased his formidable powers. Until now, Bruce had dreaded the fading of day. But with word gone to The Shadow, the darkening of night promised greater security.

ATOMS OF DEATH

TEN minutes had almost ended. Bruce stepped away from the window. A new thought inspired him. His was a double task. Not only was his own security at stake; that of many others lay in the balance.

Crime was in the making. Hazy, indefinable crime that Bruce could not analyze. Its existence; its imminence – these, however, were indisputable. It was Bruce's duty to make that threat known; and he could think of no one better fitted to cope with it than The Shadow. In fact, as Bruce considered it, only The Shadow would give full credence to the strange tale that Bruce himself could tell.

Seating himself at the writing desk, Bruce took pen and paper. The darkness of the room made it difficult to write. Time had become short; and not until this moment had Bruce dared give thought to placing facts upon paper. Realizing the double difficulty, the hunted man chose a course that promised brevity.

Instead of using words, he drew a diagram. The slight glow from the window enabled him to trace lines in rough, exaggerated fashion. His chart completed, Bruce scrawled explanatory words at the bottom of the sheet. Instead of using blotter, he carried the paper to the open window and blew upon the page to make it dry.

Ten minutes had passed. Bruce folded the paper and thrust it in his pocket. He glanced hurriedly at his watch; then moved toward the door. Softly he unlocked it. With fists clenched, body half set for a spring, Bruce Duncan stepped into the hall.

No one was there. Bruce looked about, half puzzled. Though he had not anticipated a horde of enemies, he had at least expected a few pretended loiterers who might be ready to make trouble. Bruce began to wonder if his fears had possessed any groundwork.

When an elevator came in response to Bruce's ring, there was no one in it but the operator. When Bruce reached the lobby, he noticed that it was almost deserted. The few guests that he did see looked more respectable than any he had observed at lunchtime.

Heading for the street, Bruce felt increasing confidence. The thoroughfare looked brighter and more peopled than it had from above. Among the wayfarers, Bruce spied none who aroused his suspicions. Smiling to himself, the young man sauntered away from the Palladium Hotel.

TWO plans had occurred to Bruce Duncan. One was to take a cab and keep changing directions as he drove along – if necessary, changing to another taxi. The other was to travel by foot, holding to lighted districts until he made his final cut over toward Third Avenue.

The second plan seemed preferable, under present circumstances. As with the first, Bruce intended to follow a circuitous route. As he walked along, however, his sense of security so increased that he saw no reason for a lengthy course.

Harry Vincent had named a definite corner of Third Avenue. Reaching the street that led to it, Bruce decided to go directly to his destination.

Turning from the lighted street, Bruce threw a hasty glance over his shoulder. He saw none but passers; he smiled with satisfaction as he increased his walk to a brisk pace. Fears, Bruce thought, had been groundless. He would have a good laugh when he talked with Harry Vincent.

But had Bruce troubled himself to take a longer look at the turning point, he would certainly have reverted to original plans. From across the street which the young man had left, a stoop-shouldered figure came shambling out of a doorway. Ugly eyes, peering from a grimy face, were quick as they spotted the street that

Bruce had taken.

This spy gave a signal with his arms. Back along the street, others emerged from hiding-places. More signals were passed. Down a side street, a rakish touring car moved from the curb. Men on foot shuffled hurriedly toward the street that Bruce had taken.

The hunted man had not been wrong in his original fears. Enemies had been watching the Palladium Hotel since noon. Spies had been posted in the fifth-floor hallway, listening. Full word had been passed to the leader who commanded this crew that was out to get Bruce Duncan.

Watchers had let their quarry pass. They were keeping tab on his trail until he reached some spot where quick, ugly action could be sprung more effectively than close by the Palladium Hotel. Bruce Duncan, heading eastward in advance of schedule, was putting himself into the hands of the foemen who awaited him.

CHAPTER II. CRIME'S VANGUARD

BRUCE DUNCAN was looking straight ahead as he neared Third Avenue. The darkened structure of the elevated loomed in front of him. The roar and clatter of a passing train, accompanied by the lights of cars, reduced the impression of blackness. Bruce saw security rather than danger in the gloomy depths beneath the "el."

Harry had named an opposite corner. As Bruce reached the avenue, he waited to make sure that traffic was clear. No cars were coming from the north. A taxi shot by from the south; then Bruce saw a clear spot, the next car being fully a hundred feet away.

Halfway across the street, Bruce stopped short. The bare quiver of dull, approaching light was the cue that gave him sense of danger. Looking quickly, he saw the car that he had spied before. With only its dim lights aglow, the automobile was bearing down upon him at a speed of fifty miles an hour.

Had Bruce sprung forward to gain the pillars opposite, the whirling car would have mowed him down. Instinct and luck combined to save him. With a sudden twist, Bruce swung about and made a dive back in the direction from which he had come.

With that move, Bruce outguessed the driver. At the same time, the ruffian at the wheel allowed no doubt as to his murderous intention. Instead of keeping straight ahead, he veered left in hope of overhauling his victim before Bruce could gain safety.

Luckily, an elevated pillar was close at hand. Diving for it, Bruce escaped death by a scant three feet. The driver had swung in; Bruce was directly in the car's path; but to avert collision with the pillar, the driver was forced to bear back to the center space of the avenue.

Brakes shrieked as a long touring car spun its length about. The driver had jammed for a stop as he passed the pillar. Finding open space beyond, he was madly making halt, that he and his companions might leap after the quarry that they had missed.

BRUCE DUNCAN was dashing for the sidewalk. He knew that murderers were after him. He saw safety in the darkened street that he had left. It was not until he reached the curb that he realized his error. From the very darkness that he sought, three men pounced up to confront him.

Thugs were seeking to deliver death without gunfire. They had the car into which they could pack a slugged

ATOMS OF DEATH

victim. Swift, silent evil was their aim. Revolvers flashed; but the hands that held them were raised as though wielding clubs.

Bruce tried to spin about. A thug grappled with him. Ready for fight, Bruce clipped the fellow on the chin. As two more sprang up, he sent one sprawling and dodged the swinging gun hand of the other. Madly, he started a new dash out into the avenue.

Mobsmen from the touring car had him as their target. A new reason made them withhold their fire. Their companions were piling after the escaping man. A revolver shot might have clipped one of their own number. Five in a row, the rogues from the touring car spread out to block Bruce's flight.

Odds were too great. As Bruce made a leap for the first man who confronted him, another thug leaped up from behind. This time, a swinging gun hand was not dodged. A revolver barrel thudded hard against the side of Bruce Duncan's felt hat. The young man staggered dizzily.

Another thug swung hard with his gun. Bruce sprawled; as he tried to rise mechanically, his first assailant piled upon him and bashed his head sideward against the cobblestones. Pummeling fists landed on Bruce Duncan's body. The victim did not feel the blows. He was unconscious.

Two maulers dragged their quarry to his feet. As they started to haul Bruce to the touring car, their leader snarled a vicious command. A huge mobster sprang forward to deliver a final blow that would end the victim's life without the aid of a bullet.

Bruce's hat was gone. His head sagged forward uncovered, while blood trickled down his face. Almost at the side of the touring car, his carriers paused to give their murderous companion a chance to swing his cudged gun.

A revolver gleamed in the big fist that held it. The downward stroke began, driven by a malletlike arm. But the killing blow was doomed to fail. An interruption came from the last spot where would-be murderers expected it. An automatic roared from the darkened street that Bruce Duncan had left.

With the burst of the gun came a pointing tongue of flame. Like an arrow from gloom, it thrust its reddened shaft straight toward the villain who was about to drive down a death swing. The bullet from the speaking gun was true in its mark.

With a wild cry, the big thug spun about. His swinging hand poised in mid-air; then quivered as his body toppled sidewise. The upraised arm dropped helpless; the body spin became a backward stagger as the thwarted killer stretched his length upon the cobbles.

Hard on the echo of the gun shot came a taunting cry. A weird laugh rose; then blended with the thunderous roar of a train that sped overhead. But that mockery had reached the ears of the killers for whom it was intended. They knew the author of the shot that had spilled the big gorilla. Men of crime were faced by The Shadow!

MOBSMEN swung their guns toward the corner whence the shot had come. The thugs who gripped Bruce Duncan let their prey slip to the street as they, like their fellows, brought weapons into play. Revolvers spat wild shots toward the side street. Bullets ricocheted as they dug the asphalt.

Crooks had seen the flash from midstreet. Blackness, however, had obscured The Shadow. When thugs aimed for where The Shadow had been, they found their foe no longer there. Automatics answered suddenly; their flashes, this time, came from the corner of an old brick building.

ATOMS OF DEATH

Killers broke before The Shadow's cannonade. Eight at the outset, their force was reduced to five. Another fell as he tried to deliver a shot when he backed away. A gangleader's command came in a high-pitched snarl. The Shadow heard the cry as he ended his barrage.

Crooks were leaping for cover – behind the touring car, into the shelter of elevated pillars. Before them lay the body of Bruce Duncan, ready to be riddled with bullets should they fire at the man whom they had knocked unconscious.

Out from his shelter sprang The Shadow. Entrenched mobsters raised a shout as they caught a flash of a cloaked figure sweeping toward the elevated. Revolvers barked to stop The Shadow in his new maneuver. Almost as if he had timed the exact second of the outburst, The Shadow swung back.

Shots whizzed wide. Thugs were forced to change their aim. As they did, gloved hands swept from beneath The Shadow's cloak. Diving into blackness, the dread fighter unlimbered a new brace of automatics. Mobsters ducked as he began a new barrage.

Just as the mobsmen had failed to pick off The Shadow, so was he failing with his present volley. But The Shadow had purpose in his actions. By presenting himself as a momentary target, he had made the crooks forget Bruce Duncan. By sending them to shelter, he was still keeping the intended victim from their minds.

Apparently, The Shadow was wasting his ammunition. Attackers were holding their own bullets in reserve. Again the snarl of the mob leader rose above the din. Triumph of evil seemed imminent, should The Shadow continue his wasteful fire.

A sudden pause. Mobsmen were tense, watching the spot where they had seen the last flashes. The mob leader barked a sudden order. Henchmen sprang out, opening fire into blackness. Automatics spurted hastily, as if in retreat.

Then came the overdue break on which The Shadow had depended.

DOWN the avenue came a taxi that jolted to a sudden stop half up on the sidewalk. As the mob leader whirled about to view this cab that had defied the danger zone, three men sprang from opening doors.

Harry Vincent and two others had arrived. Their faces could not be seen in the darkness; but the rattle of their loaded automatics meant disaster to the cause of crooks. The Shadow's laugh rose triumphant. He had tricked four thugs into exhausting their guns, that his expected agents would have a clear field before them.

One mobster dived away from beyond the touring car. His gun empty, he wisely took to flight. He was beyond The Shadow's range of vision; the shots of agents failed to drop the scurrying rat. Two others snarled as they dived for pillars to fire their last shots. They sprawled, clipped by bullets from guns of The Shadow's men.

Then from behind a pillar leaped the leader of the mob. Squarely into the path of one of The Shadow's agents, he came face to face with this comrade of Harry Vincent. From the mob leader's bloated lips came a snarl of recognition:

"Cliff Marsland!"

The mob leader had spotted a face he knew. He had learned a secret that the underworld had failed to guess. He had identified Cliff Marsland, man of repute in gangland, as an agent of The Shadow.

ATOMS OF DEATH

Cliff, chisel-faced and firm-jawed, recognized the man who had snarled his name. The ugly, distorted face of the mob leader was that of "Stinger" Lacey, who sold the services of his gorilla crew to bidders who wanted murder. But Cliff did not reply by giving the mob leader's name.

Stinger's gun was coming up. Cliff swung his automatic to meet the revolver thrust. Harry Vincent and the third agent swung about. They were too late to stop the duel. It looked like a double finish: Stinger seeking vengeance with the last bullet in his gun.

An automatic barked from beside an "el" pillar. It beat the trigger finger of both contestants by a split-second. The Shadow, too, had held one bullet in reserve. Catching the profiles of the fighters, he had delivered his shot straight for Stinger.

The mob leader wavered. He tried to press trigger as he sagged; then Cliff's automatic boomed spontaneously. The leader of the murderous crew went down, clutching an elevated pillar with the slipping fingers of his left hand. His revolver clattered on the cobblestones as his weakened effort ended.

Police sirens were whining. From somewhere along the avenue, a harness bull was clattering his night stick on the sidewalk. A hissed command came from near the touring car. The Shadow's agents swung about to see their cloaked chief lifting Bruce Duncan's body.

No need to aid The Shadow. He had picked up that unconscious form as one might raise a child. His command was for departure. Acknowledging it, the agents leaped back into their cab as The Shadow headed for the street from which he had made his first appearance.

When police cars came spinning to a stop beneath the elevated, the taxicab was gone.

HALFWAY up the side street, a luxurious limousine was rolling away. A puzzled chauffeur was wondering. He had stopped halfway down the block and had turned about to await his master's return. He had listened, troubled, to the gunfire.

In the back seat, a shrouded figure was leaning above the form of Bruce Duncan. The Shadow's rescue was successful. Though beaten into unconsciousness, Bruce still lived.

A gloved hand took the speaking tube. It was a quiet, almost methodical voice that spoke to the chauffeur.

"Stanley," came the order, "turn left at the next street. Then continue to Doctor Sayre's."

The chauffeur nodded.

"Tell him," continued the quiet voice, "that you are from Mr. Cranston. That he is to keep this gentleman, Bruce Duncan, at his home until I call."

Again Stanley nodded. He swung left at the next corner; slowing to let traffic pass. The Shadow, blackened in the rear of the limousine, had eased Bruce Duncan into a comfortable position. Gloved hands were probing the young man's pockets.

The light of a street lamp gave The Shadow a flash of lines drawn on a sheet of paper. Then the limousine completed the left turn. It came almost to a standstill as Stanley was forced to let a car cut in, turning right. The left side of the limousine was in darkness just past the corner.

The door opened softly. A figure stepped out and dropped easily to the curb. The door closed, just as Stanley shifted gear. The limousine pulled away; the light on the corner gave a fleeting flash of a cloaked shape in black.

Then the figure had blended with total darkness. Stanley was driving on, unwitting that his master had left the car. Bruce Duncan was being carried to a haven where his wounds would be attended.

The Shadow had dealt with crime's vanguard. In the effort of eight killers to obliterate one lone victim, he had seen impending evil beyond. Choosing blackness as his habitat, The Shadow was ready for new plans. His first step would be a study of a solitary clue: the paper which he had gained from the unconscious form of Bruce Duncan.

CHAPTER III. THE BLIND TRAIL

BRUCE DUNCAN'S diagram was an odd one. The Shadow recognized that fact as he surveyed the rough chart beneath the rays of a blue-bulbed lamp. In his sanctum, hidden headquarters somewhere in Manhattan, the mysterious master was studying his single clue.

Of Bruce Duncan's loyalty, The Shadow had no doubt. He had rescued Bruce from danger in the past. Then Bruce had gone his way; even Harry Vincent's contact with the young man had ended. Tonight, Bruce Duncan had bobbed back into view in most unexpected fashion.

Harry Vincent had relayed word to The Shadow. The chief had seen no reason to change his agent's plans for meeting Bruce Duncan. In fact, the very strangeness of Bruce's situation had indicated to The Shadow that the young man's predicament was genuine.

The Shadow, too, had headed for the meeting point. His rescue of Bruce Duncan had been timely; the fact that evil workers had nearly murdered Bruce was capping proof that the young man's danger had not been exaggerated.

Hence The Shadow, as he consulted the diagram, was convinced of two points. First, that its purpose was important; second, that no time should be lost in following the clue which this chart offered.

Though The Shadow felt confident that Bruce would recover from the blows that thugs had dealt him, he knew that the victim's condition was serious. There would be no chance of getting a statement from Bruce Duncan for at least twenty-four hours, if that soon. In the meantime, Bruce's chart represented the only fragment of the important knowledge which the thugged man had somehow gained.

THE diagram was obviously the floor plan of a house. It showed three entrances: front, back and side, thus indicating that the chart marked the layout of the ground floor only. Both the front and back doors were marked with the letter "S." Below the chart was the brief statement that "S" represented "signal."

The front door opened into a large hallway, with a staircase indicated at the inner end. At the beginning of the stairs, Bruce had marked wavy lines, with the letter "D." This was explained by a bottom notation, "D" meaning "danger."

Similar lines appeared just within the back door of the house. Even less leeway was afforded at that point. But, the side door, obscure at the edge of the chart, bore neither the letters "S" nor "D." It led, apparently, to a totally detached section of the building. A second stairway was marked just within the door. An arrow pointed inward.

ATOMS OF DEATH

A soft laugh betokened The Shadow's understanding. The objective must be the second story of the house. It could not be safely reached by either of the regular entrances. Only the obscure side door would provide sure access. Probably a secret entrance, it had been left unprotected.

At the very bottom of the sheet, Bruce Duncan had scrawled the notation: "18 Delavar." That provided information regarding the location of the house itself. Delavar Street was a short, one-block thoroughfare that lay in a crisscrossed district below the numbered streets of Manhattan.

The Shadow recalled the street as one of those forgotten spots where a few old residences lay hemmed in between warehouses and loft buildings. In fact, the name of the street had been dropped, except for address reference concerning the few houses that still remained in use. Familiar with the most isolated sections of Manhattan, The Shadow could picture the very building to which Bruce Duncan's chart referred.

It was obvious that Bruce must have come from 18 Delavar. Either he had known how to pass the danger zones at front and back; or he had taken that unprotected side exit as his means of departure from the building where menace lurked. The fact that Bruce had been trailed and thugged was proof that his absence was known.

Until this night, The Shadow had heard nothing of a lurking menace at the house on Delavar Street. Bruce Duncan's call for help had come from clear sky. The diagram which The Shadow had gained gave no further information concerning the hunted man's dilemma.

Mystery like this intrigued The Shadow. Not only because his chief investigations concerned the unusual; but because the most dangerous of crimes invariably lay concealed behind masked fronts. To The Shadow, one course alone lay open; namely, an excursion to the house on Delavar Street.

WHILE The Shadow was thus engaged in mapping his campaign, a tiny bulb glittered on the wall across from the table. The Shadow reached for earphones. He spoke; a voice responded across the wire:

"Burbank speaking."

"Report," ordered The Shadow.

"Vincent at the Metrolite," came Burbank's words. "Marsland and Hawkeye at the Black Ship. Marsland reports being recognized by Stinger Lacey, mob leader.

"Report, from Burke. At headquarters. Stinger Lacey one of those killed in the Third Avenue fight. Wounded prisoners taken by the police admit Stinger to be their leader. No other information."

A soft laugh was The Shadow's answer. Some of the would-be killers had survived that fray in which Bruce Duncan had been rescued. But the only one who could have passed Cliff Marsland's name to the underworld was dead.

Cliff, with "Hawkeye," the third agent in the fight, was now stationed at the mobland dive called the "Black Ship." That meant he would soon report to Burbank for new instructions. Clyde Burke, reporter of the staff of the New York Classic, had covered detective headquarters to get information there.

All was well, despite the fact that one mobster had fled and others had been crippled but not eliminated. Apparently the crew had taken orders direct from Stinger Lacey. This, though it meant complete coverage of The Shadow's agents, also signified that there could be no tracing of the connection between the mob and events at the house on Delavar Street. Stinger was the only man through whom such information might be

ATOMS OF DEATH

gained.

Burbank's voice came once more. This time the contact man was making a report of his own. He stated in quiet tones:

"Call made to New Jersey. Richards has received word from Lamont Cranston. He will arrive within the next half hour."

A pause. The Shadow was considering this information. Tonight, as often, he had played the role of Lamont Cranston, taking the personality of a millionaire globe-trotter who seldom lived at his New Jersey home. The Shadow had been ready to discard his part immediately upon Cranston's return.

Burbank, as a radio technician, visited Lamont Cranston's home on occasions, to take charge of a sending station that the millionaire had installed in his mansion.

Tonight, therefore, Burbank had been posted to keep tab on the real Cranston's return. Doing so, he had just learned that Richards, Cranston's valet, had received a wire from his employer. The Shadow laughed in whispered tones as he thought of the servant's perplexity. Richards had believed that his master was in New York.

"Call the Cobalt Club," ordered The Shadow. "Leave word that Mr. Cranston wants his limousine brought to New Jersey. The message must be given to Stanley, as soon as he arrives at the club."

"Instructions received," replied Burbank.

"New instructions," announced The Shadow. His right hand was inscribing words upon a sheet of paper. "Agents to go on special duty at midnight. Details as follows –"

The Shadow paused as his hand wrote on. Then he spoke again; the words that he gave were those that he had written in ink of vivid blue. Singularly, his hand continued writing as his voice spoke. One step ahead in his thoughts, The Shadow was passing his orders on to Burbank.

At times, the hand slowed, indicating that The Shadow was contemplating some detail. Then, before his voice approached that point, his hand sped its work, driving further ahead. Oddly, too, the writing on the paper was fading, line by line. Such was the way with the ink The Shadow used.

Thus The Shadow was making swift plans; he was repeating those that he had completed, that Burbank might follow them; and automatically, all written traces of The Shadow's campaign were disappearing from view.

The writing ceased. The Shadow's steady voice kept on speaking for five full seconds. Then the tones stopped. Written lines faded; as the last was disappearing, Burbank's voice gave acknowledgment across the wire:

"Instructions received."

Earphones moved across the table. Enshrouding darkness echoed a solemn laugh. The Shadow had completed his plan of campaign. Information from Burbank had given him an unusual opportunity. The Shadow was ready to take up his dangerous mission.

The blue light clicked out. There was movement in the darkness; then, moments later, came the hush that indicated the departure of The Shadow. He had left this hidden, blackened room by his own secret exit.

ATOMS OF DEATH

HALF an hour later, a taxi stopped a few blocks from the shortened thoroughfare that was known as Delavar Street. A tall passenger alighted, paid the driver, and strolled away in leisurely fashion. Garbed in evening clothes, he was an unusual sort of visitor in this grimy district.

The black of the evening clothes merged oddly with darkness in front of buildings. The stroller had pressed his coat lapels together. His garb had the same blackness of cloak and slouch hat. Only The Shadow could have blended with gloom in such unaccountable fashion.

A few minutes later, this same shape was gliding past a darkened warehouse that marked the corner of Delavar Street. Enshrouded by darkness, The Shadow reached an old, two-story brick house. He saw dully lighted windows on both stories; he noted a glass transom above the closed front door. Against the light that showed through the transom, he discerned the faded number "18."

There was a narrow passage space between the house and the corner warehouse. That opening loomed black, to The Shadow's liking. Cautiously, this strange prowler entered the narrow passage. A flashlight flickered its rays close to the brick side wall.

A glimmer showed an alcove. It was a peculiar niche with steps that led downward. The Shadow took this course; it ended with a door at the bottom of the steps. The location of this barrier corresponded with the side door on Bruce Duncan's diagram.

The Shadow tried the door. He laughed softly as he found it unlocked. He stepped into a little entry and closed the door behind him. The flashlight showed another door at the left. This, too, opened at The Shadow's touch.

Straight ahead was a stairway illuminated by a single light at the top. It offered access to the second floor of the building. With easy, steady stride, The Shadow ascended the steep stairs to reach a landing at the top.

Here another door led inward to the house itself. The Shadow tried the knob. This door was locked. A thin smile appeared upon the lips of the steady countenance which The Shadow wore. Again, the tall visitor placed hand to knob. At that instant, the landing light clicked off.

The Shadow wheeled about in darkness. He was too late to reach the stairs. Clicks came from portions of the wall; there was a flash of blinding light from every side. The atmosphere was charged instantly with the odor of ozone.

Huge arcs had shot a powerful current through the landing. As flaring carbons faded, new clicks announced the closing of the walls. The landing light came on. It showed the tall figure in evening clothes flattened on the floor, motionless.

The knob of the single door was opening. A trap had done its work. Entering by the path that Bruce Duncan had marked as safe, The Shadow had encountered an overwhelming snare.

Rendered helpless by a terrific electric shock, the master investigator had become a prisoner. The Shadow had fallen into the hands of those from whom Bruce Duncan had fled.

CHAPTER IV. THE INTERVIEW

"Good evening, Mr. Cranston."

ATOMS OF DEATH

The greeting was uttered in a sarcastic cackle. The words came from the lips of a dry-faced old man whose eyes glared sharply through the rounded lenses of gold-rimmed spectacles.

To The Shadow, looking upward, the speaker's face was a blur, in which the spectacles appeared as a pair of owlsh eyes. Above the face was a mass of whiteness; as The Shadow stared more steadily, he made out the old man's features, topped by a mass of shocky white hair.

Limp in an easy-chair, The Shadow formed a weakened figure as he turned his head to survey his surroundings. To his left, The Shadow saw a stocky, hard-faced man who looked like a mobster. A glance to his right showed him another man of the same sort.

These two rowdies were acting as servants of The Shadow's captor. Their disguises, however, were thin. The Shadow knew them for small-fry gangsters recruited from scumland. His lips formed a thin smile as his eyes caught the venomous glares of these ruffians.

"Allow me to introduce myself," came the old man's crackly voice. "My name is Professor Baldrige Jark. Perhaps, Mr. Cranston" – again the tone had a sarcastic tinge – "perhaps you have heard my name before?"

The Shadow had finished his study of the room. His chair and a table were the only articles of furniture. The floor was uncarpeted. An old, unused fireplace was in back of Professor Jark. On the mantel above it was the only other moveable item – a clock that registered half past eleven.

"Half past eleven," chuckled Professor Jark, as he saw his prisoner's gaze turn toward the clock. "You arrived here shortly after nine. That was the time at which you experienced the forcible electric shock on the stairway landing. Perhaps, Mr. Cranston, that episode will jog your memory. I ask you again: have you ever heard of me?"

The Shadow moved leisurely in his chair. In the manner of Lamont Cranston, millionaire clubman, he reached in his pocket and found a cigarette case. Extracting a cigarette, he lighted it with a lighter that he drew from a vest pocket. Then he replied to the professor's question.

"Yes," remarked The Shadow, in the deliberate tone of Cranston, "I have heard of you. Professor Baldrige Jark, the electrical wizard. I suppose that it was one of your inventions that I encountered on the landing?"

"It was," chuckled Jark. "You walked into a high-voltage area, Mr. Cranston. The direct current was not designed to kill. It merely stunned you and I have been waiting more than two hours for your recovery."

"Quite considerate of you, professor," acknowledged The Shadow, dryly. "It is a pleasure to meet you, although I feel that the circumstances could have well been less overwhelming. Tell me, professor – have you gone back to your inventive processes? I understood, from the last report I heard, that you were in retirement."

The Shadow's words were well calculated. He had learned immediately – when addressed as Cranston – that his pockets must have been searched for cards of identification. Jark had found some bearing the name of Lamont Cranston. But he knew also that the professor must have found Bruce Duncan's diagram. In reaching for his cigarette case, The Shadow had gone to the pocket in which he had placed Bruce's floor plan. He had found the paper missing.

"I went into seclusion," declared Professor Jark, "not into retirement. I had greater work to do. New inventions commanded my skill. That is why the public has heard but little of me, lately.

ATOMS OF DEATH

"And now, Mr. Cranston" – again the old man emphasized the name as he uttered it – "it is my turn to ask some questions; ones that I shall expect you to answer, since you were trespassing on my premises."

THE SHADOW made no reply. Instead, he arose from his chair, smoothed the coat of his full dress suit in fastidious fashion and turned to face the professor. A quizzical smile showed on The Shadow's steady lips. It indicated, as much as words could have, that he was ready for the professor's quiz.

"Tell me, Mr. Cranston," suggested the professor, "how you first came to be acquainted with my secretary, Bruce Duncan."

"Bruce Duncan?" questioned The Shadow, in a puzzled tone. "Who is Bruce Duncan?"

"Come, come!" snapped Jark, in an irritated manner. "I have every right to demand fair answers to my questions. Your acquaintance with Bruce Duncan is a known fact."

"The name is not familiar to me," affirmed The Shadow, in a convincing tone. "I have given you my answer, professor. It is I who should be annoyed; not you. Let me ask why you have kept me here after subjecting me to the peril of an electric shock? What has warranted such behavior on your part?"

"This!" ejaculated Jark, bringing a paper from the pocket of the old jacket that he was wearing. "This paper, found in your possession. Not only do I recognize words in Bruce Duncan's handwriting; but the information that it carries could only have been given by my former secretary."

The Shadow stared curiously at the paper in Jark's hand. His lips phrased a slight laugh as he extinguished his cigarette in an ash tray on the table. Chuckling slightly, he spoke, still in Cranston's fashion.

"So that was Bruce Duncan," remarked The Shadow. "That wild-eyed chap without a hat, who came barging into my limousine. Of course, I would have recognized the man, professor, had you prefaced your question by speaking of the list.

"This has been an adventurous evening, professor. It has caused me to miss my bridge game with the acting police commissioner, Wainwright Barth. I was to have met him at the Cobalt Club this evening. However, I doubt that Barth will start the police searching for me much before one o'clock. He never worries about anything but bridge until after the game is over."

A look of worry appeared upon Jark's face. The thuggish servant shifted uneasily. Seating himself in the easy-chair, The Shadow resumed his discourse.

"BARTH will have no trouble locating me," mused The Shadow. "I told the head waiter in the grillroom that I was coming to this address. Barth always goes to the grill after he plays bridge. But that, of course, is irrelevant to our present conversation. I suppose, professor, you would like to know how I came in contact with Bruce Duncan."

"I would," cackled Jark.

"It is a most curious story," stated The Shadow. "You see, professor, I have just returned from San Francisco. Immediately on arriving, I went directly to the Cobalt Club. I had wired Barth that I expected to be in tonight. But I had informed no one else. Therefore, you can imagine my surprise when I found Stanley, my chauffeur, outside the club with my limousine.

ATOMS OF DEATH

"I noticed the car as I was going in the door. As I hailed Stanley, the doorman stepped up and gave me a message. It was marked 'urgent,' and it bore the simple statement that the meeting would take place at a corner on Third Avenue at eight o'clock."

"At what time was this?" queried Jark, as The Shadow paused.

"Twenty minutes of eight," returned The Shadow promptly. "The message intrigued me. I called Stanley and told him to drive to the address given. It was just about eight o'clock when we neared there."

"And then?"

"Stanley stopped the car as we heard gunshots beneath the Third Avenue elevated. I told him to turn the limousine about, even though we were on a one-way street. While he was doing so, I slipped from the car.

"As the firing ceased, I saw a taxicab speed away. Then a man came dashing in my direction. He had no hat; he was panting; and blood was streaking his face. He saw me by the car; he thrust that paper into my hands. Before I could stop him, he dashed into a courtyard between two houses.

"Police cars were blowing their sirens from the avenue. I hastened to enter my limousine; I had Stanley drive me back to the club. When I arrived there, I asked him why he had come in from New Jersey. He said that the club had phoned, stating that I wanted the limousine there. So I sent Stanley back to New Jersey, stating that I would either drive out in a friend's car, or would remain at the club overnight."

The Shadow paused to light another cigarette. He was chuckling over the circumstances which he had related. He seemed quite at ease when he proceeded.

"Barth was not due until half past nine," declared The Shadow. "I had supper in the grillroom and while I was eating, a jolly idea struck me. I decided to use this chart that the running man had given me; to find out what mystery lay within this house. I thought that I might gain some unusual news for my friend, the acting commissioner."

The Shadow paused abruptly. He smiled as he shrugged his shoulders. His story was told; idly puffing his cigarette, he awaited Professor Jark's comment.

"An interesting tale, Mr. Cranston," giped the old man. "Unfortunately, it does not fully bear out circumstances. At about half past nine tonight, I had a friend put in a call to your New Jersey home. Do you know what he learned?"

"I have no idea, professor."

"He learned that Lamont Cranston had been at his home this evening. That he had just left, shortly before half past nine, for a trip to New York. So it seems, Mr. Cranston, that you are a most unusual person. One who can be two places at once."

The Shadow leaned back in his chair. He indulged in a chuckled laugh that made the professor stare, while the hard-faced servants looked bewildered.

