

CARDS OF DEATH

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I. DEATH STALKS

THERE were half a dozen passengers aboard the South-bound plane, as it waited for the take-off. Outside the windows lay the broad stretch of Newark Airport, dull, barren except for the hangars that squatted against the muggy sky.

Afternoon was well advanced, and dusk was due early, because of the overcast sky. Flight, however, would not be difficult at low altitude. Passengers felt apprehensive; as they watched the lines of automobiles streaming along the Skyway with headlamps already lighted; but the pilot did not share their worry.

Propellers were spinning; there was a call of "All aboard!" That cry came like a cue to a messenger in uniform, who stood near the ship. Hurriedly, he advanced to the closing door, extended an envelope.

"For Mr. Balcray," the messenger told the stewardess. "Elwood Balcray. He's aboard."

The stewardess looked annoyed. She had seen the messenger standing there gawking at the plane. She

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wondered why he had waited, and the messenger knew it. He muttered something about orders to hold the message until the last minute.

The stewardess summoned Elwood Balcray. He appeared at the door – a stoop-shouldered, long-faced man, with sharply nervous eyes. The messenger handed him the envelope, with the question:

"Any answer, sir?"

Balcray opened the yellow envelope, amid the increasing whir of propellers. Impatiently, the plane dispatcher stood ready to signal the plane's departure. He wasn't noting Balcray closely; nor was the stewardess.

The one person who saw the horror that swept Balcray's face was the messenger. Moreover, he spied the cause.

The object that Balcray had drawn from the envelope was a card. It looked like a playing card; but it was longer, narrower than those in most packs. Furthermore, it differed from any such card that the messenger had ever seen.

Instead of spots, the card had long rods, six of them, in diagonal rows of three each. Those crossed rods formed an elongated letter X within the borders of the card.

"Any answer, Mr. Balcray?"

The messenger's question brought a response from Balcray's lips. The action seemed mechanical; the man's voice was a hoarse whisper.

"No answer" – Balcray was forcing the words, as his eyes stared glassily – "there can be no answer – to this!"

The messenger turned away. The door went shut; the dispatcher gave his signal. It was then that Balcray's horror took a frantic swing. He realized that he was cut off from the world; isolated aboard the plane. Still clutching the curious card, he pounced toward the stewardess.

"I've got to leave this ship!" Balcray's shout was wild. "Let me off! Open that door – I've got to get out!"

The whir of the propellers had become a roar. The plane was rolling along the runway. Balcray's grapple for the door was a dangerous move; by the time he succeeded, it would be suicidal.

Valiantly, the stewardess fought him away from the door; other passengers rallied to help her.

Though Balcray was battling like a madman, they overcame him. Gripped by half a dozen hands, he was shoved along the aisle, clear to the front of the plane, where the rescue squad plopped him into a seat.

Balcray subsided with a groan, the cardboard card crumpled in his tight-clutched hand. He was at the most distant spot from the door he wanted; and the route was blocked. With frenzy useless, Balcray had changed in an instant to a pitiful, hopeless figure.

NONE of the ground crew saw that short-lived struggle. Door and windows had moved beyond their view. They were watching the plane as it gathered speed along the runway. Swift ships of this type, though speedy in the air, required a long take-off. A half-second more and the plane would be rising in the air.

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At that instant, the swerve came.

The plane gave a telltale wobble to the right, as the wheel on that side crumpled. There was a lurchy swoop, as though wings sought to clutch the air. A slue to the right; the ship was off the runway. The tip of the right wing clipped the ground.

The crack-up was immediate.

Propellers chewed the turf, as the plane's nose hit. Sleek, silvery metal crackled into junk. Flames spurted; the rising blaze licked the twisting fuselage. Sirens wailed the alarm; running men followed the fire apparatus that sped to the spot of the catastrophe.

Prompt work extinguished the blaze. From the debris, men dragged the stewardess, scarcely injured. Then came passengers, four of them, to be placed in an arriving ambulance. After that, two more, who needed no aid.

Like the pilots, those passengers were dead. They had been at the front of the cabin, where the shock was worst. Life had been crushed from them.

One of the dead passengers was Elwood Balcray. His fist, jammed, clawlike, hard against his chest, still gripped the curious card with its design of six crossed rods.

Elwood Balcray had recognized the threat of that strange card. It had proven his warrant of doom.

Two hours passed. Deep dusk had gripped Manhattan, when a short, pompous man strode into the lobby of the Sheffield Apartments. It wasn't a pretentious place, the Sheffield, but it was exclusive; therefore, it suited this pompous resident.

He stopped at the desk for mail. The clerk handed him an envelope addressed to Sylvester Lysand. The pompous man opened it; he halted, stock-still.

"Is anything the matter, Mr. Lysand?"

The clerk's question was a logical one. He had seen Lysand's face. It carried the same expression of horror that Elwood Balcray had shown, two hours before.

Lysand gave no answer.

The clerk looked downward, saw the object that projected from a frozen hand. Like the messenger at the airport, the clerk was astonished.

Lysand was holding what seemed to be a playing card, except that its design was unusual. Set in its ornamental design were six spots shaped like ancient goblets. Lysand's eyes were riveted on those printed cups.

The clerk repeated his anxious question. Lysand did not hear it. He turned, as though lost in a trance, and walked toward the elevators.

There were two of those cars; only one was in use. The operator was jerking at a lever; as Lysand arrived, he called to the clerk:

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"Jammed again. Better send Joe up with the other car."

The clerk beckoned to an attendant who was seated near the desk. The fellow opened the door of the little-used elevator; Lysand and two other passengers went aboard. Joe's elevator had scarcely started, before the man who had suggested it left his own car and walked out through a side door of the lobby.

New bewilderment gripped the clerk. The man who had just left wasn't the regular operator. Who he was; how he happened to be here, were riddles. Unfortunately, too, the clerk did not get a good look at the stranger's face; something that he was to regret greatly, later.

For the present, the clerk had less than half a minute to think it over. A rumbling sound quivered the building. It came from the shaft where Joe's elevator had gone up. The clerk stared in that direction. The dial above the elevator door showed that the car was at the fifth floor; but it was quivering at that mark.

As the clerk gaped, horrified, he saw the dial take a long-sweep toward the bottom. With it came the rumble, louder than before, accompanied by a terrific clatter.

The door shook as the plunging elevator whizzed past the ground floor. There was a terrific crash from the basement; with it, shrieks that faded.

The palsied clerk suddenly gained control of his muscles; leaping out from the desk, he dashed to the street, where he shouted the ill tidings to the first policeman that he saw.

TEN minutes later, a cluster of firemen had reached the basement of the Sheffield Apartments. They were hacking through the elevator door, where few groans answered them. The barrier gave; they dragged out Joe, the operator, limp but alive.

The passengers were extricated from the wreckage. One still lived; he went to the hospital along with Joe. But the other two were dead; and one of them was Sylvester Lysand. Like Elwood Balcray, he had been crushed to death.

Lysand's hands had a dying clutch. The object the rescuers pried from those stilled fingers was the six-spotted card that had come in the envelope.

Again, doom had been predicted; and death had stalked along its trail.

Both events had seemed like accidents, but the link of those fatal cards proved them otherwise. Some master hand had arranged those thrusts, to strike down the victims that he wanted. Ruthless, that invisible murderer had sacrificed others along with Balcray and Lysand, the chosen victims.

Was death's toll finished?

Only the murderer, himself, could give the answer. His reply might be another stroke: the massacre of other innocent persons, along with a third victim. How long the chain would last, no one could tell.

Yet, with all its suddenness, death would not come without its warning. Like a venomous rattlesnake, the hidden killer gave his signals before he struck.

Cards of doom were the tokens that told each victim that death was due!

CHAPTER II. THE THIRD CARD

SOON after the elevator crash at the Sheffield, a man checked out of a pretentious New York hotel. He was a jolly, broad-faced individual, who looked brawny despite his stout build. When he asked for his bill, he stated his name. It was Hastings Keever.

Although Keever had been a guest at the hotel for only a few days, the bill ran close to two hundred dollars. Keever paid it from a fat bank roll that his pudgy fist could scarcely circle. Going out through the lobby, he peeled more notes from the roll, to tip bell boys, porter and doorman.

It was the doorman who politely closed the door of Keever's cab, expressing the hope that the departing guest would soon return. That brought a smile from Keever.

They knew him well at that hotel; and Keever was glad of it. It was an asset to be established there. For Hastings Keever was a man who made money by spending money. He was a promoter who could talk wealthy men into big deals.

Precarious though his business was, Keever had done well with it. Luck and good judgment traveled with him. Enough of Keever's deals came through to give him a good reputation. Satisfied clients produced more. Whenever Keever fluked, he always had an explanation.

Keever had told the cab driver to take him to the Pennsylvania Station. He altered that order, as the cab rolled southward on Seventh Avenue. The new address that Keever gave was twenty blocks farther south, near the heart of Greenwich Village.

The cab reached a gloomy street; stopped before an old-fashioned building that had once been a private residence. Paying off the driver, Keever alighted, suitcase in one hand, an evening newspaper in the other.

He entered the old house; its lighted lobby showed that it had been converted into an apartment. A box marked "3 E" carried the name of Hastings Keever.

Few of the promoter's clients knew that he maintained this small apartment in the Village. It served Keever as a residence only during those intervals between his big promotion deals.

There was no elevator in the place. Keever went up two flights of narrow stairs, puffing as he reached the third floor. The stairs brought him to the center of a lengthwise hall; his apartment was a dozen feet toward the front.

Unlocking the door, Keever turned on the lights. He placed his bag in a corner of the little living room; stretched himself in a comfortable chair.

AS his puffy breaths subsided, Keever spread the newspaper. His eyes centered on the most conspicuous headline: a report of a plane crash at Newark Airport. Keever seldom traveled by air; the news scarcely interested him, until he saw the names of the victims.

That list brought the pudgy man bolt upright. His pointing finger jabbed the line that carried the name of Elwood Balcray, wealthy real estate operator.

Again Keever's breaths were long drawn; this time through a tautness of his nerves. The genial smile went from his lips, to be replaced by an anxious twitch. His beady eyes showed a trace of terror.

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Gripping the chair arms, Keever regained composure. He forced a smile, as he muttered:

"Maybe it was an accident. Yes, just an accident – like the newspaper says it was –"

Keever's eyes showed lingering doubt, despite his words. Those eyes also glimmered with an idea. Turning the pages of the newspaper, Keever found the radio programs. He noted that news reports were almost due from Station WNX.

There was a radio set in the corner. Keever thumbed the dial; paced his little living room while he listened to the finish of a musical program. There was a lull, then the announcer for the news reports. Keever was intent, expecting further details regarding the plane crash. Instead:

"Flash!" The announcer's voice was brisk. "Two persons were killed, two others injured, in a fall of an elevator at the Sheffield Apartments –"

"The Sheffield!" Keever's tone was gaspy again. "That's where –"

He was about to mention a man's name. It proved unnecessary. The news broadcaster was stating that very name across the air. The brisk tone drilled through Keever's ears:

"Sylvester Lysand, killed in the fall, was a director of the Triton National Bank. Well-known in financial circles, Mr. Lysand –"

Keever snapped off the radio without changing the dial. His beady eyes were hunted.

"Balcray – Lysand, both of them!" he muttered. "It couldn't be coincidence. It's his work! Legrec is back of it!"

Keever shot a wild look toward the door; he took a few steps in that direction. Pausing, he shook his head; mopped his forehead with a crumpled handkerchief. He wanted safety; he figured he might find it, if he remained in this isolated apartment.

There was a telephone on a table in the corner. Keever pounded to it; crouched as he lifted the receiver and dialed a number. His pudgy fingers succeeding in that task, he calmed as he lifted the telephone from the table.

An instant later, Keever was riveted, too terrified to quiver.

On the spot where the telephone had rested lay a narrow card that spoke its promise of doom!

THAT card resembled those that Balcray and Lysand had received, even to the fact that it was a six spot. But instead of rods or cups, it had rounded spots, resembling coins. One at the top; beneath it a pair, side by side; below, another pair, with a last spot at the bottom.

Keever counted them, all six. His hands relaxed; the telephone dropped from his grasp, to hit the carpet with a dull thump.

"Six" – Keever's tone was the barest whisper. "Six of money –"

His awed tone faded. There was a clicking sound from the telephone receiver; a voice questioning across the wire. Keever did not hear it. His beady eyes were shut; his lips were twitching, voiceless, as his body swayed.

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There was another sound that Keever did not hear: the slight scrape of a key in the lock of the apartment door.

While the voice repeated from the telephone receiver, the door opened. A man was standing there, watching Keever; but the angle of the door cut off all light from the watcher's face.

Keever became conscious of the repeating voice from the telephone receiver. He stooped to pick up the telephone. The man at the door stepped quickly into the living room. With back turned, he closed the door, loud enough for Keever to hear it.

Hands dropping the telephone, Keever sprang about. He saw the man inside the doorway; recognized him as he turned around. An instant later, before Keever could make a move, the man was driving for him.

Shoving his thick hands upward to ward off the attack, Keever found his voice, to half shout the name that he had uttered before:

"Legrec!"

If Keever intended more words, they never came. His voice produced a rattly gargle, as fingers clutched his throat. Though he outbulked his opponent, Keever was helpless. Iron fingers whipped his body back and forth like a mongoose lashing a huge snake.

The only expression that came over Keever's face was the bulge of his eyes as they fixed on his enemy's face. There was sight in that stare; but it soon faded. Keever's eyes glazed as his efforts ended. Choking fingers relaxed; Keever collapsed to the floor.

Again death had followed the delivery of a dooming card. This time, the sender of the token had supplied murder in person.

As coolly as he had slain Keever, the man called Legrec completed other tasks. He had an intuitive skill at keeping his face from the light; for he had revealed it only during those moments of Keever's recognition.

While choking Keever, Legrec had kept his shoulders hunched, turning so that they partially obscured his face. His features were darkish as he stooped beside the telephone, to replace the receiver upon the hook.

That done, Legrec put the telephone on its table, setting it slightly to one side, so that a portion of the death card projected from beneath it. Hand half across his chin, Legrec moved to the corner and hovered over Keever's suitcase.

Finding nothing in the bag that interested him, Legrec sidled along the wall. He reached for the light switch, pressed it, to plunge the room in darkness.

Seconds passed; softly, the murderer opened the door. The fresh air from the hallway was a contrast to the stuffiness of Keever's living room; but that was not why Legrec waited.

He was a calculator, this killer. Death delivered, he chose to linger, to make sure that no sounds of the struggle had been heard. The hallway, like the apartment, was pitch-black; for Legrec had extinguished its lights preparatory to his invasion of Keever's abode.

That was another reason why the murderer waited. If any one had observed the dousing of the lights; Legrec would soon learn it. He had measures, too, for any one who might approach this scene too early.

At that moment, Legrec doubted that his precautions would prove necessary. He was to change that opinion within the next few minutes.

Legrec, the master killer, was due for a foray in the dark, against a being whose ways of vengeance were as skillful as Legrec's own modes of murder.

CHAPTER III. DEEDS IN THE DARK

EYES were looking upward from the street in front of the old house. They were weird eyes, like living beings in themselves; for their owner was invisible. He was a shape in the darkness where he stood; and the thick gloom beneath a building wall completely shrouded him.

Only one human watcher could have blended with darkness in that supernal fashion.

The unseen observer was The Shadow.

Master investigator who hunted men of crime, The Shadow frequently looked into the affairs of persons who passed muster with the law. For some reason, he had decided to have an interview with Hastings Kever; and had chosen the Village apartment as the place for it.

Agents of The Shadow had witnessed Kever's return to that abode, and had notified their chief. During the brief interim, however, no one had spotted the arrival of Legrec.

From his vantage point, The Shadow held an angled view of Kever's apartment, situated at the side of the house. He had seen the lights go out, but doubted that it signified Kever's departure.

The promoter had not come to his apartment within the last few days. Chances were that his visit there would not be a short one.

There were various reasons why those lights could have gone out; and on this occasion, The Shadow rejected the correct one. The Shadow had labeled Kever as a gilt-edged crook, whose tricky promotion methods were unsuspected by the law. It followed that Kever would avoid alliances with criminals of a dangerous sort.

Therefore, the extinguishing of the lights seemed to be Kever's own action. The sudden darkness merely spurred The Shadow's plan to pay the man a visit.

Blackness moved from blackness. The trickling glow of a street lamp showed the outline of a cloaked form, with slouch hat above shrouded shoulders. That fleeting trace was gone; the lights of the little lobby showed it next.

Even there, The Shadow was too obscured to be identified. Only a gliding streak of blackness silhouetted against the wall; then the sight had vanished.

The inside stairway furnished the sort of gloom that The Shadow liked. He was a spectral figure as he neared the third floor. A turn of the stairs produced a flicker from a tiny flashlight; but that blink was not repeated.

The Shadow had discovered that the third floor hall was as dark as Kever's apartment.

That was something that he had not noted from the street; for the hallway's only window was at the back of the building, opening above the roof of a garage, one floor below.

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Having discovered the third floor darkness, The Shadow adopted new tactics. He approached through utter darkness, actually picking his way by touch alone.

SOMETHING creaked in the hallway. The Shadow located the sound, some six feet distant. He knew at once that some one was present; whether Keever or another, the sound did not tell. One fact, though, was certain. That mover in the darkness had spotted the blink that The Shadow had given his flashlight, while still on the stairs.

Instantly, The Shadow scented that the person was moving away from Keever's apartment. Lurking, he would wait for proof that The Shadow was bound there. That was why The Shadow chose the very destination that the foe suspected. But in his shift toward the apartment, The Shadow did not make the sounds that Legrec expected.

Absolute silence marked The Shadow's course. When he reached the door, he sensed that no one was close. Moreover, The Shadow's probing hand found something much to his choice.

Legrec, seeking a silent course of his own, had left the door of the apartment open.

It was obvious to The Shadow that he had passed the lurking man; that his adversary, whoever he might be, was somewhere near the stairs, still in listening attitude. Once inside the living room, The Shadow rose silently; found that there was no transom above the door.

With consummate skill, The Shadow closed that door; not the slightest sound betrayed the fact that he had shut it.

The Shadow had scored one on Legrec. In the hallway, the killer still awaited The Shadow's passage. He would be there, later, after The Shadow had finished a quick survey of Keever's apartment.

The tiny flashlight blinked guardedly from the folds of the cloak. The Shadow found Keever's body. He saw the telephone; the card that edged from beneath it. That identified Keever's killer.

The Shadow had heard of these tokens of Legrec.

The newspaper lay beside the radio. There, The Shadow saw a chart that listed stations according to Keever's dial. Legrec had left the radio as Keever had tuned it. The Shadow knew that the dead man had listened to WNX.

That gave The Shadow a partial sequence of Keever's own thoughts. The promoter had been interested in the affairs of some one who had died when the plane crashed.

While coming here by taxi, The Shadow had been listening to the radio news. He had heard the flash from WNX. He recognized the possible link between two previous deaths. There was a chance – a strong one – that both concerned Keever.

That happened to be something for future study. Right now, The Shadow was thinking of a murderer.

Gautier Legrec!

Such was the name of a celebrated international crook, almost unknown in annals of American crime, but whose death tokens were famed in foreign lands. A killer extraordinary, who used hidden methods of assassination but who could supply quick strokes, in person, when occasion called.

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He was canny, Legrec. When he staged crime, it broke suddenly, leaving the police at loss. While they still hunted for Legrec, and guessed where he might be, Legrec was gone.

Such swift vanishes explained why The Shadow had never before crossed Legrec's actual trail. Though The Shadow moved everywhere to strike down crime, he had never been in any foreign capitals at the times when Legrec had bobbed up in those cities.

There was much, therefore, that The Shadow had to learn about Legrec; but circumstances had suddenly reversed the situation. For once, The Shadow was where Legrec happened to be.

The supercrook, lurking outside Kever's apartment, was within The Shadow's immediate reach!

THERE were no more blinks from The Shadow's flashlight. A gloved hand gripped the doorknob; silently, the barrier opened.

A few seconds later, The Shadow was creeping through the dark hall, moving foot by foot toward the stairway where Legrec still lurked.

A creak answered The Shadow's advance. Grimly, The Shadow analyzed its cause. It did not mean that Legrec had heard a sound denoting The Shadow's presence. Legrec had simply guessed that the black-cloaked hunter had arrived. To a smart crook like Legrec, absence of telltale sounds meant The Shadow.

The stairs offered a sure outlet; but Legrec wasn't using them. The Shadow heard the creaks continue, back along the hall. There was the scrape of a rising window; but the darkness was sufficient to hide the man himself.

Timing his actions, The Shadow made sure of the moment when Legrec dropped to the roof below. With a sweeping stride, The Shadow reached the window itself.

Below lay darkness; beyond that stretch, the city's lights showed an expanse of the garage roof. In choosing that outlet, Legrec had trapped himself. He was safe, so long as he remained in the darkened fringe. He could not risk a trip beyond it.

To any hunter but The Shadow, that would have brought elation. From this window, he held absolute control. Mere vigil would bring success, even if it meant a wait until daybreak. No window lay below for Legrec to enter. Every portion of the roof edge was light enough to betray a man who moved there.

It was that very situation that made The Shadow understand why Legrec had chosen the window as an outlet.

The crook wanted The Shadow to stay at that hallway window. Why?

There was only one answer. Something, apart from either The Shadow or Legrec, would reverse the situation. It was The Shadow – not Legrec – who would meet disaster before this game of hide-and-seek had ended, provided that The Shadow kept up the vigil, as Legrec hoped.

Through The Shadow's mind flashed recollections of those previous murders; one camouflaged as an airplane crash, the other as an elevator fall.

Some similar catastrophe was planned to cover the fact that Legrec had strangled Kever!

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THE SHADOW moved back from the window. He didn't have to stay there, to deceive Legrec. Lurking in the shelter of the house wall, the criminal was taking it for granted that The Shadow was watching from above.

Reaching the door of 3 C, The Shadow listened. That was the apartment just in back of Kever's, the nearest trouble spot to where the dead man lay. Hearing nothing, The Shadow used a tiny picklike instrument to probe the door's lock. The pointed metal encountered a plug of wadded paper.

With a plierlike instrument, The Shadow pulled the wadding loose. Through the keyhole he caught the flicker of faint light, like a wavering flame. The sound of a faint hiss came from the empty apartment; with it, the odor of gas.

