

CHICAGO CRIME

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I. CRIME'S HEAD MAN

THERE were two men in the long-built coupe that parked in front of the Southlake Hotel, Chicago's most fashionable lakeside resort.

One, the driver, was chunky-built and square-faced, with eyes that had a hardness that he was trying to suppress. His lips, too, were the sort that required control, for they had a habit of curling downwards, bringing an overwise expression to his rough face.

The other man was young. His doubled knees showed him to be tall, his broad shoulders marked him as rangy. But his features had much of the dreamer. His clear eyes had a far-away look as they stared toward the waters of Lake Michigan, purple-dyed by the late sunset.

The chunky man clapped a friendly hand upon the dreamer's broad shoulders.

"Wake up, Herb!" The tone was gruff, but not unpleasant. "We're here!"

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Herb Waylon jerked himself from his reverie, gave a startled look at Chet Soville. Sight of the rough face, displaying a well-faked grin, made Herb realize where he was.

"All right, Chet," said Herb, sheepishly. "Let's go in and meet the chap you told me about."

Chunky Chet led his meditative companion into the spacious lobby of the pretentious hotel. At the desk, Chet announced that he wanted to see Mr. J. M. Cruke. Soon, the visitors were riding an elevator to the twelfth floor.

As Chet knocked at the door of an east-wing apartment, he undertoned to Herb:

"This fellow Cruke is regular, like I told you. But don't stare at him like you noticed he was crippled. He's trying all the while to forget it."

They found Cruke seated in an invalid's chair, gazing through an open window across a balcony that fronted toward the lake. He made a huddled figure, wrapped in blankets; for though the day was warm, he seemed to fear the chill of the slight lake breeze.

Cruke turned his head to greet the visitors. His face was pallid, weary; one that bore traces of great pain, as did the smile of welcome that he managed to twist upon his lips.

They shook hands. Cruke's grip was flabby. Leaning back, he stretched his hand toward the window, showing great effort merely in raising his arm.

"I have been watching the traffic on Michigan Boulevard," wheezed Cruke, in a slow tone. "Thousands of persons going to and fro about their business. Hundreds more beyond" – he pointed to bathers disporting in the surf – "whose thoughts are those of pleasure."

He dropped his arm, let his head lean farther back. His eyes seemed to reflect a glimmer from the outside scene.

"All who have health," declared Cruke, solemnly, "should be happy. But some are not. You are one of those unfortunate persons, Mr. Waylon; at least, so Mr. Soville tells me."

"I guess Chet is right," returned Herb, sheepishly. "But after meeting you, Mr. Cruke, I suppose I ought to forget what's bothering me. In a way, it's trivial –"

"Nothing is trivial," interposed Cruke. He shook his head by keeping it levered on the chair back. "The smallest things can destroy happiness, in some instances; whereas, real anguish can often be forgotten."

Herb said nothing. He felt that Cruke was certainly demonstrating the final point that he had made. During that silence, Cruke's eyes kept steadily on Herb. The gaze was kindly; then:

"Your trouble," declared Cruke, "is largely financial."

"That's about it," admitted Herb. "If – well, if –"

Herb hesitated. His pride kept him from saying more. Cruke understood, and picked up the statement.

"If you had a job," wheezed the invalid, "your troubles would be ended."

"Just about," agreed Herb. Then he added hastily: "But I'm not asking you to —"

"Whatever I do," interposed Cruke, "is a matter of my own inclination. Mr. Soville tells me that you drive a car. Very well, having seen you, I can recommend you to a friend of mine, Mr. Arthur Reether, who needs a chauffeur.

"The situation is an excellent one. Mr. Reether is willing to pay a salary of fifty dollars a week, because he feels that a competent chauffeur should be well paid."

HERB'S moroseness vanished. His eyes gleamed happily at the offer. Chet had talked about some sort of a job that Cruke could arrange, but Herb had never expected a windfall like this.

Fifty dollars a week!

After months of unemployment, during which his cash reserve had steadily dwindled, this was like happening upon a fortune.

Herb stammered thanks. They were incoherent, because through his mind was running the thought that Joan Gramley would be pleased. She wanted Herb to have a job, because she felt that he did not amount to much without one.

And Herb, despite his grumbles to the contrary, had felt the same way about it.

Chet ended Herb's stammered thanks with a nudge. He conducted his companion to the door. Once outside, Chet told Herb what to do.

"Wait for me in the car," undertoned Chet. "I'll go back and chin with Cruke. I'll give him some details to put in his letter of recommendation."

"But you haven't known me long, Chet."

"Long enough to suit Cruke. When he likes a guy, he likes him. That's the way with all these wealthy philanthropists."

Chet stepped back into the apartment and closed the door. He listened until Herb's footsteps had dwindled, then gave a short guffaw. Turning toward the window, Chet announced:

"O.K., Long Steve!"

The man in the invalid's chair flung away the blankets. His huddled figure stretched to a long, beanlike form. He smeared away the chalky substance that gave paleness to his face. His lips twisted into an ugly grin that made Chet's seem mild.

"Just another sap," sneered "Long Steve", in reference to Herb, "who has walked out of this joint feeling sorry for poor Mr. Cruke."

"And he's the last guy in the world," added Chet, "who would ever guess that Cruke is really Long Steve Bydle."

"Yeah," declared Long Steve. Then: "What was the trouble with the guy? A dame?"

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"I think so," nodded Chet, "but he hasn't talked about it."

"Where'd you dig him up?"

"Down around The Loop. Staring in a window, like he'd gone into a trance. He was easy to make friends with."

Long Steve gave an abrupt nod, which dismissed the matter of Herb's past. He pulled a little black book from his pocket, and Chet Senville produced a similar memorandum. The two began to check figures.

"Last week's take was only five grand," growled Long Steve. "That much ain't half enough!"

"The boys are cracking up the buggies, same as usual," reminded Chet. "Yesterday, a couple of 'em did a dive into traffic in front of witnesses. That will bring more dough from the insurance companies."

"It still won't make ten grand," snapped Long Steve, "let alone running this racket up into the box-car figures where it ought to be. We've got to use stooges that carry bigger insurance."

"Yeah," agreed Chet. "Guys like Reether, who have put on a front like they were big-business men. Only, Reether is yellow; always trying to stall. He don't like getting hurt."

"He's going to get hurt," growled Long Steve. "That's why I'm giving him a new chauffeur. Don't forget to insure Waylon. He's good for a hundred a week on a double indemnity policy, like Crawler."

"And Reether's good for five hundred a week," chuckled Chet. "Unless" – his expression became doubtful – "unless he squawks later."

LONG STEVE stroked his chin. His gaze was anything but kindly as he stared out toward the boulevard, where dusk was producing firefly glows from the headlights of passing automobiles.

"Five hundred a week," declared Long Steve, slowly. "It's worth it, even if Reether does try to squawk. But there's another way of figuring it, Chet. Fifty grand – without any chance of Reether going yellow."

Chet couldn't see Long Steve's face, for the dusk hid it; but the tone was all that Chet needed. He gave an enthusiastic hiss between his teeth. Long Steve stepped to a writing desk, took out a blank sheet of hotel stationery, folded it in an envelope and sealed it.

"Hand this to Waylon," he told Chet. "Tell him it's the letter of recommendation! Reether's smart, even if he is yellow. He won't let Waylon spot it, so there's no need for me to write anything."

"Besides, it's time you got back with Waylon. We don't want him to get suspicious. I'm leaving it to you to talk with Reether. Salve him plenty. Tell him he won't get hurt at all. Make out we'll be satisfied with small dough."

Standing at the window five minutes later, Long Steve Bydle was puffing a cigarette when he saw Chet's coupe swing into the traffic of Michigan Boulevard. Steve's grunt of ugly pleasure fitted the insidious leer that adorned his lips.

Crime was rampant in Chicago, although the law didn't know it. Traffic accidents had been doubled within the past few months, and the police were still looking for an explanation, that only Long Steve Bydle could have provided.

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For Long Steve Bydle was at present head man of crime in Chicago. His racket included other lieutenants besides Chet Soville, and they, in turn, were aided by numerous small-fry who posed as victims – fake and real – in those very traffic accidents.

So far, the net profits were around a quarter million, but Long Steve had fixed his mind upon acquiring twice that sum. Posing as Cruke, in an invalid's chair, crime's head man had been figuring out new ways of increasing the accident toll.

The sky was dark above Lake Michigan. Amid its blackness, Long Steve could see the tiny lights of a swift plane, coming from the East. Later, perhaps, thought Long Steve, airplane accidents could be arranged. For the present, smashing automobiles was sufficient for his game.

