

BROTHERS OF DOOM

Maxwell Grant

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BROTHERS OF DOOM

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Through air reddened with the flaming glow of mighty mills of steel sounds the strident scream of The Shadow's taunting laugh, as he meets the challenge of the evil four who had made their terrible compact as Brothers of Doom.

One after the other, mighty barons of industry died on the threshold of great success. Millions were in their grasp; then came death! From motion-picture magnate to Wall Street millionaire—all were stricken down with the suddenness of a meteor's flash. No warning. Then the unexpected.

Brothers of Doom!

Into each murder scene came these four men of evil—four gray-clad fiends whose masked eyes held the glitter of prearranged murder! Brothers of Doom showed no mercy; their evil work done, silently would they steal away, to plot the gruesome crimes that would be their future strikes.

Rolling high above the creeping fog, billowing tongues of flame outlined the rambling, massive buildings that, flung across the New Jersey meadows, made up the Centurion Steel Co. Its fiery furnaces once cool, its interior silent of the hoarse shouts of workers' voices, these sounds were heard again; the heat of molten steel felt, as new management took over the old company.

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But into this rejuvenated industry crept the menace that was Brothers of Doom. Through wreathing fog, their approach was unseen—unseen to all but one pair of eyes. Gleaming, piercing eyes—that could penetrate the evil afoot. The Shadow's eyes!

The Shadow!

To this Master Crime Fighter had come secret knowledge that all was not well within the empire of steel. Brothers of Doom walked abroad, and in their bloody wake was a trail of blood and disaster!

Turn the page and read of the titanic struggle between this evil horde and The Shadow, and of the masterminds of the steel industry who ruled their empire of molten metal with hands as strong as the product they produced!

Follow the trail of The Shadow, as he moves from strand to strand of the web of crime woven by the Brothers of Doom. Turn over the page and start this thrilling episode of The Shadow's, as he closes in on “Brothers of Doom”!

CHAPTER I. THE BROTHERS MEET

LOW fog clung to the New Jersey meadows, giving a dank pall to the evening air. Distant, above the level of the creeping mist, were the glimmering lights of automobiles, streaking an endless procession across the viaduct of the Skyway toward the Holland Tunnel and New York City.

At intervals, huge electric locomotives slithered along the embankment of the Pennsylvania Railroad, bringing long lines of passenger cars, their windows merry with light. From lower ground came the occasional rumbles of steam trains along the Erie and the Lackawanna, their whistles wailing while their great lights cleaved the fog.

Nature had marked those meadows as desolate stretches. For years, the dismal wasteland had been shunned. Then man had cross-ribbed the area with arteries of traffic: railroads and highways reaching into New York City. That, in turn, had made the meadows strategic ground for factory sites; near to Manhattan, with transportation at hand.

As a result, big, rambling buildings had encroached upon marshy soil once considered valueless. Built upon filled foundations, these structures stood like lonely haystacks upon a flattened field. Far apart, they made darkened, grimy shapes amid the shrouding blanket of the fog.

One of those spectral masses was the plant of the Centurion Steel Co. It consisted of blocky, clustered buildings, that tapered upward to a central structure. Viewed from a distance, the plant resembled a squatly pyramid.

Close at hand, an observer could see spaces between the buildings. The middle one was straight-walled, rising to a twelve-story height. Its lower floors housed the offices of the company. Above were experimental shops and storerooms. All were dark at night.

Grumbling men were patrolling the muggy area around the buildings. They were company detectives, assigned to such nightly duty; and they considered their task a mean one. Two dozen in all, they met in pairs, at each end of their sentry stretches. There, they paused to exchange condolences.

“I'll be off this trick next Tuesday,” grumbled one. “It'll suit me, too. I still don't get the idea. Why've they got a whole crew of us? A couple of watchmen ought to be enough.”

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“Guess the old man's jittery about his equipment,” returned the other dick. “They've installed a lot of new machinery lately.”

“Yeah? And who's going to haul it away? Nobody!”

“Somebody might cop some parts.”

The first dick snorted.

“If you ask me,” he confided, “I'd say that old Marcus Omstred doesn't need his equipment. He'll be licked before he ever gets it working. Consolidated Metals will gobble this outfit inside of six months! They've got a smart man at the head of that organization.”

“Sidney Thrake is smart, all right,” agreed the other. “He took over two more plants last month. This is the kind of grip he's got on Consolidated Metals; and it's the biggest corporation in this line.”

A doubled fist was the dick's description, where adjectives failed him. The two separated, to resume patrol. Each, going in his own direction, was swallowed by the mist.

THE fellow who had grumbled arrived near a light. It shone from beside one of the small outlying buildings. Its glow was feeble and fog-muffled. The guard listened. From a roadway that passed the plant came the soft murmur of an expensive motor, throttled down to faint rhythm.

The noise ended. Soon, the guard heard a slight sound beyond the fringe of light. Gripping a gun, he approached the darkness. A blocking figure halted him. The patroller whispered:

“Who's there?”

No reply was spoken. Instead, a gloved hand nudged the guard's arm. He felt the rub of a silky gauntlet. The hand opened. In its palm lay a shining disk, the size of a half dollar. The token was all that the guard could see. It was coated with a luminous substance, that gave it the weird glow.

“All O.K.,” whispered the guard. “Go through!”

The fist closed. The figure crinkled forward. Watching, the guard saw the outline of a dark-gray shape; almost the color of the night fog. The garb was tight-fitting, although it had a noticeable bulge. The shoulders were topped by a rounded helmet that extended over the head above them, in the fashion of a cowl.

Another motor throbbed. Again, an unseen figure made a crinkly approach. The guard's whispered challenge was answered by the display of a luminous disk. The second visitor went through.

Five minutes later, the company detective resumed his delayed patrol. He liked this night shift better than he claimed. It gave him the shivers; but it was worth it. His regular weekly pay was thirty-five dollars. Fifty more came in a mysterious envelope, delivered by some unknown hand.

That extra fifty was the bribe for letting the strange passers through. They came at intervals. Who they were, what they were, the bribed dick neither knew nor cared.

He knew that there were at least four of them; although that number did not always pass. All looked alike, from the glimpses that he gained of them. Tight-clad figures, bulgy in their dark, grim gray.

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The reason why the number varied was explained by an occurrence on the other side of the steel plant. There, another company guard was allowing a second pair of grayish stalkers to pass through. He, too, had recognized identifying tokens that shone in darkness.

There were four of those visitors who carried ghostly, phosphorescent disks. Always four; but individually, they chose the route that suited their convenience. They had bribed a pair of the two dozen patrollers, so that they could always be sure of passing through the cordon, even if one of the fixed guards happened to be off duty.

Two weak links in the encircling chain were all that the four gray passers needed. Within the cordon, they did not meet immediately. They had a special place for conclave.

THE first of the four reached a corner of the central building. He stopped by a heavy door that looked as though it had been closed for months. He gave a silent tap with one closed fist.

The gauntlet made no sound. Some hidden instrument must have magnified the blow, for the heavy door slid open, noiselessly. It closed as soon as the rapper had passed.

At the end of a short passage, another door glided open. The gray-robed man stepped into a tiny, lighted elevator. He faced a huge giant of an operator, who towered head and shoulders above him. The fellow was roughly dressed; his dull face had a leering grin that exhibited fangish teeth.

“Up, Suda.”

The gray-clad arrival gave the order in a deliberate monotone, speaking through a thin, tight-fitting mask that formed a portion of his roundish headpiece. Suda took the elevator swiftly upward, through a doorless shaft. As soon as the masked man left the car, it went down again.

One by one, three more grim visitors were brought to the top of the darkened building. Each passed through a door and reached a square, low-vaulted room that was located in the exact center of the roof. The room was windowless; outwardly, it would appear to be no more than a portion of the roof.

In the center of the ceiling was a square-shaped opening with heavy, frosted glass. It looked like a skylight, which in a sense it was. Seen from above the building, it would have been taken for one. Actually, the square panel was double. That was proven by the fact that electric lights glowed from within it, to provide the illumination for this secret room.

Those lights could be seen outside the building; but not from the ground below, nor even from the railroad embankment or the high automobile roadway that stretched across the meadows. They were visible only from the air; and passing planes could not linger to identify their position.

The lights had a peculiar greenish tinge, that produced a noticeable effect upon the grayish garbs beneath it. Their color seemed an olive drab, showing plainly against the dark plush cushions upon which the four were seated.

The secret room was furnished in sumptuous style with tables of heavy teakwood; chairs that were thick in upholstery. Though the four had chosen seats that were alike, three had drawn their chairs so that they faced one. It was plain that they recognized him as their leader.

“The Brothers meet.” The leader spoke in the singular monotone that all adopted. “Our long-awaited time has arrived. Each shall take his turn, to strike for wealth. The others shall aid.”

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A pause. Three Brothers understood the fourth. His statement was the expression of their own thoughts.

“Our plans are fully made. Thrice shall we gain. Our resources shall be used for the final stroke, the greatest. My own.”

There was no boast in the leader's declaration. Every word carried the steady weight of fact. All was accepted; yet the listeners did not rise. They were waiting for their chief to flash the news of their decision.

The leader stepped to the far wall. He pressed a switch, as slowly, as methodically as he had spoken. The greenish light blinked off; came on again. The moments of blackness were irregular. They formed a series of dots and dashes, that dispatched a coded message that some distant watcher could observe.

With the finish, the light came on again. It remained steady while the leader resumed his chair. Pointing to one of the Brothers, the chief waited while the designated man arose and went from the meeting place. The leader allowed sufficient time for the elevator to make a return trip. He pointed to the second of the Brothers. After a sufficient interval, he motioned to the third.

Alone, the last Brother approached the light switch. He waited, as though counting the passage of seconds. His grayish gauntlet descended. Final blackness filled the windowless room.

Gauging direction perfectly in the dark, the leader walked to the elevator. He reached it just as the door slid open. Suda grinned as the last Brother entered the car.

At the bottom, the masked man spoke an order. Suda was to descend below. He would be needed no more tonight. That statement given, the Brother followed the route of the three before him.

TWENTY minutes after the masked four had made departure, a coupe stopped close to the battered fence that surrounded the property of the Centurion Steel Co. From it stepped a being as weird as the Brothers themselves. He was cloaked in black; his head was topped by a slouch hat. He was The Shadow.

This master of darkness entered the fog-shrouded premises. His course was noiseless for a short distance; then, deliberately, The Shadow scraped the corrugated wall of a small tool shed.

Promptly, a company guard challenged. The Shadow did not respond. When the guard approached with revolver and flashlight, The Shadow was gone.

Other sentries had similar experiences, all around the cordon. The results were identical. Not one of the posted guards uncovered an intruder. Satisfied with his circuit, The Shadow returned to his car.

It was The Shadow's avowed purpose to thwart crime. He had learned of the guarded steel plant on the Jersey meadows. He knew that valuable equipment had been installed there; that important experiments had been in progress. Such news was often of interest to men of crime. The Shadow had come to learn if the Centurion Steel plant happened to be well protected. He had found all guards alert.

Driving up a long ramp to the Skyway, The Shadow halted his car before joining the traffic on the high-level roadway. He looked toward the meadows. He could see the central building of the steel plant, above the low-lying fog. Its roof was on a higher level than the one that The Shadow had gained. Green lights would have been invisible, even if they had not been extinguished.

The fog stretched eastward, transforming the meadows into a billowy sea. Lights of Jersey City shone from the low-ridged hill beyond, like beacons upon some ocean island. Past that, the sky was lighted with the vast

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glow of Manhattan; but from this point, only one landmark was visible.

That was the tower of the Empire State Building. Alone, of all Manhattan's skyscrapers, it reared its dome above the blocking stretch of headland. Like an upraised forefinger, it beckoned travelers toward the metropolis.

It was chance, not design, that caused the Empire State tower to be visible from this remote spot. No architect had planned the tower's height with that point in mind. Nor had the central building at the steel plant been reared to gain a special view of the highest Manhattan tower. It had no apparent link with the mighty spire of the Empire State Building, more than one hundred stories above the level of Fifth Avenue.

The remote connection was not apparent even to The Shadow. He had arrived too late to uncover the gray-clad Brothers. Their conclave ended, their very existence was as wraithlike as the fog upon the meadows.

Brothers had voted to strike. With each thrust they intended to draw their shrouding veil still closer. That might deceive the law; but it could not baffle the cloaked investigator who had nearly traced them to-night.

Brothers of Doom would soon be destined for a meeting with The Shadow.

CHAPTER II. DOOM DRAWS CLOSE

Two nights later, a group of men were assembled in the living room of a pretentious Long Island home. Despite their surroundings, the meeting was most informal. Northrup Lason, the owner of the house, felt that his guests would be more comfortable when fully at their ease.

Gray-haired and portly, Lason arose as a servant entered carrying a dark-brown smoking jacket. Smiling, he took off his coat and vest, put on the jacket in their place. As he buttoned the smoking jacket, Lason said to the servant:

“Bring the drinks, Alphonse. We are ready for them.”

Lason was still smiling as he sat down. Donning that smoking jacket had become a ritual with him. He observed how the gesture had made his companions feel more comfortable. Those who had dined too well were unbuttoning their vests, to relax more easily.

Most were like Lason—men past middle age, who looked prosperous. They were here for business; that was apparent when Alphonse brought the drinks. A few sips from glasses; then the group waited for Lason to speak.

“To-night, gentlemen,” announced the portly host, “our proposed theatrical chain will become a reality. I know that you have looked forward to this occasion.”

Pleased murmurs from the group. Looks of anxiety faded from several faces.

“For several months,” proceeded Lason, “theatrical stocks have been selling very low. They have stayed far below par, while investors have been awaiting our announcement. We have regretted the delay; but it was necessary. We needed to acquire one recognized property before our organization could function.”

Nods of assent. Every one knew the situation. They knew, also, that Lason had dickered with several theatrical groups. A man of great wealth, Lason was positive of a purchase. Sooner or later, some one would

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weaken and sell. That time had come.

“I was fortunate,” declared Lason, with a smile. “I learned that one man, Lewis Groth, had acquired full control of the Eastern Theater Circuit. He purchased that stock for the comparatively small sum of one hundred thousand dollars.

“To-day, I was told that Groth was on the edge of bankruptcy. I called him by telephone, and offered to buy his stock for the exact price that he had paid. One hundred thousand dollars will prove a life-saver to Groth. He almost wept when he heard the offer.”

Smiles matched Lason's. His associates knew well what the purchase would mean. Lason had an entire million dollars ready to finance his new theater chain. With the Eastern Circuit in the bag, at a price of one hundred thousand dollars, Lason would still have capital to buy out others. Their only resort would be to sell out.

“Groth will be here to-night,” concluded Lason. He picked up a sheaf of folded papers. “Here is the sales contract, in triplicate.”

Hardly had Lason completed the statement, before Alphonse entered with the announcement that Mr. Groth had arrived. Lason sent the servant to bring in the visitor. Soon, Groth was shaking hands with the group.

THE owner of the Eastern Theater Circuit was a weary-faced man, whose shoulders seemed stooped from burdens. His sloping forehead; his receding chin, gave him an appearance of weakness. His eyes had something of an eager gleam, as they peered from above his pointed nose; but that was obviously because he had found a way out of his difficulties.

Groth read the contract greedily. When he had finished, he displayed a tired smile. He turned to the group.

“You understand my situation, gentlemen,” he said. “I had hopes for the Eastern Circuit. I found that they were useless. Every one was waiting for the Lason Chain to begin its operations. For weeks, I have been wishing one thing only: that I could dispose of my circuit at the price I paid for it.

“This offer is more than generous.” He turned to Lason. “You are taking over encumbrances that you can easily handle, but which I could not. You have saved me money that I would surely have lost.”

He drew a pen and signed the contracts. Lason applied his own signatures, when Groth was finished. With a sigh, the peak-faced man sank back in his chair and accepted a drink that Alphonse brought him.

“One thing more,” reminded Lason. “That is the payment. It will bind the contract.”

“I shall bring you the stock certificates,” returned Groth. “To-morrow morning—at your office.”

“Of course. But to-night, you shall receive the check for one hundred thousand dollars. That will complete the deal.”

Lason reached in his pocket, expecting to find the check book. He realized that he was wearing his smoking jacket. Alphonse had taken away his coat.

Lason looked for the servant; Alphonse was not about. With a wave of his hand, Lason told Groth to finish his drink, stating that he could make out the check when the servant returned.

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THERE was a curious reason for Alphonse's absence.

The servant had gone to a side door of the mansion. His drab face showed a pronounced grin; his breath came in deep hisses as he hurriedly unlocked the door. Stepping outside, Alphonse closed the door behind him. He waited in the darkness beside the house.

There came a low-toned hiss, that the servant could barely hear. Alphonse answered it with a whisper. There was a crinkly sound beside him.

Staring downward, Alphonse saw a shining disk of light. He whispered quickly that the door was open; that Groth was signing the contracts. The disk vanished as a fist closed over it. Alphonse heard the Brother enter the mansion.

More of those marked visitors were due. Alphonse waited to admit them. He listened for hissed whispers; watched for those shining coinlike tokens in the darkness.

Others beside the Brothers were about the mansion. Lason's grounds were ample—running along three streets, with a small connecting lane at the far side. A touring car was cruising along streets and lanes, its lights dimmed.

At times, the car paused, while ugly voices spoke from its interior. Mutters responded from spots beside the hedges. Skulkers from the underworld were on duty, covering the moves of the Brothers. Ready for their thrust of crime, those masked invaders were protecting their departure.

Darkened cars, parked in the lane, told the direction from which the Brothers had approached the mansion.

Traffic was light along the near-by streets. The mob in the touring car watched all cars suspiciously. They saw a limousine approach; doused their own lights when it neared the corner. The limousine turned left, heading away from the mansion. The touring car resumed its patrol.

Immediately afterward, the limousine nosed back along the street that it had taken. When it came in sight of the lights of Lason's mansion, a quiet voice spoke through the speaking tube:

“This will do, Stanley. Turn off the lights and wait here.”

The steady voice was that of Lamont Cranston, wealthy member of Manhattan's Cobalt Club. Fastidious and leisurely, Cranston was usually seen in evening clothes after nightfall. When he alighted from his limousine on this occasion, he was totally invisible.

He was The Shadow.

STEALTHILY, The Shadow moved forward, unseen, unnoticed even by the limousine's chauffeur. He reached the corner; sidled from the glow of a street lamp. A wraithlike being, he glided across the street under cover of darkness.

Uncannily, The Shadow located a crouched picket by the hedge. He avoided the thuggish lookout; found a space where the hedge was thin, and worked through without a rustle. Half a minute later, he was approaching the near side of Lason's mansion.

Reports from the underworld had brought The Shadow on this mission. Aided by agents, he had finally traced the location where thuggish crooks were on patrol. Their presence outside Lason's mansion was proof that a

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thrust was due there. There was no token, though, of the robed Brothers who had already entered.

The Shadow knew that Northrup Lason lived in this house. The millionaire was a collector of rare paintings; he had a gallery of them on the second floor of the mansion. It was possible that crooks intended to pillage that gallery. Their constant patrol could mean that they were waiting until Lason's guests had left.

Hence, The Shadow's present purpose was to find a strategic position within the house.

The windows of Lason's living room did not open directly upon the lawn. There was an enclosed sun porch between. It was dark, and offered a good post from which The Shadow could gain a first look into the living room. Steps led up to the sun-porch door. It was locked, but easily opened. The Shadow edged into the enclosed darkness.

He saw a French window, open. Through it, he viewed the thronged living room. He saw Lason rising impatiently from his chair.

"I shall get the check book myself," announced the millionaire. He stopped, smiling, as he faced the door. "Ah! Here is Alphonse. What has been keeping you?"

"I was preparing more drinks for the guests, sir—"

"Good! Fetch my check book before you bring them. You will find it in my coat pocket."

Alphonse departed, while Lason went back to his chair. The Shadow noticed Groth; he heard the peaked-faced man speak dubiously.

"This sale helps me, Mr. Lason," reminded Groth, "but there are others who will not relish it. Some of the owners of other small circuits are holding tight to their stocks, hoping that they will rise."

"What of it?" queried Lason. "None of them was ready to help you out of difficulties."

"Perhaps they have difficulties of their own—"

"Nonsense! They are holding out for outrageous prices. I shall pay them fair sums, as I am doing with you, Groth."

Alphonse entered with the check book. He handed it to Lason and went out to get the drinks. Lason noted satisfied smiles on the faces of his associates. They were counting on this prompt payment that would complete the deal with Groth.

The Shadow had recognized the purpose of this meeting. He knew of the proposed theatrical chain; but had not heard of the sudden transition it had taken, bringing it from obscurity to reality.

He watched Lason fumble with a fountain pen, angry because ink did not flow. He saw Groth, again eager; while the rest of the group retained their expectant smiles.

Then, in one quick instant, The Shadow tightened.

A SLIGHT sound had gained The Shadow's attention. It was from the other side of the living room, at the doorway from the hall. Looking in that direction, The Shadow saw an intruder as weird as himself.

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The man from the hallway was clad in silkish gray. His costume had the tight fit of an athlete's attire; but it was bulgy, proving that its wearer had ordinary clothes beneath. By using an oversize costume, a close fit had resulted.

From the shoulders, the garb extended upward to form a rounded headpiece, like an aviator's helmet. That gear was part of the costume itself. It included a thin, tight mask of the same silky material. The mask hid the intruder's face completely, except for narrow eye-slits.

For the first time, The Shadow had sighted a mysterious Brother of Doom.

In his thin gauntlet, the Brother clutched a revolver. He held it lowered, while he looked over the gathered throng. Men were clustered; the Brother wanted a definite aim. Like a hunter picking out the fattest game in a herd of grazing prey, the masked assassin stepped into the room. He side-paced along the wall.

The Shadow produced a .45 automatic. Carefully, he took aim toward the Brother. One lift of the Brother's revolver would bring The Shadow's gunfire. The stalker, himself, was being hunted.

At that instant, a startling change occurred.

Lason's pen had no ink at all. Instead of borrowing another, Lason looked up to call Alphonse. The millionaire saw the stalking Brother. A gasp left Lason's lips.

Others echoed Lason's cry. Chairs went clattering as men sprang away, stumbling against each other as they sought protection behind tables. Lason was springing with them; so was Groth.

The hooded Brother, his revolver lifted, started a hurried, weaving stride to reach the victim that he wanted.

The assassin's move, alone, could not have saved him. The Shadow had the bulge on this perpetrator of crime; was ready to drop him within the next half second. The .45 was moving with the Brother's weave. The Shadow's finger was starting its trigger squeeze when the next event occurred.

Complete blackness blotted the entire scene. Some one in the cellar had pulled the house switch. The Brother was lost in gloom; so were the scrambling men, the prospective victim among them.

Shouts, howls, the clatter of chairs, made tumult in the darkness. That sudden obliteration of light had saved a would-be murderer from The Shadow's bullets.

Brothers of Doom were to gain success to-night, despite The Shadow's presence.

CHAPTER III. DEATH IN THE DARK

THE SHADOW fired into the blackness.

His shot was intended for the masked Brother, though there was small chance of finding the man as target. At least, so The Shadow thought, a shot would cause the assassin to turn toward the outer door.

Instead, the Brother ignored the gun stab. He was somewhere in the darkness, shifting among the scrambling men. Calmly, The Shadow waited for some proof of the fellow's whereabouts. It came.

A revolver roared. The Shadow saw its tongue of flame. From far across the room, the Brother had aimed to an inner corner. He was firing from among the frightened guests; The Shadow could not risk a shot in his

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direction.

Again, the revolver blasted. A second later, it ripped a third message. Every shot pointed to that same inner corner, a spot that The Shadow could not see. Those arrowlike jabs indicated that the Brother had picked a target; yet the blackness was impenetrable.

Why had the killer fired those three shots with such precision?

The Shadow had no time to answer the question. The gun flashes told that the Brother was retreating as he fired, seeking to find the hallway door in the gloom. Moving into the living room, The Shadow calculated the interval required for the Brother to be clear of helpless men. When the right moment came, The Shadow fired for the hallway door.

The masked enemy had not forgotten The Shadow's first shot. Expecting another, he stopped short of the spot where The Shadow expected him to be. At the moment The Shadow fired, the Brother did the same. He aimed for the porch, thinking that The Shadow was still there.

Bullets whistled through doorways, missing human targets. New shots echoed, as The Shadow and his foeman both shifted, seeking better position for their duel. It was hide and seek in the darkness, each battler clever enough to keep from harm's way.

The Shadow was skilled in such fray. A few shots more—he would outguess his adversary. Crooks had a habit of becoming overconfident in the darkness. The Shadow handled them like a boxer, sparring for an opening. He fired again fading as he did. His foe returned the shot, as The Shadow expected.

This was the right opportunity. The Shadow drilled a bullet in the direction of the hallway door. An answer came, a wild shot from the hallway. Instead of shifting, the Brother had bolted. His hurried dive had come one shot sooner than The Shadow anticipated. By taking to flight, the killer had started a getaway.