Legrec had prepared for Kever's return. He had turned on the gas in the next apartment, and had left the pilot light aglow. At this very moment, the lurking crook was huddled in safety, waiting for results.

There might be time for The Shadow to use a scant few minutes, to circle around and invade Legrec's hiding place from an unexpected direction. That prospect, however, was not the reason why The Shadow made a swift dive for the stairway. He was considering the chance that perhaps those few minutes did not remain to him.

The Shadow's speed was wise. He reached the stairs, took them with a downward stride, caring nothing for the sounds he made. Before he reached the second floor, the clatter of his descent was drowned by noise above.

There was a choking roar; a mammoth sigh, as though the whole third floor had drawn in a mighty breath. Prompt upon that titanic cough came a terrific blast that shook the whole building.

Walls buckled against the strain; then crashed inward. Partitions shattered; there was a smashing roar as the roof collapsed. Kever's apartment, like the whole third floor, was buried under tons of debris.

Fissures opened in the second floor ceiling, as The Shadow sped beneath it. He was on the first floor when chunks of masonry clattered through. Reaching the sidewalk, The Shadow pressed against the front wall, while stones from the cornice pounded near him.

Crashes ended. Faces appeared at windows of the lower floors. Apartment dwellers saw that they could descend in safety; but they did not spy The Shadow. He was gone, through a space below the battered windows along the side of the apartment, picking his way along a stone-strewn path, to reach Legrec.

Scaling a corner of the garage in the rear, The Shadow looked across the edge. Flames from the third floor of the apartment house threw a glare upon the space where Legrec had lurked. Only wreckage lay there – too far from the house wall to have buried the killer beneath it.

The murderer had fled quickly to safety before The Shadow could reach him, leaving no trace of his course. Nevertheless, a sinister laugh throbbed from the cloaked pursuer.

The Shadow still knew a way whereby he might find Legrec, before this night was ended.

CHAPTER IV. LINKED TRAILS

"LEGREC!"

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The name came in a whisper from a girl's strained lips. It seemed mysterious, that name, as Eleanor Margale uttered it. Her voice was like an echo, in that alcove beside the hallway stairs.

The echo of a dying man's cry!

Eleanor stared about her. The scene was somber, yet very real. She was in her uncle's home; there, beside her, was the telephone that she had answered only a short while ago.

In response to her queries across the wire had come nothing but that one word: "Legrec!"

Who had called; and why?

Eleanor could not answer either question. The receiver had clicked shortly after she had heard the voice. Since then, she had been standing here gripped by one horrible impression.

Whoever had screamed that lone name, had been face to face with doom. Only total despair could have produced the tone that Eleanor had heard.

More than temporary strain was shown on Eleanor's face. She was a girl of marked beauty; her well-formed features and dark eyes were exquisite, outlined against her brunette hair. But even the soft light of the hallway betrayed the thinness of her cheeks; the lines that wrinkled her otherwise attractive forehead.

Some long-nourished worry was responsible. The girl's nerves were ready for a break.

Eleanor realized that fact, herself, when she stared at the big grandfather's clock. She couldn't believe, at first, that she had been standing here for twenty minutes. For a moment, she felt terrified; then her wits returned.

This was the time when something must be done. That voice over the wire was proof, at last, that matters were wrong in this household. Steadily, Eleanor reviewed events that had come before to-night.

HER uncle, Thomas Margale, had always been eccentric; but in a harmless way. He seemed to live in spurts; first seeking money, then spending it. Oddly, that energy had worked to his advantage, for he had acquired a large store of wealth. It was a well-known fact that Thomas Margale was worth several million dollars.

Six months ago, Eleanor believed that her uncle had outlived his thirst for wealth. He had gone abroad, for a longer trip than ever before. He had seemed in fine spirits when he returned from his vacation on the French Riviera.

A few short weeks had changed his mood – much to the concern of both Eleanor and Nordham, the personal servant who always traveled with Thomas Margale.

Ill health had been Margale's first worry. He had summoned physicians; they had found nothing wrong with him. Eleanor remembered that the verdict had angered her uncle. Since then, he had refused to see all doctors, but he would not admit that he was well again.

Margale had decided that he would cure his illness by forgetting it; and he had chosen business enterprises as the right way to occupy his mind. With that policy, Margale had become secretive. He secluded himself in his downstairs study, days at a time, visited only by Nordham, who carried in meals.

There had been visitors to the house; Eleanor had never met them. Her uncle insisted that she remain upstairs. He had not even allowed Nordham to answer the door when those visitors were expected. That task had been

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left to another servant, who had later been discharged.

Since then, Thomas Margale had received occasional telephone calls. Nordham answered them; but names were never mentioned over the wire. Eleanor knew that because she had questioned Nordham, only to find that the servant was as puzzled as herself.

To-night's call produced new mystery. Eleanor was confident that the man on the wire had sought to reach her uncle. It chanced that Thomas Margale had gone out for a walk, taking Nordham with him. That was the only reason why Eleanor had answered the telephone.

Legrec. The name was French; it might link with her uncle's last trip to France. There was no way to find a clue in the study; not only was it locked, but Eleanor's uncle kept all documents in a big safe.

The thought of prying into such matters did not trouble Eleanor. It was time, she felt, that something should be done about Margale's affairs.

Eleanor, herself, was entitled to some consideration. Her uncle had kept her almost a prisoner in this forgotten mansion, behind its big wall. Outside was a secluded Manhattan avenue; but Eleanor could see little of it, even from her upstairs room.

ELEANOR was tapping the telephone table. She suddenly observed the drawer, remembered that her uncle made calls from here, as well as from his study. She opened the drawer, plucked out the papers that she found there.

None were important, until Eleanor discovered a scrawled sheet in her uncle's handwriting. All that it bore was an address on Twentieth Street, with a telephone number.

Hurriedly replacing the papers, Eleanor dialed the number. There was a response from the operator, stating that the telephone had been disconnected. That proved that the mystery call had not come from that telephone; but the fact merely centered Eleanor's interest upon the address.

The girl started to close the table drawer. She left it, not quite shut, when she heard the front door open. Moving to the stairway, she halted there, just as a stocky, middle-aged man entered. The arrival was Nordham; Eleanor was relieved when she saw that her uncle was not with the servant.

"Where is Uncle Thomas?" questioned Eleanor.

"He went to the club, Miss Margale," replied the servant. "I left him there, an hour ago; but I supposed that he would be back by this time. I really believe" – Nordham's tone was a pleased one – "that your uncle is feeling better, Miss Margale."

"I hope he is," assured Eleanor. Then, briskly: "When he returns, Nordham, tell him that I have gone out."

Nordham looked troubled.

"I know he won't like it," added Eleanor, "but I'll leave it to you to humor him, Nordham."

"I shall do my best, Miss Margale."

Eleanor hurried up to her room; she gathered hat and coat. Coming back to the head of the stairs, she saw Nordham in the hall below. The servant gave a gesture, waving her back to her room. Instead, Eleanor

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remained out of sight at the top of the stairs.

Again the front door had opened. From between the banister rails, Eleanor saw her uncle. Despite Nordham's good report, Eleanor could not feel that his condition had improved.

Tall, thin of build, Thomas Margale looked spry for a man of sixty; but he offset that by his low crouch, the faltering way in which he relied on his big cane. His face was haggard, sharp pointed like a vulture's, and as gray in hue as the thin hair that topped it.

His eyes, at least, were active, but they had an ugly, suspicious glare that Eleanor had never noticed until recently. She sensed, from the fierceness of his gaze, that he was looking for her. His words proved that she was right.

"Where is Eleanor?" demanded Margale, in a savage, high-keyed rasp. "Has she gone out, against my orders?"

"Miss Eleanor is upstairs, sir," returned Nordham, mildly. "Shall I summon her to the study?"

"To the study?" snarled Margale. "Bah! Do you think I would be fool enough to allow any one in there? Nordham" – the gray-haired man had stopped by the telephone table, and was wagging his cane – "Nordham, the girl has tricked us! I tell you, she has gone out!"

ELEANOR waited no longer. Since her uncle chose to think that she was missing, he could find her gone. She hurried away from the front stairs, headed down a rear flight toward the kitchen.

There was a side door to the house, but it was always locked. The best route would be the back door.

As Eleanor descended the back way, she heard footsteps pounding up the front stairs. She thought they must be Nordham's, until she heard her uncle, shouting from above:

"She's gone, Nordham! I told you she was gone! You must find her, at once, wherever she is! Bring her back here, Nordham!"

There was a response from the servant, Eleanor could hear the muffled tone, as Nordham called upstairs from the front hall. He was promising that he would do as Margale ordered.

No servants were in the kitchen. Eleanor hurried through the back door, reached the gate in the rear wall. She breathed better in the darkness of the rear street.

There was an apartment house half a block away, taxicabs in front of it. Making for the nearest one, Eleanor stepped into it and gave the address that she had seen upon the paper scrawled with her uncle's handwriting.

As she rode, Eleanor promised herself that she would soon return to her uncle's mansion. Not because he wanted her there, but on account of Nordham. The servant was too good a friend; she could not let him be blamed for her temporary flight.

An hour from now, Margale's rage would be abated; and Nordham would be a buffer, if needed. Meanwhile, Eleanor was determined to complete this trip, even though it might lead to nothing. It was, at least, her only clue to the mysterious Legrec – who might be the person responsible for her uncle's strange behavior.

Legrec! It was strange how the name repeated itself in Eleanor's mind. Stranger, though, would be the experiences that she would encounter through trying to find the man himself.

In seeking her present quest, Eleanor Margale had linked herself with a trail that promised doom to any one who crossed it!

CHAPTER V. SNARE OF STEEL

THE house on Twentieth Street looked old and deserted. Remembering that the telephone had been disconnected, Eleanor supposed that it must be empty. The cabby thought the same; he waited, expecting that his passenger would go elsewhere.

Instead, Eleanor suddenly dismissed the cab. She waited until it had turned the corner; then, after a quick look along the street, Eleanor approached a basement door that stood half-hidden beneath the high front steps.

It had occurred to her that an empty house could furnish more evidence than an occupied one; particularly if the former tenants had left some of their belongings.

She realized that entering the place might be a form of burglary; but that did not worry her, since her purpose was not a criminal one. Eleanor's chief concern was the basement door. She wondered if she could manage to force it open.

It occurred to her to try the knob. The door swung inward, almost at touch. The house was unlocked!

Inside, with the door closed, Eleanor encountered a new handicap. She had not foreseen that she might need a flashlight; hence she was forced to rely on a few matches that she had brought with her.

It took her some time to pick her way through the basement. None of the rooms were furnished, but a stairway gave a route to the floor above.

Matters were better on the ground floor. A street lamp furnished a vague light through dusty windows. By that glow, Eleanor saw vacant rooms. They spoke of complete desertion, but the emptiness gave Eleanor confidence. She decided that she could search further, without chance of interruption.

Again a stairway. Eleanor ascended to the second floor, pausing whenever a step creaked. Those sounds were magnified within the empty walls; the girl gave a relieved sigh when she reached the hall above.

Then, in a flash, her nerves were taut again.

Eleanor had thought that she heard a sound from far below, like the thrusting of a rusted bolt.

Could some one have locked the door by which she entered?

Eleanor listened; she fancied creaks coming upward, like the echoes of her own tread. She pictured some one creeping from basement to first floor.

Flight was Eleanor's first instinct. Reason intervened. If those sounds were real, they meant that her path was cut off. If imaginary, there was no cause for alarm. In either event, her lone policy was to remain where she was, until she learned more.

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A truck rolled along the front street. Its rumble gave Eleanor comfort, until she realized that the noise might have drowned other sounds. A hush returned, so deep that Eleanor could hear the ticking of her tiny wrist watch. There was no sound from the hallway below. Eleanor smiled at her own fears.

Lighting another match, she found the door of a second floor room. Faint light from windows showed new vacancy.

Following the hall, Eleanor found more doors, all open, their rooms deserted. She passed a narrow rear stairway, reached the end of the hall.

There, Eleanor encountered the first closed door. It was unlike the others, for its knob was brass. The metal reflected the gleam of a dying match. With darkness, Eleanor decided to learn what lay beyond that barrier.

She tried the knob; it yielded. A moment later, the girl halted in alarm. Light filtered through the open space. The glow, though mild, did not come from a window.

The room, itself, was lighted!

PEERING inward, Eleanor saw a squarish room. It was oak paneled; furnished like a study. She saw a desk patterned of that same rich wood. There were chairs; a couch in the corner.

The rear of the room had a small reading nook, that projected deep between the ends of two bookcases.

The ceiling of the nook was low. There was a table in the tiny space, set with a chessboard; on each side were chairs, as if awaiting absent players.

There was no one in the room. Eleanor entered, closing the door softly behind her. Curiosity had replaced her dread. There was nothing ominous about this cozy room, with its tasteful decorations. It was amazing, though, to find such a place in an otherwise unfurnished house.

Something else, too, was cause for perplexity; although it did not strike Eleanor at first. As she looked about the room, she observed that it had no windows.

A feeling of oppressiveness seized Eleanor. She wanted to get away from the scene, but her natural curiosity would not let her. There, on the desk, was the telephone with the very number that she had tried to call.

Perhaps, in that desk, as in the telephone table at her uncle's home, she might find some clue more valuable than the one that brought her here.

A link, perhaps, to Legrec!

Eleanor tried the desk drawers. They were locked. She looked toward the nook, saw a drawer in the chess table. She went there; the drawer clattered when she opened it. Its only contents were the discarded chessmen of an old set.

Mechanically, Eleanor pushed the drawer shut. She heard the muffled roll of the chess pieces; next, she was conscious of a sound from another quarter. Alarmed, she turned toward the door that she had entered.

Eleanor was no longer alone.

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Within the portal, the girl saw a curious being, whose very appearance gave her a tingle of alarm. He was slender, crouchy like her uncle; but his almost crablike pose made it impossible to gauge his height.

His slippers and smoking jacket marked him as the owner of this isolated room; but Eleanor scarcely noted the man's attire. It was his face that held her gaze.

That countenance was smooth as parchment, so dry, that it seemed but a mask fitted over a face beneath. Lips had a dry smile; eyes were sharp, uninking. The broad, smooth forehead was topped by a shock of pure white hair, so plentiful that it might have been a wig.

Eleanor could not account for the mingled impressions that seized her. They seemed to be produced by the varied expressions in the eyes that watched her. One moment, they were fierce; an instant later, kindly.

THE girl tried to speak. Her voice was a stammer. Those sharp eyes ferreted out her thoughts. Dried lips crackled a harsh question:

"Why have you come here?"

Eleanor suppressed an answer.

"You seek some one" – the dry voice chuckled – "but you are afraid to speak his name. Ah! I am right!"

The crouched shoulders straightened partially. The shock-haired man advanced, raising one clawish hand in friendly gesture. His voice, his manner, had taken on a kindliness. Eleanor's bravery returned.

"Yes," she admitted, "I am looking for some one. A man who is called Legrec –"

Eleanor paused. This time, her eyes had the keenness. The old man's gaze was dulled. He shook his head, almost piteously.

"Legrec?" he questioned, sadly. "No. I have never heard that name." Then, with a proud gleam in his eyes, he pointed toward himself, to ask: "You know who I am?"

Eleanor shook her head. Dried lips crackled a half-pleased laugh. As if talking to himself, the old man added:

"You have never heard of Rupert Roban!"

He reached the chess table, seated himself there. With a wave, he invited Eleanor to take the chair opposite.

The girl sat down, wondering if the old man's name was really Rupert Roban; if so, just why she should have heard of him.

"I can trust you?"

Roban tilted his head as he spoke the question. Eleanor nodded. Chances were that the old man was a half-crazed recluse. Her best course was to humor him.

"Very well," smiled Roban. "I am a counterfeiter, and a clever one. Too clever to copy money, because my very skill would betray me. That is why I followed the advice of" – he paused, his eyes gleaming shrewdly – "of a man whose name I have sworn not to reveal."

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"I manufacture bonds, instead of money. Why not? The market is always good. Particularly when one has a friend who knows how to dispose of them."

Roban arose, but gestured for Eleanor to remain seated. He stepped out into the room, began to tap the walls. Eleanor heard metal ring beneath his knuckles.

"They look like oak," chortled Roban. "Actually, they are steel. Would your friend Legrec" – he spoke the name with emphasis – "think of such a clever plan? Watch!"

Spryly, he stepped to the door, pressed a spot along the wall. A steel barrier slithered shut on the room side of the wooden door. It made another panel to the room, closing the only visible exit.

"That is not all." Roban approached the little nook. "It happens that I have removed my equipment; otherwise, you would see it there" – he pointed to the chess table. "This little space" – he stepped into the nook – "is an elevator, contrived to sink into the floor, between thick walls below.

"There, I could bury all evidence where it would never be found. Moreover, when this tiny alcove sinks it gives me a new exit. Above the steel ceiling" – Roban pointed a bony finger upward – "is a trapdoor to the roof. I can leave through it while invaders storm this room."

He eyed Eleanor as though expecting comment. The girl spoke humoring words.

"It is very clever," she agreed. "I am glad, however, that you have removed your equipment –"

Roban clucked an interruption: "My equipment, yes. But not all evidence."

Puzzled, Eleanor looked at the chessboard. She pointed to the chessmen, as she questioned:

"You mean these?"

"I mean you!" Roban screeched the words. "You are evidence! You can speak! That is why you came here: to learn all you could. So I told you everything" – his laugh was maddened – "because you never shall repeat it!"

BEFORE Eleanor could reach her feet, Roban seized the chess table and flung it from the nook. The girl sprang from her chair while the table was clattering; but the crazed man was too swift for her.

Seizing the other chair, Roban swung it viciously. Eleanor warded off the blow, but sprawled to the inner wall of the alcove doing so.

Hurling the chair out into the room, Roban grabbed the one that Eleanor had used; he made another fierce sweep, as the girl tried to rise.

Eleanor put her arms before her eyes as the chair swished past. When she peered over her elbow, Roban was gone from the nook carrying the last chair with him. He whipped a pair of books from a bookcase, shoved his hand deep against the wall.

A steel door slid across the mouth of the little alcove, drowning Roban's shrill laugh. Frantically, Eleanor reached the barrier, to beat against it. Her pounding was useless. If Roban heard it, the sound merely sped him to his next deed.

Eleanor heard a muffled click. The floor began to sink, carrying walls and ceiling with it. There were four walls – not merely three – for the new barrier was descending with the others.

Rupert Roban was making good his boast. He was burying the evidence that might betray him, caring little that his deed was another human's doom!

CHAPTER VI. VANISHED EVIDENCE

TERRIFIED by her plight, Eleanor Margale was no longer thinking of Rupert Roban, the crazed man from whom she could expect no aid. Roban, in his turn, had forgotten Eleanor. As soon as the sealed nook had begun its downward glide, the white-haired inventor had flung himself to hands and knees.

In the middle of his study, he was fondly gathering the scattered chessmen, packing them away in a box that he drew from the desk. He muttered gleefully, while the faint rumble of a mechanism marked Eleanor's journey to the thick-walled space below.

The rumble ceased. Roban noted it as he placed the last chessman in the box. Pushing the sliding cover into place, he came to his feet. His eyes were raised upward, as he turned to look at the ceiling above the alcove.

New walls were visible; the top of the secret elevator had formed another floor. There was a new ceiling, too; but it was higher than the other. In it was the trapdoor that Roban had mentioned.

Clutching the box of chessmen with one hand, Roban reached for a bookcase to draw its shelves into the alcove, where they would serve him as a ladder. His gaze came downward, and stopped.

The amazement on Roban's face was similar to Eleanor's expression when the old man had first stepped into the study.

Like the girl whom he had sentenced to doom, Roban was faced by an unexpected intruder.

A being in black stood in the new-formed alcove. Roban saw a cloaked form, burning eyes beneath the brim of a slouch hat. He spied the yawning muzzle of an automatic, that bulged a threat of prompt disaster.

Like others steeped in crime, Roban recognized that figure. The counterfeiter pronounced himself a deep-dyed crook, as he gulped the name:

"The Shadow!"

A SINISTER, taunting laugh whispered its answer. Roban edged backward, whining a plea.

"I've done nothing! Nothing, I tell you, in all the years that I have been away."

"Until you met Hastings Kever," interposed The Shadow. "That much might be true, Roban."

Wild alarm showed in Roban's eyes. It faded, a moment later. His gaze became shrewd.

"Kever never talked," sneered the counterfeiter. "He would never talk – not even to you, The Shadow."

"Kever is dead!"

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Surprise spread over Roban's dryish face, evidenced chiefly by the dropping of his jaw. It meant nothing, for the shock-haired crook could counterfeit emotions as cleverly as bonds.

The Shadow watched the old man's expression. Roban's teeth clicked shut; his lips tightened. He changed the subject, speaking through gritted teeth.

"You were always clever," he told The Shadow. "Yet you never found me, through all these years. It took a blunderer like Keever to bring you here.

"Since Keever is dead" – Roban's lips relaxed, his tone became glib – "we have no quarrel. This room" – the old man shrugged – "was merely a device that I designed to while away my time.

"I thought it proof against intruders, but I was wrong. You have done me a service, by demonstrating that my upper exit was a weak spot, that could be used for entrance also. Fancy it!" Roban chuckled heartily. "I bring down the ceiling – and with it comes The Shadow!"

THE SHADOW was eyeing Roban steadily. The old man was playing his best game: that of a crazed inventor. It worked with others, but not with The Shadow. Roban was hiding something deeper than whatever deal he had made with Keever.

"Look!" Roban stepped across the room. "This is my regular entrance." He pressed the switch; the front panel glided open. "The way is clear, when you choose to use it.

"Meanwhile" – Roban came back, placed the box of chessmen on the table – "shall we match our wits in a friendly contest? A game of chess – there, in the little nook where I always play?"

Roban's smile faded when The Shadow did not answer. The schemer had overplayed his hand. His mention of the nook was the very clue The Shadow awaited. It gave away the spot that Roban wanted his visitor to ignore.

Stepping straight toward Roban, The Shadow thrust his automatic closer. He hissed the command:

"Press the other switch!"

Roban hesitated; crafty though his eyes were, they gave his thoughts away, with their dart toward the bookcase.

The Shadow moved backward; he shot a sidelong glance to the right spot. He reached into the space, felt two switches. He pressed one.

There was no motion from the alcove. The Shadow threw the other switch. Machinery rumbled. Stepping to the center of the study, The Shadow kept Roban covered while he watched the elevator rise.