Long Steve Bydle would have changed that opinion, had he known the identity of the pilot who flew that very plane. Had he guessed the truth, crime's head man would have given a half year's profit to see that ship crash.

The plane's lone occupant was The Shadow, master foe of crime. His purpose in coming to Chicago was to ferret out a hidden big-shot; namely, Long Steve Bydle!

CHAPTER II. AT THE CLUB MICHE

EARLY that evening, a guest registered at a centrally located Chicago hotel. He was a tall personage, that stranger, with a hawkish face that was immobile and masklike. The name that he applied to the register was Lamont Cranston, but it was not his actual name.

The supposed Cranston stopped at a newsstand long enough to buy some evening newspapers. He went to his room, with his luggage. Once alone, he glanced through the newspapers and cut out many clippings.

Laying the slips upon a desk, Cranston turned out all the light except a single lamp. It threw a focused glare upon the surface of the desk. There was a rustle of papers from a briefcase. Long hands came into the light.

A strangely iridescent gem gleamed from the third finger of the hand that brushed the clippings aside. That jewel was a rare girasol; an unmatched fire opal that marked the identity of its owner.

The supposed Lamont Cranston was The Shadow.

Upon the desk, he placed a folder that bore an imprinted symbol of a hand. Opening the folder, The Shadow studied the list that came to light.

The list bore three names:

"Thumb" Gaudrey

"Pointer" Trame

"Long Steve" Bydle

There had once been two other names on that list: "Ring" Brescott and "Pinkey" Findlen. The Shadow had disposed of them in reverse order; for each had become a big shot in his own right, like other members of the organization to which they had belonged – The Hand. (Note: See "The Hand" Vol. XXV, No. 6 and "Murder

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for Sale" Vol. XXVI, No. 3.)

Each specialized in his own brand of crime; and Long Steve Bydle, with Chicago as his field of operation, had become the third man that The Shadow sought.

At the time when The Hand had functioned as a complete organization, it had actually been a group of five crime masters, banded for mutual profit. The Hand had been ready to take over crime in New York, and The Shadow, in turn, had prepared to meet the whole five in conflict.

Then had come a wholesale smashing of rackets, through a special prosecutor.

The Five Fingers, conveniently assembled for The Shadow's master stroke, had suddenly cleared New York, considering it a ruined field for operations.

Only The Shadow knew the insidious menace that the five had carried. He, alone, had leads that were enabling him to uncover them one by one.

In the case of Long Steve Bydle, The Shadow was seeking the shrewdest of the lot, when it came to ability at keeping under cover.

Long Steve had always been a skillful organizer, using smart lieutenants and shifting them with uncanny precision. In fact, The Shadow had not at first connected Long Steve with the insurance racket that was riding high in Chicago.

Careful tabulations of accident reports had convinced him that some big-shot was behind the game, although police and insurance companies had not waked up to the fact. But it was actually the seeming lack of a controlling master mind that had caused The Shadow to suspect Long Steve.

Then had come the clincher.

The Shadow had learned that "Kid" Dember was in Chicago.

FROM the folder, The Shadow drew a report sheet that showed a photograph of Kid. He was a youngish-looking man, broad-faced, steely-eyed, who sported a cow-puncher's hat. Kid liked to create the impression that he came from Texas.

Statistics, however, classed Kid as a native of Hoboken, New Jersey. If he had ever been to Texas, it was during those days when he had traveled with carnivals, working the three-card-monte game.

Since then, Kid had become a con man. He had dropped his swindling tactics only when he met Long Steve Bydle. That had happened in New York, when Steve wanted a bodyguard; not a tough gorilla, but a smooth chap who could talk tough when needed.

Kid Dember had those qualifications. Furthermore, he was cool and skillful with a gun. He had gained the job as Long Steve's bodyguard, in New York, and from all appearances it had become a permanent assignment.

No one else recognized that fact, except The Shadow. Whether or not Long Steve was actually using Kid at present, was a question. But there could be only one reason why Kid Dember happened to be staying in Chicago. That was because Long Steve was also in the city.

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Finding Kid Dember would not be difficult. Reports showed that Kid's favorite hangout was a place called the Club Miche. The Shadow closed the folder, laid it aside. The single light clicked off.

LOCATED near The Loop, the Club Miche formed a popular nitery. It was a noisy place at times, but the booths that lined the walls were quiet places, where persons could chat together.

It was in one of those booths that Kid Dember sat, his nimble fingers practicing with pea and walnut shells along the surface of the table. Kid prided himself on his skill at the "shell" game, and was disregarding the drink that stood before him.

His ears, however, were trained to pick up approaching sounds. Hearing a slight footfall, Kid gathered the shells and pea in one sweep, dropping the whole outfit into a pocket of his tuxedo jacket.

A man in evening clothes looked into the booth; then, calmly, the stranger took the seat opposite. Kid saw hawkish features that he seemed to recognize. He gave the newcomer an inquiring gaze.

The stranger laid a hand upon the table. The thumb and first two fingers were extended, the last two doubled under. Kid responded by flattening his own hand in similar position.

It was the countersign of The Hand, used by all who worked for Long Steve Bydle. The missing fingers symbolized the two of the original band who had succumbed to The Shadow's prowess.

"You've heard from Long Steve?"

The stranger's inquiry was in an even undertone, the sort that Kid expected. But it brought a puzzled look to Kid's poker-faced visage.

"That's what I was going to ask you," whispered Kid. "That's the way Long Steve left it. I was to hear from him."

"He sent you a previous message" – questioningly.

The Shadow was parrying, but Kid didn't realize it. He took this stranger for some silk-hat chap working with the racket.

"Sure he did," admitted Kid. "He told me to lay off Korber, so I did. If you're going to see Long Steve –"

Kid hesitated. The Shadow encouraged him in a calm tone that suited the personality of Cranston.

"I expect to see him," he said. "Very shortly."

"Then tell him I laid off," assured Kid. "I found out that Korber was wise, anyway. I can always spot it when a sucker is getting hep."

Behind the impassive features of Cranston, The Shadow's brain was forming swift thoughts. It was plain that Kid Dember was being held in reserve; that Long Steve Bydle didn't need a bodyguard at present.

Which meant that Long Steve was as safe as some crawly creature dwelling beneath a forgotten stone.

Meanwhile, Kid had whiled away the time by starting a confidence game with a man named Korber as the victim. Word had gone back to Long Steve; he had told Kid to lay off. Kid had obeyed instructions, following

his own intuition as much as Long Steve's command.

Of vital importance was the fact that Kid was actually hearing from Long Steve, even though he didn't know where the big-shot was. It left The Shadow no other alternative except to take Kid Dember into camp.

The versatile bodyguard was too shrewd to forget this interview with a stranger who passed the countersign. When an actual messenger showed up, Kid would remember the false one and send word back to Long Steve.

True, The Shadow could wait until that time, then trail the emissary; but word might flash to Long Steve too quickly. The one sensible policy was to keep Kid where he wouldn't blab.

THE SHADOW'S doubled fingers stretched. Kid saw the motion. His eyes caught the sparkle of the girasol. The flash of that rare stone gave him a sudden start. Kid shoved a hand toward his hip. He was too late.

Halted by a whispery laugh, Kid looked straight into the muzzle of an automatic that the pretended Cranston had produced.

With that laugh, Kid caught the glint of burning eyes. He realized instantly who it was that held him trapped. Memory of that hawkish countenance was no longer hazy. Kid's poise was gone, as his lips gulped the name:

"The Shadow!"

"We're leaving here" – it was again the steady tone of Cranston that Kid heard – "to a place where you will be more comfortable; where we can discuss more details concerning Long Steve Bydle."

Cranston's left hand withdrew from the table. Reaching beside him, he flung a blackish garment over his right hand. Kid recognized it as a cloak; in its folded condition it looked like a light overcoat. Poking from the folds was the brim of a slouch hat.

Such garb was the reputed habit of The Shadow.

Gun concealed beneath the cloak, The Shadow arose, and Kid Dember willingly did the same. Side by side, they moved from the booth, The Shadow using the leisurely stroll that suited Cranston. Close to his companion, Kid could feel the nudge of the gun muzzle.

They were well back in the night club, with a long distance to the outer door, but The Shadow made the stroll calmly, keeping his prisoner under complete control. There wasn't a chance for Kid to make a break for it. Already, The Shadow had acquired one helpless informant who might eventually lead him to Long Steve Bydle.

From the side of his mouth, Kid Dember was muttering curses, blaming ill luck for his present plight. That opinion was not justified. The Shadow, alone, was responsible for Kid being in this hopeless position.

But whether The Shadow could lead his victim out of the club without mishap was a matter that only time could decide.