THE SHADOW had an antidote for that move. He hurled himself through the darkness, driving straight for the hallway door. He knew that when he reached there, he would find the Brother by the sound of the man's mad scramble in the hallway. In flight, the killer could never twist about and fire accurately at the room that he had left.

Once again, The Shadow was due for the unexpected; this time, a reversal of the surprise that had come before.

Just as The Shadow wheeled through the doorway into the hall, the house lights came on again.

The glare was blinding in its suddenness; but it was apparently a bad break for the fleeing Brother. Thanks to the light, The Shadow could spot him before he reached the front door. That, in fact, was what The Shadow started to do, when a sudden sound made him change his course.

There was a click from another angle. The Shadow heard it, just as he saw the first Brother hustling through the front door. Turning instantly, The Shadow saw the side door; the click had told of its opening. Standing on the threshold was another Brother of Doom.

The newcomer was aiming for The Shadow. He lost his chance to fire when The Shadow turned. Swifter than his new foeman, The Shadow ripped the opening shot. It missed the masked man by a scant inch. The fellow did not wait but ran out the side door.

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The Shadow started pursuit; for this new adversary was closer and would have no chance to do anything but run. Before The Shadow had gone more than six paces, a door burst open and a man leaped forth to block him.

It was Alphonse. The servant had a small revolver; he had been hiding at the top of the cellar steps. The Shadow wheeled so suddenly that he caught Alphonse off guard. The fellow tried to duck as The Shadow lunged upon him. Alphonse lost his balance and his gun.

Clutching wildly, he was lucky enough to grip The Shadow as the cloaked attacker drove him back through the doorway. Alphonse's weight carried him over the top step of the cellar stairs. Unable to wrest free, The Shadow went with him. They formed a whirling pair as they took their headlong plunge to the stone floor below.

The Shadow still clung to his gun; and he managed Alphonse as they fell. The servant's body went beneath. It took the brunt of the fall. When they hit the cellar, Alphonse sprawled. The Shadow went rolling farther, in an acrobatic twist. He came to hands and knees against the far wall of the lighted cellar.

Through sheer luck, Alphonse had come through that breakneck tumble without severe injury. Though weaponless, he was on his feet again, starting a barehanded attack against The Shadow.

AS The Shadow shifted sideward and raised his gun toward Alphonse, he saw a figure that stood beyond the servant.

Grim, insidious, a third gray-clad Brother was standing at a flight of steep steps that led outside the house. The third Brother was the one who had handled the light switch. Ready for departure, he had heard the crash of tumbling bodies down the cellar stairs.

The Brother was taking aim for The Shadow. Only Alphonse intervened. The servant had not seen the Brother. He was driving across the masked man's path of aim. That was a saving factor for The Shadow. He came up to grapple with Alphonse, to use the servant as a shield.

The third Brother fired. Alphonse slumped into The Shadow's grasp. Mercilessly, the Brother had slaughtered his own spy; and with double reason. Alphonse was no longer needed; by dropping him, the Brother could take aim at The Shadow.

The third of the masked clan was to learn how badly he had guessed.

As Alphonse's weight slumped upon him, The Shadow fired. His aim was disturbed by the dying man's sag; but The Shadow had gained first fire. His opening blast was wide, but close enough to tell the Brother that another shot would mean disaster.

Like the pair before him, the Brother took to flight. He made an upward spring for the outer door. He dived to the outside ground just as The Shadow singed a second bullet at his disappearing figure.

The cellar doors clamped shut. The Brother jammed a metal bar in place to hold them. The Shadow heard the noise as he let Alphonse's body fall away. Promptly, The Shadow dashed up the stairway that led to the hall above. There, he sprang to the side door; reached it in time to hear motors throbbing from along the lane.

The Brothers had made good their maddened escape. The cover-up crew was following them. The start was too great. It would be useless for The Shadow to follow.

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Calmly, the cloaked fighter went back to the hallway. There, he heard commotion from the living room. The Shadow stepped to the doorway and viewed the scene.

Men were too excited to notice the cloaked observer. Two guests were fumbling with the telephone, trying to call the police. The others were in the far corner, grouped about a propped figure that lay against a bookcase.

The victim was Northrup Lason. They had pulled his smoking jacket from his shoulders; they had opened his shirt to reveal wounds upon his chest. The millionaire had been the target for the Brother's bullets. Despite the darkness, the assassin had riddled Lason's heart.

It was Lewis Groth who recognized the glassy stare in the portly millionaire's eyes. Shakily, Groth turned to the others and in shaky voice quavered the single word: "Dead!"

SILENTLY, The Shadow glided away from the living-room door. He crossed the hallway, reached the open front door and blended with the outside darkness. Skirting the house, he passed the closed sun porch, to make sure of no lurkers.

Satisfied that the Brothers had departed with all their followers, The Shadow knew that further protection was not needed in the mansion where Northrup Lason lay dead.

Killers had completed their full design. One Brother, alone, had given the bullet thrusts to Lason's heart; but the others were as guilty as the actual assassin. Every member of that insidious group must pay the penalty for murder. Such was The Shadow's verdict.

Sirens shrieked in the distance. The telephone call had reached the local precinct. Police were coming to investigate the scene of crime. The case was big enough to summon important officials. After they arrived, The Shadow could return, to hear their summary. With it, The Shadow might form conclusions of his own.

Police cars were close when The Shadow reached the parked limousine. Stepping noiselessly into it, he watched a small line of cars pass the corner. They rolled into the driveway that led to Lason's mansion.

The chauffeur of the limousine had been aroused by the sirens. Alert, he was staring through the windshield. He was startled when he heard a quiet voice through the speaking tube.

"There appears to be some disturbance, Stanley. This is a poor time to call. Drive along to the country club. I shall stop off during the return journey."

The Shadow had removed his garments of black. They were tucked in a secret drawer beneath the back seat; a compartment unknown to Stanley. Even the chauffeur had no inkling that the supposed Lamont Cranston, owner of this limousine, was The Shadow.

As the big car reached a lighted boulevard, the passing glow revealed its passenger. He was tall, clad in evening clothes. Reclining leisurely upon the cushions, he tilted his face toward the window. The lights showed a calm countenance, hawkish in expression. That face was immobile and masklike, save for the burn of piercing eyes.

The Shadow was considering circumstances of crime.

Behind the death of Northrup Lason, he saw more than insidious intent. The very manner of the murder constituted a mystery. A sort that The Shadow had never before encountered.

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Death in the dark.

Shots that had been dispatched with deadly accuracy, by a marksman who had picked Lason out of a scrambling throng. Guesswork by the killer could not account for it. A dozen seconds had passed before the Brother had started his fire in the darkness. Lason had changed position, fully twenty feet, from the spot where The Shadow had last seen him.

In contrast to the assassin's accurate aim toward Lason was the fact that later, when he tried to wing The Shadow, the Brother had shown no precision. Curiously, that catlike skill at seeing in the dark had applied in Lason's case alone.

There would be an answer to that riddle.

Seeking it would be The Shadow's first task, when—as Cranston—he returned to the house where death had fallen. By solving the mysterious puzzle of Lason's death, The Shadow would gain his first clue to the tactics used by the Brothers of Doom.

CHAPTER IV. DEATH'S TOKEN

WHEN Lamont Cranston arrived at Lason's, an hour or so later, he found the police in full charge. Matters had developed as expected. Joe Cardona, ace acting inspector of the New York force, had taken the job of investigation. In addition, Cardona's work was being aided—or perhaps retarded—by the presence of New York's police commissioner, in person.

Ralph Weston was the police commissioner. Weston was a man of military appearance, straight-shouldered and pompous. He wore a short-clipped, pointed mustache that seemed to bristle as he made brisk comments.

Cardona, in contrast, was a swarthy, stocky individual, who represented the experienced police officer. Joe had a poker face; he kept silent until he saw good occasion to talk. When he opened up, though, Joe was apt to say a good deal.

Cranston's arrival was a break for Cardona. It meant that Weston would have some one to talk to. The commissioner always took delight in impressing Cranston. Whenever his friend learned that the commissioner had gone out on a crime case, he usually came along to find him.

On this occasion, Weston supposed that Cranston had stopped at their New York club and had there learned the commissioner's whereabouts.

While Cardona went about his business, Weston took time out to sum matters for Cranston's benefit.

The facts of the case were plain. All the guests were business associates of Lason, anxious to see his theater chain become an established enterprise. All of them held options on stock in the new chain, the moment it became a fact. Their dream was shattered with Lason's death. He was the key man of the proposition.

Most pitiful was Lewis Groth. He had come here because he was at the end of his resources. Creditors were threatening him with bankruptcy. If that came, Groth's holdings would go up with a single puff. He would lose the entire one hundred thousand dollars that he had invested in the Eastern Theater Circuit.

“Groth was on the ragged edge,” commented Weston. “He had his chance to get back the money, dollar for dollar. Lason's death ended it.”

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“Both Groth and Lason signed these contracts,” remarked Cranston, holding the papers in question. “They constitute a completed agreement.”

“Dependent upon Lason's payment,” reminded Weston. “That was not made.”

He showed Cranston the check book. The top check showed scratches where Lason had started to write with his pen.

“One minute longer,” said Weston, sadly, “and Groth would have had his money. If the check had been written, he could cash it to-morrow, regardless of Lason's death. As it stands, Groth cannot collect. Lason's estate will certainly refuse to go through with a business enterprise that depended upon Lason's own management.”

CRANSTON looked across the living room, where Cardona was completing a quiz of the witnesses. He saw Groth's face, peaked and anxious. The man's lips trembled with a question. Some of the others spoke to him with reassurance. Weston made low-toned comment to Cranston:

“They are telling Groth that the deal may go through. It won't, though; they have assured me privately of that. They may be able to help him hang on to his holdings for a little while. In times of tragedy, Cranston, human nature is at its best. Those chaps took a tough blow through Lason's death; but they're decent enough to think of the fellow who is worse off than they are.”

Cardona came over to recommend that the witnesses be allowed to go home. Weston agreed. He shook hands all around, thanked the men for their testimony. He returned the contracts to Groth. When all had gone, Weston received the testimony.

“The witnesses agree on major points,” he declared. “They all saw the murderer enter. He was of medium height, dressed in tight-fitting clothes of blackish gray. He wore a tight hood with a mask of the same material. Thin stuff, almost like silk. He had gloves, with cuffs that made them look like gauntlets.

“He was picking a target when the lights were blotted. That means he had followers; one sneak was in the cellar with the master switch. Evidently the killer's idea was to intimidate the throng, and he succeeded. Every one scrambled for cover in the darkness.”

“Unquestionably, the motive was theft,” declared Weston. “The murderer intended to keep Lason and the guests thoroughly intimidated, while his crew seized the paintings from the upstairs gallery.”

The police commissioner continued talking. Weston's entire narrative contained no mention of The Shadow. If witnesses had glimpsed the cloaked fighter going through the doorway, they had probably mistaken him for the Brother. In ninety per cent of its details, the police theory was wrong.

The law thought there was only one Brother in the game. Evidence had been accepted as proof that Alphonse was loyal. The motive, as the police had it, was burglary. Lason's death was regarded definitely as a chance misfortune.

Every one of those counts was incorrect.

THE SHADOW knew that there was a band of Brothers. He recognized Alphonse as a traitor. He saw that the motive was to ruin all plans for a big theatrical chain. With that, The Shadow knew that Lason's death had been deliberately intended.

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Nevertheless, The Shadow had gleaned an important point from the medley of facts that the police had obtained. He had learned something about Alphonse's actions prior to the entry of the Brothers.

It was obvious to The Shadow that Alphonse had passed those murderers through. The servant could have done that while supposedly mixing drinks. Going back further, there was something else that Alphonse had done. The servant had brought Lason's smoking jacket.

Forgotten, tossed on a chair in the hallway, was the jacket itself. It had wide lapels; its front was of the open sort, held only by buttons close together at the bottom. The Shadow remembered how the guests had drawn the jacket from Lason's shoulders in a natural effort to aid the dying man.

There were no bloodstains on the jacket. The bullets had drilled above its open front. The smoking jacket had therefore been disregarded as an exhibit for the law. That made The Shadow doubly desirous of examining it further.

Weston and Cardona were going back into the living room. They saw Cranston pause to light a cigarette. He was having trouble with his expensive lighter that usually worked so well. They did not wait for him. The moment that they were gone, Cranston's eyes looked keenly about, to make sure that no policemen were on duty.

Whisking the smoking jacket from the chair, Cranston stepped to a hallway closet. He closed the door behind him. In the blackness, he was as invisible as when he wore The Shadow's cloak. As he hung the jacket on a hook, he reached for a flashlight. That was when he stopped.

There was a glow from the smoking jacket itself—a spot of light no larger than a twenty-five-cent piece. Shining in the blackness, it was the clue that The Shadow wanted. He gripped it with one hand; produced his tiny flashlight with the other. When the flashlight gleamed, the luminous spot vanished.

The Shadow was gripping the top button of Lason's smoking jacket.

The scheme of death was plain. Alphonse, working at the order of the Brothers, had coated that button with luminous paint. From the moment that he had brought the smoking jacket to Lason, the victim was slated to die in the darkness.

Lights had gone out exactly as intended. The Brother, moving among the frightened guests, had looked for a rounded spot of light. He, alone, had seen it in the corner by the bookcase. Others had been diving, frightened for their lives.

The Shadow, from the porch door, had been at the wrong angle to see toward Lason's chosen corner.

With the button as a shining target, the assassin had aimed deliberately, firing a few inches above it. He was sure that his bullets would inflict mortal wounds; as certain as if he had held Lason helpless in full light.

THE SHADOW extinguished his flashlight. He watched the button for a full minute. Its glow was dwindling slowly during that time. It began to fade more rapidly. The luminous paint was of the short-lived type. While Lason had worn the smoking jacket, the button had absorbed light, which had given it a strong but temporary glow.

Left in darkness, or in ordinary daylight, it would not absorb well. Moreover, passing hours would render it less effective, as was the case with inferior types of phosphorescent paint. By tomorrow, the paint would be almost useless. From then on, that button would be no more than an ordinary one.

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The Brothers had counted upon the clue being worthless before the police began to regard the smoking jacket as a possible clue. Therefore they would not return to dispose of this evidence that Alphonse was no longer able to handle for them.

Stepping from the closet, The Shadow became Cranston. Leisurely puffing his cigarette, he met Weston and Cardona coming from the living room. He accompanied them out to his car.

The Shadow had found his clue. Though it gave no immediate lead, it proved the fact that he had so strongly suspected; namely, that Lason's death had been designed. It also gave him an insight into the keen methods of the Brothers.

That clue of the shining button was to prove more valuable, later. From it, The Shadow would be able to surmise another use for disks that glowed mysteriously in the dark.

CHAPTER V. CRIME MARCHES ON

THREE days later, a large automobile entered the gates of the Centurion Steel Co. The time was five o'clock; departing steel workers gawked at the man who stepped from the car. He was Sidney Thrake, head of the Consolidated Metals Corporation.

Tall, pompous, with full, squarish face, Thrake glared sourly. He beckoned to a timid, browbeaten secretary who had accompanied:

“Come, Parkinson. We have no time to tarry.”

Entering the central building as though familiar with it, Thrake went up to the sixth floor. With Parkinson in tow, he was admitted to the office of Marcus Omstred, the president of the Centurion Steel Co.

Omstred was gaunt and baldish. His tired face was streaked with deep lines that indicated overwork. Meeting the snap of Thrake's eyes, Omstred stiffened for the interview. Thrake came to business briskly:

“Consolidated Metals will buy this plant Omstred. Sell out before you waste more money. You have bought too much machinery on credit. You are hopelessly in debt.”

Omstred shook his head defiantly.

“We owned this plant once,” reminded Thrake, in a tone that indicated pity. “We took out the equipment; put it up for sale as a cast-off, never dreaming that any one would buy it for a steel works. You made a great mistake in doing so.”

“I have a good proposition,” retorted Omstred. “I owe for my machinery, yes. But I have the processes of Ivor Yakoff, with full rights to his inventions in durable, lightweight stainless steel. Did you know that, Thrake?”

“Only too well, Omstred. Consolidated Metals turned down Yakoff. That is why he came to you. We did not need him. We have formulas, processes, molds—all that we need. Furthermore, we already hold contracts to construct thirty streamlined trains at a million dollars each. The entire output in that field, during the next twelve months.”

To prove his statement, Thrake brought a sheaf of correspondence from a briefcase that Parkinson carried. Omstred sat half stunned; but he shook his head at Thrake's resumed suggestion that he sell out. With a shrug,

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Thrake turned and strode from the office, followed by Parkinson, who carried the briefcase.

DUSK was settling as Thrake's limousine scaled the ramp to the Skyway. Contemptuously, Thrake was looking down at the Centurion Steel Plant, as though appraising it as worthless. Parkinson was squinting at the financial page of a newspaper.

“Your theatrical stocks have doubled to-day, Mr. Thrake,” informed the secretary. “Since Lason's death, all the small circuits have done well. The financial news states that banks have voluntarily loaned money to concerns like the Eastern Theatrical Circuit that were ready to sell out or go to the wall.”

“Humph,” grunted Thrake. “I should have bought some of those smaller stocks, while they were low.” Then, testily, he snapped: “Put away that newspaper, Parkinson! Do not bother me with small matters! I am thinking about steel!”

Thrake made a sweeping gesture toward the meadows. The wave of his hand included Omstred, along with the Centurion Steel plant.

“Equipped with new machinery,” snorted Thrake. “Bought from factories that I control. When they demand their payment, Omstred will not have it. He will be thrown into bankruptcy! I shall take over his plant, as it stands!

“Its assets will include Yakroff's processes and inventions. They will be mine, even though I do not need them. That is business, Parkinson; big business. I gave Omstred my final warning. He should have heeded it.”

As the big car rolled eastward, into the gathering dusk that shrouded the Skyway, Thrake added:

“If Omstred investigated closely enough, he would learn that I already own the property that he thinks is his.”

WHATEVER the financial status of the Centurion Steel Co., it was a fact that the premises lay under a powerful domination. That was demonstrated four hours later, after darkness had settled completely. There was no fog on this occasion; but the thick curtain of night was sufficient to hide the insidious visitors who arrived there.

Soft-purring motors stopped short of the barricading fence. Dark-clad figures crept inward through the thick blackness. Picking the spots where bribed guards had gone on duty, Brothers of Doom displayed their luminous tokens.

Passed through the patrolling cordon, they entered the central building one by one, to reach the secret elevator where Suda was on duty. Lifted to the secret meeting room between the roof levels, the Brothers held conclave beneath the greenish light.

The masked leader spoke in the singular monotone that each Brother used. Despite the steady drum of his words, a sense of elation was present.

“Our first thrust brought success,” announced the chief Brother. “The death of Northrup Lason has already brought fruit. Our profit, fully ripened, will be half a million dollars. That is the first contribution to our required fund!

“The time has arrived for our second thrust. We shall strike to-morrow, exactly as we have planned. Again, we shall be assured of success.”

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The leader paused emphatically. Two of the listening Brothers began to speak. Their chief silenced them with a wave of his gauntlet-clad hand.

“I have not forgotten The Shadow,” he declared. “He interfered with our past endeavor. He will not interfere again. We know that his only trail must have come through watching the crew that we held in reserve.

“That crew is useful. Therefore, we shall use it, as before. This time, however, those followers will be instructed—and aided—to accomplish a single purpose. It will be their task to dispose of The Shadow after our own work is completed.”

With that statement, the masked leader went to the wall switch. He began to blink with the lights a dot-dash message that flashed a signal from the skylight above. The other Brothers watched the coded signal. In low-voiced monotones, they expressed their approval. Their leader's plan was a sure one.

WITH the finish of the signals, the Brothers departed. This time, there was no cloaked intruder arriving at the steel plant after they had left it. The Shadow believed that all was well upon the Jersey meadows.

There was an aftermath, however, to the meeting of the Brothers. It occurred in Manhattan, half an hour after the green-light signal had flashed. A tuxedo-clad passenger stepped from a taxicab on a side street near Broadway. He entered a small cigar store and nodded pleasantly to the proprietor, who ushered him into a rear room.

There, the tuxedoed man found a doorway into a darkened courtyard. He ascended an inside fire tower at the back of an apartment building. When he reached the fourth floor, he stepped aside and tapped lightly on the back door of an apartment. That door opened conveniently to a platform from the tower.

The door opened cautiously. The tuxedoed man whispered:

“It's Case Hurrin. I want to see Mocker Shebly.”

“Case” was admitted. Conducted through the darkened apartment, he reached a lighted front room, where a big man was seated in an easy-chair. The two began their conference.

Case Hurrin was a smooth-looking customer. His nickname was well earned. Case was noted for his ability to cover any one, any place, at any time. He had ways of getting out of sight, that helped him in his spy work. Hence, Case frequently sold his services at a high price, to big-shots in the underworld.

“Mocker” Shebly, bore his nickname because of the many unappreciated tricks that he had played upon the police. The law had tried to brand Mocker as the head of a band of organized hoodlums; but proof had never been obtainable.

The reason was that Mocker was careful in his choice of followers. He hired thugs on a short-term basis. The personnel of his outfit changed completely with each successive month.

“Just got a flash from the Four,” confided Case. “The Shadow was in it, there at Lason's. He must have tagged some of your torpedoes.”

“I know it,” returned Mocker, gruffly. “That's why I sent three of them out to Chi. Take a gander at this list, Case. It tells the guys I've got on a string. I've marked the three new ones that I picked.”

Case shifted his wiry figure in the armchair. His lean face lighted as his slitty eyes checked the names.

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Mocker, hard-faced, with outthrust lower lip and wide flat nose, sat watching the go-between's expression.

"They're jake," decided Case. "Say, though—you might have taken on Cliff Marsland. He's a real bet!"

"The others were first in line," replied Mocker. "Cliff comes next. I'll use him with the next shift."

Case pulled a slip of paper from his vest pocket and handed it to Mocker. The hard-faced crook read it. His grin was a gold-toothed one, as he burned the instruction sheet and poked the ashes to bits with the point of a pencil.

"The Brothers don't take chances," was Mocker's comment. "I don't blame them. They're wise, the four of them. These are swell orders, Case!"

"I thought you'd like them."

"I do. It means covering the Brothers and foxing The Shadow at the same time. Leave it to me, Case."

WITH Mocker's assurance, Case departed by the route along which he had come. He picked up a cab near the cigar store on the rear street and rode away for a midnight sojourn at a night club. Case was pleased with the way matters had worked out.

Perhaps he would have been less joyful, had he remained longer in that back street. Five minutes after Case's departure, a cloaked figure moved past the cigar store, just as its proprietor was closing for the night.

When the lights went out, the shape came closer; it paused a few moments, then resumed patrol. Near the next corner, that strangely gliding form was faintly visible for a fleeting second. After that, it merged with darkness.

The Shadow was covering the domain of Mocker Shebly.

The Brothers were right in their supposition that The Shadow had trailed them through members of Mocker's crew. They had made the guess that The Shadow had actually located Mocker's own whereabouts. Again, they were right.

The Brothers had risked one thing only. They took the chance that The Shadow had not learned that Case Hurrin was the go-between. There, perhaps, the Brothers had been favored by luck; but, for the present, they had made another successful guess.

The Shadow's one trail still existed.

By watching Mocker, he would know when the Brothers moved to crime. Two positive reasons supported The Shadow's belief. First, the Brothers could not afford to be without a supporting band. Second, there was no outfit that could compare with Mocker's.

Since Mocker had made changes in his crew, the Brothers would have reason to depend upon him again. They would certainly do so, if The Shadow gave no inkling of his presence.

Using his accustomed caution, The Shadow was keeping entirely out of sight while he covered Mocker's headquarters. He was satisfied that the policy would bring results. When Mocker started on another expedition, The Shadow would follow, unseen.

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Perhaps The Shadow would have changed his own plans, had he known how far the Brothers had gone with theirs. Brothers of Doom had given The Shadow full credit for his ways of strategy. They had tipped off Mocker to be ready for what was to come.

Thanks to Case Hurrin's lucky evasion of The Shadow's patrol, the scheme of the Brothers remained hidden. The Shadow would learn it when the right time came. That time would be when the trap had closed.

The Brothers intended a thrust against another helpless victim. With it, they expected—through Mocker—to insure The Shadow's doom.

CHAPTER VI. THE NEXT NIGHT

WEDGED between two downtown buildings stood a smaller structure that looked like a bank. Its narrow front displayed barred windows. A bronze plate by the heavy, deep-set door bore the name:

FROYD & CO.

In a rear office of that low-roofed building, a group of men assembled, early the next evening. One was seated at a desk; the others had chosen chairs at random. The man at the desk was Elwell Froyd, head of the financial house that bore his name.