Roban's fingers clawed the box of chessmen. He knew that the front of the sealed room was open, thanks to the switch that The Shadow had pressed first. He expected to hear Eleanor's voice, denouncing him; instead, there was silence, until the original alcove came into place.

Then Roban heard The Shadow's laugh, grim and mirthless. It threatened ill to Roban; the old man saw why, when The Shadow stepped into the nook. On the floor lay Eleanor; the girl was motionless.

"She can't be dead!" insisted Roban. "She was unhurt when I trapped her! No, no – she can't be dead!"

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Roban was thinking of his own hide, when he screeched those words; but his tone was filled with remorse. It broke into sobs of relief, when The Shadow raised Eleanor's head and Roban saw the girl's eyes open.

For once, Roban's emotion seemed sincere. The counterfeiter's face was buried in his scrawny hands. For the moment, The Shadow forgot Roban, because of Eleanor. It was the break that Roban wanted.

With a sudden twisting leap, the crook sprang for the door; he yanked it open, started to dive for the hallway. The Shadow aimed an automatic, to cut off Roban's flight. One bullet, sizzling past that shock of white hair, would be enough to frighten Roban into a prompt halt.

ROBAN'S high-cackled shout, given as he dived, was the cause that changed The Shadow's plan. With a quick sweep, The Shadow whipped Eleanor from the tiny elevator, pushed her to safety past the desk in the corner. Wheeling, he reached the edge of the door through which Roban had gone.

Guns sputtered from the hallway: a response to Roban's command. It was lucky that The Shadow had recognized the cry's significance. For the first time in his curious career of crime, Roban was provided with a crew of gunmen. Through overzeal, he had given the fact away.

Whining slugs slammed the steel walls of Roban's study. The counterfeiter was below that line of fire, continuing his dive down the back stairs. Marksmen were snarling their anger, because The Shadow had been too quick for them. They were due for another demonstration of his speed.

From the door edge, The Shadow's automatic tongued its answer. He wasn't taking pot shots, like the thugs in the front hallway. Revolver spurts were his targets; his bullets winged the foemen who used those telltale guns.

There were howls as the .45 slugs hit home. Clipped gunmen staggered for the front stairway, went thudding downward, with their pals scrambling after them. The Shadow reached the hallway; his laugh was a fierce, strident challenge to all comers.

Downstairs, crooks were rallying for new battle. The Shadow could hear Roban's high-screamed call. Stepping back into the study, The Shadow pressed the switch to send the alcove downward. He knew that Roban would hear the rumble, telling that the exit to the roof had opened.

Beckoning to Eleanor, The Shadow moved out to the hallway. The girl had recovered; she followed. Blinking a flashlight, The Shadow led the way down the back stairs. The rear of the first floor was deserted. Roban and his band had hurried out to cut off the route across the roof.

The Shadow handed Eleanor his flashlight, whispering a quick order:

"Through to the rear street – four flashes of the light – take the cab that comes from the corner."

Eleanor was away. Behind her, she heard The Shadow's laugh tone eerily from darkness. Shouts answered from the roof; then gunfire. Crooks had taken The Shadow's bait. They were shooting, hopelessly, into the lower darkness, making themselves new targets for The Shadow.

Meanwhile, Eleanor's flight was covered.

The girl reached the next street. She paused to blink the flashlight; before her finger pressed it, – she saw a cab parked near by. Mistaking it for the one mentioned by The Shadow, Eleanor started toward it.

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A stocky man sprang out to seize her. Eleanor tried to wrench away, then recognized his voice. The man was Nordham; he hurried her into the cab.

The servant told the cabby to get started; the fellow hesitated, until he heard Eleanor's assurance:

"It's all right, driver. This man is my friend."

RIDING back to the mansion, Eleanor whispered her story to Nordham, in a low tone that the cabby could not hear. The servant gasped bewilderment, when he heard it.

"It was fortunate that I followed you promptly," he declared. "I saw your cab drive away; this man's cab was next in line. I asked where you had gone. He had heard you say 'Twentieth Street'; so we rode along there. We were coming back when we heard the gunfire."

Eleanor nodded gratefully; then questioned in worried tone:

"What does it all mean, Nordham? What connection is there between my uncle and this madman, Roban? And who can Legrec be?"

"I don't know, Miss Margale," replied Nordham. "I, too, have puzzled over your uncle's strange behavior. What is most important, is that he learn nothing of to-night's occurrence."

Eleanor agreed. She and Nordham decided to tell her uncle that she had come back alone, by cab; that the servant had met her at the corner. That settled, they rode along in silence. All the while, Eleanor was wondering how The Shadow had fared in final battle.

It happened that The Shadow, in another cab, was thinking about Eleanor at that moment. Crooks had scattered before his devastating fire, and Roban had escaped with them. Departing, The Shadow had found his own cab, still at the corner.

The driver, Moe Shrevnitz – one of The Shadow's own agents – had seen no flashlight signal; but he remembered that a cruising cab had paused, apparently to pick up a passenger. That satisfied The Shadow regarding Eleanor's safety.

It told him nothing, however, of the girl's identity; how she had crossed the trail that The Shadow had hoped would lead him to Legrec. She was a new mystery in the case.

Though The Shadow had saved Eleanor Margale from doom, the girl remained the very factor that Rupert Roban had termed her.

Eleanor Margale was vanished evidence.

CHAPTER VII. THE LAW'S LEAD

EARLY the next evening, a contented man was seated at a table in the grill-room of the exclusive Cobalt Club. He had finished a hearty meal; he was chuckling over the headlines of the latest newspapers.

The pleased man was Ralph Weston, New York City's police commissioner. Usually, his mustached military face was dour when crime was on the rampage. Not so to-night.

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It happened that the newspapers had little to say regarding crime. They carried reports of accidents, yesterday: an airplane crash, an elevator fall, an explosion in Greenwich Village. The only account that involved the police was the story of a gun fight on Twentieth Street.

There, the law had invaded an old house, to find a steel-walled room that looked like a pill-box. Apparently it was the hide-out of some jittery mobleader, who had fled when attacked by rivals. A trapdoor in the ceiling proved how the unknown big-shot had escaped.

Weston concentrated on the accident reports. He folded the newspaper, reached into his pocket and drew out a telegram. He read the message on the yellow paper, put it away again.

A streak of blackness stretched across the table; for the moment, it formed a hawkish silhouette. The shaded image slid away as Weston looked up, to see a tall personage standing beside him. There was something placid in the face that Weston recognized; with it, a leisurely air.

Eyes gazing mildly from each side of an aquiline nose added to the masklike expression of those features. The commissioner, however, was familiar with that countenance. The arrival was his friend and fellow club-member, Lamont Cranston.

"Sit down, Cranston," invited Weston. "Tell me" – his tone became serious – "what do you think of this wave of recent accidents?"

"Quit extraordinary." Cranston's reply was quiet, even-toned. "But purely from the standpoint of coincidence."

Weston turned his head to suppress a smile. Cranston had simply repeated the newspaper theory. His glance diverted, the commissioner failed to observe the momentary glow that came to Cranston's eyes.

They were the eyes of The Shadow.

The guise of Cranston was simply one that The Shadow chose on certain occasions, particularly when he wanted to learn what the police were about. There was a real Cranston, a millionaire globetrotter, who was at present trekking across the South African veldt. When the actual Cranston was far away, The Shadow doubled for him.

There was a reason for The Shadow's revealing gaze. He had seen the telegram that Weston had stowed away. Though he had gained no chance to read the message, The Shadow connected it with the accidents that the commissioner had mentioned.

"CURIOUS, those accidents," observed The Shadow. His eyes, like his tone, had become Cranston's. "I wonder –"

He paused, slowly shaking his head. Weston became alert, put a quick question:

"You wonder if anything lay in back of them?"

A nod from Cranston. Weston inquired why. Pointing to the newspaper, The Shadow remarked:

"That trouble on Twentieth Street, happening so soon afterward. There might be a connection, commissioner."

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"You are miles wide, Cranston," laughed Weston. "That gun fray was a horse of a different sort. Tell me, though" – Weston's tone was brisk – "what gave you the idea in the first place? Something must have inspired it."

A solemn expression set itself upon Cranston's lips, as he spoke:

"I knew all three men, quite well. Balcray, Lysand, Keever – it seems incredible that those friends should have perished, separately, within the space of a few hours."

It never occurred to Weston that Cranston had totally reversed his original statement. Everything that The Shadow said had been based upon his observation of the commissioner. He knew that Weston had a habit of forgetting casual statements, when he heard more pointed ones.

"You're the man I've wanted to talk to, Cranston!" asserted Weston, eagerly. "Some one acquainted with all three of those victims."

Cranston seemed disinterested. He was rising from the table. The commissioner gripped his arm.

"Don't you understand?" insisted Weston. "Those deaths were crimes, perpetrated by the same murderer. They are linked; but we have to learn why those victims were chosen."

Cranston showed bewilderment. "But the newspapers say nothing, commissioner"

"Because they know nothing!" snapped Weston. "Cranston, we are on the trail of a supercriminal; one whose arrival we anticipated. We were watching for something, and we found it. For once" – the commissioner's smile showed grim satisfaction – "we managed to keep that detail from the newspapers."

There was interest in Cranston's eyes: the sort that generally inspired Weston to further statements. On this occasion, however, Weston suddenly dropped the subject.

"Where can I reach you later?" he questioned, abruptly. "Say, in about an hour? Will you be back here, at the club?"

"I can call here."

"Very well. There is some one – rather, there is something – that I shall want to talk to you about. I am expecting more information that will aid our discussion."

STROLLING out through the foyer of the club, Lamont Cranston encountered a stocky-built man who entered. He nodded, as he recognized the arrival's swarthy face. The man was Inspector Joe Cardona, Weston's ace investigator.

Cardona was coming to hold conference with the commissioner; but he was not the person that Weston had begun to mention. The Shadow had already linked another party with the case: some one who had sent the commissioner that precious telegram.

An hour's interval did not annoy The Shadow. He needed it to build up the bluff that he had made to Weston. Except for Keever, The Shadow had been totally unacquainted with the men who had died in yesterday's so-called accidents.

CARDS OF DEATH

To-day, however, The Shadow's agents had been on the job, gathering all available data that concerned the three dead men. There would be reports, accessible to The Shadow when he needed them. From those, The Shadow could gain enough information to establish his pretext.

Meanwhile, Cardona had joined Weston in the grill-room. The ace pulled a sheaf of papers from his pocket, thwacked them on the table.

"No luck," gruffed the inspector. "We can't hook up those three deaths, so far as the victims were concerned. All we know is that Legrec staged them."

"Which is quite enough," assured Weston.

"I don't see it that way, commissioner," returned Cardona, bluntly. "Here's the original flyer, that came in weeks ago, from England. Scotland Yard tipped us off that Gautier Legrec was supposed to have headed here. But they gave us no description of the fellow."

"Except his habit of placing death cards with his victims."

"That's his method, commissioner. It doesn't give us a line on Legrec himself. As far as I know, nobody knows much about Legrec."

"No one except Alan Rigby."

For a moment, Cardona looked enthused, then his expression faded.

"Rigby could help us," he admitted. "I remember him from a few years back, before this Legrec business ever started. He's an ace in his line – the best of private investigators. I used to wonder what had become of Rigby, until I learned that he was chasing Legrec."

"But where is Rigby? Scotland Yard said that Legrec had started for New York. That meant that Rigby ought to have followed. But he didn't. We've been expecting him on every boat, and he hasn't shown up yet."

WITH a smile, Weston produced the telegram. Cardona eyed the paper with interest; but Weston paused before unfolding it.

"Had it occurred to you, Cardona," questioned the commissioner, "that Legrec might have foreseen trouble in entering the United States?"

"It hadn't," admitted Cardona, "but it makes sense."

"Very well. May I remark, also, that Legrec is a Frenchman?"

"His name sounds French, but it may be phony."

"At least, Cardona, you will concede that Legrec is conversant with the French language; that he could probably pass himself as a Frenchman?"

"I'll grant that, commissioner."

Weston spread the telegram, handed it to Cardona with the comment:

CARDS OF DEATH

"That is why Legrec may have entered the United States by way of Montreal. That city has a large French population. Legrec could find Montreal an ideal stopping place. In fact, he probably did stay over at that city."

Cardona was reading the telegram. He finished it, and exclaimed with new enthusiasm:

"So that's where Rigby chased Legrec! Hot on the trail again; but Legrec slipped him. So Rigby sent this wire, telling you he'd be in from Montreal some time to-night!

"Early this evening," corrected Weston. "To be precise, Cardona, Rigby will arrive at Grand Central Station in exactly thirty-five minutes. That is why I summoned you: so that we both can meet him."

Cardona needed no further urging. He was reaching for his hat. Weston copied the inspector's move. Together, they started to the street, where the commissioner's official car awaited.

Though The Shadow was not present to learn it, the reason for the law's knowledge was explained. Thanks to word from Scotland Yard, plus the services of Alan Rigby, the authorities had gained their start along the trail of Gautier Legrec.

CHAPTER VIII. THE SHADOW'S DETOUR

THOSE minutes that preceded Rigby's arrival were important to The Shadow. He was in his sanctum, a hidden black-walled room, reviewing reports that his agents had supplied.

New facts pieced with The Shadow's theories, producing new insight into the ways of Gautier Legrec.

First, the murders themselves formed a paradox. They showed a curious conflict of methods.

Legrec had sent each victim a death card. The Shadow had gathered that from his talk with Weston. Agents had also established the fact, by inquiries at the airport and the Sheffield Apartments.

Though the matter had slipped past the newspaper reporters, a messenger at the airport had seen Elwood Balcray holding a strange card. The clerk at the Sheffield had observed a similar token in the possession of Sylvester Lysand. The Shadow, himself, had spied a death card close to the body of Hastings Keever.

The law had needed none of those testimonies; for the police, themselves, had found the actual cards. Commissioner Weston probably regarded the clues as lucky ones; but there, The Shadow's opinion differed.

Legrec had wanted those death cards to be discovered.

Why, then, had he tried to camouflage the murders as accidents? The two policies did not fit. Behind it lay some purpose, to which The Shadow saw a plausible answer, one that he intended to reserve for his own investigation.

Oddly, luck had been with Legrec; for The Shadow saw where the plotter had nearly failed.

Some helper had loosened the wheel of the South-bound plane, but the crash had not been wanted during the takeoff. Legrec had expected it to happen when the ship landed at Washington. A sharp descent on a difficult field would have meant a complete crack-up.

CARDS OF DEATH

Balcray would have died only a short while before the fall of Lysand's elevator, which had probably been fixed with greased cables. Kever, therefore, would have known nothing of those previous deaths.

The explosion in the Greenwich Village apartment house had been designed as the only measure to dispose of Kever. Legrec had been forced to make a special visit, because the plane had crashed too soon.

The whole case proved that Kever had known who Balcray and Lysand were, even though they might have known nothing about Kever.

Had Balcray and Lysand been innocent men, Legrec would not have needed to hide their deaths from Kever, himself a crook. It followed, therefore, that Balcray and Lysand were tools of Legrec. He had disposed of them because he needed their services no longer.

Knowing Balcray and Lysand for what they were, Kever had naturally become a problem, for he had inferred that he was slated for a similar fate.

Who, actually, was Gautier Legrec?

Was he an existing personage in his own right, or was he a crook who merely assumed that name?

CONSIDERING the latter probability, The Shadow had found one candidate who might be the master crook. That man was Rupert Roban. The old counterfeiter's absence during the past few years was a factor that made him eligible.

There could be others. To list them, The Shadow studied reports concerning Balcray, Lysand and Kever. Legrec, whoever he was, had certainly known those three.

Agents had done well with their reports. Beneath a bluish light, The Shadow penned names that he found mentioned. One by one, he eliminated them, until only one remained.

That name glared in bluish ink.

It was the name of Thomas Margale.

One of The Shadow's agents was a newspaper reporter named Clyde Burke. He had learned that Elwood Balcray had made previous trips to Florida, to dispose of property there. Some of that real estate had been Balcray's. The rest had belonged to Thomas Margale.

Another agent was Rutledge Mann, an insurance broker. Checking on Sylvester Lysand, Mann had learned that the bank director had arranged certain loans at the Triton National. Among them were short-term loans advanced to Thomas Margale. The amounts were large; but all had been repaid.

A third agent, Harry Vincent, had visited the hotel where Hastings Kever had stopped a few days before his death. Posing as a relative of Kever's, Harry had been given a list of telephone calls that the promoter had made. Two of those calls bore the number listed under the name of Thomas Margale.

The Shadow had reports on Margale. The millionaire had been abroad frequently during the past few years. He could have been almost anywhere during those periods.

Moreover, Thomas Margale had a niece named Eleanor. From among a sheaf of clippings, The Shadow drew one that had been cut from the society columns of a New York newspaper.

CARDS OF DEATH

There was a whispered laugh from hidden lips, as eyes studied that printed portrait.

The Shadow had learned the identity of the girl whom he had rescued the night before.

While he still noted Eleanor's picture, The Shadow was conscious of a tiny light that glowed from the wall beyond his table. His hand stretched forward to pluck up earphones. A methodical voice responded:

"Burbank speaking."

"Report!" whispered The Shadow.

"A call from Commissioner Weston, at the Cobalt Club," informed The Shadow's contact man. "He wants Lamont Cranston to come immediately to the Weatherly Arms Apartments. Top floor."

"Report received!"

The bluish light clicked off. There was a swish of The Shadow's cloak. The sanctum was empty.

SOON afterward, The Shadow was riding in his taxi along a side street near Times Square. The cab passed the police commissioner's car; a short distance onward The Shadow saw two signs, spaced sixty feet apart.

The first bore the name: "WEATHERLY ARMS;" the next read "HOTEL WEATHERLY."

Of the two, the hotel was the older. Its success had caused its owners to erect the newer apartment house next door, and to give it a similar name.

That coincidence meant little to The Shadow, as he started to slide his cloak from his shoulders, so that he could leave the cab as Lamont Cranston. A moment later, The Shadow had changed his immediate plan.

A man was pacing near the entrance of the Hotel Weatherly, looking toward The Shadow's cab. That man was Harry Vincent. The agent had come here as a matter of mere routine, in case The Shadow needed him; but the fact that he had gone to the hotel instead of the Weatherly Arms, was proof that Harry had some message.

The Shadow whispered to the driver. The cab glided ahead. It looked empty when it stopped at the hotel entrance. Harry boarded it; heard a whisper in the darkness. As the cab slowly rounded the block, the agent reported.

"Tough customer went into the Weatherly Hotel," stated Harry. "He looked a lot like Mort Fadler, the triggerman."

The Shadow knew the name. Mort was classed as a specialist in murder.

"Looked like he was going to the twentieth floor," added Harry, tersely. "The elevator only made one stop before the top."

The cab had reached the rear street. An alleyway past a deserted theater offered a quick route through to the hotel. The Shadow decided to postpone his visit to the Weatherly Arms, while he looked into the matter of Mort Fadler.

CARDS OF DEATH

With an order for Harry to remain on duty, The Shadow alighted in the darkness. The cab continued its circuit to the front street.

When The Shadow entered the rear of the hotel lobby, he was no longer wearing cloak and hat. They were folded across his arm, so bundled that they looked like ordinary garments. He took an elevator to the twentieth floor.

FROM a hallway window, The Shadow observed the top of the Weatherly Arms. The apartment house was about the same height as the hotel, but it was topped by a duplex penthouse. That two-story structure was set back from the edge; its lower floor opened to a roof promenade that extended in this direction.

There were lights in the lower half of the penthouse, but they were dulled by thick curtains. All seemed quiet there.

Craning from his window, The Shadow looked along the row of rooms on this side of the hotel. As he watched, he saw a flicker come from one. It seemed like the blink of a flashlight. Counting to that window, The Shadow stepped back into the little hall. There, he donned his hat and cloak.

Moving to the door that corresponded to the window where he had spotted the flash, The Shadow produced a pick. He was about to probe the lock when an elevator door clanged open. The Shadow glided from sight as a bell boy, loaded with luggage, conducted two guests to a room at the other end of the hall.

While he waited for the bell boy's departure, The Shadow watched the space beneath the door that he had chosen to open. He saw another flicker from the flashlight. Though the delay was troublesome, The Shadow had at least gained positive proof that he had picked the room where Mort Fadler lurked.

That delay was to produce a chain of consequences. Below the hotel, near a rear corner of the building, two men were looking upward. One seeing the flashlight's reflection gave the other a nudge in the darkness.

"Looks like Mort's there," growled one. "We're not so dumb, after all."

"Who said we were?" demanded the other. "If Mort's up there, though, what's keeping us here?"

The two moved into the hotel, their destination the same floor, the very room, where The Shadow was seeking a silent meeting with Mort Fadler.

CHAPTER IX. SWIFT MINUTES

THE penthouse atop the Weatherly Arms was less gloomy than its windows indicated. Inside, three men were seated in a living room. Weston and Cardona were two, the third was Alan Rigby.

The celebrated investigator was of average height. His deep-lined face and well-grayed temples showed him close to middle age. He had a nervous energy, though, that gave him a youthful mood. His speech, slightly English in its accent, was rapid.

"It was well that I came by Montreal," snapped Rigby. "Even though I did not find Legrec, he did not find me."

Weston started a question; Rigby answered it before it came.

CARDS OF DEATH

"I meant exactly that," said the investigator. "Legrec is out to get me. The bouncer is anxious to amend his previous failures."

The clatter of a cocktail shaker sounded from a pantry. Rigby called out:

"Hurry in here, Clyston, with those drinks!" Then, when a dapper man in shirt-sleeves appeared, Rigby introduced him: "This is Clyston – my secretary, batman, and what-have-you. Like myself, he is eager to trap Legrec."

"We'll catch up with the blighter some day," commented Clyston, with a grin. "I'm looking forward to it!"

"And I'm looking forward to a cocktail," reminded Rigby.

Clyston's grin widened. He handled the shaker with increased speed, as he approached a table where glasses were set upon a tray.

"When I decided to come by Montreal," Rigby told Weston, "I sent Clyston directly to New York. I told him to rent a suitable apartment – if possible, a penthouse.

"He chose this one. I like its location. But I can't say that the arrangements quite suit me. Tell me, Clyston" – Rigby turned to the secretary – "why did you take a duplex, when we require only one floor?"

The secretary was busy pouring the cocktails. He hesitated a moment before he replied:

"The floor above us is locked off, sir. Some tenant had an unexpired lease. His furniture is stored there and no one uses the place."