"What a joke on Stanley!" exclaimed The Shadow. "Finding me at home when he arrived there. He must have thought that I flew over by autogyro. Well, Stanley has been perplexed before; so this time it won't matter."

ATOMS OF DEATH

Rising to an upright position, The Shadow ended his laugh. A sternness replaced the smile that had shown on his steady, disguised features. He pounded a fist upon the arm of his chair.

"The joke, however, has gone too far!" announced The Shadow. "I shall tolerate no more of it! This impostor who uses my name, my home, my club – I shall end his lark at once! I thought before that it was foolish to allow the hoax to go on. Tonight has proven that the whole masquerade is dangerous."

Professor Jark was staring, as if demanding an explanation. Before the old man could put a question, The Shadow resumed in an irritated tone.

"I do not know the bounder's real name," he declared, "but he calls himself 'The Shadow.' He had the audacity to write me a letter, stating that he chose to pass himself as Lamont Cranston during my absence from New York. If I objected, I was to say so, by an advertisement in the want ads of the Globe.

"I never raised that objection. When my servants spoke of my having been at home when I was absent; when strangers addressed me by name, I took it all as a friendly game. Particularly because I was never really annoyed by the bounder's activities.

"In fact, I never connected tonight's message with this chap who calls himself The Shadow. But now when you tell me that I was at home when I was actually here, I see the whole scheme of things. That message at the Cobalt Club was not meant for me. It was sent to this fellow who was masquerading during my absence from town.

"What a mess it has become. The cheeky fellow must have called Stanley into New York, so he could return to New Jersey after his escapade. Since I had taken the car, he did not find it at the club, so he went to my home by some other means."

PROFESSOR JARK was still staring, totally swayed by The Shadow's indignation. He saw his prisoner arise. He watched an impatient gesture of the black-coated arm.

"If this cad has been troubling you, professor," declared The Shadow, "deal with him as you choose. But do not blame me for his meddling in the affairs of others. He has troubled me too much, this impostor who calls himself The Shadow. Bah! He is a nuisance. I would like to be rid of him!"

The clock on the mantel was approaching twelve. Professor Jark stroked his chin. He watched his prisoner pace back and forth. An annoyed expression showed on the firm-featured face that resembled Lamont Cranston's.

"If you will excuse me, Mr. Cranston," declared Professor Jark, in a mild tone, "I shall take up this matter later. The facts that you have told me are most astounding. I should like to discuss them in greater detail. Kindly make yourself at ease until I return."

The Shadow nodded in absent-minded fashion. Preserving his role of Cranston, he was still pacing, apparently more annoyed by the facts that he related than he was by his present predicament.

There were two doors in the room. The professor went out by the one at the left, which had been standing ajar. The criminal-looking servants maintained their vigil. The Shadow, fuming to himself, seemed oblivious to their presence. It was not until he again seated himself that he again adopted the placid manner that was usual with Lamont Cranston.

Drawing a cigarette from his case, The Shadow placed it between his thin lips and lighted it methodically. His lips were straight, his eyes were meditative as he sat smoking.

But all the while, The Shadow was noting the clock on the mantel. The hour of twelve was approaching. Midnight would bring the result he wanted. For then, if all went well, Professor Jark would be fully sold on the idea that The Shadow had given him. He would have proof that the prisoner he held was the real Lamont Cranston!

CHAPTER V. THE MIDNIGHT STROKE

WHEN Professor Baldrige Jark closed the door of the next room, he turned to face two men who were awaiting him. This pair had been listening at the partly opened door. They had heard every word of the interview between Jark and The Shadow.

One man was tall, dark-complected, with bushy eyebrows and bristling hair. His face, though hard, was crafty; his jaw carried an ugly thrust that gave him a challenging expression.

The other, short and sandy-haired, was a fellow whose face had a downward droop. His countenance was pale; his lips held a half-smoked, unlighted cigarette that hung downward like the corners of his mouth.

Though more intelligent than the thugs who acted as the professor's servants, these fellows likewise had a criminal look. They were strange companions for a man with the scientific standing of Professor Baldrige Jark.

"You heard it all?" cackled the professor. "What did you think of it, Theblaw?"

He addressed the tall man, who shrugged his shoulders. Jark wheeled to the short fellow.

"What is your opinion, Wight?" demanded the professor.

"Digger don't know what to make of it," interjected Theblaw, speaking for Wight. "He's left it for me to figure out. How about it, Digger?"

"Sure thing, Matt," acknowledged Wight.

"Since that is the case," decided Jark, "I await your comments, Theblaw."

Matt Theblaw sat down. This room was as poorly furnished as the other. Its only furniture consisted of three folding chairs. "Digger" Wight took a second seat, lighted his cigarette and tossed the burnt match on the bare floor. Professor Jark seated himself in the last chair.

"Well," began Matt Theblaw, "it's a cinch that Duncan called some guy who knew The Shadow. One of Stinger's men was listening outside of Duncan's door, at the hotel. He heard Duncan say something about The Shadow. That's why Stinger called me."

"Perhaps," admitted Jark. "At the same time, the man appears adventurous. Does he look like The Shadow, Theblaw?"

It was Digger Wight who guffawed in reply.

ATOMS OF DEATH

"Say, prof," scoffed the little man, "who do ya think has ever seen The Shadow, anyhow? Do you think he goes aroun' lettin' people spot his mug? I'd say he don't! The Shadow's a fox, he is!"

"So I have heard," cackled Jark, dryly. "But tonight – if our prisoner is The Shadow – we have seen the infallible personage enter an awaiting snare."

Digger looked puzzled by the professor's references. Matt, however, was quick to get the point.

"I'M glad you brought that up, prof," he asserted. "I must admit I was sort of on the fence. But The Shadow walking in here don't quite go."

"He had that map," put in Digger. "He seen the way was clear. Duncan had marked it that way."

"Yes," admitted Matt, "but The Shadow, whether he talked with Duncan or not, could have guessed that Duncan had scrambled out of this place. That would mean that we knew Duncan was gone."

"Which we did," inserted Jark.

"And The Shadow should have figured that we'd trap the side entrance," continued Matt. "You know what I told you, prof. I said put the extra apparatus on that landing. Have it ready if Duncan or anybody else tried to come back here. We needed time while we were getting the rest of the equipment away."

Matt paused while Jark nodded. A short silence followed; then the professor spoke.

"Your comments, Theblaw," said the old man, "make it appear quite evident that we have captured the wrong man. I am convinced that our present prisoner is the real Lamont Cranston.

"He appears to be antagonistic toward The Shadow because The Shadow has caused him trouble. Therefore, it would be to our advantage to deal well with Cranston. Release him, with an apology. I can handle that in a manner which will not excite his suspicion."

"What's the good of lettin' the guy go?" demanded Digger. "Say – he's worth dough, ain't he? Why not hold him?"

"Can it!" snapped Matt. "We're running no snatch racket, Digger. This guy's a pal of Barth's. What do you want to do – have the bulls on our trail? The prof's got the right idea.

"The only thing is, we don't want to make a mistake. No use in lettin' this bird go until we're sure he's not The Shadow. We can grab the other Cranston, talk to the two of them together, and find the right one that way."

"Say, Matt," commended Digger, "That's a real ticket. Even if the other mug's The Shadow, we ought to be able to snatch him, knowin' where he is."

"The only objection, Theblaw," inserted the professor, "is this. If our present prisoner is really Lamont Cranston, holding him will cause me to lose his friendship. I would suggest therefore that you lose no time in seeking to capture the other man. Unless –"

"Unless what?" interposed Theblaw.

ATOMS OF DEATH

"Unless you can think of some other test," proceeded Jark. "Some clever bit of questioning that will settle our problem rapidly. We have too great an opportunity ahead. We must not jeopardize matters by false steps."

Theblaw paced across the room. At last he wheeled to Jark and made a definite assertion.

"LET'S think about Duncan for a moment," he declared. "We know he got away from Stinger's crew. That much is sure."

"On this guy Cranston's say—so?" demanded Digger.

"Certainly," retorted Matt. "If we've really got The Shadow, we know he's seen Duncan. If he isn't The Shadow — if he's Cranston — he's given us a straight story. All right, supposing we've really got Cranston. That leaves Duncan in the clear, don't it?"

Matt had swung to the professor. Jark nodded.

"So we can figure," continued Matt, "that Duncan's passed the word to The Shadow. And if I know The Shadow right, he won't be waiting until next week to come here."

"So what?" put in Digger.

"The longer we wait, the better," asserted Digger. "There's the test you want, prof. Hold our prisoner for twenty—four hours. No — that's too long. Twelve hours are enough. If The Shadow is coming, he'll be here any time."

"And if he don't come?" asked Digger.

"It'll mean that we've already got The Shadow," sneered Matt. "All we've got to do is wait. Sit up with this prisoner of yours, prof. Keep him awake talking boloney about your inventions. And if nothing's hit before daylight, We'll give him the bump. We'll know then that he's The Shadow."

Another pause. Professor Jark was nodding as he rubbed his chin. Matt decided to drive his argument home.

"Anybody's liable to be dumb," said the tall crook. "Even The Shadow. Maybe he's pulled a boner and that's how we got him. What I've said still goes. If we've got the real Cranston, The Shadow will show up. If he does, I'll bet it won't be by the side door."

"Why not?" queried Jark.

"Because he'd figure it was trapped by this time," replied Theblaw. "If this prisoner is the real Cranston, the best argument he's got is one he hasn't mentioned. The fact that he came in the side door. The Shadow wouldn't have been likely to have tried it."

"Unless he was takin' a long shot," inserted Digger.

"Or crossing the dope," agreed Matt. "After all, you can't tell just what The Shadow's likely to spring. But my guess would be that he'd hit the front."

"Why?"

ATOMS OF DEATH

"On account of the hall being clear. If Duncan's tipped him, The Shadow would know that the wiring don't begin until the foot of the stairs. Anyway, that's beside the point. If we haven't got The Shadow, we'll know it when he comes here.

"The only thing we can do is plan what to do if he does come. He can't get by those stairs. Nobody can. So he'll have to beat it, and not knowing we've Cranston, he'll go back to New Jersey."

"And we'll snatch him there?" queried Digger.

"Sure thing," agreed Matt. "Understand, of course, this is all figuring that The Shadow's still due. If he comes and goes, we'll know where he's gone then –"

"And then," interposed Jark, dryly, "you will perpetrate a deliberate kidnapping. A mistake, Theblaw. A bad mistake. We have done too much already, seizing Lamont Cranston. We must cause no more furor."

FOR a moment, Theblaw fumed. He glared angrily at the professor, who met his gaze steadily. Then the dark-browed crook laughed. His mirth was an admission that the professor had spoken wisely.

"It won't be a snatch, prof," assured Theblaw. "I'm glad you brought it up. It'll work different, and I'll tell you why. We can drop the real Cranston, if we have to grab the phony. Both at the same time, see?"

From a hallway outside the room, came the jangle of a muffled bell. It was ringing in steady fashion.

"The front alarm!" exclaimed the professor.

"That's it!" acknowledged Theblaw, grimly. "Stay here with the prof, Digger. I'm moving out to shove those other gorillas on the job. It's The Shadow!"

With that, the tall crook darted for a door. The barrier opened just as he reached it. A dark-faced mobster thrust his visage into the doorway. Theblaw motioned the fellow back into the hall.

Then Theblaw shouldered through and closed the door behind him. Digger grinned as he turned to the professor. Old Jark was staring toward the door, half puzzled, half expectant.

"Matt called it, didn't he, prof?" chuckled Digger. "Said maybe The Shadow was still comin'; that if he was, he'd be due. Take it easy, prof. There's nothin' to worry about. Matt an' them gorillas will take care of him, if he don't get a hot shot from the stairs."

Professor Jark nodded, smiling. With an expression of relief, the old man resumed his chair. Like Digger Wight, he was content to await the outcome of Matt Theblaw's impending battle.

CHAPTER VI. SHADOW'S STRATEGY

Across the street from the house on Delavar Street, two men were crouched in the doorway of a half-empty loft building. They were watching another man whose figure they could scarcely discern. He was huddled against the front door of the house that bore the number 18.

"Tapper's working slow tonight, Cliff," whispered one of the crouched men. "Say – I don't figure why he's here picking that lock, unless The Shadow is around at the back –"

ATOMS OF DEATH

"Psst!" Cliff's warning was an interruption. "Keep your ears open, Hawkeye. Hear that? Sound like a bell!"

A faint jangle was barely audible. It probably could not be heard at the front door of number 18. The location that Cliff and Hawkeye had taken must have placed them on a line with an opened upper window in Professor Jark's present residence. They were listening to the same alarm that Jark and his companions had heard.

The faint tingling ended. Hawkeye gripped Cliff's arm and pointed across the street. The huddled figure was moving down the steps. The front door opened an inch or two; a streak of light could be seen at its edge.

"Tapper's got it!" whispered Hawkeye. "He's easing back, like he was going to be ready to join us. Say, Cliff – The Shadow must've ordered Tapper on the job so's both doors would be ready –"

Again, Cliff stopped his companion's words. Blackness had appeared against the grimy whiteness of the house steps. An outlined figure was moving upward. The door swung wide; against the light from the opened portal, The Shadow's agents saw the cloaked figure that represented their chief.

"Come on, Hawkeye!" ordered Cliff. "That's our cue. Orders to follow The Shadow into the house. Don't worry about Tapper. He's got his own instructions."

A beckoning motion from a cloaked arm. Running forward, Cliff and Hawkeye saw a turn of the slouch hat that topped The Shadow's garb. Then the cloaked figure strode straight into the house. The agents reached the steps a few seconds later.

As Cliff and Hawkeye edged into a vestibule, someone came up behind them. It was "Tapper." Like the other agents, he held a ready automatic. He apparently had the same orders – to remain upon this threshold while The Shadow ventured into the house itself.

THOUGH they themselves were in semidarkness, The Shadow's agents could see the scene before them. Straight ahead was a lighted hallway. Across it rose a flight of stairs. In the center of the uncarpeted hall was the cloaked figure of The Shadow, weaving warily forward.

Almost at the stairway, the figure paused. Cliff saw the black shape wheel about; he caught a glimpse of cloak collar muffled high about the face beneath the slouch hat, giving no chance to discern the hidden features. Then again, The Shadow's form turned toward the stairs. Sweeping arms suddenly displayed a pair of heavy automatics.

The weapons were a challenge that came as the advance ended. The Shadow had stopped short of the stairway. Harsh shouts sounded above. The cloaked figure swung backward just as wild shots broke out at the head of the stairs.

With surprising haste, the cloaked figure made retreat. Swinging about as he hurried toward the door, the attacked fighter loosed one round from each automatic. Derisive cries greeted this insufficient thrust. Footsteps clattered on the stairs.

Mobsmen were dashing down to open fire on their retreating foe. They thought they had The Shadow on the run.

But the agents at the outer door knew differently. Their chief's retreat was their cue. They understood the orders that they had received, through Burbank, from The Shadow.

ATOMS OF DEATH

Up came automatics. As the cloaked figure sprang to the side of the hall, the entrenched agents opened a barrage from their darkened post. Guns crackled; bullets ripped the stairway. One mobster, clipped by Hawkeye, made a grab for the banister and clung there.

A second ruffian received a slug from Cliff. With a terrorized shout, the thug pitched forward and came whirling down the stairs. He struck head-first at the bottom, kept jouncing on and rolled over three times. He sprawled motionless in the center of the hall.

That was enough for the rest of the descending mob. As someone rasped an order from above, three gorillas turned and dashed upward. The ceiling of the ground floor took them beyond range of The Shadow's agents. But the mobsters were not free from pursuit.

As the agents stopped their useless fire, they saw that cloaked figure spring out from the wall. Cliff chuckled as his chief swept forward. Big automatics thundered from thin-gloved fists. As two of the fleeing mobsmen reached the top of the stairs, the third floundered to hands and knees, wounded by a zipping bullet.

Half crawling, half diving, the fellow managed to reach the safety that the other two had gained. The retreat had become a stampede. Crooks were madly fleeing from terror of The Shadow. Not one remained, to fire at that dread figure on the ground floor.

FROM the outer door, Cliff watched the cloaked fighter step over the sprawled body of the mobster in the hall. The rogue on the steps was huddled against the banister, his gun arm sagging. He could put up no fight.

The Shadow's figure stopped just short of the stairway. Fists came up; automatics roared a brief barrage toward the second floor. These shots were a preventive measure to keep the crooks cowering above. One pace ahead – one more – the cloaked fighter stood stock-still.

For some reason, Cliff decided, The Shadow chose to go no further. That, to Cliff, was puzzling. He could see the purpose of the false retreat. It had drawn the gang into a range of fire. But why was The Shadow pausing?

At that instant, the cloaked figure made a move. It looked like a feint on The Shadow's part. A quick stride to the very bottom of the stairs; then a sudden whirl about for a new, deceptive retreat. It was at that instant that the unexpected happened.

Blue lights blazed with roaring crackle from both sides of the stairway. Hidden arcs shot ripping streaks of man-made lightning about the spot where the cloaked figure was turning. Dazzling, blinding glare made The Shadow's agents throw their arms before their eyes.

Then, as blankness faded, they saw the figure of their chief rocketing toward the floor. Turned full about as the current was loosed, the cloaked fighter was hurtled outward by the shock that he had received. He had been caught just within the edge of the danger zone.

Cliff knew instinctively that the shock had been little more than staggering. He realized now why no advance had been made beyond the foot of the stairs. In one glimpse, he had seen leaping currents obscured by the cloaked figure of The Shadow. Closeness to the current had felled the turning fighter.

Someone above must have recognized the same. New footsteps were clattering. Rallied mobsmen were springing downward to aim shots for their crippled foe. Cliff snapped a command to Hawkeye and Tapper. Rising, the trio sprang forward, opening fire.

ATOMS OF DEATH

Mobsters faltered before they could deliver shots at the cloaked body on the floor of the hall. One man sagged; the others made another wild dash up the stairway. Cliff and the other agents barked slugs in plenty, up to that beleaguered second floor. Everyone above had dived away.

AS Hawkeye and Tapper still continued firing, Cliff leaped forward and caught the cloaked shoulders of the prone man on the floor. Dragging the victim to safety, he barked another order to Hawkeye and Tapper. They thrust away their guns to aid Cliff with The Shadow.

Carrying their cloaked burden, they reached the street. Again Cliff spoke as temporary leader. Pointing Hawkeye and Tapper toward the corner past the warehouse, he ordered them forward, while he hurried to a post across the street. Cliff's move was an effective one.

Some sniper started fire from a darkened upstairs window. Cliff fired at the blackness where he had seen the flame spurt. The sniper dropped back, no longer anxious to aim for the men who were hurrying to the corner.

Then came police whistles, a block away. Scudding from his post, Cliff followed after Tapper and Hawkeye, who had turned the corner. Shots broke out behind him as he ran; Cliff swung about at the corner to fire at two men who had come from the front door of the beleaguered house.

Then, passing the corner, he saw a waiting cab. Cliff leaped aboard. Hawkeye and Tapper were already aboard, a slumped black shape between them. A crafty-faced driver saw Cliff enter. The cab shot away as shots sounded wildly from the corner. Cliff responded with a quick volley from the cab window, just as the taxi rounded a corner.

The belated move was Cliff's one error. The cab had run into the path of a police car, coming from the street into which they had turned. Shots came from the police, as they sped in pursuit of the cab. The chase that followed was a mad one.

Luckily, this was no ordinary cab in which The Shadow's agents rode. The driver was Moe Shrevnitz, an agent of The Shadow. The cab was The Shadow's own, which Moe drove as an independent. Like other cabs, it was geared low for traffic; but it also had a fourth gear for speed.

No jehu in Manhattan could outdo Moe Shrevnitz. The twisting course that he took gave the patrol car no opportunity to deliver damaging fire. Moe was half a block ahead when he turned into the broad space of a clear avenue. There he took to a straight-away course.

The officers in the patrol car thought their opportunity had come when they reached the corner that Moe had turned. But to their surprise, they saw the cab a full block ahead, walking away from them with ease. After half a dozen blocks, the taxi was out of sight.

CLIFF MARSLAND breathed easily, five minutes later, when Moe threaded into a darkened street and brought the cab to a halt. Cliff knew that he had brought on the chase; not only had it caused temporary trouble for Moe, it had also allowed respite to those in the house on Delavar Street.

Cliff knew that mobsmen could easily have scurried back to safety; that the closed door of 18 Delavar would give no clue to the police. The law would put down this episode as a running mob fight. Thus had Cliff's rescue of The Shadow developed into a mad flight.

But Cliff had another matter in mind. The figure in the cab was stirring. Cliff gave an order to Hawkeye and Tapper. The two slipped from the cab and moved away in the darkness. While Moe waited at the wheel, Cliff turned on the light to learn how fully The Shadow had recovered.

ATOMS OF DEATH

That action brought the final surprise. As Cliff looked at the cloaked figure, he saw shoulders move. The slouch hat slipped from the head that it covered. Bewildered, Cliff found himself staring into the face of Harry Vincent.

"Hello, Cliff." Harry spoke with a weak grin. "Got me out of it, didn't you? I should have kept further from those stairs."

"You – you were The Shadow?" gasped Cliff.

"Pinch hitting," returned Harry. "Don't ask me why. I don't know. Burbank's orders, that's all. A package arrived for me at the hotel. I was to hit that house at midnight, to wait until Tapper cracked the door. Then fake a fight and beat it."

"You faked it fine," acknowledged Cliff. "You had me buffaloed. Hawkeye and Tapper, too."

"I faked it too well," decided Harry. "Burbank told me those stairs meant danger. Well, it worked out well enough to deceive those fellows at number 18, whoever they are."

CLIFF opened the door of the cab. He sidled out into darkness; then spoke to Moe and told him to drive to the Hotel Metrolite. In the cab, Harry Vincent settled back on the cushions. He shifted the cloak from his shoulders, bundled it with the slouch hat and automatics; then dropped the load into an open bag that he saw on the floor.

Tonight had been a succession of surprises for Harry Vincent. The rescue of Bruce Duncan; the orders to attack the house on Delavar Street; the masquerade that he had played; that powerful shock at the foot of the stairway in the beleaguered house – all blended into mystery for Harry Vincent.

Harry could divine only that The Shadow had wished to trick the occupants of the house. To make them believe that he had come there; that he had picked the lock of the door and had waged battle as a sequel. Through Tapper as the lock picker and Harry as the cloaked fighter, The Shadow's ruse had doubtless succeeded.

But Harry, recalling orders, remembered that retreat was to have been the finale of a swift, hot fray. The retreat had come, all right, thanks to Harry's own misfortune. It had been precipitous; but convincing, inasmuch as Harry – presumably The Shadow – was out of combat.

But what could The Shadow have to gain by making enemies think that he had lost a battle? That was the question to which Harry Vincent could not even imagine an answer. For once, Harry felt himself believing The Shadow had made a tactical error.

Harry's thought was erroneous. The agent would have been amazed had he known the value of the service that he had performed tonight. Already, The Shadow was reaping the fruits of prearranged strategy.

The Shadow had issued tonight's instructions knowing that he was bound on a most dangerous mission that might lead to his capture. Actually a prisoner, The Shadow had bluffed his captors.

Well had The Shadow bluffed, and with confidence that he could keep up his pretended role of Lamont Cranston. The prearranged attack at midnight, with Harry Vincent faking himself as The Shadow, was the clinching argument in The Shadow's game of bluff.

CHAPTER VII. THE DECISION

"IT was The Shadow, right enough."

Matt Theblaw gave this verdict as he faced Professor Baldrige Jark. The two were in the room where they had held previous conference. As before, Digger Wight was witness to the confab. Digger had remained with Jark while Matt had been out directing combat.

"He blew in big as life," asserted Matt. "Pulled a smart stunt on us, too. Dodging back from the stairs, so the gang would follow. With a bunch of heels laying back to plug our mob on the stairs."

"We heard plenty of rods workin'," put in Digger. "Who did he get?"

"Between him and his outfit," calculated Matt, "Charley and Fritz took the bump. Luke and Brodie got plugged; but not very bad. They'll hold out until we get them to the medico."

"Yeah?" quizzed Digger. "Well, where's the sawbones?"

"You're asking me that?" scoffed Matt. "What about Doc Baird? We've got him tucked away, haven't we? On your account, prof" – Matt smiled cunningly as he turned to Jark – "but I guess you won't squawk if we make Baird do extra duty."

"Not at all," commented Jark, dryly. "Suit yourself, Theblaw. It is all for the common cause. This means, of course, that you recommend a prompt departure from this house."

"Yes," nodded Theblaw. "Suppose we work it this way. You ride with Digger, in the sedan. Parsons can sit in back, looking out for Luke and Brodie. Digger knows the way to that flossy hide-out of ours. Meanwhile, I'll take the rest of the mob in the other cars. We'll dump Charley and Fritz out of one; we'll carry this bird Cranston in the other."

"What about the junk around here?" demanded Digger.

"You and the prof can pack it," suggested Matt. "Leave the furniture; it's no account. The equipment is all you'll want to take. How about it, prof?"

"Quite satisfactory," assured Jark. "With this exception, Theblaw. I would recommend that Wight dismantle the equipment before you start. Unless the wounded men are in critical condition, it would be advisable for me to talk with this man Cranston."

"That's right," decided Matt. "Sure thing, prof; the gorillas can wait. I want to listen in and hear how Cranston takes the spiel you hand him. Make it snappy, prof. Don't spill too much about the shots he heard."

"I doubt that he heard them at all," assured Jark, with a smile. "The noise of the firing was scarcely audible in this room. The closed door would have prevented Cranston and his watchers from having heard it."

With that, the old man went to the door of the next room. Matt gave a nod to Digger, who sidled out into the hall. Then Matt moved behind the door as the professor opened it.

Jark, when he entered the adjoining room, was careful to leave the barrier ajar. Peering through the crack, Matt could view both the professor and the prisoner.

ATOMS OF DEATH

THE gorillas who guarded The Shadow looked restless, as though they had sensed that a fray was on. But The Shadow, calm in the guise of Lamont Cranston, gave no indication that he had noticed anything unusual. He was seated languidly in the easy-chair, almost half asleep.

Matt Theblaw attributed that to weariness, following the powerful electric shock that the prisoner had received. The crook watched Professor Jark approach the easy-chair; he saw a listless gaze on the features of Lamont Cranston. Apparently the prisoner was not worrying about his present situation.

"Well, Mr. Cranston" – there was no sarcasm in Jark's present mention of the name – "I have attended to my other duties. Let us resume our discussion where it ended.

"It is apparent that you came here under a misapprehension. You chanced to meet my secretary, Bruce Duncan. He passed you a paper that he was anxious to be rid of and did not have the opportunity to destroy."

"Interesting," observed The Shadow, becoming less languid. "I should like to know more about this man Duncan."

"He was my secretary," stated Jark. "In that capacity, he had access to plans that concerned my new inventions. Duncan, as I learned by chance, saw opportunity to sell his knowledge to rogues who wanted to capitalize upon my efforts.

"Unfortunately" – the old professor smiled blandly, and ran his clawlike fingers through his mopy hair – "I suspected Duncan of complicity and moved all my files and apparatus from this residence. Duncan had already accepted money from his bribers. That put him in a most embarrassing position.

"He left here last night. Undoubtedly he formed contact with the rogues who had paid him. He must have arranged to meet them; to give them the floor plan that would enable them to come here for themselves. But he was dealing with dangerous persons. The meeting proved to be a trap. Duncan barely escaped with his life, according to your testimony."

"And handed me the paper," chuckled The Shadow. "Of course – that was the best step he could make. Had he thrown it away –"

"The others might have found it," interposed Jark. "Perhaps, in justice to Duncan, we may believe that he saw my life in menace also. Duncan was crooked, but not murderous. But whatever his motive, he felt – after that attempt on his life – that he must preserve the information."

"Possibly," mused The Shadow, "Duncan thought that I was the impostor who calls himself The Shadow."

"Possibly," agreed the professor. "That, however, does not concern us. Let us forget Duncan, Mr. Cranston. Instead, picture my own position. I have always feared intruders here. Thieves – robbers – adventurers coming to steal my inventions. That is why I installed electric devices at every door.

"Duncan knew of the ones at front and back; but he did not know that I had also equipped the side door. Naturally, I was on guard after Duncan's surprise departure. When you arrived tonight, you received the shock that I had prepared for my enemies.

"Having convinced me of your innocence, Mr. Cranston, you are entitled to my profound apology. I can assure you that your unpleasant experience will leave no ill after effects. But before you depart, I feel that we should come to a mutual understanding."

ATOMS OF DEATH

The professor paused emphatically. He eyed the prisoner steadily. A fixed smile showed on The Shadow's thin lips.

"I SUPPOSE, professor," remarked The Shadow, calmly, "that you refer to the rather unusual circumstances which marked my visit here. I presume that you would prefer that they remain unmentioned."

Professor Jark nodded soberly.

"Quite a logical request," assured The Shadow. "I can readily appreciate your situation, professor. The very fact that you are still actively engaged in inventive effort is something which you do not care to have the public know."

"Exactly! What is more, should the authorities begin prying into my affairs, I should be forced to go into lengthy, troublesome details. My work would be disturbed –"

"This matter, professor," interposed The Shadow, rising, "does not concern the police whatever. I understand the point of your worryment. You require assurance that I shall not mention my experience to my friend, Acting Commissioner Barth.

"In fact" – the fixed smile was steady on The Shadow's lips – "I feel that we both have mutual cause for indignation. Not only against your crooked secretary, but against the masquerader who calls himself The Shadow. If you, professor, could use one of your electrical devices to give that chap a lesson, I should be most gratified.

"Anything to rid me of his troublesome intrusion. He has annoyed me quite as much as Duncan has annoyed you. Well, professor" – The Shadow glanced at the clock upon the mantel – "it is considerably past midnight. Too late for me to visit the Cobalt Club. I should like to return home and call the club from there, simply to inform them that I was otherwise engaged this evening."

The Shadow extended his hand. The professor received it in clawlike grasp. With his free hand, the old man clapped his prisoner upon the shoulder. Then Jark nodded to the crook servants.

"My men will drive you to New Jersey," informed Jark. "I have a small sedan that will be suitable for the journey. Perhaps, Mr. Cranston" – the professor's smile was subtle – "they may encounter this impostor who calls himself The Shadow. Should they do so, they will be instructed to bring him to me.

"I should like to talk with him; to inquire what he knows concerning Duncan's treachery. Should I have the opportunity to talk with him, I shall convince him that it will be unwise for him to trouble you further."

Professor Jark walked across the room and opened the closed door on the right. He watched his tall, leisurely, prisoner stroll out with a guard on each side. One of the gorillas looked back to catch a nod from Jark. The Shadow did not observe the professor's order of assurance.

AS soon as the trio had left, Jark hurried back to the door on the left. The barrier opened as he approached it. Matt Theblaw stepped into view to give a commending nod.

"Good work, prof," commended the tall crook. "You fixed Cranston, all right. He won't do any squawking. He showed he was worried when he admitted he was in the wrong coming here."

"He understands nothing about our plans," assured Jark. "I watched him closely, Theblaw, all the while that I was speaking to him."

ATOMS OF DEATH

"I'm following over to Jersey" – Matt made a gesture toward the doorway and three rowdies entered – "so we can clinch the proposition. Go on down, Louie, and slip this note to Pete."

He handed a folded paper to one of the gorillas, who hurried through the far door after the pair who had conducted The Shadow.

"Tipping them off," explained Matt, "so's they'll hang on to Cranston until after we've snatched The Shadow. That's my part of the job. In the meantime, when you and Digger leave here, put in a call to the Cobalt Club. Give the message that Mr. Cranston has gone home. Tell them to pass that news to Barth. He'll call New Jersey before he makes a visit here. So we won't have any trouble."

"But, after all, why worry? Nobody knows anything. Just so long as we don't have a search on for a wealthy guy like Cranston, there's nothing to worry about. We covered the snatch when we grabbed Doc Baird. So if Cranston does any talking it won't put anybody wise. Especially" – Matt spoke with assurance – "after we've got The Shadow."