CHAPTER III. FORGOTTEN DEATH

THE Club Miche was well filled, and among its customers were many who had the look of crooks. The Shadow had not discounted their presence. Taking Kid past tables where tuxedoed hoodlums sat was a more

than ticklish proposition.

Success depended entirely upon the way Kid behaved; and with that, The Shadow took no chances. Kid's grumbles ended suddenly, as the gun poked harder. As they neared a table halfway to the door, it was The Shadow who supplied the undertone.

"Say hello to your pals," he told Kid, "and make them think I'm just another sucker. Get it?"

Kid "got" it. He paused long enough to give his cronies a friendly wave. His other hand nudged toward The Shadow, while Kid supplied a wink. Kid's pals took it for granted that Cranston was just another stuffed shirt that Kid had in tow. When it came to trimming wealthy guys, Kid was tops.

At the cashier's desk, Kid had to pay his check, even though he hadn't finished the drink that The Shadow had interrupted. Kid fumbled gingerly in his vest pocket, bringing out enough small change to settle the bill.

He didn't have nerve enough to reach for his wallet. He figured that The Shadow might think he was going after a gun. From what he'd heard of The Shadow, Kid guessed that one false move would mean a quick finish. Kid could picture himself on the receiving end of the first gunshot that interrupted the babble of voices in the Club Miche.

Nervy, nevertheless, Kid was looking for some last chance to get himself out of this fix. Luck supplied it.

The Shadow was looking at the cashier, a man who could surely make trouble, if phony. Patrons were coming through the door; The Shadow saw two women preceding the men who escorted them. That quick glance caused him to expect no trouble from the party of four.

Kid, though, had hopes.

The deft con man let his last two fingers slide into the vest pocket from which he had removed the change. His thumb and first two fingers wiggled the signal of The Hand. Kid's hunch was a good one. The men who came through the revolving door were bruisers who owed loyalty to Long Steve Bydle.

Kid Dember had flashed the emergency signal. With a sudden shove, the pair sent the girls sprawling aside and made a lunge for The Shadow. Before he could offset the unexpected drive, The Shadow was hurled back against the counter. Kid was away, the bodies of his rescuers blocking The Shadow's aim.

An average fighter would have cut loose with his gun, in such a predicament. Not The Shadow. He knew that such a move would be suicidal, once the quick-triggered Kid was loose. There was only one solution: to reach Kid before he drew his revolver.

To manage that, The Shadow flung away his cloak and hat, the wrapped automatic going with them. Before that bundle thudded in a corner past the counter, The Shadow was punching a path between the rowdies who had jolted him.

LIKE a speeding arrow, The Shadow launched for Kid just as the fellow wheeled to meet him. Kid's gun was out, but he couldn't bring it up the last few inches that he needed for a straight aim. By that time, The Shadow's fists had clamped both Kid's revolver and his gun hand.

Twisting, The Shadow wrenched Kid behind his right shoulder. The revolver spat, its flame searing past The Shadow's ear. The bullet pinged the ceiling, and with the echoes, Kid was hoisted in a long, headforemost whirl across The Shadow's shoulder.

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Kid couldn't yank the trigger in the last half second allotted to him. After that, he had no chance to fire, because the gun was no longer his. Clamping the gun tight, The Shadow had literally flung Kid from it. The crook landed weaponless upon a table, overturning it amid a bevy of shrieking women.

Sidestepping to a corner near the door, The Shadow gave a deft toss of the captured gun that brought the trigger to his finger, with the muzzle pointing straight for the two attackers who had aided Kid.

The neat move was timely. Those thugs had guns and were drawing them. Their hands halted when The Shadow covered them. To the left was the revolving door. One quick shift and The Shadow could be through it, safely outside.

But the imperturbable fighter still had thoughts of taking Kid Dember along. Before venturing that risky task, The Shadow took a quick glance at the nearer tables, to learn whether other tough customers were close enough to add trouble.

Kid's long dive had given the impression that the con man had taken the bullet from the gun, particularly as Kid had not yet crawled from beneath the collapsed table. Some waiter, recognizing the pair of gunners that The Shadow had covered, decided to give them aid.

The waiter yanked the switch that controlled the lights of the Club Miche.

Shouts, screams rose from the sudden darkness. In the bedlam, The Shadow drove for the two hoodlums who were blotted from sight, just as their guns tongued in his direction. Again, shots went wide. A moment later, The Shadow was slashing the darkness with Kid's chunky revolver.

Would-be murderers took those strokes on their skulls. Flashlights, glimmering from spots about the night club, showed the tall form of Cranston above the slumping mobsters.

The Shadow had saved shots, and he needed them. He knew who held those flashlights. They were other crooks who sided with Kid Dember. The lights doused as The Shadow ripped shots toward them, shooting high to avoid the patrons of the night club.

Other guns began to talk. Their barrage shattered the glass sections of the revolving door, where crooks thought that their foe had gone. That guess was as wide as their bullets. The Shadow had flung away the revolver, to dive past the counter.

Close to the floor, he swept his cloak over his shoulders, clamped his hat upon his head. An automatic in his fist, he came up to meet the surge of pursuing crooks, who expected to find a bullet-riddled victim on the sidewalk.

There were shouts from the mob. Useless howls, for The Shadow was hewing his way toward a side door that he had previously picked as a possible exit. Hubbub gripped the night club, for other customers had picked out some of the trouble-makers and were battling them.

AS The Shadow reached the side exit, figures blocked him. Grappling with a pair of husky attackers, he dragged them with him to the street. It was dark outside that little exit; by the time they reached a patch of light, the sluggers didn't recognize the fighter that they had gripped.

The reason was that they were already toppling under hard sledges from The Shadow's gun. As they rolled into the light, The Shadow saw that he had met with a pair of waiters who served as bouncers at the club.

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Whistles were shrilling everywhere. Police were arriving to quell the riot at the Club Miche. Once they entered the front of the place, mobsters would break for the side exit. That was why The Shadow waited in darkness, opposite.

Intuitively, The Shadow expected one man to come out ahead of the others. That fugitive would be Kid Dember. He, more than any other brawler, had reasons to get away from the Club Miche.

A minute passed. A wary head poked into sight. It was Kid Dember, crawling from the side door toward the stirring figures of the flattened waiters. Kid saw a revolver lying on the sidewalk. He snatched it and retired.

He was lurking there, close to the exit, on lookout for The Shadow. But he expected to see the figure of Cranston, not a shape of blackness. Easing across the narrow street, The Shadow was skirting in to trap his quarry.

Then, with a swerve, came the lights of a stopping police car. They flung a blinding path down the street, silhouetting The Shadow in the center. Against the glare, The Shadow had no chance to spot Kid Dember. Instead, he made a target for the tricky con man's aim.

Diving across the street, The Shadow hit blackness as Kid's gun barked. He made that dart before Kid could fire. Flattening, The Shadow wriggled along the curb toward a blank wall, while bullets whistled only a foot above him.

Kid was smart. He was firing low, but not quite low enough. He figured that The Shadow had gone past the curb. More than that, he was coming forward as he fired, hoping to cut down the range.

Stretched at full length, The Shadow aimed, taking as his target the orange bursts from his opponent's gun. Kid was almost to the fringe of the police car's lights. He couldn't come farther safely; he would have to waste a precious second, if he tried to retreat.

This was The Shadow's chance to nick the man he needed. Later, he could lug Kid away, a prisoner. Steadily, The Shadow's finger tightened on the trigger. One shot more from Kid's gun, The Shadow would be ready. That was when Kid made a final mistake.

In his eagerness, the smart con man shoved into the glow of the police car's headlights. Like The Shadow had been previously, Kid was bathed in light. This time, watchful officers were ready. The gun that gleamed in Kid's fist was his official death warrant.

A salvo burst from the police car. Kid's tuxedoed figure became a bullet-lashed shape writhing on the asphalt. His contortions carried him nearly across the street. He was only half a dozen feet from The Shadow when the police reached him.

One look told the cops that they had settled this trouble-maker. Other brawlers were coming from the side door. The officers charged them, driving the hoodlums back into the night club, where other police had already made a strong drive through the front.

FOR a short interval, there was a complete lull in the street. During those moments, The Shadow crept forward to where Kid Dember lay. Kid's eyes were glassy, but his ears could hear the stir beside him.

"It was The Shadow!" Kid hoarsed the words in a final whisper, as he propped upon one elbow. "Tell Long Steve – that The Shadow – is out to get him –"

A cough finished Kid's sentence. Lips flecked with blood, he flattened backward to the street, dead. Those same lips showed a satisfied smile, despite their pain. Kid Dember had told his story.