"I would have preferred the upper apartment," returned Rigby. "What use is a penthouse without a roof, where one can stroll and enjoy the night air?"

"We have a promenade of our own, Mr. Rigby," explained Clyston, eagerly.

"Really? That's jolly! This place is frightfully stuffy. Let us have our drinks on the promenade, Clyston."

OBLIGINGLY, Clyston set aside the cocktail shaker. He put on coat and vest, crossed the room, and opened the French windows. A pleasant breeze swept through the stuffy living room.

Rigby was filling his pipe from a tobacco jar; he paused to gesture his guests outside.

Commissioner Weston started ahead; but Joe Cardona paused to lay three cards upon the table. They were the death tokens that the inspector had found with the dead men.

"Legrec's souvenirs," nodded Rigby. "A whim of his, to place them with his victims. They are tarots."

"Tarots?" The word was unfamiliar to Cardona.

"Ancient playing cards," interpreted Rigby. "Originally used for telling fortunes. Each tarot has a special significance; that is why they are sometimes termed the Book of Thoth."

Cardona picked up the six spot with the crossed rods, mentioning that it had been delivered to Balcray.

CARDS OF DEATH

"Six of rods," stated Rigby. "Its meaning is 'failure'."

Cardona indicated the card with the cuplike spots, that Lysand had received.

"Six of cups," defined Rigby. "Its significance is a bit more subtle. It stands for insuperable obstacles. That could mean 'disaster'."

"What about this one with the six coins?" queried Cardona. "We found it in Keever's apartment."

"Six of money," declared Rigby. "It symbolizes complete ruin."

Gathering the cards, Cardona pocketed them. He was about to ask another question, when Rigby intervened. The investigator was glancing at his watch, when he inquired:

"What is keeping that chap Cranston? The friend that the commissioner mentioned while we were riding here? If he can tell us important facts regarding those three victims, his testimony may prove vital."

Cardona surmised that Cranston would arrive in a short while, and said so. Rigby curbed his impatience.

"We shall wait until he joins us," decided the investigator. "Since those murders constitute our first evidence of Legrec's operations, we must consider them as a starting point. Come, inspector, let us join the commissioner on that delightfully cool promenade."

RIGBY lighted his pipe. Cardona walked ahead of him, out through the French windows toward a table near a parapet, where Weston was already seated. Cardona sat down opposite the commissioner, leaving a chair for Rigby.

Clyston was arriving with the tray. He set it on a chair; tendered a glass to Weston, another to Cardona. The secretary picked up a third glass, started to set it on the table, at the same time moving the chair intended for Rigby.

Cardona remembered that action afterward.

At that particular moment, Clyston could easily have been mistaken for the owner of the penthouse. His motion almost indicated that he intended to take his place in the empty chair. Rigby had not yet appeared from the living room.

Something whimpered in the air, its momentary sizzle followed by an impact. Cardona caught a dull, sighing echo that came from beyond the penthouse terrace. Springing to his feet. Cardona upset the cocktail glass as he grabbed the table edge.

A moment later, Joe was staring across the parapet toward the windows of the adjacent hotel.

There was a shout from the opening to the penthouse living room. Rigby's voice:

"Down! Down! Both of you!"

Weston was the first to turn; he saw Rigby's gestures; dropped to the shelter of the parapet. Cardona copied the move, an instant later. Rigby, coming in a long dash, went to hands and knees and scrambled up to join them.

CARDS OF DEATH

There was good reason for Rigby's excited order.

A silent form had slumped without a murmur. Clyston was lying on the floor beside the table, his arms outspread. His face was staring straight upward; below the face, Cardona saw a splotch of blood spreading itself on the man's light-gray vest, just above his heart.

"A silencer!" gulped Cardona. "On a gun – from one of those hotel windows! Some sharpshooter –"

Joe was drawing a revolver. Rigby stopped him before he could poke his head above the parapet.

"Legrec's work," grated Rigby. "Careful, inspector, or we may share Clyston's fate. Poor Clyston – the assassin may have mistaken him for me."

Something projected from Clyston's vest. It was the white edge of a card, forced up from the upper breast pocket by the impact of the bullet. Rigby drew the object into full view.

The card was another tarot – but with seven symbols instead of six. They represented swords; two groups of three, curved like scimitars, with a straight blade between them.

"Seven of swords!" muttered Rigby. "It signifies an enemy's success. Legrec's success – through another of his hired assassins!"

As Rigby spoke, the eyes of his huddled companions were fixed upon that telltale tarot. The card was stained with Clyston's life blood. Through the center was a hole drilled by the death-dealing bullet.

Legrec had struck again, leaving another of his sinister souvenirs as a token of defiance to the law!

CHAPTER X. THE MAN IN THE ROOM

THE door of the hotel room shoved inward. The Shadow sprang across the threshold, moments late. Delay in the corridor had prevented him from picking the lock in time to stop a killer's thrust.

There was the window; outlined against it the sweated figure of the murderer, Mort Fadler. Something gleamed in dim light. It was the barrel of the killer's rifle.

Beyond, The Shadow saw the parapet of the penthouse promenade; the glow from the opened French windows made a background. No one was in sight; but The Shadow knew why. Men had ducked below the parapet for safety.

The sigh of Fadler's gun had come just as the room door yielded to The Shadow's operations. But the killer hadn't heard the door swing inward. Swishing through the darkness, The Shadow had a seemingly sure chance to grab the murderer.

A chance event warned Fadler.

From the hotel corridor came the clang of an elevator door. The sound was audible, and the murderer heard it. Realizing that the door of the room must also be open, Fadler spun from the window. Dim corridor lights enabled him to see the shape of blackness that was sweeping in upon him.

The killer swung his overweighted rifle. A hard stroke and a lucky one, descending straight for The Shadow's head.

CARDS OF DEATH

Up sped a warding hand. The rifle barrel clashed the steel of an automatic. The Shadow had stopped Mort's stroke; an instant later, the cloaked fighter tugged his automatic trigger.

Driven down by the rifle blow, the automatic muzzle was off aim. The gun blast scorched past Mort's ear. The killer grappled with The Shadow.

Again the automatic tongued. A chance bob of Mort's head saved him from that bullet. Moreover, it gave him a momentary advantage. He managed to drive the butt of the rifle against The Shadow's neck.

The savage jolt was like an electric shock. The Shadow went limp, lost his grip on Mort. Dropping the rifle, the killer clamped brawny hands on his adversary's shoulders, gave The Shadow a heave toward the window.

There was a long instant during which The Shadow saw what lay below.

Twenty stories to the blackened ground. At intervals were ledges – dark streaks – each three feet wide. Good enough for a grip, if a climber approached them; but not for a falling person.

A jolt against one of those ledges would jar a man so swiftly that he would hardly have a chance to stop his plunge. Only the greatest of luck could save any one who went from this high window.

Mort Fadler knew it. He exerted every effort to pitch The Shadow downward.

The Shadow's head and shoulders went through the window. His head tilted downward; his slouch hat fell, skimming the building wall as it scaled toward the depths. Mort made a fierce snatch at The Shadow's hands, trying to pry them from the window sill.

There were shouts from the corridor. The gunfire had been heard. Those cries seemed far distant to The Shadow, like faint voices from a dream. They meant nothing to Mort Fadler. He was on the verge of the greatest triumph of his murderous career.

DOOM to The Shadow!

That was Mort's aim. His lips spat a victorious snarl as he broke the hold of The Shadow's left hand. He grabbed for The Shadow's right wrist, wrenched it hard.

His clutch loosened, The Shadow took a backward twist, half out through the window. His gun was gone; he couldn't thrust his numbed fists past Mort's shoving forearms. But that last instant brought a spasm to The Shadow.

His strength was back; it still might serve him, although he was on the very brink of oblivion.

The Shadow flayed one arm wide. It came up above Mort's shoulder, swooped over the killer's head. The folds of a coat sleeve entangled across the killer's eyes. Mort tried to shake it away; unwisely, he let one arm go low.

The Shadow's other hand thrust through. The second sleeve bagged Mort's head. Savagely, Mort used one hand to rip at the black cloth. The Shadow dropped inside the window sill; twisted half away. More of the cloak enveloped Mort.

Grips were even. The pair were a swaying mass of blackness against the dimness of the window. Hands were gripping through the folds of the twisted cloak. If one fighter gained a throat clutch, the battle would be over.

CARDS OF DEATH

Those shouts from the corridor had loudened. Two men were on the threshold: the same pair that had viewed Mort's blinking flashlight from the ground. They had flashlights of their own. They used them.

The beam showed a chaos of blackness, which the arriving men mistook for a turning figure. They ducked away, snapping off their lights. They saw the shape heave upward at the window, poise there, as if ready for an outward plunge.

They didn't realize that a fighter had gone suddenly helpless in the grip of a foeman. From within the doorway, the two arrivals opened fire with revolvers. There was a rip of cloth; they didn't hear it, for the sound was drowned by the echoes of the guns.

The fighter swayed across the window sill, went through the space beyond, the sweep of cloth spreading behind it. So rapid was the dive of that cloaked form, that it deceived the men who had fired the clipping shot.

"It was Mort!" shouted one. "We got him! He took a dive out through the –"

"Hold it," interrupted the other. "I think he plopped inside, here in the room!"

A flashlight glittered. Oddly, it proved that both speakers were right. A diving form had gone through that window; but another still remained within the room.

BEFORE the flashlight could outline the crouched fighter, he was driving toward the doorway. He fell upon the man who held the light, wrenched it from the fellow's hand. Two figures wrestled; a third sprang into the battle.

Snarls, oaths were frequent during the fray that followed. Neither of the two fresh fighters dared use a gun as a bludgeon, for fear of slugging his own pal. It was a bare-handed battle; two squatly, husky men against a wiry foe who offset them, although he could not wrench away.

Back and forth across the room they went, hitting chairs and tables. At times, the wiry man was almost clear; but always, a lucky grab halted his escape. Guns were forgotten; fists, clawing fingers were the only weapons, except when chairs were slung.

Minutes passed while the struggle raged. There was tumult from the corridor; the pounding of feet.

"Hold him!" panted one of the blocky fighters. "We've got help coming!"

"We've got him!" shouted the other. "We've got Mort Fadler! Give us some light!"

They thought they had Mort Fadler, but they had no one. With a last desperate heave, the man from the window was away, breaking for the door. One of the blocky men made a wild dive, and had the luck to grab a passing ankle.

There was a sprawl in the darkness: two men bounding for the spot where a body thumped.

An instant later, the lights came on.

On the threshold stood Joe Cardona, holding a revolver; behind him were Commissioner Weston and Alan Rigby. The three were backed by a squad of hotel employees.

Cardona was gazing toward the floor; he saw two husky men throw themselves upon the prone form of a prisoner, smothering the captive's last effort to rise. Cardona recognized that pair; they were headquarters detectives.

"They've got the killer!" shouted Weston.

"It's Mort Fadler," panted one of the dicks. "We got a tip-off that he was coming up here."

Joe Cardona thrust forward; he brushed the detectives aside. Looking at the senseless prisoner, the ace shook his head. He tilted the face up into the light.

It was Commissioner Weston who supplied the rest, in a tone that he blurted from mechanical lips:

"My word! It's Cranston!"

CHAPTER XI. THE LAW GAINS FACTS

COMMISSIONER WESTON was overwhelmed by the circumstances. He knew that this room had contained a killer; for it was on a direct line with the penthouse terrace. But the last person he would have considered as a murderer was his friend Lamont Cranston.

It did look black for Cranston. Though the headquarters detectives admitted they had come to seek Mort Fadler, they swore that Cranston was the only man they had encountered. If the death shot had been fired from this room, they said, Cranston was the man who had dispatched it.

There was no question about the death shot. On the floor beside the window lay the rifle, with its silencer: grim evidence that Cranston was the murderer. Joe Cardona picked up the weapon, handed it to Weston.

The commissioner gave a helpless shrug. His duty to the law compelled him to arrest his friend on a murder charge. Weston was about to give that order to Cardona, when Rigby intervened.

"Odd circumstances, commissioner," remarked Rigby. "You tell this friend of yours where to meet you. Instead of coming to the penthouse, he heads here. It looks as though he surely intended murder; and then expected to drop in on us, to view the scene."

"Yeah," supplied one of the detectives. "And he sent that false tip-off, so we would think it was Mort Fadler."

"A good theory," commended Rigby, nodding toward the dick. "But it does not apply to this instance. Commissioner, I advise you not to arrest Cranston. Revive him and hear his story, first."

Weston gave a thankful gulp. Rigby had provided a way out of the dilemma. Cardona was willing to let matters go as Rigby suggested. He told the detectives to get water; to bring Cranston to consciousness as soon as possible. Nevertheless, Cardona was blunt, when he asked Rigby:

"Why don't you think that Cranston is responsible?"

"Because we are dealing with Legrec," replied Rigby, with a meditative gaze. "It would be like him to hire an assassin of Fadler's sort, then have the law trap the fellow."

"You mean Legrec double-crosses his own bunch?"

CARDS OF DEATH

"Certainly! For the simple reason that he can always hire others. That is his cleverest ability."

"But what about the new ones? Don't they think they'll get theirs, the same way?"

"Never!" Rigby was emphatic. "Legrec makes every man believe that he is privileged. He has such an amazing power of persuasion, that they believe him. None know that they have been tricked, until their turns arrive."

There was a stir from Cranston. He was propping himself up from the floor, staring in dazed fashion. Weston spoke; apparently, Cranston did not hear him. In trancelike fashion, he found his feet and walked mechanically toward the window.

There, he stopped to stare downward. The detectives, returning with the water, made a quick grab to hold the prisoner. Cranston never noticed them. He was looking into the deep blackness that lay between the hotel and the apartment house.

The Shadow's daze was feigned. He was looking for something of his own: the hat that had fallen first; the cloak that had gone later, draped over Mort Fadler. He saw a trace of deep blackness, that clotted the shaded strip of a wall ledge.

It was the cloak. It had caught there, when Mort's body took a bounce. Probably the hat had halted somewhere else along the route to the ground. Evidence connecting Cranston with The Shadow was safely out of sight. Those garments could be secretly regained later.

All was set for the story that The Shadow wanted to tell.

TURNING from the window, Cranston looked toward Weston with a weary, reproving smile.

"Hello, commissioner," he said, in slow, even tone. "Why weren't you here?"

"Why wasn't I here?"

"Yes." Cranston's nod was slow. "On the top floor of the Weatherly, as your message stated."

"I said the Weatherly Arms!" ejaculated Weston. "It's next door. This is the Hotel Weatherly."

Understanding dawned on Cranston's hawkish features; then puzzlement replaced it.

"No wonder I was puzzled," declared the commissioner's friend. "That's why I walked into this open room. It was the only place where I supposed you could be. Only, I found some one else instead."

There was grimness in Cranston's voice, despite its monotone. Eagerly, Weston asked to hear more. Cranston stroked his forehead slowly; he began to recall what had happened.

"A chap tried to club me," he remembered. "He had a gun, or something, but I managed to get it away from him. We wound up by the window; he wanted to pitch me out.

"We were at even grips, when a lot of shooting started. I was on the floor; the other chap was gone, through the window. I thought that the shots were meant for me. I went after the men who fired them."

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There was a pause, while Cranston stood with hand pressed hard against his forehead. It was Joe Cardona who broke the silence, as he snapped to the detectives:

"Get downstairs, you stupes!! That's where you'll find Mort Fadler – down in the courtyard! Don't you saps know a fight when you see one?"

The dicks muttered to each other, nodding. They recalled that they had seen a lot of commotion at the window. They hurried out to the elevator. At the end of a few minutes, hollow shouts came up from the courtyard.

Cardona answered them from the window. The dicks had found the smashed body of Mort Fadler.

Cardona picked up the death gun, tenderly. He put a question:

"You didn't have a hold on this, did you, Mr. Cranston?"

There was a shake of Cranston's head.

"That's fine," declared Cardona. "We'll get the finger prints. If Mort's are the only ones on it – as I'll bet they will be – that will put the goods on him."

"One moment," reminded Weston. "You and I have handled the gun, inspector."

"But our mitts don't count," returned Cardona. "There're three people who couldn't have used this gun, commissioner. You, myself and Mr. Rigby."

THE group left the hotel room. While Cardona attended to business, Weston and Cranston joined Rigby in a trip up to the penthouse. They formed a solemn group in the living room, while a police surgeon examined Clyston's body.

The secretary's dead form was removed on a stretcher. Rigby suggested that they go outside, since the terrace would certainly be a safe place, with Mort Fadler dead.

They were seated there – Weston, Rigby, Cranston – when Cardona arrived. The detective ace handed a scribbled report to the commissioner. It brought a smile from Weston.

"The case is cleared," announced the commissioner. "Fadler's finger prints were the only ones on the gun, except" – the commissioner smiled – "except yours and mine, Cardona."

Then, turning to The Shadow, Weston added: "I owe you an apology, Cranston."

"An apology?" queried Cranston. "For what?"

"For suspecting you of murder," replied Weston. "I was actually going to arrest you, when Rigby intervened."

Cranston's lips framed a smile that denoted surprise. For the first time, apparently, he began to realize that he had been suspected as the killer. Then:

"Tell me about Clyston," remarked The Shadow. "Just why was Fadler sent to murder him?"

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"Plain enough." It was Rigby who gave answer. "Clyston took this penthouse in my name. Legrec must have learned it. He left the rest to Fadler, giving to-night as the time.

"I have learned that Clyston sent his suit out to be pressed, with orders to deliver it to this apartment. That must have been when the death card was placed in the vest pocket.

"Legrec always leaves much to his hirelings, when he is confident that complications are absent. This time, Legrec slipped. All along, Clyston was mistaken for me."

The Shadow's smile showed no change. It was a fixed one; the sort that fitted the lips of Cranston. But behind that smile, a keen brain was considering another theory.

Three of Legrec's previous victims had actually been tools of the master crook. Could Clyston – Rigby's own man – be another person bought over by Legrec?

If so, there had been no mistake by either Legrec or Fadler. Assuming that Clyston's usefulness had ended, Legrec would have ordered the man's death.

To make it appear as a mistake, with no one to tell the real fact, Legrec had sent that tip-off to the law. Knowing the sort that Fadler was, Legrec had foreseen that the killer would prefer death to capture.

The theory was sound. Mentally, The Shadow accepted it. A moment later, he heard Rigby's voice:

"You knew the victims, Mr. Cranston. The ones who died in supposed accidents. Tell us about them."

IN quiet fashion, The Shadow gave sketches of Balcray, Lysand, and Keever. He remarked that Balcray had sold considerable real estate in Florida; that Lysand had much to do with loans at the Triton National. He added that Keever had been engaged in his usual promotion work.

That was all. The Shadow left further conclusions to the others. He refrained from mentioning the name of Thomas Margale. That was a lead that The Shadow chose to follow on his own.

Both Weston and Cardona seemed disappointed because Cranston's facts went no further. It was Rigby who seemed to catch an inkling of what the statements could produce.

"There is a link between those three men," declared Rigby. "The link is a person; and his name" – Rigby paused, emphatically – "is Gautier Legrec!"

Rigby's tone pleased The Shadow. It meant that more facts were due – facts which The Shadow wanted, along with the law.

Alan Rigby arose, gave a long sweep of his arm to invite the others into the penthouse living room. The investigator's face was stern; his eyes grim in their gaze.

A trail of murder stretched from the past. A grueling search lay ahead. A double quest, for the law and The Shadow – that hunt for Gautier Legrec. And Alan Rigby, who knew more about Legrec than any other living man, was ready to guide the quest.

Though he did not show it, The Shadow was gripped with eagerness as he strolled into the penthouse.

The time had come when The Shadow was to gain new and needed links to Gautier Legrec.

CHAPTER XII. THE BLAZED TRAIL

IN the quiet of the penthouse, Alan Rigby began a methodical procedure. His trunks had come from the station. He opened them; assembled a variety of objects that made him seem more like a lecturer than a crime investigator.

Rigby set up a portable motion picture projector, with a screen against the wall in front of it. In addition, he had half a dozen cloth rolls that looked like charts, which he arranged on the wall, above the screen.

There were scrapbooks on the table; chairs were stacked with wooden boxes that bore labels. All these were exhibits that pertained to the notorious Gautier Legrec.

The projector chattered. There were flickers from the screen. A picture focused there. Rigby spoke:

"Budapest. Five years ago. The scene is outside the Oriental Bazaar, shortly after Legrec raided there."

The street was flowing into the camera. Clusters of bystanders were pressed aside by a policeman, to allow a close-up of a huddled figure that looked like a Turk.

"One of Legrec's workers," supplied Rigby. "Shot by the police as he attempted to flee with others. We shall see a picture of another henchman, in a moment."

The film shifted to the actual scene of crime: a bazaar booth that had been wrecked by an explosion. Other dead figures appeared: men in varied costumes. The camera concentrated upon a second Turk, whose face was turned up into the light.

"The assassin who threw the bomb," explained Rigby. "Not a Turk, but an Algerian, in disguise. He miscalculated the time element and perished with his victims. The raid followed. Unfortunately, among the innocent persons slain was this man –"

A close-up showed a bloody face tilted askew above crushed shoulders. This victim was unquestionably a Turk; despite the rigidity wrought by death, his features marked him as a man of importance.

"Ali Ras," identified Rigby. "Owner of the jewel bazaar. He ignored threats from Legrec. This was the result."

The camera moved to the dead man's hand. There, clutched by long fingers that lay near a tasseled fez, was a tarot. It did not show plainly in the film; Rigby halted the reel. Turning on the nearest lamp, he held the actual card in view.

Unlike the tarots that had been found on recent victims, this card bore a picture. It showed a square-shaped tower tumbling into ruins; a man plunging headlong amid the crashing stones.

"An atout," defined Rigby. "In the tarot pack, it corresponds to a court card of an ordinary deck. It carries many symbolisms; but one is most significant. Termed the 'Castle of Plutus', the card bears a warning to misers.

"That apparently applied to Ali Ras, one of the wealthiest of Ottoman merchants. He was noted for the hoards of money that he had stowed away. In this case, Legrec evidently began with tactics resembling those of a racketeer. When such methods failed, he turned to murder and robbery."

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Cardona studied the card from Budapest; he noted the descriptive word, "La Torre", beneath the tumbling castle. The tarot passed to Weston; next to Cranston.