“I called this directors' meeting,” announced Froyd, in a crisp tone that suited his dry, withery face, “at the suggestion of our secretary, Mr. Ralph Vanible.”

With that, Froyd indicated a man on his left. Vanible was tall, middle-aged. His long, loose-jowled face was as solemn as an undertaker's. There was gloominess about his gaze that troubled the other directors.

Though Froyd completely controlled his own financial business, Vanible and the other directors were important. They received fees for their services; most of them held small shares in the enterprise. Furthermore, they enjoyed the prestige that went with being a director in Froyd & Co.

“We are floating some new foreign issues,” explained Froyd. “Because of that, similar offerings from smaller financial houses have frozen. If we proceed as planned, those rival issues will remain at a standstill.”

There were pleased smiles from all the directors except Vanible. None had need to speak his thoughts. Their verdict was that Froyd should proceed with the sale of his new issues and leave the owners of rival securities holding the bag.

Froyd understood how his listeners felt.

“I am anxious to proceed,” he declared crisply. “Prompt action will crowd the other issues off the market. Delay would cause those competing securities to flourish. To-day, however, Mr. Vanible went over the assets of this company.”

Froyd swept his hand toward a big vault in the corner of the room. The directors knew that it contained a large amount of cash and stacks of securities, some negotiable. Those represented the holdings of Froyd & Co.

“Mr. Vanible found that we are overloaded with certain doubtful assets,” added Froyd. “He wonders what might happen if we were forced to liquidate them.”

Pleased looks turned to worry. Froyd became uneasy. It was Vanible who came to Froyd's rescue. The

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solemn-faced man spoke:

“No cause for alarm, gentlemen.” Such words were soothing, from a pessimist like Vanible. “It is simply a case for precaution. It would be very unwise to advertise the present condition of this company. Such a step would shake the confidence of investors.”

Nods of agreement. The directors knew that strong houses had frequently avoided failure through silence during dangerous periods. Still, there would be the possibility of rumor. Vanible came to that troublesome subject.

“Thousands of shares of other securities have been sold,” he reminded. “Their purchasers—whoever they are—would profit greatly by the failure of Froyd & Co. We must do more than merely avoid rumor. We must spike it.

“We can accomplish that by absorbing Froyd’s doubtful assets. We can lend him a quarter million, taking his frozen assets as security. Then the condition of Froyd & Co. may be advertised openly.”

The suggestion left the listeners breathless. Then they began to buzz among themselves. They popped questions to Vanible, who began to answer them from memory. Froyd opened the big vault; brought out documents and stacks of securities for Vanible’s reference.

WHILE this was in progress, Froyd and the directors thought nothing of what was going on outside the building. They had reason to feel secure, for the establishment was strongly protected. It was equipped with a burglar-alarm system, that included sliding doors and gateways throughout the ground floor.

Two watchmen were on duty. One at the outer door, the other at an inner post where the alarm system was located. Unfortunately, the inner watchman could not see the man who handled the big front door.

At that moment, the front watchman was opening the door. He had no legitimate reason for so doing, since Froyd and all the directors were in the building, with no more visitors expected. The cause for the opening of the door was explained when a hand moved in the darkness outside.

A grayish gauntlet opened. From its palm shone a luminous disk. The watchman stepped back to admit a Brother of Doom.

That masked man was not the only one who passed the bribed watchman. Others followed, each with a shining token. Inside, they congregated, sneaking through the high-roofed spaces that led to Froyd’s own office. Occasionally, they passed through short, connecting passages; but always, they avoided the place where the inner watchman was stationed.

Meanwhile, the bribed man at the outside door took glances at the street, as though that were part of his duty. After ten minutes, he saw a touring car roll past. It turned a corner; a short while later, it made another trip along the secluded thoroughfare.

When the car was out of sight, the watchman went back into the building; but left the door unlocked. He approached a little alcove and lifted the receiver of a wall telephone. He pressed a button to signal Froyd’s office.

“Some suspicious-looking people out front, Mr. Froyd,” reported the watchman. “Shall I notify the police?”

While the watchman was speaking, the unlocked door nudged slowly inward. A cloaked shape emerged from

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the darkness. Silently, The Shadow glided behind the watchman's back and reached the gloomy interior of the building. When the watchman finished his call, he saw the door as he had left it.

IN the rear office, Froyd was explaining the telephone call to the directors.

“Henry reports suspicious characters outside,” said the financier. “Bah! He is stupid, that watchman. He had no reason to open the big door at all. I told him to lock it and keep it that way.” Froyd used the telephone to call the inside watchman:

“Kater, contact Henry at the front door. Make sure that he has barred it. Check the main room when you return to your post.”

The main portion of the floor was like a banking room, with various partitions. There were various passages that fed to small offices and other department rooms. These were lighted only at a few places; as a result, they formed a gloomy maze.

The main room had a balcony that extended all around it, like a mezzanine. There were a few lights in the main room; its white marble floor was plainly visible from Kater's watch-post, which was on the far side.

The Shadow was entering the big room from a front passage, just as Kater came across the floor. Gliding beneath the shelter of the balcony, the cloaked visitor chose a darkened patch and remained there, unnoticed by the watchman. The Shadow waited until Kater returned from his trip to the front door.

The Shadow surmised that Kater had gone to make sure the front door was locked; that done, the watchman was returning to the post, where the alarm controls were located. That made it bad, in a way, for Henry, for The Shadow suspected the front watchman to be crooked.

To arrive here, The Shadow had trailed Mocker Shebly and his crew. Logically, that outfit should have come ahead of the Brothers. Henry's game, as The Shadow saw it, was to report suspicious characters; then let them overpower him. That would give him an alibi.

Thinking in terms of Mocker, The Shadow remained unaware that the Brothers had already entered.

Whatever new fakery Henry tried, The Shadow barred Mocker from the conference in Froyd's office. He was prepared to block off crime.

So The Shadow supposed. He had not yet learned that the Brothers, going ahead of their interference, were already at Froyd's door. The Shadow might have discovered that, had he not been delayed by Kater's approach and return.

Nevertheless, The Shadow decided that the closer his position to the rear office, the better. With that decision, he began a stealthy trip toward the back of the building.

IT was the promptness of the Brothers that made The Shadow's trip too late. In Froyd's office, the directors had satisfied themselves on the figures that showed the condition of the banking house. They were anxious to lend Froyd money; but they knew that they were taking doubtful assets as security. It was Vanible who paved the way to action.

“We are taking no chances,” affirmed the solemn-faced man. “We are lending this money on the reputation of Froyd & Co. By strengthening the concern, we insure the repayment of the loans. I am willing to set the example for the rest.”

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From his pocket, Vanible drew a check book. He wrote out a check for fifty thousand dollars, payable to Elwell Froyd. Others, looking over his shoulder, saw the amount. They were willing to go as heavily as Vanible. Other check books were coming out before Vanible had finished writing. The solemn man was just about to apply his signature when he heard a gasp from Froyd.

The financier had raised up from his chair. He was staring across the desk, looking toward the door. There, Vanible saw the cause of Froyd's rigid pose. Just within the doorway stood a tight-clad figure in dark gray. Eyes peered through a slitted mask that formed part of a rounded headgear.

The Brother of Doom was gesturing with a big revolver. His calculating eyes were gleaming toward the bundles of securities that lay on Froyd's desk. Vanible dropped his pen and shrank back. The other directors gaped; they raised their hands. The Brother began to look around the group. Froyd saw opportunity. He reached for an opened desk drawer; pulled out a gun of his own.

That move was the financier's last.

The Brother of Doom leveled his gauntleted fist. He fired straight-aimed shots while Froyd's hand was still fumbling with the revolver that it had produced. Three bullets found the financier's breast.

The first slug jolted Froyd; the second sagged him. The third bullet drilled his heart as he was sprawling face-forward across the desk top.

Standing with smoking revolver, the murderous Brother of Doom centered his greedy gaze upon the spoils that lay on the desk beside Froyd's body. Robbery, apparently, was his motive; he was playing that part for the benefits of witnesses.

Actually, the Brother had accomplished something far more disastrous. He had forced the unfinished business of this conference into public light. With Froyd dead, the directors could not go through with their arrangements.

Those bullets not only meant the death of Elwell Froyd. They spelled the collapse of Froyd & Co.

WHAT the murderer wanted was a chance to flee without going through the burdensome pretense of a robbery. He knew, like the directors, that Froyd's cash assets were comparatively small. Looking for opportune departure, the Brother found it.

Froyd's gun had bounced across the desk toward Vanible. The solemn man was grabbing for it, at the same time shouting to others to seize the murderer. Two men near the door were bold enough to start for the masked killer.

Sidestepping them, the Brother whipped the key from the door. He sprang outside, yanking the door shut behind him. He was quick enough to insert the key and lock the door before the directors could open it. Vanible's shots came, belated.

The Brother started a sneering chuckle as he turned from the door. The sound died as he faced about. He saw a figure that loomed upon him from the nearest passage. The muzzle of a .45 was looming toward his eyes.

The Brother of Doom was covered by The Shadow.

CHAPTER VII. THE TRAP REVERSED

THE SHADOW had trapped a criminal whose hands were soiled with guilt. Froyd's murderer stood threatened by prompt vengeance. The schemes of the evil Brothers were on the brink of failure. Despite their precautions, The Shadow had outwitted them.

They had expected The Shadow, those four. That was why certain of the Brothers had remained out of sight, while the chosen one went into the office to slay Froyd. Lurking Brothers, however, had failed to note The Shadow's approach.

They were in spots of darkness, watching the office door. There, they saw their masked companion helpless before The Shadow's aim. Even their own spots were insecure. If they moved; they would give away their position. They knew what that would mean.

Death first for the masked man at the office door; then the same dose for those who tried to help him. The Shadow had stopped short at a vantage point. The game was in his hands; knowing that Mocker and the mob had not yet entered, The Shadow had time to deal with the Brothers as he chose.

Only luck could save the Brothers. It came to their aid in this emergency, from a source that neither they nor The Shadow had expected.

The Shadow had allowed for the possible arrival of Henry, the guard. By a side turn, he was ready in case the crooked watchman came dashing through from the front. The man whom The Shadow had discounted was Kater. The loyal watchman should still be at his post. For some reason, Kater had left there.

From a side passage, Kater saw The Shadow; he made a wild lurch toward the figure in black. The Shadow straight-armed him, but twisted with the move. It was a break for the Brother at the office door. The murderer saw a route that promised shelter. He took it.

Kater sprawled under The Shadow's shove. Leaping out into the light, The Shadow fired two shots after the first Brother. The killer turned a corner just as The Shadow fired. A second Brother blazed bullets in The Shadow's direction. The shots were wild; The Shadow turned and stabbed replies as the second foeman ducked.

A third Brother did not wait. He was on the run before The Shadow neared him. Shots barked here and there; bullets ricocheted from the walls of passages and spots beneath the balcony. With a second gun unlimbered, The Shadow was blocking off the escape of the masked Brothers.

In that chaos, Kater found his feet and ran madly back to the alarm controls. Henry was there. That explained why Kater had gone after The Shadow. Henry, however, had failed in the duty that he had taken over. He should have yanked the alarm switch and started the sliding doors.

Angrily, Kater shoved Henry aside and reached for the controls. He pulled the first one; an alarm began to clang. But before Kater could start the doors shut, Henry slugged him.

When Kater sprawled, Henry took over. He raised a loud shout that the Brothers could hear.

ONE Brother made a dive from cover; cut through a passage that offered escape. The Shadow had looked forward to that move. With a surge of his own, he came through a joining passage to block the crook's escape.

The Shadow was aiming as the Brother bounded into view; but before The Shadow could fire, a steel door

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slithered across the passage in front of him.

Wheeling about, The Shadow saw a second Brother trying to box him. As The Shadow fired, the crook hurdled away. After him, The Shadow took aim as the Brother dived for a corridor between two offices. As The Shadow fired, his bullets were blocked. They thudded against another door of steel that slid shut just in time.

There was still a route that led to the front. The third Brother was taking it. The Shadow launched after him; again, the time space favored a departing crook. Henry yanked another switch; the Brother got by a barrier like a rat squeezing through a hole. The Shadow was halted by a sheet of steel.

Vanible and the directors were still locked in Froyd's office. The main floor was deserted except for The Shadow. He was boxed at last, but in a large-sized space. Henry had closed every steel door. There were other switches, though, that the treacherous watchman intended to handle.

Two of those controlled steel gates that could block the stairs to the balcony. A third took care of another gate that protected the boothlike space where Henry crouched above the sagged figure of Kater. That space had a gate instead of a door, in case the inside watchman wanted to use it as a pill-box. There was an alcove to which he could retreat if under fire.

Henry was about to close the balcony stairways when he saw The Shadow rounding a row of telephone booths that were used by Froyd's sales department. The Shadow was coming for the safety zone where Henry stood. The crook forgot the stairway gates; made a grab to close his own. This time, he was too late.

The Shadow fired a quick-timed shot. It clipped the watchman's forearm. The fellow came staggering from security; he rallied to grapple with The Shadow. There was frantic power in Henry's wild lunge. He forced The Shadow back to the open floor; there, the cloaked fighter prepared to down the watchman without further ado.

An interruption came from above. Amid the continued clangor of the alarm, glass shattered. A crew of huskies sprang in through a broken skylight, to reach the balcony. Mocker and his thugs were on the job. Taking the roof as their route, they were on hand to finish The Shadow.

This was the pay-off of the trap. Brothers of Doom had thoughts of more than mere escape, when they had piled out past the sliding doors.

Mocker's cover-up crew had changed its game. That thuggish outfit had become a death squad. Finding vantage points along the balcony rail, gunmen were taking The Shadow as their target. Some might fall before their bullets riddled The Shadow; but those shock troops from gangdom had agreed to take the individual risk. Getting The Shadow was worth it.

THE SHADOW held Henry helpless when the crash sounded. As thugs leveled their guns, the cloaked fighter took the only opportunity afforded him. In the center of the big room, he had no chance to fade; and steel doors blocked the passages that offered him security. The one advantage that he held was his grip on the crooked watchman whom he had yanked from the control booth.

Wheeling, The Shadow swung that traitor as a living shield between himself and the new invaders. Crooks did not hesitate. They opened fire for The Shadow's buffer. Their game was to shoot the watchman from his grasp.

Gunmen either knew, or could guess, that the watchman had served the Brothers. That did not matter. He was

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not one of their own crowd. With Mocker shouting the unnecessary order, the men from the balcony poured bullets into the victim who had become The Shadow's shield.

The game seemed a sure one. The Shadow was holding the sagging watchman at arm's length. A few seconds more, the dead weight would fall. In those seconds, however, The Shadow thought of more than mere defense. His own gun began its pumping output, from a muzzle that he thrust from beneath Henry's dead and limpish arm.

The Shadow's bullets told.

One aiming crook jolted; then another. A third leaned over the balcony, hoping to clip The Shadow's shoulder with a side aim. Another shot stabbed from below, and the crook on the balcony howled and pitched headlong over the rail.

He was wounded when he started, dead after he finished the fall, for his skull cracked like a breaking walnut shell, when it hit the marble floor.

Attackers shifted when that happened. They went back from the rail, spreading for better position. Mocker shouted for them to lie flat; to aim through the posts of the metal rail. It was a smart order; for Mocker, last to dive for cover, saw the watchman's body fall at last from The Shadow's grasp.

Before the crooks could gain their required aim, The Shadow was dashing forward. The shots that were fired at him did no more than chip the marble floor; for the resumed barrage was wild as it began. Two seconds later, The Shadow had covered a space of thirty feet, to reach a stairway to the balcony.

A thug saw him from the top of the stairs; fired once and missed. The gorilla went backward, coughing the word that The Shadow was coming up. It was hardly necessary, that information, for the thug was sagging from a blast that The Shadow delivered. The gunshot from the stairway was proof enough that crooks could expect The Shadow.

FOR an instant, Mocker stood amazed. The Brothers had assured him that the stairway gates would be closed. The trap, as arranged, would therefore have been a complete one. Instead, it was open—and at the worst place possible. Mocker's crew, already depleted, was due for a flank attack from The Shadow.

Wild-eyed, Mocker shouted for his band to take to cover. That meant the skylight. The opening was wide and only shoulder-high. Gunmen dived through it in pairs. Mocker made the last scramble for the roof, just as The Shadow reached the top of the stairs.

Instead of stopping there, The Shadow came onward. He reached the skylight as Mocker's crowd was spreading. His guns spoke before the gorillas could flatten themselves and take aim. The hoodlums decided not to wait. There were open windows in an adjoining office building. They went through.

Two thugs tried to fire as they ran. Their flight ended as The Shadow spilled them with quick triggering of his gun. Mocker saw it; gave up his own plan of a pot shot. He went headfirst through a window and hit the floor within, just as The Shadow cracked the pane above him. Mocker was lucky to escape that bullet.

Brothers of Doom were gone. Mocker and his mob were in mad flight. Sirens were shrieking from distant streets, telling that the police would soon arrive. The law would get its story from Vanible and the other prisoners in the directors' room.

Kater, of course, would reveal Henry's treachery. The police would have a better result than at Lason's. There,

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they had not even suspected Alphonse, the butler, as an accomplice. Here, they would know that the Brothers had one.

They would learn, also, that a cover-up crew had been in action tonight. Perhaps Joe Cardona would guess that The Shadow had forced that fight. There were facts, however, that the law would neither learn nor surmise.

Again a lone, masked killer would be held responsible. There would be no evidence to prove that the Brothers numbered more. Likewise, the law would accept the crime as an attempted robbery, instead of a successful attempt to eliminate Elwell Froyd.

There had been profit through Lason's death. There would be profit through Froyd's. Brothers of Doom would be the reapers. After that, further crime could be intended. The Shadow still lacked a trail to the evil Brothers. Nevertheless, he had opened the way for one.

The Shadow had thinned Mocker's crew. That, in itself, was a step to a future move, that could bring him to the goal he wanted. The Shadow's laugh sounded with whispered grimness, as he left the gloom of the roof.

That chilled mirth boded ill for Brothers of Doom.

CHAPTER VIII. STRENGTHENED LINES

MORNING newspapers proclaimed the death of Elwell Froyd, with every harrowing detail that could be acquired. The story that reporters told was the one that the police gave them. It began with the masked killer's entrance—the same murderer who had slain Northrup Lason.

Attempting new robbery, that killer had shot down Froyd during a meeting of directors. Frustrated by Vanible and others present, the masked murderer had fled. One watchman, Kater, had struggled with him. The killer had slugged Kater; the other watchman, Henry, had turned on the alarm and closed the steel doors, only to be shot down by a cover-up crew that had aided the murderer's escape.

These inaccurate details were partly the result of police investigation, and partly Kater's testimony. The loyal watchman had first confused The Shadow with one of the masked Brothers. After that, he had taken Henry's slug without seeing who gave it. Recovering consciousness to find Henry a dead, bullet-riddled hero, Kater had taken it for granted that his fellow watchman was as loyal as himself.

The Shadow, in his quick shooting, had wounded several of Mocker's crew. Only one had died; he was the thug who had toppled from the balcony. The others had managed a get-away with Mocker. They were out of service, and would remain on the shelf. That, however, was knowledge that belonged to The Shadow and not to the law.

The police credited Henry with dropping the crook from the balcony; and they conceded that the watchman had wounded perhaps two others, as evidenced by blots of blood on the roof.

The evening newspapers came out with details that the morning sheets had not acquired. The reason for the meeting at Froyd's had leaked out. The directors, when quizzed, were forced to admit the financial condition of Froyd & Co.

One day later, fresh news broke. The financial house of Froyd & Co. closed its doors. The announcement produced huge activity in Wall Street. Until then, foreign securities floated by other houses had been selling low. They skyrocketed with the failure of the Froyd institution.

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ON the third evening, Lamont Cranston dropped into the exclusive Cobalt Club to find it crowded with members, all agog over events in Wall Street.

Some wealthy men stated openly that they had purchased small blocks of the lucky securities, purely on speculation. The number of shares on the market was far in excess of the admitted purchases. Therefore it was generally conceded that some persons must have bought more than they cared to claim. There was common talk of purchases by proxy, through straw men who had represented some wealthy buyer.

No one linked that possibility with Froyd's murder. The financier's death seemed too obviously the result of an attempted robbery. Opinion was that no one wanted to brag of too much fortune, because the issues that had profited through Froyd's death had been in poor repute. Any one who had held huge blocks of them would be considered lucky, not brainy.

Behind that smoke screen lay the truth that The Shadow recognized. Some individual had carefully arranged his plans beforehand, knowing that he would gain when Froyd died. That person belonged to the insidious, tight-knit band that called itself the Brothers of Doom.

In one corner of the club, Cranston chanced upon two men who had met by accident. He paused to overhear the conversation, because it referred to a past matter. The two men were Sidney Thrake and Marcus Omstred.

Thrake was in a jovial humor. The head of Consolidated Metals was clad in evening clothes. His squarish face showed a smile; and he was as self-important as ever.

Omstred looked tired. He was wearing an unpressed business suit; which indicated that he had just arrived in from the Centurion Steel plant. His gaunt face was tinged with worry.

"Hello, Omstred!" greeted Thrake, indulgently. "You look as though the atmosphere of the meadows did not agree with you. Maybe you've decided to change your mind about that sale."

Omstred shook his head, indicating that he was not open to persuasion.

"I meant to show you some reports," remarked Thrake, carelessly. "Parkinson had them in his briefcase, when I called the other day. They were from the equipment companies that sold you plant machinery."

"All this is useless, Thrake," returned Omstred. "I know that you control those companies. They can throw me into bankruptcy, if I do not pay. I shall have time, though, to raise the money."

"You won't get any contracts. I've tied them up. Maybe you've had some luck with these foreign bonds that every one is talking about?"

Omstred managed a weary smile.

"I wish I had walked into some luck of that sort," he admitted. "But I lack funds for investments. Everything that I own is tied up in my plant, as you doubtless know. But what about yourself, Thrake? Were you in on the ground floor?"

Thrake shook his head.

"No," he replied. "Those issues were too doubtful. Only fools would have bought them. It appears that fools are sometimes fortunate."

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There was bite to Thrake's last sentence, as if his words referred to Omstred. It was plain that Thrake believed that Omstred's steel plant could survive only through some stroke of sheer luck. Omstred caught the inference, but showed no anger.

“Good night, Thrake,” was all he said. “I'm going home. I work too hard during the day to spend the evenings talking shop. Some time I may prove to you that a man who knows his business and sticks to it, is never a fool.”

THRAKE watched Omstred walk wearily away. A hard smile wreathed Thrake's broad face; then he decided to forget the conversation. He drew two opera tickets from his pocket; looked at his watch and decided that he could stay a while at the club. He stalked past Cranston without even noticing him.

After a brief stroll through the club, Cranston reached the telephone booths. There, he dialed a number. A quiet voice came over the wire:

“Burbank speaking.”

“Report!”

The order came from the lips of Cranston, but it was in The Shadow's whisper. Burbank, the contact man, reported:

“Marsland at Hotel Spartan. Vincent with him. Expecting visit from Mocker Shebly.”

That was the news The Shadow wanted. It meant that his agent, Cliff Marsland, reputedly a tough dweller in the underworld, had received a bid to join Mocker's depleted crew. Cliff had managed to include another in the invitation. If matters went right, Harry Vincent would also become a member of the outfit. Harry was one of The Shadow's most capable agents.

When Cranston reappeared in the club foyer, Sidney Thrake was no longer there. Evidently the steel magnate had changed his mind and had decided to go to the opera early.

AN hour later, The Shadow arrived near Mocker's apartment house. He relieved a hunch-shouldered watcher named “Hawkeye,” an agent whom he had posted to keep tabs on all visitors.

The Shadow had inklings that some contact man paid visits to Mocker, bringing word straight from the Brothers. To-night, The Shadow suspected that the Brothers were holding a conclave.

That surmise was correct. Atop the steel plant on the New Jersey meadows, the four were gathered in their secret room. There, the leader intoned:

“Our second thrust has brought success. The death of Elwell Froyd has doubled the profit in our coffers. Our fund holds two contributions; it awaits a third. Our thrust will be made at the proper time. It will bring success!”

The last sentence carried a pronounced emphasis. To give it weight, the masked leader added:

“This time, The Shadow will be drawn on a false trail. No matter how he fares, he will not meet us.”

The leader flashed a green-light signal. The details were pleasing to the Brothers. The message referred to action on a future night, involving moves that could be held almost to the last minute. That order given, the

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Brothers disbanded.

Because of that message, Case Hurrin did not pay a visit to Mocker Shebly. It was unnecessary; and therefore unwise. The Shadow, on watch at Mocker's, continued his long wait, counting upon a visitor. The fact that Mocker did not start for his appointment with Cliff was proof that Mocker could be expecting some one.

It was nearly midnight when Mocker came from the front door of the apartment house, which was proof that he no longer expected a visitor. Midnight, The Shadow calculated, must be the time limit on which Mocker operated.