It hadn't occurred to Kid's dying brain that the only listener had been The Shadow.

So far as Long Steve Bydle was concerned, Kid's death would be forgotten. The big-shot would still lack news that The Shadow was in Chicago. That was one reason why a whispered laugh came from the hidden lips of a black-clad figure that glided swiftly from the vicinity of the Club Miche.

There was grimness, nevertheless, to The Shadow's mirth. Through the death of Kid Dember, The Shadow had lost his one trail to Long Steve Bydle. He would have to begin anew before he could gain another first-class lead.

The Shadow could foresee new crime, of the sort that Long Steve manufactured, while that coming trail was still a future prospect.

CHAPTER IV. DEATH BY ACCIDENT

HERB WAYLON liked his new job. One day of it had convinced him that he would get along with Arthur Reether. Not that Reether was friendly and sympathetic, like Cruke; quite the reverse.

Reether was drab, and nonexpressive to such a degree that he seemed to consider his new chauffeur as part of the car. Since Reether's imported limousine was five years old and was expected to last forever, Herb decided that his own job was good as long as he wanted it.

In fact, Herb had been told that Reether's last chauffeur had left only because of ill health. Since then, Reether had been using taxicabs instead of the big car. But with a driver as good as Herb, recommended by Reether's friend Cruke, the limousine had been promptly brought from storage and put back into service.

The real truth never occurred to Herb Waylon.

Actually, Reether had never had a previous chauffeur; nor had he owned the limousine for five years. The car had been bought for a song, only a few months before, and had been kept waiting for the present opportunity.

Meanwhile, Reether had been living in a pretentious North Side apartment, which he had acquired at bargain rates because of an unexpired lease.

Reether's business likewise was a fake. He had a small office high in one of Chicago's skyscrapers, where he posed as a commission merchant. Faked books created the impression that Reether handled huge transactions, with attendant profits.

Visited by eager insurance agents, Reether had taken out an accident policy that offered compensation of two hundred and fifty dollars a week in case of injury, with twenty-five thousand dollars as a claim for accidental death.

Those sums doubled for certain types of accidents, one of which covered injuries sustained while riding in a motor vehicle.

Reether believed firmly in accident insurance. That was why he had a policy drawn up for his new chauffeur, the first day that Herb Waylon came on the job. Herb's policy was for fifty dollars a week, with a double

indemnity clause.

It was dusk when Herb parked the limousine outside Reether's office building. A traffic cop warned him that he could stay there for only fifteen minutes. That limit was sufficient. From the lobby of the building, Herb phoned Reether's office, told him that the car was ready.

While he waited, Herb put in a call to Joan Gramley, to announce proudly that he had acquired a job.

Joan's voice was sweet across the wire.

"Of course I don't mind what the job is!" she told him. "All that I ever asked, Herb, was that you would try to make something of yourself. It doesn't matter how you begin."

"I hope your father feels that way about it," returned Herb. "As a rule, bankers don't like to have their daughters fall in love with chauffeurs."

"Don't worry about dad!" laughed Joan. "I'll handle him. Drop around any time you want, Herb. It's time that you met my father."

Herb was smiling when he strolled out to the sidewalk. Dropping around to see Joan would be easy, as there were many hours when Reether didn't need the big car. Moreover, Reether had passed over the matter of a uniform as unimportant, so the Gramley servants would not identify Herb as a chauffeur when he called at Joan's home.

As Herb started to open the door of the limousine, someone thwacked him on the shoulder. He turned to meet the smiling face of Chet Soville.

"Spotted you as I was going by," chuckled Chet. "Where's Reether? Coming out?"

Herb nodded.

"I'll stick around and say hello," decided Chet. "Maybe I'll get a good report on you to take back to Cruke."

Reether arrived. The drab man was nervous. The reason seemed to be that he had a companion with him, a wiry man whose looks didn't please Herb. The fellow had a scrawny face, with little darting eyes.

Reether didn't bother to introduce the fellow to Chet. However, he invited Chet to ride in the limousine. Chet accepted; he and Reether stepped in and the scrawny-faced man joined them.

Watching the fellow in the mirror, Herb wondered how he happened to be with Reether. He decided that the man must be some business acquaintance that Reether could not afford to ignore.

Low conversation was buzzing in the rear seat.

"Leave it to me," Chet was telling Reether. "You won't get hurt bad. Maybe not at all."

"But there's bound to be a crash!" protested Reether, in a whisper. "Any smashup may be bad!"

"I've got to lam after the wreck," reminded Chet. "So I'll see that it won't be too tough. What you've got to remember, Reether, is to fake it that you're hurt worse than you are."

"That may be difficult."

"Not if you watch Crawler." Chet nudged toward the scrawny-faced man, who supplied a wise grin. "Do what he does. That's all!"

SNATCHES of that conversation reached Herb's ears, for he had not been ordered to close the glass partition between the back seat and the front. But Herb did not hear enough to guess what the talk was all about.

Driving carefully, Herb was watching every traffic light. So was Chet, from the right of the rear seat. Like a vulture waiting for its prey, Chet was hoping for one slight shred of daring on the part of the new chauffeur.

It came at last.

A traffic light was changing, just as Herb started to nose across a wide street. The sensible thing was to step on the accelerator and get across. Herb did so; he had plenty of time to clear the traffic that was moving in from the right.

That was when Chet acted.

With a wild yell to "Look out!" Chet dived over the front seat and yanked the wheel from Herb's hands. Startled, Herb pulled his foot from the accelerator. The limousine slackened speed as Chet's tug jerked it squarely into the path of other cars.

Two cabs had started with the light. They couldn't stop in time. Together; they cracked the limousine, their combined momentum bowling it to the far curb. The big car teetered there. Shouldered by Chet's weight, Herb thwacked the window on the left. He was slumped, groggy, behind the wheel by the time the limousine had gained its upright balance.

"Crawler" had doubled like a rubber ball. Unhurt, he was stretching, writhing his limbs as if in agony. Beside him was Reether, jarred but not badly hurt. The drab man blinked at Chet, who pointed to Crawler, as if showing what Reether was supposed to do.

As Reether's eyes went toward the floor, Chet's hand whipped from his hip pocket. Hooking Reether's hair with his left fist, Chet swung a blackjack with his right. The blow, was a short one, completely hidden in the confines of the car, but it was the accurate stroke of an expert.

The blackjack thudded a vulnerable spot at the base of Reether's skull. When Chet released his hair-hold, Reether's head flopped sideways. Chet voiced a quick whisper to Crawler.

"That sock does it!" gloated Chet. "Yank that door open, Crawler!"

Chet was looking through the window on the left, as he spoke. They were on the sidewalk close to a building wall, and pedestrians had scattered. Crawler's hand came up to pull the door handle.

With a bound, Chet cleared both figures. As he reached the sidewalk, he crouched, watching Crawler let himself slip down to the car step from the open door. Herb was out of sight behind the wheel. He was the only person in the car who mattered, from Chet's viewpoint.

All that Chet needed to know was whether or not his escape from the car had been spotted. If it had, his only course would be to admit that he was a passenger in the wrecked limousine.

Apparently, no one had spotted Chet's departure. All persons who were hurrying toward the limousine were coming from the street.

By the time a traffic cop was directing the removal of the chauffeur and two passengers, Chet was part of a gawking throng of pedestrians who had gathered in from doorways and other spots of refuge.

Chet watched the loading of the victims into taxicabs. Paced by a motorcycle cop, the caravan whizzed away toward the nearest hospital. When the screech of siren and honk of horns had died, Chet strolled toward an elevated station.

It had worked out great, in Chet's estimation. Reether was dead, and his finish would be attributed to a chance whack against a door handle. Herb was a genuine victim, too groggy to have witnessed the blackjack blow that ended Reether.

Crawler, the best accident faker in all Chicago, would pose as a badly hurt victim, and would also serve as the best of witnesses, when he gave his version of the accident. There wasn't a flaw in the situation, as Chet saw it.

THE murderer might have changed that opinion, had he been bold enough to remain upon the scene.

Traffic had resumed, despite the curious throng. Most persons who passed in vehicles simply glanced at the wrecked limousine. There was one cab, however, that carried a most interested passenger. Sighting the wreckage, he told the cabby to stop.

The passenger who stepped from the cab was hawk-faced, bearing a haunting resemblance to Lamont Cranston, although the contours of his features had a different mold.

Chet nor anyone else – not even the dead Kid Dember – would have recognized this chance arrival as The Shadow.

Joining the onlookers, The Shadow studied the smashed limousine. He heard witnesses remark that one victim had been killed, that the man's head must have cracked the door open. Somehow, that didn't seem to tally with another statement; namely, that an injured victim had rolled out to the step.