"THAT tarot," resumed Rigby, "was but the first of many that I have discovered along Legrec's trail. In Cairo, an Egyptian official was found dead, clutching this card." He produced a tarot showing a demon, above the wording, "Il Daivolo," and added: "The murdered man was beside his rifled strong box."

The next card that Rigby produced was the picture of a hanging man suspended by his feet. It was called "L'Appeso", which Rigby translated as the "Hanged Man", stroking his chin when he noted the tarot.

"Sterling Craythorn was an Australian adventurer," recalled Rigby. "He won a million francs in one evening, at Monte Carlo, in most mysterious fashion. Oddly, Craythorn was found dead, off the suicide leap. Usually, losers are the ones who take that plunge.

"Perhaps he jumped because his money had mysteriously vanished. More probably, he was tossed to his death. There is no question who gained Craythorn's profits. One of his pockets disgorged this token from Legrec. The card symbolizes a martyr to a cause."

Rigby's face was stern, its lines deep. He turned to the projector, flashed pictures of Cairo and Monte Carlo. The Shadow pondered on a point that had apparently eluded Rigby.

The deaths of the Turkish merchant and the Egyptian official fitted with Rigby's suppositions. Legrec had slain those men in order to obtain wealth which they rightfully possessed.

But the Australian adventurer marked a departure.

How had the Australian cracked the bank at Monte Carlo? Probably through use of some system that had beaten the roulette table. Where had he acquired that method?

From Legrec!

The case was a link that The Shadow wanted. The very name, Legrec, was a French term for "swindler", or "gambler"; the murderer's constant use of tarots also smacked of a gamester's ways.

With the Monte Carlo incident, The Shadow could see the beginning of new tactics on the part of Legrec. The master crook had started using dupes to aid his schemes.

The Australian, Craythorn, could easily have been working under Legrec's supervision. He was the "front" for the master criminal's clean-up at the gambling casino. Instead of a percentage of the profits, the Australian had received death.

Ironically, Legrec had placed the card that branded his murdered dupe as a fool.

Since then, Legrec had worked through other dupes. Balcray, Lysand, Keever, finally Clyston – all had participated in some game, here in New York.

It would be useless to search for coming crime. Legrec had probably completed his present scheme. These deaths of dupes were merely the clean-up men who knew too much; persons who would want a share of the spoils that Legrec intended to keep entirely as his own.

There could, however, still be a trail to Legrec.

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RIGBY had finished with the motion pictures. Facing his audience of three, he spoke in recollective tone.

"The police quizzed all foreigners in Budapest," he stated, "myself among them. Learning that I was a crime investigator, they asked my assistance. Clues indicated that Legrec had gone to Istanbul. The authorities there requested that I come.

"I uncovered a dead spy of Legrec's. New evidence pointed to Cairo. I arrived in Egypt too late to save the victimized official. After many months, chance information brought me to Monte Carlo.

"Craythorn, the Australian, made his big winnings just after I arrived there. He was murdered; Legrec was gone with the spoils. On a long chance, I went to Australia, thinking that Legrec, always daring, would try to acquire property that belonged to the dead adventurer."

Rigby drew down a rolled wall map. It showed the world, with lines that marked Rigby's own travels. He ran his forefinger eastward, to the island of Ceylon.

"I was waylaid there by murderous Singhalese," he recounted. "Legrec's work; but I managed to escape before he sent payment for my capture. Afterward, Australia – again, Legrec was gone."

Rigby started to pull down a roll that showed the outline of a man's face. It was the wrong one; he drew down another, instead. The Shadow's eyes became keenly interested.

The face, huge in size, reminded him of some one that he had seen recently: Rupert Roban, the counterfeiter.

There were points that spoiled the exact resemblance. Where Roban's chin was sharp, that of the outlined portrait had a roundishness. The forehead bulged, like Roban's, but the incorrect chin gave a wrong comparison between the lower and upper portions of the face.

The hair was shocky, like Roban's; but grayish, rather than white. The eyes were almost perfect; but they displayed only one of Roban's moods. They were fixed in a cold stare that seemed to threaten eyes that met it.

The portrait showed the face as pale; it lacked the ancient hue of Roban's parchment skin. Withal, Roban could have been identified from it, particularly when Rigby explained the chart's limitations.

"This is a pieced portrait of Legrec," declared the investigator. "I have checked statement after statement, made by persons who claimed that they had seen him. I started to show you one of my earlier charts; its details were bad.

"In fact, I discarded portrait after portrait, keeping only my lists of details. None was satisfactory, until I obtained new information in London. Legrec had begun a swindle there, then dropped it.

"Descriptions of him tallied with some of my old details. They provided new items, from which I constructed the final portrait. I feel confident that I have cleared two important points."

Pausing, Rigby stepped back to survey the picture. Meeting the ugly glare of the huge painted eyes, Rigby added:

"First, that Legrec, despite his name, is not a Frenchman. Second, that his crop of hair is real, even though it appears to be a wig. I am positive that, somewhere, we may find a criminal who closely resembles that portrait; that when we discover him, we shall have met Legrec."

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RIGBY'S discourse was finished. He invited an inspection of his scrapbooks and the boxes that contained bits of evidence pertaining to Legrec.

Cranston joined the others in studying that material. Rigby's records proved varied, even though they lacked completeness.

Among them was a wisp of almost whitish hair, believed to be Legrec's; a photograph taken on shipboard, which showed a hunched figure, face turned away, that could have been Legrec. There were signatures in scrawly handwriting; possible aliases used by Legrec.

Before leaving, Commissioner Weston granted a request made by Rigby. The investigator wanted two plainclothes men at hand, in case he needed them.

The request pleased Weston, for the murder of Clyston indicated that another death–thrust might be coming from Legrec. Weston was glad that Rigby was the sort of man who would accept the law's protection.

Lamont Cranston was meditative when he and the commissioner reached the street. Weston saw his friend stare upward to the lighted lower floor of the two–story penthouse, with the darkened space above it.

Weston smiled. For once, he had seen Cranston impressed. Those details recounted by Alan Rigby had certainly been effective.

Commissioner Weston would have been personally impressed, had he gone with Lamont Cranston. Soon after his departure, Cranston entered a waiting cab. There, he became The Shadow. His course took him to his hidden sanctum.

Beneath the bluish light, a long–fingered hand held a pen. A weird laugh whispered from the darkness above. The Shadow was thinking of Rupert Roban. He dismissed that name from mind. Roban, a known criminal, who resembled Rigby's portrait of the supposed Legrec, was a man that the law could seek.

Instead of Roban's name, The Shadow wrote another; one that he had previously inscribed. The name of a man who had not even been mentioned in connection with this case.

"Thomas Margale."

The bluish light clicked off. Darkness marked the beginning of The Shadow's own investigation. To learn the purposes of Legrec, The Shadow chose to solve the unknown factor.

That factor was Thomas Margale.

CHAPTER XIII. THE BLIND TRAIL

UPON leaving his sanctum, The Shadow went directly to the neighborhood of Margale's mansion. The hour was late; the huge mansion loomed dark beyond the wall that surrounded it.

Clad in black, The Shadow formed a gliding, evanescent shape, as he skirted that outer wall. The shelter offered perfect opportunities for concealment. There wasn't a chance that watching eyes from within the house could spy The Shadow.

Nevertheless, The Shadow avoided direct entry to the grounds. The side gate, like the front one, was obviously one of the spots that would be under observation. The easiest method of access, from The

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Shadow's standpoint, was to scale the wall itself.

The Shadow managed that with upward glide. For a few seconds, he took on the semblance of a human beetle, as he found crevices for fingers and toes. Then his gloved hands gripped the wall—top, probed there momentarily. Finally, The Shadow rolled flat upon the ledge itself.

His new location gave him an admirable view of the mansion, as well as a prospect of the surrounding streets. Crawling along the wall, The Shadow remained in blackness, stretching flat at places where an ordinary creeper might have been noted from the house.

All the while, he was taking in the details of the mansion: its big windows and formidable doors. Yet, in those intervals when he paused to view the street, his brief glances were sufficient to tell him that no lurkers were about.

The Shadow's ears were also keen. Catching the distant pound of footsteps, The Shadow waited, watching a corner of the wall. A bulky man came into sight; he was clad in blue uniform. The arrival was the patrolman who regularly covered this beat.

Pacing slowly past, the officer looked upward toward the wall edge. Though this was part of his regular procedure, he was not lax in its performance. The patrolman's eyes were sharp enough to spot any ordinary lurker flattened on that wall. It was The Shadow's uncanny ability to merge with blackness that enabled him to remain undetected.

The officer continued along his beat.

Again The Shadow was in motion, timing his progress to the fade of the patrolman's footsteps. Then, again he flattened. The sound that he heard this time was almost indistinguishable, yet The Shadow sensed it; not only that, he knew what to expect.

THE SHADOW was watching that wall corner, expecting new figures to come around it. He was not disappointed. Close to the shelter of the wall, two sweater-clad men crept into sight. They stopped on the sidewalk, just below The Shadow.

"Hold it," gruffed one, his voice well muffled, "until we lamp the harness bull!"

The reference to the patrolman brought a suppressed guffaw from the other hoodlum.

"Him?" demanded the fellow. "He's clear around the next corner! We ain't runnin' no risk. All we gotta do is case the place and make sure nobody else ain't near here."

"Who else would be around?"

"How do I know?" Again, a chortle sounded. Then: "The Shadow, maybe."

That reference didn't please the thug who heard it. He said so with a growl, remarking that wise guys weren't smart when they kidded about The Shadow. Perhaps his companion was somewhat convinced, for he suggested that they move along.

The hoodlums hadn't gone more than a dozen paces, before something plopped in the gloom behind them. That landing, however, was noiseless – the sort that only The Shadow could perform.

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From then on, the skulking men were followed by a spectral shape that they didn't know was near. Close to the wall, The Shadow was stalking the very men who had come to look for lurkers.

There was no question that this pair served Legrec; but, like others who worked for the master crook, they wouldn't know facts concerning him. However, The Shadow recognized that they might offer a worthwhile trail.

This was smart business on Legrec's part, having outside watchers on the job, instead of utilizing spy measures from within the house itself. These hoodlums, if accosted, would not be connected with events inside the Margale mansion.

Finishing their patrol, the thugs headed for an avenue and came to a small lunch room that was open all night.

Following at a considerable distance, The Shadow had no opportunity to observe their faces. Reaching the lunch room, only one man entered; the other remained near a darkened wall, on watch.

That again prevented The Shadow from identifying them, but he was very close when the first thug came out from the lunch room.

"I made the phone call," the fellow told his companion. "It's all O.K., except there's a place where we've got to stop off."

"What for?" demanded the other.

"You'll find out," was the reply. "It ain't far, though, so let's hoof it."

THE pair moved eastward. They came to a dingy neighborhood. The first thug picked out a house number; the place looked empty, but the door proved to be unlocked. The pair entered.

They had hardly reached an inside stairway, leading upward, before the outer door opened again, without their knowledge. This time, it was The Shadow who entered.

Trailing the thugs, The Shadow heard the hollow echoes of their muffled footsteps: proof in itself that the house was empty. Finally, the crooks reached the third floor and entered a room.

Listening outside the door, The Shadow soon sensed a definite silence.

That was when he eased the door inward, to make his own entry in the pitch-black gloom. A moment later, The Shadow's flashlight cleaved the blackness.

The room was empty, as he had suddenly supposed, and The Shadow saw the reason. There was a door on the far side, filling a crude entry that had been cut through to the next house.

The thugs had used that route, and they had barred the door behind them. The Shadow learned that when he tried the door itself.

The flashlight showed that the room contained a broken-down cot, a few chairs, and other items of furniture. There was a small trunk in one corner; before examining it, The Shadow went to the windows.

They were shaded with battered blinds. Extinguishing his flashlight, The Shadow pushed a rumpled blind aside and looked out to a rear fire escape. He noted that the window was closed and nailed tight shut, but it

wouldn't be difficult to jimmy it in a hurry.

Satisfied that there would be no intrusion from the fire escape, The Shadow went to examine the trunk. He had to pry it open, but he had the necessary tools and kept the process muffled.

The moment that he raised the trunk lid, The Shadow knew what this place was. The trunk tray contained a few old letters, addressed in scrawly writing to Mort Fadler. This was a hide-out that the dead trigger-man had kept for emergency purposes.

HARD upon that discovery, The Shadow stiffened, his only motion the flick of his thumb to extinguish the flashlight. A new sound had reached him, one that came with no advance notice. In busying himself with opening the trunk, The Shadow had failed to hear an intruder's approach.

The present sound was the slight squeak of hinges from the very door that The Shadow had entered.

Instantaneously, The Shadow recognized the fullness of Legrec's scheme. Though the pair of hoodlums didn't know it, they had been sent on very special duty to-night. Their real purpose had not been an inspection tour.

They had been sent by Legrec to lure The Shadow, if he happened to be watching Margale's mansion!

The thugs had managed that duty. They had brought The Shadow along a blind trail. By bolting the other door, as ordered, they had automatically changed the old hide-out into a trap.

The Shadow had fallen for the subtle snare designed by Legrec. Between The Shadow and the one door that offered an immediate path of departure, was a hidden challenger.

The total darkness served the other man as well as it did The Shadow. The end of this blind trail promised blind battle!

CHAPTER XIV. THE SHADOW'S HUNCH

LEGREC!

The name flashed instantly to The Shadow's brain, so clearly that it seemed a spoken word. There was good reason for The Shadow to receive such a vivid impression of that name.

This was the sort of snare that Legrec would visit in person. It was a place where; with one well-delivered bullet, he could forever rid himself of the menace known as The Shadow.

Identifying the man at the doorway as Legrec, The Shadow saw the advantage that the challenger held.

It was impossible for The Shadow exactly to locate his opponent. On the contrary, there was every reason for Legrec to suppose that The Shadow would be close by the trunk.

Once a duel in the dark began, Legrec would hold the odds. But there was still a way whereby The Shadow might forestall that duel until conditions were more nearly equal.

Coolly, he calculated the thoughts that Legrec would hold. The crook couldn't be positive that The Shadow was at the trunk, unless he heard some betraying sound.

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Silence would therefore make Legrec guess; and the longer it persisted, the better. For Legrec would begin to reason that The Shadow was not beside the trunk. He would credit The Shadow with an unrestrained desire to get away from that danger spot.

Hearing nothing, Legrec would eventually decide that he had chosen the wrong moment for entry.

It was certain that Legrec would regard himself capable of detecting a sound on this occasion. This room was small; in its cramped space, Legrec would be able to hear noises of a sort that he had failed to discern at Keever's apartment.

It was a case where conditions were reversed, bringing them to Legrec's advantage. But The Shadow, despite death's imminence, was doing his best to outguess Legrec.

There was a creak of a floor board. The Shadow's tactics were bringing a reward. His opponent was on the move, coming toward the corner where the trunk was located.

That was The Shadow's chance to shift. He did not take it. Footsteps, vague in their approach, might be Legrec's method of luring The Shadow into making a revealing sound.

The footsteps, however, did not halt, as The Shadow logically expected. Instead, they were creeping closer, almost to a point where The Shadow could accurately locate them.

That was when The Shadow gained a sudden hunch.

Silently, he slid a drawn automatic beneath his cloak. Slowly extending his arms, he waited. His adversary was near, low-drawn breathing furnished a give-away that footsteps had not revealed. The Shadow was ready for a spring.

Despite the fact that he knew a gun must be aimed straight toward him; that a quick trigger finger was ready for a rapid tug, The Shadow had willingly placed away his own gun.

His hunch had suggested possible circumstances, wherein a silent thrust would be preferable to shots in the dark.

A squeak from the floor. From the way it stilled, The Shadow knew that it meant a final step. A gun was probing through the darkness, ready to press against The Shadow's ribs, when once its muzzle found him.

But The Shadow was shifting without moving his feet. He was close to the floor itself.

LIKE an arrow, The Shadow drove. His gloved hands hooked a pair of hips, taking them with a clutch like that of grappling irons.

At that instant, a revolver spoke, its roar sounding like a cannon directly in The Shadow's ear.

With the roar came a tongue of flame that seared the brim of The Shadow's flat. Head shifted to the right, The Shadow had allowed for that shot, which his adversary had considered to be a point-blank stab.

An instant later, The Shadow was hoisting upward, flinging his opponent over his shoulder. Headlong, a figure hit the raised lid of the trunk, carrying it backward with a crash. There was the thud of a revolver striking the wall.

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With whippet speed, The Shadow twisted, pounding upon the sprawled man. One hand on the fellow's throat, The Shadow flicked his flashlight with the other.

The Shadow's hunch was right. The attacker was not Gautier Legrec. That was something that his own motions had betrayed. Nevertheless, The Shadow was gripped by one of the most startling surprises in all his long career.

The half-stunned man upon the floor was Inspector Joe Cardona!

WISELY had The Shadow refrained from shooting it out with an unknown assailant. That was a policy that he had long since adopted. In this case, convinced though he was that the foeman must be one of Legrec's tools, The Shadow had followed his regular procedure. As a reward, he had won a triumph over Gautier Legrec.

Somehow, the master crook had guessed that Joe Cardona would find Mort Fadler's hide-out. Therewith, Legrec had seen an opportunity to throw the ace inspector into conflict with The Shadow. Staying out of the affair himself, Legrec had nothing to lose but much to gain. He had hoped to rid himself of at least one investigator who might later harass him.

There wasn't time for The Shadow to consider more details. Footsteps were hammering the stairs, indicating that Cardona had brought a squad along with him, but had first come up to make a lone inspection of the premises.

Cardona's gunshot had served as the summons. Explanations wouldn't help if detectives found their leader groggy, with The Shadow hovering about him. They would open battle with The Shadow before Cardona would be able to halt them.

Springing across the room, The Shadow reached the windows. Using the same jimmy that he had employed with the trunk, he ripped open one window, then the other. Rolling through the second window, he closed both sashes from the fire escape.

There wasn't time to get below. The Shadow swung over the edge of the metal platform, took a grip beneath it. Thanks to the open slats, he found a perfect security. His fingers clutched through at one end of the platform, his toes pressed between at the other end.

THE police squad reached the room. Lights appeared; detectives were dragging Cardona to his feet. Joe wasn't quite able to tell what had happened, but the detectives saw the windows and yanked them open.

Wisely, The Shadow had taken time to jimmy both windows. The fact that both were loose made the detectives overlook the nails that had previously held them. One window tight, the other loose, would have been a telltale situation.

As it was, the headquarters men were satisfied when they flicked flashlights down the steps of the fire escape. Others sent up beams from below; but the few on the ground couldn't distinguish The Shadow's outline at that height, any more than the men at the window could spot him through the slats of the platform.

The detectives in the room decided to smash the bolted door that led into the next house. Recuperating from his groggy condition, Cardona directed the work. He took it for granted that his recent opponent had used that route.

MEANWHILE, The Shadow squeezed out from beneath the platform and made a silent descent of the fire escape. Detectives were absent when he reached the bottom. He supposed that they had gone indoors. Therein, The Shadow was mistaken.

Reaching the next street, he came suddenly upon two detectives. Whipping from sight, he moved rapidly toward the street, disregarding a lighted section, because it was past a parked car. At that instant, The Shadow spotted the motion of a car across the street.

As The Shadow dived back, guns roared. In that car were the two hoodlums who had lured him along the trail. They were just starting their own getaway, when they spied The Shadow. Their attempt to drop him had been a foolish effort.

From his new position, The Shadow had an excellent chance to clip the thugs as they wheeled past. All that saved them was the sudden arrival of the detectives. As luck had it, the dicks chose The Shadow's own location as a place from which to fire.

Rather than run into complications, The Shadow whisked along the curb, dropping beside another parked car. He was leaving the battle to the headquarters men, who didn't even see him go.

But in their hurry, the detectives were useless as marksmen. Their shots whizzed wide of the swift-moving car, for already its occupants realized that they had failed in their hasty thrust against The Shadow.

By the time the detectives had chased the fleeing car past the next corner, The Shadow was on his way in the opposite direction. As he reached enshrouding blackness, his hidden lips phrased a grim low laugh.

The law had gained nothing from this latest episode. Joe Cardona would discount the fray at Mort's hide-out, figuring he had met up with some pal of the dead trigger-man. In turn, The Shadow had made no progress with his investigation of affairs at the Margale mansion.

That matter, however, was one that he could manage on the morrow, but from a different starting point. The Shadow did not intend to resume investigation from the outside.

Instead, he was planning a new measure to offset Legrec; one whereby The Shadow could gain facts from within the house itself.

CHAPTER XV. HARRY SEEKS TROUBLE

AT dusk, the next evening, Eleanor Margale heard a rap at the door of her second floor room. A servant was summoning her downstairs with the word that her uncle wished to see her.

The servant took the back way to the kitchen. Eleanor went down the front stairs, to get another surprise.

Nordham was standing there. That was logical enough, for he was the only one of all the servants who had recently been allowed in the front hallway. But Nordham was not disengaged. Instead, he was close to the front door, peering through the panes of a tiny window at one side of it.

Eleanor approached. Nordham heard her; turned with a start.

"What is the trouble?" undertoned the girl.

Nordham gestured nervously toward the little window.

CARDS OF DEATH

"The house is watched," he whispered. "I'm sure of it, Miss Margale!"

"But why?"

"Because of the young man who came this afternoon."

"What young man?"

Eleanor was utterly perplexed. Nordham explained. The young man's name was Harry Vincent. Why he had come here, was a mystery. At present, he was with Thomas Margale, in the study.

"That's why your uncle wanted you," Nordham told Eleanor. "Since there is a guest, he intends to dine in the dining room; and he expects you, also, Miss Margale. To help entertain Mr. Vincent."

Eleanor was relieved. She had expected some aftermath regarding her adventure of a few nights ago. As yet, her uncle had not quizzed her on that subject.

A voice came from the study. It was querulous; Thomas Margale was demanding to know how soon dinner would be ready. Nordham went to the kitchen, while Eleanor turned to face her uncle.

The girl's relief increased at sight of Harry Vincent.

For a long while, Eleanor had worried over the problem of her uncle's visitors. She had always doubted that they would be the sort of persons that she would care to meet. Harry, however, was a pleasant surprise.

He was a clean-cut young man, likable at first sight. Even though his purpose here was unexplained, Eleanor was glad that he had come.

THEY dined in a big, musty dining room. Thomas Margale left the task of entertaining Harry to his niece. While they chatted, he kept up a steady growl, that Eleanor noted. It was plain that Margale was not pleased by Harry's presence.