Mocker was accompanied by a bodyguard. The Shadow trailed the pair to the Hotel Spartan, which was a favorite haunt for bigwigs of the underworld.

When he entered the old hotel, Mocker left the bodyguard in the lobby and went upstairs alone. The Shadow knew that Mocker was calling on Cliff Marsland; that visit ended The Shadow's vigil. He could count on his agents to report further.

MOCKER found two men awaiting him. He knew Cliff Marsland, and regarded his reputation highly. Cliff was midway between the types that represented the smooth racketeer and the tough gorilla. His features were well-molded, but his square jaw carried a threat. His bluish eyes and light hair gave him the appearance of an athlete; with it, there was hardness in his stare, ruggedness in his manner.

Cliff introduced Harry Vincent. The stranger impressed Mocker. He was a clean-cut chap, less hardened than Cliff; but he looked husky enough to suit. Seen together, Cliff and Harry had the appearance of a good team.

Mocker seated himself and thrust out his lower lip, to form his equivalent of a smile. His eyes were shrewd as they gleamed above his flattish nose. He wasted no time in offering terms.

"You know what I want, Cliff," said Mocker. "I'm always shifting crews. That means a short-time job—but a sweet one—for you. The same goes for your pal. Half a grand each is the dough."

Cliff stopped short as he started to light a cigarette. His expression showed contempt for Mocker's offer.

"What's wrong, Cliff?"

"Five hundred bucks," scoffed Cliff. "It isn't worth it, Mocker, when The Shadow doses out pills."

"Who said anything about The Shadow?"

"Nobody. I read the newspapers."

"So do I. The bladders didn't say nothing about The Shadow."

Cliff turned to Harry.

"Hear that?" he questioned. "I told you Mocker's mob was in on that job at Froyd's. Here's Mocker practically telling us so, himself."

For a moment, Mocker showed rising fury. His expression changed suddenly to one of keen admiration.

"You win, Cliff," he admitted. "But how did you figure The Shadow was in it?"

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“Plain as day, Mocker! That watchman couldn't have been good enough to stave off a crew like yours. The bulls don't know that you have an outfit; but I do. That's why I figured you were in it. That meant you met up with The Shadow.”

Mocker dropped all pretense.

“We ran into The Shadow, all right,” he growled. “One of the guys we lugged away croaked. A couple more are laid up. Nobody clipped The Shadow, worse luck! He may be due again. Whatta you say—a full grand each? Are you on?”

“You bet we are!” returned Cliff. “You're talking real dough, Mocker; and just for that, I'll put you wise to something. If there's one guy that I'd like to meet, it's The Shadow! What's more, I've sold Vincent on the same idea. A little ante would make things right. A century each will do.”

Mocker promptly produced ten twenty-dollar bills; he divided them and handed a hundred dollars each to Cliff and Harry. He paused at the door, to comment:

“Brains suit me. You guys have got them. I should have used you on the last job. We'll be thinking of the next one, instead. Come up to the joint some time to-morrow. I'll have you stay there, with the rest of the crew.”

MOCKER was highly satisfied when he reached his apartment. He knew that he would have good news for Case Hurrin. That, in turn, would be good news for the Brothers; but they could wait for it, in the form of results. With Cliff and Harry on the pay roll, Mocker foresaw trouble for The Shadow.

Oddly, there would be trouble. In this checkered chain of combat between The Shadow and the Brothers, thrusts were proving boomerangs against those who delivered them. Luck, too, was playing a controlling part that it seemed loath to relinquish.

The Shadow, in planting his own agents with Mocker Shebly, had gained an advantage that would have proven powerful in the past. In the future, it was to be a handicap as much as a gain. Despite his preparations, The Shadow would be forced to resume his lone game.

Brothers of Doom had changed their evil tactics, as The Shadow was to learn.

CHAPTER IX. DOUBLE CONTACT

MOCKER SHELBY was satisfied with Cliff and Harry. They came higher priced than other gorillas, but they meant business. Once on the job, they were ready to take over any task assigned to them. That relieved Mocker of a minor, but troublesome, problem.

Members of Mocker's crew had always grumbled at a special duty upon which the flat-nosed crook insisted. That was keeping nightly watch at the rear door which Mocker termed the “back gate.” Neither Cliff nor Harry raised any objection. Hence, they were assigned to that detail the first night that they spent at Mocker's apartment.

Mocker, himself, gave instructions to Harry, who was the first to take the duty.

“There's just one guy that comes through,” informed Mocker. “You don't have to know him; his name's enough. When you hear him spill his moniker, let him by. It's Case Hurrin.”

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Harry had heard of Case; but did not say so. He was not surprised that The Shadow had not learned the identity of the go-between. Working for a secret group like the Brothers was a stronger job than any that Case had ever handled. The fellow was suited for it, though, from what Harry knew of him.

Posted by the rear door, Harry had no way to pass the news to Cliff; for Mocker had stated it privately. Wisely, both The Shadow's agents had refrained from asking any questions that would arouse the suspicions of Mocker's gunmen. Harry decided that the word could wait.

Mocker had said nothing of an immediate move. That meant he was waiting to hear from Case; and it might be a long while before the go-between arrived. The odds were favorable. As Harry figured it, he could take a stroll outside when Cliff took over the rear gate duty. That would be Harry's chance to contact Burbank and thus get the information to The Shadow.

A mere half hour proved that Harry's expectations were unfounded. It was only a short while after dark when stealthy footfalls sounded from the fire tower. Harry gave a low-voiced challenge; he received the response:

"It's Case Hurrin. I want to see Mocker Shebly."

Harry passed Case through. He watched the wiry visitor steal past a darkened doorway that led directly to Mocker's own room. Listening from the fire tower, Harry made sure that Mocker had no other lookouts posted. Thereupon, Harry chose a bold course.

Stealthily, he followed the route that Case had taken. It was tricky; for there were rooms with which Harry was only vaguely familiar, having seen them but once. When he neared Mocker's door, which had a light beneath, Harry ran afoul of a chance chair; but caught it before it toppled.

CLOSE by the door, Harry could make out the murmur of voices within. By straining, he caught gruff words from Mocker. He decided that it was better to listen under handicap than to risk a move with the door. Harry had already learned the important fact that Case was the go-between. That was something too good to lose.

Mocker said something about the "Brothers" and added the word "tonight." The term "Brothers" was appropriate. Harry knew that it fitted the masked men whom The Shadow had met in combat. To Harry, "tonight" signified that there was a job for Mocker and his outfit.

When Case spoke, his smooth-purred tone was too low to be understood. Mocker's reply, though partly audible, lacked information. Following it came a shift of chairs. The business was finished.

Harry started for the back door. He was across the room when he heard Mocker's door clatter.

Instinctively, Harry paused; he was far enough ahead to use stealth instead of speed. His wait proved fortunate. It gave him a chance to hear a parting conversation between Case and Mocker. This time, both voices were clearly audible.

"Leave it to the Four," purred Case. "They'll be there! You've got your own job, Mocker. Stick to it."

"It suits me," returned Mocker. "The Brothers are running the racket. I'll handle my end."

Harry was at the back door when Case arrived there. Convinced that a job was due to-night, Harry's one worry was how to get off duty and shoot word to The Shadow. He had learned definitely that there were four masked crooks; for Case and Mocker had used the terms "Four" and "Brothers" to mean the same persons.

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While Harry still puzzled over his present problem, Mocker arrived to solve it for him.

“Come on in, Vincent,” ordered Mocker. “We're going out. I'm sending you along to get the bus.”

Harry left with another member of the crew; thus he had no chance to tip off Cliff. In the elevator, Harry put his right hand in his coat pocket. He used a stubby pencil to write information on a tiny pad.

Outside, Harry and his companion passed a parked taxi. Wadding the top sheet from the pad, Harry flipped it with his thumb, straight from his pocket edge.

The wad scaled through the cab window. That taxi belonged to The Shadow; its driver was Moe Shrevnitz, one of The Shadow's agents. Harry's report was on its way.

AT the Cobalt Club, an attendant was paging Mr. Sidney Thrake and getting no response. Marcus Omstred, coming through the foyer, heard the name announced. Mere mention of Thrake annoyed Omstred. He shook his head, as he went downstairs to the grillroom for a late dinner.

Another club member was in the foyer. Lamont Cranston was idly smoking a thin cigar, when another attendant approached him with news that he was wanted on the telephone. Entering a booth, Cranston heard the voice of Burbank. Methodically, the contact man gave Harry's facts.

Within twenty minutes, The Shadow was outside Mocker's apartment. He waited a quarter hour more; then Mocker's crew arrived to join Harry and the driver of the touring car. Mocker and Cliff came last; they went to find a taxi. Mocker always traveled separate from the mob, with a single bodyguard.

In the cab, Mocker mentioned the address of a downtown building that held wholesale jewelry offices. He named one concern.

“Rotherwelt & Deprew,” he said. “That's a fancy handle. Maybe they've got some fancy sparklers in that joint of theirs. The office is on the second floor. We're going to cover the place.”

WHILE Mocker's band was making its downtown trip, a man was preparing to leave the offices of Rotherwelt & Deprew. He was some forty years of age, middle-sized. His face was roundish, rather pudgy; he had sleek black hair, smoothly parted.

Just as he drew the office key from his pocket, the man heard the telephone bell. He answered the call in drawling tone:

“Hello... Yes, this is George Deprew... Certainly, Mr. Rotherwelt is at the Starview Hotel. Suite 1610... Yes, I am going there right away. Hope you can join us there...”

Deprew looked about, as though he had forgotten something. He saw a stack of account books and tucked them under his arm. He extinguished the light; locked the door when he went out.

Ten minutes later, Mocker's crew arrived and began to deploy about the building, using a side alley and passages at the back. Cliff took a station near a side door in the alley. It seemed to him that the cordon was loose and poorly arranged.

Cliff heard a whisper close beside him. It was The Shadow. He told Cliff what Harry had learned; in turn, Cliff stated Mocker's mention of the jewelry firm on the second floor of this watched building.

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The Shadow entered silently. With guarded flashlight, he found the offices belonging to Rotherwelt & Deprew. He noted that the door was locked, but not protected with an alarm device. Using a clipper-shaped pick, The Shadow entered.

He saw an inner door with a line of light beneath it. It had an alarm device, that had not been set. Inching the door inward, The Shadow expected to see some one in the inner room. Instead, it was empty.

There was a square vault in the far wall. Deprew had locked it, but had evidently forgotten to lock the door of this small private office. Looking to the outer office, The Shadow saw an extension telephone resting close to the table edge, as though it had been set there in careless hurry.

The Shadow pictured events almost as they had happened. Some one—a person who belonged here—had come from the inner office, just as the telephone rang. That person had answered the phone in the outer office. Having closed the door of the inner office, he had not noticed that he had left the lights on there.

Deprew's neglect suited The Shadow doubly. The Shadow had gained prompt access to the inner office; and it was lighted. Drawn window shades enabled The Shadow to survey the room as he chose. He studied the vault; made sure of its strength. He looked for strategic spots about the room.

There was a chance, perhaps, that persons were due here. That would account for Mocker's outfit being on the job. It would mean also that the Brothers of Doom would arrive. Nevertheless, The Shadow saw opposite possibilities. This scene was different from those that The Shadow had previously witnessed. Studying the situation, The Shadow decided that the Brothers had reversed their game.

Knowing that The Shadow had uncanny aptitude at trailing Mocker Shebly, the head of the crime ring had delegated Mocker's crew to the task of trapping The Shadow. Proof was present in the alley below, where Mocker had stationed his cordon loosely.

The idea was to let The Shadow enter unmolested. After allowing sufficient time for him to pick this office as the spot where crime was intended, Mocker and his fighters would close in to snare The Shadow.

THE SHADOW stole to the outer door, opened it a trifle and listened. He heard creeping sounds from the distant stairway, that carried through the darkness. Returning to the inner office, The Shadow pressed a blind a half inch inward. Eye to the window, he saw crouched figures on the far edge of an adjoining roof.

The Shadow's analysis was correct. Mocker's tribe was closing in for battle. The Shadow was bottled better than ever before. That meant more than a trap. It signified that Brothers of Doom were moving toward new crime; toward an objective that lay elsewhere. They had brought The Shadow to a blind quest that threatened death, while they took a free route of their own.

It still lay within The Shadow's power to offset this half of the scheme. The Shadow's own agents were in with Mocker's outfit. With their aid, The Shadow could move silently and unnoticed from the snare, leaving it empty. That was the course that The Shadow chose.

Stepping to the outer office, he closed the inner door behind him. Blanketed in the darkness of the outer room, he drew an automatic and glided toward the door. A half minute more, The Shadow would be clear for his departure. Suddenly, he halted his course.

An unexpected sound filled the darkened room. It was the jangle of the telephone bell, ominous in the gloom. That sudden ringing made The Shadow wheel. Locating the telephone instantly, he lifted the receiver from the hook.

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The ringing persisted, as The Shadow held the receiver to his ear. In the darkness, he kept turning slowly, ready with his leveled automatic. Delay could prove costly at this moment. The call might be a ruse provided by the Brothers, to slow The Shadow's departure.

That ringing might be a signal—a tipoff to aid Mocker. Prolonged, it could call for Mocker to withhold his advance. Ending abruptly, it could stand as proof that The Shadow was here. If so, it would mean a mass attack, at once.

The Shadow took those chances. He had a reason for his hazard. The telephone call might bring him luck, instead of difficulty. Grimly, The Shadow was seeking a quick clue to the real crime that the Brothers intended. He was willing to accept the risk on the chance that the clue would come.

As the buzzing ended, The Shadow spoke a quiet hello into the mouthpiece. He waited for a responding voice. The one that came furnished a surprise, even for The Shadow. The gruff speaker whom The Shadow heard was the last man whom he had expected to contact at this moment.

The voice on the wire was that of Inspector Joe Cardona!

CHAPTER X. BATTLE WITHOUT BULLETS

CARDONA introduced himself across the wire. His words told that he thought he was talking to George Deprew.

“This is Inspector Cardona,” explained Joe, “calling from the Starview Hotel. I'm with Mr. Rotherwelt. We were worrying about you, Mr. Deprew.”

The reply that Cardona received left him momentarily voiceless. Instead of the speaker that he thought was Deprew, Joe heard the whisper of The Shadow.

“Deprew has gone,” spoke The Shadow. “He should arrive shortly. State why you are at the Starview.”

It was several seconds before Joe took the cue. When he caught the idea, the ace detective responded neatly. Without giving any inkling to Rotherwelt, regarding the odd situation at the office, Cardona outlined information for The Shadow.

“I came up from headquarters,” explained Joe. “Your suggestion was a good one, Mr. Deprew. Since Mr. Rotherwelt had just returned from Europe, bringing those uncut diamonds, it was a good idea to have police protection.

“The customers are all here, ready to look at them. The last one just came in; said he'd talked to you over the telephone, a little while ago. Don't worry about the diamonds; we aren't. We were wondering about you.”

A moment's pause. Cardona added:

“Mr. Rotherwelt says to be sure and bring the account books, so you can talk over business, afterward.”

The Shadow spoke as soon as Joe had finished. In brief, sibilant tones, he expressed:

“Keep close watch! Suspect every one! Trust no one but yourself! Crime may strike shortly! Expect my arrival!”

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Joe had a prompt answer:

“Yes, everything's fine, Mr. Deprew, up here in 1610. I'll do as you suggest. I'll be expecting you.”

HANGING UP the receiver, The Shadow moved toward the door. He had gained valuable news regarding events elsewhere, but he had lost precious minutes here. The Shadow recognized that the moment that he gripped the doorknob. He sensed a slight sound from the gloomy hall outside.

Mocker had sent one thug ahead to try the door. Others would be following shortly, The Shadow's course was quick action. He felt the doorknob turn; he added a slight twist of his own to speed the process. The door moved slightly inward.

Through the crack, The Shadow saw a crouching gunman. The fellow had not expected the knob to turn so easily; he started to draw back, raising a gun as he looked upward. The Shadow's fist sliced downward. That move was a silent, well-made thrust.

The door had not opened wide enough for The Shadow's fist to go through; but the space accommodated the thickness of the automatic. The Shadow had grasped his .45 by the barrel. The handle was through the door, projecting as it drove for the thug's skull. The crook had no time to avoid the blow.

The heavy butt glanced on the fellow's skull above the temple; and the crash proved sufficient. The thug folded at the threshold. With a spring, The Shadow was through, across the stunned man's shoulders before they had settled in their slump.

Along the passage near the stairway, The Shadow saw a second hoodlum awaiting the report of the first. By his quick leap, The Shadow caught the fellow flat-footed. At that moment, he could have turned his gun about and drilled the watcher where he stood.

Such a move would have been unfortunate; for gunfire was something that would produce delay. Instead of shooting, The Shadow made a long sweep for the crook, to overpower him before he could raise his gun.

The fellow saw The Shadow's surge; spotted the uplifted automatic, reversed for another sledging blow. Finding his legs, the crook darted away. At the darkened stairs, he dived for a side passage before The Shadow could reach him. The man was ahead of The Shadow; if he had gained that corridor, he could have turned and begun a wild fire.

At that instant, a hand swung from the stairway. The crook collapsed at the passage entrance; he was sprawled when The Shadow reached him. Cliff Marsland was at the top of the stairs. He had come just in time to deal the needed blow that had been beyond The Shadow's reach.

The Shadow pointed down the stairway, then took to the side passage. Cliff understood. His job was to rejoin Mocker and report mysterious occurrences upstairs. The Shadow would be credited with downing both thugs. When they recovered, the second man—like the first—would testify that a cloaked foe had slugged him.

On the landing, Cliff met Mocker. Quickly, Cliff gave the news:

“Both those gorillas are cold! I just stumbled on one at the top of the stairs. The other guy is flat by the office door.”

Mocker and an accompanying gunman hurried up the steps to find that Cliff was right. While Cliff and the gorilla stared as though dumfounded, Mocker pointed to the passage.

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“That's where The Shadow went,” rasped Mocker. “There's a window, opening to the next roof. Come along! We'll plug him when the rest of the crew start shooting!”

OUT on the roof, The Shadow had already encountered the problem of the waiting attackers. Men were crouched there, watching the barred windows of the inside jewelry office, where light showed very dimly through the drawn shades.

One thug was close to the hallway window from which The Shadow had dropped. The fellow did not budge. The Shadow supposed that he was Harry, and gave a close-up whisper. The gorilla turned with a savage snarl. The identification was sufficient. Before the fellow could raise a shout, The Shadow felled him in the darkness.

The thug's plop attracted the gorilla next in line. The Shadow heard a shift in the darkness. Reversing his gun with a deft, long-practiced twist, The Shadow shoved the muzzle into the man's ribs and hissed his identity into the crook's ear.

The thug stiffened with upraised arms. With free hand, The Shadow plucked the man's revolver before nerveless fingers let it drop.

Another figure shifted closer. This time it was Harry. He was the only one of the remaining watchers near enough to hear The Shadow. Putting away the thug's revolver, The Shadow reached for the muzzle of Harry's gun. Shifting his own weapon away, he guided Harry's gun point against the frozen crook's back.

No words were needed. Harry understood. He was to keep the man covered while The Shadow decamped. In the deep blackness along the roof, Harry was as shrouded as The Shadow. No one could guess that he was working with his chief; not even the thug whose ribs felt the poke of Harry's gun.

Noiselessly, The Shadow moved away. Tensely, Harry counted off thirty seconds. Another half minute, he could slide away and let the helpless thug give the alarm. Suddenly, a flashlight glimmered from the very window that had served The Shadow. Harry's only course was to drop away before he was discovered.

The moment that Harry sprang clear, the thug in front of him dived for the roof. He made a clatter as he rolled; Mocker's flashlight centered upon the fellow. Wildly, the thug pointed in the direction where Harry had gone, shouting:

“The Shadow! He had me covered!”

AN oath from Mocker. The flashlight shot its beam farther. Harry had changed his course; he was on the fringe of light. He was turning when the glow hit him. Without an instant's hesitation, he stabbed shots at an imaginary figure farther away.

It was quick headwork; the best that Harry could possibly have used.

The Shadow had taken a different direction entirely, and at that very moment was swinging over a darkened roof edge. If Harry had not acted, Mocker would have swung the beam sideways to make a discovery that would have forced The Shadow into battle.

As it was, Mocker thought Harry had spotted the cloaked foe. Mocker added his own shots to Harry's. Cliff and the gunman with him fired also. Revolvers spurted from spots along the roof. The whole outfit was in action; when their flashlights showed no one at the far edge, they poured in that direction.

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Ordering Cliff and the man with him to drag out the stunned men, Mocker leaped from the window and joined his advancing band. At the roof edge, the shots rattled against the cobblestones of an alley beneath. Flashlights spread along those cobbles in search of a victim. There was none.

“We've got to get him,” gritted Mocker, “before the bulls get here! There's another guy lying cold. Bring him along, you lugs. Make it fast!”

As they put the unconscious thugs aboard the touring car, Mocker spoke words of commendation that were heard above the shriek of approaching sirens:

“Good work, Marsland! You gave us a quick tip-off. The same for you, Vincent. You spotted The Shadow. If this whole outfit was made up of guys like you, we'd have rubbed out The Shadow to-night!”

The touring car roared from the alley in time to slip the approaching police cars. Mocker and Cliff scudded between two buildings to reach an obscure street. Crooks were making a get-away; and with them went The Shadow's agents, established as the smartest workers in the outfit.

Cliff and Harry deserved that credit. Their work had been far more impressive than Mocker supposed. They had retained their status with the mob, while aiding The Shadow in battle without bullets. Through swift strategy, helped by his smooth-working agents, The Shadow had lost no time in starting for his more important venture.

Again, The Shadow was heading for combat with the Brothers of Doom.

Joe Cardona would be on the job until The Shadow arrived. The detective ace was prepared for a criminal thrust, and was therefore in a position to hold matters well in hand. The Brothers would be oversure regarding The Shadow, thinking him harried by Mocker's crew.

Moreover, the Brothers, by their strategy, had placed themselves in a spot where they would have to fight alone. Because of their own measures, they would lack Mocker's aid.

Odds favored The Shadow against the Brothers of Doom. The chance had come to thwart a scheduled murder and put an end to crime. Through speed, The Shadow expected to accomplish those two aims.

Yet, with all his speed, The Shadow could not regain the time that he had already lost. Past minutes were to prove of future value for the Brothers of Doom.

CHAPTER XI. DESPITE THE LAW

AT the Starview Hotel, Inspector Joe Cardona was watching an assemblage of business men in the living room of Suite 1610. Two of these men were Joe's greatest concern. One was Richard Rotherwelt, who had been here when Cardona came. The other was George Deprew, who had just arrived.

Rotherwelt was an elderly, ponderous man, who slouched heavily in his armchair. His face was broad and baggy, ashen in color. His downturned lips were tired; so were his listless eyes. It was only occasionally that Rotherwelt managed a smile or showed interest in his gaze.

Deprew, a considerably younger man, showed more life. The round-faced junior partner shook hands with the visitors, all of whom looked prosperous. No mention was made of Cardona's telephone call to the office, for it was unnecessary. Deprew had brought the books that Rotherwelt wanted.

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Cardona summed the circumstances surrounding this occasion.

Richard Rotherwelt, a semi-invalid, had been in Europe for the past year, taking the medicinal baths at Carlsbad. During his absence, the affairs of his business had rested with George Deprew. This morning, Rotherwelt had arrived aboard the Normandie. Deprew had met him when the liner docked; and Rotherwelt had come directly to this reserved suite at the Starview.

During his year in Europe, Rotherwelt had picked up one hundred thousand dollars' worth of uncut diamonds. He had notified Deprew, who had mentioned the gems to a few de luxe customers. Those possible purchasers were the men who had come to this suite. Both Rotherwelt and Deprew had vouched for every one of them.

Nevertheless, Deprew had worried about Rotherwelt's possession of the unguarded gems. Uncut diamonds were the very sort of swag that criminals might seek. Once stolen, such gems could be cut in secret, fashioned into finished jewels. They could be offered on the market at more than their original value, with identification impossible. That was why Deprew had called headquarters, to arrange for police protection.

Cardona had undertaken the assignment because of its size. Rotherwelt had received him cordially. Joe had dined with the elderly man, here in the suite. All the while, the chamois bag with the diamonds was resting safely in Rotherwelt's pocket.

Then, like a voice from the void, The Shadow had spoken.

JOE could not forget that surprise response that had come when he called Deprew. Joe knew from past experience that when The Shadow foresaw crime, it was actually due. Some time during this very evening, a criminal thrust would occur within this very suite.

Rotherwelt's diamonds were the logical stake.

Fine swag for a master thief, those diamonds. The set-up made Cardona think of recent thrusts; ones that had failed and would therefore spur their perpetrator to greater effort.

Joe was remembering the foiled attempt to steal Lason's paintings; the broken effort to steal the contents of Froyd's vault. The law still considered those attacks as unsuccessful tries at robbery. In recollecting them, Cardona also pictured the descriptions of the masked Brothers; but he thought in terms of one, not more.