The tall crook crossed the room, followed by the other two gunmen. At the same moment, Digger Wight entered from the door on the left. Turning about, Professor Jark saw the little crook. With a dry smile, the old inventor joined Digger to prepare for their mutual departure.

IN a space behind the old house; The Shadow was smoking a cigarette as he sat in a coupe. Behind him, in the rumble seat, was one of the thugs whom Jark had termed a "servant." The other rowdy was at the wheel. A man came up in the darkness and passed a folded slip to the driver. It was Louie, contacting Pete.

The driver read the note by the dashlight. He tore up the paper and growled his understanding. Louie stepped away; Pete shoved the car in gear and drove off. The Shadow, half reclining, could see Pete's eyes watching him in the mirror.

From behind came the roar of another motor. A glance in the mirror gave The Shadow a glimpse of a second car following the first. The thin smile remained fixed upon The Shadow's lips.

It was still wise to continue his ruse. A horde of enemies was still concentrated upon him. He saw that it would be well to prolong the game, postponing action until his captors were totally off guard.

CHAPTER VIII. THE SHADOW'S THRUST

"WE'RE going to stage it like a phony snatch, see?"

Matt Theblaw growled this news to the men with whom he was riding. Seated in the rear of a sedan, the tall crook was leaning over the back of the front seat, watching the tail-light of the coupe ahead. Louie was at the wheel of Matt's car.

"The whole thing will look like a bum job," continued Matt. "But it won't be. Because there are two guys who look like they were each other. Just as much as if they were twins. When we grab the new bimbo, Pete drops the old one. That's all."

Matt paused to poke Louie's shoulder. Pete's coupe was drawing ahead past a turn in the road. Matt wanted the driver of the sedan to keep closer. Louie stepped on the gas.

"We don't want a squawk," explained Matt, "so we're going after this guy in a hurry. No fireworks, unless he

ATOMS OF DEATH

yanks a gat. But he don't know we're after him, so that gives us an edge. When you fellows snatch him, Louie and I will be sitting back with our rods. We'll pump him if he gets tough."

Louie chuckled.

"Bet you we will," he volunteered. "Say, Matt – the way you talk about it, you'd figure this mug we're after was The Shadow."

Chuckles from the other mobsters. They liked the jest. Matt maintained silence. He had not wised his men to the identity of their prey. Only Digger and the professor had shared Matt Theblaw's knowledge. There was no reason to give the information to these yeggs.

But Jark had suggested nothing that indicated murder was afoot. To preserve the friendship of the prisoner they dropped, it was essential that they should avoid a killing under the very windows of Lamont Cranston's home. But if the new victim should put up a fight, Matt intended to mow him down, with Louie's aid.

Matt Theblaw was clever. Two of his men knew what was up. But those two were the pair up in the car ahead: Pete and his pal. They had been present during Professor Jark's interview with the prisoner. They knew the part they were to play; but they had gained no chance to talk with Matt's crew.

All this was to Matt's liking. The crook was thinking of the surprise his men would get after snatching The Shadow; when he revealed the identity of their new victim. For Matt, relishing the idea of a surprise attack, felt full confidence in his scheme.

Matt wanted The Shadow alive. He had – so he thought – a golden opportunity to trap the master fighter. Never before, to Matt Theblaw's knowledge, had raiders managed to catch The Shadow unaware. For once, Matt believed, The Shadow's own confidence would make him easy prey.

Guised as Lamont Cranston, not knowing that his counterpart had returned to New York, The Shadow would be enjoying a respite from battle when he returned to his New Jersey home. Tonight – so Matt believed – The Shadow had been balked in open fray.

The gorillas with Matt were men who had fought from atop the stairway. They were still exultant over The Shadow's retreat. Not elated enough to tell them that they would again be up against The Shadow. The memory of fallen companions might throw cold water on their enthusiasm.

But they were confident enough to seize a man from ambush. That was sufficient for Matt Theblaw. Watching the road ahead, the big crook smiled to himself as he listened to the chuckles of Louie and the other mobsmen.

THE coupe ahead had taken to a lonely road. Matt Theblaw knew the general vicinity of Lamont Cranston's home. He had looked into that after the early evening capture. He was sure that they must be close to the grounds of the millionaire's estate.

Then the coupe began to slow. It pulled up past a gateway, where Pete piloted it to a stop beyond some bushes. Matt gripped Louie's arm and told the driver to stop in front of the gate. Louie complied.

"We're heading in," informed Matt, "without lights. Feel your way, Louie, by the gravel on the tires. Pete's holding that guy he's got until we make the snatch. Look there; see the lights of the house? Guide by them."

ATOMS OF DEATH

Louie blinked off the lights. He turned the sedan into the driveway. A slight glow from windows of the mansion ahead showed that the driveway separated to form a circle in front of the house. Matt gave another nudge.

"Take the left," he whispered. "Stop before you get to the house. I don't think the bird's home yet. If he comes in, he'll cut around by the right."

Louie obeyed the instructions. He brought the sedan to a stop at the edge of the circle. Matt motioned the two gorillas out into the drive. They moved up to the steps of the house and crouched there, ready for a new command.

OUT on the road past the gate, Pete and his pal were waiting in the coupe. Their prisoner was between them; both thugs had hands upon revolvers, but they were keeping the weapons out of sight.

The Shadow was calculating. He had played his ruse almost to the limit. He had brought Pete to Lamont Cranston's, believing that Matt Theblaw might have learned the exact location of this estate. The Shadow knew that Matt had followed; he knew that the tall crook was posted with his crew.

Moreover, The Shadow had figured Matt's game to the dot. He knew that the crook would want to make a silent capture; that there would be no fireworks, if Matt could help it. But The Shadow did not care to trust that to chance.

Here, in the confines of the coupe, he was waiting for the right opportunity to deal double attack against Pete and the fellow's pal. Unarmed, The Shadow faced bad odds. But he had a plan of action that would work. Soon, he was sure, either Pete or the other mobster would get the idea of stepping from the car. Then would come opportunity. Already Pete was shifting at the wheel, one hand on the handle of the door.

Then, just as The Shadow saw success before him, a new event spelled finish to the plan. A glare of light flashed suddenly from the road at the gateway; the glow turned suddenly and cut off into the drive. With it came the crunch of heavy tires upon gravel.

Lamont Cranston's limousine had come in from New York. The millionaire was riding straight into the trap that Matt Theblaw had provided for him. Pete and his pal became rigid, guns half drawn from their pockets. The Shadow could only wait.

A battle in the coupe would prove fruitless. Shots here would cause hubbub by the house. A man's life was at stake. The Shadow could not afford to risk a disturbance that might bring wild action elsewhere. He still, however, had one factor upon which he could count. The chances were that the capture at the mansion would be an easy one. After that would come The Shadow's turn.

UP by the house, Stanley had alighted from the limousine. The chauffeur was opening the door of the big car. The front door of the house opened also. Richards, the valet, stood in view. A shaft of light showed the cement walk beside the drive.

Then, from the limousine, stepped the real Lamont Cranston. Light showed full upon the millionaire's face. Lurking mobsters recognized the double of the prisoner who had been at Professor Jark's. As Cranston stepped toward the house, two brawny forms lunged forward to meet him.

The millionaire was caught entirely off guard. The attack bowled him over. As he rolled upon the ground, the thugs pounced fiercely and dragged him to his feet, half dazed. While Stanley and Richard stood astounded, the captors swept their bewildered prisoner toward the car where Matt and Louie awaited them.

ATOMS OF DEATH

On came the lights. The sedan was in reverse as the mobsters bundled their captive aboard and leaped in after. Revolvers were pressed against Cranston's body; then the guns were raised as the victim sank helpless in Theblaw's clutch.

The sedan swished backward through a shrubbery bed. Louie spun the wheel to head it for the gate. At the house, Richards gave a cry of alarm and dashed in to find a weapon. Stanley, in turn leaped to the wheel of the limousine, to give pursuit.

Out on the road, Pete had seen the blinks of lights. Hearing the cry of Richards, the driver of the coupe gave a hoarse laugh. The job was done. It was time to get rid of his first prisoner. Pete grunted to his pal, who yanked open the door on the right.

"Hop out," ordered the gorilla, shoving The Shadow forward. "We're goin' places."

"And call off the bloodhounds," added Pete, remembering orders in Matt's note. "Tell'em you're all right. Savvy?"

The Shadow dropped from the step. As Pete shoved the coupe in gear, his companion leaned forward to close the door. Then came The Shadow's stroke. Like a flash, he dropped lethargy for action. Long arms shot forward; vise-like fingers caught the leaning gorilla's throat.

PETE was stepping on the gas as The Shadow grabbed his pal. Turning, Pete saw the fellow go headlong from the coupe. The Shadow had whipped the thug clear with the precision of a mongoose attacking a writhing cobra.

Pete jammed the brakes. As he did, he heard a terrorizing sound. From that figure on the ground came the burst of a wild, outlandish laugh. It was a cry that had until now been silent – the mocking merriment of The Shadow.

Wildly, Pete stepped on the gas. As the coupe shot away, The Shadow dived to the ground and grabbed up a gleaming revolver that had come from the clutch of the man whom he had overpowered.

Whirling, The Shadow dashed through bushes, toward the gate. As he took that direction, he again emitted his strident, unmistakable laugh. The weird crescendo quivered upon other ears. Matt Theblaw's sedan was whizzing from the gate. Matt and the gorillas with him caught The Shadow's challenge.

A revolver barked from blackness. The bullets sizzled past the opened window of the sedan. A second shot, as The Shadow dashed forward. With the echoes of his fire came that gibe that only he could utter.

Matt Theblaw fumed as he dropped his hold upon Lamont Cranston. Whirling about, the tall crook jabbed his hand from a window and opened wild fire from the fleeing sedan.

"The wrong guy!" muttered the crook. "We've got the wrong guy!" Then, in a harsh rasp to Louie: "Get going! Keep going! It's The Shadow! He's in the clear!"

The Shadow's laugh had ended. Again came the staccato bark of a revolver. The Shadow was at the gate, squarely in the middle of the road, when suddenly his evening-clothed form was outlined in a blaze of light. Stanley was coming from the driveway in the limousine. The chauffeur applied the brakes when he saw his master.

"Mr. Cranston!" cried Stanley, leaping from the big car. "Are you hurt? How did you get free?"

ATOMS OF DEATH

Trembling, the chauffeur was holding a revolver that he had pulled from a pocket in the car. Without a word, The Shadow swung and plucked the weapon. With agile stride, he sprang to the wheel of the limousine. With Stanley's gun as reserve, The Shadow shot the big car forward, leaving the chauffeur bewildered by the gate.

Far ahead, The Shadow caught the twinkle of the sedan's tail-light. The limousine, heavy and powerful, clung hard to the winding road as its driver impelled it forward. Steadily, The Shadow was closing the gap between himself and the fleeing sedan.

Raising the gorilla's gun with his right hand, The Shadow delivered three quick shots. Revolvers answered from the sedan. The chased car veered to the center of the road, almost into oncoming traffic. Approaching cars took to the shoulders.

The Shadow sped the limousine up on the right. His laugh rang clear, taunting, vengeful, terrifying. His left hand flashed the revolver that he had snatched from Stanley. A mobster fired blindly toward the limousine. The Shadow answered; his bullet sent the gorilla sinking back into the sedan.

Matt Theblaw fired once and ducked. The cars were almost alongside. A mobster took pot shot from the front seat. The Shadow picked him off with the second of two swiftly delivered slugs. Lamont Cranston's face was showing white at the window. Matt had dropped from view.

Again, The Shadow raised his strident laugh. He had a bead on Louie, but he did not fire. The driver must have known his danger; he slung the sedan to the right to force The Shadow's car to the ditch. The Shadow jammed the brake. His big car slowed enough to avoid the crash.

Then, as Louie saw a clear path to the left, the sedan kited suddenly in that direction. Half skidding, it took to a side road as the limousine kept straight. Louie caught his grip on the wheel; the sedan righted and kept in flight.

From the limousine came final shots; with them, the last taunt that The Shadow chose to give. The tones of that fear-provoking mirth brought tremors to Matt Theblaw and Louie. But to Lamont Cranston, The Shadow's laugh gave hope.

The sedan kept on in its flight for safety, far along the side road that Louie had thought himself lucky to find. But the limousine, still on the main road, was following a course to Manhattan. The Shadow had given up the chase of Lamont Cranston's abductors.

HALF an hour later, the big car stopped near Delavar Street. Stepping from his post behind the wheel, The Shadow strode in the direction of the house that bore the number 18. He found the front door unlocked. He entered.

Downstairs and up, the building was empty. Professor Jark had left with his electrical equipment; only odd pieces of furniture remained on the second floor. Still in his guise of Lamont Cranston, The Shadow turned on lights and laughed sardonically as he viewed the room wherein he had played his game of bluff.

The big clock on the mantel was gone. Jark had evidently taken that one item with him. Turning, The Shadow extinguished the light and made his departure through darkness. His laugh was soft and prophetic.

The Shadow had no fear for the present safety of Lamont Cranston. Crooks had not wanted the real Cranston before; they would not want him at present. Deliberately, The Shadow had restrained himself from shooting Louie; for had he wounded the driver, he would have wrecked the sedan with Cranston in it.

ATOMS OF DEATH

Lamont Cranston would come to no harm, thanks to The Shadow's chase. For in that pursuit, The Shadow had pronounced his own identity in a manner that Matt Theblaw would remember. Crooks had grabbed the wrong man after all. They would release Cranston as willingly as they had The Shadow.

Having driven Matt Theblaw into flight, The Shadow had chosen to let him go, that Cranston's safety might be assured. Instead of continuing the chase of the sedan, he had come swiftly to this house on the chance that Jark and Digger had lingered too long.

Those birds had flown; learning that, The Shadow had searched for some clue. None found, his trail was ended. Crime still lay ahead; and, as yet, The Shadow had gained no inkling of its purpose.

Though he had saved Bruce Duncan's life; though he had bluffed and extricated himself from captivity; though he had assured Lamont Cranston's safety – The Shadow was back almost to his starting point.

Stinger Lacey and various mobsmen had fallen in strife against The Shadow. The master fighter had displayed amazing prowess. Yet the real men behind crime were still at large; and The Shadow had no knowledge of their whereabouts nor of the crimes they contemplated!

CHAPTER IX. DOUBLE FACES DOUBLE

AT eight o'clock the next morning, a coupe pulled up in front of Lamont Cranston's mansion. As tires crunched on gravel, Stanley came into view from the garage, while Richards, the valet, appeared from the house door. Both men stared in surprise as they saw their master stepping from the coupe.

"I thought you were still asleep, sir," exclaimed Richards, from the porch. "It was after four o'clock when you arrived home, Mr. Cranston. I did not suppose that you would be rising until noon."

"I decided to rise early," came the dry comment. Richards saw a smile fixed on his master's lips. "You were not about when I called; so I strolled out without your knowledge. You should be more alert, Richards."

The valet nodded at the rebuke. Yet Richards was puzzled. He would have sworn that his master was still upstairs asleep.

"How did you get the coupe, sir?" inquired Stanley. "You usually keep it in the Manhattan garage. And what about the limousine, Mr. Cranston? I asked you about it when you came in at four o'clock."

"One question at a time, Stanley," was the chuckled rebuke. "I drove the limousine into New York and left it there. When I came back, I used the coupe, but left it at the garage near the station."

"And that was how you happened to be walking in, sir? At four this morning?"

"An excellent guess, Stanley. The air was so delightful at four o'clock that I preferred a stroll; and I decided to take another walk, half an hour ago, down to obtain the coupe."

Strolling past the puzzled servants, the tall arrival went up the steps to the house. There he paused, to remove an object from his pocket.

"By the way, Stanley" – a toss sent a glimmering gun to the chauffeur – "here is the revolver I borrowed from you. I forgot to give it to you at four o'clock. And Richards, I am going to my room. Do not disturb me. If anyone telephones, tell them I am asleep."

ATOMS OF DEATH

STANLEY and Richards exchanged astonished glances as their master disappeared through the door. The chauffeur scratched his head. It was beyond him.

"I can't understand it," asserted the chauffeur. "The master, coming in at four o'clock, all ragged. Why should he have strolled up from the station?"

"He was very taciturn," recalled Richards. "And very tired, Stanley. Exhausted, Stanley."

"He didn't tell us where he had been. But the air was not delightful, Richards. It was drizzling. Indeed it was."

"As if I didn't know it, Stanley. Why, the master's evening clothes were drenched and bedraggled. It astonishes me! Here Mr. Cranston has slept but four hours; and look at him, as vigorous as ever."

"He showed surprising agility, Richards, when he sped after those ruffians last night. Well, we did right not to inform the authorities. I was sure that the master would return."

The servants separated, shaking their heads. They knew their master for an eccentric person; but on this occasion, he had shown activity that seemed almost incredible. Stanley, recalling other perplexities, turned about to make another statement.

"Last evening," declared the chauffeur, "I had the limousine in town at the club. Mr. Cranston rendered aid to an unfortunate man; then I returned to the club and received word to come back here –"

"But Mr. Cranston had already notified me to expect him," put in Richards, "and he was here before you arrived –"

"Only to go out again, as if he had not been to New York at all –"

"And then to return to be trapped by those abductors. He was helpless when they seized him, Stanley."

"But he was free from them, Richards, before they reached the gate! There he was – I saw him with my own eyes – driving after them in the limousine –"

"And walking in at four o'clock, only to arise at half past seven. Strike me, Stanley, I have never known the like of it!"

UPSTAIRS, the tall arrival had reached the door of a front room. Opening it softly, he peered into a chamber where blinds were lowered. A man was sleeping in the bed. The visitor approached, after closing the door, and turned on a reading lamp.

The glare troubled the sleeper. A hand shook his shoulder. Mumbling, the man in the bed sat up, while the other took his seat at the foot. The two were face to face – the man in bed blinking, his visitor smiling. It was a strange scene; for the visages of these two seemed absolutely alike. Double was facing double.

"Good morning, Cranston," came a quiet tone from the foot of the bed.

"Good morning, yourself," returned Cranston, rubbing his eyes without noticing the visitor.

"You should say: Good morning, myself," chuckled The Shadow, dryly.

ATOMS OF DEATH

Cranston was pulling down the sleeves of his pajama jacket. He sat bolt upright, staring. Then a slow smile showed on his lips; one that was almost a replica of The Shadow's.

"So it's you," remarked Cranston, sleepily. "Well, I knew that last night. It was about time we crossed paths again. Well, old man, you landed me in for plenty this trip."

"I expected that they would release you," stated The Shadow, "They didn't want me when I made them think that I was you. So it was logical that they would not hold you after they learned you were yourself."

"They didn't," admitted Cranston, "but they were so anxious to elude you that they did not stop for a dozen miles. Then they ditched me most unceremoniously in the middle of a country road. I walked back through fog and drizzle, across fields and meadows, cursing the boundaries all the journey."

"And arrived here at four o'clock."

"Who told you?"

"Stanley and Richards."

Cranston leaned back and chuckled. The Shadow watched him with a smile. It was but another test that showed how closely The Shadow had learned to copy Cranston's gestures.

"I said nothing to the servants," remarked Cranston. "I merely told them that I intended to sleep. I supposed that by morning I might hear something from you. But I had not expected a personal visit. How did you deceive Stanley and Richards?"

"I told them," declared The Shadow, "that I had left the limousine in New York, to come back to the station garage in the coupe. Desiring a pleasant walk, I came up from the station at four o'clock. Rising early, I went down there again a half hour ago, to bring the coupe."

"And all the while, you actually stayed in New York? Leaving the limousine there and bringing the coupe this morning?"

"That is correct."

CRANSTON shoved bedclothes aside and perched on the edge of the bed. He found cigarettes on the telephone table; The Shadow supplied a flame from a lighter before Cranston could ignite a match. The millionaire noted that The Shadow's lighter bore the initials "L. C."

"You handle every detail, don't you?" questioned Cranston in admiration. "Jove! I remember the first time I met you. (Note: See Vol. I, No.8) In this very room. You dropped cloak and hat and left me looking at my own face as plainly as if I had seen it in a mirror. Just as it is today."

"And I advised you," recalled The Shadow, in Cranston's own tone, "to take a trip abroad, while I used your identity. You were a bit exasperated at first."

"I must admit that I was. I threatened to have you arrested, as an impostor, until you proved that you knew more about my affairs than I did. Jove! I really believe that if it had come to a showdown, I would have been proven the impostor and you the genuine Lamont Cranston. Jove!"

ATOMS OF DEATH

"Jove," repeated The Shadow, quietly, "You have acquired that expression recently, Cranston. I shall remember it for future reference. You have a penchant for acquiring anglicisms during your sojourns in British colonies. Jove!"

"Boulder and blighter," laughed Cranston. "Don't forget those. I still use them occasionally."

"I worked those words last night," recalled The Shadow. "Cranston, you have my confidence to some degree. Naturally, you do not know my identity. You appreciate that I am a capable disguise artist, inasmuch as I can play your part as well as yourself. Outside of that, you know only that my life purpose is one of counteracting crime."

"And criminals," smiled Cranston. "Like our enemy who called himself the Black Falcon. (Note: See Vol. VIII, No.5) Jove! That blighter did kidnap me proper. He thought he had you – like those rogues did last night."

"The Black Falcon was a different sort," reminded The Shadow. "At present, I am campaigning against criminals who play a much deeper game. One so involved that I do not as yet know its hidden significance."

"Last night, I fell into the hands of the foe. I expected danger; I went on my adventure in your guise. After I was captured, I tricked my inquisitor – I had contact with only one important man – and made him believe that I was you."

"I backed my bluff by having one of my agents attack the house, wearing my familiar black. My captors decided to release me. I was sure that they did not want Lamont Cranston. Therefore, I had no qualms when I learned that they intended to exchange me for you."

"Indeed, I actually offered them suggestions along that line. I showed them the way, so that they would bring me here. I intended to prevent the exchange altogether; but, unfortunately, you arrived too early for my plan."

"So you were seized. I nullified your abduction by means of a prompt pursuit, which left no further doubt as to who was actually Lamont Cranston. As I expected, your captors released you."

Cranston nodded as The Shadow paused.

"There were two of them," stated the millionaire. "One called Louie; the other, Matt. Louie was the driver; Matt was in command. I say there were two; actually there were four when the chase began. You managed nicely, however, when you eliminated two of the subordinates."

"I allowed the escape," said The Shadow, "so that you would not be involved in a wreck of the car. Now I am at the beginning of a new trail. I intend to trace it in a new way."

"By dropping my identity?"

"Yes. And in order that no new complications may arise, I suggest that you start on another trip. You have worked well with me in the past, Cranston. In fact, we have become very much in accord."

"I'm game for the future. Another trip? Certainly. I have been considering a voyage to the Argentine. I have my passport available. Suppose I start tomorrow?"

"Excellent!" The Shadow arose and extended his hand. Cranston gripped it. "You are sure about the passport? If not, I have a duplicate, bearing your name."

"I have it. But you forget nothing, do you? Well, cable me in Buenos Aires when it is time for me to return."

RICHARDS was not in the hall when The Shadow emerged. On looking through an upstairs window, the visitor saw the valet out front talking with Stanley. Descending to the ground floor, The Shadow went out to a side veranda. He paused as he neared the front of the house. He could overhear the servants talking.

"Most alarming, Stanley," Richards was saying. "As I chanced to pass the master's door, I heard him talking to himself."

"Mumbling?" demanded the chauffeur. "Like he had gone to sleep again?"

"I could not distinguish the words," stated the valet, "but he seemed to be engaged in an actual conversation. Questioning himself and answering. Chuckling and laughing. One would have thought that two persons were in the room. But both voices were the master's."

Stanley shrugged his shoulders as he went to the coupe. He intended to drive into New York, to get the limousine. Richard went back into the house, wondering if he should awake his master from what he believed must be a strange sort of nightmare.

The Shadow stepped into view as soon as Richards had closed the front door. He reached the coupe just as Stanley was about to start. Opening the door, he smiled in greeting, then took his seat beside the perplexed chauffeur.

"Cobalt Club, Stanley," ordered The Shadow, in Cranston's easy tone. "Leave me there and go up to the garage. Drop the coupe. Have the limousine washed and bring it back here. I may be home again before your return."

Stanley was silent as he drove along. He decided that his master must have been awake when Richards had heard him talking to himself. Stanley made no comment, however. Lamont Cranston's servants were trained to be silent.

While The Shadow was riding Manhattanward with Stanley, Richards, passing Lamont Cranston's room, heard a slight motion from within. The valet decided that his master must have returned to bed; that the talk that he had heard had actually occurred while Lamont Cranston was asleep.

Once again, the servants of this household had a new problem to baffle them. Yet the fact that they served two masters had never yet dawned upon the faithful attendants of Lamont Cranston!

CHAPTER X. BRUCE DUNCAN'S STORY

LATE that afternoon, a taxicab stopped in front of an uptown apartment house. The figure that alighted was that of Lamont Cranston. The Shadow, traveling about in Manhattan, had still retained the millionaire's guise.

The ground floor of the apartment building housed a physician's office. The name that appeared upon the brass plate was that of Doctor Rupert Sayre. The Shadow entered the office.

A few moments later, an inner door opened. A serious-faced young man peered into the reception room.

This was Doctor Rupert Sayre. Despite his youth, Sayre had already gained a high reputation as a medical practitioner through study both in America and abroad. To counteract his young appearance, he had

ATOMS OF DEATH

cultivated a solemn air that made him look half a dozen years older than he was.

Sayre recognized the features of Lamont Cranston. Well he might, for he had contacted this visitor in the past. In fact, The Shadow – as Cranston – had himself been a patient of the skilled young physician on more than one occasion.

The Shadow had originally performed signal service in Rupert Sayre's behalf. The physician owed his own life to The Shadow's intervention, when one Eric Veldon, self-style master of death, had held Sayre prisoner.

Since then, Sayre had ever been ready to perform services for this personage whom he knew as Lamont Cranston. Sayre had hazily identified Cranston and The Shadow as one. He knew that this mysterious friend was constantly battling for right. Under such circumstances, Sayre believed that the rendition of medical aid was both ethical and just.

Last night, Sayre had accepted Bruce Duncan as a patient. There had been no question in the physician's mind. Bruce had been brought here in Cranston's limousine. That was sufficient. Today, Sayre had received telephone calls concerning the condition of the patient. He had suggested that Lamont Cranston call at five-thirty.

"How is the patient, doctor?"

The question came in Cranston's quiet voice. Sayre smiled as he heard The Shadow's query.

"I owe myself a compliment," remarked the physician. "My patient was still in a stupor this noon; but I was confident that he would be fully conscious by five o'clock. I was right. Save for the after effects of a slight brain concussion, he came completely to his senses half an hour ago."

"I can see him then?"

"Certainly."

Sayre ushered The Shadow through a hallway. They reached an inner room – Sayre's apartment adjoined the office – and there The Shadow saw Bruce Duncan propped in bed. The young man's head was bandaged. His eyes were closed as he rested his head back upon his pillows.

The Shadow nodded to Sayre. The physician stepped back into the hall and closed the door, leaving visitor with patient. The Shadow took a chair beside the bed. He spoke in a slight, almost inaudible whisper. Bruce Duncan opened his eyes.

BRUCE'S vision was still blurred. He could barely distinguish the features of his visitor. But he knew, from the whisper that he had heard, that The Shadow had arrived for conference. Bruce tried to speak; then he heard a quiet voice; this time, Cranston's tones.

"Tell your story," urged The Shadow. "But use no effort as you do so. Merely mention names as they occur to you. I shall understand."

Bruce Duncan nodded; then he spoke slowly.

"Some months ago," he stated, "I met Professor Baldrige Jark. It was purely a chance meeting; but when Jark learned that I had some knowledge of electrical apparatus, he offered me a position as his secretary."

ATOMS OF DEATH

"That came about in natural fashion?" inquired The Shadow.

"Yes," acknowledged Bruce. "Much of my income was tied up and I had become confidential secretary for Talbot Lowberry, the banker. It was at Lowberry's home that I met Jark. The professor, learning that I intended to leave Lowberry's employ; offered me a job."

"Proceed," remarked The Shadow, after a pause.

"Professor Jark wanted seclusion," declared Bruce. "He was working on a new invention, a disintegrating ray with which he had gained some success. I saw designs of the apparatus. It was a concave projector, broadmouthed but shallow, its inner surface fitted with powerful coils."

Bruce paused to rest. The Shadow made no comment. He watched the young man's eyes close and waited until Bruce had again opened them. Bruce reached for a glass of water on the table. The Shadow tendered it. Bruce swallowed a drink and proceeded.

"In his experiments," said the young man, "Jark discovered that by lengthening the bowl of the projector, he could considerably increase the range of the ray. Roughly, a bowl projector, one foot in depth could cast rays only one foot from its mouth. But by increasing the bowl to a two-foot depth, it would gain a range of eight feet; while a three-foot bowl would send the ray twenty-seven feet."

"I understand," nodded The Shadow. "The ratio of the range increase would be the cube of the bowl depth. A geometrical progression."

"That is right," stated Bruce. "With a projector thirty feet in length, the professor knew that he could drive his ray twenty-seven thousand feet – approximately five miles."

"But he must also have learned," remarked The Shadow, "that the power of the ray would diminish in proportion to the increasing length of the projector."

"Right again," announced Bruce. "I believe that his experiments showed a one-half loss of intensity for each added foot of the projector. That meant that the power of the ray would be quite feeble in a thirty-foot projector."

"How did the ray act with the one-foot projector?"

"Powerfully, I am sure, although the professor was very loath to make admissions. I am positive, though, that his original projector – one foot in depth – was capable of disintegrating substances less than one foot away. Professor Jark must have experienced that much success. Otherwise he would not have proceeded with further experiments."

The Shadow nodded in acknowledgment of Bruce's logical statement.

"It was Jark's hope," resumed Bruce, "to produce what he termed an atomic gun. He believed that if he could construct a thirty-foot projector, it would be possible to insert coils all along the tube. He would thus have thirty units combined in one; with this stepped-up power, the atomic gun would gain the strength of the original disintegrator."

"And that," inserted The Shadow, "would mean that his gun would destroy any object that came within a five-mile range."

ATOMS OF DEATH

"So Professor Jark believed," said Bruce, wearily. "He needed capital for his experiments. He gained it through a promoter named Basil Tellert. It was Tellert who introduced the professor to Lowberry and other wealthy men."

Another pause while Bruce took a second drink of water. Eyes fully opened, Bruce was surveying his calm-faced visitor more clearly. A bit of enthusiasm showed in Bruce's voice as he proceeded with his story.

"I handled the correspondence between Jark and Tellert," stated Bruce "The Professor had his apparatus in the house at 18 Delavar Street. I was living there; and there was also a servant named Harkins. Jark was always eccentric and close-mouthed about his experiments. The only reason I learned as much as I did was because I kept my ears open and made no comment.

"A few weeks ago, Jark wrote to Tellert in reply to a letter from the promoter. In his letter, the professor stated that his atomic gun would surely be a success; but that because of its amazing power, he had decided to offer it to the government. He added that when he did this, he would insist that the original investors be reimbursed dollar for dollar."

"And Tellert's reaction –"

"Was one of indignation. He wrote a letter stating that he doubted Jark's sincerity. He intimated that Jark was a swindler, his disintegrating ray a fake. He told Jark that unless he came clean, within a reasonable period, he could expect prosecution for fraud."

"What did the professor do about it?"

"That brings me to the strangest part of my story," declared Bruce, emphatically. "The professor wrote a letter to Tellert stating that he was overworked and needed a rest. He told Tellert that he intended to go on a vacation. That did not surprise me, for I had already overheard Professor Jark making a telephone conversation to a specialist named Doctor Nordis Baird. Apparently, Baird intended to take a trip somewhere in the West, and wanted Jark to go with him for treatment."

"Had Jark already been undergoing treatment from Doctor Baird?"

"Yes, and his life really depended upon Baird's treatment. I never learned the exact nature of Jark's ailment; but I did know that it required certain changes in medicine at irregular intervals. Baird alone could diagnose Professor Jark's varying condition. If Baird went away from New York, Jark would have to accompany him."

"Proceed."