The crab-faced millionaire began to take it out on Nordham, who was serving the dinner. Nothing was to Margale's liking. He became almost violent over the matter of the salad dressing.

In fact, Margale's actions so disturbed Eleanor that she forgot all about Harry. Her uncle had half risen from the table; was shaking his fist at Nordham. Eleanor was about to intervene, when the argument ended. An instant later, she had remembered that Harry was present.

The reason was something that flipped the table beside her and took a short bounce into her lap. It was a wadded note. Eleanor gave a quick look at Harry; then nodded. She kept that message for later inspection.

It was after dinner, when her uncle and the visitor had gone into the study, that Eleanor found a chance to read the note. Its wording was terse:

Must see you privately. Be in the library. Make sure no one
can overhear us.

V.

CARDS OF DEATH

That was a tall order, considering her uncle's present mood. Eleanor doubted that the interview could be conducted without interference. Then she thought of Nordham. The servant had proven a real ally, in the past. This was a chance to use him again.

Finding Nordham, Eleanor showed him the note. It made the servant shake his head.

"The library would be impossible, Miss Margale," he said. "Your uncle might decide to go in there at any time."

"But Mr. Vincent is depending upon me –"

"To meet him in the library," nodded Nordham. "But you must talk with him elsewhere. I would suggest the little smoking room just behind the library."

Eleanor smiled. The suggestion was a good one. The smoking room had two doors: one from the library, the other from the little-used passage that led to the side door of the house. They would have to enter from the library, for the passage door was always locked. Eleanor mentioned that to Nordham.

"Quite so, Miss Margale," said the servant. "I shall remain in the library, arranging the books. If your uncle comes, I can warn you."

"Good," agreed Eleanor. "I'll depend on you, Nordham."

MEANWHILE, matters were progressing in Margale's study. Secluded with the crabby millionaire, Harry had resumed a conversation that he had started before dinner.

As an agent of The Shadow, Harry was here with the definite purpose of finding out unusual facts that might concern Thomas Margale. He had a perfect smoke-screen for that task. The Shadow had provided Harry with a legitimate purpose for the visit.

The Shadow had learned that Margale was the administrator of a fifty-thousand-dollar trust fund that belonged to Eleanor. That sum was too small to figure in any twisted schemes that might concern Margale at present. But it was the very wedge that The Shadow had needed.

There were other trustees besides Margale. They had not heard from the millionaire for months. Through a prominent physician, The Shadow had stirred those trustees with an inquiry regarding Margale's mental condition.

Like others who knew Margale, the trustees had heard rumors about Margale. They had dismissed them as idle talk, until the physician questioned them. Thereupon, they had agreed that some one should visit Margale. Harry had been introduced as an excellent man for the job.

Whatever Margale's actual condition, he was shrewd enough to see what lay behind Harry's visit, especially when Harry repeated that he had come at the request of Eleanor's trustees. The matter reached a showdown.

"They think I'm crazy, do they?" sneered Margale, from behind his desk. His eyes gleamed fiercely, as much like a vulture's as his profile. "What would they say, Mr. Vincent, if I told them that the trust fund had shown a ten per cent increase since last year?"

"They would be pleased, Mr. Margale," assured Harry. "You understand, this is not an inquiry –"

CARDS OF DEATH

Margale ended the statement with a fierce gesture. He turned toward a bulky safe; then swung about again. From the desk, he produced a metal box.

Soon, Margale had spread the contents on the desk. Here were the stocks that made up the trust fund; with them, tabulated figures. Harry went over them in detail. Margale was right; Eleanor's fund was in order and had shown the stated increase.

Politely, Harry arose with a thank you. He was turning toward the door when Margale stopped him.

"Tell them something else," stormed the millionaire. "Tell them that you found out nothing about my affairs! I saw your face, Vincent, when I turned back from the safe. You wanted to see what was in there, didn't you?" Ugly shrewdness was on Margale's lips. "And you didn't manage it.

"You're not the first who has tried that game, Vincent. Perhaps" – Margale's eyes fastened on Harry's with a beady stare – "perhaps you've been prying into the affairs of others beside myself."

Harry shook his head. Margale's lips twitched, as though the millionaire doubted his own suspicions.

"Certain things have happened recently," reminded Margale, narrowly – "certain things that were unfortunate – let us say coincidental – regarding certain persons."

Harry knew the persons meant: Balcray, Lysand and Keever. He was prepared for some significant remark concerning those three; and The Shadow's orders were to draw Margale along that path. Harry handled it well.

"If you mean the trustees of Miss Margale's estate," he said, innocently, "I can assure you that they are merely worried."

"Those simpletons?" Margale tilted his head for a deep-gargled laugh. "Bah! I never think of them, except when they remind me of their presence. I refer to others!"

MARGALE halted. Harry's gaze was blank. Twitching lips compressed, Margale arose from his desk and crouched over his big cane, as he pressed a buzzer.

Nordham appeared. Crispily, Margale instructed the servant:

"Mr. Vincent is leaving. Perhaps he may wish to speak with my niece. If so, he may be permitted." Margale swung to Harry. "Perhaps you may care to call again.

"You will be welcome, Mr. Vincent. Very welcome! In fact" – Margale's tone took on a bitterness – "another visit would be pleasant. I might induce you to state the names of those persons whose affairs actually interest you!"

Margale's whole face was ablaze. He was standing without the aid of his cane; apparently, he did not realize it, until Nordham spoke in alarm. Realizing his own position, Margale let his knees give way. Nordham caught him; helped him into a chair.

"My medicine" – Margale was panting – "my medicine, Nordham! No, no, not those pills! The tonic that I brought from France!"

"But you said, sir –"

CARDS OF DEATH

"I said nothing!" Margale was huddled, pitifully, his eyes wide and staring. "Bring that bottle, Nordham!"

The servant brought a bottle from a small cabinet; he poured out a milkish liquid into a cordial glass. Margale swallowed the tonic with one gulp. He sank back into his chair.

Nordham conducted Harry toward the door. When they were almost there, Margale called. His voice was weary; it had a surprising mildness.

"Good evening, Mr. Vincent," were his words. "I trust that you will pardon any undue remarks that I have made. I am not myself; I am actually an ill man.

"But this trust fund" – he gestured toward the box – "is in the best of condition. Like my own affairs" – a satisfied smile came on the tired lips – "it prospers. Remember that, Vincent."

Nordham was holding the door open; his face was toward Harry. The visitor saw a motion of the servant's lips, caught their undertone:

"See Miss Eleanor, sir. Before he changes his mind –"

The advice was good. Harry stepped from the study. The door closed behind him, for Nordham was humoring Margale further. With the closing of that door came silence.

Harry was alone in the big front hall, his interview with Thomas Margale finished. He was ready for the rest of his mission: a talk with Eleanor.

With all his nerve, Harry could not repress a long breath of relief. He felt that the dangerous part of his task had been finished.

Therein, Harry Vincent was mistaken. The menace within this gloomy mansion was deeper than he supposed.

The Shadow had sent Harry here to seek out trouble. Harry was to find it.

CHAPTER XVI. THE VANISHED GUEST

INSTEAD of crossing the big front hall, Harry Vincent went toward the outer door. Beside the little window from which Nordham had previously peered, Harry produced a flashlight. He blinked it through the pane.

Harry was flashing news to an outside watcher, stating that all had gone well. Moreover, he was adding the number of minutes that he intended to remain: a quarter-hour in all.

This was one of The Shadow's precautions, having contact ready. But Harry was convinced that it would no longer be needed; therefore, it was better that the outside man should report to The Shadow.

Harry based his opinion on the fact that he had cut short Margale's quiz. Matters, as Harry saw them, had not gone beyond the safety limit. That was why Harry was using a privilege that The Shadow always granted his agents: that of relying on their own judgment.

Occasionally, such judgment erred; but not often, with a man like Harry. To-night, however, Harry's guesses were very, very wide. He had hit a bad snag without realizing it.

CARDS OF DEATH

Entering the library, Harry found Eleanor waiting there. The girl had just greeted him with a whisper, when they heard the door of Margale's study open. Eleanor pointed quickly to the open door of the little smoking room. Harry told her to wait.

"Your uncle gave me permission for this interview," he told Eleanor. "We can wait and see what happens."

Nordham appeared. The servant tiptoed to the spot where Harry and Eleanor stood.

"He's likely to change again, sir," Nordham told Harry. "I managed to stop that tantrum of his – but I know Mr. Margale. He'll rage again, soon."

"He will," agreed Eleanor, soberly. "Tell me, Nordham; do you think he will become angry if he believes that Mr. Vincent is still here?"

"It's best to take no chances."

Nordham's words were serious. They brought prompt decision. Eleanor motioned Harry into the smoking room, while Nordham nodded at her orders. The girl was telling the servant to keep close watch on her uncle; to inform them immediately if his wild mood returned.

IN the smoking room, with the door tight closed, Eleanor asked Harry:

"What can I tell you, Mr. Vincent?"

The tone carried trust. It told that Eleanor felt she could rely upon this outside friend. Harry wasted no time.

"Tell me everything that concerns your uncle," he replied. "Who his friends are, what they are, and, particularly, any matters that have directly concerned you."

There was significance in the final words. Eleanor caught it. She knew that Harry was testing her, by a subtle reference to her adventure in the house on Twentieth Street. Intuitively, the girl divined that Harry must have come from the black-cloaked rescuer who had saved her life.

"I know nothing about my uncle's friends," Eleanor admitted, ruefully, "except that certain visitors came here frequently, until about a week ago. My uncle was always mysterious regarding them; I never saw them, nor did Nordham."

"And then –"

Harry inserted the words; but not as a question. Eleanor understood. She poured the whole story of the episode that had taken her to Roban's, with all that had happened afterward. When she finished, she awaited questions. Harry put some.

"The voice over the telephone," asked Harry – "you are sure that you had never heard it before?"

"Never!" replied Eleanor. "I am positive."

"And the paper in the drawer of the telephone table. You say it was in your uncle's handwriting?"

"I think so. It looked like his."

"You have examined the paper since?"

Eleanor shook her head. Her expression was troubled.

"No," she replied, "because it was gone after I returned that night."

Harry considered. He recalled an important question that The Shadow wanted answered.

"How were you found so promptly?" he asked. "The cab had, of course, come for you."

"Yes," nodded Eleanor. "Nordham brought it. The driver of his cab had heard me give the destination to my driver."

"But your uncle gave Nordham no instructions?"

"Only to bring me back here. I was still in the house and heard the order. When Nordham told me the same thing, later, I knew that he spoke the truth."

The fact impressed Harry. He was here to learn if any one in the household – specifically, a person like Nordham – was in Margale's confidence. Eleanor's statement proved definitely that Margale was not using Nordham as a secret aid in any of his hidden transactions.

Harry's conclusion was that Margale had known Eleanor's destination, and had been in a bad dilemma. He certainly would not have wanted her to go to Roban's; and he could not risk sending Nordham there.

That left one logical inference. Knowing that Eleanor had been gone only a few minutes, Margale had hoped that Nordham would overtake her before she traveled far.

HARRY was groping for another question, when a cautious rap sounded against the door from the library.

It was Nordham; his face was worried.

"I've been in and out of the study, Miss Margale," informed the servant. "I just suspected that your uncle has been using the telephone. Something has come over him. He's very suspicious. Asking to see you."

"Where is he now?"

"Pacing the study, as if he were coming out here any moment. He'll soon want to talk to you."

Eleanor decided that she would see her uncle immediately. It offered a chance to learn more facts for Harry. He nodded, when Eleanor suggested that he remain in the smoking room.

"Nordham can go into the study with me," said Eleanor. "If wise; I can signal for him to leave. He can then tell you whether it is best to stay or go."

Eleanor left with Nordham. Harry remained in the smoking room, with the door slightly ajar. He listened, as he glanced at his watch. His fifteen minutes were two-thirds gone.

Though Harry strained, he could hear nothing. Sounds were absent from the front of the mansion. Somehow, the hush was maddening, particularly when Harry imagined peculiar, indefinite noises that had no exact location.

CARDS OF DEATH

A distant scrape; sounds that resembled a peculiar creep – they couldn't come from the study, for its door was closed. Were they upstairs somewhere? Were other servants, practically unmentioned by Eleanor, persons who needed to be watched?

A peculiar – oppressiveness seized Harry. He closed the door; turned about to pace the silence of the smoking room. Oddly, those sounds became more apparent as he turned. Before that fact had drilled his wits, Harry had a visible explanation.

With a quick intake of his breath, he sped his hand to his hip, hoping to draw an automatic. The move was hopelessly late.

A trio of masked men swooped upon Harry, so suddenly that they might have come from nowhere. They had his gun hand pinned in back of him; they were choking him as he struggled.

His eyes bulging, Harry saw the answer to their arrival.

They had come through the back door of the smoking room. The scraping noise had been the turning of the door's lock. The creepings, seemingly distant, had been their sneak behind Harry's very back!

That understanding was Harry's last impression, except for a wave of blackish spots that came when an implement thudded the back of his head. A few seconds later, The Shadow's agent was a limp prisoner in the hands of his captors.

The masked men shouldered Harry out through the door. They locked it behind them. There was a slight thud beyond, as the side door of the house went shut.

THE departure was a timely one. Two minutes later, Eleanor Margale opened the door from the library. Thinking that Harry was still in the smoking room, she whispered:

"It's all right – my uncle has calmed. Nordham is with him –"

Eleanor stopped, puzzled by the silence. She stared all about the room. Her lips trembled; she couldn't believe that Harry could have lost his nerve and gone without word. Suddenly, the girl spied an object beneath a chair.

A moment later, she was holding the automatic that Harry had failed to pull. It had slipped from his grasping hand, to leave his pocket during the struggle. Hurried captors had overlooked the gun.

Grimly, Eleanor turned toward the library. From the determination on her face, her purpose was plain. She was going to the study, to demand an explanation from her uncle.

Eleanor had no doubt regarding the evidence that she had found. It told of the foul play that had come to Harry. But it was more than a clue, that gun. It was something that she could use as a threat of her own.

In the doorway, Eleanor hesitated. Like Harry, she thought that she had heard sounds. She recognized their source more swiftly: that rear door from the passage!

Eleanor turned, aiming the automatic, her finger on the trigger. A driving figure launched upon her; a hand took the gun in one swift clutch. The weapon was literally plucked from Eleanor's hand; before she could scream, she was half smothered in a suppressing grasp.

CARDS OF DEATH

Cloth folds bagged Eleanor's head. Choking, she heard the library door go shut. Pressure relaxed; Eleanor stared into burning eyes. Panting, wondering, she recognized the intruder who had stopped her effort at gunfire.

Eleanor's captor was The Shadow!

HIDDEN lips spoke reassurance. With the first words, Eleanor realized that The Shadow knew about Harry's visit; that he, too, was concerned over the young man's disappearance.

Eagerly, Eleanor repeated all that she had told before, finishing with the last few minutes, wherein she had visited the study.

The Shadow had a new question. It concerned Thomas Margale.

"Nordham brought word that your uncle asked to see you," he reminded. "Just what did your uncle have to say?"

"Nothing important," replied Eleanor. Then, indignantly: "It was a sham – to bring me in there, with Nordham. My uncle was seated at his desk, in one of his glum moods. He sneered, as he often does, when he asked me what I wanted."

"And you told him"

"That I understood he wanted to talk with me. He decided that he did. He asked why I was not satisfied with his management of my affairs. When I gave no answer, he muttered to himself, until he seemed to tire. He seemed half asleep when I left the study."

There was silence; then The Shadow's tone:

"Say nothing to your uncle. Tell Nordham that Vincent must have left. By forgetting all that has happened – for the present, at least – you will be in no danger."

The Shadow pointed toward the library door. Eleanor nodded. Though the instructions puzzled her, she was willing to obey. As she entered the library, she heard a whispered laugh; it faded vaguely.

That strange mirth was prophetic. It gave Eleanor full confidence. She turned, to speak a last word to The Shadow. Her eyes showed bewilderment. The cloaked visitant had already departed.

Only the whispered tone of The Shadow seemed to linger in that room where dim floor lamps glowed.

Another visitor to the Margale mansion had vanished into the outer night.

CHAPTER XVII. THE MADDENED MESSAGE

SCANT minutes had passed between the time of Harry's capture and The Shadow's arrival at the mansion; but that period had been long enough for the raiders to manage a quick get-away.

Summoned to Margale's to remove a man who had begun to learn too much, the snatchers had apparently worked in accordance with a clockwork plan.

CARDS OF DEATH

Harry realized that, himself, when he regained a brief spell of consciousness. He sensed motion; decided that he was riding inside a truck. About him, he could hear the mutters of his captors; occasionally, a flashlight glimmered.

One light flickered toward Harry's face. He shut his eyes, faking a stupor. Chances were that if his captors knew he had come to life, they would favor him with another knock-out blow.

Any attempt at escape was hopeless, for the present. Harry's arms and legs were bound; the chafing cords were too tight to be slipped. Shifting his shoulders a trifle, Harry managed to prop his aching head in a spot where it thumped less. That was the extent of his effort.

The truck came to a stop. Men hauled Harry to a darkened street; shoved him into a touring car. Pushed to the floor by the rear seat, Harry could do nothing more than count the turns that the car made at corners, particularly because a grimy lap robe was stretched across his head and shoulders.

That car might have been anywhere on Manhattan Island, when it stopped. The chance had arrived, though, for Harry to take bearings and locate where he was. So Harry thought; but his captors had different ideas.

As they hauled him up from the floor, one man held a flashlight in Harry's eyes; another shoved a hard fist against the prisoner's jaw.

It was blotto, again, for Harry.

The punch could not have left him groggy for many minutes; but it was long enough for Harry to lose all track of where the carriers took him. When he again noted his surroundings, he was lying on an old couch, in a dimly lighted room.

There was considerable furniture about; all the chairs were adorned with dust covers. The place looked like a storeroom; and the effect was ghostly. What light there was trickled from a transom, to show the shrouded furniture in outlandish shapes.

From somewhere, Harry could hear the murmur of street traffic; but it sounded very different. Half groggy, he arose from the couch and tried to find a window. A breeze guided him toward one wall; there, he encountered a Venetian blind.

The slats of the blind were closed, but the window beyond them was open. Faint lines of light showed between the slats, and Harry pried the blind with his fingers, thinking that he could force a gap. He failed, and the reason astonished him.

The blind was made of steel. Those slats were as strong a barrier as iron bars!

While Harry leaned against the wall beside the window, he heard the turning of a key. Light flooded from the hallway, when the door opened. A pair of huskies saw Harry, advanced with growls. They shoved their prisoner through a narrow hallway, sent him sprawling into another room.

From hands and knees, Harry looked up to see an elderly man crouched above a desk that was lighted by a single lamp. Seldom in all his experience had he seen so evil a face.

The old man had a yellowish smooth-drawn countenance, with glittering eyes. Above his withered features was a mass of white hair.

CARDS OF DEATH

Harry recognized the fellow from a description furnished by The Shadow; later, by Eleanor Margale.

The man was Rupert Roban.

A PLEASSED cackle issued from Roban's lips. It was the murderous tone that Eleanor had mentioned. Something in its lingering note gave Harry an added impression; but whether it was better or worse, the prisoner could not guess.

It signified simply that Harry was one person whose life Roban intended to preserve; but the malice in the old man's eyes betokened lack of mercy. Life, in Roban's power, might prove far less desirable than death.

"Your name" – Roban's eyes took on a false friendliness, as his cackle softened – "is Harry Vincent. Am I correct?"

There was no use denying it. Harry nodded.

"You are searching for a man named Legrec." Roban was leaning forward, to watch the effect of his words. "Am I again correct?"

Harry moved his lips slowly, as though trying to pronounce a name that he had not understood. Roban's laugh was a scoffing one.

"Legrec," he repeated. "Gautier Legrec. Suppose" – his lips pursed wisely – "suppose that I told you that you had found Legrec. Would that please you?"

"Legrec" – Harry pretended to catch the name – "is that your name?"

Withery lips showed a slow smile.

"I call myself Legrec," declared Roban. "How long I shall choose to do so, is another question."

Harry considered the statement. Roban had denied that he was Legrec, the time that Eleanor had invaded his stronghold. That, however, had been at a place different from this one, under circumstances that Roban had not liked.

Perhaps Roban had feared that Eleanor might escape him, hence had taken no chances in declaring a double identity. Certainly, on that occasion, Roban had been ready to abandon one headquarters to seek another one. His position had lacked complete security.

Here, he was complete master. Not only was his isolated stronghold unknown; it was peopled with henchmen of the sort who had carried Harry hither.

Still, Harry was not certain of Roban's reason for declaring himself Legrec, until the old man demanded:

"Who sent you where you went to–night?"

That explained it! Roban wanted Harry to betray himself. Mention of the name Legrec had been the test. Those shrewd eyes of Roban's had a searching power that never lessened. In part, at least, Roban had delved into Harry's thoughts.

CARDS OF DEATH

Coolly, Harry explained his pretended mission at the Margale mansion. Roban listened in a cunning manner that was worthy of Legrec. When Harry finished, Roban jabbed:

"Suppose I set you free? Where would you go?"

"Back to my hotel," supplied Harry. Then, with a forced smile: "To sleep off this nightmare."

Roban bounced to his feet, pointed bony finger across the desk.

"You lie!" he shrieked. "I can tell exactly what you would do. You would report to The Shadow!"

Harry tried to look puzzled. It wasn't a good effort.

"Who is he?" demanded Roban. "The man you call The Shadow?"

"Never heard of him," insisted Harry.

"Again you lie!" Roban spat the words. "Again, I give you an opportunity. Who is The Shadow?"

Silence seemed the best answer. Harry used it.

"You cannot deceive Legrec," sneered Roban. "Time will come when you will babble all I wish to hear. You will know the power of Legrec!"

THE old man rattled his clawish knuckles on the desk. It was a signal for others to enter. With a valiant effort, Harry came to his feet, took a lunge in Roban's direction.

Like a whippet, the shocky-haired crook twisted away. He whisked a revolver from his pocket, had it against Harry's ribs when a pair of rowdies entered.

"He tried to deceive Legrec," sneered the old man. "I shall show you the treatment that I have provided for his sort."

While the thugs held Harry, Roban produced a cone of the type used for administering ether. He clapped it upon Harry's face and turned on a supply of gas.

Harry whiffed an overwhelming odor; he tried to struggle away. The men beside him clamped him to the floor.