Nevertheless, Cardona pictured others besides a lone attacker. He remembered the cover-up crew that had figured in previous crimes. That did not worry Cardona. He was posted. He could handle anything that happened here. There would be no murder to-night; nor robbery, either.

Best of all, Joe could count on The Shadow. Fifteen minutes more, the cloaked battler would be near at hand. Cardona preferred The Shadow over a whole squad of headquarters detectives. Crime was due for a bad fall.

Rotherwelt's guests were anxious to see the uncut diamonds. Deprew was opening the account books for Rotherwelt; but they decided mutually to postpone their own business until afterward. Rotherwelt reached for the bag of diamonds. Cardona stopped him.

“Just a minute, Mr. Rotherwelt,” suggested the ace. “I want to make sure that everything is all right before you begin.”

Rotherwelt nodded obligingly. So did Deprew. Cardona tried a door that led into another suite. He found it locked. He entered Rotherwelt's bedroom, which was lighted. He found it empty; and inspected the bathroom,

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where rows of Rotherwelt's medicine bottles stood upon a shelf.

Joe noticed a half-filled glass containing a pinkish liquid. It was covered with a small plate.

Cardona had seen Rotherwelt mix that compound earlier and drink half of it. It was a digestive medicine that Rotherwelt took in separate doses, an hour or so apart.

The bedroom, like the living room, had a door that led into an adjoining suite. That door was also locked. Nevertheless, those connecting doorways were a bad factor. They made Cardona decide that his own post should be the corridor, where he could watch for any one who might arrive on this floor.

Joe planned a simple procedure. He would open the door of Rotherwelt's living room and stand outside. Then he could cover the corridor and also view the inside scene.

“All ready, inspector?”

Rotherwelt put the query when Cardona returned to the living room. Joe shook his head.

“Just a minute, Mr. Rotherwelt,” he replied. “I want to open the door to the corridor—”

A RAP at the mentioned door brought interruption. Cardona whipped out a stubby revolver, grabbed for the door and yanked it open. His swarthy face registered a grin as he lowered his gun. The man who had knocked was the house detective, a chap named Murthell.

Seeing the house dick, Cardona had a new idea. He told Murthell to remain in 1610 for a few minutes. Going toward the elevators, Cardona stepped into a side passage and found an emergency door that led to a fire tower.

Joe found that the door was properly latched; that it could be opened only from this side. That was all the ace wanted to know. He was confident that no invading killer could enter from that direction.

Returning to the suite, Joe questioned Murthell: “Got a gun?”

A puzzled look showed on Murthell's longish, sallow face as he nodded.

“Good!” declared Cardona. “Cover the corridor. Keep an eye out for any snoopers. Stay close enough to give me quick word, if you see any one that looks suspicious.”

With that, Cardona stepped into the big room, closed the door almost shut. Turning to the group assembled at a table, he remarked:

“You can bring on the diamonds, Mr. Rotherwelt.”

The elderly jeweler managed a smile. He produced the chamois bag. The uncut gems slid to the table. The visitors began to examine them with eye microscopes, while Cardona watched. From where he stood, Joe could hear Murthell pacing the corridor.

Unfortunately, Cardona could not see the house dick. Therefore, he failed to observe the changed expression that had come upon Murthell's face. Instead of puzzlement, Murthell was registering a sly, conspiring look as he peered back toward Cardona's door.

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Quickly, the house dick slipped to the passage that ended with the fire tower. He opened the steel barrier that Cardona had examined. Listening intently, Murthell gripped a revolver. He heard a stir in pitch darkness. A luminous spot appeared in the blackness. It was a glowing metal disk in the open palm of a gauntleted hand.

Murthell beckoned the Brother through. With a pass-key, the house dick opened a door that came before Rotherwelt's suite. The tight-hooded Brother entered a darkened room. Murthell closed the door gently. He stepped along to 1610, to pass the word that all was well.

After that contact with Cardona, Murthell paced back toward the elevators. He made another quick trip to the fire tower, found another Brother waiting with luminous disk. Hardly had the second Brother entered, before a third appeared.

One of the pair followed Murthell. At 1610, the dick edged up to the door; as he spoke to Cardona, he slipped the pass-key to the masked man who accompanied him. Cardona saw Murthell's eyes at the door; heard the dick inform:

“Everything's jake. Want me to take another look around?”

As Cardona nodded, he did not see the masked man who was sidling past Murthell. The house dick blocked the view. The gray-clad Brother was a difficult figure to notice under such conditions. By the time Murthell left the door, the Brother was entering the room just past Rotherwelt's suite.

Murthell strolled up, took the passkey. He strolled back to contact the third Brother near the fire exit.

MEANWHILE, a curious, silent episode was occurring in Rotherwelt's bedroom. The connecting door clicked, muffled. Into the lighted room came the creeping figure of the first insidious Brother.

Catlike, the crinkle of his costume almost noiseless, the murderous intruder crossed to the bathroom. Despite the darkness, he saw the saucer-covered glass that held Rotherwelt's medicine.

The Brother raised the saucer. From between thumb and forefinger, he dropped a luminous pellet that glowed like the disk he carried. The pill struck the liquid; fizzed silently as it dissolved. Darting molecules added ghostly light to the contents of the glass. Pinkish fluid took on a ruddy glow.

Slowly, the fiery effect lessened. The Brother stepped away. At the door, he moved quickly; made back for the room from which he had come. He was out of sight, with the connecting door closed, just as Rotherwelt came slowly in from the living room. Rotherwelt had remembered his medicine.

Rotherwelt was not alone. Cardona had seen the bulky jeweler rise from his chair. Following, Joe watched Rotherwelt cross the bedroom.

At that moment, the Brother's deed was on the verge of discovery, for a dying sparkle remained within the medicine glass. It happened, though, that Rotherwelt blocked Cardona's view. Rotherwelt, himself, did not see the glowing glass. He was looking for the bathroom light.

When the light came on, the luminous tinge was lost. Rotherwelt removed the saucer; picked up the glass. He turned his profile toward Cardona. As Rotherwelt drank, Joe saw the glass and supposed it to be as innocent as before.

Cardona convoyed Rotherwelt back to the table, where customers were talking prices with Deprew. The junior partner asked Rotherwelt's opinion; the elderly man heard the amounts and gave his agreements.

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“Satisfactory offers,” he declared. “Suppose we register them in the account book. Let me have the final one, George.”

Deprew handed the book to Rotherwelt. Slowly, the bulky man began to thumb the pages. He came to the figures that told the present balance of the business. Looking up toward Deprew, Rotherwelt gave an inarticulate gargle.

“What's the trouble, Richard?” questioned Deprew, in alarm. “Are you ill?”

Rotherwelt's eyes were bulging; their fixed stare went beyond Cardona, toward the outer door of the room. For the moment, Joe had forgotten that door. He was concerned with Rotherwelt. It was the jeweler's gaze that made Cardona turn.

The door was open. There stood a tight-clad figure in garb of grayish, silklike texture. Eyes glittered through a slitted mask beneath the close-fitted hood. A Brother of Doom was master of the scene. His gauntleted fist clutched a revolver; his threat of crime allowed no dispute.

Deprew and the customers stared along with Cardona. As they did, a change came over Rotherwelt. His ashen face whitened completely. His hands, groping for the uncut diamonds, became suddenly limp. The jeweler's heavy head plumped forward to the table. A sighed death gasp escaped his lips.

The Brother of Doom who occupied the doorway had no need to pull his trigger. Death had struck with his arrival—doom to Richard Rotherwelt, this night's intended victim.

Crime had won again, despite the law.

CHAPTER XII. THE SHADOW CONNECTS

MEN turned instinctively when they heard the thump as Rotherwelt collapsed. Cardona forgot his own dilemma, to stare toward the dead jeweler. He saw Rotherwelt's hands clasped to his heart. They had made their last spasmodic move in that direction.

Like others, Cardona thought that sight of the masked Brother had produced an overstrain. Rotherwelt, Joe remembered, had been warned to avoid all excitement. His death was logical, under the circumstances; but despite its apparent accident, it was murder.

The masked man at the door was here with criminal intent. Rotherwelt's collapse was the direct result. The law held such cases to be murder. Joe Cardona stood witness to the fact.

The thought struck home. Joe guessed what the killer's course would be: New murder, with Joe as the victim. In previous crimes done by the masked raider, some persons had been spared. But not Joe Cardona, whose stubby revolver still glimmered in his lowered hand. The ace inspector was too dangerous an obstacle, to be allowed to live.

With his guess, Cardona took quick action. He sprang about, diving for the door of the bedroom, hoping to fire as he ducked.

The masked Brother already had Cardona covered. From the doorway, his revolver loomed straight for Joe's heart. Death could blast from that steady-aimed weapon before Cardona had a chance. All that could save Cardona was the unexpected; and it came.

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An elevator door rolled open at the end of the hall. From it surged a black-cloaked shape that bowled over an astonished operator, who had not guessed that he carried this mysterious passenger.

As he sprang into view, The Shadow saw the aiming Brother at the door of 1610. He pressed the trigger of his automatic before the would-be murderer could fire.

There was nothing wrong with The Shadow's aim. Quick though it was, the cloaked avenger had picked his target. The factor that saved the masked Brother was the sudden attack that came from another direction. From the fire tower passage, Murthell sprang for The Shadow, just as the master-fighter delivered his gun blast.

With left hand, Murthell grabbed The Shadow's arm; with his right, he shoved his own revolver up toward The Shadow's heart. The stab from The Shadow's .45 went inches wide, splintering woodwork beside the Brother's shoulder. Urged by desire for self-preservation, the masked crook forgot Cardona and dived along the corridor.

The Shadow faded from Murthell's grip. Twisting, dropping, he lowered his left shoulder. It was clear when the house dick fired. The bullet scorched past The Shadow's ear. An instant later, Murthell was clutched by The Shadow. With a terrific spin, The Shadow hauled the fellow toward the side passage.

Murthell made a wild grab for the corner of the main corridor and caught it. His move was a bad one. The Brother in the corridor had opened fire, hoping to clip The Shadow, not caring if his bullets found the treacherous house dick also. Those shots came as Murthell grabbed. The bribed detective took the sizzling slugs. He dropped inert, in The Shadow's clutch.

IN Rotherwelt's living room, Cardona saw the retreat of the masked Brother. Hearing the shots, Joe guessed that The Shadow had come. Starting across the living room, Joe headed for the outer door. There was a clatter from the far side of the room. Cardona wheeled short, to see a Brother of Doom bound through.

Joe took the second foeman to be the first one, supposing that the killer had ducked through the next room. He leaped toward the attacker, swinging for aim as the Brother did the same. The two met; each took a side step to avoid the other's gun. Both made the same surprise move: a grapple, with a cross-hand gun stroke.

The masked man's slash was quicker. It jarred Cardona's elbow; and that, fortunately, broke the full force of the blow. There was reserve power, though, in the glancing, metallic stroke that hooked the base of Cardona's skull. The ace slipped sideways to the floor.

Deprew and the others had found themselves, at sight of Cardona's bravery. They were leaping for the masked enemy, bringing chairs, canes, ash stands every improvised weapon that they could muster.

Dodging the swinging missiles, the Brother sprang for the corridor. He was the same one who had pulled a clever move at Froyd's, for he repeated it. With a quick yank, he took the key from the door and pulled the barrier shut behind him.

At that moment, The Shadow surged from the side passage, seeking the first Brother who had retreated. The second crook came into his path. The Shadow had both at bay. One was scrambling for a far window; the other was locking the door to 1610. The Shadow's laugh, echoing through that corridor, was a sinister taunt that froze both adversaries.

Surrender or death. They had their choice. They took the former. Guns dropped as hands went up. The Brothers started a sluggish, reluctant approach at The Shadow's command.

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With merciless, gibing tones, The Shadow ordered speed. He stepped forward, gesturing with his gun hand, to force the promptness that he wanted.

A door whipped open at The Shadow's very shoulder. From it sprang the third Brother—the actual assassin who had assured the death of Rotherwelt.

If The Shadow had turned to meet that surprise attacker, sure finish would have been the cloaked fighter's fate.

Doom was intended by the Brother; quick death that the others had failed to give. His gun was leveled; its muzzle was poking hard for The Shadow's shoulder. With all his speed, The Shadow could never have swung in time to beat that shot.

Instead, The Shadow gave a terrific side lunge, his left shoulder driving furiously upward. With that heave, he sprawled into the darkened room, bowling the gray-masked man ahead of him. A trigger finger yanked; but the gunshot spat upward. The Shadow had nullified the Brother's aim.

They hit the floor, The Shadow and that enemy, rolling into a quick grapple. The Shadow made a side-sweep with his gun hand. It was straight for his adversary's head; but a lucky arm-fling stopped it. As The Shadow came to his feet, his enemy took a plunge from hands and knees, out through the door to the corridor.

GUNS regained, the other two Brothers were at the door. The Shadow dived into darkness as they fired, to gain a safe spot of his own. He caught the knob of a metal bedstead; swung clear about, away from the wild, useless volley. The Shadow came to aim. The Brothers dashed off just as he opened fire. The Shadow's slugs whistled through vacancy.

In mad flight, the masked tribe had not taken time to slam the door. The Shadow was after them with furious speed. He reached the corridor to see the trio in an elevator. Murthell had stopped it there, with its doors closed, to be ready for the get-away. The Brothers were safely inside; the doors were closing when The Shadow fired. Bullets flattened against steel.

Good luck followed that bad break for The Shadow.

The doors of the next elevator slid open. An operator and another house detective sprang out, looking for Murthell. Before they saw the false dick's body, they spied The Shadow hurtling toward them. They sprang aside to avoid the black clad avalanche.

The Shadow never stopped. He leaped into the elevator; slammed the doors with a single move. A few moments later, he was speeding the car downward.

The Shadow knew where the Brothers would end their drop. The hotel had a little-used mezzanine, that afforded exit by an obscure stairway to a rear entrance. By taking that route, the crooks could avoid the lobby.

Jerking the elevator to a quick stop at the balcony floor, The Shadow hurried out. An empty elevator, its shaft doors open, stood as proof that the Brothers had gone ahead. Reaching the short stairs, The Shadow made for the rear street.

There were the Brothers, two of them, scurrying off through the dark. The Shadow fired after them. Their lives seemed charmed against his bullets. One made a lucky scramble past the front of a parked car; the other, cutting through a narrow passage, was saved by the steelwork of a half-opened gate that The Shadow could not see.

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Clangs from a car fender and the metal gate told that The Shadow's bullets had missed their human marks.

The third Brother opened fire. He was boxed, on the same side of the street as The Shadow. There was a lighted stretch of pavement that the Brother wanted to avoid. His only immediate hope was battle; so the killer began it.

His shots were worse than futile. He could not see The Shadow in the darkness. All that he did was reveal his own position. A cab was stopping by the curb. Frantically, the Brother ceased his useless fire, to make a dash for it.

THE SHADOW'S gun was empty. Rather than reach for another weapon, he took a quicker course. Springing from darkness, he reached the rear of the cab just as the Brother arrived at the front. In the darkness of this back street, both The Shadow and the Brother were evasive figures that no one could have recognized.

The Shadow saw the Brother thrust his left hand through the open window where the driver sat—a gesture so short and rapid that, for the moment, it seemed meaningless. An instant later, the Brother was grabbing for the rear door. The Shadow fell upon him.

They grappled in the darkness, driving up against the cab. The Shadow expected it to speed away; instead, it remained where it was. The door had opened, the driver was craning out, clutching a revolver. Like Murthell, that taxi driver was another of the many who served the Brothers.

With a quick swing, The Shadow sprawled the Brother to the sidewalk. He lost his own footing on the curb. The cabby jumped down from the front seat. He was between The Shadow and the Brother, unable to see either in the darkness. Then, for some reason, the fellow jumped in The Shadow's direction.

Coming up, The Shadow slashed away the man's gun and rolled him on the sidewalk beside it. During the brief fray, the Brother came to his feet, jumped aboard the cab and yanked it into gear. The taxi was ripping for the clear before The Shadow could stop it.

Quickly, The Shadow dashed out into the street, cloaking his empty automatic and drawing a fresh gun.

The cab wheeled the corner just as The Shadow opened fire. The third Brother was safely away in maddened flight.

A patrol car shrieked from darkness. The Shadow sprang to the curb beyond. Looking back, he saw the dethroned taxi driver picking up the lost revolver. There were shouts from the police car. The thuggish taximan did not heed them. Instead, he aimed for the patrol car.

The Shadow had the crook covered, but did not fire. Shots ripped from the patrol car; others came from the rear door of the hotel, where another officer had arrived. The crooked cabby spilled dead. Like Alphonse, Henry, Murthell, he had received death as an award.

Brothers of Doom were generous. They dealt death to their own henchmen, along with other victims. They deferred that doom only until they had finished with the services of those who worked for them. After that, oblivion sealed the lips of men who might speak.

DEPARTING through darkness, The Shadow considered those dead tools of the Brothers. Neither Alphonse nor Henry had been clever. Murthell, perhaps, was smart; but the cabby had been clumsy. Yet the cab driver had demonstrated an ability which all of those dead traitors seemed to possess.

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He had identified a Brother of Doom in pitch darkness. So had the others, although the point had not impressed itself upon The Shadow until he, himself, had witnessed a demonstration.

That thought afforded an odd contrast. This very night The Shadow, with all his keenness, had made a mistake in the dark. He had confused a crouching thug with Harry Vincent.

Immediately, The Shadow connected present with past. At Lason's, one of the Brothers had shown uncanny ability in the darkness. The answer, in that case, had been a luminous painted button. The Shadow recognized where the Brothers had found that idea.

It came from a device that they already used. Luminous disks, to identify themselves to their followers. They had simply applied it to aid in the murder of Lason.

To-night, a Brother had flashed such a token to the cabby. Cupped in a gauntlet, the disk had been invisible to The Shadow; but the cab driver had seen it. That was why he had attacked The Shadow. He had picked the fighter who had no glowing token.

Previously, The Shadow had analyzed the motives behind murders. Brothers of Doom were eliminating certain men, because such deaths promised gain to the masked killers. To-night, The Shadow had gained a vital fact from Harry Vincent. That was the name of the man who brought orders direct from the Brothers; namely, Case Hurrin.

To those facts The Shadow had added a new discovery: the secret of the luminous disks. It was the last link that The Shadow needed. The murder of Richard Rotherwelt was the last crime the Brothers of Doom would accomplish.

When their next thrust came, those masked murderers would find their plot uncovered by The Shadow.

CHAPTER XIII. THE LONG WAIT

THE details of Rotherwelt's death made big news. The law had positively established the existence of a masked murderer, who garbed himself in tight-fitting gray, and fought with uncanny skill. The killer had struck again.

For the third time, the murderer's attempted robbery had been thwarted. The uncut diamonds were left untouched upon Rotherwelt's table. Offsetting that, the killer was charged with double death. The first was regarded as an accident, for which the murderer was responsible: the death of Rotherwelt.

Classed as heart failure, the death seemed too obvious to demand a complete autopsy. The law, recognizing only one masked murderer, could not picture any evidence of an administered poison.

The other death was Murthell's. Like Alphonse and Henry, the dead house detective was honored as a man who had died while performing loyal duty.

The Shadow analyzed Rotherwelt's death correctly. He knew that Brothers of Doom would not have left it to chance. With a group of them engaged in crime, the act of poisoning Rotherwelt's medicine was easy and likely. Cardona's statement included mention of Rotherwelt's medicine. That gave The Shadow the answer.

The Shadow could also see the purpose of such death. The Brothers wanted to make sure of Rotherwelt's death. They had learned that Cardona was at the hotel suit. Foreseeing that Joe might be a difficult customer, they had taken no chance on a slip.

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Rotherwelt's death did not produce financial reactions, as had the murders of Lason and Froyd. The firm of Rotherwelt & Deprew was financially sound; but the death of the senior partner had been quite a blow to George Deprew.

The business was chiefly Rotherwelt's. Deprew's job was that of management, at a good salary, with a small share of the profits. During Rotherwelt's year abroad, business had been slow. Deprew had hoped that Rotherwelt would put more money into the concern, after he sold his uncut diamonds.

Since those gems belonged to Rotherwelt, the estate took charge of them. Examination of the company's books showed that its total assets, in cash and gems, totaled one hundred and twenty thousand dollars. That was considered sufficient for Deprew to continue business without further capital.

CURIOUSLY, a few nights after Rotherwelt's death, the Brothers of Doom held another meeting in their secret room above Omstred's steel plant. There, the masked leader stated to his three companions:

“Our third thrust has succeeded. The death of Richard Rotherwelt has added another half million to our profits. Our needed fund is completed. Hitherto, we have been forced to show rapid action.

“That circumstance is changed. We can bide our time with ease. Events will develop as we wish. All that can force us to immediate action is an unexpected emergency. In that case, we shall meet.

“Unless the unforeseen occurs, we shall continue as already planned, holding our next conclave at its proper time.”

The leader flashed no signals that night. The green lights were extinguished, and remained dark. Only Suda, the huge grinning servitor, retained a vigil over the secret abode where the Brothers of Doom had met.

Though the Brothers of Doom did not recognize it, their period of inaction was fully apparent to The Shadow. He received occasional reports from Harry and Cliff—always to the same effect: Mocker Shebly was idle, but keeping his crew together. That indicated that the outfit would be needed later.

The Shadow had other proof, of his own.

Case Hurrin had not contacted the Brothers.

Ever since that night at Rotherwelt's, The Shadow had kept close upon Case's trail. That was not difficult, for Case frequented the liveliest night clubs in New York. Sometimes The Shadow went to those places as Cranston; on other occasions, he disguised himself in different garb.

At times, he left the job of watching Case to a reporter named Clyde Burke, another of his agents. At other intervals, Hawkeye, the little spotter kept tabs outside the spots where Case had stopped.

Four Brothers; therefore, four crimes.

So The Shadow reasoned; and he had expected an interval between the first three and the last one. It would mark the final, strongest effort made by the Brothers of Doom. They were building up to some grand pay-off. When that came due, it would be the right time to strike.

DURING this interlude, there was an episode that had a significant bearing on the future. Sidney Thrake paid another visit to the Centurion Steel plant.

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As usual, Thrake was accompanied by Parkinson, his secretary, and the pompous steel magnate was more affable than generally. Marcus Omstred, pale and weary-eyed, was quick to observe Thrake's mood, and promptly put himself on the defensive. Thrake saw the expression on Omstred's gaunt face, and delivered an indulgent laugh.

"Come, Omstred," said Thrake. "I know that you are thinking of the old proverb: 'Beware of the Greeks bearing gifts.' You believe that I have come here to trick you with some offer. You are wrong. I have brought the offer; but there is no trick.

"Name your own price for this plant. I shall pay it. Our orders for streamlined trains have forced us to consider expansion. Rather than build a new plant, we are willing to buy yours. At your price, provided that it is anywhere within reason."

For a few moments, Omstred stroked his thin chin as though he might consider the proposition. Then, in dry tone, he questioned:

"What is the trouble, Thrake? Have you learned that your processes are faulty? Is that why you are making your offer? So that you can buy Yakroff's formulas?"

Thrake shook his head.

"We are holding tests next week," he replied. "On full scale. To prove that our steel is structurally superior. At the same time, we shall start our regular production. Our product will be satisfactory. To be frank, Omstred, we want nothing to do with Yakroff.

"If we buy this plant, we intend to put in our own processes. You can charge us what you paid for Yakroff's services and inventions. We shall write them off the books. Now that we understand each other, what about the sale?"

Omstred's mind was changed. He reached to the side of his desk, picked up a small steel casting, which he handled like a piece of light aluminum. Indignantly, Omstred declared:

"This is Yakroff's work; yet you say you will have none of it. Let me tell you, Thrake, this steel is lighter, stronger, better, than any you can produce! If—"

"We have specifications," interrupted Thrake. "We shall supply them."

"This is the steel of the future—"

"But mine will be the steel of the present. I have the orders, Omstred. They are all that count. This plant will go out of business, long before that future of which you speak. It is unwise, sometimes, to think too far in advance."

OMSTRED clanked the piece of steel upon his desk. He arose from his chair; walked dejectedly to the window. He looked over the buildings of his plant, sadly at first; then with a sense of satisfaction. When he turned about, Omstred showed a face that was tinged with decision.

"Not for sale," he declared, firmly. "I intend to stay in business. Beginning with next week, this plant will include a night shift. I shall turn out my steel with double confidence. First, that I can gain the required orders, despite you. Second, that I can borrow money on my prospects, in order to pay the equipment bills that are due next month.

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“As for Ivor Yakroff, I have double confidence in him. Not only because of his past work; but because of his present experiments. His laboratories are busy with new formulas. He has produced further alloys, as good—if not superior to those that he has already supplied. The time will come, Thrake, when you would like to deal with Yakroff. You will be too late!”