Nor did the door itself bear proper testimony. Momentum would have had a part in ripping it open, even if a passenger did bounce against it. The door, however, showed no signs of having been ripped wide. To The Shadow, it told an accurate story: that someone in the car had deliberately pulled the handle.

Noting the license number of the limousine, The Shadow returned to the cab, told the driver to take him on to his destination. But as the taxi pulled away, its driver imagined that he heard an oddly whispered laugh from the rear seat.

That mirth was actual. The Shadow had gotten the lead he wanted. From this fresh accident, with victims still available, The Shadow would start his trail to Long Steve Bydle.

CHAPTER V. HERB'S VISITORS

WHEN Herb Waylon awakened, he thought it was morning, until he noted a gradual dimming of the light outside his window. Then came hazy recollections of nightmarish events that had almost slipped from his mind.

CHICAGO CRIME

Herb remembered that he had been in a hospital; that he must have spent the entire night there. Then he recalled snatches of daylight, accompanied by a joggy ride in a vehicle that must have been a private ambulance.

The room where he was at present was not in a hospital. It looked more like a hotel room. As Herb raised his head from the bed pillows, he caught a view of Lake Michigan through the window.

He was in a room of the Southlake Hotel.

Herb's left arm lay, bandaged, across the front of his pajama jacket. Looking toward the bottom of the bed, he saw a bulge that indicated his right leg to be in what seemed a plaster cast. His chest was tightly bandaged, bringing pressure against his ribs.

Sensing no pain, Herb attributed his comfortable condition to some opiate that had been given him. He certainly felt dopey.

The door opened. Herb turned to see Chet Soville enter. The chunky man looked anxious; but he smiled as he approached the bed. Clasp ing Herb's hand, Chet spoke in sympathetic tone.

"Lay quiet, old man," he said. "Just thought I'd drop in to chat with you. There's a police inspector due here pretty soon."

"About the accident?" queried Herb.

"Yeah," returned Chet. "Reether was killed. But it wasn't your fault, Herb." Chet was adding that news glibly. "It was his own. He tried to jump out.

"Anyway, the other drivers were to blame. So just stick to your story: You were driving across the street when they hit you. Forget that I was in the car."

Herb nodded, but his grimace showed that he would find it difficult to forget that Chet had been there. Though he couldn't be too sure of his memory, Herb could picture the grab that Chet had made to yank the wheel.

Still, Chet was his friend; at least, so Herb believed. It was better to rely on Chet's judgment for the present.

That was why Herb told a simple, slow-worded story when the police inspector arrived. He stated that he had been on his way across the street when the light changed; that cars had suddenly borne down upon him.

Quillon – the inspector – seemed quite satisfied with the account. As soon as he had gone, Chet thwacked Herb on the unbandaged shoulder.

"Good enough, so far!" approved Chet. "When the doctors arrive, don't say anything."

Two physicians soon appeared. One was an elderly, pinch-faced man with an air of self-importance. Herb heard Chet address him as "Doctor Ruttler", but didn't catch the name of the younger physician.

Ruttler managed matters briskly. He had his companion check the extent of Herb's injuries, while Ruttler, himself, conducted the examination. Ruttler also undertoned data that he read from a paper, which appeared to be a hospital report.

CHICAGO CRIME

The little that Herb heard made his spirits sink. There was mention of a compound fracture of the right ankle, a dislocated left shoulder, and two broken ribs. Those were sufficient to give Herb aches that he hadn't felt before.

The younger physician went out; Ruttler paused in the hall. Herb could see him whispering with Chet, and for the first time, a smile appeared upon Ruttler's dryish face. It was a toothy grin, one that Herb didn't like.

Then Ruttler was gone. Lying with eyes half closed, Herb saw Chet sneak a look back into the room. Thinking that Herb had gone into a drowse, Chet went his way.

A FEW minutes later, Herb was propping himself in bed, cautiously trying his left arm. Oddly, he felt no great pain from his shoulder, although he had imagined some, a short while before. His ankle didn't hurt, when he worked it inside the bulky bandages. As for his ribs, the tight strap accounted for their discomfort.

Left foot first, Herb gingerly reached the floor. He limped about the room and soon walked steadily. He was dizzy from the dope; nothing else was wrong with him. The doctors were crazy.

Or were they crazy?

That wise grin of Ruttler's began to have some meaning to Herb Waylon.

Near the door of the room, Herb decided he had better get back to bed. He paused, to steady himself by gripping the doorway. He was doped, all right, for the room was whirling around a bit.

Moreover, his eyes were acting funny.

Out in the hallway, which was dim with dusk, he could see a big black splotch that seemed to drift as he watched it. The thing had a human shape, at first; then it blended with the gloom of a doorway on the opposite side of the corridor.

Herb blinked, as if he had seen a ghost. He shook himself from his momentary trance and stumbled back to bed.

There were footsteps in the corridor. They were cautious, hesitant, seemingly a long way off. Light footsteps, that soon reached Herb's door and paused there. Though he kept his eyes closed, Herb sensed that someone was stealing close to the bedside.

Wearily, Herb opened his eyes. A happy gasp came from his lips.

This was no hallucination, the face that he saw above him! It was a beautiful face, rounded in its mold, with eyes that brimmed tears, lovely lips that quivered beneath a shapely nose. That face was angelic, against the background of dark hair that melted into the twilight of the room. As tender fingers grasped his hand, Herb spoke the name:

"Joan!"

"You're badly hurt, Herb" – Joan's voice was low, troubled – "and you didn't let me know!"

"I couldn't, Joan," returned Herb. "I only woke up a little while ago. But I'm all right."

CHICAGO CRIME

The tight grip of his hand testified to the truth of his words. Again, Herb propped himself on his elbow, placing his hand to Joan's chin. The girl's lips met Herb's in a long kiss.

Happiness loosed the tears that were in Joan's eyes. With grateful sobs, she told of the anxiety that she had suffered all that day, during her lone search for Herb.

"I read about the accident," Joan explained. "I went to the hospital, but they said that you had just been removed from there. I followed a private ambulance that came to this hotel, but you were carried in through an entrance on the next street.

"They declared that you were not here; that someone else had been brought in the ambulance. Somehow, there seemed to be a plot to keep me from finding you. I called up several times, with always the same answer.

"Finally, I came here again, through that other entrance. I found a service elevator, and the man who ran it was friendly – different from the clerks and the others who had talked to me. He told me to try this floor."

Herb was clasping Joan's hand between his own, a proof that his left arm was not badly crippled. He told her that a friend had brought him here – Herb was thinking of Cruke, not of Chet – and probably the clerk had made a mistake in the name.

"They'll look after me," promised Herb. "I'll be up and around by tomorrow, Joan. I'm sure of it! You will be, too, when I come to see you. But right now, you'd better go out, the same way you came in."

Joan nodded. She pressed her hand to Herb's forehead, noting that he had no fever. The gentle touch eased Herb's head back to the pillow. Joan's parting whisper was as soft as the stroke of her fingers.

In the minutes that followed, Herb could fancy that she was still in the room. He clung to that illusion, even after he opened his eyes again, for the room had become quite dark. It took a sharp sound and a sudden rattle to rouse Herb from his pleasant recollection.

Someone pressed the light switch. In the glow that came from ceiling sockets, Herb saw Chet Soville stepping in from the doorway.

CHUNKY Chet pulled a table up beside the bed, placed a rectangle of paper on it. Giving Herb a pen, he told him to sign just below the perforated edge.

"What is it?" demanded Herb, suspiciously. "A check?"

"Yeah," returned Chet, wisely. "From the insurance company. Put your signature on it."

"If I see the check –"

"You'll see it. Only, sign first."

Herb signed with the fountain pen that Chet provided. Lifting the check, Chet held the face toward him, manipulating his fingers for a moment. Slowly, he turned the check in Herb's direction. It was from the insurance company, as Chet said, but the chunky man was holding his thumbs across the lines that told the check's amount.

"A hundred and fifty bucks," remarked Chet, wriggling his right thumb slightly. "Take a peek for yourself."

Herb took a peek, a bigger one than Chet supposed. He saw the figures mentioned, but there was another zero after the one hundred and fifty.

The check was actually for fifteen hundred dollars!

"That will take care of your expenses," remarked Chet, casually pocketing the check. "I'll cash the check for you and slip you the dough. Those big insurance companies always pay up prompt when they know your claim is all right. Doc Ruttler saw that it went through right away."

Herb gave a mechanical nod. He hadn't forgotten that undertoned conversation between Chet and Ruttler. It was certain enough that Doc Ruttler had put the check through; and that meant one thing only.