Harry expected his senses to leave him. Instead, the room seemed to revolve, while Roban's voice pitched higher amid the basso rumbles of the hoodlums who gripped Harry.

The air crackled. Voices seemed to ring out a hideous chant; a name that thrummed through Harry's brain:

"Legrec – Legrec – Legrec – Legrec – Legrec –"

The gas cone was off. Harry saw faces that looked unreal. Roban's yellowish countenance was tinged with a demonish red, like the face of a tormenting devil. The thugs seemed tusky monsters as they leered.

All objects in the room were distorted. The desk, the chairs, even the walls appeared to swell, then dwindle. At moments, Harry huddled, fearing that the ceiling would swoop down and crush him. At other instants, it

looked as far away as the sky.

Detached phrases wafted upon Harry's ears. They were in hoarse voices, spoken by Legrec's grinning helpers.

"It's knocked him loco, Legrec!"

"Like you said it would!"

"How long will it keep him goofy?" another asked.

Those voices became incoherent, but Harry could hear Roban's tone; it seemed shrilled to a treble.

"The effect of hasish," spoke Roban. "The drug called bhang. He will remember what Legrec wishes him to remember" – it seemed to Harry that there was a long pause; then a hideous laugh – "and no more! Later, he will talk. Perhaps another treatment –"

The words became hazy, babbly. Harry felt himself tugged from the room. The hallway was undergoing kaleidoscopic changes, twisting its shape, so that Harry could not hold his footing. The thugs jostled him along, gibing their ugly laughs close to his ears.

After a journey that was mentally prolonged, Harry reached the room where he had first been. They shoved him on the couch. Seconds seemed minutes until the door slammed. The grating of the key was a long-drawn wail.

HARRY'S hands fumbled for his pockets. His fingers found an envelope, tore the front from it. Vaguely, he remembered that it bore his address. Finding a pencil, Harry clutched it and began to scrawl a message.

The words that he wrote were a cipher in themselves. They made but little sense; except in snatches:

Prison – Leg – Roban says he – bhang – talk later – hours – loco – window –

Though he held the paper toward the light, Harry could not see the words he scrawled. Each motion of his pencil took a huge labor from his hand; his fingers numbed, so much that he could not even add his initials.

To himself, Harry muttered:

"Name on envelope have to do – got to send this. Right away – got to, right away"

He was off the couch, reeling in slow-motion fashion toward the window. Harry's forehead thumped the metal blind. He fingered the slats; somehow, he couldn't remember why he had come there, until he sensed the crinkle of the envelope.

Harry's fingers clawed the slats. That touch, connected with the envelope front, reminded him of a mail box. He dug his finger nails deep; wedged the sheet of paper through.

"Going somewhere," muttered Harry, "It's – going – even if I'm – not –"

A last dig of the finger nails. The envelope was through, fluttering in the air outside the window. Harry's knees caved; his fingers rattled from the metal blind. A few moments later, Harry had folded on the floor.

In his last moment of effort against the drug supplied by Legrec, Harry Vincent had dispatched his maddened message to The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVIII. TWO MEN AGREE

WHILE schemes of Legrec were faring well, Alan Rigby was seated morosely in his penthouse living room. On the table before him lay bulky report sheets supplied by the police. From them, Rigby had gathered nothing upon which to work.

A telephone bell jangled. Rigby eyed the telephone with worried air; paced to an outer door, to beckon in a plainclothes man who was standing by the elevator.

"Somebody's on the wire," informed Rigby. "You'd better answer it. Legrec is nervy enough to call here. If he does, I'd like to have some one check his voice beside myself."

"The phone rang?" The dick was surprised. "I didn't hear it, outside the door."

"There it is again." Rigby smiled as the call was repeated. "Answer it, as I told you."

The plain-clothes man lifted the receiver, gruffed a "Hello". His serious look changed to a grin.

"It's from downstairs," he told Rigby. "Mr. Cranston wants to see you, the doorman says."

"Tell him to come up," ordered Rigby. Then, when the dick had done so: "Do you know Mr. Cranston when you see him?"

The plain-clothes man nodded.

"Very well," decided Rigby. "Make sure it is Cranston, before you usher him in here. Mistakes can prove costly, when one is dealing with Legrec."

It was Cranston who appeared from the elevator. The headquarters man admitted the commissioner's friend, then took his post outside the living room door.

Rigby shook hands, motioned the visitor to a chair. Scanning Cranston's usually impassive face, Rigby commented:

"Something is troubling you, old chap."

Cranston nodded. He looked toward the door. Rigby smiled.

"You can speak. The good old watchdog can't hear a thing that is said here. But if you prefer —"

He gestured his hand toward the penthouse terrace, inviting Cranston to accompany him there.

"Where Clyston was slain?" Cranston's tone was troubled. "Surely, it is not safe out there. Unless you have another guard posted."

"There is one," assured Rigby. "But he is in the hotel next door. In the very room, in fact, from which Mort Fadler sniped poor Clyston. The terrace is quite safe, I assure you. But I must leave word that we have gone there."

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WHILE Cranston was strolling out through the French window, Rigby went to the anteroom to talk with the man who guarded the elevator. Returning, he stopped in the pantry for several minutes. When he joined Cranston, Rigby was carrying a tray with bottles, seltzer and ice.

Cranston was seated at the little table, his hat on a chair beside him. He shook his head at Rigby's offer of a drink.

"I'm badly worried," he confessed. Then, abruptly: "Tell me, Rigby; wouldn't this fellow Legrec have a hideout somewhere?"

"He certainly must have," returned Rigby, "if he is still in New York. But we have not been able to prove that he has remained here."

"I feel positive" – Cranston's tone was slow, but emphatic – "that Legrec is still about."

Rigby showed immediate interest to hear more.

"I have come to you," explained Cranston, "because the matter still lacks certainty; moreover, it is somewhat personal. To put it briefly, a friend of mine has disappeared."

"You think Legrec is responsible?"

"Yes. Because, to-night, that friend – whose name is Harry Vincent – went to see a man named Thomas Margale."

Rigby tried to recall the name. He shook his head. It wasn't mentioned in any of the police reports.

"Vincent chanced to call me," explained Cranston, "because he knew that I was acquainted with Legrec's three victims: Balcray, Lysand, and Keever. I had asked Vincent, among others, to look for any one who knew all three.

"From the message that Vincent left at the Cobalt Club, it appears that Thomas Margale, who is reputedly a man of much wealth, was a friend of the three dead men."

Rigby's eagerness increased, then faded.

"What sort of a chap is this Vincent?" he quizzed. "How did he learn these facts about Margale?"

"Vincent is reliable," assured Cranston. "The rest, I cannot state. However, there is another important fact. I was to hear from Vincent by eight-thirty. It is now nine o'clock, but there has been no word from him."

Rigby poured himself a drink. He paced beside the table, weighing all that Cranston had said. He remarked aloud that the matter had interest, even though its threads were flimsy. Then, with finality.

"I see your inference, Cranston," declared Rigby. "Margale could be Legrec. For that matter" – Rigby's tone was hopeless – "any one might be Legrec. But to have the law invade Margale's home" – the investigator shook his head – "such a step would be unwise, on such slight evidence."

"That is why I came to you," observed Cranston.

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"In hope that I would go there?" questioned Rigby. "That would be even worse. Legrec would know me in an instant."

"That is not my plan." Cranston's tone was calm. "I intend to call on Thomas Margale myself."

An enthused look came to Rigby's face.

"Excellent!" he decided. "But if Margale does not expect you"

"He will expect me. I shall telephone him first. From here, if you will permit me."

RIGBY invited Cranston indoors. Consulting the telephone book, Cranston found Margale's number then dialed it.

"Hello." Cranston's voice was level. "Mr. Margale's residence?... My name? Lamont Cranston... Yes, I would like to talk with Mr. Margale..."

Lowering the telephone, Cranston added, to Rigby: "It was some servant who answered. A solemn-voiced fellow."

A long pause followed; then:

"Hello." Cranston was brisk this time. "Mr. Margale? My name is Cranston – a friend of Mr. Vincent... What's that? You say Vincent has left... Yes, so I understood; but there is a matter he wanted me to discuss with you..."

"No. It would be impossible over the telephone. But I can be at your house in fifteen minutes... A half hour would be much better? Very well..."

Hanging up, Cranston dialed another number. This time he called the Cobalt Club, to leave a message for Commissioner Weston. It was to the effect that the commissioner could reach him within an hour at Rigby's penthouse.

Rigby was pleased by the second call. It meant that Weston would be waiting when Cranston returned. He promised, however, to make no mention of the Margale visit until Cranston had time to return.

One point, though, troubled Rigby.

"If something has happened to Vincent," he remarked, "you may be walking into similar trouble, Cranston. Therefore, we should take precautions."

"What would you suggest?" was Cranston's question.

"That I send my outside man along to Margale's," returned Rigby. "I mean the detective that the commissioner furnished. Not with you, of course" – he added that, as Cranston started an objection – "but after you have started."

"You will have him remain outside there?"

"Yes. Ready at your call."

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"That would be quite agreeable."

THERE was a smile on Cranston's lips when he stood in the little anteroom, waiting for the elevator. The stationed detective observed it, and wondered what it meant.

He would have liked a view of Rigby's face, also; for he knew that Cranston had conferred with the investigator. But Rigby had remained in the penthouse, to make some notes.

The elevator was a long while coming up. Cranston's faint smile had vanished, leaving his face inscrutable. At last, the elevator door slid open; the hawk-faced visitor stepped aboard.

The Shadow was embarked upon new adventure: a journey that was to bring swifter consequences than Harry's visit to the Margale mansion.

The elevator operator halted at the eighteenth floor. A lanky man stepped aboard; with him was a square-built companion. Despite their attire, neither looked the sort who lived at the Weatherly Arms. They were rough characters, more like the elevator operator.

The car halted again at the sixteenth. Another tough-faced passenger joined the group. He shifted to a corner, to avoid the closing door. An instant later, he had swung about. His coat front was open, showing a sweater instead of a vest. His fist had a revolver, tugged from his hip.

The gun muzzle poked for Cranston; hard lips grated the order:

"Up with the mitts, mug!"

There would be no shooting on that elevator. The Shadow was confident of that, from the moment the first toughs had stepped into the car.

Gunshots would echo up and down the shaft. Under the circumstances, The Shadow could play the part he preferred: that of Cranston.

The hawklike face lost its impassive air. Cranston seemed bewildered; so greatly, that the thugs who flanked him let half-drawn guns slide back into their pockets.

The elevator operator was with the band. He pulled the lever, but the elevator did not descend. Instead, it went up; when it reached the level of Rigby's penthouse, it continued higher.

The car stopped at the very top of the shaft. The operator opened the door to let the passengers step out into the second floor of the duplex penthouse!

This was Clyston's secret: the reason why Rigby's servant had been assassinated. Clyston had been in league with Legrec. He had rented the duplex, with its top floor cut off, so that there would be a secret apartment above Rigby's own!

CROOKS shoved Cranston along a passage, into a room where a lamplight glowed. There, The Shadow saw the triumphant figure of Rupert Roban bowed above his desk.

With cackled laugh, the counterfeiter spoke one word:

"Listen!"

He pressed a switch. There were three seconds of silence, then Rigby's voice, conversing over a telephone.

"Yes, Cranston was here, commissioner... I expect him back within an hour..."

Roban cut off the switch.

"I hear all that passes below," he sneered. "Because I am Legrec! Tell me, since you are Vincent's friend – do you know The Shadow?"

Cranston's face showed perfect ignorance. It passed Roban's scrutiny. His look became contemptuous.

"We shall not waste time with questions," he declared. "If you have anything to say, it can come later."

Crooks threw a quick grip on the prisoner. Roban pressed the conical appliance to The Shadow's disguised face. The tall form of Cranston swayed almost immediately. Roban held the cone in place a half minute longer.

"Enough!" he decided. "Take him away. Legrec commands!"

Ready hands drew the tottering form along the passage, gave the new prisoner an unceremonious shove into a small room that resembled Harry's prison. The thugs saw Cranston miss the couch and roll heavily to the floor. They laughed as they locked the door.

Whether they would have scoffed more, or less, had they known their captive was The Shadow, was an unanswered question. For the present, the guise of Cranston had served its part.

Even Legrec did not know that in capturing Lamont Cranston, he had taken The Shadow!

CHAPTER XIX. MURDER AT THE MANSION

THE electric clock on Rigby's mantel had passed the hour of ten. Commissioner Weston showed anxiety; so did Joe Cardona, who was with him. Their concern was caused by Rigby's recent statements.

The investigator had told them the details of Cranston's visit.

"You shouldn't have let him go there alone!" stormed Weston. "It was folly, Rigby! Folly! What if Legrec is behind affairs at Margale's?"

"We discussed that," admitted Rigby. "But Cranston insisted. After all, it was his plan. He was eager –"

"So eager that he left his hat out there on the chair," interrupted Weston. "Proof that he was not himself; for Cranston is methodical."

"But I sent the man you posted here," reminded Rigby. "He is probably on duty at Margale's home."

"We shall learn that soon enough," decided Weston. "Come! We are starting there at once."

The group left the penthouse. The same operator was on the elevator; but the man's face told nothing. Perhaps he had a lurking hope that there would be orders to snatch one of these passengers; for he detested all of them.

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Three, however, were apparently too large an order for Legrec. The trip to the ground floor was made without incident.

It took the commissioner's big car a scant eight minutes to reach Margale's neighborhood. A wailing siren cleared the way; but it ceased its shrieks near Margale's, much to Rigby's relief. The investigator expressed that fact to Weston.

"We must be cautious, commissioner," warned Rigby. "The house may be watched by others than your own man. Let us be conservative in our approach."

Weston spoke through the speaking tube. The big car halted.

"We are only a block from the house," stated Weston. "What would you suggest next?"

"That two of us – Cardona and myself – go on foot," replied Rigby. "One of us can approach the front; the other, the back." He turned to Cardona. "Does that suit you, inspector?"

Cardona nodded.

The two alighted. Soon, they were on the silent sidewalk by Margale's wall. They halted at a side gate. Rigby tried it, shook his head. The gate was locked.

"Suppose you take the front," whispered Rigby. "Your man is there; he will report more readily to you. I can try the back gate, if there is one."

They separated. Cardona kept close to the wall until he reached the front corner. He saw the plain-clothes man across the street, sneaked over and talked to him.

No one had been in or out of the mansion during all the while that the headquarters man had been there. No one, at least, who had used the front way.

"Stay here," ordered Cardona. "I'll go back and see how Rigby's making out. If you hear a whistle, bust in through the front."

GOING back along the avenue, Cardona saw a figure waiting for him. It was Rigby, near the locked side gate. He had been to the back, had found another gate there, but it had been bolted from inside.

The two agreed that direct approach would be best. They went to the front, summoned the headquarters dick. All three went through the unlocked front gate; they followed the walk to the big door of the house.

There was something formidable about that mansion; its setting annoyed Cardona. It wasn't sensible, a place like this, squatting in the middle of Manhattan. Anything might happen in an old, forgotten house.

A swell place for Legrec to use as a hide-out, particularly for the type of crook he was supposed to be. Posing as a millionaire – yes, that would be Legrec's style. The idea gripped Cardona more and more, as he considered it.

In fact, that growing impression was to explain some of the ace inspector's later actions.

All the while that Cardona pondered, Rigby was ringing the front doorbell. Its tingle was audible from somewhere deep in the house. It gave the impression that the place was abandoned, although dim lights

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showed at a few windows, including the panes at the sides of the wide front door.

Cardona peered through one of those tiny windows, Rigby through the other. Loose-draped curtains, though thin, made it impossible to see what lay inside.

Rigby resumed his pressure of the bell button.

That tingle could be heard on the second floor, where Eleanor Margale was in bed, trying vainly to sleep.

It was odd, thought Eleanor, that Nordham did not answer. The other servants had retired; but Nordham should be about, for her uncle was still in the study.

Turning on a reading lamp, Eleanor found slippers and dressing gown. Holding the flimsy robe close about her, she stole out through the hallway. The bell was louder, when she heard it here; yet its ring might fail to penetrate into her uncle's study.

Perhaps Nordham was in there, trying to calm another of her uncle's violent moods.

At the top of the stairs, Eleanor hesitated. Who could the person be, who was keeping up the constant summons? Dread gripped her; then, like an echo from a distant past, she remembered whispered words in the unforgettable tones of *The Shadow*:

"You will be in no danger –"

The words were true; but Eleanor was soon to experience stark terror.

HALFWAY down the stairs, she stopped again. There was something in the hallway – a blocky shape that looked grotesquely human. For a moment, Eleanor laughed at her qualms. The thing didn't move; it might be a rug, scuffed out of shape.

She reached the bottom of the stairs. She saw the object more plainly.

The girl's taut nerves gave way.

Eleanor's shriek was louder than the incessant doorbell. It carried beyond the barrier, for there was a sudden pounding there.

Eleanor's own cries freed her from a terrible paralysis that had gripped her. Though she could not repress her screams, she was able to seek aid.

Whoever was beyond that front door was a friend, in Eleanor's distraught opinion. With a hurried dash, Eleanor ran wide of the thing on the floor and approached the door itself. Her cries had finished; but shudders quailed her as she fumbled with the bolts.

Moments seemed endless, before Eleanor realized that her task was done. She dropped back, gasping aloud that the door was open.

Cardona and Rigby did not hear that faint summons. They had listened, though, to the unlocking of the door. With the finish of such sounds, they grabbed the latch together. The door went inward; they crossed the threshold.

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The scene that met them was one of the most surprising that Cardona had ever encountered. Joe saw a girl, beautiful even in her horrified pose, clad in nightgown and disarrayed robe. She was pointing to the floor; with a brave effort, she uttered a name:

"Nordham! It's Nordham – dead!"

Together, Cardona and Rigby reached that shape on the floor. It was huddled; but a face was staring upward from above a contorted neck. Dead features glared, as if in dying hope of vengeance.

They rolled the body sideward. A knife handle gleamed in the dim light. The blade itself was buried in the center of a crimson blotch that covered the dead man's shirt front.

From the victim's attire, Cardona could see that he was a servant, probably the one who should have answered the door.

Flowing blood told that murder had been recent. That centered Cardona's attention on the knife, for he knew that the thrust must have been swift, straight to the heart. But Rigby noted something else, and pointed it out to rivet Cardona's gaze.

Pinned to the bloodstained shirt—front, by the blade of the knife itself, was the token of the murderer who had so speedily killed this latest victim.

The object was a tarot: another of those death cards that were dealt by the insidious hand of Gautier Legrec!

CHAPTER XX. THE RIDDLE UNRAVELS

THE chimes of the old grandfather's clock were the first sounds that broke the silence of that hallway. The clang of the half—hour notes roused Rigby from his rigid pose. Cardona heard Rigby's low—phrased words:

"The three of swords – it symbolizes hatred!"

A short—clipped sound came with the clock's final chime, but from another direction. Both men caught it; so did Eleanor. The girl's voice warned them, as they stared upward.

"Look out!" called Eleanor. "From the study!"

A door had opened. On the threshold stood Thomas Margale; his eyes were glaring, white. The gritting of his teeth was audible; in his hand he held an old—fashioned revolver, that he seemed intent to raise.

"Legrec!"

Cardona spouted the name for Rigby's benefit. Both lunged forward from beside Nordham's body. Their mutual action brought the result they needed. Each man veered, as he drove for the study door, forcing Margale to a choice.

Before the fuming millionaire could decide, both men had gripped him. Margale fought hard to keep his gun; he tugged the trigger while he battled. His shots, however, did no harm. Between them, Cardona and Rigby had forced the gun muzzle to the floor.

For a long half minute, Cardona was impressed by Margale's strength. It was when the struggle seemed to be turning in his favor, that the millionaire gave out. His collapse was complete. Gun gone, he crumpled to the

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floor, to lie moaning above the bullet holes that he had driven through the woodwork.

When Commissioner Weston arrived, they had Margale plumped in the chair behind his study desk. All fight was out of him; he was a weary, weeping prisoner. Weston could hardly believe it, when he heard reports of the battle. Margale appeared to be anything but a fighter.

Bluntly, Cardona accused the millionaire of murdering Nordham. In whiny tone, Margale pleaded innocence. Leaving Weston to quiz him, the ace stalked about the house, accompanied by Rigby.

They found the side door locked, with no key. The back door was bolted from the inside. There wasn't a servant anywhere nearer than the third floor. Those that they rounded up were huddled in beds, terrified by the sounds of gunfire.

"There's no one could have murdered Nordham," decided Cardona, "except Margale. That is, counting out the girl. It wasn't her work."

"Some one may have gone out," argued Rigby. "We must take that into consideration, inspector."

Cardona agreed. After all, a passkey could have been used at the side door. But it would have taken a rapid worker to finish Nordham and make a departure in the brief minutes allowed.

As Cardona put it, only Legrec could have managed it, and Thomas Margale happened to be Joe's only choice for the identity of Gautier Legrec.

BY the time Cardona and Rigby had returned to the study, Margale's shattered nerves had steadied. He pleaded for a dose of his medicine; it was in the cabinet. When Eleanor assured Cardona that her uncle took it regularly, the dosage was allowed.

The milkish liquid had a soothing effect. Resting back in his chair, Margale announced wearily that he was ready to answer any and all questions.

From the start, it was plain that the law had a canny man with whom to deal.

Cardona asked Margale if he had murdered Nordham, to which the millionaire returned a serious negative headshake. Joe planked the bloody tarot upon the desk, asked if Margale had ever seen it before. The millionaire showed complete surprise.

"There's a fellow named Legrec passes these things around," announced Cardona, referring to the card. "Ever hear of him? Or his calling cards? He still has a lot of them left in his pack."

"There are no such cards here," assured Margale. "You may search the place, if you wish."

"How about seeing the inside of that safe? We've looked everywhere else."

"Certainly!" Margale gave the decision promptly; then looked about, a trifle nervous. By this time, police were plentiful. The millionaire smiled, as he decided: "I shall be well protected."

"Against what?" demanded Weston.

"Against robbery," returned Margale. "The contents of that safe are worth approximately five million dollars."

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That statement, in Cardona's estimation, indicated that Margale was either a liar or a lunatic; possibly both. But when the millionaire began to open the safe, Joe gawked.

It wasn't one safe – it was four, each inside the other. All had tricky combinations, over which Margale mulled. The final safe was a comparatively small one; it was stuffed with packages of stocks and bonds.