Thrake waited for Omstred to say more. Omstred had finished. With an amused look, Thrake arose and beckoned to Parkinson. At the door, Thrake gave a sad shake of his head. His parting comment was a sarcastic one.

“Overwork has tired you physically, Omstred. You are trying to recuperate through sheer mental energy. Your imagination has carried you away. I am sorry for you.”

PERHAPS Omstred thought that Thrake had bluffed. Such was not the case. As Thrake's limousine drove up the ramp to the Skyway, Thrake indulged in comment to Parkinson. The steel magnate pointed to the Centurion Steel plant.

“Not enough work to keep it going,” he remarked. “Yet Omstred talks about night shifts. The added expense will ruin him completely. He has already carried the burden of two dozen watchmen, on duty every night, to protect special equipment that no one wants.”

Thrake was still thinking on the subject when the limousine rolled through the Holland Tunnel underneath the Hudson River. This time, he stated:

“I was right, when I told Omstred that his imagination had carried him away. The man is afflicted with impossible dreams! His hiring of those watchmen proves it. His faith in Yakroff is childlike. I have met Yakroff. The fellow is almost a fanatic!”

The big car stopped for a traffic light, only a few blocks distant from the Manhattan exit of the tube. As he looked northward from the window, Thrake could see the tall tower of the Empire State Building, lighted against the sky. It rose above the low-built midsection of Manhattan.

Just across the street from where the car had stopped was an old, five-story building of brick, squatly and antiquated. Its top story showed windows that glimmered with a brilliant blue light. At moments, bursts of vivid sparks broke from within.

“That's odd, Parkinson,” remarked Thrake. “That place reminds me of steel.”

“It should, sir,” returned the secretary. “It is Yakroff's laboratory.”

“No!” exclaimed Thrake. Then, realizing that Parkinson would not joke, he added: “Is it actually Yakroff's place?”

Parkinson nodded and tapped the briefcase.

“Those letters from Yakroff,” he reminded. “They bore that address. Probably you did not notice it, Mr. Thrake.”

Thrake settled back as the car started. He laughed as he took a last look at the sparkling windows.

“Yakroff looks busy,” he scoffed. “No wonder! Omstred is promising him a fortune! Those letters were odd, Parkinson. I must read them again. Yakroff said he would like to talk to me. But he seemed to indicate that he

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had nothing to sell. They sounded as though Omstred had so praised the man that he has begun to feel a grudge against me.”

The limousine rolled northward to the pretentious but old-fashioned house where Thrake lived while in New York. Thrake dined there; later, he appeared at the Cobalt Club. Omstred did not arrive there. He had stayed late at his steel plant.

While Thrake was at the club, he received a call from Parkinson. A telegram had come, stating that all was ready for the tests at the Pittsburgh plant. Chatting with friends, the head of Consolidated Metals mentioned that he would leave for Pittsburgh the next day.

While Thrake was speaking, Cranston chanced to happen by. He overheard Thrake's plans, but gave them no special attention. Cranston was leaving for an evening at a de luxe gambling establishment, where Case Hurrin was expected.

The Shadow had chosen the direct plan of keeping vigilant, but unsuspected, watch on Case. That, he was confident, would lead him to the Brothers of Doom. Through Case, The Shadow could anticipate the final stroke of the masked supercriminals.

There was logic in The Shadow's plan; at the same time, an oddity existed. While thinking of Case, The Shadow had passed up a person whose coming purposes would have a direct bearing on the next meeting of the insidious Four.

That man was none other than Sidney Thrake.

CHAPTER XIV. THRAKE'S RETURN

THE Pittsburgh plant of the Consolidated Metals Corporation was a small city that covered many acres. Though it had its own officials, Sidney Thrake ruled supreme, whenever he was there. The president of the plant, a mild-mannered individual named Dannard, became nothing more than a “yes-man” when Thrake arrived.

The expected tests had been postponed when Thrake reached Pittsburgh. That did not matter, as Thrake had much to do while in the city. He remained there over a weekend; and on Monday, the tests were in readiness.

In Dannard's huge, magnificent office, Thrake shook hands with the representatives of railroads that had contracted for the fleets of streamlined trains. The visitors were much impressed by the pompous czar of the steel industry. At three o'clock, announcement came that the tests were ready.

Just as the representatives were starting out, a superintendent came in and spoke to Dannard. The mildish president looked troubled. He requested Thrake to wait for a few minutes. As soon as the rest were gone, Dannard explained.

“There has been trouble with the sheets,” he said. “This superprocess calls for tremendous heat. We had no difficulty until to-day.”

“Then why should it begin?” demanded Thrake. “What is the answer, Dannard?”

“We have attempted sustained production, which was not necessary in the past.”

“Why should that cause difficulty? You can keep up the heat, can't you?”

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“Yes, Mr. Thrake—”

Dannard stopped. That was as far as he could go. He gestured to the superintendent, who put the condition bluntly:

“The equipment just won't stand up under it, Mr. Thrake. That was allowed for, we thought. Tests made it look like there'd be no trouble. But there is.”

Angrily, Thrake abused the experts who had devised the process. He called for Dannard's files. They were brought. Thrake told Parkinson to check them. Thumbing through sheaves of papers, the secretary announced:

“They seem to all be here, Mr. Thrake. Exactly as finally approved in New York.”

Thrake ignored Dannard, to question the superintendent:

“What will be the result of it?”

“Slow production,” replied the superintendent. “With a great deal of uncertainty. With more equipment, like we have at present, we might be able to meet production schedule. But we will need it in a hurry.”

“You'll have it!”

“A different process would help. There ought to be one. But you can't take out much time to start new experiments, Mr. Thrake.”

THRAKE thanked the superintendent for his candid information. No more minutes could be spared. With Dannard and Parkinson, Thrake set out for the huge test building where the finished specimens of lightweight steel were to be proven.

Specifications called for a featherweight steel that would stand double the shock of the heavier, old-fashioned product. The added resistance was essential, because streamlined trains would travel at much higher speed than those that they replaced. To prove the new product beyond all doubt, a daring test had been arranged.

Double tracks had been laid in through both open ends of the big test building. As soon as Dannard gave the word, two shifting locomotives, one at each end of the same track, started puffing toward each other. Each shunted a steel railway car ahead of it. The cars were regulation coaches, supplied by one of the railroads that had contracted for the streamliners.

Workers clocked the cars as they came; waved arm signals to the engineers of the shifters. The little locomotives halted, the cars coasted inward at constant speed. When they neared, they seemed to leap at each other for the crash.

The impact was terrific. The vestibules bent as the cars jarred upward. When they settled, the coaches showed definite signs of damage, although they had stood the shock rather well.

Thrake was pleased.

“The cars buckled,” he undertoned to Dannard. “That helps. Our steel will certainly fare no worse.”

Thrake was due for a surprise.

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The shifting engines were busy on the other track. Watchers drew farther back, as two shiny cars of stainless steel came gliding inward. The new cars had double the impetus. Sliding on roller-bearing wheels, they made a smooth sight as they approached.

Pride of the Consolidated Metals Corporation, these cars were slithering to disaster. They met with a roaring clangor. As Thrake had predicted, they did not buckle. Instead, they telescoped.

The front ends withered back like crushed paper. Jamming at each other's throats, the cars clutched into a mass of tangled wreckage. Ripped sheets of bent steel curled beside the tracks. The cars had smashed as badly as a pair of wooden coaches.

Commotion reigned among the railroad men. Their faces showed amazement. Thrake's jaw was set, as he eyed the ruined steel. He turned to Dannard.

"Get those fellows to your office," he ordered. "Be talking to them when I come there."

TWENTY minutes later, Thrake walked in on a hubbub. Dannard, behind his desk, looked like a dried peanut in an oversize shell, as questions popped from every side. Thrake stopped in the center of the room. He spoke in a voice that boomed above all others.

"Gentlemen! A few words, please!"

The talkers silenced to hear the big "voice of steel." Thrake reduced his tone to a lower key; but he spoke with all his accustomed self-importance.

"I have learned the source of trouble," declared Thrake. "The steel used in the test cars was the result of an experimental process. It stood strain under test; but strain is not shock."

There were nods of agreement.

"Intense heat is necessary to our process," added Thrake. "It was too severe for certain equipment; and was therefore reduced. The mistake was not learned until to-day. Had I known it, I would have postponed the test."

Thrake turned to see Dannard moving his lips incoherently. Coolly, Thrake questioned:

"Those are the facts, are they not, Mr. Dannard?"

"Yes," gulped Dannard, in his usual form. "Yes! But—"

"But we have rectified matters. Am I correct?"

Dannard could do no more than gulp another "Yes."

"Our new process goes into effect this week," announced Thrake. "It will allow us to push all equipment to the limit. The first steel that we produce will go into new cars. Our test will be repeated for your satisfaction."

No one could raise objection. The listeners knew that Thrake held signed contracts. Those orders called for steel that would meet requirements. If Thrake could produce it, as he claimed, a new test would prove it. The first failure would be nullified.

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Thrake beamed confidence all around, as he shook hands with every one. The visitors were smiling when they left. They not only admired Thrake's gameness; they believed that he would make good with his promises.

When Thrake came back into the office, he found the superintendent with Dannard. The mild-mannered president was repeating all that Thrake had said. The superintendent was listening with doubt; and even Parkinson registered uncertainty.

"I told you I would handle matters," said Thrake to Dannard. "The whole idea was to send them away pleased. I accomplished that much."

"Yes," began Dannard. "But—"

"No 'buts' about it, Mr. Thrake," inserted the superintendent. "We're licked from start to finish. I told you we could produce under forced conditions. I meant that we could produce the steel that was in those cars. Since they're done, we have nothing. Unless, as Mr. Dannard tells me, you can find a new process."

"I shall have one," declared Thrake. He turned to Dannard: "Do you remember that fellow Yakroff?"

Dannard's eyes lighted for a moment.

"Yes!" he exclaimed. "Yakroff had a process. But you told him we didn't want it. And later"—the gleam faded from his eyes—"later, you decided that Yakroff had nothing, after all."

"Since then," informed Thrake, "Yakroff sold his process to Omstred."

"Can you buy out Omstred?"

"No. But Yakroff has experimented further. He has new formulas; he is making even better steel. I intend to acquire it."

THRAKE ordered Parkinson to produce Yakroff's correspondence. Thrake read one letter; handed it to Dannard. When he came to the second, he kept it; and did the same with the third.

Thrake pursed his lips and looked at Parkinson. The secretary shook his head doubtfully. Dannard did not notice it; but the superintendent did. He saw something behind Thrake's reluctance.

Taking the first letter back from Dannard, Thrake thrust all three to Parkinson and told him to put them in his briefcase and summon a cab. To Dannard, he said:

"I'm going to the airport. There is just time to catch the New York plane. You will hear from me to-morrow."

On the way to the airport, Thrake told Parkinson that he was going into New York alone. He ordered the secretary to return to the plant and settle a few details with Dannard; then come in by later plane, or train, whichever suited him.

"Take a sleeper, if you wish," suggested Thrake. "I shall not need you until to-morrow morning. Remember those telegrams, Parkinson; also those two letters that I dictated. By the way—let me have the Yakroff correspondence."

Parkinson fished in the overstuffed briefcase. They were at the airport; in his hurry, the secretary could not

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find Yakroff's letters.

“Never mind,” snapped Thrake. “Find them yourself and destroy them. Yakroff made ridiculous statements in those letters. I want to forget them! I shall humor the fellow when I see him!”

A few hours later, Thrake's plane was descending at Newark Airport. Off on the meadows, puffs of flame were wallowing from the stacks of the Centurion Steel plant. Omstred's enterprise had begun its night work, turning out the very sort of steel that Thrake wanted.

Thrake grimaced as he saw the sight. His lips finally stiffened in a contemptuous curl.

A car was waiting when Thrake stepped from the strip. Parkinson had wired New York to have it at the airport. A dapper chauffeur saluted, as Thrake stepped into the automobile. The big car left speedily, taking the road that led eastward to the Skyway.

THOUGH the Centurion Steel plant was using a night shift, patrolling guards were still on duty there. They formed the usual cordon amid the deepening dusk. A low ground fog was creeping slowly, making blackness complete along the soggy soil.

One of the bribed guards halted. Glowing in the darkness, a luminous disk poised before his eyes. The guard let a Brother through; whispered that the way was clear between two unused buildings. Soon, a second Brother arrived and followed.

On the far side of the plant, a third Brother found a route to the secret meeting. Minutes passed; then the fourth Brother appeared. He was the leader; but that fact did not become evident until he had gone up in the elevator with Suda.

When he arrived in the meeting room, the last Brother of Doom found the others waiting, under the glow of the green light.

“To-night,” declared the leader, in his singular, disguising monotone, “we must act as we have planned. The circumstances that we anticipated have taken place. We were not sure that they would happen; but we were prepared in case they occurred.

“We shall strike at once! There is no time for delay. Millions of dollars lie at stake! Swiftmess will bring success. It will also balk our lone enemy, The Shadow. We shall send our call, thrice repeated. Then we shall move to our final goal.”

Imposingly, the leader moved to the wall. His gauntleted hand gripped the switch. Green light was blotted. Blinks of light sent their message through the night. The signal once given, the leader waited, allowing time before he repeated it.

The Brothers of Doom had risen to prompt action. Seemingly, those masked killers had sprouted from the ground, to meet in this important conclave. Though only a few hours had passed since the failure of the tests in Pittsburgh, word had reached them. Their night's mission was the aftermath of the earlier episode in a city nearly four hundred miles away.

Sidney Thrake, speeding by plane, had reached Newark before the meeting hour. That fact directly concerned this conclave of the Brothers. It had speeded their final plans. They were ready for action despite The Shadow.

Though The Shadow was watching Case Hurrin, the living link to the needed trail, he was far from his final

meeting with the Brothers of Doom.

Death would confront The Shadow, in all its menace, before this quest was ended.

CHAPTER XV. THE DEATH PLUNGE

BROTHERS OF DOOM were wisely waiting to repeat their message. They knew that Case Hurrin might not be ready to receive the first coded blot-outs. In fact, it chanced that Case, at that particular moment, was hurrying to the appointed spot. That was the one place in all Manhattan from which the signals could be seen.

Case's destination was the observation tower of the Empire State Building.

When Case stepped from his cab, on Thirty-fourth Street, he looked around to make sure that no one was following him. His slitty eyes were wary. The lips that adorned his lean face showed a smile. Case was satisfied that he was unobserved.

The go-between was mistaken. Across the wide street, a shadowy figure was alighting from another cab. That shape clung to darkness like a haunting wraith. The Shadow saw Case enter the Empire State Building.

The night was cold and windy. Few visitors were going to the top of the building, although the visibility was good. Case paid his fee and went up with a few other passengers. They changed to the tower elevator and arrived at the main observation floor.

At the left, Case saw the restaurant, with a few late diners present. Case turned to the right and entered the sumptuous lounge room, where a few other visitors strolled about. He crossed the lounge and went out to the observation promenade that circled the tower.

There, Case found himself alone amid the driving chill of the wind. Below lay the vast glitter of Manhattan: myriads of twinkling windows; areas of brilliance, like Times Square. The splendid sight had no charm for Case.

He went to the west side of the promenade; looked away from the dazzle. His gaze was toward the Hudson River, black except for the few moving lights of tugs and ferries. Beyond, Case eyed the dull glow of New Jersey cities. He saw the flat, darkish expanse of the meadows.

Case stepped to one of the large observation telescopes along the parapet. He sighted it westward, to a dim spot on the meadows. He dropped a dime into the telescope. A click dropped a black disk from in front of his eye.

Case saw the sight he wanted. Enlarged by the telescope, dim light became discernible. Case viewed the dull outline of a building top. He focused the telescope; adjusted it a trifle. Case studied a green glow that shone from the sides of a low, squatly skylight.

While Case was sighting the gleam from the secret meeting-room, another visitor arrived in the lounge room that Case had left. The arrival was Lamont Cranston. He was carrying a well-packed briefcase.

Cranston strolled out to the promenade. From the door, he saw Case outlined beside the telescope.

Black garments came from the briefcase. A cloak slid over shoulders; a slouch hat topped a head. Cranston had become The Shadow, invisible in the patchy darkness of the promenade. Stealthily, the cloaked shape moved toward Case.

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AT that moment, Case was watching a change in the green glow. Blinks gave a signal. Case caught the dots and dashes. He delivered a grunted chuckle, as he stepped back from the telescope. Case's shoulder almost brushed The Shadow as the go-between turned and started to the south end of the western promenade.

The Shadow did not follow. Instead, he took advantage of Case's departure, to peer through the telescope. After viewing the green glow, The Shadow looked above the telescope to make sure of the direction. Though the green light had not flickered, The Shadow knew that it must have sent a signal. More than that, he identified its location.

The green light represented the Centurion Steel Co. The Shadow had discovered the headquarters used by the Brothers of Doom.

As The Shadow took another peer through the telescope, the black blind flicked across. Case's dime payment had finished its time limit.

The Shadow looked for Case. The fellow had stopped at another telescope; he was training it in a southward direction.

Quickly, The Shadow approached; he was beside the parapet, only a dozen feet away, when Case left the telescope. Hurriedly, Case entered the lounge room. Through the window, The Shadow saw him enter a telephone booth.

Taking advantage of the telescope's open eye, The Shadow turned to the view Case had seen. He saw the top floor of a low building in downtown Manhattan. Lights were flickering, sparkling, within the windows. The Shadow recognized that floor as the experimental laboratory run by Ivor Yakroff.

Weeks ago, when he had first checked on doings at the Centurion Steel Co., The Shadow had learned of Yakroff. The Shadow had dropped that investigation, thinking it an unnecessary one. Here was proof that matters had been deeper than The Shadow supposed.

Seen through the telescope, there was no mistaking Yakroff's lab. It was practically unnoticeable when viewed by the naked eye; but the lens magnified it to perfection. Moreover, the telescope showed the exit of the Holland Tunnel, just beyond Yakroff's building.

STEPPING away from the telescope, The Shadow watched Case through the lounge window. Case had finished his telephone call. The Shadow presumed that he had contacted Mocker by telephone, instead of by a personal visit.

Earlier to-day, Harry Vincent had reported that Mocker was on pins and needles. He had seemed to be expecting some news on this particular date. Late in the afternoon, Mocker had remarked that he intended to go out, taking the crew with him. They had been ready to start when Harry managed to send a report.

Mocker could have been waiting for a quick call from Case. If so, he had received it.

The Shadow saw a disadvantage in starting for Mocker's. It would be a long-shot, reaching there before the crew set out. The Shadow would have taken that chance, if it had not been for Case. For some reason, Case had remained in the lounge. He was pacing back and forth, looking at his watch.

The Shadow divined the reason.

Case was following a regular routine. He expected a repetition of the message from the Brothers. Having

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nothing else to do, he was waiting here for it. Sometimes, perhaps, the Brothers added special comment when they dispatched their last message.

By staying along with Case, The Shadow could intercept the message itself. That would be better than trailing Mocker.

After ten minutes, Case came out to the windy promenade. He went to the first telescope that he had used. He fished out a dime, dropped it in the slot. The Shadow, closing up behind him, heard the coin's click.

An instant later, Case was numbed by a sensation more chilling than the wind. The ice-cold muzzle of an automatic pressed his neck. His ears heard the whisper of a sinister laugh. The crook's blood went frigid.

Case could scarcely hold his footing as The Shadow, pushing the automatic, shoved him away from the telescope. Hands upraised, Case faced the parapet, shivering as he stared beyond it. Holding the man helpless, The Shadow took a look through the telescope.

For ten long seconds, the green glow remained constant. Then it began to blink. The black dots and dashes were in ordinary Morse. The Shadow read them as they came:

“Send M to cover lab on top floor of—”

At that point, The Shadow was interrupted; not through any break of the message, but by a move from Case. The crook performed a double action. He made a twisting movement away from the gun muzzle. At the same time, he voiced a wild, gargled shout.

INSTANTLY, The Shadow swung away from the telescope; not toward Case, but clear about. The Shadow recognized the cause of the crook's cry. It meant that Case had gained a chance for aid. The Shadow was swinging to meet unexpected attackers.

They were at hand.

Coming from the door of the lounge, they formed a surging trio: Mocker and two thugs. They must have been somewhere near the Empire State Building when Case called them. On that account, Case had told Mocker to stop here first.

Case must have sensed that The Shadow was close. Jittery, he had wanted protection; and Mocker was here with it. As ill luck had it, Mocker had left Cliff and Harry below.

The one break in The Shadow's favor was the fact that Mocker and his thugs had seen nothing when they heard Case's shout. The Shadow's form was invisible against the telescope. That gave him his chance to make his swing effective. He was slashing with his automatic as the crooks poured upon him.

Complete surprise would have swept the attacking trio, if Case had not managed a new shout that he gave:

“The Shadow!”

The frantic call was lost in the wind; but thugs were close enough to hear it. They swung at blackness; a revolver hand was lucky enough to break the drive of The Shadow's forearms. A second later, The Shadow was grappling with the trio.

One crook-fired gunshot could have spelled The Shadow's finish. The cloaked fighter was equal to the

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emergency. His gun hand blocked, he swung his free arm. His gloved fist clipped an attacker's chin; recoiling, that same hand plucked at a revolver and snatched it from a crook's grasp.

As he flung the weapon backward over the parapet, The Shadow twisted away from the only armed attacker capable of fight. With a hard, side-tripping swing of his right foot, he tumbled the man to the concrete.

Mocker was the thug whose gun was gone. Savagely, he sprang for The Shadow's throat. Swinging, The Shadow met a sudden lunge from Case, who was pitching back into the battle. Twisting past the telescope, The Shadow made a vaulting jump up to the parapet. He intended to reverse it with a downward drive upon his enemies.

Case made an upward clutch before The Shadow could complete the maneuver. The two locked—The Shadow bearing down upon Case, using him as a momentary buffer. The Shadow's gun hand was free; he was ready to gain the bulge on Mocker, when that crook made a wild attack.

WITH Mocker came the other pair; both supporting thugs were useless, but on their feet. Since Case was in their way, they heaved him upward, using him as a ram to shove The Shadow back upon the parapet.

Rolling sideways, The Shadow reached to grab the telescope. That grip was all he needed to twist back inside the parapet and gain the ambush of darkness.

It was Case who balked The Shadow, in a manner that the fellow never intended.

Case's light weight was partly responsible for what happened. With The Shadow's pressure ended, Case took an automatic lunge; thanks to the propelling power of Mocker and the huskies. Being wiry as well as light, Case twisted as he went; his writhe was as rapid as The Shadow's twist.

As The Shadow's fingers scraped the smooth surface of the telescope, Case grabbed for the cloaked figure's neck. The Shadow tried to sledge him with the automatic. At the same moment, Mocker and the others grabbed at The Shadow's shoulders.

Case went rolling outward as The Shadow swung. Wildly, the wiry crook tried to restrain himself by clutching The Shadow's throat. Mocker, missing his grip, managed a hard shove. That, coupled with Case's helpless roll, produced the result that followed.

Locked together, two figures shot outward off the parapet. Mocker and his thugs stopped short, their hands upon the bare concrete. The other combatants were gone. The Shadow and Case Hurrin had pitched in a headlong plunge from the parapet of the observation promenade.

One thousand feet lay between that fatal rail and the ground below. Death would be sure at the end of that tremendous plunge. The Shadow and Case Hurrin were off on a dive that was to end in doom!

CHAPTER XVI. RETURNED FROM BELOW

As he went from that parapet, The Shadow saw void beneath him. Case was underneath The Shadow; the crook's face was gaping upward. Across Case's shoulder, The Shadow gained that awesome view of space that dwindled to microscopic proportions.

Then, instantly, came blocking whiteness that rushed up toward The Shadow's eyes. Smashing concrete produced a barrier, three stories below the observation rail. Case hit that ledge skull first. The blow jarred The Shadow; cast him away from the crook's relinquished clutch.

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The falling fighters had struck the suicide break that lay below the tower. Time and again, that projecting floor had stopped the voluntary jumps of would-be suicides. Even to those who leaned from the parapet to look, that projection could not be noticed.

It was an even break for many who landed there. If their outward spring proved hard enough, they would bounce farther and take the whole plunge to the ground. If short by a foot—sometimes, even by inches—they would remain sprawled upon the ledge.

Sometimes the wind was a factor. It proved that way to-night. Whistling around the tower, the half gale was like a monstrous creature seeking to pluck its prey. Whipping, it snatched at the two shapes that rolled apart upon the ledge.

Case Hurrin was dead—his skull cracked, his limbs broken by the thirty-foot fall. The Shadow was jolted; but only slightly hurt, for Case, beneath him, had taken the full impact against the cruel stonework.

Lunging over the ledge itself, The Shadow caught a one-hand grip upon a stone projection. He clung there, momentarily. From where he lay, he saw the body of Case Hurrin, head and shoulders out from the ledge, arms dangling downward.