"Tellert must have accepted Jark's statement. Like myself, others who knew Jark understood the importance of his treatments. I wondered, when Jark sent the letter, whether or not he was trying to deceive Tellert. A few days later came a most remarkable proof that some hidden game was under way."

Bruce paused to rest. He was coming to the crux of his story, gathering his latent strength in order to be accurate with the facts which he had in mind.

"PROFESSOR JARK left the house one afternoon," declared Bruce, "stating to me that he had an appointment with Doctor Baird. The next day Jark remained indoors. That evening two men came to call. One was tall and dark-complected. He said that his name was Theblaw. His companion was short and sandy-haired. The name that he gave was Wight.

ATOMS OF DEATH

"They looked like bad customers. With them was another pair, who had the appearance of mobsters. Theblaw and Wight told me that Tellert had sent them; that they wanted they see Professor Jark. Their introduction sounded like a false one; but the whole crew looked so dangerous that I was forced to announce them to the professor.

"They went into an upstairs study, leaving the two toughs on guard downstairs. I realized that the thugs were watching me, so I went about my business in matter-of-fact fashion. The rowdies watched me when I went upstairs, but offered no objections."

The Shadow raised his hand for a pause, partly because Bruce was tiring and partly because he had a question. He waited for a few moments; then put his interrogation in an easy tone.

"Was this long after the arrival of Theblaw and Wight?" asked the Shadow.

"About a half an hour after they came in," replied Bruce. "I was wondering if the professor had encountered trouble. That was why I thought it imperative to go upstairs. It happened that the door of the study was ajar; it had never latched properly. I could hear the conversation that was going on within.

"To my astonishment, I overheard Professor Jark talking in a most crafty tone. He was chuckling, almost gloating, enthusiastic as he talked of success. I heard Wight address Theblaw as 'Matt'; while Theblaw called Wight 'Digger.' From their remarks I gathered that Matt Theblaw had important gang connections while Digger Wight was obviously an experienced safe-cracker.

"Then came a buzzing sound. I knew that the professor must have brought in his original disintegrating apparatus, to give a demonstration. After the buzzing ended I heard Jark say that it would require only a few weeks to properly adjust the machine; that if it gave trouble, he could always repair it.

"Theblaw and Wight seemed satisfied. Then I caught some anxious remarks from the professor. He was referring to Doctor Baird. I heard Theblaw assure Jark that he and Digger would see that Baird was at the new place. By that I inferred that Jark intended to change his residence. At that point, I considered it wise to return downstairs."

Another pause. Bruce had a faraway look, as though reviewing tense days that he had experienced. His next statements came in short, terse sentences.

"MATT THEBLAW and Digger Wight remained," declared Bruce. "So did their henchmen. Harkins was dismissed. Jark retained me. I knew too much. I knew I was under observation – both from Jark and these men who were always with me. More henchmen arrived at the house."

A few moments of rest; then Bruce added:

"Professor Jark had previously equipped both the front stairs and the back door with electrical devices to surprise burglars. There was also a side entrance. Its equipment had caused a short circuit; and Jark had removed it for repairs.

"So I knew that if I once managed to leave the house, there would be a method of reentry. Everything was being moved out – apparatus, furniture, files. Where it was going, I did not know. I realized, though, that I would be forced to travel along when Jark and his associates departed.

"My one opportunity was to escape before moving day. I found my opportunity night before last. I fled by the side doorway. I went to the Palladium Hotel. From there I communicated with Harry Vincent."

ATOMS OF DEATH

Bruce rested back wearily. He knew that The Shadow knew the rest. As Bruce's eyes closed, the tall visitor arose. Passing into the hallway, The Shadow continued to the office, where he found Doctor Sayre.

"I am starting on a journey tomorrow," informed The Shadow, in Cranston's tones. "To Buenos Aires. Take care of the patient, doctor. Allow him to communicate with his friend, Harry Vincent. A friend of mine may also call here – a gentleman named Henry Arnaud. Should he visit you, you may speak to him as confidentially as you would to me.

"Mention that to your patient also. It may prove wise for him to talk to Arnaud on certain occasions. Good night, doctor. I should say, rather, good-by, for you will not see me during the next few months."

"Bon voyage," acknowledged Sayre, extending his hand.

Leaving the physician's office, The Shadow entered a cab and rode toward Times Square. As he neared the brilliant district, glowing light showed the firm features of the disguise that he still wore.

The Shadow's expression was meditative. His keen brain was piecing Bruce Duncan's story, adding Bruce's findings to facts that The Shadow had already gained. Bruce's reference to Matt Theblaw and Digger Wight was important. The Shadow had heard of both these crooks before.

Jark – Theblaw – Wight – Tellert – Baird – five names had been mentioned by Bruce Duncan. From one of these, The Shadow might gain a clue. That point managed, the master sleuth would have a start along the blind trail that still confronted him.

CHAPTER XI. THE SHADOW'S VIGIL

ON the following morning, a tall man of distinguished appearance entered a medical building on Fiftieth Street. There was something about this individual that was dimly reminiscent of Lamont Cranston. Perhaps it was the firm mold of his features. It could have been nothing more, for facially, he did not resemble Cranston closely.

Arriving on the third floor, this visitor entered a physician's office and inquired for Doctor Nordis Baird. The girl at the desk informed him that Doctor Baird was out of town; but that certain of his associates were available.

"Another will not do," remarked the tall man, almost coldly. "I must see Doctor Baird personally. I am Mr. Arnaud – Henry Arnaud. I telephoned yesterday, stating that I would call today."

"I am very sorry," informed the girl, seriously. "It is absolutely impossible to reach Doctor Baird. No one has any idea where he may happen to be."

"They told me that when I called his apartment house. But they added that I might gain information here."

"We do not know ourselves, Mr. Arnaud. He left about a week ago, for a complete rest. He may be gone for a period as long as three months. We are to expect him when we see him."

A smile showed on the lips of Henry Arnaud as the visitor left the office. It was a smile that differed from that of Lamont Cranston. For Arnaud and Cranston were two contrasting personalities, even though both were parts played by The Shadow.

ATOMS OF DEATH

As Henry Arnaud, The Shadow had more leeway in his work. For there was no real Henry Arnaud. The Shadow could let the role suit his own convenience. As a rule, however, he preferred the role of Lamont Cranston.

The Shadow had reverted to the Arnaud role because of his recent experience while playing the part of Cranston. As Arnaud, he was brisker at times. More of a business man than a leisurely gentleman of millions.

At the same time, he possessed well-faked credentials, and could summon influential friends to prove that Henry Arnaud was a man of means and ability. Therefore, the part of Arnaud was eminently suited to The Shadow's present investigation.

As he reached the street and summoned a cab, The Shadow's disguised face showed plainly in the daylight. It carried something of the hawkish trace that marked The Shadow's impersonation of Lamont Cranston. But the features of Henry Arnaud were thicker and heavier. Somehow, also, The Shadow appeared shorter as Arnaud than as Cranston.

HALF an hour after his departure from Doctor Baird's, The Shadow reached an office building south of Times Square. He took the elevator to the fourteenth floor. There he entered an office that bore the glass-paneled legend:

BASIL TELLERT

PROMOTIONS

This suite, numbered 1409, was equipped in modernistic style. The reception room had chromium-plated chairs and settees; an oddly designed rug adorned the floor. It was obvious that Basil Tellert was in business to stay.

The Shadow knew that these signs of affluence were not faked. Basil Tellert was a man who had been in the news. He had been connected with the promotion of certain sporting events and spectacular stage productions.

Moreover, when Tellert dealt with investment promotions, they usually showed themselves sound. The Shadow had this information direct from an investigating agent, Rutledge Mann. Presumably an investment broker, Mann was actually an aid of The Shadow; and he had contacts that frequently proved valuable. This morning, Mann had forwarded a preliminary report that spoke highly of Tellert's dealings.

The Shadow gave a secretary a card marked with the name of Henry Arnaud. He stated that he was here to see Mr. Tellert. The girl surveyed the visitor; then entered an inner office. A minute later, she reappeared with the announcement that Mr. Tellert was ready to see Mr. Arnaud. The Shadow entered the inner office.

Basil Tellert was a man whose face was a symphony of curves. His florid countenance was well-rounded. His hair line formed a perfect arc; his eyebrows matched the exact curve. His forehead bore three creases identical in appearance, all curving, with exact spacing between.

His lips curved upward in a welcoming smile that looked like a forehead crease inverted. Spreading from each side of his nose were vertical curves that gave his face its final symmetry. Tall, heavy of build, Tellert was an imposing figure.

"Good morning, Mr. Arnaud," greeted Tellert, in a rich baritone. "Kindly be seated. I would appreciate it if you would begin by stating the nature of your business. That is usual, when I hold interviews."

ATOMS OF DEATH

"Very well." The Shadow seated himself and accepted a cigar that Tellert offered. "I have come here, Mr. Tellert, at the advice of a friend who stated that you were promoting a project that might interest me."

"The friend's name?"

"Carstairs Townsend. At present in Florida, where I met him last week. Like myself, he is a member of the Merrimac Club."

"I do not know him."

"So he told me. But he has a friend whom you know quite well. At least, so Townsend told me. I refer to Talbot Lowberry."

"Ah, yes, the banker. Mr. Lowberry is now in Europe."

"Townsend mentioned that fact. He stated also, Mr. Tellert, that you had interested Lowberry in some new electrical marvel – an appliance invented by an eccentric old scientist: Professor Baldrige Jark."

Tellert's smile faded. His lips took on a downward curve. Placing his cigar between them, he stared from the window while his left hand drummed the table. Then, suddenly, he faced The Shadow and spoke emphatically.

"I AM glad," declared Tellert, "that you have referred to Professor Jark as eccentric. The word describes him exactly. I made a mistake, Mr. Arnaud, in attempting to promote the man's invention. I am afraid that it is going to prove a bad venture. One of the very few with which I have been associated."

"The invention is not satisfactory?"

"I am afraid not. As yet, I have not informed my clients – such as Mr. Lowberry – because I still hold to the hope that my opinion may be wrong. But I have positively decided against interesting any new investors in the proposition."

"Frankly put, Mr. Tellert."

The promoter drew himself up proudly behind his desk. His eyes were straight, his manner was direct.

"I believe in frankness, Mr. Arnaud," he asserted. "That method of dealing has been responsible for my success. Therefore, I feel that you are entitled to a full explanation of the circumstances involving Professor Jark. It is possible – as I mentioned before – that his idea may be as good as I once thought it was."

"Should such prove to be the case, I should certainly recommend your investing in it. So I consider it good policy to give you a full account of the matter, that you may be able to judge it properly at some future date."

Tellert pressed a button. A stenographer entered. Tellert called for the Jark files. The girl left and reappeared in less than one minute, bringing a folder of papers and letters. Tellert began to talk again, referring to the data as he spoke.

"Professor Jark," he stated, "first came to me with news of a new device that he had invented. He termed it the disintegrating ray. Fundamentally, it was an electrical process through which he could reduce the component parts of any solid substance that came within its path."

ATOMS OF DEATH

"Jark, as you doubtless know, is an electrical wizard. He gave me a demonstration with a model of his invention. The bowl-shaped projector which he used did have the quality of melting, or destroying, crude bricks, blocks of cinders, and certain alloys.

"Commercially, the idea had two possibilities. Built on a large scale, it would offer a means of demolishing buildings and other structural objects. It might be used in quarrying, or in other projects. Apparently, it afforded a cheap and efficient method of doing away with certain old and expensive mechanical processes.

"But Jark needed funds to continue with the invention. In its present form, it could not do the work that must be expected of it. The reduction of solid objects was slow; and in most instances, a failure. But the principle was present. It was logical that Jark – given opportunity – could make the device accomplish marvels."

Tellert made new reference to his papers. He brought out certain letters and laid them to one side. Then he resumed his discussion of the invention itself.

"ANOTHER possibility that Jark presented," stated Tellert, "was the stepping up of the device to produce what he called an atomic gun. He claimed that with this device he could project a ray several miles, destroying all objects in its path.

"He spoke of the atomic gun as a war weapon. He pictured squadrons of airplanes dematerializing under the withering effect of his machine. He talked of melting battleships. Such outlandish statements worried me. Nevertheless, I was willing to concede that the atomic gun, in modified form, might be a possibility of the future.

"I provided the funds, fifty thousand dollars for experimentation, which I received from interested clients. Jark declared that the amount would be more than ample to perfect the disintegrating ray machine to a point where it would be commercially satisfactory.

"But all the while, Mr. Arnaud, he persisted in his desire to develop an atomic gun. He could not think in sane terms, or let us say" – Tellert smiled – "in sound business terms. The time came when the preliminary funds were almost exhausted. It was then that I received this letter."

The promoter passed a typewritten sheet to The Shadow. It was signed with a ragged scrawl that represented the signature of Professor Baldrige Jark. While The Shadow was reading the letter, Tellert added a carbon copy of his own reply; then passed over more sheets.

"You see," explained Tellert, "I write Jark quite frequently, asking for reports on the progress that he was making. It was in reply to one of my usual letters that he again sidetracked mention of the disintegrating ray machine in order to discuss the merits of the atomic gun.

"Apparently – from his inferences – the disintegrating ray had already reached its proper point; but he wanted to drop it. His wonderful gun was a reality; and because it was so amazing, he could deal no longer with private interests. All of his creations must be offered to the government."

"He mentions here," remarked The Shadow, "that he would insist that the investors be reimbursed."

"Yes," agreed Tellert, "but how? Only one way would be possible: through a government appropriation. And when? No one could tell. Furthermore, my clients did not invest with the understanding that they would simply be reimbursed.

ATOMS OF DEATH

"The agreement with Jark – I have it here – was a fair one. If the disintegrating ray should gain its required intensity, it would become the property of a corporation in which the investors and the professor would have interest.

"I replied with an indignant letter," asserted the promoter. "I told Jark what I thought. Perhaps I put it strong, Mr. Arnaud, but I believe that I read correctly between the lines of Jark's own letter. The progress that he claimed sounded doubtful. It looked as though he had decided to try some dodge. His reply stated that he was overworked; that he intended to go away on a vacation."

Tellert indicated Jark's last letter with a nudge of his thumb. Then, leaning forward on his desk, he spoke in troubled tone.

"I FELT that I had been harsh with the old man," he declared. "His letter indicated that his opinion might be changing. I thought that he was coming to his senses. I felt sure that he would write me later, at least to tell me when he expected to leave New York.

"No further letter came. Yesterday afternoon – that was about a week after he wrote me – I telephoned the professor, only to find that the service had been disconnected. I sent a messenger to his home. I received the amazing report that the house was deserted.

"I could not believe it at first. I went there myself, to make sure. The house was open; I entered and found it practically barren. Without a word to me Professor Jark had flown, carrying thousands of dollars worth of equipment, all of which had been provided through the investors who had shown trust in me."

Tellert sank back in his chair. He drew a silk handkerchief from his pocket and mopped his florid brow. It was plain that the promoter saw himself in a most embarrassing dilemma; one that would be difficult to explain to the men who had invested in Professor Jark's invention.

The Shadow arose. He passed the papers back to Tellert. Everything that the promoter had said; all this data from the files, bore testimony to Bruce Duncan's statements regarding Professor Jark's strange behavior.

"Would it be possible," he asked, in the monotone of Arnaud, "that Professor Jark could have decided to conduct his future experiments in some other place? Where he could not be found? So that he would experience no interference from you?"

"I thought of that," responded Tellert, also rising. "But there is one factor in the way. The matter of money. Jark has very few remaining funds."

"Could he have acquired some elsewhere?"

Tellert looked startled.

"By George!" he ejaculated. "That might be it! Do you know, I was thinking that the old codger had merely worked a mild swindle; or that he had run away, seeking to cover failure. But it might be that he is playing a double game.

"This is serious, Mr. Arnaud." Tellert sobered. "May I ask that you keep this interview as a matter of confidence? Really, my position is most embarrassing. I have been hoping only that Jark would soon return. Now I am beginning to doubt him altogether."

ATOMS OF DEATH

"I shall mention this to no one," assured The Shadow, steadily. "Only one matter still puzzles me, however. What do you intend to do about Jark's disappearance?"

"I can only wait," answered Tellert, mopping his forehead. "Wait – for a few weeks – maybe for a month. Then, if I have heard nothing from Professor Jark, I shall be forced to place the matter in the hands of the proper authorities.

"But to brand Professor Jark as a swindler will be a drastic step. One, I assure you, that will prove damaging to my own reputation. For my clients have always placed great store by my opinions. I must certainly wait, for a month at least, before proclaiming publicly that I have been a dupe."

Tellert managed to smile hopefully after this statement; but it was evident that new apprehensions troubled him. He shook hands with his visitor as he accompanied him through the outer office.

The skyscraper which housed Tellert's suite of offices was known as the Lambreth Building. Outside that towering edifice, The Shadow strolled away toward Times Square; then increased his pace to a brisk walk. The figure of Henry Arnaud mingled with the crowd.

LATER, a light clicked in The Shadow's sanctum. Although it was daytime in Manhattan, this secluded room was black save for that one spot where blue light glowed upon The Shadow's table. Hands came beneath the glow. Upon a sheet of paper, The Shadow wrote the single word:

CRIME

A sibilant laugh. The word and the mirth summed The Shadow's findings. He had seen the one point of contact through which Professor Jark and the men with him could be reached.

Bruce Duncan's story was valuable. The Shadow knew of Matt Theblaw and Digger Wight. The former was a smart ex-racketeer who had long been latent. The latter had done time for safe-cracking, and had not recently been seen in New York.

Their statement, to Bruce Duncan, that they had come from Tellert, had obviously been made to deceive the young man. Bruce's observation and his eavesdropping proved clearly that Professor Jark could have contacted with these criminals outside his home; and given them a cue for introducing themselves when they met his secretary.

It was definite that the crooks had agreed with Jark to lull Bruce into thinking that all was well. Despite the presence of mobsters from that time on, Bruce might have fallen for the game had he not overheard the last portion of Jark's conference with Theblaw and Wight.

Half an hour, Bruce had said. Those thirty minutes of early discussion must have been important. Had Bruce overheard that portion of the conference, he might have learned facts that would give The Shadow a definite trace to the present whereabouts of Jark and the professor's new associates.

As it was, Bruce had been lucky to get away. Crooks must have planned to take him with them to wherever they were establishing new headquarters. Once he had managed to leave the house on Delavar Street, the plotters had decided that his death was necessary.

At present, Bruce Duncan was safe. From him, The Shadow had learned all that could be gained. Two new leads had arisen. The Shadow had followed both. Doctor Nordis Baird was supposedly on vacation. The Shadow knew that the specialist must have been abducted.

ATOMS OF DEATH

Baird was necessary to Jark. Hence the physician must be at the new headquarters. But Baird's own penchant for keeping his vacation plans unknown even to his associates meant that it would be impossible to pick up the physician's trail.

By interviewing Tellert, The Shadow had learned the promoter's side of the story. At present, Tellert was latent. He did not intend to do anything about Professor Jark's disappearance for a month at least. Nevertheless, Tellert's future actions might have some important bearing on the activities of Professor Baldrige Jark.

THE SHADOW inscribed brief coded notes. One to Rutledge Mann; the other to Harry Vincent, for delivery through the investment broker. To these agents he was deputing the task of cautiously watching Basil Tellert, for the definite reason that crooks might also be keeping close check on the promoter.

Jark – Baird – Tellert – not one gave present promise. In that trio, The Shadow saw how one man had been duped and a second kidnapped to serve the wiles of a master plotter. The Shadow, in his own meeting with Professor Jark, had gained an inkling of the old man's cunning.

He had divined how capable Jark was at playing a double game; how craftily Jark could cover up his real purposes. Talking with the supposed Lamont Cranston, Jark had made himself out to be a friendly individual who had merely taken drastic measures against trespassers.

Yet all the while, crooks had been listening in on Jark's shrewd palaver. Neatly, the professor had avoided all mention of his disintegrating ray, that device which both Bruce Duncan and Basil Tellert had sketchily described.

Crime. Therein lay The Shadow's contact. The change of Professor Jark's abode indicated that plans were ready. The collaboration of Matt Theblaw and Digger Wight showed that quick-acting crooks were on the job, ready to use Jark's invention to the limit.

Bruce Duncan had escaped. Although Jark, Theblaw and Wight thought that Bruce knew less than he did, they must realize, nevertheless, that the missing secretary could eventually cause trouble.

Crooks were holding Doctor Nordis Baird. There, again, would be difficulty in the future, when Baird's associates realized that his prolonged absence meant abduction. Another point. Basil Tellert, within the next few weeks, would be forced to proclaim that Professor Baldrige Jark was a swindler.

Finally, The Shadow himself had entered the game. Captured, he had bluffed the foe. But crooks would know that he would not rest until he had carved deeper into their hidden game.

Crime, therefore, would be immediate. The stage was set for it. Quick, swift thrusts, with rapid clean-up, could be the only course. Matt Theblaw and Digger Wight were backed by a brainy master who would certainly order these lieutenants to lose no time.

Crime would strike in Manhattan. That was another logical deduction. Matt and Digger knew this terrain and their contacts here. New York offered the richest opportunities, with the greatest number of varied striking points.

Crime would be covered. Workers like Stinger Lacey would be used to trick the police into thinking that ordinary criminals were pulling routine jobs. That was The Shadow's final deduction. It marked the course that he intended to follow at once.

Earphones came from the wall. Burbank's voice came over the wire. In whispered tones, The Shadow issued instructions. Orders to Cliff and Hawkeye. Through these agents in the underworld, The Shadow saw means of counteracting the strokes of evil that soon would be due.

CHAPTER XII. CLIFF'S PROPOSITION

EARLY evening showed a glittering bright spot west of Sixth Avenue. Blazing lights atop a marquee proclaimed to Gothamites that the Club Cadilly offered the best floor show in Manhattan with no charge other than the price of a dinner.

Customers were entering the place when a taxi pulled up outside. Moe Shrevnitz was at the wheel. The passengers were Cliff Marsland and Hawkeye. Cliff alighted. He was attired in tuxedo and made a striking appearance as he entered the Club Cadilly.

Moe drove away, with Hawkeye huddled in the back seat. Around the block, a three-minute trip brought the taxi back to its starting point. Hawkeye, also tuxedo-clad, alighted and walked into the club.

Though Hawkeye lacked Cliff's gentlemanly appearance, he was not out of his element. For the Club Cadilly had never been patronized by the elite. Its chief customers were characters of underworld connections – all above the level of ordinary crooks, but none of real social background.

Cliff had taken a seat on one side of the night Club's floor. Hawkeye did not approach him. Instead, the second agent seated himself fully thirty feet away. Cliff looked almost aristocratic in his evening garb; Hawkeye was incongruous in the tuxedo that he had hired. No one would have recognized the pair as pals.

Filtering among the tuxedoed rabble were men of better appearance. Close observation of their countenance, however, showed marks of dissipation. They were rogues who had found the Club Cadilly to their liking. The attraction that had brought them here was located beyond a curtained archway, through which these respectable-looking customers stalked one by one.

Cliff, after spotting Hawkeye's arrival, decided to follow the others who had gone through the arch. Leaving his table, he took that path and came to a loopholed door at the end of a corridor past the curtains. Cliff knocked.

The loophole opened. An eye surveyed Cliff's face. The door unbolted.

"Hello, Cliff!" greeted a fat-faced guard whose rumpled tuxedo looked two sizes too small. "Say, I wondered who was trying to crash dis gate. Ain't you wise to the knock? Ain't you never been here before?"

"No," chuckled Cliff, with a shake of his head. "But I figured that whoever was lookout would know me. I was right, wasn't I, Beef?"

"Sure t'ing," rejoined the fat-faced fellow. "Any guy dat knows his onions knows dat Cliff Marsland's in de know. You get by widout no stallin', on any gate I'm watchin'."

"Thanks," said Cliff, dryly. "Listen, Beef: I'm here to see Luke Cardiff. Where will I find him?"

"Go t'rough de gamblin' joint. Pick de door over past de table where dey're playin' chuck-a-luck. If any mug asks where you're goin', tell him you're a friend of Mr. Carney. Dat's de password."

ATOMS OF DEATH

Cliff nodded. "Beef" rapped at a second door; it was opened by another rowdy who also recognized Cliff. The Shadow's agent strolled into a large gambling room. The place was half filled, with roulette and faro tables going, while men along the walls were dropping quarters and half dollars into slot machines.

The chuck-a-luck table had not yet opened. Cliff received no challenge as he passed it. He found the door that Beef had mentioned and rapped upon it. A gruff voice ordered him to enter. Cliff went into a little office, where a gawky, long-jawed man was going over books at a desk.

THE fellow showed a gold-toothed grin as he recognized Cliff Marsland. The man at the desk was Luke Cardiff, proprietor of the Club Cadilly. The restaurant with its floor show was a blind for the gambling casino that Luke had recently opened.

Cliff seated himself opposite Luke. The proprietor offered his visitor a cigar; then waited for Cliff to speak. Luke knew that Cliff had a rep in the badlands. A visit from someone so closely in the know promised to be important.

"Say, Luke," began Cliff, in an indifferent tone, "have you seen Matt Theblaw lately?"

"No," acknowledged Luke. "What's the matter? Somebody gunning for Matt? He was an old pal of mine; if any rats are making trouble for him, I'll be glad to know it."

"You and Matt were pretty close, weren't you?"

"Sure. But Matt knew a lot of other guys, too."

"Stinger Lacey for instance."

Luke's eyes opened. The underworld had been talking about Stinger's demise. Rumor had it that the mob leader had succumbed following a battle with The Shadow. But no other names had been mentioned in connection.

"You mean Stinger was working for Matt?" demanded Luke.

"I know he was," returned Cliff. "That's why Stinger built his mob – on Matt's account."

"Where'd you get that dope?"

"Straight from Stinger. The night before he took the bump."

Luke Cardiff whistled.

"Here's the lay, Luke," asserted Cliff. "Matt told Stinger to build up a crew. Stinger did; but it wasn't enough. Matt wanted a second outfit to work with the first. But he was playing straight with Stinger, see?"

"That's the way Matt would work," acknowledged Luke.

"So he told Stinger to get a good guy for the new mob," continued Cliff, smoothly framing his story as he went along. "Stinger picked me. He told me Matt was in back of the deal. I was to get my own gorillas and team up through Stinger."

Luke nodded his understanding.

ATOMS OF DEATH

"Then Stinger got his," declared Cliff sourly. "What's more, it came so quick after he'd talked with me that he couldn't have had a chance to wise Matt up to it that he'd picked me."

"Which leaves you out in the cold," remarked Luke.

"That's it," stated Cliff, "with a bunch of swell gorillas itching to go to work. I want Matt to know where I stood with Stinger. That's why I've come to talk to you. You're the one guy who was ever really in as partner with Matt Theblaw."

LUKE nodded as he considered. Cliff had stated a known fact. Matt Theblaw and Luke Cardiff had once been termed the Siamese twins of mobland. They had maneuvered rackets, with mob leaders on their payroll. But they had wisely dropped their activities at a time when the going became too hot.

"We worked together, Matt and I," acknowledged Luke, slowly. "Made some good deals between us. We split because we were wise. What Matt's pulled since, I don't know. This gambling joint's my gravy right at present; and I'm working it alone."

"I know that," agreed Cliff, casually. "All I was figuring, Luke, was that you might have some way of passing word to Matt. Whatever he's working has got big dough in it. Stinger wised me to that. With Stinger out, it's a cinch that Matt needs me more than he did before."

"I get you," nodded Luke. "You'd like to know who Matt would pick now that Stinger's gone. So you could see the bird and tell him how close you were to Stinger."

"Sure," asserted Cliff. "You've got the idea, Luke. Maybe you know who Matt would be picking."

Luke became thoughtful. Cliff knew that he was recalling old names, going down a list, just as if he and Matt were still paired in effort, with big crime as their stake. At last Luke spoke.

"I'll tell you the guy," he declared, slowly. "Maybe you know him already. He's the next best bet to Stinger, to do the mob work Matt would want: Loco Zorgin. He hangs out down at the Black Ship."

"Loco Zorgin," repeated Cliff with a nod. "Sure, I know him. I think I'll ankle down there and look him up. Thanks for the tip, Luke. I'll let you know how I make out."

That ended the conversation. A handshake concluded the discussion; Cliff left the office and went out through the gambling joint. He whacked Beef on the back; then, as the entrance closed behind him, Cliff thrust his right hand into his coat pocket.

Quickly, he used the stub of a pencil to write terse words on a tiny pad. Plucking off the written sheet, Cliff rolled it into a pellet and brought it out between his fingers. Strolling through the place, he passed Hawkeye's table. There, Cliff paused to bring a pack of cigarettes from his pocket.

The pellet dropped from Cliff's fingers as he pocketed the pack. Hawkeye saw it; he watched Cliff light a cigarette and continue out. Hawkeye shifted and let his hand rest on the pellet, which had fallen on the table. A few minutes later, he also decided to leave the Club Cadilly.

Outside, Hawkeye unrolled the pellet and read the words: "The Black Ship – Loco Zorgin."

HALF an hour afterward, both Cliff and Hawkeye were in the underworld dive known as the Black Ship. An underground hangout, this joint was one of the crossroads of the underworld. At different tables in the

smoke-filled dive, both of The Shadow's agents were keeping their ears open.

Hawkeye had picked a spot near two sweated mobsters. The pair were discoursing, in low tones, over a bottle of grog. Hawkeye had recognized them as ruffians who might be torpedoes in the employ of "Loco" Zorgin. As he listened, his wiry body hunched at his own table, Hawkeye realized that his conjecture was correct.

"Loco didn't want us hookin' up with the rest of the outfit, see?" One thug was talking to the other. "Us watchin' that house was somethin' he needed done. But there was the chance that some harness bull might've spotted us."

"Sure," came the reply. "An' if th' bull had tipped some dick to it, we'd have been trailed back to th' outfit. Sure, I get it. Loco was wise."

"The mob's keepin' in between the bank an' the house we was at," added the first speaker. "Comin' up there with Loco. It don't matter to us what's up. Loco's the guy that's doin' the job."

"Yeah," was the response, "but it's a tough one. Say – that Colonnade Trust Company ain't no easy-lookin' joint. If Loco busts into it, he'll be doin' somethin'."

"Loco ain't bustin' in; he's coverin'. But lay off the gab. It ain't good to talk too much nowhere. Not even in this joint. You can't tell where stoolies are planted."

The conversation ended. Warily, Hawkeye watched the torpedoes. He gave them five minutes, while they kept downing their grog. Then Hawkeye arose and shuffled from the Black Ship. Outside, he made for a near-by alleyway.

Five minutes more. Someone approached. Hawkeye recognized the step. He gave a whisper. It was Cliff Marsland. The first agent had seen the second leave the Black Ship. Cliff had stalled a few minutes before following.

Hawkeye whispered the news that he had heard. It was sufficient. Mention of the Colonnade Trust Company told where crime was due.

Cliff and Hawkeye made their way together from the alley. They separated; Cliff, with Hawkeye trailing, was heading for the nearest telephone.

Word to Burbank. Prompt information for The Shadow. Following the lead that had been given him, Cliff, with Hawkeye's aid, had achieved immediate results. Luke Cardiff had named Loco Zorgin. Minions of the latter had talked of the mob leader's doings.

Crime was already in the making – crime that could be traced to Matt Theblaw, through him to professor Jark and the disintegrating ray. The time had already arrived for The Shadow to spring a counter thrust.

CHAPTER XIII. CRIME COMES THROUGH

CLIFF MARSLAND, reporting to The Shadow, knew that crime was in the making. How close it was to completion, Cliff had not guessed.

For at the very time that Cliff had started to call Burbank, a group of men were participating in a most

ATOMS OF DEATH

remarkable scene, close by the foundation of the big building which housed the wealthy Colonnade Trust Company.

The men were crouched in a circular tunnel that measured five feet in diameter. Extending from the cellar of a vacant house, the tribe had been burrowing for a distance of thirty feet. Along the floor of the tunnel ran an insulated wire which hooked with a mechanism at the inner end.