The insurance company's examiner was working with the racket, the same as Chet Soville!

For there wasn't a doubt in Herb's mind that he had become the dupe of a swindling organization; out to trim insurance companies for all that they could get.

All that restrained Herb was the thought of his benefactor, Cruke. Until he knew how Cruke stood, Herb didn't care to blow the works. That was why he again pretended sleepiness. Seeing Herb relax, Chet made an exit, chuckling softly as he went.

During drifting minutes, Herb thought things over. Had Chet gone to see Cruke? If he had, did that mean that Cruke was in it? The more that Herb pondered, the more he decided that the sooner he exposed the game, the better.

If Cruke wasn't in it, he could easily prove his innocence, and would certainly approve Herb's honesty.

A name spoke itself in Herb's mind. That name was Quillon – the police inspector who had called earlier in the afternoon. He was the chap to talk with. Probably Quillon was back at headquarters by this time.

Herb reached for the telephone, started to lift the hand-set from the cradle. An instant later, he swung, startled, as a blackish shape blotted the lights above the bed.

Hawkish features and burning eyes beneath a slouch hat – those were Herb's impression of the attacker who swept upon him like a living avalanche. A gloved fist sped from a black-cloaked form; like a trip hammer, it stopped the hard swing that Herb made with the telephone.

A moment later, Herb was yanked half from the bed. He found his whole form doubled, his bandaged arm twisted behind him gripped in an arm-lock. Under Herb's other arm came a hand that clamped over the young man's mouth.

One hand free, the cloaked arrival had gained the telephone. Replacing the telephone on its table, he relaxed his grip on Herb.

Sinking back weakly, Herb stared at the eyes above him. From hidden lips he heard a whispered laugh, one that might have carried a variety of meanings, according to the mental state of listeners who heard the mirth.

Herb Waylon's state was one of sheer amazement at this, his first meeting with that incredible being – The Shadow!

CHAPTER VI. MURDERERS THREE

PROBING eyes read Herb's very thoughts, as the young man replied steadily to questions from The Shadow's lips. Somehow, Herb didn't realize that he was answering questions. This weird intruder started sentences, then let him finish them.

It was almost hypnotic that method. Each urging of The Shadow's tone forced a spontaneous reply. Lies would have meant hesitation on Herb's part, had he given them.

But Herb spoke the entire truth under that encouragement. Detail by detail, he related how he had come under the influence of the criminal ring commanded by Long Steve Bydle.

Without realizing it Herb revealed the big-shot's actual headquarters. Though Herb still had hopes of Cruke's integrity, The Shadow soon identified the pretended cripple as Long Steve.

For the moment, The Shadow was most concerned with Herb's status.

In preventing Herb from using the telephone, The Shadow had stopped a suicidal move. From Joan's experience, which Herb had detailed, it was plain that Long Steve, alias Cruke, controlled a considerable proportion of the hotel's personnel.

Herb's call would never have reached headquarters. Instead, he would have had a visit from Chet Soville, at the head of a mobster crew.

Thanks to The Shadow, Herb was still safe. Moreover, he had unwittingly been initiated into the fake claim racket. He was the sort who could prove of further value to the crooks. Doubtless, they would sound him out along that score.

That would give Herb his chance to join up; and from his study of the young man, The Shadow saw great possibilities. Herb was straightforward. His love for Joan made him anxious to do something worthwhile. He was the very man to aid The Shadow from the inside.

"Cruke is crooked," The Shadow told Herb. "He is actually Long Steve Bydle, a big-time racketeer, While a single stroke might finish his operations, hundreds of his followers would escape justice.

"It is preferable to wait. We must injure his game, driving him to desperate measure. Meanwhile, the law will be informed of certain facts. When the time arrives, Long Steve will be helpless."

Eagerness flashed from Herb's eyes. His dopiness had ended.

"I can help?" he queried.

"You can," replied The Shadow. "Accept whatever proposition is offered. Tell no one of the part you intend to play. Follow instructions that come directly from myself. You will recognize them by this!"

As he spoke, The Shadow used a fountain pen to ink words on a sheet of paper. He handed the message to Herb. Its words were a repetition of those that The Shadow had uttered.

But as Herb watched, the writing obliterated itself letter by letter, leaving him staring at a blank sheet!

CHICAGO CRIME

Herb understood. Written with a disappearing ink, those messages were unique, easy to identify; and they would leave no trace, once exposed to air. He turned to nod his agreement to The Shadow, but the mysterious visitor was gone.

As final token, Herb heard the whispered echoes of a low, weird laugh that seemed to trail back from the corridor. Such was The Shadow's final reminder that Herb was in his service.

THREE floors above, a prowling bellboy was keeping patrol outside Long Steve Bydle's lake-front suite. The fellow's natty uniform was a thin disguise. He was a thug of the first water, and the bulge on his hip showed that he carried a gun in readiness for unwanted visitors.

Perhaps it was overconfidence that caused the fake bellhop to miss sight of the dark streak that slid along the corridor. Possibly no eyes could have spotted that long patch of blackness. Certainly, the figure that caused the moving silhouette had an amazing ability to keep under cover.

Gliding from doorway to doorway, The Shadow seemed part of the dim corridor wall until he reached the door he wanted. There, he blotted into blackness.

That door offered access to Long Steve's apartment. When the patrolling thug reached it, he stopped, tugged out his gun and poked it into the door space. The probe brought nothingness. In a quarter minute, The Shadow had silently unlocked the door with a pass-key and stepped inside.

The noiseless closing of the door had escaped attention from those within. Gliding to an inner corner of the little entry, The Shadow saw Long Steve in conference with Chet Soville. With them was a third man, whose pockmarked face brought instant recollection to The Shadow.

This extra man was a New York crook named Barney Heslip. He was a trigger-man who had found the Manhattan atmosphere unhealthy and had headed for parts unknown.

Murderers three – such were Long Steve Bydle and the pair of lieutenants with him.

Long Steve had discarded the fake role of Cruke. He was talking business, with a raspy briskness. The Shadow had arrived just in time to hear the big-shot's summary of an important matter.

"WAYLON'S ripe," declared Long Steve. "So go ahead, Chet. Talk to him. Lay it smooth, like he had a choice. If he grabs the proposition, use him. If he won't listen –"

Long Steve finished the sentence with an ugly grin that brought a knowing grunt from Chet Soville. The chunky killer knew what to do with Herb if he didn't listen.

Thumbing his little black book, Long Steve calculated the latest receipts.

"Fifteen hundred bucks on Waylon," he remarked. "One grand besides, for Crawler. Keep those little ones coming in fast, Chet. They total up big. But what I'd like to stage is another haul like the one we just made on Reether.

"Fifty grand at one clip! And no squawks coming! There's no disputing a death claim. That's something that Doc Ruttler doesn't even have to cover up. What about it, Chet?"

Chet shook his head. Before he could answer, Long Steve interrupted him.

"I get it," growled the big-shot. "You've had to alibi it with other guys that are insured heavy, like Reether was. They listened when you said it was an accident. But things like that don't happen twice."

Long Steve discarded his plans for further murder, with a muttered grumble. Then, suddenly, he turned to Barney Heslip to demand:

"Say – what've you found out about Kid Dember?"

"Not much," returned Barney. "He got in a row with some stuffed shirt, probably a guy he'd flimflammed. There was a brawl. The dude got away, but the cops croaked Kid."

"The stuffed shirt wasn't a guy named Korber, was he?"

"Naw," replied Barney. "They know Korber down at the Club Miche. This was some other guy."

"Kid was working on Korber," recalled Long Steve. "Maybe Korber carries heavy insurance. Look into it, Chet. I got an idea, and we can use Waylon with it."

The big-shot nudged toward the door, suggesting that Chet go down and talk with Herb Waylon. The lieutenant shouldered out through the entry, passing within an arm's reach of The Shadow.

It was lucky for Chet that he didn't see that tall shape of blackness in the corner. A .45 was in readiness under The Shadow's cloak, in case Chet had.

When the door had slammed shut, Long Steve turned to Barney. The raspy voice became a rolling undertone that only the trained ears of The Shadow could have heard from that distance.

"You're lamming, Barney," announced Bydle. "You're taking that lake freighter out of Milwaukee. Don't bother to send back word after you get to Canada."

Barney's pocked face showed dull surprise.

"It's on account of Maisie Troy," explained Long Steve. "She was listed as Reether's niece. The fifty grand went to her."

"She's got it already?" queried Barney.

Steve's response was a snort.

"She signed it over," informed the big-shot. "All she's got is my check – a Cruke check – for five grand. She thinks she's going to cash it in Kenosha. But she won't! You're driving her there, on your trip to Milwaukee."