Fierce wind whisked those arms, spun them like the blades of a fan. Case's body trembled as if alive. It shifted to a more outward angle; sagged sideward, sinking. Twisted legs bobbed upward. The wind seemed to snatch them. The corpse of Case Hurrin slipped downward, backward, to resume its plunge.

A moment later, that body was a spinning mannequin, diminishing to toylike proportions as it whizzed through hundreds of feet of intervening space. Whirled strawlike in the wind, the crook's remains were carried clear of the lower walls. A mere dot when it finished the drop, the body spread into a tiny, motionless blob.

The Shadow, too, was sliding; but his slip was restrained to inches. With a one-hand grip, he fought the elements. One leg was past the ledge. The other was dragging hard against the stone. The Shadow's toes dug for a hold. As they made that futile effort, his foot encountered a raised block of ornamental stone.

The Shadow's grip was double; hand and foot. He held it. With a backward strain, he urged his weight inward. His arm tightened around the block beside it. The Shadow's pull turned to a roll. He flattened, back upward, safely on the ledge, while the thwarted wind whined its disappointment above him.

There, The Shadow rested.

FROM the parapet above, three thugs were peering downward. They saw only the blackened space. They did not stretch far enough to view the ledge, nor could they spy Case's body. Blackness suited them.

They voiced their enthusiasm with oaths. To them, the loss of Case Hurrin meant nothing. The Shadow was dead; that was all that counted.

Mocker Shebly tugged at his two followers.

“We're lamming,” he told them. “We can't stay here, you lugs! Slide out—that's what we've got to do—before there's a lot of holler!”

The thugs came down from the parapet. Sidling along with Mocker, they went through the almost deserted lounge and reached the elevator, just in time to join a small group of descending visitors.

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When they reached the street, Mocker gave one henchman a wise nudge. People were running to the far side of the Empire State Building. There were shouts along the street. Some one had reported a crash from the low roof of an adjoining building.

“Some guy's jumped off the Empire State—”

Mocker heard that call and altered it as he and his gorillas hurried to their touring car.

“They should have said a 'couple of guys',” he chuckled. “That's what they'll find on the roof. Two! Only we won't be here to see it. We've got another place to go.”

At the touring car, Mocker shoved one thug aboard. He kept the other one to travel with him by taxi. He gave orders to the touring car's driver; then, to the passengers, he spoke the pleasant news:

“We croaked The Shadow! Off the top of the Empire State Building! That's who the saps are looking for! The Shadow!”

Mocker had no time to add that Case Hurrin had also taken the plunge. He considered that fact superfluous and unimportant. Even the Brothers of Doom would not care about Case's death, since it had been necessary in the elimination of The Shadow.

Harry and Cliff were among those who heard Mocker's news. As the touring car started forward, both were gripped by the same idea. Though The Shadow had survived many ordeals, this was one that seemed beyond hope. Neither agent doubted that his chief was dead. Both had the stern duty of carrying on with The Shadow's plans.

That meant that they must block the Brothers of Doom.

The first step was to nullify Mocker and his crew. Harry and Cliff had heard the address that Mocker gave. If the touring car could be stopped and its underworld passengers disposed of, The Shadow's agents could travel on alone, to handle Mocker and his single bodyguard.

After that, the way would be open to reach the Brothers, when they arrived at Yakroff's.

WHAT Harry and Cliff needed was cooperative effort. They had their chance to plan it as the touring car rolled swiftly southward. Thugs were jesting among themselves, wise-cracking about The Shadow. Words of praise were added regarding Mocker and his methods.

“Leave it to Mocker,” the driver was saying, while the others leaned forward to listen. “The Shadow ain't the first tough nut he's cracked. I can tell you about a lot of others—”

“How about it, Cliff?” whispered Harry. “Shall we take this bunch?”

“I'm ready,” undertoned Cliff. “You handle the driver. Make him shove for a side street.”

Harry shifted in the driver's direction. Cliff shot a look back through the rear window. Seeing no cab that might be Mocker's, Cliff pulled a gun and swung it in the faces of the men around him.

“Reach, monkeys!” snapped Cliff. His crisp tone meant business. “I'm taking over! Vincent is with me. This heater's hot.” He jabbed the muzzle at a thug who hesitated. “Who wants the first pill?”

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No one requested a bullet. Cliff Marsland had a rep at handling a gat. Harry was acting in support of Cliff's statement. His gun was poked behind the driver's ear.

"Next turn left," ordered Harry. Then, as the driver tried to shift, he added: "Rather crack up, would you? Go ahead! Do it! You won't know it when we smash!"

The driver decided to accept Harry's threat. He pressed the brake pedal, eased the car into the side street. With hands up, the thugs began to pile out at Cliff's order. Harry sprang to the street; came around to the curb, to keep the gorillas in line.

The job was to hand this bunch to the law. The fact that the thugs carried guns would produce their arrest. It would mean a dash afterward, for Harry and Cliff, to get back to the touring car. They were ready to worry about that later.

Unfortunately, they found earlier troubles.

Just as Cliff joined Harry, a taxi swung in from the corner. Its door was open; Mocker jumped to the curb before the taxi stopped. Through sheer luck, he had spotted the touring car's turn; had guessed that something was sour.

With Mocker came his bodyguard, both aiming. The light was good enough for them to spot The Shadow's agents. Harry and Cliff swung hard to meet their fire. Shots never came.

Captive gorillas had spied Mocker. Their hands dropped downward; sped forward as they lunged for The Shadow's agents. Harry was hurled to the sidewalk; Cliff was sprawled into the touring car. Their guns were gone when Mocker arrived. He glared at the new prisoners.

"A couple of wise bimbos," sneered Mocker. "Springing some racket of your own! Thought you could slip it past me, only you didn't. I ought to let you have it, right here!"

Henchmen hoped that Mocker would give the order for slaughter. Instead, he told them to bind and gag the prisoners. To appease his muttering crew, Mocker told them:

"Case Hurrin is through. I'm working direct with the big-shots from now on. There's a way I can reach them; but I never used it. I wasn't supposed to, unless Case went out. The big-shots would like to talk to these palookas. They'll get their chance."

Bound and gagged on the floor of the touring car, The Shadow's agents received the snarls and kicks that thugs chose to give them. The cover-up crew was on its way again, minus the services of two members. Mocker kept close behind, in the cab.

MEANWHILE, searchers below the Empire State Building had found the smashed body of Case Hurrin. They took him for a suicide. Looking up, they eyed the massive heights one thousand feet above. The observers were too far below to witness a sight that would have made them forget Case's plunge.

The Shadow was scaling the wall above the suicide ledge. His route was doubly precarious; for he was weakened by his jolt, and the wind was as fierce as ever. This time, a drop could mean the same fate that had overtaken Case Hurrin.

Danger was greatest at the top. It was a long reach for the parapet; The Shadow gained a slender grip with his numbed fingers. Icy blasts hauled at his swaying figure. It was a tug between The Shadow and the gale. Then,

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with the finish of a heavy gust, The Shadow lurched inward over the parapet.

He fell safely beside the telescope where Case had watched the signals from the meadows. Rising, The Shadow found his briefcase; he packed his black garments. He limped into the deserted lounge and made a telephone call to Burbank.

There was no stir in the observation tower. Visitors were being watched as they descended; if they looked like eccentric persons, they were questioned, on the chance that they might know something about the suicide who had plunged below.

Forcing his limp into a casual stroll, The Shadow passed inspection in the guise of Cranston.

Attendants saw his briefcase; took him for an out-of-town business man who had finished a day's calls with a trip to the observation tower.

On Thirty-fourth Street, The Shadow's cab was ready. It had been summoned from Times Square, by Burbank. At The Shadow's order, the cab headed southward. Riding for Yakroff's laboratory, The Shadow again garbed himself in black.

Despite the fray on the Empire State Building, the hurl into space, the climb up from the suicide ledge, there was still time left to balk the master schemers. The minutes that The Shadow had lost might be balanced by the time required for the Brothers to ride in from the Jersey meadows.

That was the chance on which The Shadow gambled. He counted on a clear path through Mocker's thuggish cordon, knowing that his agents were with the crew.

So they were. But Harry and Cliff had a new status with that outfit. Helpless prisoners, they could not aid The Shadow. They needed the help of the chief whom they believed dead.

Returned from the abyss of doom, The Shadow would be due for new trouble from Mocker's crew before he could reach the Brothers of Doom.

CHAPTER XVII. MASSED CRIME

WHEN Mocker reached the squatly brick building near the Holland Tunnel, he made prompt arrangements that fulfilled instructions. He stationed the touring car on a side street, with two henchmen to watch the prisoners. He took the rest of the depleted crew along with him.

Originally, Mocker's outfit numbered eight, including himself. Thus Mocker set forth with only three followers; but that number was sufficient. Their job was simply to guard a blind alley and small courtyard in back of the brick building.

The courtyard marked the bottom of an old-fashioned fire escape that hung from the building wall.

Ordinarily, Mocker would have remained with his underlings. To-night, he had another mission. He needed contact with the mysterious Four whom he served, but had never seen. Case's death made that necessary. There was a way to reach those Brothers; also a method by which to recognize them, in emergency. Case had explained that matter to Mocker, in the past.

Sidling from the blind alley, Mocker went to the front of the building. He paced warily past a large front door that was barred for the night. He strolled into the gloom of a side street until he reached a small side door,

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that was locked but not formidable. From there, Mocker went back to the avenue.

In his back-and-forth pacing, Mocker was making himself somewhat conspicuous. That meant no danger; for no police were close. What it did mean was that Mocker would be seen by the Brothers, who were almost due. That would bring the contact that Mocker wanted.

After five minutes. Mocker heard a sound near the secluded side entrance. He shifted beside the darkened steps, bringing out a revolver. A thrusting hand pressed his arm. The fist opened. Mocker saw a luminous disk poised in the darkness.

It was the token of the Brothers. Every one of the Four carried such a coin, so Case had said. A monotoned voice demanded why Mocker had made contact.

“Case is croaked,” whispered Mocker. “He went off the top of the Empire State Building! He hauled The Shadow with him. It was curtains for The Shadow, too!”

There was an approving murmur in the darkness. Mocker sensed that other figures had joined the first Brother; but he was not sure that they totaled four.

“There's something else,” added Mocker. “Two of the outfit went haywire! Tried to take over the rest of the crew, after I spilled the dope about The Shadow. We grabbed them.”

There was a monotoned question for more details. Mocker explained that Harry and Cliff were prisoners in the touring car. The first Brother conferred with those beside him. After a few moments, he drew a second disk from a tight pocket and placed it in Mocker's palm.

Briefly, the Brother gave the location of headquarters; told him to take the prisoners there. The speaker explained that Mocker could pass the company guards by showing the token to the right one.

“Bring two men with you,” concluded the Brother. “With the guard aiding, you can carry the prisoners through.”

MOCKER heard footsteps on the sill that fronted the side door. A key grated heavily. Brothers of Doom were taking that route to Yakoff's laboratory. Mocker's job lay elsewhere. Since he already had two men in the touring car, he decided to fix matters in the alleyway; then go away.

Oddly, the darkened space below the fire escape became a spot of action before Mocker reached it. A figure was creeping inward, moving noiselessly in the darkness. The Shadow had arrived at the place where crime threatened.

His guns beneath his cloak, The Shadow was groping through, avoiding Mocker's three thugs. To offset his limp, The Shadow needed a hand grip against the wall. He did not expect to use his guns here below. Somewhere in this blind spot, he should find either Harry or Cliff.

When he reached the inner limit of the blocked space, The Shadow had learned that his agents were not present. That was unfortunate. It meant slow work in the darkness. Where the agents were was something that did not matter for the present. The Shadow's purpose was to reach Yakoff's.

There was a thug close by the bottom of the fire escape. Despite the fellow's presence, The Shadow took a bold course. Stretching high in the darkness, he managed to reach the hinged steps that hung above his head. He started to draw those steps downward.

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Iron groaned rustily in the darkness.

The thug heard it. With a quick growl, he flicked a flashlight toward The Shadow. A gloved hand clamped upon the torch before the crook gained more than a momentary glimpse. The Shadow caught the fellow's throat, started to twist him toward the wall.

The Shadow's right leg weakened. He slipped; before he could regain his balance, the other two hoodlums were upon him. Bashed back against the wall, The Shadow's only chance seemed a wild battle; gunfire that would give away his presence to the Brothers.

That issue was almost forced, when the choked thug, breaking free, gulped to the others:

“The Shadow!”

Locked with their adversary; the others heard the cry incredulously. This could not be The Shadow. The cloaked avenger was dead. Clamping The Shadow's arms against the wall, they halted in disbelief. That moment's respite enabled The Shadow to shove a fist beneath his cloak.

Starting a slow draw, he waited for the instant when his identity would be proven. The released thug was picking up his flashlight, to throw its rays upon the wall, when a hard voice growled just beside him:

“Hold it! Who've you got there?”

It was Mocker. Coming from the side, he jabbed his revolver toward the spot where crooks clutched The Shadow. The thug lowered the flashlight, muttering that it was The Shadow returned to life. Mocker sneered his contempt.

“Yeah? Have you gone screwy? Whoever this lug is, I'll find out!”

As Mocker shouldered forward, The Shadow performed a daring move. Quickly, he had analyzed the reason for Mocker's temporary absence at a meeting between the gang leader and the Brothers.

On the chance that the ruse would work, The Shadow deliberately let his .45 slide back beneath his cloak. He brought his forearm forward with a jerk. His fist opened in front of Mocker's eyes.

There, Mocker saw another luminous disk.

“Let this guy go,” ordered Mocker. “He's the McCoy. One of the big-shots! Move out! I want to talk to him.”

As henchmen shifted away, Mocker produced his own disk; he showed it proudly to the arrival whom he believed was the fourth Brother, here on special mission.

“Sorry I wasn't here,” apologized Mocker. “I had to pass the word that Case was croaked. I was around at the side, talking to the others. They'll tell you about it.”

The Shadow put away his disk; without a word, he reached for the hinged section of the fire escape. Mocker heard it creak; supposed that the Brother wanted to get up to Yakroff's. Obliging, Mocker helped The Shadow pull down the hinged extension.

While The Shadow was moving upward, Mocker gave orders to his three guards.

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"I'm going back to the car," he told them. "Stick here. There's others like the guy that just went up; but they'll all be going out the other side. If anybody tries to make it down the fire escape, give 'em the works! That's what you're here for."

THE top floor of the squatly building was divided into four rooms, all in a row. The first, at the front, was an experimental shop. Next came the actual laboratory; behind it, a small office. The last space, opening to the fire escape, was a large storeroom.

The shop was dark; there were lights, though, in the lab, where Ivor Yakroff was at work alone. The inventor was an eccentric-looking fellow, frail, but energetic. His thin, whitish face was twitchy. His eyes had an odd, excited gleam. A shock of bushy gray hair added to his peculiar appearance.

Yakroff was busy at a bench, working out a chemical process. Big beakers and bottles stood along the shelf. Whenever Yakroff reached for one, he steadied it carefully. Those chemicals had been placed with meticulous care. They were dangerous to handle.

The office was lighted; its door stood half open. Yakroff heard the jangle of the telephone bell. He replaced a beaker; set a test tube carefully in its rack. Then, with a nervous bound, he dashed for the rear office.

There was a slim girl seated at the desk, going over stacks of papers. Her face was thin, like Yakroff's; but her manner was quiet. Her eyes were as keen as the inventor's; the wild glint was lacking and that made them attractive. Dark-haired, the girl possessed an exotic beauty.

She was reaching for the telephone when Yakroff stopped here. Glaring, the inventor screamed in high-pitched tone:

"Do not touch it, Robina! Let that telephone ring! Here"—he pulled the receiver from the hook and clamped it upon the table—"that will settle it."

"Calm yourself, father," urged Robina. "There is no reason why you should ignore a call—"

"Sh-h-h!" Yakroff glared. "Some one may hear."

He picked up the receiver, listened with cocked head. He heard a gruff, demanding voice; then the click of a receiver. Yakroff hung up. He chuckled.

"Was it Mr. Thrake again?"

Robina asked the question. Yakroff shook his head.

"Perhaps," he replied. "Perhaps not. Whoever called said something about police headquarters. Bah! It may have been Thrake, trying to trick me!"

LEANING across the desk, Yakroff tapped the papers that Robina had sorted.

"Thrake wants these," he told his daughter. "My new formulas. That's why he called me to-night, to bargain for them. He shall never have them! They belong to Omstred."

"But Omstred still owes you money," objected Robina. "He has all the processes he needs. He cannot buy these—"

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“I shall give them to him. Why? Because Thrake wants them. Do you know what Thrake offered me? A half million dollars! Yes, and he begged me to take it!”

Yakroff drew himself erect, proud as a peacock. Robina showed amazement; her face became troubled. She tried to humor her father.

“Perhaps you are wrong about Mr. Thrake,” she said. “You claim that he conspired to injure you; that he sought to steal your inventions. You said so in the letters that you wrote him.”

“And I meant it!”

“But could you prove it, father? After all, Mr. Thrake merely refused to buy your processes when you first offered them to him. It was his privilege to refuse them, if he chose.”

Yakroff's glare focused steadily. The inventor wagged his forefinger. He twitched his lips, while he declared, shrewdly:

“Thrake refused to buy. Yes. Because he was cunning. He thought he could buy out Omstred and take my processes. That failed. Thrake has come to me.

“Again, he is crafty. He plots against me. He does not want to buy. His intent is to steal. He is trying to learn when we leave to-night, so that he can enter and seize my formulas. We shall take them with us, Robina—”

The girl interrupted with a stifled cry. Her face showed her first belief in the charges that her father made. She stared toward the laboratory door. Clutching his precious papers, Yakroff sprang about.

He saw a monstrous figure clad in tight costume of silkish gray. Hooded, masked, the intruder showed only his eyes. They stared, cold, through narrow slits. Behind that insidious invader stood three others. All four held aimed revolvers. Yakroff's fears stood proven. An evil thrust had arrived. Brothers of Doom were concluding their criminal strokes. They had come for Yakroff's formulas.

Brothers of Doom were ready to declare their terms.

CHAPTER XVIII. TRAPS OF DOOM

IVOR YAKROFF showed the challenge of a fighting bantam, as the leading Brother stepped forward. He placed one hand upon the precious formulas, doubled the other into a shaking fist that defied the muzzle of the Brother's gun.

Robina caught her father's arm, to restrain him. She could not make him listen, until the gun muzzle almost pressed Yakroff's forehead. Then, hearing a voiced threat from the Brother, along with Robina's entreaties, Yakroff sagged back into a chair.

He saw that fight was useless. Dejectedly, he watched the masked Brother gather the formulas, with the comment:

“These belong to us!”

The words were like a signal to the other three Brothers. Leaving the victims to their leader, they hastened out into the laboratory. Staring, Yakroff saw them seize beakers that were filled with liquids.

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“No, no!” The inventor shouted excitedly as he came to his feet. “Not those! Leave them alone! They could cause destruction!”

“We intend destruction.”

The cold monotone of the chief Brother supplied the interruption. Instantly, Yakroff realized that there would be no mercy from these rogues. He made a wild leap for the chief Brother.

Taken unaware, the Brother lost his aim. He slugged savagely with his gun. Yakroff, ducking, made a wiry attack that drove the Brother to the laboratory door. For a moment, they locked upon the threshold. Beyond them, Robina saw the other Brothers, ready to hurl the beakers.

There was something else that no one saw. The Shadow was swinging in from a side window; over the sill, he was taking aim for the chief Brother, holding his shot only until Yakroff could twist away. The Shadow had found the metal door between storeroom and office; but it was riveted shut. Some worker of the Brothers had fixed it that way, for a death trap.

That was why The Shadow had swung from window to window, shrouded in the darkness of the night. He was seeking a chance to finish crime, in the moments that remained.

That chance was suddenly banished.

The chief Brother, jabbing his elbow upward, gave a hard jolt to Yakroff's chin. The frail inventor flew backward, straight in The Shadow's direction.

The Brother, recoiling, went through the doorway. He was out of The Shadow's sight; and before the cloaked fighter could spring through the window, complete catastrophe arrived.

The other Brothers flung their beakers toward the doorway. The glass containers hit the door frame and the floor. As glass shattered, there was an instantaneous conflagration.

Spattering chemicals ignited with a roaring spurt far greater than the Brothers had expected. The combustibles hurled their liquid flame. There was a puff of sulphuric smoke that completely clouded the doorway. A crackle followed, throughout the laboratory. Flames became a holocaust; like burning tongues from an inferno, they swept after the evildoers who had begun them.

THE get-away that the Brothers made was the most fortunate of any that they had accomplished. They hurtled from that volcanic outburst; through the workshop, they reached the freight elevator that had brought them up from the street.

Once escaped, the Brothers were doubly fortunate. The roaring laboratory was a furnace that served as a barrier to hold back the one enemy who could have dealt with them. The Shadow was unable to follow.

Flames were whipping into the little office, puffing as far as the desk. There, Robina was bravely handling the telephone, dialing for the operator as calmly as though haste were unneeded. Yakroff, coming up beside the desk, heard his daughter speak:

“Operator... Call police headquarters. Crime, here at Yakroff's laboratory...”

Yakroff snatched the telephone from Robina's grasp. He pointed to the metal door at the rear of the office, urging the girl to open it. Coughing as he inhaled the fumes from the smoking acids, Yakroff gulped:

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“Tell the police—that I—Ivor Yakroff—accuse Sidney Thrake—”

Volumes of smoke were enveloping Yakroff. Flames seared toward him with the fumes. The office was ablaze. Yakroff choked as he dropped the telephone and sprang to join Robina. He came from the smoke, to stop short at the closed metal door.

“I can't open it!” gasped Robina. “It's bolted! We are trapped!”

Flames lashed the window frames. The office was filled with lurid light. Amid the oncoming smoke, the trapped pair saw the fire lick in from three sides. Wooden walls were burning furiously. A rising barrier of fire was lifting clear above the laboratory roof, ready to wash down like a tidal wave and engulf Yakroff and his daughter.

Dull, puny sounds came from beyond the metal door. They were shots from The Shadow's automatic. Back in the temporary safety of the storeroom, The Shadow was blasting the stout rivets that held the blocking door.

Fanned by a sweeping wind, the wave of flame came downward; its crest was a jagged line of fire that could wither with its touch. Robina and her father shrank against the metal door. Powerful arms rolled the barrier open. Inventor and girl sprawled through to safety, just as the sizzling wave scorched the deepest wall line of the office.

SMOKE billowed through. Flames rose anew to roar for the doorway that the rescued pair had taken. The Shadow was guiding Yakroff and Robina toward the fire escape. Just as they reached it, there was a muffled blast from the flame-swept laboratory. Fire had reached stores of chemical explosives.

The office wall shattered as the building shook. Flames roared into the storeroom. Yakroff pointed excitedly to boxes stacked in a corner.

“More explosives—there—”

No effort could have served to halt that coming blast. The one move was escape, before the explosion struck. The Shadow was on the platform of the fire escape. His cloaked form was outlined against the flames. Mocker's three remaining watchers saw him from below. Sight of The Shadow, returned from a hellish mass of fire, was something to amaze them.

Wildly, they fired at the cloaked foe, whose very presence seemed unreal. Their shots thudded against the open metalwork of the quivering fire escape. Unscathed, The Shadow returned the gunfire, picking his targets easily by the light of flames that gorged from every window.

One thug sprawled. Another staggered. The third started away, stumbling as he went. Reaching back, The Shadow hauled Robina and Yakroff to the fire escape. He started them on their downward run. The Shadow followed.

Upper portions of the fire escape were dropping when they reached the bottom. Licking flames had caught that portion of the outer wall. Metal was melting under the heat. Any freak of the flames would bring them to the explosives which luck alone had reserved for later destruction.

Racing along with Yakroff and the girl, The Shadow passed the three thugs. The first was motionless; the second was rising savagely on hands and knees. The third had stopped at the entrance of the alley. He jumped in from the corner, to aim as he saw The Shadow shove Robina and Yakroff along the street in the opposite direction.

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That last thug never dispatched the bullets that he hoped would drill The Shadow's back.

A titanic detonation came from the old brick building. The last stretch of roof was hoisted high in the air. The rear wall of the old building burst outward. Tons of crumbling brick poured upon the three thugs who had served Mocker Shebly. Like the two who were helpless, the aiming crook was entombed beneath that shattered mass of masonry.

Sidewalks rocked as windows clattered everywhere. The Shadow was sprawled with Yakroff and Robina. First to rise, he helped them to their feet; hurried them a half block onward. There the trio boarded The Shadow's cab.

The fleet taxi was off like a bullet. Twisting from streets where patrol cars appeared, it made for the entrance to the Holland Tunnel.

AS the cab rolled into the westbound tube, the night air was filled with the terrific clangor of fire engines coming to the ruined building.

Riding through the tunnel, The Shadow talked to Yakroff. The bushy-haired inventor heard those statements with an amazement that Robina shared.