There, a five-foot concave bowl was faced against solid concrete. The glow of burning light showed from its rim. A singing buzz was coming from the device, with occasional crackles. Matt Theblaw, close against the back of the machine, was pressing it forward in a slow, regular manner, while Digger Wight and others watched him in the dim glow.

The disintegrating ray was eating through the stone foundations of the Colonnade Trust building. Concrete was melting away as if before a sand blast. But Professor Jark's invention was smoother and more efficient than any old-type device. It conquered steel and other metals as effectively as it withered rock.

"We're there," came Matt's growled announcement, heard despite the crackles of the ray. "Move back – all of you."

He clicked a switch. The glare of the ray machine flickered into oblivion. Matt swung the shallow bowl sidewise and drew the base of the machine toward him.

"Flashlights," he ordered in the darkness.

Glimmers came. Digger and Louie aided in pulling the machine edgewise back through the tunnel. Matt groped through to the finish of the cavity; then clicked his own flashlight. He chuckled as he saw the interior of a huge vault. He had picked the right goal.

Crooks went to work at Matt's order. In and out, in and out, they rifled the contents of the nest to which they had penetrated. Stacks of currency, piles of negotiable securities, boxes of silver coin constituted their spoils.

The Colonnade Trust Company had connections with banks that did a large business in foreign markets. Its vault – the one that Matt had reached – was used to store large quantities of foreign as well as domestic currency. The crooks were making a haul that meant huge profits.

Dragging boxes as they worked with speed, Matt's picked henchmen brought the spoils into the cellar of the empty house from which the tunneling had begun. Digger was in charge there; he had dismantled the ray machine and boxed it. Matt ordered his crew to carry the boxed machine up with the swag. The workers were to load cars that were parked on streets close by.

DIGGER was engaged in a new task. The short crook had gained his nickname because of his ability to carve his way through barriers. Tonight's job was one that he could not possibly have accomplished; but it was his work to make it look as though some force other than the ray had done the trick.

Skillfully, Digger began planting dynamite charges all the way through the tunnel, from the vault back to the cellar of the house. He had accomplished this by the time the last boxes were gone. Setting a time fuse, Digger gave the word that he was ready.

"This way, Digger," ordered Matt, as they reached the ground floor above the cellar. "We're going out by the front door. So's I can pass the tip-off to Loco."

ATOMS OF DEATH

The swag carriers had taken a rear exit. The entire terrain about this vacant house was under guard. As Matt and Digger emerged from the front door, they stepped to a secluded street, where the whiteness of the Colonnade Trust building showed cater-cornered from where they stood.

A man shouldered up to the doorway. It was Loco. Matt spoke in an undertone. This was the word for the cover-up crew to spread. No more watchers were needed between the old house and the bank building.

"We'll be clear inside of ten minutes," informed Matt, "but you won't have to wait that long. Just hold it for a couple of minutes after the soup blows. That's going to bring the bulls. Give them a chance to spot some of the cars. Lead them a phony chase, with a good start."

"That's all fixed, Matt," assured Loco. "Leave it to me. The whole crew's posted. But they'll still be watching out until the blow-off comes."

Long and lanky, Loco sidled away from the house. Matt nudged Digger. Together they walked along until they reached a passage between two houses. Moving through, they came to a rear street, where three cars were waiting. Matt and Digger each boarded a different vehicle.

The caravan started. With lights dimmed, the cars were moving out into an avenue, there to take up a northward course, increasing speed as they cleared this district. Matt had deliberately planned for the fireworks to start soon after the get-away.

That was because he did not want Loco's crew lingering longer than was necessary. Rather than figure half an hour for the swag bearers to make distance, he had counted on only ten minutes. To draw in the police and to give them a blind trail of mobster cars, was the idea that Matt had picked as best.

There were few cars passing along the avenue. The leading vehicle in Matt's procession waited until the broad street was cleared; then it swung out with the other cars close behind. But while the three cars were turning, another vehicle swung into the avenue from three blocks below.

It was a trim coupe that had made haste in reaching this location. The driver, looking up the avenue, spied the three cars coming into the wide street. A whispered laugh came from blackness above the wheel of the coupe.

FROM the details of Cliff Marsland's report, The Shadow had divined that robbery might be completed by the time that he reached the vicinity of the bank building. He had deliberately arranged his course so that he might spot any suspicious-looking cars that were about.

For even if crime had succeeded, The Shadow had a rare opportunity. He knew that crooks would not expect followers. This was his chance to pick up a trail that would lead him to the new headquarters of Professor Baldrige Jark.

The Shadow had reasoned that Matt and Digger would be the jobdoers; that Jark would still be at the unknown spot where Doctor Baird was held prisoner; that reserve gangsters would be there also. The Shadow also knew that traffic on the avenue would be running without interruption.

Coming in to skirt this district, he had seen the beginning of the get-away. His plan was to keep on the trail. Idling along in the coupe, he gave the three cars more leeway; then, when they were four blocks distant, The Shadow suddenly increased speed.

Well had The Shadow calculated. But chance, which had first favored him, was now ready with a bit of trickery. From a store front on the avenue, sharp eyes were watching The Shadow's coupe. Those optics

ATOMS OF DEATH

belonged to one of Loco Zorgin's pickets.

The crouching mobster noted the coupe's increase of speed. He watched the vehicle for a moment; then decided to look along the avenue. That was when the freak of chance occurred. Just as the picket spotted the swag-bearing cars, the leader of the procession swung off the avenue into another side street.

But for this fact, the picket would not have suspected the coupe. As it was, he reasoned backward. He thought that the driver of the coupe had seen the cars turn and on that account had increased acceleration. Leaping from his post, the mobster gave the alarm by opening fire on the coupe.

The Shadow was already fifty feet beyond the picket's post. His increasing speed made his car an evasive target. The picket's bullets whistled wide. But other gunmen bobbed into view; like the first, they sought to riddle the coupe.

INSTANTLY, The Shadow decided to run the gantlet. Whisking an automatic as he jammed the accelerator to the floor, he leaned from the window of the coupe and aimed ahead. Mobsters in the rear did not matter. They were firing at a car as it sped beyond them, adding to the range.

But those ahead must be eliminated before the coupe came alongside them. Responding to the picket's fire, all mobsters on the avenue had swung from their hiding places. They thought it would be easy to stop this suspicious coupe. They had not reckoned on the fact that The Shadow was at the wheel.

An automatic spat flame at the nearest sniper. A searing bullet sent the rogue spinning to the sidewalk. This mobster had been at The Shadow's left; but The Shadow had fired in crisscross fashion with his right hand. Left fist still gripping the wheel, The Shadow shifted his form clear across to the window on the right. Out shot that automatic; again its muzzle jabbed a tongue of flame.

An aiming gorilla sank to the curb, his revolver rattling as it struck the gutter. Snarling, the mobster was clutching his right arm. He was an open target; but The Shadow did not want him. Again shifting to the left, the cloaked driver aimed for a third mobster who was on the left side of the street.

Two guns barked simultaneously. The mobster's slug cracked the little window just back of the coupe's door. Shatterproof glass did not scatter. But the burst of The Shadow's automatic was an effective one. As the coupe sped by, the third foe lay flattened. He, too, had taken a bullet from The Shadow's .45.

Cutting straight across the avenue, The Shadow was heading for the street that the three cars had taken. The last picket was diving for the shelter of a fat fire-plug. The Shadow, his automatic regained, was ready to drop the mobster if he tried to fire. But that moment, a new threat roared into view.

From the street which The Shadow had last passed, a mobster-manned touring car had whirled out into the avenue at the very moment of The Shadow's veer. Whizzing up the right side of the avenue, it was bulging straight for the swinging coupe. Two mobsters were aiming a bulky machine gun from the left side of the touring car as the driver cut in to meet the path of the coupe.

AS he jammed the brakes of his car, The Shadow aimed a straight shot for the most vulnerable point among his foemen; the driver of the touring car. A zimming bullet jolted the fellow up from the wheel. Unguided at this important instant, the long car went into a half skid.

Its rear veered to the left. The man beside the driver uttered a cry as he grabbed the steering wheel to yank the car off the curb. The machine gun rattled; but its aim was hopeless. The sudden swerve of the rakish car caused the stream of bullets to zip in front of the halted coupe and clatter off the brick wall of a corner

building.

Then, as the car swung zigzag fashion, The Shadow blazed away at the machine gunners. He nipped the man who was trying to change the heavy weapon's aim. As the rattle broke off, the touring car took another side skid, squarely into the coupe.

The jar whacked the lighter car half around and sent its front wheels jouncing up upon the curb. But the touring car, with its combined weight and momentum, was due for a worse fate. Its rear wheels caught an oily section of the side street's asphalt. The big car keeled over on its side as it hit the curb.

At this instant came the muffled roar of a subterranean blast. Digger's charge in the tunnel between the old house and the bank. The ground shook; glass clattered from hundreds of windows in the surrounding blocks. Amid the reverberations of the explosion sounded the shrill notes of whistles. A siren whined from off the avenue.

The Shadow yanked the coupe into low gear and stepped hard on the accelerator. The car fairly leaped over the curb and out into the avenue. A sharp swing of the steering wheel, a quick shift into high speed second. Whizzing across the avenue, The Shadow sped away into the silence of the side street to the left.

As his car whirled toward the corner, The Shadow added aftermath to chaos. Above the roar of the motor came the chilling mockery of his strident laugh. Sweeping away from pursuing cars, balking the attack of enemies who had all but surrounded him, The Shadow was leaving his disorganized foemen to bear the brunt of a converging police drive.

Left at the post, the mobsters would be forced to scatter in flight. The Shadow had given them the slip; should they take up a chase, they would run risk of dashing squarely into the intervening approach of police cars. Their only choice was to flee up the avenue, leaving stragglers to be captured by the police.

The Shadow had made the most of belated opportunity. Unable to meet crime before it struck, he had sought to gain an important trail. Chance had robbed him of his mission. Outspread mobsters had sought to down The Shadow within their cordon.

Once again, The Shadow had conquered evil hordes. Yet his quest still lay blank against him. Though he had delivered telling blows to the minions who had covered crime, he had made no score against those villains whose game must yet be beaten.

CHAPTER XIV. THE FALSE THRUST

THREE days had passed since The Shadow's running fray with Loco Zorgan's mob. Newspapers had been filled with details of the daring robbery through which supposed dynamiters had rifled the Colonnade Trust Company.

At detective headquarters, the work had been attributed to local mobs. Police were on the lookout for signs of the swag. Captured mobsters had been quizzed; but it was apparent that those arrested had been no more than members of a cover-up crew.

On the evening of this third day, Detective Joe Cardona, acting inspector on the case, was seated at his desk at headquarters talking with two of his men. Cardona, a man of stocky build, showed grimness on his swarthy features.

ATOMS OF DEATH

"We've got to get at the guys in back of it," announced the detective. "There's no mystery about how they pulled that job. They must have been working for a week from the cellar of that empty house. Drilling so they could plant the dynamite.

"It was that fight out on the avenue that fooled us. It started about the same time as the blow-off. It gave the inside gang a chance to crawl through the hole and grab the swag. They delayed their get-away until we had finished pulling in some of those fellows outside."

"The inside gang had nerve," insisted one of the subordinates. "It wasn't long after the fight that we found where the explosion had been. It was a fast get-away, Joe."

"We're dealing with a fast-moving bunch," declared Cardona. "We've got no line on them either. The only mugs good enough to have pulled that job – fellows like Soup McClannley or Digger Wight – haven't been seen around for months.

"Our only lead is to spot the cover-up crew. But there's no use for the dragnet until we know better where we stand. I've got a hunch, after looking over some of those mugs we brought in, that Loco Zorgin headed the outside mob. But until –"

Cardona broke off as he heard footsteps in the hall. He waited until a newcomer entered.

THE arrival was a man of wiry build, who was wearing his hat tipped back from his forehead. Cardona recognized Clyde Burke, reporter from the Classic.

A real friendship existed between the ace detective and the newshawk. There were times, however, when Cardona chose to be noncommittal with Burke. This was one of those occasions.

"Nothing new, Burke," informed Joe. "I'll let you know when anything turns up."

"Nothing on either end?" queried Clyde. "No dynamiters? No mobs?"

"None," replied Cardona. "Ask the boys here, if you don't believe me."

"I'll take your word for it, Joe," decided Clyde.

Turning about, the reporter nearly ran into a brawny newcomer whom he recognized as a detective sergeant named Markham. With a nod to Markham, Clyde kept on. He was satisfied that Cardona had nothing for him.

For Clyde, secretly an agent of The Shadow, was interested chiefly in Cardona's opinions on the mode of robbery. Clyde had gained facts in a message that he had received through Rutledge Mann. He knew that dynamite charges had not admitted burglars to the vault of the Colonnade Trust.

The Shadow had recognized that the criminals had used the short-range disintegrating ray invented by Professor Jark. Though the power of the ray was limited to a distance no greater than the depth of its projector, the crooks had, by moving the machine constantly forward, found it a simple task to burrow their tunnel through steel and concrete.

Dynamite had covered up this work. Cardona had no clue to the actual means that the crooks had used in tunneling. And Clyde, after a glance at the sleuth's glum face, had decided for himself that Cardona had not gone far in his search for the leader of the outside mob.

ATOMS OF DEATH

That was where Clyde had made a mistake. Back in Cardona's office, Markham was speaking in a low tone. Receiving a nod from the ace, Markham went out. He returned a few minutes later, bringing a scrawny, dope-faced man who was attired in baggy trousers and grimy sweater.

This was "Bagger" Lungley, a mobster who had turned hophead. Since he had joined the ranks of the cokers, Bagger had turned yellow. Some smart detectives had threatened to frame him unless he turned stoolie. Bagger would once have scorned such a threat; but the prospect of a visit to the Island worried him, now that he had become an addict of the "snow."

So Bagger had resigned to the ultimatum. Markham had brought him in tonight, believing that he knew something. Bagger's drawn countenance showed that he knew what was coming.

Cardona smacked on the heat.

"Hello, Bagger," he growled. "Coming clean at last, are you? Well, I'm telling you something. I know who was in the outside at that bank job the other night. Some of the birds we pinched weakened when we talked to them. It looks like you know what I know; and I want to check up on what those fellows said. So let's have it."

"I'll talk," promised Bagger. "Honest, Joe, I'll talk, if you'll give me a decent break from now on. Don't make no ordinary stoolie out of me, will you, Joe? I can be worth more to you if you go easy with me."

"That's a go," promised Cardona. "Hear it, boys?" The dicks nodded. "See that, Bagger? Now, come clean."

Bagger licked his lips warily; then spoke.

"It was Loco Zorgin," informed the newly initiated stool pigeon. "That's the straight news, Joe – no grapevine chatter. Because – listen, Joe – I met one of the gazebos who was in on it. See? And he was talking to me about joining up with the mob."

"How soon?"

"Any time now. Maybe tonight."

"Who's the mug?"

"A fellow named Clatz. Hangs around the Pink Rat. That's where I'm to hang out. Waiting, in case he's got the job for me. Says that so many of Loco's crew got bumped or pulled in that Loco needs more rods."

"The Pink Rat, eh?"

Cardona arose and began to pace his office. Suddenly he turned about and faced Bagger squarely.

"Listen, you," ordered Joe. "Go down to the Pink Rat like you're supposed to. Stick there and go through with the deal if it comes your way. Don't worry about anything. If you join up, tell me what happens. That's fair enough, eh?"

"Thanks, Joe," whined Bagger. He shifted toward the door. "You – you mean I can slide along? Just act like I wasn't no stoolie?"

"That's it. Scram."

ATOMS OF DEATH

Bagger departed, sneakily. He did not want to be spotted in the neighborhood of police headquarters. Cardona allowed time for consideration as he sat down at his desk. Then he gave an emphatic thump with his fist.

"That's where I'm going," he told the listening dicks. "Down to the Pink Rat. I'm giving Bagger rope. I've got a hunch he'll be signing up tonight. I'm going to trail him and the other guy, Clatz."

"Going alone, Joe?" queried Markham.

"No," replied the ace. "All three of you are coming with me. You'll stay further off. I'll give you the high sign if I need you along. Come on, let's get started."

WHILE Joe Cardona was concentrating on the Pink Rat, another crime investigator was still keeping close watch on the Black Ship. It was from that dive that The Shadow's first tip had come. Tonight, as on previous evenings, Cliff Marsland and Hawkeye were posted within those portals.

But another was on the job as well. The Shadow was lurking in darkness outside the notorious dive. From a darkened alleyway, he was watching all who entered and departed. Tonight, there would be no delay if the tip should come again.

About an hour after the scene at headquarters, The Shadow saw two stalwart thugs emerge from the Black Ship's portals. Three minutes later, Hawkeye sidled into view. The little spotter headed for the alley where The Shadow stood. It was the direct route toward the place where Hawkeye usually compared notes with Cliff.

"Report."

The lower whisper stopped Hawkeye short. He could see no one in the darkness; but he knew the author of that weirdly spoken word. Hawkeye edged to the wall beside the alley. Whispering in return, he answered The Shadow's demand.

"The two gorillas that just came out," explained Hawkeye. "They're heading to a house one block below the East Side Bank. House number is two forty-six. They're helping Loco Zorgin on a cover up job."

"Instructions," came The Shadow's whisper. "Contact Marsland. Have coupe stationed two blocks east. Close in carefully on the house. Use judgment in case of trouble. Otherwise await instructions."

A swish in the darkness. Hawkeye thought he caught a momentary glimpse of solidity in the blackness. Then The Shadow was gone. Hawkeye moved along toward the spot where he was due to meet Cliff.

THE East Side was a bank at which crooks had taken previous stabs. The Shadow knew its location well. It was there that he had once battled with the minions of a supercrook who had called himself the Red Blot. (Note: See Vol. VI. No. 1)

Since those days, the old bank building had been strengthened to a point where few criminals would consider attacking it. But to Matt Theblaw and Digger Wight, aided by Professor Jark's disintegrating ray, the East Side Bank would prove a simple job.

It was a logical objective for them to choose. Suspicious characters would be less conspicuous than in a neighborhood like that of the Colonnade Trust. Knowing that the police would be vigilant after the recent fray, the criminals could not have picked a better location for a second crime.

ATOMS OF DEATH

Threading his way from the bad lands, The Shadow progressed along the fringes of less disreputable districts. He traveled back into doubtful terrain, followed the line of an elevated railway and finally entered the danger zone about the East Side Bank.

Here, the cloaked avenger became totally invisible. Any alley, any building front might be the lurking spot for pickets. As he reached the street behind the bank building, The Shadow edged forward until he reached the blackened front of a house which he calculated to be number 246.

White steps showed despite their griminess. The Shadow approached them from the side, raising himself to the top of the steps so that he did not blot out one glimpse of the dull whiteness. He tried the knob of the front door. It was unlocked.

Gliding through the door as he opened it, The Shadow moved softly through a hall. He used no flashlight; feeling walls, he found a door. He opened it noiselessly; he caught a draught of air. It was the entrance to the cellar.

Descending, The Shadow closed the door behind him. He had sensed that lurkers were present on the ground floor; but he had passed them without giving an inkling of his presence. Moving past a turn in the stairs, The Shadow spotted a glimmer of light. He caught the sound of muffled voices.

Blackness ended at the bottom. The Shadow stood in the last limit of darkness. He viewed a cellar illuminated by a single light. At the other side was a coal bin. The Shadow could see its boarded side; its entrance, apparently, was from the far end. It was from the coal bin that the voices were coming.

Carefully, The Shadow edged toward the right, where helpful blackness offered him a shaded path. He wanted to gain a vantage point from which he could observe the entrance to the coal bin; but as he craned along, his first glimpse showed him that the bin had a closed door.

Moreover, just as his moving form became partially revealed by light, The Shadow caught a reflected glimmer from between two wooden slats at the side of the bin. Instantly, he knew its meaning. The interior of the coal bin was sheeted with steel.

This was no base tunneling operation. It was a trap. The coal bin was a veritable pill-box, an armored turret which constituted a fortress for the men inside it.

ON the edge of the lighted floor, The Shadow wheeled. His discovery had been a fortunate one. The Shadow had made it a scant second before the watchers from the pill-box had spied the edging shape of his cloaked form.

Muffled cries arose as The Shadow made a sweeping dive to regain the stairway.

A gloved hand grabbed the door frame at the bottom of the cellar stair-way. Like a whip, The Shadow snapped his body around and upward, finishing with a headlong dive halfway up the steps. His speedy maneuver was all that saved him.

A machine gun loosed its rattle from the coal bin. With a clatter of an electric drill, the "typewriter" drove a stream of steel-jacketed bullets that ripped the doorway and the lower steps with its deadly spray.

But with that barrage came a challenge to those below – mockery that taunted the would-be killers. His presence known, The Shadow had delivered a strident laugh to taunt the foemen who had failed.

ATOMS OF DEATH

With the laugh came action. Gaining the turn in the stairs, The Shadow pulled two automatics in the darkness. Straight upward he aimed, just as the door at the top swung open. The automatics blazed. Cries sounded atop the stairs. Blasting with all the fury of his guns, The Shadow dashed upward.

Dropping as he reached the top, The Shadow thrust eyes and fists over the uppermost step. Mobsters had dived for cover – with good reason. The front door of the house was open; there, a husky mobster, arm back, was about to hurl a rounded object that showed dull black in the light.

The fellow was launching a "pineapple" for the steps, intending to wreck that vantage point and slay its occupant with the same stroke. The thrower's arm was already on the move as The Shadow pressed the trigger of an automatic.

The timely bullet clipped the husky's wrist. The effect was that of a stopped throw. The pineapple sailed upward as the hurler received the jolt. It crashed the ceiling and exploded. The house front shook; beams and plaster tumbled down to mass debris where the big mobster had been.

Shaken windows dropped their panes in echo. Following the clatter of glass came the bark of revolvers. Mobsters who had piled behind doorways to allow the bombing were coming back to action, firing from cover toward the stairs.

Below the top step, The Shadow held one gun upward. A new automatic from a second brace, he had it ready to deliver jabbing bullets should a mass attack begin. With his other hand, he had an automatic tilted downward, to meet any comers from below.

Then came a burst of gunfire from the back of the house. Warning shouts were followed by a sudden scurry. The upper mob was dashing back to meet some unexpected onslaught. The Shadow peered quickly from the steps. He saw nothing except the ruined hall at the front door, where the dust of plaster was still rising.

Swinging downward, The Shadow gained the turn in the stairs. From blackness, he opened sudden fire upon creeping mobsmen who had come from the steel-sheeted coal bin. Thinking The Shadow occupied above, the lower crew had started this stealthy approach.

Two thugs sagged. Another pair scurried toward the rear of the cellar. Cut off from their protected pill-box, they were seeking prompt exit, caught unaware by The Shadow's fire.

Instead of pursuing, The Shadow headed up the stairs. He could hear pounding footsteps from the rear. The hoarse orders of a voice he recognized. Detective Joe Cardona was here with a squad. Bagger had met Clatz. Cardona and his men had followed these two members of Loco's cover-up crew.

THE SHADOW swung forward toward the debris at the front. Close to the door, he found footing at a side by the wall. He reached the outer steps; then dropped suddenly as a broad figure surged toward him. A revolver spoke; flame seared The Shadow's hat brim as a bullet whistled a scant inch from his ear.

The Shadow answered with an automatic. His foe succumbed upon the steps. The Shadow had dropped from the side; that move had saved him. Crouched in darkness, The Shadow viewed a grimy face upon the dirty white of the step. Light from within the house dimly revealed the features of the foe whom he had dropped. Loco Zorgin, second of Matt Theblaw's mob leader's, had gone to join Stinger Lacey.

As The Shadow swung from the steps, shots broke out from picket posts along the street. The Shadow, moving swiftly, used revolver spurts as targets. Mobsters could not find the moving shape that never remained in one spot.

ATOMS OF DEATH

Other automatics barked with The Shadow's. Halfway from a corner, Cliff and Hawkeye were aiding their chief. Mobsters formed scurrying figures as they fled in the opposite direction. They stopped and tried to hide as they saw the lights of a police car coming from the direction toward which they ran.

Five minutes later, the law was in full control. Mobsters, dead, wounded and captured, were all that remained of Loco Zorgin's formidable crew. Two blocks away, a coupe was swinging out from a secluded curve. The Shadow was at the wheel; with him, Cliff and Hawkeye.

A police car saw the departing coupe. It swung in to take up a chase, believing that other mobsmen were in flight. The Shadow took a twisting course that left the chaser far behind. Stopping in a quiet spot, he ordered Cliff and Hawkeye to take the car.

Leaving the coupe, The Shadow glided into darkness. Again he had won a victory, but with no progress toward his goal. He had been trapped; and escape might never have been his lot had not Joe Cardona and his men appeared to give unwitting aid.

The Shadow was dealing with crafty, dangerous foemen. The proof of their full cleverness came, one hour later, when the cloaked fighter had gained his sanctum. There he received a telephoned report from Burbank, giving news that Clyde Burke had gained at headquarters.

While The Shadow and Joe Cardona had been busy in the neighborhood of the East Side Bank, crime had struck elsewhere. A dynamite explosion had brought police to a jewelry store on Fifth Avenue, where they had arrived too late to prevent the flight of two dozen mobsmen.

The police had uncovered a tunnel blown into the basement of the jewelry store from the cellar of an old apartment house in the rear. Crooks had made a huge haul from the rifled vault. The law could not understand how the swag had been gained so rapidly. The Shadow knew. Matt Theblaw and Digger Wight had pulled a second job with the disintegrating ray provided by Professor Jark. Some new mob leader had been chosen as the man to cover up. Loco Zorgin had been deputed to draw The Shadow elsewhere; to end the career of the foe whom all crooks feared.

The Shadow had finished Loco instead. But the sinister laugh that echoed through the sanctum showed that he was not pleased by tonight's episodes. Men of crime had tried The Shadow's game with good results. They had covered their own thrust with a perfect bluff.

CHAPTER XV. LUKE MAKES A DEAL

"CULLY FREER is outside, Luke."

"Show him, in, Beef. And listen: nobody's to know he's been here. Savvy? Nobody."

"That goes, Luke."

Luke Cardiff settled back in the chair behind his desk. He glanced at a clock and noted the time as half past five. A smile showed on Luke's long-jawed face. Early for customers to be coming to the Club Cadilly. That was to Luke's liking.

Beef had gone out into the deserted gambling room. When the fat-faced lookout returned, he was accompanied by a stocky, square-visaged man whose ugly features showed a scar that circled one eyebrow in a course from forehead to cheek.

ATOMS OF DEATH

"Sit down, Cully," ordered Luke. "Outside, Beef."

Cully took a chair and eyed Luke suspiciously. The gambler made no comment until after Beef had gone. Then, in a dry tone, he remarked:

"Nice job you did last night, Cully. You always were a great guy for handing the bulls a bum steer."

Cully scowled; then shrugged and delivered a slight laugh.

"Don't get you, Luke," he scoffed "What is this – some kind of a game? Bringing me up here to spring some boloney?"

"You know what I'm talking about," assured Luke. "You were covering for Matt Theblaw, up at that Fifth Avenue jewelry store. Pulling a blind while Loco Zorgin was getting his over by the East Side Bank."

"You mean I was in with the guy that grabbed the rocks?" queried Cully as if in surprise. "Say – what use have I got for sparklers? D'you think I'd want to take a chance like that?"

"You wouldn't have cracked the place yourself, Cully. That isn't your racket. But covering up is your old bet. That's why I sent Tony down to tell you I wanted to see you."

"Nix, Luke. I don't get it."

Luke straightened behind his desk. His face wore a hard look; one that made Cully stare. Emphatically the gambler drove fist to woodwork, so hard that the desk clock jounced.

"You're going to get it, Cully!" growled Luke. "Listen, you mug! I'm talking straight – telling you something for your own good. First off, Matt Theblaw and I used to be like that. You know that much, don't you?"

Cully nodded as he saw Luke raise his hand and cross two fingers. Like others in the underworld, the scar-faced rowdy knew that Matt Theblaw and Luke Cardiff had been pals.

"All right," assured Luke. "We never split, Matt and I. We used to think alike. We still do, even though we're in different rackets. Whatever either of us would be doing, the other might be. Savvy that?"

Again a nod from Cully.

"If I'd been picking some gazebo to head a mob of mine, the first bet would have been Stinger Lacey. It wasn't long ago, Cully, that Stinger got his. My second bet would have been Loco Zorgin. He took it last night.

"Matt would have made the same picks as I would" – Luke's eyes were narrowing – "and if either of us had lost Stinger and Loco, the third guy we'd have used was you. Get that, Cully?"

"You know who bumped Stinger, don't you? I'll tell you. It was The Shadow. And who got Loco? The same guy. And who's going after you next? I'll tell you: The Shadow! Listen, Cully, how much is Matt paying you to take it on the chin?"

CULLY'S mouth had widened. Half nervous, the mob leader started to say something, and then stopped. Luke chuckled.

ATOMS OF DEATH

"Come on, bo," he suggested. "Spill it. I'm wise. I'm a pal of Matt's. You're not going to tell me anything that'll hurt Matt's racket. But maybe you're going to fix it so I can help yours."

"All right," decided Cully, shifting. "Maybe I am workin' for Matt. But that don't mean nothin', Luke. I ain't even seen him. When I hear from him, it's over a telephone down at Crazy Toehler's pool room. Supposin' Matt did sign up. That don't mean I know anythin'."

"I get that much," chuckled Luke. "Matt always was close-mouthed. I didn't think you'd know how he was working. I don't know myself. He's got some swell racket, that's all. But it's a cinch you've heard from Matt and that you're going to hear from him again. That's why I called you in – so you could hand him a tip from me!"

"I'll do that, Luke."

"All right. Listen, Cully. There was a guy came in here not long after Stinger took the bump. You know the bird; his name is Cliff Marsland. He told me he was close to Stinger. He'd found out that Stinger was working for Matt Theblaw. Marsland was supposed to have signed up; with Stinger out, he wanted to know who might be taking Stinger's place."

"And you told him?"

"Yeah. I was a dub. I named Loco Zorgin. That same night, Loco ran into it tough over by the Colonnade Trust Company. Marsland dropped in again; said he hadn't got in touch with Loco, but it looked like Loco must have handled that mob. Said he hoped maybe he could get a hold of Loco later."

"Did he?"

"I don't know. But we'd talked about The Shadow, Marsland and I, and it looked like maybe The Shadow had started that mess for Loco's outfit. Well, last night, Loco and a bunch got wiped out. Joe Cardona took the credit.

"But I read the newspapers pretty close" – Luke indicated a stack beside his desk – "and I figured more than the bulls did. What was the idea of fixing up a coal bin like a pill-box? The bulls say it was to cover while charges were being set off to blow the East Side Bank. They say there was a premature explosion upstairs in the house.

"Boloney! Look at these pictures. It was a pineapple wrecked the front of that house! Loco Zorgin wasn't there to cover up anything. That joint was rigged like a trap, to nab The Shadow. They had him between the pill-box and the pineapple heaver. But something went wrong.

"Because who was it bumped Loco? It couldn't have been the bulls. The mob turned yellow and gave up. The Shadow was in on that deal. Matt knew he was trailing Loco and gave Loco the job of fixing him. Loco flopped. But I'm telling you something that Matt don't know. I'm wise to how The Shadow got on Loco's trail. Leastwise, I've guessed it."

"How?" queried Cully, eagerly.

"Marsland's working with The Shadow," confided Luke. "I told the guy too much. But he told me too much. It's even. He claimed he was once with Stinger; said he wanted to get with Loco. Well, there's Stinger and Loco. One and one. How many does that make, Cully?"

ATOMS OF DEATH

"One and one's two."

"You're right. Two: Cliff Marsland and The Shadow."

Cully's smile was not a pleasant one. The mob leader was experiencing qualms.

"I want to close this gambling joint of mine," Luke said. "I want to get in with Matt. And I'll make it worth while for him. I'll do more than hand Marsland a bum steer. I'll bluff the guy so good that I'll snake him right out from wherever he is and bring him in to Matt."