MURDEROUS enlightenment spread across Barney's wide face. The Shadow caught snatches of muttered details that followed, enough for him to formulate a plan. He let the last words pass, because Long Steve and Barney were moving toward the door and it was imperative, more than ever, to keep away from sight.

The ringing of the phone bell halted the strolling murderers. Long Steve hopped to the telephone, with Barney watching him. The call was from Chet, and the news pleased the big-shot.

"You signed Waylon up, huh?" queried Long Steve. "Good enough... Yeah. We'll use him... Sure! On the Korber proposition. Don't tell Waylon, though... Yeah. Let him wait until we've framed the job the way we

want it..."

The entry door was closing. It marked the well-timed departure of The Shadow, unnoticed by either Long Steve or Barney. Getting out of that apartment wasn't as sure a task as entering it. The Shadow learned that, when he reached the corridor.

In the hallway, the pacing thug had turned about. He was squinting at the doorway, wondering if he imagined things. There was too much blackness to suit the fake bellhop. It went away when he blinked, but still it puzzled him.

The guard fancied that he saw something creep along the floor. He yanked his gun from his hip, to trail that creeping streak that seemed constantly uncertain as it faded along the corridor, sliding just too fast for its follower to make sure that it was real.

One chance upward look from the uniformed thug and The Shadow's game would have been finished, for there were moments when his cloaked shape blotted the corridor lights. It was a long chance, but it worked.

The moment when the guard did look up, The Shadow was twisting past the corner of a broad stairway near the elevators. Spying the stairs, the guard sprang forward. He made the turn, saw blackness loom from the steps below. The guard lunged downward.

The blackness flattened clear across the broad steps. That fall was speedier than the guard's mad lunge. The thug took a dive into gloom that was empty. His headlong tumble ended on a landing, a dozen steps below.

Coming from Steve's apartment, Barney Heslip heard the crash. By the time the trigger-man arrived, The Shadow had passed the half-stunned guard and was gone, below the landing. Barney hopped down the steps. Hoisting the fake bellboy, he shook him back to life.

The fellow muttered that he had been seeing things, and Barney agreed with him, but on that point alone.

"Lucky you didn't cut loose with your gat," the trigger-man. "You know the orders around here. No shooting if you can help it. Snap out of it and get on into the apartment. Mr Cruke wants you to wheel him over by the window."

Barney helped the guard up the steps, starting him on his way to Bydle's apartment. While waiting for an elevator, Barney could hear the fellow still muttering. It stopped, however, before the guard entered the apartment.

"That bellhop must be a dope," Barney told the tough-faced elevator operator, as they rode down. "He was sneaking up on nobody, and he fell down the stairs trying to grab a guy that wasn't there!"

Choosing a side exit from the lobby, Barney still was scoffing at the guard's stupidity. Anybody could see things in the darkness, if they looked long enough. But Barney wasn't that dumb. He proved it by giving no more than a passing glance toward the foot of the stairway, which ended near the side exit.

Barney wasn't entirely wrong. He would have seen something if he had stopped to scrutinize those stairs more closely. But Barney was in a hurry. He had no time to waste. Hence the cloaked shape that emerged from that very gloom was seen by no one.

For Barney Heslip was the only person who might have learned that The Shadow was on his trail!

CHAPTER VII. DEATH REVERSED

WITH Barney Heslip, murder was a pastime, provided the details were well arranged. The easier the victim, the better, in his opinion. What Barney liked was his ability to lull persons into false security; to make them believe that he was a real friend.

It was funny to see the way their faces looked when they found out different. They reminded Barney of things he had seen in movie comedies, particularly the animated cartoons.

Taking a dame for a one-way trip was a new treat for Barney, and he got a big kick from it. Particularly, because he knew Maisie Troy and had always figured her as a smart moll. On that account, Barney had treated Maisie politely, whenever he had met her.

So if there was one guy Maisie would talk to, it was Barney, and that made it all the funnier.

They were riding northward through Evanston, in their battered coupe, when Maisie decided to be confidential. She wasn't a bad looker, Maisie wasn't, with her big blue eyes and blond hair, as Barney noted in the mirror above the windshield. She had class, too, when she talked.

"You're a good scout, Barney," declared Maisie. "Too good to stay in the racket. You ought to be getting out of it, the way I am."

"I dunno," gruffed Barney. "Maybe you're taking the toughest way out."

"With Cruke's check for five grand?" queried Maisie. "What's tough about that?"

"You're riding to Kenosha, ain't you?" countered Barney, "in an old bus that's ready to fall apart. That's tough, huh?"

Maisie laughed, which proved that she had missed a point that Barney regarded as subtle. Apparently, she thought that Barney had a phony reputation as a trigger-man. That was another point of pride with Barney. He knew how to cover up his jobs.

"Reether was in the racket," declared Maisie, suddenly. "His death was accidental. If it hadn't been, I wouldn't have taken the money."

"Just a softy, ain't you?" put in Barney. His gruff tone had a thickness, as he added: "You and me both, kid. I don't like the wrong kind of dough, neither."

There was something sympathetic in Maisie's big-eyed gaze, as a passing light showed her face more distinctly. Barney chewed down a grin; the result was that his face showed a somewhat sad expression.

From that moment on, Maisie didn't hold the slightest suspicion regarding Barney, although he kept watching the mirror frequently to check on a trailing car. If the girl hadn't fallen for Barney's bluff, she might have realized that the car behind them carried a cover-up crew that was seeing the killer along his route.

At times, that car fell behind, only to pick up the distance again within the next mile. Good stuff, thought Barney. It showed that the crew knew their job. There was a factor, though, that neither the killer nor the cover-up crew considered.

CHICAGO CRIME

A FEW miles north of Highland Park, the trailing sedan let Barney's coupe curve from sight. At that timely moment, there was a sharp purr from a powerful roadster in back of the sedan. The driver of the roadster whipped toward the car ahead; leaning far to his right, he poked a gun muzzle from the side of the open car.

There was a report from a big automatic, aimed toward the highway. The burst of that .45 produced quick alarm in the sedan. Three mobsters yanked guns of their own, ready to open fire on the roadster when it passed them.

A moment later, the sedan was jouncing heavily on the concrete. The driver growled to his pals:

"Put them heaters away! Don't you mugs know a blowout when you hear it?"

Revolvers went from sight as the roadster sped by. None of the crew noticed its black-cloaked driver, crouched low behind the wheel. A few minutes later, the mobbies were changing a rear tire, with one of them still arguing that the burst had sounded like a gunshot.

Oddly, all disputants were right. They had heard both a gunshot and a blowout; but the two sounds had been simultaneous. It happened that The Shadow's bullet was rattling around inside the inner tube of the flat tire, where no one noticed it.

Up ahead, Barney was still watching headlights that tagged close behind him; but the identity of the trailing car had changed. There was not enough variance in the lights for Barney to recognize the shift. The Shadow's tactics were precisely those of the sedan's driver; that satisfied Barney.

He had reached the spot suggested by Long Steve. Barney veered suddenly from the main highway, taking a rougher road that cut along the lake shore.

The jounces of the rattletrap coupe awakened Maisie from a light drowse. She asked where they were.

"On a detour coming into Waukegan," informed Barney. "We'll be getting back to the highway pretty quick."

Sight of lights behind him satisfied Barney. They offered him a plan that had been brewing in his mind. Steve had said to junk the old car after he reached Milwaukee. Barney had an idea that he could do that before he reached the Wisconsin line, since there was another car to take him away.

Brakes screeched as the coupe pulled up on an embankment. The lights showed a sharp slope ahead, leading to a rickety, long-abandoned pier. Barney watched the mirror. He saw the headlights of the other car go off.

"Guess we're headed the wrong way," grumbled Barney. "We gotta back up, Maisie. Take a gander out your window to see if there's a ditch."

As Maisie turned, Barney slid the gear shift into high. He kept one foot on the clutch pedal; the other pressed the brake as hard as it could, to hold the car on the slope. Twisting about, Barney pulled the throttle button with his left hand, while he drew a revolver with his right.

The roar of the motor furnished the noise that the killer wanted. Amid that racket, a shot would pass for nothing more than a backfire, assuming that the wrong persons happened to be near enough to hear it.

"Hey, Maisie!" gruffed Barney. "Look here a minute."

CHICAGO CRIME

The bright, uncovered dashlight showed horror in those large blue eyes when Maisie looked down the threat of the .38. The blonde's lips twitched only for a moment. Then they stiffened.

Maisie knew what was coming, and she was game. That didn't impress Barney; it annoyed him.