The cab reached the New Jersey side; took swiftly for the Skyway. As they whirled along the high roadway, Yakroff extended his thin hand to receive The Shadow's firm clasp.

Grim duty lay ahead. Yakroff was ready to aid The Shadow. Like The Shadow, the inventor would come as another victim from the grave, to settle with Brothers of Doom.

The cab made speed along the Skyway. Traffic was light; patrolling officers took it for a taxi that was bearing belated passengers to Newark Airport. They let it exceed the speed limit.

At the high spot of the Skyway, along the mile stretch between the great bridges spanning the Hackensack and the Passaic Rivers, The Shadow pointed across the meadows.

There, Yakroff saw the flaming puffs that came from the tall chimneys of the Centurion Steel plant. But neither he nor The Shadow spied any trace of the greenish light above the central office structure. That glow was invisible, even from this angle.

The cab reached the desired ramp; it sped downward to the meadows. It wheeled to a darkened space just outside the fence surrounding the steel works. There, The Shadow spotted Mocker's touring car. He had found the route that crooks had taken.

Creeping through darkness, The Shadow approached the cordon of company guards. The dank ground was dark, despite the night activity in certain buildings. Coming close to a patroller, The Shadow stroked a gun muzzle along the rough wall of a low outbuilding.

The guard challenged. The Shadow's left hand unclenched. Hung in the darkness, the guard saw the luminous disk. He came close, whispering:

“The way's clear! Slide on through! I just helped them lug those guys downstairs—”

The guard had mistaken The Shadow for one of the Brothers. That was why he was explaining how he had aided Mocker with the burdens of Harry and Cliff. The bribed man ceased his statement when he found

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himself in error. A gun muzzle that poked his ribs gave him the sudden information.

The Shadow spoke a sibilant signal. Yakroff crept up to join him. His daughter remained in the taxi. The Shadow supplied the inventor with the guard's gun. The captured guard quaked as a sinister tone commanded:

“Lead the way!”

The prisoner had heard of The Shadow. He knew the identity of the dread captor. He had talked too much, that guard. He had no chance to crawl. With hands lifted, he took the straight path to the corner of the central building where the Brothers had their entrance.

Strong barriers lay between. It would be The Shadow's task to force them. Nor could he delay in that endeavor. The Shadow had verified a situation which had struck him as a likely one. He knew that Harry and Cliff were prisoners.

Lives of those agents lay at stake. Need for new rescue was imperative. The Shadow had effected such deliveries in the past. He was prepared to repeat, no matter how great the difficulties. That was to prove a large undertaking on this occasion.

The Shadow was to face a test that witnesses would declare impossible of accomplishment, even when they saw The Shadow meet it!

CHAPTER XIX. THE MOLTEN FLOOD

WHEN Mocker and his helpers had entered the secret doorway in the building on the meadows, Suda had received them. The giant servitor showed them through a massive doorway beside the elevator. Mocker, his men, and the aiding outside guard took the prisoners down into a forgotten, stone-floored cellar.

Suda had locked the door behind them. He had taken the guard up in the elevator, which he had left below. Suda was gone for five minutes. When he returned, with the elevator, Brothers of Doom stepped forth.

Coldly, the Four eyed the prisoners. The leader questioned the captives in his singular monotone. Harry and Cliff had nothing to say. Steadily, the chief Brother reminded them that The Shadow was dead. The statement produced no result.

In the corner of the cellar stood a concrete platform. Steps led up to it; and beyond the platform lay a squarish, hollow cavity the size of a small swimming pool. In the front was a solid grating, set deep. Made of thick metal, it was made to operate up and down, like a window sash.

That grate was actually the sluice of a dam. Once lowered, it would let any contents of the vat pour forth in a streaming flood.

From another corner, Suda slid two oblong metal molds that were mounted on rollers. They were just the size of coffins. Alone, Suda picked up Harry and planted him in one of the hollow molds. He did the same with Cliff, using the other container. To keep the prisoners from writhing, Suda strapped them to metal rings at the sides of the molds.

Mocker and his brace of thugs watched the process with interest. They saw Suda roll the deep molds to the far corner. The giant servant grinned as he pushed the heavy boxes side by side, shoving their ends beneath the shutterlike sluice. The grating was just wide enough to accommodate both molds.

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The leader of the Four Brothers pointed Mocker and the thugs to the corner platform. When they arrived there, the leader stated, in his droning tone:

“We bury our dead alive. We entomb them so that their remains are forgotten forever. Each becomes the occupant of a solid block of steel. Suda will perform the operation.”

GRINNING from the platform beside the empty tank, the big man demonstrated the simple operation of the sluice. It had a round knob on the inner side. Suda pushed that knob with a wide steel bar that was shaped something like a crowbar. The sluice went clear down. Stooping, the big servant grasped the knob and pulled the sluice up to its shut position.

The Brothers nodded. They walked to the elevator and Suda followed, leaving Mocker and his gorillas wondering what would come next. They amused themselves by exchanging ugly gibes for the benefit of Harry and Cliff.

When Suda returned, he marched directly to the corner. He took a look at the prisoners. Satisfied, he mounted the platform. He went to the rear wall, and tugged at a lever that Mocker had not previously noticed.

Instantly, large plugs opened in the walls. From big pipes came a sluggish, silver stream, that sizzled as it poured into the waiting vat.

That heavy liquid was molten steel, drawn from some secret outlet. Like boiling lava, it was filling the tank that loomed above the heads of Harry and Cliff. Staring face upward, the prisoners could see the sluice that kept the boiling mass from reaching them. They could hear the hiss of the molten metal.

Mocker saw the system. Suda would wait until the tank was filled with burning, liquid steel. He would dip the crowbar down through the bubbling pool, engage the control knob and press the sluice clear to the bottom.

When that grate was gone, the molten metal would pour into the molds where Harry and Cliff lay staring. They would be entombed in blocks of steel, as soon as the molds had cooled. Mocker had learned the meaning of the Brother's promise.

The horror of the death pleased Mocker. Given to savagery, he liked to see victims take the ugliest routes to the hereafter. This was vicious doom, better than any that Mocker could have designed for the hated prisoners who had served The Shadow.

Mocker gloated, as he waited for the moment when Harry and Cliff would see that cataract of white-hot liquid come pouring over them.

The prisoners had realized what they could expect. Their jaws were set grimly. Mocker decided to look into the tank, so that he could inform the victims of what was due.

“Just about half full,” he reported. Mocker exaggerated that detail somewhat. “It's coming fast, too! Plenty more than we'll need. A quarter of it would bury you palookas!”

Mocker's second estimate was correct. Harry and Cliff lay deep within their molds. The Brothers were generous with the amount of steel that they allowed a victim.

“Halfway up,” repeated Mocker. This time, he was just about correct. “Maybe Suda ought to let it go, right now. No. I'll have him wait. The Brothers will be back to see the finish.”

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With that comment, Mocker looked toward the open elevator. He thought he heard a clank somewhere above; but the sizzle of the molten steel, so close at hand, made hearing difficult. Mocker listened intently. He looked toward the stairs. Suddenly, with a wild yell, he whipped out a revolver.

A blackened figure had weaved to the bottom of the stone steps. Mocker saw the glint of burning eyes; he spied the muzzle of an automatic. Complete recognition seized him, even though the sight was incredible:

“The Shadow!”

MOCKER'S thugs pulled their guns, to join fire with him. Their effort was hopelessly belated. Only Mocker managed to shoot, as The Shadow's .45 began its ripping fire. Mocker went first, his gun hand jouncing as his revolver sputtered. The thugs sagged, wounded, as bullets bored in their direction.

Yakroff was behind The Shadow, ready to cover other enemies. Only one was left; that was Suda. Yakroff saw The Shadow aim for the ugly faced giant who served the Brothers.

Suda, stripped to the waist, was atop the platform. His eyes were glaring viciously, his skin was glistening from the intense heat that came from the half-filled vat beside him.

Suda was holding the crowbar. He poked it viciously down into the molten steel. When it passed the surface of the liquid metal, the crowbar reached the control knob. The Shadow was stabbing shots. Suda took two bullets; he gave a last pushing effort, then staggered along the platform toward the wall. As he slumped to his knees, he bashed the crowbar against the wall lever, breaking it completely.

The molten tide was still pouring from the wall pipes. It would be minutes before the boiling torrent overflowed the vat; but there was another menace that was instantly due. Yakroff saw it and shrieked to The Shadow. The inventor was pointing toward the sluice above the tight-clamped molds that held Harry and Cliff.

Suda's jab with the crowbar had shoved the sluice halfway downward. The rise of simmering metal was fringing the upper edge. Fifteen seconds more, the deadly, molten mass would pour across the brink, disgorged by the filling vat.

The first splash of that white-hot steel would start the scalding doom of The Shadow's helpless agents!

The Shadow performed an astounding deed.

Flinging away his automatic, he reached the platform in five tremendous strides. He took the steps with a single bound. As he came, he stroked his right wrist with his left hand, peeling away his right glove. Flattening on the platform, The Shadow stretched squarely above the sizzling tank of melted steel.

As Suda gaped from the wall, The Shadow thrust his bare right hand downward into the molten mass. He dipped it clear to the elbow, with that quick, valiant move. The thrust ended as he gripped the submerged control knob. Pulling straight upward, The Shadow yanked the sluice grate up to the top level of the vat!

His hand did not hesitate an instant. Releasing, it whipped upward, clear of the white-hot liquid. Boiling steel dripped from The Shadow's fingers. His bare hand was unscathed, despite that burning ordeal amid a liquid heated to a temperature of more than a thousand degrees!

Only Yakroff understood how The Shadow had accomplished it. The natural moisture of the skin produced a vapor that offset the effect of the melted steel. A seemingly incredible demonstration; yet one that was a

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scientific fact. For brief moments, The Shadow's hand could endure that heat, its flesh saved from the scalding power of the liquid metal by that temporary film of moisture.

One lingering moment longer, the seething liquid would have bitten through. The Shadow had performed his quick task within the brief limit that nature allowed.

STUNNED by the seeming miracle, Suda gaped. Then, with a fierce bellow, the wounded giant found his feet. He hurled himself upon The Shadow, who came up unarmed to meet him. Hamlike fists gripped The Shadow's shoulders. Suda gave a hard heave, hoping to pitch the rescuer into the hissing vat.

The Shadow twisted away from the big man's clutch. A pang caught Suda. He doubled, sideways, as he lost his hold. With a long, tottering quay, Suda plunged headlong into that fatal liquid wherein he had tried to hurl The Shadow.

As the metal splashed, The Shadow was springing from the platform. Blobs of that steel lava did not reach him. The high grate stopped the splashes that went frontward toward the prisoners. Suda was gone from sight, swallowed in the bed of molten foam. He did not reappear. His terrible death was instant.

The Shadow and Yakroff tore at the bonds that held the prisoners. Harry and Cliff came free. The Shadow pulled both to safety, for Yakroff lacked the strength. The Shadow regained his automatic. He pointed toward the elevator. With Yakroff and the agents following, the cloaked rescuer led the way.

Steel splattered over the raised sluice, just as they reached the elevator. A streak of the molten metal swept the platform. The overfilled vat was pouring forth its excess load.

The Shadow slammed the elevator door, started the car upward before the spreading tide could reach it.

There had been no need to look after Mocker and his thugs. All three were dead. The Shadow had been forced to rapid, conclusive action when he met that trio. The lifeless bodies of the crooks could remain amid the creeping, swallowing steel as it hardened on the concrete floor.

Time was too short to consider the dead. Living foemen must be met. With three men ready to join him in action, The Shadow was speeding to meet the Brothers of Doom. As the elevator whizzed upward, The Shadow passed spare automatics to Cliff and Harry.

The car reached the top of the shaft. The Shadow slid the door wide. Ahead lay the entrance to the secret meeting room. Leading the drive, The Shadow whirled through to the den that glowed with greenish light.

As the door burst inward, the leader of the Brothers sprang from his chair, gun in hand.

The other three were slower as they came about to face the invaders. Their eyes showed frantic through the mask slits; their hands were hasty as they grabbed for weapons. Like their leader, they saw a shape that they took for an apparition—an incredible being back from the halls of death.

Trapped in their own abode, Brothers of Doom stood confronted by The Shadow. Their relentless foe had reached the one place that they considered secure from all invasion.

This time, The Shadow was bringing doom!

CHAPTER XX. CROOKS UNMASKED

BEHIND the swiftness of The Shadow's attack lay his knowledge that the Brothers did not expect the elevator until they summoned it. That being so, the sound of the sliding shaft door had told them something was wrong. The Shadow's only course was to speed into the meeting room before the Four could prepare for a defense.

Outstripping his own followers, who were hardly started from the elevator, The Shadow almost gained the result he wanted. One enemy alone was ready. He was the leader of the Brothers. His three accomplices, like The Shadow's aids, were left behind in the whirlwind rush.

Two guns were aimed for an instant duel. The Shadow held the chief Brother covered. The master-crook's revolver was aimed for The Shadow. Fingers were ready on triggers. The mouths of deadly weapons were due to spurt their fury.

All that differed were the sudden springs that the two fighters gave.

The Shadow made a half wheel to the right, fading away from the door; but he held his big gun like an anchored pivot, its muzzle straight toward the aiming Brother. The masked foe did not use such tactics. He lunged straight forward. His arm was forced to swing to follow the direction of The Shadow's fade.

Those differing moves told their story, a half-second later. The roars of two guns split the hush of the teak-furnished meeting room. Tongues of fire thrust from muzzles, each toward a living target. For a full second, neither battler halted.

The Shadow's fade became a spin, as swift as the whirl of a crazed dervish. The Brother's lunge continued forward, like the charge of a maddened bull. Suddenly, both fighters halted.

The Shadow pulled up beside the wall, gripping a table. His left arm was stretched rigid. His fingers were strained in their clutch. The Brother's bullet had given him a deep-scorched flesh wound, just above the elbow. The swing of the murderer's gun had been inches behind, in its endeavor to follow the line of The Shadow's heart.

Simultaneously, the chief Brother stumbled. His surge ended with a fall, his arms flinging wide. The revolver went from his loosened grip as he flattened face forward on the floor. The jar rolled him headlong. Half somersaulting, he rolled sideways and lay motionless. His body was contorted; his masked face stared toward the ceiling.

Directly over the killer's heart was the mark of The Shadow's bullet. Blood was tinging the tight garb that showed olive drab in the greenish light. The spreading crimson looked black beneath the glow. That darkened splotch symbolized the evil of the dead leader, who no longer ruled the Four.

FOR a moment, the remaining Brothers gaped. Then, with wild shouts, they sprang apart, looking for The Shadow. A fierce, taunting whisper answered them. They saw their adversary against the wall. His right hand was coolly swinging its automatic back and forth, to keep the three Brothers helpless.

Each thought that the .45 was aimed for him. All dived for separate shelter, hoping that The Shadow would first pick some other victim. No shots came; instead, The Shadow's mockery turned to a stern order that halted the three crooks.

Turning abruptly, each saw why The Shadow had hurried them into scattered positions. Three men had

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arrived from the elevator. Harry, Cliff and Yakroff each had a separate Brother as an easy target. Should any Brother attempt fight against the man who covered him, The Shadow's big gun would produce immediate support.

One blast from that .45 meant death. The proof was present on the floor, in the person of the evil leader, whose life had ended through combat with The Shadow.

The three masked crooks dropped their revolvers. They cringed as they raised their hands. They were a cowardly lot, when trapped. They had lost their leader; they could no longer count upon each other's support. Nor could they depend upon Mocker Shebly and his vanished crew. The three Brothers needed no words to tell them that Mocker and his gorillas had been obliterated.

Harry and Cliff stepped deeper into the meeting room; Yakroff copied their move. Each stepped behind a Brother. They turned the three crooks so they formed a line, all facing The Shadow.

The cloaked avenger approached the Brothers. He studied their masks with a penetrating gaze that seemed to pierce the tight-drawn cloth. The Shadow knew the faces behind those masks. He identified them, one by one, as he put away his automatic.

“Lewis Groth.”

Pronouncing the name. The Shadow used his right hand to whip the Brother's mask upward. The hood went back from Groth's head, to show the man's pointed, sloping countenance.

“You bought the Eastern Theater Circuit,” accused The Shadow, “when its value was lowest. No one wanted it while Northrup Lason planned a huge theatrical chain. Lason's death alone was needed to raise the value of your circuit.

“You arranged that death, through the Brothers. As alibi, you accepted Lason's offer to buy at your original price. You pretended that his death was a blow that meant your ruin. Instead, your circuit rose in value, along with many others. When you finally sold it, you made a half million in profit.”

The Shadow turned to another Brother, speaking the name:

“Ralph Vanible.”

The Shadow ripped back the hood to reveal Vanible's solemn face, sickly in the greenish light.

“You were a director for Froyd & Co.,” stated The Shadow. “Knowing that Froyd held doubtful assets, you used proxy methods to purchase foreign issues from other financial houses. You brought up Froyd's condition at a directors' meeting.

“Pretending to favor Froyd's interests, you were the first to offer helping him with loans. The Brothers entered and Froyd was murdered. That forced a public statement regarding Froyd's financial condition. Loans were thwarted by his death. Froyd's company failed. Trading was heavy in rival foreign issues. Your proxies brought you a half million, to match Groth's contribution.”

THROUGH with Vanible, The Shadow stepped to the third Brother. He pronounced the name:

“George Deprew.”

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A rip of the mask showed the pudgy face of Deprew. In cold, steady tones, The Shadow divulged details:

“Rotherwelt controlled your partnership. The business was actually his. While he was in Europe, you falsified sales and padded the accounts with pretended losses. You whittled down assets from nearly a million dollars to less than two hundred thousand.

“Rotherwelt was murdered before he saw the books. The estate accepted your figures as accurate. You gained a half million in stolen funds.”

The Shadow was not through with Deprew; but his next words had direct bearing on the other Brothers, also.

“Your game, Deprew, carried the condemning proof that supported my previous theories. You had Cardona at the hotel, for an alibi; but you left your office as a trap. I recognized it as such. I learned also that the Brothers were called the Four. In each combat, I encountered only three. That proved that the fourth—a different Brother in each instance—was engaged in special duty.”

Moving away, The Shadow reached the body that lay on the floor. He pointed to the masked face of the dead man.

“Your profits were pooled to support the designs of your chief. Your ambitions were puny, compared to those of this man: Marcus Omstred!”

As he announced the name, The Shadow pulled away the last mask. The gaunt face of Omstred lay displayed, in greenish pallor. Correctly, The Shadow had named the chief crook in the game.

Marcus Omstred—not Sidney Thrake.

“Omstred bought this plant,” declared The Shadow. “He purchased machinery on credit. He acquired Yakroff's first formulas. He saw to it that Thrake's process would fail. That was to leave Centurion Steel equipped to handle the contracts held by Consolidated Metals. Thirty million dollars was the stake.

“With funds produced by the Brotherhood of Doom, Omstred could meet his debts. Thrake, unable to foreclose on the machinery, would find his own plants idle. One by one, Omstred would acquire them, to make himself complete master of America's greatest industry!”

Those words told why the Brothers had tried to murder Ivor Yakroff. Omstred already held processes. He wanted to keep new ones from reaching Thrake. Moreover, Yakroff's death was a burden to be planted on Thrake, leaving him in a bad position to combat Omstred's rise to the head of a vast steel empire.

Just how deeply the Brothers had managed their plot against Thrake was something soon to be discovered. From Omstred's bloodstained costume, The Shadow produced the bulging papers that the master-plotter had taken from Yakroff. Soon afterward, The Shadow extinguished the green lights. That grim glow was never to shine again.

AT his home in Manhattan, Sidney Thrake was seated behind a table in an upstairs room, facing two persistent questioners—Commissioner Weston and Joe Cardona. With them, the visitors had brought Parkinson, Thrake's secretary. The secretary had arrived by plane from Pittsburgh.

“The facts are plain, Thrake,” declared Weston. “Cardona received an anonymous call at headquarters, telling him to call Yakroff.”

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“Which I did,” put in Joe. “He wouldn't talk. But he called back, accusing you of something. I went and found his place gone up in smoke. Yakroff and his daughter died in that fire.”

“I kept calling Yakroff from here,” retorted Thrake, angrily. “I finally went down there. I was amazed to see the place in ruins! I—”

Weston snapped Thrake short. He ordered Parkinson to give his testimony.

“When I came in from Pittsburgh,” declared Thrake's secretary, in a reluctant tone, “I made a telephone call here; but no one answered. I went to Yakroff's, knowing that Mr. Thrake intended to get the inventor's formulas. I found that there had been a fire. I was concerned over Mr. Thrake's safety. So I notified the police—”

“That I wasn't here?” broke in Thrake. “That I wanted to see Yakroff? That means nothing!”

“Nothing,” announced Commissioner Weston, “except for these.”

On the desk he placed the letters that Yakroff had written to Thrake. Thrake started to reach for them, glaring as he did. Weston pocketed the letters. Thrake blurted:

“I told Parkinson to destroy those letters—”

“So he told us,” interrupted Weston. “He forgot to do it. He remembered the letters when we quizzed him. He told us about the trouble in your Pittsburgh plant, where you stated in front of witnesses that you intended to get those formulas. These letters indicate that Yakroff would not have sold them.

“We have a complete case, Thrake. In writing, Yakroff has branded you a thief. Over the telephone, he delivered a last-minute accusation. You started that fire, Thrake. You murdered Yakroff. You may have stolen his formulas; but you will never use them.”

To Cardona, Weston added: “Inspector, arrest the accused man.”

BEFORE Joe could snap handcuffs on Thrake, a ghoulish, clumping sound riveted every listener. It came from the darkened stairway. As Weston and Cardona jumped up, pulling revolvers, an amazing procession came into the room.

Three oddly attired, gray-clad men were acting as pallbearers for a fourth, whose body lay stretched on a thin, wide board. Their glum faces were in plain view. Weston recognized the living entrants as they placed the slab upon the floor. He exclaimed their names:

“Groth—Vanible—Deprew—”

It was Thrake, rising horrified from his table, who pointed to the dead figure on the slab and cried:

“Marcus Omstred!”

Into the room came Ivor Yakroff. Solemnly, the inventor approached Thrake. The steel magnate stared as if viewing a ghost. So did Weston and Cardona, when they heard Thrake gasp the inventor's name. Thrake sat dumfounded, when Yakroff handed him the regained formulas, with the statement: “They are yours, Mr. Thrake. At your own price.”

BROTHERS OF DOOM

There was a sudden scuffle. Parkinson, white as marble, was bolting for the door. He stopped short in the hall. Sight of a menacing black-cloaked figure made him quail. Unseen by others, the eyes of The Shadow bored their accusation upon Parkinson.

The secretary realized why three Brothers of Doom had brought the dead fourth here without resistance. They knew that The Shadow still held them in control.

Parkinson staggered back into the room. His trembling lips gulped their confession:

“I filched your formulas, Mr. Thrake! I—I gave them to the Brothers! They altered them—returned them—your processes were no longer correct. Then—then to-night, I sent that tip-off to Inspector Cardona, telling him to call Yakroff. I kept the letters that you told me to destroy. All that was ordered by the Brothers. I—I served them to betray you, Mr. Thrake!”

In the silence following Parkinson's confession, the three Brothers looked uneasily toward the door. They saw The Shadow almost on the threshold. Each gulped a sentence.

“Alphonse served us also,” expressed Groth, “when I arranged for Lason's murder.”

“And Henry, the watchman,” admitted Vanible. “We needed him when I paved the way to Froyd's death.”

“Murthell, the house detective,” added Deprew. “He helped us. I managed the details of Rotherwelt's finish.”

Under the guns of Weston and Cardona, the three Brothers poured out their complete confessions, while Thrake called headquarters, at the commissioner's order. Parkinson, huddled in a corner, was waiting to add more testimony when the unmasked trio came to Omstred's story, which their dead leader could not tell.

All the while, the confessing crooks shivered at thought of The Shadow, covering them from the darkness of the hall. They still quivered when approaching sirens told that officers were arriving to take away the murderers.

From the hallway's blackness came a whispered token—a fading laugh that sounded like an echo of the mirth that the Brothers had heard so strident, in their secret meeting room. That taunt from the past was fading; it told a parting triumph.

The Shadow's quest was finished. Marcus Omstred, master of crime, was dead. With his body, the law had gained three living murderers in Groth, Vanible and Deprew.

The Shadow had conquered the Brothers of Doom.

The future would bring to The Shadow the strangest episode of his entire career. He would meet a man who—like The Shadow—could anticipate crime before it took place! “The Shadow's Rival” worked hand in hand with the police department, and so amazing were his deductions that the police would clean up gang after gang in the very enactment of their crime! Would The Shadow's long reign as Arch foe of Crime be toppled? In the future only, lay the answer, as The Master of Darkness vied with “The Shadow's Rival” in a titanic battle of wits!

THE END