"That'll bring me and Matt together, with one of The Shadow's stoolies in our claws. We'll put the heat on Marsland and make him blab. That way, we'll get The Shadow. So all you've got to do is put Matt wise. Relay his answer through to me. Call me here from the pool room. We'll arrange it right."

CULLY considered. An idea was filtering through the mob leader's brain. Cully offered it as an objection.

"Say, Luke," he volunteered, "It'd be a cinch for me to grab Marsland, with my mob. We could drag him somewhere where Matt could pick him up. If he got tough, we'd rub him out."

"Yeah?" Luke's tone was savage. "Get that pipe-dream out of your noodle, Cully. Keep your trap shut; spill nothing to nobody except Matt. Do you think The Shadow's dumb enough not to be covering Marsland? Say – if you grabbed that guy in the open, you'd be in for it as bad as Stinger and Loco."

"I'm going to stall him. So neat that he won't suspect nothing. Matt's wise enough to know that, when you tell him what I've told you. I'm not naming you, Cully. Pass the news to Matt. Leave him think it over. Tell him I'll bring in Marsland. Savvy it?"

Cully nodded. Luke Cardiff arose and shoved out a paw. Cully accepted it; then walked to the door. Luke urged him out with a parting warning.

"Don't be seen sliding out of here," said the gambler. "Get down to that place of yours and lie low. I want this word to get through to Matt. It's going to mean a lot to both him and me."

AFTER Cully Freer's departure, Luke Cardiff busied himself in the gambling room. An hour passed; throngs began to arrive. While business increased during another hour, Luke kept strolling back and forth between the gaming room and the office.

Shortly before eight o'clock, Luke heard the jangle of the telephone. He entered the office and closed the door. Lifting the receiver, he recognized the voice at the other end. It was Matt Theblaw.

"Hello, Matt..." Luke was terse as he spoke to his old pal. "Cully wised you, eh? Good... Yes... Yes... All right, tomorrow night... Don't worry about my end of the deal... Yes, I can fix it sweet... Just tell me where I'm to travel to... Yes... Yes... I've got it..."

"All right. That's a go... Sure, plant the bus and I'll tell you where to have it... Down in Hoxler's old garage, next to Nagan's pawnshop... That's right, the garage is empty... What's that? Cully? Well, I don't know... All right, he can call me... Sure, I'll have him cover; but not too close... Leave it to me, Matt..."

Luke hung up. He plucked a cigar from his supply of perfectos and chuckled as he seated himself at the desk. A complete plan had formulated in his mind. That was fortunate, from Luke's viewpoint, for while he pondered, the gambler heard a rap at the office door. When Luke growled to come in, the door opened and

ATOMS OF DEATH

Cliff Marsland entered.

Luke received his visitor with a sour grin. As Cliff sat down, the gambler spoke the facts that seemed to be uppermost in his mind. They concerned the death of Loco Zorgin.

"Well, Marsland," announced Luke, "we've lost another bet. I made a good enough guess, didn't I? Picking Loco as the bird that Matt would use with Stinger gone."

Cliff nodded soberly.

"It puts us back to scratch," growled Luke. "And believe me, I'm feeling as sour as you are. I'd like to get in touch with Matt, and I've figured that if you make the contact, you can fix it for me. But with Loco out, it's tough."

"It looked like there were two jobs last night," remarked Cliff casually. "Some mob was pulling a cover up at the Fifth Avenue jewelry store. Loco couldn't have been handling that squad, too."

"I know it," agreed Luke, "and that's our one bet, Marsland. I've been reading the newspapers" – he motioned to the side of the desk – "and I've been thinking it over. Only trouble is, I can't believe it's the guy I think it is."

"Who is that?"

"Bats Dilladay. You've heard of him?"

"Sure. I thought he was in stir, though."

"Got out of the Big House a month ago. Last I heard, he'd headed west. But I figure Matt must have gotten hold of him."

"Why?"

"Because nobody could have moved out so neat as Bats did. He wasn't as good a bet as Stinger, or Loco, because Bats hasn't got the fight those bimbos had. But it looks like Matt was counting on Loco to draw the bulls after a phony job. That jewelry store needed careful covering."

Cliff nodded.

"And Bats was the guy for it," assured Luke. "So it's a ten to one shot that Bats is somewhere around town. If he is, I'll know it by tomorrow night. I know a couple of guys who'll be able to tell me. See me about this time tomorrow, Marsland. I may have some dope for you then."

"Suppose Bats is around. Where'll he be?"

"In some hide-out. That's his usual system. Particularly now, since he's been in stir. I'll have it fixed so you can get to see him. Leave that to me."

Cliff departed, satisfied. Luke sat back in his chair, smoking his perfecto. His long face showed a grin as his fingers flicked ashes on the floor. Luke chuckled.

For Luke Cardiff was one of the few persons who knew that "Bats" Dilladay had headed for Chicago and was lying low in that city, hoping to make some mid-West gang connection.

Craftily, Luke had set the stage for a perfect frame. One that Cliff Marsland had not even begun to suspect. Secretly, the old team of Matt Theblaw and Luke Cardiff was again in operation. Luke had paved the way for Matt to gain a new advantage over The Shadow.

CHAPTER XVI. CRIME STRIKES AGAIN

IT was early the next evening. A dampening drizzle was producing haze about Manhattan's lights. On intermediate avenues, where traffic was not heavy, darkened spaces were prevalent between the spots where street lamps glowed.

A patrolman, following his beat, paused to study a huge mansion that stood surrounded by a high brick wall. He noted lights from the upper floors; satisfied, he resumed his pace. This old building, relic of a once fashionable neighborhood, was the residence of Montague Reisert, elderly multimillionaire.

The man on the beat was not alone in his careful scrutiny of the large residence. A patrol car, coming up a side street, rolled slowly by while its occupants took front view of the building's perspective. Observation of the Reisert home was definite routine duty on the part of the police.

As long as all was well outside, the law was satisfied. The millionaire's home was a veritable fortress, garrisoned by a dozen servants. It would take a healthy mob invasion to make a dent in the portals of that mammoth building.

At the same time, Reisert's residence was known to contain a mass of wealth. It housed art galleries, curio rooms and furnishings of incredible value. Beneath the buildings were vaults that contained treasures that were neither on display nor in use.

One of old Reisert's hobbies had been the collection of solid gold tableware. This penchant had cost him a fortune, despite the fact that the millionaire was a shrewd bargain hunter. Some thirty-odd years ago, he had purchased gold table sets that had been carried from a Peking palace during the Boxer insurrection.

A few decades later, he had acquired similar items that had been the property of the Czar of Russia. When kings had abdicated in Europe, when members of the nobility had found themselves in straitened circumstances, Reisert had stepped in with ready cash to buy their plate.

Reisert had acquired most of his treasures at little more than the actual value of their gold content. Some for less, for in certain cases he had made purchases from doubtful owners; in other instances, he had accepted valuable items as pledges for loans that the recipients had been unable to repay.

But except on special occasions, when he gave receptions for wealthy guests, the old millionaire kept his golden possessions buried away in the deepest of the formidable vaults beneath his home.

THE cop kept along his beat. He passed the end of a row of houses, tawdry buildings that fronted on the street in back of Reisert's mansion. Glancing down this thoroughfare, the patrolman spied a small truck parked at an angle from the curb.

Two men were arguing as they jacked up a rear wheel of the vehicle. The policeman could see them in the light from the tail-lamp. Walking in that direction, he noted that the truck was old and empty; it carried New

ATOMS OF DEATH

Jersey license plates.

"What's the idea?" growled the cop. "Obstructin' traffic, eh? How long are you goin' to keep this wagon stalled here?"

"Sorry, officer," replied one of the truckmen, rising in the darkness. "We've got a flat and no spare. We're yanking off the tire so my helper here can take it over to a garage and have it fixed."

"Yeah?" queried the patrolman. "And you're keepin' this junk of yours halfway in the middle of the street? For an hour or two? Nothin' doin', friend. You're movin' along!"

"It's the only tire we've got, officer. We can't afford to cut it up –"

"Maybe not. But you're not parkin' here, nor on the aveynoo, either."

While the truck driver mumbled to himself, a newcomer arrived. The light of a street lamp showed a stocky man who was wearing an oilskin slicker. The arrival had heard the last words of the conversation.

"You don't have to worry about the tire, you guys," informed the man in the slicker. "I'll help you out and all it'll cost you will be two bits."

"Who're you?" quizzed the officer.

"I'm the night man for that parking lot that Bill Morey is running," was the reply. "He just put me on the job tonight. You're name's Henderson, ain't it?"

"Yeah?"

"Morey told me you'd be on this beat. Said to say hello for him."

"So Morey's figurin' on pickin' up some night business again, huh? Well, it ain't a bad idea. Got any other customers yet?"

"Only a couple. But Morey said I ought to be able to tag a bunch of cars along this street."

"Morey's a good talker. What's he doin' – havin' you work on a percentage?"

"Yeah. Fifty–fifty."

"I thought so."

The patrolman was laughing to himself. Meanwhile, the truck men had decided that it was worth a quarter to use the parking lot. They pulled the jack from under the rear wheel and the parking lot attendant guided them to a space between two buildings, twenty yards ahead.

The patrolman followed. He watched the crippled truck limp crosswise, in order to back into the narrow lot. Then, hearing a motor coming from the avenue, he turned around to see the patrol car.

"What's up?" came a query.

ATOMS OF DEATH

Henderson strolled over to explain. While he stood with one elbow on the window of the patrol car, the truck limped back into the parking lot. The attendant followed, his figure barely discernible in the feeble light of the truck's poor lamps.

The patrol car rolled along. Its occupants glanced into the parking lot as they went by. They saw two cars parked at one side; they noticed the dull lights of the truck, with steam rising from the radiator, to mingle with the mist.

WHEN Henderson paced by, the lights of the truck blinked out. Then a flashlight appeared by the crippled rear wheel. The cop continued along his beat. Immediately, whispers began. The chief truck driver was talking.

"All right, Digger" – Matt Theblaw's voice was no longer disguised – "get the boxes out so we can set up. All clear into the cellar of the old house, Bevo?"

"Bevo" was the man in charge of the parking lot. A member of the gang, he had framed the story that he had given the cop. His voice came in an affirmative grunt.

"When the touring car shows up," ordered Matt, "flag it in here and chase the boys along. And all the while, Bevo, you stick out by the street, like you were flagging other cars. That will kid the harness bull, if he comes by again."

Another grunt from Bevo.

"Louis won't be driving the touring car," added Matt. "Pike is bringing the bunch. Tell him to stick around, after you park his car alongside those others. Kid the real customers when they come around.

"And another thing. Have Pike ditch those Jersey license plates off this truck. I knew the harness bull would spot them. Pike can stick on the Pennsy plates instead. They're under the front seat."

Joining Digger at the rear of the truck, Matt aided with the hoisting of two boxes. Straight behind the truck was the broken entrance to the cellar of an old house. Taking the boxes downward, the two crooks used a flashlight when they reached the cellar.

Together, they produced the shallow, five-foot bowl of Professor Jark's disintegrating ray machine. Mounting it on a semicircular base, they carried it to the front of the cellar, where a niche past the furnace afforded an excellent starting point.

Matt used a flashlight to find the switch of the house current. He attached a wire to a plug. On came the juice. The bowl of the ray machine began to flicker. Digger pressed its mouth squarely against the wall. Bricks and mortar began to melt away.

"It's working swell tonight," growled Matt, as he pushed the sliding base forward. "Look at it take away that first foot. Warming up, too. Say, the prof sure stepped up the power since that last job."

"I'll say he did," chuckled Digger. "Wait'll we tell his nibs about the way it's bitin'. I'll bet he'll get a kick."

"Maybe; maybe not. He's still goofy over that long-range gun of his. He might just as well be, since we're handling this work. It's good for us, though."

"How do you figure that, Matt? That gun stunt ain't goin' to work. An' if it does, how'll we use it?"

ATOMS OF DEATH

"We're getting the benefit of it right now. The improved coils that the prof fixed for his gun were just the ticket for this machine. I had him put a set of them in the disintegrator. That's why it's moving so fast."

Already, the machine had eaten so deep a hole that Matt was crawling in to keep it going forward. Digger, crawling after, kept up conversation while they worked.

"LOUIE'S seein' Cully?" questioned the dynamiter.

"Sure," replied Matt. "Luke's staging the stunt; but Cully's covering. This is one job we don't need any cover up for, So it leaves Cully loose."

"And we'll have him waitin' after tonight, until we pull other jobs."

"Other jobs nothing. We're through with this business after we clean out Reisert's vault. When we land Marsland, we'll have a line on The Shadow. Luke's going to be with us from now on; between him and me, we'll figure a way to get The Shadow after Marsland talks."

"Goin' to put the heat on Marsland in a hurry?"

"We'll take our time, maybe. It all depends. But I've got other ideas, Digger. I think the prof will like them. We'll be close to a million, after we make this haul."

"That's a lot."

"Yeah, but not enough. But it fixes us so we can lay off New York."

"And hit around the country?"

"No. Take a trip abroad. The prof was suggesting that we ought to make another move. Maybe he's right. We could go to London, for instance, live swell, and figure how we could take a crack at some joint like the Bank of England."

"But the prof's goin' to be missed. And Baird –"

"That's just it. If the prof writes Tellert from England, saying he's quit inventing, and sending dough to pay off the investors with a profit, that whole business can be settled nice, without anybody getting wise. See the idea?"

"But won't Tellert have to say the prof is phony?"

"Why? He's got a reputation, hasn't he? He'd be acting dumb to shoot it, wouldn't he? It's the natural way out for him as a promoter. He'll tell his clients that the prof is where he can't be reached. An unproven swindle, with money returned, won't allow a chance for extradition. What Tellert will do will be to talk things over with his clients. They'll all be glad to get better than an even break when they realize how eccentric the prof has been."

"What about the sawbones?"

"Baird? The prof can handle him. You remember how we listened in while they talked."

"The prof sure handed out the soft soap."

ATOMS OF DEATH

"The old boy's sure been warmin' up as we go along. I thought he was kind of goofy at first, when he began spillin' his ideas. But the way he's stepped up is somethin' nifty."

"I'll say it is! Look at this new baby burn!"

THE improved ray machine had been going steadily onward; Matt and Digger had followed it well beneath the street. They were more than halfway to their goal – the rear of Montague Reisert's mansion.

Digger crawled back through the hole. He was gone for a dozen minutes. When he returned, it was with the news that Pike's men had arrived. These were all members of the gang that was hiding out with Matt and Digger at Professor Jark's new headquarters.

Matt told Digger to stand by. A few more minutes passed. The glow from the machine began to widen, forming an aura around the edges. Matt clicked off the switch. Waiting a few moments, he turned the machine edgewise and flashed a torch.

They had reached Reisert's lowest vault. Locked cabinets showed where the swag was housed. Matt entered. Breaking a lock, he opened a cabinet to reveal stacks of golden dishes that looked like mammoth coins. Matt blinked the light through the tunnel.

Digger and the helpers came through the shaft. Sacks were laid flat on the floor. Mobsters set to work on each cabinet that Matt cracked. Spoils, literally worth their weight in gold, were passing into the hands of these lawless raiders.

The rifling required fifteen minutes. Matt, the last to leave, passed Digger in the cellar of the old house. The little crook had brought in new boxes from the truck, handling them gingerly. He was ready to set the charges.

Outside, Matt found the golden harvest stored in the truck that now had Pennsylvania license plates. He took two mobsters aboard; the rest joined Pike in the car that was to serve as rear guard. Matt waited at the wheel of the truck until Digger joined him.

The truck rolled away at a signal from Bevo on the sidewalk. The patrolman, Henderson, had passed ten minutes before, suspecting nothing. At the corner of the avenue, Matt blinked the tail-light. Bevo gave a signal to Pike. The car – a sedan – rolled out to the street and Bevo sprang aboard.

A dozen minutes later, the loaded truck was chugging through upper Manhattan. A hidden spare tire had been fitted on the rear wheel during the stay at the parking lot. That had been Pike's job. The old dilapidated vehicle was actually much more powerful than its appearance indicated.

Digger's time-fuse was a slow one tonight. There was no need for rapid results, since a cover-up crew was absent. The blast was due to go an hour after the crooks had made their get-away. Then the police would have a new dynamite mystery on their hands.

Matt Theblaw was chuckling at the wheel of the truck. But the tall crook was not thinking about the coming explosion. He was considering events that were due to happen elsewhere.

For, as a climax to successful robbery, another important piece of business was in the making. Luke Cardiff was due to spring a fast one that would leave The Shadow guessing.

CHAPTER XVII. THE TRAP SPRINGS

WHILE Matt Theblaw and Digger Wight were wending from their latest scene of crime, Cliff Marsland, agent of The Shadow, was at the beginning of what he believed would be a successful trail.

Cliff was again a visitor in the office of Luke Cardiff. The gambler was passing him news that promised to be important. For Luke was emphatic in his statement that he had located Bats Dilladay, mob leader so recently in stir.

"Bats is no dummy," said Luke to Cliff. "He's got a real hide-out. But there's a way to reach him. You know where Crazy Tochler's pool room is?"

Cliff nodded. The place was well known. It was a joint near the Bowery. "Crazy" Tochler, the proprietor, was an ex-pug who had been punch-drunk from so many bouts that he had apparently gone half goofy. He had invested earnings in a pool room, which had promptly become a loafing place for toughs.

"Bugs has a lookout posted there," resumed Luke, referring to the pool room. "Go down to the joint and let a quarter hit the sidewalk when you're going in. A guy will grab it up for you."

"What then?"

"You'll hear him say: 'Here's your two bits.' That's his password. And you say: 'Two bits? I thought it was a dime.'"

Cliff nodded. A man dropping a quarter accidentally might mistake it for a nickel but not a ten cent piece. Cliff could guess what would follow; but he listened to make sure.

"The guy will walk away," explained Luke. "You go along, too. He'll tip you off to the hideout and how to let Bats know a friend is coming in."

Concluding, Luke gave a nudge toward the door. It was time for Cliff to be starting. The Shadow's agent strolled out and left by way of the gambling room.

Hardly had Cliff departed before Luke Cardiff sprang to his feet. He opened a door at the side of the room. It was a passage that afforded a private exit. Cully Freer was standing there, grinning.

"Snapped it, eh, Luke?"

"You bet he did, Cully. But it's time to be moving. Got your man posted at the pool room?"

"Sure thing."

"All right. Let's travel."

SOME twenty minutes after he had left the Club Cadilly, Cliff arrived near Crazy Tochler's pool room. The lights of the Bowery were gleaming from the nearest corner. Elevated trains were rumbling by as Cliff approached.

Seeing three loafers outside the pool room, Cliff paused almost between them as he lighted a cigarette. Then, as he thrust his cigarette pack back into his pocket, he let a coin drop to the sidewalk.

ATOMS OF DEATH

Cliff had chosen a bright quarter dollar. The coin made a glimmering splotch as it hit the cement. As it bounced, one of the loiterers pounced forward and planted his foot on it. Stooping, the fellow picked up the coin. He turned to Cliff.

"Here's your two bits."

"Two bits?" Cliff feigned puzzlement as he took the coin. "I thought it was a dime."

The other made no reply. Turning, he slouched toward the Bowery. Cliff strolled in the same direction. One look at the face of the fellow had told Cliff that this must be his man. He was obviously a member of some mob; although Cliff had never encountered him previously.

Across the street, a solitary observer had witnessed the meeting. This was Hawkeye. The little spotter had been at the Club Cadilly; he had received a scrawled pellet in the usual fashion which Cliff had left.

Hawkeye had put in a report to Burbank; then he had hurried hither to cover up. Cliff had not dallied long in keeping the rendezvous; but he had allowed sufficient time for Hawkeye to get posted.

Hawkeye waited until Cliff and the other man had reached the Bowery. He watched the direction that they took; then trailed. On the Bowery, he could spot them well ahead. Hawkeye allowed three blocks leeway until he saw Cliff joining the other man. The two turned into a side street.

As Hawkeye slouched in prompt pursuit, he noticed two rowdies detach themselves from a group on a corner. This pair followed the direction that Cliff had taken. Hawkeye became troubled. He had inkling suspicions of a trap.

Reaching the corner, Hawkeye huddled by a flight of elevated steps; looking along the street, he could see Cliff and the other man turning at the next block. Shiftily, Hawkeye headed along the Bowery. His plan was to reach the street below; there to cut over and come closer to Cliff's path.

This time, it was Hawkeye who was observed – not from the street, but from a cab coming in the opposite direction. A lone passenger, lost in the blackened interior, saw the spotter moving toward his goal.

The driver of the cab was Moe Shrevnitz. Leaning back from the wheel, Moe caught a whispered order. His passenger was The Shadow; Moe maneuvered a prompt turn among elevated pillars and headed back toward the street which Hawkeye had chosen.

Fifty feet off the Bowery, Moe halted. He caught the slight sound of a rear door opening. As he listened, he thought he heard a swish in the darkness. Moe waited at this post. He knew that The Shadow was going ahead.

HAWKEYE, nearing the next street, was puzzled. He had made a bad guess. He had seen no sign of Cliff Marsland crossing at the lighted corner. Hawkeye knew that he should not have allowed Cliff to get so far ahead. He understood now that Cliff must have entered some building in the block that paralleled the Bowery.

Peering from the corner, Hawkeye spied the house that looked suspicious. He saw that two lurkers had edged up to a doorway. The man whom Cliff had met must have steered him into that house. The place was covered. Hawkeye moved forward.

ATOMS OF DEATH

Sudden danger prompted him to turn. Swinging, Hawkeye dodged as a powerful watcher sprang upon him. This rogue, stationed at the corner, had seen Hawkeye shifting forward. The two scuffled in the darkness. The muzzle of a gun swung for Hawkeye's head. Hawkeye's arm went up; but the warded blow was hard enough to jolt him.

Another figure caught him from behind. Arms pinioned while he struggled, Hawkeye heard a growled order to deliver another blow. Hawkeye ducked, expecting to find the process useless. But no second swing of the rod was forthcoming.

Massed darkness seemingly sprang from the blackness of the corner. A gloved fist swung for the slugger's chin. Hawkeye heard the crack as the driving punch landed. Wriggling away from his present captor, he saw the man with the gun go hurtling backward to land flat on the sidewalk.

The gorilla who had gripped Hawkeye swung to meet the strange foe from the darkness. This fellow was whisking a blackjack. The weapon was useless. As his startled gaze met the blaze of burning eyes, the ruffian saw a wide swinging arm come sweeping toward him.

The Shadow landed a terrific punch. He had felled the first crook with an uppercut; the second succumbed from a powerful left hook. Yet The Shadow's full purpose had not been realized. He had sought to dispose silently of these thugs. Instead, the vehemence of his blows had flattened them so hard that their sprawls were audible across the street.

Crooks by the doorway were drawing guns. Others at picket posts were alert as they saw the action of the men across the street. The Shadow drew Hawkeye back into the side street. Posting the little agent there, he crossed and moved away through gloom.

Hawkeye knew The Shadow's purpose. He was crossing the lengthwise street below the intersection, so that he might creep unnoticed upon the guards who were still peering across toward the corner where two sluggers had dropped unconscious to the darkened sidewalk. Hawkeye drew an automatic, ready to cover when the time came.

CLIFF had gone into the doorway that Hawkeye spotted. The Shadow's agent had contacted with the guide; the man had led him here and had left him with the terse growl: "Foist door at de top. T'ree raps den two."

Unsuspecting, Cliff had entered. His guide, in the street, had shifted to a lookout post while another pair of rowdies had closed in to cover the doorway. Cliff, moving up a flight of gaslighted stairs, had found the doorway in the second-floor hall. He had delivered the required signal.

No answer. Cliff rapped again. He heard a hoarse, whispered voice, apparently, from the keyhole, which queried:

"Who's there?"

"Cliff Marsland," responded Cliff, in a low tone. "From Luke Cardiff."

"Who do you wanna see?"

"Bats Dilladay."

A bolt drew back. Cliff stepped slightly away from the door while a crack opened and an eye peered through. Cliff had his hands away from his body. No reason to give Bats the idea he had a gun. The voice had sounded

suspicious.

The door opened. A hand motioned for entry. Cliff walked in; he looked about as the huddled man who had received him closed the door again. A single gas jet provided a low-turned illumination. Cliff could barely discern the figure of the man who had received him.

Then, as he turned to meet the fellow face to face, the huddled man straightened. His right hand whipped out a shining revolver. Cliff, staring into the muzzle, gaped as he recognized the long-jawed face behind the gun.

"Luke Cardiff!" gasped Cliff.

"The same," growled the gambler. With his free hand, he bolted the door. "Thought you'd bluffed me, eh? Well, I knew you for a phony. That's why I pulled the stall about Bats Dilladay.

"Ease back" – Luke was gesturing with the revolver – "because you're going for a ride. Maybe it won't end so bad for you if you don't make trouble. But if you do, Marsland, I'll drill you and –"

From somewhere below came the muffled report of a gun. Then came other shots in response. Some sort of battle was starting on the front street. For a moment, Cliff tightened, thinking he could spring upon Luke. Then came a sound from behind him; his arms were pinned.

A door had opened in the further wall – one that Cliff had taken for an entrance to a closet. Cliff was gripped by a big mobster who had entered. With the rowdy was a man whose face Cliff recognized. It was that of Cully Freer, the mob leader.

Too late, Cliff realized the real man whom Luke could have named. The whole frame-up dawned on him. Chance of escape, however, was ended. Cully was finding Cliff's automatic; the mob leader had it.

"Turn him around," snapped Luke. "I'm taking him out, Cully. You follow."

As Cliff was spun about, Luke jabbed the revolver muzzle in the back of his neck. He drove his prisoner through the door, into a house that was the twin of the one they were leaving. Here, however, Luke took a flight of rear steps. They reached the bottom. Luke pushed Cliff through an opened door.

Two men were standing there. One was Louie, Matt Theblaw's henchman. The other was a second gorilla on Cully Freer's payroll. Cully ordered his man upstairs. He turned to Luke.

"What's next?"

"You'd better head up, too," returned Luke. "See what that shooting is all about." The gambler paused as he heard new shots from far in front. "Leave this mug to Louie and me. So long, Cully. We're heading into the garage."

THE firing that Luke and Cully had heard was a peculiar one. Its direction had changed in singular fashion. That was because The Shadow had opened one of his surprising frays.

Almost at the doorway of the front building, he had been spotted by a picket across the street. Instead of dropping back, The Shadow had landed squarely upon the two guards out front. Felling one with a swing of an automatic, he had met the second, guns muzzle to muzzle, and had beaten the thug to the shot.

ATOMS OF DEATH

Whirling into the doorway while bullets spattered all about, The Shadow had tricked Cully's pickets as he had Loco's on that night at the Colonnade Trust building.

Bounding from their posts, mobsters had sought opportunity to fire. Swinging suddenly back into view, The Shadow had jabbed quick, effective shots at the nearest figures. As two mobsters toppled, wounded, those further away had dropped to take aim at their cloaked enemy.

That was when Hawkeye opened. Crawling forward, the crafty little agent had reached a spot near one of the knocked-out mobsters whom The Shadow had first felled. With his left hand on a revolver that one had dropped, Hawkeye raised his automatic in his right and began to pump away at figures on the gloomy street.

He was firing pot luck as he emptied his revolver. His wide shots ricocheted from asphalt. Lucky enough to wing one mobster, Hawkeye heard the fellow's cry; but with it came the oaths of others, as they wavered and dived for the shelter of buildings.

Hawkeye had emptied his own gun with spreading fire. His object was to give the impression that a real flank attack was coming through. Hawkeye succeeded. As his quick shots ended, he heard The Shadow's ringing challenge, a weird mocking laugh that defied all comers. With last stabs from his automatics, The Shadow swung about and dashed up the stairs of the building.

With the gorilla's revolver in his clutch, Hawkeye scrambled back to the shelter of the corner building, ready to open against any who came his way; ready, also, to blaze at the doorway across the street, should mobsters follow The Shadow.

But the street gained a complete lull. Mobsters, not guessing the number of The Shadow's reserves, were crouching in the holes that they had gained.

At the top of the steps, The Shadow formed a weird figure in the flickering gas light. He was looking at the first door; stepping close, he listened. He could sense movement within. The Shadow stepped back. His eyes rested squarely upon a panel of the door.

Raising his right hand automatic, The Shadow poised; then drove the weapon downward with sledge hammer power. That calculated blow could have felled a steer. The heavy gun ended its terrific sweep straight against the flimsy panel just above the doorknob.

THE blow did not merely crack the door. It smashed the panel completely out of its frame, opening a rectangular window that showed the room within. With that downward stroke, The Shadow had brought his gun from the vertical to the horizontal.

As the stroke fell, the guarding mobster swung to aim. Instinctively dropping back as he heard the crash, the fellow lost the advantage that he needed. The Shadow's gun was through the door; above it came burning eyes. The Shadow fired quick shots while his foeman gave response.

Neither aim was perfect; but The Shadow's hand was moving as he fired, spraying while the lone mobster fired wild, frantic shots. Revolver bullets tore through the door just above The Shadow's shoulder; then a slug from The Shadow's gun found its desired mark. The mobster sprawled.

The Shadow clicked back the bolt with the barrel of his automatic. He swung into the room; sprang forward as the far door opened, and pounced upon the second mobster who was coming through. The fellow dropped back, diving for the rear stairs as The Shadow followed.

ATOMS OF DEATH

Other enemies might lie ahead. The Shadow's unused cartridges were few. The master fighter needed no bullets to deal with this surprised foe. As the gorilla wheeled at the top of the stairs, The Shadow swept in past his aiming gun and felled him with a downward blow of a heavy automatic.

As the gorilla sagged at the top of the stairs, a springing figure met The Shadow. It was Cully Freer, lunging up from below. The Shadow dropped away from a revolver muzzle that was thrust between his eyes. He rolled beneath the forward sagging body of Cully's henchman.

Cully's revolver delivered its blast a split-second late. A bullet singed the top of The Shadow's hat. As Cully snapped his hand downward to deliver a second bullet, The Shadow's .45 spoke its answer upward.

Cully rolled to the floor. Like Stinger, like Loco, he was another mob leader gone.

Rising clear of Cully and the mobster, The Shadow hurtled down the steps. He was stopped when he reached the bottom. Cully had locked the rear door and taken the key.

There was a light here. It showed the door to be a flimsy one. No need for The Shadow to bother with the lock. Swinging about, The Shadow leaped three steps upward, to prepare for a lunge. A sound from above stopped him. He looked up to see the slugged mobster raised on hands and knees, aiming with a revolver, down the stairs.

The Shadow could not beat the shot. But he whirled sidewise as he aimed with his own gun, trusting that the mobster's hand would waver. A burst came from the revolver; a stinging sensation came to The Shadow's left shoulder as the bullet nipped his flesh.

As the mobster essayed a second shot, The Shadow fired with his right-hand gun. His bullet reached its living target. The crook straightened, wavered right to left, then pitched forward.

LAUNCHING himself right shoulder foremost, The Shadow hit the door in a fierce drive from the steps. The shaky barrier caved. The Shadow staggered out into the open air, tripped, then regained his footing. A clatter was coming from behind him. It was the mobster, plunging head foremost down the steps.

Gathering momentum, the crook's body came spinning out through the opened door, to roll over and lie sprawled. This gorilla, like the one upstairs, had witnessed Cliff Marsland's capture. Both he and his pal were dead, along with Cully Freer. None of the cover-up crew – the only ones who would remain in New York – knew that Cliff was an aid of The Shadow. Those who had known, were dead.

Blood was streaming from The Shadow's arm. The sleeve of the cloak was soggy. The trickle had reached the gloved left hand. Crimson drops were slowly pattering the paving. But The Shadow gave no thought to his wound.

He was listening to the roar of a motor. A car was leaving an old garage across the tiny court from the house that The Shadow had left. Dashing for an opening, The Shadow cut through to the next street. He saw the departing car turning a corner.

An instant later, The Shadow caught sound of another car. This one was approaching. It was Moe's cab, wheeling around from the side street, Hawkeye on the running board. Moe had spotted Hawkeye backing from the corner out front. He had driven up, snatched the little fighter aboard and kept on coming to contact The Shadow.