Margale sorted them carefully, placing them in front of Weston.

"I shall hold you responsible, commissioner," said the suspected murderer, dryly. Then, to Cardona: "There is the safe, inspector. Empty!"

Weston was looking through the securities. Their total value was huge; probably equal to Margale's five-million-dollar estimate. Margale sat with a triumphant look, facing Cardona.

"So you never heard of Legrec's cards," snapped Cardona. "He puts them on his victims, Margale. Your own servant, Nordham, was one. And there were some others, recently. Listen and tell me if you recognize any of their names."

Margale nodded seriously.

One by one, Cardona repeated the names of Elwood Balcray, Sylvester Lysand, Hastings Kever.

The effect was remarkable.

Cardona would have been happy with one hit. Instead, he scored three. With each name, Margale gave a gulp.

"So you knew them?" snapped Cardona.

"Of – of course!" panted Margale, his face harrowed. "But – but I thought – their deaths were accidents."

"That's what Legrec wanted people to think," informed Cardona. "He'd claim he fell for it, Legrec would, if we could find him. Maybe" – Joe added the words wisely – "maybe we have found him!"

Margale ignored the inference. He was thinking of another matter.

"Since all three are dead," he declared, soberly, "I can discuss my relations with them; although" – he looked toward Weston – "I do so only because it may help you clear matters, commissioner."

Weston nodded, counting to himself. He was going over a stack of Margale's bonds.

"KEEVER was a promoter," explained Margale. "He obtained all these securities of mine. That's how I happened to know him. He was a smart man, picking up gilt-edged buys at special prices.

"So smart, in fact, that I depended upon Lysand to study all my purchases. Lysand was my banker. Occasionally, he loaned me money, with some of those bonds as security.

"I was not the only one who profited. Balcray bought some of these securities also. He sold real estate to obtain the money. I did the same, and Balcray helped me dispose of such property."

Margale's tone was convincing to all but one listener. His own niece was staring, in doubt. Eleanor was used to her uncle's varied moods. She was picturing him as she had often seen him: a raging tyrant. She thought of

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Nordham, her one friend during Margale's periods of fierceness.

She could see her uncle as a murderer, with Nordham as his final victim. She wondered what had happened to Harry Vincent. She recalled her visit to Roban's old house; mention of bonds brought the counterfeiter's boasts to mind.

It was all that Eleanor could manage, to hold back her story of that night. All that was needed was a spark to ignite the blaze of spoken memories. Before Eleanor realized it, the flame was touched.

Unwittingly, Commissioner Weston inspired it.

"An odd thing" – Weston spoke musingly from his side of the table – "something very odd, indeed. This special bond issue – Supertransit Fives – did Kever buy them, Margale?"

"Of course," replied Margale. "I have already told you that Kever bought all those securities."

"You have a quarter million in those bonds alone."

"I suppose so. The list will tell."

Weston shook his head, puzzled.

"I know about that issue," remarked the commissioner. "It was originally intended as a million-dollar sale; but it was halted. Only two hundred thousand dollars of the issue was printed. You have fifty thousand more than are in existence."

Eleanor reached the table. That news was all she wanted. It meant that the truth would have to come out. Eleanor had been catching glimmers of it.

"Those bonds are counterfeit!" exclaimed Eleanor. "Those, and probably all others with them! I know the man responsible. His name is Rupert Roban!"

CARDONA had heard of Roban. The man was almost a myth; but his work was too famed to be ignored. Turning from Margale, Cardona started to quiz Eleanor. It wasn't necessary.

Eleanor was telling of the mystery call, with the spoken name of Legrec. She mentioned the address in the telephone table; her trip to Twentieth Street. By the time she had recounted her interview with Roban, Cardona was on his feet.

"That's plenty!" he shouted. "We raided that place on Twentieth Street! The story fits, commissioner. Margale's story is phony. He's covering up how he got those bonds."

"Roban made them for him. Kever was the go-between who brought them here. Lysand and Balcray were the saps who were supposed to fall for them. But Margale got leery of the lot."

"He knocked off his own man – Kever – and handed it to the other two, besides. To-night, he figured the trail was closing in on him. That's why he grabbed Vincent and Cranston."

"Out there in the hall" – Cardona made a dramatic gesture – "is the one man who might have told us facts we need to know. Nordham is that man, and he is dead. Murdered by you, Margale" – Cardona was pointing an accusing finger at the millionaire – "to cover up your biggest swindle game!"

Weston bounded up beside the table, shouted to Cardona:

"Arrest him, inspector! Thomas Margale, alias Gautier Legrec, we charge you with the murder of –"

Further words were useless. Under the point of Cardona's finger, Margale was slumping as if the accusation withered him. His face was ashen; life seemed gone from it. Cardona shoved forward on the chance that Margale's sag was a fake.

It was Alan Rigby who suddenly intervened.

"Wait, inspector." Rigby spoke coolly, solemnly. "We are mistaken. This man is innocent. He is not Legrec."

There was stunned silence. Rigby let it lengthen; then:

"The man we want," said Rigby, "is Rupert Roban. Find him and we shall at last have Gautier Legrec!"

CHAPTER XXI. THE CLUE FROM ABOVE

IT was an hour later, in Rigby's penthouse. The famed investigator was standing in the center of the room, with Weston and Cardona seated opposite him. Rigby was making a final review of a theory with which the others fully agreed.

"It wasn't Margale's collapse that broke the case," stated Rigby. "That was genuine enough – and no wonder! Poor devil – all his fortune is in those fraudulent securities.

"The real point was Kever. You gave me that, inspector, though I don't think you realized it. Your theory was good, very good, but it made Kever out to be a crook. That made me see the clear.

"Kever a crook! Then why not Lysand? Why not Balcray? Victims of Legrec? Not a bit of it! Their game was to work together; to deprive poor Margale of his fortune. Kever brought the securities to Margale. Lysand certified them; Balcray bought, to encourage Margale.

"Promoter – banker – investor; what a combination! Behind it all the evil genius of Legrec, otherwise Roban. The long-forgotten counterfeiter, whose face is here!"

Rigby pulled down the chart that showed the composite face which he had formed to represent Legrec.

There was another point that Rigby added.

"An inside man was needed," he stated. "Nordham was that man. He sent the tip-offs to Legrec. That slip of paper that Eleanor found? Planted there by Nordham, in writing falsified to look like her uncle's. But Eleanor chanced upon it too soon."

"It led to Roban's own place," reminded Cardona.

"Of course," assured Rigby. "He wanted his old headquarters to be found later, to confuse the law. He is no longer Roban, to his own way of thinking. He is Legrec!"

"Quite clear," agreed Weston. "No wonder Nordham found Eleanor so easily. Once safe, it was wise to bring her back. She could not harm Roban, once his last great counterfeiting job was ended."

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"Roban wanted to kill her," mused Rigby. "But that is Legrec's way. He has tricked me, badly. Here he was, slaying his own duped confederates, making us think that they were innocent victims, with a death card placed on each!"

Rigby strolled to the French windows. The terrace was cool; he motioned the others to join him. Sight of Cranston's hat brought a tightness to Rigby's lips.

"Legrec was there, at Margale's," he recalled, "only a few minutes before we arrived. That was when he slew Nordham. But where did he go after that? If we could only find his hide-away!"

"Vincent is a difficult case to follow. He must have been carried through that side door, to which Legrec had access. But Cranston – he never reached Margale's, so far as we know. Where was he intercepted?"

RIGBY picked up Cranston's hat, stared at it as though hoping that it held the clue. Something fluttered to the cement promenade. Weston picked it up.

"What's this?" he inquired. "It looks like an envelope, addressed to Vincent. Oddly disconnected. L–e–g – it must refer to Legrec. Here's Roban's name, too!"

Rigby wasn't listening. He was still speaking about Cranston.

"How – tell me how!" His tone was pleading. "How did Legrec know that Cranston was going to Margale's at all?"

"Look at this, Rigby!" Weston was excited. "Vincent's message puts it that Roban is Legrec! What does he mean by bhang?"

Rigby saw the word; his eyes stared.

"Bhang! The term for hashish! Vincent was drugged when he wrote this! Wait – that medicine at Margale's! That's how Nordham kept Margale half stupefied. The concoction was doped!"

Rigby's eyes reverted to Harry's message. He didn't seem to realize that Weston had just found it.

"Cranston talked to me," mused Rigby. "To no one else. He was here, on this terrace – no, in the penthouse living room. I wonder –"

Rigby looked upward. Above was the darkened wall of the penthouse second story; windows were black against it. Rigby squinted.

"Those look like Venetian blinds," he remarked. "That place is curiously cooped up, even though goods are stored there. Do you suppose, by any stretch of the most fantastic imagination, that Legrec –"

Cardona caught the suggestion. He snatched Harry's message from Rigby's hand, pointed to Cranston's hat, then to the chair.

"That's where it was!" exclaimed Joe. "The message was covered by Cranston's hat. Maybe he read it; maybe he didn't even see it, when he laid his hat down. But it's a cinch where it came from. Through one of those slats!"

CARDS OF DEATH

Rigby nodded solemnly. He slid his hand to a pocket where he carried a gun. His eyes were straight upon the upper windows. His words were undertoned.

"It is fortunate that we are speaking out here," he asserted. "I see it all plainly, although it amazes me. Legrec has chosen his hide-away directly above my own headquarters!"

Weston gazed as though Rigby were insane. Cardona, however, approved with a grim nod.

"It's a cinch he's got your place wired," whispered Joe. "That's how he overheard Cranston talk to you."

"But Cranston called Margale's," reminded Weston. "He talked to Nordham."

"So he did!" exclaimed Rigby. "I had forgotten it. It is fortunate that I did. That mental lapse started me on the right route. That paper proves it."

RIGBY'S next action was a cool one. He lighted his pipe, strolled toward the door of the penthouse, with a slight shrug as though he found the terrace too cool.

Cardona caught the idea, did a pretense of his own. Weston followed.

Once inside, Rigby beckoned them. They went to the door that blocked the stairs to the upper story. Rigby tested the lock. He nodded. On a slip of paper, he wrote the words:

I can manage it. Keep up a conversation.

Weston and Cardona took the hint. They forced a discussion that became effective as they continued. All the while, Rigby was trying his hand as a locksmith; but without luck.

Finally, he pulled his revolver from his pocket, made a gesture toward the lock. It looked like the only way.

Cardona motioned for Rigby to wait. Joe went out and called in the headquarters man, to add strength to the raiding squad.

They were crouched, ready for a dash, when Rigby fired two quick shots. The first blew the lock askew; the second ruined it. As Rigby yanked back the door, Cardona took the lead.

There were dim lights above. From a corridor came the scuffle of arriving men. First at the head of the stairs, Cardona opened fire. Revolvers answered; but the opposition broke. Cardona headed for a turn in the hallway.

When he reached there, Weston was at his shoulder; Rigby and the detective were close behind. Cardona tried to give a warning; too late. Three gunners had rallied down the hall. Their fingers were on gun triggers.

It looked like curtains for Joe Cardona, even though his companions were on hand to avenge his death. An instant more, opposing guns would bark. Then, into that moment came a burst from an unseen gun.

It spoke from a transom that shattered with the thrust of steel. Down from the clattering glass tongued the flame from an automatic. A bullet clipped the foremost of the attacking gunners. Instinctively, the others aimed for the transom.

CARDS OF DEATH

More shots volleyed. That down-tilted muzzle had the edge. Revolvers were belated in their answers. Weston saw the face of his friend Cranston at the transom; gave a welcoming shout. Cardona toned it with shots from his own revolver.

Three thugs were down. There were others, piling in from elsewhere. Bullets clipped them as fast as they came. Crooks had no chance with the spreading invaders – not with that supporting fire from the transom.

Shooting above the heads of Weston and Cardona, The Shadow took out the cream of the opposition.

AT the finish, there was a blast at the locked door. Copying Rigby's move below, Cranston had shattered the lock of his prison room. He sprang out into the hallway; before Weston could greet him, Cranston gave the quick question:

"Where's Rigby?"

A call answered. It was distant. Cardona was nearest to that direction. He led a dash to an open doorway. Beyond it, he saw two men grappling: one was Rigby, the other a white-haired old man who battled with fury: Roban.

The Shadow came behind Cardona. He was motionless, calm as Cranston always was. While Cardona stared helplessly, Cranston's automatic trained upon the fighters. He was awaiting a chance break in that struggle.

A muffled shot sounded while The Shadow aimed. It was Rigby's gun that gave it; the muzzle jabbed against Roban's ribs. A shrill shriek sounded from dried lips; the old counterfeiter rolled to the floor.

Panting, Rigby watched the others while they gathered. His eyes were fierce from the fury of the fight. Roban, too, was staring with embittered glare. His lips moved, to croak in challenging gasp:

"Legrec – Gautier Legrec –"

That proclamation of identity was all. As Roban's eyes glazed in death, it was Alan Rigby who pronounced:

"We have seen the end of Gautier Legrec."

Those were the only words. But there was an expression from another person present. It was visible, not spoken; hence no one observed it.

The gaze of Lamont Cranston sparkled.

His eyes were those of The Shadow.

CHAPTER XXII. THE SPOILS OF LEGREC

LAMONT CRANSTON received his congratulations later. They came when the victors reached Rigby's own living room. With them, they brought a rescued prisoner in the person of Harry Vincent.

Half stupefied from the dose of bhang, Harry could not talk coherently. That was new proof of Cranston's endurance. Although he had been similarly treated, he had resisted the ordeal.

The explanation was a simple one. Cranston, it seemed, had found Harry's note, but had not entirely grasped its importance until his capture. Realizing that he would be in for the hashish treatment, he had faked a rapid

collapse for Roban's benefit.

His dose of the vapor had therefore been a mild one. His weariness, however, indicated that he felt some effect from it. He decided to leave now, taking his friend Vincent with him.

On the cool terrace, Rigby discussed the triumph with Weston and Cardona. Rigby had one regret: that he had been forced to give Roban that death bullet.

"It ended Legrec," he declared, "but it brought us nowhere in our next step: the reclamation of Margale's wealth."

"Roban didn't stow it up above here," put in Cardona. "We've scoured that place all over."

"Wherever it is," returned Rigby, "only Roban could tell us. Five million dollars – buried somewhere, as deep as that metal room in the old house where he counterfeited those bonds."

There was a stir from the penthouse living room, so slight that no one observed it. Shaded blackness glided across the floor, like the passage of a cloud before the sun.

"I wish you luck, inspector," said Rigby to Cardona, "and I shall willingly give my cooperation. But the search for Legrec's spoils may prove a hopeless one."

"Margale converted his funds into those false securities, some weeks ago. That gave Legrec a long while to bury away the cash. What fools, those chaps who aided him! They let all those millions drift into his possession."

"But that proves the cleverness of Legrec. I told you, when I first arrived here, that he invariably disposed of helpers when he needed them no longer. This time, he annihilated them. Legrec intended to make this haul appear as his last."

Rigby stood by the parapet, gazing southward toward the bay and the ocean beyond.

"I shall be leaving soon," he remarked, "for my first real vacation in years. Keep me well posted, inspector, regarding any clues to Thomas Margale's lost wealth –"

The telephone bell sounded from the penthouse. Rigby went to answer it. He called back:

"For you, commissioner!"

CARDONA came in with Weston. Glumly, the inspector stared at a broken panel in the wall, where Rigby had uncovered the dictograph over which talk from Rigby's quarters had reached Roban's room upstairs.

Despite his puzzled thoughts regarding the location of Legrec's swag, Cardona became suddenly conscious of excitement in Weston's voice.

The commissioner clattered the telephone receiver.

"It was Vincent!" he exclaimed. "So hazy, I could scarcely make him out. But his import was plain."

Weston drew a troubled breath, then added: "Cranston has disappeared!"

CARDS OF DEATH

Rigby eyed the commissioner closely, half smiling, as though the matter were a jest. Then:

"Impossible!" he exclaimed. "What could have happened to him, with Legrec dead? Who could have wanted to quiz Cranston –"

The name died on Rigby's frozen lips. He was staring across the living room. Weston and Cardona followed that gaze, but their ears brought news before their eyes could see it.

A strange laugh, chill and sinister, crept through that room. It crept from lips that were invisible, unlike the eyes above them. Those eyes gazed from beneath the brim of a slouch hat worn by a cloaked figure in black.

Despite the ominous tone of that laugh, Joe Cardona felt a sweep of exultation.

The Shadow!

All along, Cardona had been bothered by one mighty problem: The Shadow's odd absence from this case. Somewhere – probably in Eleanor's uncompleted testimony – Cardona had caught indications of The Shadow's work. That, in fact, was why Cardona had expected more.

It had come – The Shadow's entry into the quest for Legrec; but only after the case was solved. Cardona had one flickering hope – that The Shadow might help him in regaining Margale's millions; but that began to fade.

The search for Legrec had run ahead of The Shadow. The rest would probably be beyond his depth. With all his faith in The Shadow's prowess, Cardona could not dispel his present doubts.

Weston showed actual anger.

The commissioner's thoughts were similar to Cardona's. His reaction went further. Weston looked upon The Shadow's arrival as a useless masquerade. He began to splutter that the cloaked visitor was not needed.

THE SHADOW'S eyes fixed upon Weston.

A gloved hand came from beneath the cloak. It bore an object that Weston recognized. It was the hat that Cranston had left on the promenade, but which he had worn later, when he departed with Harry Vincent.

"What has happened to Cranston?" demanded the commissioner. "If harm has come to him, you are responsible!"

From beneath the inner band, The Shadow plucked a card. He passed it to Weston, who stared at it, then showed it to Rigby.

The card was a tarot. It depicted a skeleton carrying a scythe; beneath, the grim legend: "La Morte."

"Death" – Rigby's tone was mechanical – "the one infallible card. But not from Legrec's pack –"

"From that pack!" spoke The Shadow. His tone was as sepulchral as the voice of death itself. "But not with Legrec's knowledge.

"The infallible card has failed. Yet there is another, Rigby" – lips phrased the name coldly – "that is even greater than the card of death.

CARDS OF DEATH

"Receive it – not from Legrec" – The Shadow's laugh toned out – "but from The Shadow!"

Another card came to view, gripped by gloved fingers. The Shadow thrust it into Rigby's frozen hand. It showed a wanderer, moving toward the distance.

"Il Matto!" The name came from Rigby's nearly motionless lips. "The fool who gains what he deserves –"

"From The Shadow!"

At those words, Rigby took a frantic, backward spring. He had lost the last vestige of his former nerviness. His face, with its wild expression of fury, gave him away.

But his hand stopped short of its gun.

The Shadow held Rigby covered with an automatic. It had come from that black cloak with one amazing sweep.

"LEGREC disposed of all the men who aided him," declared The Shadow. "All, including Rupert Roban. Cleverly, Roban's part was changed. From a mere counterfeiter, approached by Keever, he was induced to pose falsely as Legrec.

"The real Legrec wanted the testimony of Eleanor Margale. Why did Roban try to murder her? Why did Roban once deny that he was Legrec, then make that claim?"

"When did Roban go to Margale's to murder Nordham? Cranston can tell. From his transom, he was watching the passage from Roban's room above here. Cranston has answered that question. He states that Roban did not leave."

The muzzle was looming closer to Rigby's eyes, forcing the snarling man back toward his table.

"How did Legrec cover his presence in so many places where he engaged in crime?" quizzed The Shadow. Then, coldly, he answered: "By posing as a man who sought to find Legrec!"

"When Legrec had chosen Roban as a scapegoat, how did he prepare for it? By framing that false picture, on this wall. And how" – The Shadow was pointing to the huge picture that resembled the dead Roban – "how did Legrec prevent Roban from finally betraying him?"

"By murder! The last of many murders. One death that was not marked by a misleading card. There is the final answer – given to Gautier Legrec!"

Rigby's eyes bulged from a purplish visage. His game was ended; he, the real Legrec, saw his long-built schemes go fluttering like the fool's card that drifted from his fingers.

Moving away, The Shadow kept Rigby covered every instant, until, at last, the cloaked avenger stood by the shattered panel that wired this room with the floor above it.

His free hand thrust deep, The Shadow pressed a hidden switch, that proved how Rigby – not Roban – had been able to cut the circuit. The Shadow had not forgotten how Rigby's voice had begun in the middle of a conversation, over the loud-speaker above.

CARDS OF DEATH

"As for the wealth gouged from Margale" – The Shadow's tone was mocking – "where better could it be, than here!"

Gloved fingers were probing the broken panel. There was a snap; the smashed woodwork slid aside. With it came the next panel to it, revealing another deep cache.

That recess in the wall was stuffed with bundles of currency: Margale's millions, that the dupe had converted into cash for Alan Rigby, the self-styled Gautier Legrec.

HANDS slumped behind him, Rigby made a move that only The Shadow saw. It was pressure of a button, the push signal that he had used to instigate Cranston's capture. Rigby waited, hoping that the motion had not been seen.

Words of admission gulped from Rigby's lips. He was admitting his crimes, to hold The Shadow's attention. But he could not keep his gaze from shifting toward the outer door. Rigby's own eye flash told The Shadow when the barrier wavered.

With a sardonic laugh of challenge, The Shadow wheeled to meet the last half dozen of Rigby's horde. They were men who had thought Roban to be Legrec, but who responded to the signal that had reached the elevator.

They would have rallied to Rigby, realizing him their master, had they encountered any foeman other than The Shadow. In their bewilderment, they thought that The Shadow had hoaxed them to the penthouse.

Two of the startled crew raised guns. The Shadow's quick shots crippled them. The rest flung away their weapons, thrust their hands high.

Rigby gave a cry of frenzy, breaking from the grasp of Weston. Shoving past Cardona, he sprang for The Shadow.

A gloved hand turned as Rigby's gun came out. In that instant, with Legrec's last followers ready to snatch up their weapons on a chance, The Shadow had a lone course. His gun spoke; its spurt arrowed for Rigby's heart.

A long, crashing plunge brought Rigby to the center of the room, a dead form when he struck the floor.

Turning from the body at his feet, The Shadow moved toward the door. Bowed crooks huddled while The Shadow passed.

Cardona clamped bracelets on a pair of them, covered the last pair with his revolver, while Weston pounced for the telephone to bring detectives from the lobby. As the commissioner called across the wire, he heard the dull clang of the elevator door.

That echo was toned with the throb of a final, solemn laugh. Mirthless, The Shadow had spoken his triumph over the multi-murderer, Gautier Legrec!

THE END