ATOMS OF DEATH

Hissing an order, The Shadow shoved Hawkeye in through the door that Moe opened. Following aboard, The Shadow dropped to the rear seat. Right arm thrust from an opened window, bearing his full weight on that side, The Shadow directed the pursuit of Cliff Marsland's captors.

Moe spied the other car; but could not gain on it. The chase kept on; Louie was threading a wild course with many turns that kept Moe a full two blocks behind. The course led northward, into a district where the whine of sirens became suddenly audible.

The fleeing car sped across an avenue. Moe, driving up, jammed on his brakes at a crossing one block behind. Quickly, the cab driver turned off the cross street. A police car had cut in from the avenue. It was heading straight for the cab.

Chance of pursuit was ended. Luck had again tricked The Shadow. The dynamite had blown beneath the street in back of the Reisert mansion. The Shadow's chase had led through a district to which police cars were converging.

Moe's get-away was easy. The cabby nodded as he heard a wearied order from his chief. With no further opportunity of rescuing Cliff, The Shadow was giving thought to himself. Soon he would leave this cab, letting Moe and Hawkeye go their way.

For Doctor Rupert Sayre was due to meet an emergency patient. As Henry Arnaud, friend of Lamont Cranston, The Shadow would soon introduce himself to the physician whose door was always open.

CHAPTER XVIII. AGENTS CHOOSE

MORNING journals blasted big news of the Reisert robbery. Huge headlines gloated in their proclamations. The criminal activities of the unknown dynamiters had become a news sensation. The evening sheets were planning extra editions to keep pace with any new developments.

Detective Joe Cardona was fuming at headquarters. Deluged with reporters, the ace sleuth was at his wit's end. The acting police commissioner had shoved the newshawks in his direction. Cardona was beating off the pests as fast as they arrived.

Worst of all, from Cardona's standpoint, the reporters had been harping on one question. Did Cardona intend to use the dragnet? Joe had given no reply; but he knew that the afternoon newspapers would predict the use of that weapon. There had been a gang fight near the Bowery, last night. The dragnet would be heralded as the logical bet.

Actually, Joe Cardona did intend to put the dragnet into operation. That was the chief reason why he fumed. To suit his best advantages, he was withholding his orders to scour the underworld. He wanted to spring the net tonight. Meanwhile, the newspapers were practically tipping off the mobs to what was coming; and there was no way to muzzle the press.

WHILE Cardona was having his difficulties, two men were discussing the same problems that perplexed the detective. Their meeting place, however, was far from detective headquarters. These two were seated in an office high in the towering Badger Building, near Times Square.

One was Harry Vincent, sober-faced and thoughtful. The other was a rotund, lethargic man who sat behind the desk. This was Rutledge Mann, chubby-faced investment broker whose real work was to serve as contact agent for The Shadow. The meeting place was Mann's office.

ATOMS OF DEATH

Reaching in a dark drawer, Mann extracted an envelope and passed it to Harry Vincent. The visitor opened it, read a coded note, and nodded. The writing vanished after Harry's perusal. It was a message from The Shadow.

"I am ready," declared Harry, decisively.

"You recognize the risk?" inquired Mann.

"Certainly," responded Harry. "Cliff Marsland's life is at stake. The only way to save him is to find out where he is."

"Marsland may already be dead."

"And if he is –"

"It will mean death for you also."

Harry smiled.

"It's a fifty–fifty chance, Mann," he declared. "If they're holding Cliff to make him talk, they will hold me also. I am ready to risk it. I shall give you my own message, stating that I have started on the venture."

"One moment," interposed Mann, with a slight drawl. "Are you sure you read the message exactly?"

"Certainly," returned Harry. "It said that someone was needed to take the risk that might save Cliff. That I was to decide if I was ready for such a quest. Whatever my decision, I was to discuss the matter with you."

"Precisely," declared Mann. "The message, however, did not name you as the specific person to undertake the job."

"I inferred that it meant me."

"It did, Vincent; but not you alone, I received a message of my own. It was probably the same as yours."

"You mean that you –"

"I was offered the same privilege. The message referred to 'someone,' and that is why we must talk the matter over."

Harry smiled. This was unusual. Dangerous duties usually evolved upon the active agents. On this occasion, however, The Shadow had given Rutledge Mann the same status as Harry Vincent.

"You see," affirmed the investment broker, thoughtfully, "whichever of us takes up this duty is a matter of equal choice. The purpose is to begin a trail. Do you remember, Vincent, when we were boys: how if we lost a marble, we used to toss another on the ground to see if it rolled to the first one?"

"I certainly do," laughed Harry, "and the odd part about it was that it generally worked."

"It is likely to do so in this case, Vincent. We are marbles. Another, marble, namely Marsland, has been lost. Our question is: which of us is to be tossed."

ATOMS OF DEATH

"And the decision is up to us?"

"Obviously. And since I am as ready to go as you are, we must come to some choice between us."

HARRY pondered the matter.

"Perhaps," he said, at length, "to be fair about it, we ought to decide who will be the more useful. I mean by that, which of us is the one who should resign from the quest. Take yourself, for instance. You have this office, with its duties –"

"There is no choice, Vincent," interrupted Mann. "If one were better for the mission than the other, one of us would have been designated."

"But our activities are widely different. We are pieces in the same game of –"

"A good analogy, Vincent. You are familiar with the game of chess, are you not?"

Harry nodded.

"Very well," smiled Mann, "we know that the different pieces of the chess board have varying moves. A queen is more valuable than a castle; in turn, a castle is more valuable than a knight or a bishop."

"Yes," agreed Harry. "And the pawns are least of all."

"We are not quite down to the pawn level," chuckled Mann, in his leisurely fashion. "Let us stop with the knight and the bishop. Consider yourself as the knight, Vincent. You can be moved to any spot on the board, used in attack or defense. I, however, am in the position of the bishop.

"There are distinct limitations in my case. The bishop is confined to only one half of the squares on the board. Yet there are times when the bishop can be moved to marvelous advantage; particularly when the player seeks to check his opponent.

"Chess experts have decided that the knight and the bishop are practically equal in value. If one must be sacrificed, or placed in danger, it is largely a matter of the player's choice. Do you grasp the analogy, Vincent?"

"Perfectly," nodded Harry. "You have put it very clearly, Mann. I have been moved into many unexpected squares, like the knight on a chess board. Yet there have often been times when you were never moved into play, just like a chess bishop on the squares of the wrong color."

"Yet I," remarked Mann, "have been quite as desirous of difficult assignments as have you. I should like my turn; nevertheless, I hate to deprive you of the opportunity. By the way, Vincent" – Mann glanced at his watch – "we have plenty of time to talk this over. It is only half past eleven. We have until two for our decision. Suppose we go over to the Cobalt Club for lunch."

Harry suspected that Mann was working out some plan of choice. Therefore, he willingly accepted the invitation. The two left the office and rode by cab to the Cobalt Club. They chatted a while on other subjects; then went to the grillroom for lunch.

It was nearly one o'clock when the agents arose from their table. With a smiling glance at Harry, Mann put an unexpected question:

ATOMS OF DEATH

"Just how good a chess player are you, Vincent?"

"Not bad at all," laughed Harry. "Out home in Michigan, I was picked as the best player in St. Joe's county. And they play real chess, out there. They have plenty of spare time in the winters, between the mint crops."

"Good," said Mann, decisively. "Let us go up to the library. I want you to see the corner nook."

THE spot to which Mann referred was a quiet corner where a chess table stood with the quaint pieces all set up ready on their squares. Mann flipped a coin; Harry called heads. The coin fell heads.

"White," chose Harry, as Mann motioned to the table.

Harry took the white side of the board; Mann the black. As they studied the pieces, Mann leaned forward and spoke quietly:

"The stake in this game –"

"I understand," nodded Harry. "Knight or bishop."

Harry used the Ruy Lopez opening. Mann met it with a customary defense. The game progressed; both players forgot their surroundings in the slow tenseness of the play. Pawns were sacrificed; other pieces were exchanged.

Harry saw himself the coming victor. His pieces were well clustered about his king. Mann's queen was across the board. Harry moved a pawn to threaten it. Deliberately, Mann placed his fingers on a black bishop and moved it in to take an unguarded white knight that was on a square diagonal from Harry's king.

"The bishop takes the knight," asserted Mann, significantly. "Check, and Mate. Bishop wins from knight."

Mann's queen was covering the bishop that the round-faced broker had moved. Except for his king, Harry had no piece that could eliminate the bishop. The game belonged to Rutledge Mann.

"Quarter of two," remarked the investment broker, as they shook hands across the board. "I must be going, Vincent. You will attend to Twenty-third Street?"

Harry nodded his agreement. Mann had reference to an office in an old building where messages to The Shadow were deposited. That was usually Mann's task. Under the circumstances, it would be Harry's.

When they parted at the entrance of the club, Mann took a cab and ordered the driver to travel to Times Square. Riding in that direction, the investment broker considered well the part he was about to play. For Rutledge Mann had banked on winning his game with Harry Vincent.

As a friend of Bruce Duncan, Harry would have had one opening for the coming duty. Mann, as an investment broker, had another. But in his inside pocket, Mann had the object that he needed – a letter, addressed to himself, from Bruce Duncan. The Shadow had included it with the morning messages.

Mann had another letter also. One from Bruce to Harry, which he was to have given Harry, had the latter needed it. Mann had carried it along, in case Harry won the match. Since Mann was the winner, this second letter was no longer needed.

Drawing the extra letter from his pocket, Mann tore it to shreds between his chubby hands and let the tiny fragments scatter at intervals from the window of the moving cab.

The taxi reached Times Square. Mann alighted and paid the driver.

Then, with a quiet air of confidence, the investment broker set out afoot in the direction of the Lambreth Building. As a first step in this special duty for The Shadow, Rutledge Mann was paying a visit to the office of Basil Tellert.

CHAPTER XIX. THE WAY IS PAVED

"Most astounding, Mr. Mann! Most astounding!"

Basil Tellert, his curve-streaked face aghast, was half indignant, half troubled, as he spoke from behind his desk. In one hand he clutched a letter that Mann had given him to read.

"You were acquainted with this man Bruce Duncan?" inquired Mann.

"I have seen him," responded Tellert. "His claim is correct. He was formerly Professor Jark's secretary. But why do you suppose he wrote to you, and not to me?"

"A few years ago," explained Mann, "I handled some investments for Duncan. Since then, I have neither seen him nor heard from him until this morning. I suppose he wrote to me, knowing that my contact with investments would make me the logical person to visit you. He might have chosen some friend; but perhaps he could think of no one available."

"There appears to be no way of communicating with Duncan," decided Tellert, studying the letter. "Naturally not, since he states that his life is in danger."

"Our only hope," returned Mann, "is to follow the plan which he suggests. He promised to call on you personally, once you have made public these facts concerning Professor Jark."

Tellert dropped the letter on the desk. He arose from his chair and paced to the window, where he stared in meditation. Then, turning about, the promoter nodded his accord.

"That is right, Mr. Mann," he decided. "We have only one course. We must issue a statement to the newspapers. And yet" – he hesitated – "we must use discretion at the start. Until we have actually talked with Duncan; until we have him present, to swear to these revelations that he has made –"

"I agree with you entirely," interposed Mann. "Duncan's letter is no proof. It might even be a hoax; or a forgery."

"No, no," insisted Tellert. "It has truth in back of it, Mr. Mann. I am sure of that much; and I realize what a fool I have been not to see the vile scheme myself. Day after day, I have been reading of these robberies; yet never once did I think of connecting them with Professor Jark's disintegrating ray."

"You saw the machine that Jark invented?"

"A crude model of it, yes. But one that had nothing like the power that the present device must certainly possess. Then this dynamiting business fooled me, besides. I thought that the criminals had blasted their way

into those vaults they robbed."

"That was the police version."

"Exactly."

Again, Tellert paced. Then he sat down in his chair, folded his hands and faced Mann. Straightened lips formed an odd contrast to the ever-present curves of the promoter's face.

"In this letter," declared Tellert, "Bruce Duncan states that Professor Baldrige Jark has called in the services of two dangerous criminals, whose names, Duncan says, can be made public later."

Mann nodded.

"Also," continued Tellert, "Duncan affirms that Jark has chosen a new headquarters, location unknown, from which – so Duncan believes – the crooks are making their forays and are returning with their spoils. Duncan also expresses belief that Jark holds a physician named Nordis Baird. That is quite possible."

"Why would Baird be a prisoner?"

"Jark would need some physician to attend him. The old inventor had some strange malady which demanded constant treatment."

"Was Baird his physician?"

"I do not know. That would be easy to find out, however, by calling Baird's office."

Again Mann nodded. Tellert was showing prompt response. It was apparent that the promoter intended to throw willing aid into this cause that lay ahead. Mann tightened. It was part of The Shadow's plan that he should moderate the promoter's actions. That, Mann knew, was one reason why no letter had been sent directly to Tellert from Bruce Duncan.

"FRANKLY," declared Tellert, "I am so perturbed that I could scarcely begin to suggest our first move in this case. Apparently, however, Duncan has given the matter much careful thought. The concluding paragraphs of his letter, more temperate than the opening ones, bring up a point that offers us aid in our dilemma."

Mann smiled slightly. This was the very comment that he had been prepared to make, should occasion demand it.

"Duncan says" – Tellert was referring to the letter – "that Jark is an absolute swindler. That he has duped those willing men who invested in his invention. He stands ready to prove that Jark is a swindler. That is excellent; because it is a line along which we can proceed without Duncan's presence."

"You mean," responded Mann, "that we can publicly accuse Jark of trying to defraud the investors?"

"Certainly," replied Tellert. "This information settles my perplexity. There is only one course now open. That is to break the news that Jark is a swindler. It will pave the way to the very results that we seek."

"It will tell Duncan," agreed Mann, "that we have accepted his statements to some degree at least. It may be sufficient to bring him from hiding, so that we shall have him as a witness."

ATOMS OF DEATH

"Yes," assured Tellert, "and it will not tip off the criminals to the fact that we know their game. That would be inadvisable, until we have notified the police of all we know."

"Yet we are not sure of how much we really know until we have Duncan with us. I feel sure, Mr. Tellert, that Duncan will appear as soon as the newspapers run the swindle story."

"Let us hope he will appear, Mr. Mann. He may not, though. But if he remains in hiding, we can give further news to the newspapers. Our real course is to tell the reporters but little at the start. Enough to make a good story – that is all. We can build up later."

Rutledge Mann nodded wisely. He saw Tellert's expression easing. It was time to bring up another point.

"Your position is a difficult one, Mr. Tellert," stated Mann. "The story will have to come from you, since it would be unwise to mention Duncan until he is with us."

"Quite right," agreed Tellert. "The story will come from me."

"Then how," objected Mann, "will you explain it to the investors? How will you convince them that it was right for you to hold back this revelation after you knew that Jark had left town?"

"By George! That is a sticker!" exclaimed Tellert. His face showed worry. "It will make me look mighty bad, Mann. Only a nincompoop will take a weak middle course. That is exactly what I have been fearing, all along."

"Perhaps, Tellert, if you could attribute this discovery to news received from someone other than Duncan –"

"That'd be an answer to the riddle! But who will stand for it? Who can we bring into this? Other than –"

"Other than myself," interposed Mann, as Tellert hesitated. "Yes, that is the only final answer. I am not keen for it, Tellert; nevertheless, I have voluntarily taken on this duty; and I would be a poor sport not to stand by you."

"This is fine of you, Mann."

"Only fair, Tellert. Our question is simplified. I shall state that certain investors asked me to inquire into Professor Jark's electrical inventions. I came to you; at my request, you tried to communicate with Jark and found him missing."

"Excellent, Mann! We can both state our belief that Professor Jark has turned swindler. Let's call the newspapers at once."

"Just a moment." Mann stroked his chin. "We must limit this story at the start. I think it would be best to choose a morning newspaper and give it an exclusive story. That should mean front-page news, Tellert."

"Yes. But which journal? The Sphere?"

"Too conservative. I should prefer a tabloid. The Classic is the only one."

"The Classic! It is a yellow sheet, Mann."

ATOMS OF DEATH

"Certainly. All the better for our purpose. We want this to be a strong story. The Classic will make the most of it. What is more, if we do not give it to the Classic, that journal will lift from the others and will distort it —"

"True enough. Do you know anyone at the Classic, Mann?"

"Hardly." Mann smiled. "That scandalous journal is denounced by all the conservative club members with whom I meet."

"I never read it," snorted Tellert, "but the stenographers do. Wait; I think there is a copy in the outer office."

TELLERT went out, to return almost immediately with a copy of the Classic. He passed the tabloid to Mann, who thumbed the pages almost gingerly, then stopped with a sudden exclamation.

"What is it?" inquired Tellert.

"An article signed by a chap named Clyde Burke," chuckled Mann. "It knocks the spots out of Wall Street. A good story, too, with plenty of meat in it. Suppose we try to get hold of the fellow?"

Tellert picked up the telephone. He instructed the switchboard operator to call the Classic and get Mr. Clyde Burke on the wire. Then he handed the instrument to Mann.

"You do the talking," suggested Tellert, "while I outline my statement. You will have time to make yours afterward."

A few minutes later, Mann was talking to Burke. He spoke cryptically as he invited the reporter up to Tellert's office. Then Mann busied himself with the statement that he was to make.

When Mann and Tellert had spent some twenty minutes reading their statements to each other, a stenographer rapped at the door to announce that the men from the Classic had arrived.

Mann reached quickly across the desk, and plucked up Bruce Duncan's letter. Tellert nodded in approval as the investment broker pocketed the sheet of paper. He gave the nod for the visitor to enter.

Clyde Burke barked briskly into the office, followed by two pudgy photographers. He saw Tellert behind the desk and nodded.

"You're Mr. Mann?" he questioned. "The fellow who called me?"

"That is Mr. Mann," responded Tellert, pointing across the desk.

"Full name, please," requested Clyde, looking at Mann without a smile. Mann gave the response: "Rutledge Mann;" and Tellert added his own full name.

"What's the story?" demanded Clyde.

"Here are our statements," returned Tellert, handing the reporter two written pages. "If you prefer, I shall have them typed —"

"Never mind," interrupted Clyde. "I can read this." The reporter perused the first sheet; his eyes opened wide. He turned to the second: "Say — is this the Professor Jark — the electrical wizard —"

"The same," put in Tellert, "but we have no photograph of him."

"That doesn't matter," laughed Clyde. "The morgue down at the office has a whole flock of photos showing that old boy's physiognomy. What I want is some shots of you two."

Tellert began a protest; so did Mann. Clyde overruled. The photographers were all ready with their cameras. One focused on Tellert, while the other clicked a flash bulb. Turn about, the picture takers reversed jobs as they snapped Mann.

"Both together, now," ordered Clyde, briskly. "On the same side of the desk. Over here, Mr. Mann. Here, Mr. Tellert, hold this sheet of paper, like you were reading Mann's statement."

"There's nothing on it," objected Tellert. "It's a blank sheet."

"Doesn't matter," returned Clyde. "We're shooting the back of it. Closer – like a conference. Ready, Jerry. Flash, Steve. That's it."

POCKETING the statement, Clyde was starting from the office. Tellert was spluttering. Rutledge Mann was on his feet, showing indignation. One of the photographers shouldered up and wanted their full names. The fact that Clyde had gotten them did not matter. The editorial and photographic departments were separate. Both had their routine orders at the Classic.

Tellert calmed as he gave his name. Mann managed a rather annoyed smile. The photographers followed Clyde Burke. The story was on its way to print, five minutes after the enterprising tabloid trio had breezed into Tellert's office.

"Well," decided Tellert, "there is nothing to do but wait. But I must see you tomorrow, Mann. We may be in for it."

"By all means," agreed Mann. "Here is my card, with my office telephone. I shall be there from nine o'clock on."

They shook hands. Mann departed. Traveling down in the elevator, The Shadow's agent wore a slight but steady smile. For Rutledge Mann knew that he had accomplished all that was needed for the present. He had paved the way for Clyde Burke; and the reporter had played the part of a stranger. Clyde, too, was under The Shadow's orders.

Then Mann's smile faded. His lips became tense. Mann was thinking of the morrow. As Tellert had said, half jesting: they might be in for it. In deeper, perhaps, thought Mann, than Tellert had suspected.

For The Shadow, through Mann, had played a card that the foe would be sure to trump. When the enemy moved, danger would begin. A bold stroke – one that risked a life – yet the only move through which The Shadow could counteract the terrible advantage that men of crime had gained.

CHAPTER XX. THE NEW PREY

BLACKNESS surrounded the blue glow in the corner of The Shadow's sanctum. Outside it was afternoon; but here, no light of day was present. Twenty-four hours had passed since Rutledge Mann's visit to Basil Tellert's office.

ATOMS OF DEATH

Clippings lay on The Shadow's table. Usually, these came to him through Rutledge Mann. Today, they had been supplied by Harry Vincent. Mann, on new duty, was in contact only with Burbank; and even that touch was limited to necessary phone calls.

The Classic had scooped the town with the story about Professor Baldrige Jark. The front page showed a photo of the shock-haired inventor working at a laboratory table. This picture was an old one, taken two years before.

Alongside was the picture of Mann and Tellert, both sour-faced, looking at a sheet of paper which purported to be a statement to the Classic. The features of both men had been clearly recorded by the camera.

Post-mortems about the Reisert robbery had been relegated to inner pages, along with pictures of the dragnet in operation. Other newspapers had featured this stuff. The Classic had scored a beat with its front-page smash, which credited Rutledge Mann with stating that Baldrige Jark had turned swindler.

A tiny bulb glimmered. It meant a call from Burbank. The Shadow received a terse report. Mann had called Tellert, putting off an appointment until evening, on account of difficulties with reporters. Mann had gone to the Cobalt Club. Tellert was at his home on Long Island.

The Shadow gave terse orders. He clicked out the bluish light. His whispered laugh sounded within the sanctum's walls. Evening was close at hand; adventure lay ahead. Yet The Shadow's laugh was grim and mirthless.

HOURS passed. It was half past seven when Rutledge Mann strolled from the portals of the Cobalt Club. Hardly had he appeared before a cab shot up to the entrance before the doorman had begun to beckon.

Mann entered; the cab sped away, leaving the uniformed portal keeper bewildered by the quickness of the service.

Moe Shrevnitz was at the wheel of the cab. Two blocks down the avenue, the speedy taxi driver negotiated a left turn, roared along a side street and swung left on another avenue. He followed with a right turn, then continued a threading course toward an East River bridge.

On the second avenue, a coupe had started up as Moe approached. The driver of that car had followed the taxi's course through all the maze of streets. The coupe never lost the trail. Only one driver in all Manhattan was capable of keeping so constantly to Moe's evasive track. That helmsman was The Shadow.

Basil Tellert's home was in a Long Island suburb not far from Manhattan. It was not until Moe had almost reached the destination that houses thinned and the streets became at all secluded. At last Moe drew up in front of an unpretentious residence. Mann alighted, passed him payment, and Moe drove away.

The coupe had followed to the corner before Tellert's residence. There, The Shadow had turned right, to park in front of a house. Lights extinguished, he stepped out in darkness. Moving across the blackened street at a spot midway between two well-separated lights, he gained the side yard of a gloomy, unlighted house.

The Shadow gave a soft hiss. A man's form moved beside the house. Harry Vincent whispered a report that nothing had been observed. The Shadow skirted a hedge in back of Tellert's house. He reached a vacant lot on the other side. Close to a pile of building stone, he gave a second hissed signal.

This time it was Hawkeye who whispered a response. Like Harry, Hawkeye had seen nothing. But as he stared through the darkness, trying to make out The Shadow's position, Hawkeye spied a movement from

ATOMS OF DEATH

across the street. Faint forms could be seen against a gray stone wall.

The Shadow, too, had spied the motion. Again came his low hiss, this time a warning, before Hawkeye could whisper the news. The Shadow swished softly forward to the edge of the lot. He saw other shapes. The men were cutting through from the back of an empty house.

View of Tellert's home was partially obscured by a hedge, which lay between it and the empty ground. The Shadow spoke softly to Hawkeye, sending him to relay word to Harry. Approaching the hedge, The Shadow could see shapes beyond it.

There was a light in a living room on this side of Tellert's. Just in front of its French windows lay a side veranda. One set of windows was open; it was probable, since the night was mild, that Tellert and Mann might decide to come out on the porch.

The Shadow watched huddled men crouch by the house. Then his keen ears caught a slight sound from the rock pile. Moving thither, The Shadow whispered to Hawkeye and Harry. The agents saw his shape, vaguely, as he twisted about between them and the house.

Harry was to watch through the hedge; Hawkeye, to follow The Shadow. The latter task would have been impossible, even for Hawkeye, for cloudy night formed a blackened shroud that The Shadow used as a mantle of invisibility. But as Hawkeye moved forward, he caught slight, hissed signals. He kept close behind The Shadow.

THEY reached the house across the way. Skirting it, The Shadow and Hawkeye spied two cars that had come into an obscure driveway from a rear street. The front machine was a sedan. A man was standing on the gravel beside it. Both The Shadow and Hawkeye could hear the crunch of his footsteps as he moved along by the car.

The rear automobile was a coupe, parked twenty feet behind the sedan. A whisper from The Shadow. Hawkeye followed to this car. Looking at the chromium handle of the rumble seat, he saw what looked like blackness come forth to cover it. It was the hand of The Shadow.

Noiselessly, the rumble seat came up. The Shadow's hand probed the space beneath. Cushions had been removed. This compartment, when used at all, was required for carrying bulky articles.

Standing in amazement, Hawkeye sensed blackness rising. It settled; he realized that The Shadow had entered that vacant space.

Something clicked almost inaudibly. The Shadow was demolishing the catch that locked the back of the rumble seat. He was doing the job with some small, metallic instrument. Then, as Hawkeye leaned against the fender of the car, The Shadow spoke final orders.

Hawkeye eased back. The top of the rumble seat came downward without a sound. Circling away from the coupe, Hawkeye followed a stealthy course back to the street. Cutting wide, he came in to the rock pile on the vacant lot. He crept up to the hedge and whispered to Harry.

Guns ready, the agents waited tensely. They were to use their automatics only if revolvers barked beyond that hedge. As they listened, Harry and Hawkeye heard footsteps on woodwork. Then voices. Two men were coming out on the porch: Rutledge Mann and Basil Tellert.

ATOMS OF DEATH

Peering through the branches of the hedge, the watching men saw the stroke that followed. From both ends of the porch, attackers rose in pairs. Springing forward, they fell upon the two men and bore them to the soft ground off the porch.

Short choking gasps – no cries. Then growled warnings that noise would mean trouble. Neither Mann nor Tellert decided to fight. Swift workers tied them; the prisoners were gagged. The abductors raised their burdens.

Harry Vincent was quivering from fierce restraint. It was Hawkeye's hand that held him back. Under those final orders, the agents could make no move unless a battle started. Huddled by the hedge, The Shadow's agents watched the captors carry their victims across the street toward the vacant house.

Figures disappeared. Then came the faint sound of motors starting. Cars in gear. Crooks were on their way.

Hawkeye spoke to Harry, no longer in a complete whisper. Harry was to take The Shadow's coupe. Hawkeye would get the car in which he and Harry had come here.

On the way to Manhattan, they were to flash Moe Shrevnitz. The jehu was waiting in his cab, only a few blocks away, ready to join any anticipated chase. But there would be no action from the taxi driver tonight. Like Harry and Hawkeye, Moe would have to wait further word through Burbank.

HARRY VINCENT, on his way to The Shadow's car, was thinking of Rutledge Mann – and of the Shadow's actions.

The Shadow, seeing that shrewd methods lay behind the work of criminals, had thrown unexpected bait before the master who controlled the game. By sending Rutledge Mann to Basil Tellert, by presenting startling news which had forced the promoter to lose no time in denouncing Jark, The Shadow had made it imperative that Mann be abducted.

The Shadow had watched Mann in Manhattan. There had been no followers there. Crooks had chosen to wait until Mann had met with Tellert, at the latter's secluded home. They had bundled Tellert away along with Mann. That was the stroke by which they made it impossible for anyone to give new facts regarding Jark.

Harry knew that The Shadow had foreseen the move. He realized how cagily The Shadow had gambled. The Shadow had played on the fact that the chief of crime was crafty. Crooks could no longer be launched against Bruce Duncan, whose whereabouts were unknown. But Bruce – so the criminal brain reasoned – would not dare issue forth, once he knew that both Mann and Tellert had been kidnapped.

These were the thoughts that flashed through Harry's brain as he realized that Mann still had a chance for safety. For Harry had learned, from Hawkeye, that The Shadow had found a berth in the rumble seat of the coupe that was covering up the sedan on its flight with newly taken prisoners.

The Shadow had watched for opportunity. When he saw it, he had not missed its knock. He had eased his agents out of sight, that he might seize the golden chance that only a lone trail offered.

Responding to the bidding of a supercrook, mobsmen had issued forth from Professor Jark's new abode. Their crows had gained new prey. Another agent of The Shadow – as yet unidentified as such – would soon be on their grill.

But in effecting their swift capture, these henchmen had unwittingly gained a passenger for whom they had not bargained. Heading back to their secluded retreat, they were taking the very master whom they feared –

The Shadow!

CHAPTER XXI. HANDS FROM THE DARK

CROOKS had moved circuitously following their coup at Basil Tellert's home. First the two cars had headed northward, toward Long Island Sound; then they had shifted west, north again, and finally east. This had been a move to throw off trailers.

Nestled in the hollow compartment of the coupe's rumble seat, The Shadow was riding with the crooks themselves. He had tricked the band into a feeling of complete security.

Along an open road, the cars were moving swiftly. Blinking a tiny flashlight in the folds of his cloak, The Shadow consulted a tiny compass on the top of his fountain pen. He could gauge the direction as east. By that he knew that Jark's new abode lay somewhere on Long Island.

Mile followed mile. The coupe jolted along a stretch of dirt road. Its course was slow and twisting. At last the car's wheels crunched on gravel. The coupe halted; The Shadow heard muffled sounds of sliding doors. The coupe rolled forward, hit smooth cement and came to a stop.

Footsteps clattered on stone. Voices growled. Doors banged shut.

As sounds moved away, The Shadow reached up and raised the top of the rumble seat. It was loose; but he had kept it clamped by gripping cross-ribs during the rough part of the journey.

Through a tiny slit, The Shadow saw the prisoners being carried through a doorway. The cars had arrived in a large, stone-walled garage. Parked here were other cars; two more sedans and a brightly painted truck. The crooks had dressed up the old, dilapidated-looking vehicle with which they had hauled away the swag from Reisert's.

There were three lights in the garage. The mobsmen did not extinguish them after their departure.

Knowing that no one was about, The Shadow eased out from his cramped quarters. His figure stretched as he reached the floor. Then it moved swiftly toward the door through which the men had gone.

Testing the knob, The Shadow found the door bolted on the other side. Moving toward the sliding door of the garage, he saw that they had been clamped on the interior. If he left by one of them, anyone coming down from the house would find one catch undone.

Such problems as these did not trouble The Shadow, if he had time to handle them. But the fact that the garage had remained lighted was indication to The Shadow that someone was due. Looking back at the cars, The Shadow laughed softly as he studied the coupe.

It was the only small car in the place. The one most likely to be used if anyone was going out. Moreover, it offered The Shadow the best of hiding places. But before he returned to the rumble seat, The Shadow had work to do. A simple task.

Stepping into the coupe, he seized the knob at the rear of the seat and lowered the back window. Stepping out, he raised the top of the rumble seat.

At that instant, The Shadow caught the sound of a clicking bolt from the house door. Like a telescoping

ATOMS OF DEATH

figure, he dropped into the rumble compartment. The top dropped with him; but it did not bang. The Shadow stopped it an inch before it hit.

KEEPING a tiny crevice through which he could peer, The Shadow saw two men approaching. One was Louie; the other was Pete, the mobster who had driven The Shadow to Lamont Cranston's. The Shadow listened to their conversation.

"You know what the chief wants," Louie was saying. "Matt and Luke ain't interested in any of the old gangs no longer. It'll be a cinch for you to frame things over the telephone. Nicky used to be a pal of yours."

"He is yet," returned Pete. "An' nobody's goin' to figger him back on the job. Ownin' them gas stations in Brooklyn is keepin' him clear of the dragnet."

"But he's losin' out on the bum gas, ain't he?"

"Sure. Runnin' that bootleg gas ain't no cinch, since the Feds has been makin' it hot. Nicky's goin' to be glad to hear from me."

"All right. Hop along then. But don't call him from too close to here. Head across the island. Ten miles, anyway."

Pete chose the coupe. As he started the motor, Louie unlatched a sliding door. The lid of the rumble seat closed imperceptibly. The coupe backed out. Once again The Shadow was undergoing the inconvenience of a well-cramped ride.

Pete found a good road and traveled for about fifteen minutes. The coupe stopped; The Shadow heard the driver get out. Peering from his compartment, The Shadow saw Louie enter a fair-sized drug store that stood on the fringe of a lighted district. Further on, were the lights of a railway station.

Straight back was the road by which they had come. It paralleled the railway and came directly in from the darkened spaces of the countryside. The Shadow eased down into the compartment. Three minutes more and Pete was back in the car.

The mobster turned the coupe around. He headed along the road beside the railway. Pete was whistling to himself as he drove. Evidently he had made the required contact with Nicky. But Pete, as he watched the road, never realized what was happening in back.

The top of the rumble seat was coming up by inches. Long black hands were probing from the space provided. Pete could not see them in the mirror; for they were below the ledge of that opened rear window. The Shadow had particularly noted, back at the store, that Pete had not closed the glass panel.

One thing else. Coming in, The Shadow had noted a turn and a jounce where Pete had slowed almost to a standstill. He had learned its meaning. The coupe had gone over a railway crossing. That was the spot for which The Shadow was waiting.

It came. Pete applied the brakes and swung the car slowly to the right, shifting into second. It was then that The Shadow rose. The top of the rumble seat was heaved up by hoisting shoulders. The gloved hands shot through the opened window. Like claws of steel, they clutched Pete's throat.

The mobster struggled, raising his hands from the wheel to fight off the attack. His body writhed, while the coupe, almost stopped, encountered the rise to the crossing and stalled. In gear, it did not coast back. The

ATOMS OF DEATH

Shadow's grip, meanwhile, never lessened. Pete's body became limp.

LEAVING the rumble seat The Shadow dropped to the ground. He entered by the driver's side, pushed Pete into the other half of the seat, started the motor and went over the crossing.

He followed the road along the other side of the railway. He came to a small, darkened station.

Here The Shadow pulled the car into a sheltered spot and extinguished the lights. He bound Pete's hands and feet; then flicked the rays of a flashlight squarely in the fellow's face. He studied Pete's features carefully, to find that he had recollected them perfectly from the previous time he had seen the man.

Pete opened his eyes and started to make an outcry. A gloved hand covered his mouth. The Shadow whisked a handkerchief from the pocket of Pete's coat and used it to gag the mobster. Prior to the binding, The Shadow had pulled that coat from Pete's limp body. It was conveniently on the steering wheel when The Shadow needed the bandanna.

Pete's only gun was in the coat also. The Shadow hoisted the unarmed mobster from the coupe, carried him back and sprawled him in the rumble seat. The lid down, The Shadow went toward the little station. He found it locked.

Entering required only a few minutes. Inside, The Shadow found a little ticket office and a pay telephone booth. He chose the latter and put in a call to Burbank. Referring to a road map that he had taken from a side pocket of the car, The Shadow gave instructions.

The map was unmarked; moreover, it was one of several, all showing different states. The Shadow had no clue from the map itself. But he had seen the name Almeda on the station at the town; and he was making this call from a station called Shawlawn. Finding those spots on the map, The Shadow had all he needed.

Back in the garage, he had checked the mileage on the coupe's speedometer while opening the rear window. He had estimated nine miles as the distance between the new headquarters and Almeda, deducting approximately for the return distance from Almeda to this next station, Shawlawn.

The map showed only one paved road running out in this direction. The Shadow knew that the headquarters was a sizable house within a woods, about one mile from the highway. He gave Burbank the direction.

After other instructions, The Shadow returned to the coupe. Turning on the dome light, he spied a package on the floor. Pete had brought it from the drug store; opening the package, The Shadow found four boxes of cigars, evidently supplies for the mob at the house.

Turning out the dome light, The Shadow removed his cloak. He folded it, pried open the cigar boxes and dumped their contents one by one, through the rear window and down into the rumble seat which he raised for this purpose.

Two hundred cigars formed clusters about Pete's huddled form. Then The Shadow ripped off the lids of the boxes, broke out the fronts and threw the discarded portions in with his prisoner. He closed the top of the rumble seat.

Using the boxes as shells, The Shadow formed a large container for his cloak. He wrapped the four boxes in the paper and tied the strings. The package was the same as it had been before. The Shadow laid it on the floor; then donned Pete's coat.

ATOMS OF DEATH

There were objects on the seat beside The Shadow – automatics that he had taken from the folds of his cloak; other items, and a flattened box. The Shadow tucked the guns in a belt that he was wearing. He opened the flat box and turned on a flashlight.

The Shadow was looking straight into a mirror that formed the interior of the box lid. His right-hand glove was off. With fingers obscuring his face, The Shadow was applying make-up from the box. His task half done, his features looked rough and ill-formed.

Then The Shadow turned on the dome light to complete his task. Both hands were working nimbly. Little by little, the features changed until they began to resemble those of The Shadow's prisoner, Pete.

Hastily, The Shadow applied finishing touches. He turned out the dome light, tucked the make-up box in an inside pocket of Pete's coat and clicked the front lights of the car.

RETURNING toward the house, The Shadow had no trouble gauging his direction. His directions to Burbank were proving amazingly accurate. His headlights showed several dirt roads veering off to the right. He kept past four, until he found the one that seemed correct.

The coupe's wheels jounced through jagged ruts; over a little bridge. Points that The Shadow remembered. One mile in, The Shadow came to a drive that led to the left. His sense of direction told him that this was where he should leave the road. He drove a hundred yards on, until the car passed between two stone gates.

The Shadow stopped and extinguished the lights. He crept along through trees for another fifty yards; then reached a clearing. Boughs were creaking overhead. Rising wind was dispelling the clouded sky that had marked the early evening.

Straggling moonlight, increasing in intensity, revealed the stone walls of the house wherein men lay prisoners. Evidently an old lodge of some sort, this building had been acquired by crooks as headquarters for crime.

The building was two stories high. All the lower windows were iron shuttered; the upper ones were barred. But the building had a broad, flat roof, a fact which brought a soft laugh from The Shadow.

There were lights in the upper windows. That second floor was where The Shadow would find both crooks and prisoners. The garage, The Shadow noted, was a one-story extension to the right of the building proper.

Softly, The Shadow moved back into the gloom of the trees. He was returning to the coupe, there to make final plans for his disguised entry into this house of evil.

CHAPTER XXII. WITHIN THE HOUSE

"COME on, you!"

Rutledge Mann raised his head from between his hands. He looked up toward the doorway to see a rough-faced fellow who had growled the command. Mann arose dejectedly from the dilapidated chair on which he had been seated.

Ever since his arrival in the house on Long Island, Mann had been kept alone in a little, barren room. His captors had carried him there through a hallway. They had cut his bonds, ungagged him and shoved him in the chair.

ATOMS OF DEATH

Barred windows and bolted doors had made escape useless. Mann had waited patiently for new developments. At last some crisis had arrived. Slowly, the chubby-faced prisoner walked out into the hallway that his summoner indicated. A revolver muzzle jabbed Mann's back. He was urged along the hall.

Light showed from an opened door. The mobster behind him urged Mann through the opening. Blinking in brilliant light, the captive investment broker stepped into an oddly arranged room.

White plastered walls showed on all sides, except where doorways broke the calcimined spaces. A few chairs were located in one corner; in one of these was Basil Tellert, his face drawn and troubled.

In another corner was a flat-bowled projector that reminded Mann of a circular electric heater, built on large scale. Mann, informed by The Shadow, knew that this must be one of the disintegrating ray machines that could eat away substances that came too close to its wide mouth.

In another corner, partly covered by a torn canvas, was another device. It was an elongated projector shaped like the shell used in a field gun. It was more than three feet in length and its mouth was a foot in diameter.

Mann knew that this was an experimental atomic gun, an attempt by Professor Jark to amplify the work of the disintegrating ray. Apparently, Jark had been experimenting of late, for a heavy, insulated wire was attached between the atomic gun and the floor plug.

The tough looking mobster jostled Mann into a chair beside Tellert. As he sat down, Mann noted others who were standing about. Pacing the corner near the atomic gun was a white-haired individual whom Mann knew must be Professor Jark.

Leaning against the wall was a tall, heavy-browed fellow who answered the description of Matt Theblaw. Near him was a long-jawed onlooker who Mann decided was Luke Cardiff. Then a door opened and a short, sandy-haired individual stepped into view. A half-smoked cigarette dangled from the newcomer's pasty lips. Digger Wight, decided Mann.

Matt Theblaw looked toward Professor Jark. The old man nodded wisely; then stepped forward and studied Mann through thick-lens spectacles. Mann met the professor's gaze. He realized immediately that he was facing a man of shrewd instinct.

"Good evening, Mr. Mann," began Jark, with a chuckled cackle. "I regret exceedingly that your presence here has been a matter that involved forced action. Nevertheless, it was imperative that I interview you."

"I understand," remarked Mann, serenely.

"Mr. Tellert has explained to me," declared Jark, "that he received word from Bruce Duncan, my former secretary. The word came through you. I might mention" – Jark's manner was leering – "that I had already formed the theory that Duncan had communicated with you and Tellert.

"It required considerable persuasion before our friend here" – Jark indicated Tellert – "was willing to admit that my assumptions were correct. But I finally convinced him that it would be wise to speak the truth. That advice, Mr. Mann, will apply to you also."

Mann nodded soberly as Jark paused for a response.

"You received a letter from Bruce Duncan," asserted Jark, his cackle slightly harsh. "You were asked to communicate with Mr. Tellert."

ATOMS OF DEATH

"That is true," admitted Mann.

"The letter," resumed Jark, "requested you to denounce me as a man of crime. You and Tellert decided to brand me as a swindler."

"In a way, yes," returned Mann, slowly. "We issued statements to the newspapers."

"But you mentioned nothing about Bruce Duncan."

"No. We thought it unwise until we managed to locate him."

"Very good. Where is Duncan?"

"I do not know."

Mann had come back with a prompt reply to Jark's quick question. The professor scrutinized the prisoner closely; then nodded in satisfaction. His eyes became narrow through their lenses as he started a new tack.

"Bruce Duncan," asserted the old man, "was rescued by a person who calls himself The Shadow. Tell me: who is The Shadow?"

"The Shadow?" echoed Mann, his round face puzzled. "The name is strange to me."

Jark stared closely to see if the investment broker might be bluffing. Mann retained his composure. Jark raised a hand and motioned to Digger Wight. The short man opened a door. Mobsters shoved Cliff Marsland into view.

"Do you know this man?" snapped Jark.

MANN studied Cliff soberly, as the mobsters forced the prisoner forward. In easy, methodical fashion, he eyed every feature of Cliff's face. Then, as if troubled by his own inability to give an affirmative reply, Mann shook his head.

"I am sorry," he told Professor Jark. "This gentleman is an absolute stranger."

The old inventor eyed Mann as keenly as the investment broker had studied Cliff. Jark rubbed his chin reflectively; then turned to Theblaw and gave a shake of his shocky head.

"Neither Tellert nor Mann knows Marsland," decided the professor. "I think it would be best to offer terms. Do you agree?"

Matt looked to Luke, who nodded. Digger joined in the nod. Jark swung about to Tellert and Mann.

"I am willing," he stated, "to release you if either of you can offer proper bond. By that I do not mean cash. I require some form of assurance that will make it impossible for you to betray me.

"On that account, I shall allow you to talk matters over, together. I promise you that your conference will not be disturbed. Moreover, I shall place Marsland with you. Perhaps you may wish to hear his opinions, for he has been a prisoner before tonight.

ATOMS OF DEATH

"Moreover, he is an agent of a certain meddling party who calls himself The Shadow. We know that fact, although Marsland has not chosen to admit the connection. Perhaps, by this time" – Jark chuckled, gloatingly – "Marsland is convinced that not even his mysterious chief can aid him. That is why I think it wise to leave him with you."

Jark waved toward a door behind the prisoners. Digger walked over and opened it. Mobsters made nudges with revolvers. Mann and Tellert went into a room beyond the door. Cliff followed. The door closed behind them; the three men heard a bolt click shut.

A DIMLY lighted room, with three chairs. Barred windows as in Mann's former prison. Seating themselves, the trio looked at each other. Tellert, after studying Cliff, spoke in a whisper to Mann.

"Be careful," urged Tellert. "We may be overheard. What is more, this other man may be a spy."

Mann nodded.

"If you know him," added Tellert, his lips scarcely moving as he whispered, "ask him for a cigarette."

Mann made no move. He deemed it unwise to give even Tellert the true information. The promoter had weakened under a previous grilling, according to Jark's statement. Having told old facts, he might tell new.

"We've got to get out of this, Mann," asserted Tellert. "What do you think of this offer of terms? Can you give Jark the security he wants?"

"I don't see how," replied Mann, soberly. "Have you any way to help yourself out?"

"Yes." Tellert considered. "One time, Mann, I was connected with a certain enterprise which failed. If facts concerning my connection were known, it would be damaging to my reputation."

"How damaging?"

"Very little." Again Tellert was almost inaudible; yet Cliff could hear him as well as Mann. "Nevertheless, I can convince Jark that I would be branded as a criminal if the news came out."

Tellert concluded with a slight nod. Mann caught the cue. Picking up his question, he asked, in a raised voice.

"You mean you might go to prison for your former connection?"

"I do," replied Tellert, his voice also raised. "I was connected with the Augustine Gold Company, Mann. They sold watered stock; and if I mention that to Jark, he will know that he has the goods on me as much as I have on him."

"Then he will release you," agreed Mann. "But why will he do so?"

"In order that I can squash future stories in the newspapers," rejoined Tellert. "That is his game, Mann. I suppose he will also want me to cover up your absence. I can do that for him also."

Rising, Tellert paced the floor in front of Mann and Cliff. His figure was between them and the bolted door, the only entrance to this room. Again in his whisper, as he faced the others, Tellert spoke:

"Once free, I cannot talk to the police. Who else can I inform? Who can aid you?"

ATOMS OF DEATH

Mann shook his head soberly. Cliff Marsland was staring straight at Tellert.

"Write something," urged the promoter, "while I am covering you. Drop it in my pocket as we go back to the other room."

Again Mann shook his head; but this time, Cliff's hand stole to his coat pocket. His captors, after searching him, had left him objects which seemed unimportant. Among them were the short pencil and the pad.

"Shall we go out?" questioned Tellert, in a normal voice.

Mann nodded. Cliff arose. As Tellert went toward the door, Cliff followed. Mann, rising, came behind them. He saw Tellert knock at the door; then he saw Cliff's hand ease over and drop something into the promoter's pocket.

A psst from Cliff; a nod from Tellert. Then a bolt clicked; the door opened. They stepped out into Professor Jark's improvised laboratory.

A STOOP-SHOULDERED gray-haired man was standing near the professor. The moment that the prisoner arrived, Jark eyed them and indicated the newcomer.

"Do any of you know this man?" queried the professor.

No one responded.

"No one knows Doctor Nordis Baird?"

No response. Jark looked at the physician, who shook his head to indicate that he knew none of the trio. Jark's trick had failed.

"I can offer surety, professor," declared Tellert, suddenly. "If you will release me, I can convince you that I shall be unable to betray you. That is, I can convince you that I would suffer more than you would, should all facts come out."

Jark made no reply. He eyed Tellert as though expecting that a game was up. He studied Mann and Cliff as well. Then his gaze turned as a door opened in the far corner of the room. A mobster was entering. It was Matt Theblaw who spoke to him.

"Hello, Louie," greeted Matt. "Where's Pete? Wasn't that him coming in?"

"He's right here behind me," returned Louie.

Another figure entered. Matt recognized the features of Pete. The second arrival was wearing an old brown coat and had a square package tucked under his arm.

"What kept you so long, Pete?" demanded Matt, while Jark remained silent until this palaver had ended.

"Louie, for one thing," growled The Shadow, in a tone that answered for Pete's. "I was out front there. He didn't show up to open the door."

"I didn't hear you honk," put in Louie.

ATOMS OF DEATH

"Why should I honk?" queried The Shadow, in his disguised growl. "That would have meant noise."

"Pete's right," broke in Matt. "How about Nicky, Pete?"

"Couldn't get him. That was another reason it took me so long."

"You got the cigars, though,"

"Yeah. Where'll I put them?"

"Over on the window sill."

Jark turned to speak to the prisoners; then paused again as Matt offered another query.

"Did you bolt the inside door, Pete?" he asked.

The Shadow, back to the crook, gave a shake of his head. He was putting the package on the window sill as he growled:

"Thought Louie was to do that."

"Guess it's my job," vouchsafed Louie. "I'll go down and bolt up, Matt."

This time Jark waited to make sure there would be no interruptions. Then, in a sarcastic voice, he queried:

"So you are anxious to leave us, Tellert?"

"Quite anxious," admitted the promoter. "Let me explain, Professor Jark –"

"Sounds phony, prof," inserted Matt, stepping forward. He gave beckoning signal to Luke and Digger. "Let's see what this guy's got on him. Search his pockets while I hold him."

"No, no!" protested Tellert, wildly. "No, no, I tell you –"

Matt muffled Tellert's mouth while Digger dug into the promoter's pockets. The little crook gave a chuckle of elation as he brought out a tiny wad of paper. Matt pounced upon it and opened the pellet.

"Here it is, prof!" he exclaimed. "We got it! It says: 'Call Shadow' and it gives a phone number. It came from Marsland. Is that right, Tellert?"

THE promoter nodded weakly. Matt looked jeeringly at Cliff, who made no comment. Mann was tense. He had expected some result such as this; but he had gained no chance to give Cliff warning of his fears.

"You'll spill more from now on, Marsland," sneered Matt. "Bring the mob in, Luke" – he pointed to the door to the hall – "and tell them to start the heat. We've got the wedge we want. We'll make Marsland squawk."

Of all the mobsters, only one was present; hence Matt had given Luke the order to bring in the rest. That lone underling was Pete, standing by the window sill. His hands were coming from his coat, as though to be ready with guns if needed.

But this was not the real Pete. It was The Shadow. He was prepared to make an unexpected thrust; to mow down opposition before Luke could give the call. He was waiting only until crooks stepped away from the prisoners. Digger, alone, had drawn a gun, to urge Cliff forward. Opportunity was almost in The Shadow's grasp.

Then, at this critical instant, the corner door burst open. Two men came hurtling inward, each with a revolver. They had come up by the stairway from the garage. The foremost was Louie; behind him was the real Pete!

By some freakish chance, Louie had heard a noise from the rear of the coupe. He had found Pete and released his pal. The two had dashed up, Pete giving his story on the way. Right now, Louie was crying the truth as he thrust his gun toward the figure by the window sill.

"That's not Pete!" howled Louie. "He's The Shadow! The Shadow, I tell you! Get him!"

Hard upon Louie's damaging words came a response from the false Pete. The Shadow's disguised lips delivered a laugh that left no doubt. As he whisked two huge automatics from beneath his coat, The Shadow still raised his mocking challenge in defiance of the odds that he must face.

CHAPTER XXIII. JARK TRIUMPHS

AMID his burst of pealing mockery, The Shadow wheeled from his place beside the window. Quick with his aim, he pressed the triggers of his automatics. Bullets seared forth from flashing muzzles as The Shadow picked the closest of his threatening foemen.

These were Louie and Pete. Unwittingly, they had given The Shadow a break by their excited entrance. Already prepared for battle, the master fighter was quicker than they when it came to the opening shots.

Louie fired before The Shadow; but that was only because the mobster was hasty in his aim. His revolver bullet whistled wide of the disguised warrior. Before Louie could fire again, he was tottering, clipped by one of The Shadow's first shots.

Pete, The Shadow's second target, had dropped back as Louie fired. The move saved him momentarily, for it placed him behind Louie and The Shadow's second gun could not follow to its aim. But as Louie's body sagged, the way was open.

Savagely, Pete aimed at his double. He was too late. Again, The Shadow fired. Pete wavered; his gun clattered from his hand.

The Shadow had laughed with purpose. His jubilation was more than a challenge. It was a stroke of intuition; yet one that carried tremendous risk. For by his weird cry, The Shadow had drawn upon himself the third man who was ready for the fray: Digger Wight.

Whirling away from Cliff Marsland, Digger had aimed for The Shadow. Quick as well as accurate, he had gained a prompt bead on his adversary. A snarl was Digger's expression of elation over his own opportunity. But as the short crook pressed his trigger, a fierce attack lunged him forward. Digger's bullet missed The Shadow and buried itself in the floor.

The Shadow had counted upon Cliff Marsland; and Cliff had not failed. With the sound of The Shadow's laugh, Cliff had swung about and away from Digger. Seeing the crook aiming, Cliff had pitched upon him with a vengeance.

ATOMS OF DEATH

Luke Cardiff was leaping for the door to the hall, yanking a gun from his hip as he made the spring. Matt Theblaw, pulling a revolver with one hand, grabbed Doctor Baird as a shield and backed up against the white wall to gain aim at The Shadow.

Rutledge Mann was piling in to aid Cliff Marsland with Digger, who was putting up a struggle; while Basil Tellert was diving to gain the revolver that Pete had dropped.

AMID this chaos, there was one man who performed most singular action. That was Professor Baldrige Jark. With a loud, fiendish cackle that sounded high above the crack of guns, the old inventor raised a paean of long-repressed triumph. Bounding toward the far wall of the room, the professor reached his atomic gun and whipped away the canvas covering.

"Stop him!" The sharp cry was from Tellert. "Stop the professor!"

The old man heard the words. His answer was a jeering cackle that derided the promoter's cry. With claws clutching the chromium surface of the three-foot tube, Jark began to tug the machine clear of the wall. He was swinging the tube on a pivot.

Matt Theblaw had fired two quick shots at The Shadow. At that instant, The Shadow slumped. Matt sent Baird sprawling against the wall, while he sprang forward, shouting triumph. It was then that the dark-haired crook learned his error.

The Shadow's drop had been a bluff to make Matt toss Baird aside. An automatic spoke as The Shadow's fake dive ended. Matt's leap ended in a jolting, upward bound; from that spring, the crook pitched forward to the floor.

Luke Cardiff had wheeled as he reached the doorway. He had yanked open the door to bring in the reserves. He was starting to fire at The Shadow; his first shots were wide ones that flattened against the whitened walls beyond the weaving figure that looked like Pete.

"Stop Jark!" Tellert's yell was repeated. The promoter had yanked up the revolver that he sought. "Stop Jark!"

Cliff Marsland heard the cry. So did Rutledge Mann. Cliff had finished Louie with a gun rap on the head. Mann was close beside Cliff. Both saw Tellert aiming wildly toward the professor as The Shadow, still weaving, swung in that direction also, while he ignored Luke's spattering fire.

Jark had pulled the atomic gun clear from the wall. It was pointing across toward the outer door; the professor was still clutching the pivoted barrel as he kept behind the machine. But Cliff had a chance to wing him. The Shadow's agent aimed.

Mann was looking past Cliff, straight for both Tellert and The Shadow, who were but a few feet apart. He saw Tellert suddenly change aim; The Shadow must have sensed it, for at that instant, the master fighter wheeled toward the promoter. The Shadow gave a fierce warning hiss; at the same instant, Mann uttered an understanding cry.

Hurling his rotund body forward, the investment broker made a grab for Cliff Marsland's wrist. He jarred the aim just as Cliff fired. Cliff's bullet went wide of Jark and found the wall instead. Then, dully grasping Mann's meaning, Cliff shot a glance toward Tellert and The Shadow. Like Mann, Cliff saw the unexpected.

The promoter's aim for the professor had been a bluff to divert The Shadow. But the master battler had sensed it. The Shadow had guessed what was coming. Dropping as he wheeled about, he aimed his own automatic

ATOMS OF DEATH

for Tellert. At the same moment, the promoter pressed the trigger of the revolver, aiming the weapon straight at the spot where The Shadow had been.

Tellert's shot went wide, despite the close range. The Shadow's quick fall had won. An automatic blazed. Tellert slumped backward and rolled to the floor. The Shadow caught himself and swung about to rise.

LUKE CARDIFF had heard Tellert's cry; but he had not heeded it. Just as Tellert had counted on The Shadow and Cliff to polish off Jark, so had Luke, seeing Tellert's aim, believed that the promoter would do the job that he had so suddenly demanded.

To Luke, The Shadow was the only target. Luke, a poor marksman at long range, had spent five useless bullets. The Shadow's fall, however, had given him a better chance with the sixth. Luke fired as The Shadow rose.

Cliff saw The Shadow jolt. The Shadow's right arm gave. Luke had scored a lucky hit. He had sagged The Shadow with a bullet to the right shoulder.

Wildly, Cliff wheeled toward the door, ready to do lone hopeless battle. As he raised his gun, he knew he was too late. A surge of mobsmen was coming through the door.

Reinforced with half a dozen henchmen, Luke Cardiff was ready for slaughter. With The Shadow wounded, with Cliff holding a single gun, with Mann and Baird unarmed – the ex-gambler saw prompt and overwhelming victory. His men were swinging guns to aim. But Luke, in his desire to finish The Shadow, had forgotten all about Professor Jark.

In the sudden lull of gunfire, the shock-haired professor delivered a high-pitched cackle as he snapped the switch of his atomic gun. Blue coils flared and emitted shafts of crackling light. Behind the shell-shaped tube, the professor wavered the rounded barrel on its pivot. The mouth of the death machine shook back and forth as it pointed toward the doorway from the hall.

Luke Cardiff's face showed sickly. His emptied revolver fell from his hand. The long-jawed man clamped hands to chest. Then, with a sighing gasp, he sank to the floor.

Behind him and beside him, mobsters withered. Like Luke, they were learning the power of a machine that could deliver paralyzing death. Guns clicked to the floor. Mobsters toppled from their shaky legs. Only one of the six – the nearest to the door – had strength to back away. He succumbed as he reached the doorway in his halting, reversed stride.

Blue lights faded as crackling ceased. Professor Jark had turned off the switch. Then, as The Shadow's laugh was silent, there came a different cry of triumph that marked the victory of right over evil. That cry was the jubilant chortle of Professor Baldrige Jark.

THE SHADOW was rising by the window sill. With one hand, he thrust the automatics beneath the coat that he was wearing. With that same hand, he clutched a package from the sill. Still in the guise of Pete, he wavered.

Cliff Marsland sprang forward to catch his chief. Rutledge Mann followed.

Another joined them. It was Doctor Baird. In a quiet, but assuring tone, the specialist took charge. At his order, Cliff and Mann aided The Shadow past the withered mobsters by the door. Baird led the way to a room that was fitted like a physician's office.

ATOMS OF DEATH

Cliff and Mann placed The Shadow on a couch. Baird cut away the coat sleeve and found The Shadow's wound. He ordered Mann to rejoin Jark. Then, with Cliff aiding, Baird probed the wound. Cliff brought the instruments as the physician called for them.

SOME while later, Doctor Baird and Cliff Marsland returned to the laboratory, to find Professor Jark engaged in conversation with Rutledge Mann. Both inventor and the broker were anxious in their gaze. Baird smiled.

"The wound is not serious," declared the physician. "By giving it prompt attention, I have been able to eliminate complications. It was sufficient to put anyone out of action. Yet this patient has regained strength in most amazing fashion. He is resting, in the darkness. He would like to talk with you, professor. Immediately and alone."

Jark nodded. He walked out into the hall and found Baird's room. He groped through the darkness to a chair beside the couch. The old man heard a soft, whispered laugh.

"Again we meet, professor," came a low voice from the couch. "This time, there is no occasion for us to hide our true expressions."

"You understand?" queried Jark. "That night when you posed as Lamont Cranston?"

"Partly," replied The Shadow. "You had no need of the thugs who were present at our interview. By all rights you should have talked with me alone. I suspected listeners, also. Outside the room."

"Theblaw and Wight."

"So I decided, later. Duncan told me afterward that he had listened in the night they came to your home. He heard you conspiring with them."

"But not at first! They threatened me. They told me they had already taken Baird. My only hope was to pretend that I was as crooked as they were –"

"I know. Duncan did not overhear the first half hour of your talk."

"And yet you understood –"

"That if you had summoned those two as aids, you would have settled the important details promptly. You would have ridded yourself of Duncan beforehand. You would have written Tellert that you were going on a vacation, without sending him a letter that would stir his antagonism."

"I understand. Yes; it would have been a mistake to have sent him that letter saying I wanted my invention for the government. If I had actually been crooked –"

"But you were not, professor. You were sincerely anxious to place your great invention in the proper hands. That was why Tellert decided it was time to play his game of crime. He sent his lieutenants, Theblaw and Wight. They and their underlings watched you, constantly. You did your best to save your own life – and Baird's – and Duncan's –"

THE SHADOW paused to rest. Professor Jark was nodding solemnly in the darkness. He still could hear the echoes of the whispered voice. He marveled at the power of this mysterious avenger who had brought needed rescue. A question leaped to his mind. Singularly, The Shadow answered it before Jark could speak.

ATOMS OF DEATH

"Tellert was clever," declared the speaker from the couch. "There was no proof against him. Yet whether he was innocent or guilty, he was the only man through whom I could operate, once Marsland was a prisoner.

"I sent Mann to Tellert. I knew that Mann would be seized. Tellert, if innocent, would be taken also. Knowing that, Tellert allowed himself to be abducted along with Mann. So that he could work fiendish trickery."

"While I," put in Jark, "was still forced to act as his spokesman, thanks to the presence of his hellions."

"Yes. But the abduction was so easy that it proved my suspicions. It took place at Tellert's home. No one was about except Tellert and Mann. Crooks had learned the terrain; too promptly, however –"

"Tellert made a telephone call to Theblaw," interposed Jark. "There is a telephone in this house, used for incoming calls –"

A soft hiss from The Shadow. Jark listened. From above, a noise coming lower, closer, then ending. The Shadow spoke in tones of finality.

"Your move for the machine was timely," he commended. "It told me, at the crucial moment, that you had perfected your atomic gun. Tellert's act was final proof of his evil scheming. I left the field to you, professor, while I dealt with Tellert, the master of these crimes."

Something thudded softly on the roof above. A slight scraping followed.

The Shadow rose from the couch and moved toward the dim light of the opened door. Jark stared at sight of cloaked and hatted shape. The Shadow had donned the garments from the box, during Baird's absence.

"Come, professor," whispered The Shadow. "Show me a way to the roof."

Jark led the course to a stairway. He and The Shadow ascended. The professor unbolted a trapdoor while The Shadow gave words of instruction.

"I know that the spoils must be here," he stated. "Therefore, professor, you can return them to the law. Baird, Marsland and Mann were legitimate prisoners. Their stories, their testimony, will substantiate your statements. I shall inform Duncan of the facts. He will appear to give his evidence also."

As Jark watched The Shadow step to the moonlit roof, the old professor saw the outline of an autogyro. A man was standing by the craft. It was Harry Vincent. Receiving an order from The Shadow, Harry aided his chief aboard the ship; then followed.

Guided by Miles Crofton, daredevil aviator who served The Shadow, the autogyro throbbed loudly as it rolled forward. Huge vertical blades bent to their task. The ship ascended as it reached the edge of the roof. Ascending abruptly, the autogyro rose vertically above the trees.

Professor Jark watched it in the moonlight. The old professor chortled. Then, as he listened, his white hair flowing in the wind, the inventor heard the fading peal of a sinister mockery. Weird laughter reached its crescendo, then ended amid the breezes of the night.

The Shadow had brought victory. Professor Jark had cackled in jubilation at the moment of battle's end. Now, with all completed, The Shadow was proclaiming the achievement that had been his mission. The Shadow had sounded his triumph laugh. THE END