"That's a dame for you," he muttered. "She ought to go yellow, only she ain't. Anyway, she was easy to fool."

Maisie's fingers were on the door handle. She was leaning against the door itself, but from the ugliness that came to Barney's face, she knew why he waited. When she pressed the handle, the killer would yank the trigger.

Grim seconds passed, while Maisie withheld the fatal move. At last, her hand tightened.

"You win, Barney," she voiced, above the motor's roar. "Go ahead. Give it!"

BEFORE Maisie could shove the handle, the door shot outward of its own accord. It opened frontward; the girl, huddled at the edge of the seat, was precipitated from her perch. Sudden though her fall was, it might not have beaten Barney's trigger tug, if some unseen force had not yanked the girl more swiftly.

Literally, Maisie Troy was swallowed by a mass of outside blackness.

Barney's gun spoke with the roaring motor. A bullet sizzled through space. With a snarl, the killer lunged toward the open door, trying to spot Maisie on the ground. Upon the step he saw a black cloak whipping sideward.

That garment was whirling across Maisie, as its owner rolled the girl toward the ground, away from the dim car glow. Barney shifted his gaze, bringing his gun with it, just as an uncloaked form sidestepped into sight.

Burning eyes, hawkish face – they went with the cloak that now covered Maisie. So did the .45 automatic that was swinging in to match Barney's aim. The killer's shout was hoarse:

"The Shadow!"

A warding arm hooked Barney's wrist. The .38 spat a bullet a scant inch from The Shadow's ear. With a quick jerk of his wrist, Barney drove a hard blow for The Shadow's skull. It was vicious, that stroke; but it was partly halted as it landed.

Barney saw The Shadow sag. The crook jabbed his gun muzzle downward. This time, he was too late. A spurt of flame arrowed upward from the automatic. Barney took that slug in the right shoulder, jolting upward like a puppet on a string.

The rest happened in quick, surprising sequence. Barney's feet slipped from the pedals. The clutch gripped as the brake released. The coupe seemed to hop from the embankment, as The Shadow made a vain clutch for Barney's neck.

In high gear, with the throttle wide open, Barney didn't have a chance to get the car under control. He was bellowing, half from pain, half from fright, as the hurtling death machine hit the pier. That bounce must have alarmed him into belated action, for The Shadow saw Barney bob at the rear window as if preparing for a dive through the open door.

Then came a crackle. The door hit a post at the edge of the pier, the jar slamming it shut. The coupe was zigzagging at thirty miles an hour, its wheels hitting raised beams along the edges of the pier that jockeyed it from one side to another.

Barney never managed to grab the door handle. Finishing its ride along the two-hundred-foot runway, the junky coupe lurched out into the lake. With the muffle of the motor's roar, The Shadow gained a last glimpse of whirling wheels.

The car and its murderous occupant found a resting place forty feet below the surface.

Maisie was on her feet, riveted by the tragedy that she also had witnessed. Hands lifted the cloak that had obscured her from Barney's aim. A moment later, The Shadow had donned that garb, to become a whispered voice speaking from the darkness.

A chill swept Maisie, but The Shadow's tone did not produce it. She was thinking of the deserved fate that had come to Barney Heslip, considering it in terms applicable to herself. For the spot that Barney had reached was the one that he had intended for his victim.

By the time The Shadow had guided Maisie to the roadster, she was pouring her whole story, admitting her part in the machinations of the insurance ring. Strangely, The Shadow seemed to understand even more than Maisie told.

Riding back into Chicago, Maisie tore up the check that bore the signature of J. M. Cruke; for the first time, she realized that the funds from Reether's death were blood money. With that action, Maisie spoke her willingness to join the fight against the racket.

The Shadow had performed a rescue, reversing death's decree. In so doing, he had enrolled another ardent worker for the campaign that lay ahead.

CHAPTER VIII. HERB TAKES ORDERS

THE next day, two new guests registered at the Southlake Hotel. One was Lamont Cranston, who gave his address as New York. Another was a young man named Harry Vincent, who came from a town in Michigan.

Actually, Harry was The Shadow's most trusted agent. His chief had chosen him as the man to share the danger spot.

On the surface, all was serene at the Southlake. In fact, the pretentious establishment was well run, despite the hold that Long Steve Bydle had gotten there. The more guests, the better, in Steve's opinion, provided they weren't snoopers.

Both the new guests were approved by the big-shot. He failed utterly to link their presence with events that began to cause him trouble.

Long Steve had ordered Chet Soville to play the accident racket for all it was worth, and the lieutenant did. But, somehow, things didn't work as they had before. Doc Ruttler wasn't the only examiner called in to look over the dozen or more victims who cracked up within the next few days.

Police surgeons came into the picture. So did other physicians, who hadn't figured previously. Claim agents were more alert than usual. The whole thing was a headache that reached a climax when Doc Ruttler made an

unexpected visit to the Southlake Hotel.

The dry-faced medico stopped in to see Herb Waylon, accompanied by Chet Soville. Herb was still lounging about in bed, and Ruttler openly discussed matters in his presence, since he had Chet's assurance that Herb was in the racket.

"They're clamping down," declared Ruttler, sourly. "Who's handed them the tip-offs, I can't guess. Anyway, Waylon here, has a clear bill. But you'd better keep him out of sight, Chet."

"Herb's going on a job pretty soon," announced Chet. "Maybe tonight. But nobody's going to get a look at him. Come on, doc – we've got somewhere else to go."

Their destination was Cruke's apartment, but Chet didn't mention that to Herb. As yet, Herb hadn't been officially informed that J. M. Cruke was actually Long Steve Bydle, master of Chicago crookery. Only the more important lieutenants knew that fact, and Doc Ruttler was one of them. He covered it by posing as Cruke's personal physician.

LONG STEVE slid from his wheel chair by the open window, as soon as the visitors entered. He wanted facts from Ruttler, and the fake physician dourly supplied them.

"I'd be up against it for fair, Long Steve," he declared, "if Crawler and some of the others hadn't been so expert. Even at that, I had to yank them out of different hospitals in a hurry."

"Where've you got them now?" queried Long Steve. "Down at your private hospital?"

Ruttler nodded.

"Under observation," he smirked. "My observation; and so far, I've managed to escape suspicion. But if I'm going to keep up a front, I'll have to say that some of them look like fakes."

"Why not just ease them out of the picture?" queried Long Steve. "Let 'em beat it. That will clear you."

Doc Ruttler stroked his withered chin as he nodded. The plan pleased him, except for one angle.

"We might salvage something," he suggested. "Crawler and a few others could fake it through."

"Use your own judgment," declared Long Steve. "Only, hold out as long as you can. Something may happen meanwhile. I've got a guy trying to find out who's been handing all these tip-offs. Chet here is crazy enough to think it's The Shadow.

"But he's not in it. The Shadow wouldn't hold off this long. All we've got to find is some smart guy who's sneaking inside stuff to the police and the insurance companies. Once he's found" – Long Steve snapped his fingers – "the works will be jake again!"

Chet had his black book out. He was pointing to a column of red-ink figures.

"All this paid out," he reminded, "with no take for five days. How are you going to laugh that off, Steve?"

"We'll let the Korber job take care of it," declared the big-shot. "The way we've doped it, the whole thing is in our line. Just another accident. Set it for tonight, Chet, and use this guy Waylon."

CHICAGO CRIME

Soon afterward, Chet paid a lone visit to Herb. The two held a long and confidential talk. When Chet had gone, Herb dug deep in the closet and brought out a hidden microphone. The "mike" was hooked in with the hotel's electrical system, with Harry Vincent on the receiving end.

Harry had introduced himself to Herb three days before, by delivering a note written in The Shadow's disappearing ink. Since then, he and Herb had been in regular communication.

"Richard Korber is slated for tonight," undertoned Herb. "They figure they can pull the deal that Kid Dember started. Korber always takes a cab outside the Club Miche. I'm elected to smack it with a truck.

"Two other cars will be on the job, both loaded with gunners. One is to block off the cab. I'm to hop aboard the other, after I abandon the truck. Nobody's going to know where the truck came from or who the driver was."

Harry told Herb to stand by for instructions. Herb waited a brief five minutes. Then came Harry's reply, straight from The Shadow. It was prefaced with a single word:

"Instructions!"

Alertly, Herb listened to the rest. The words he heard brought a firm smile to his lips. The past had given him confidence in The Shadow; the future offered even more. The way The Shadow had figured a suitable finish for tonight's episode was something that commanded Herb's complete admiration.

Unquestionably, The Shadow had figured out all details that concerned the insurance racket. It was plain that he had garnered these from many sources. But in addition, The Shadow had an amazing system of planning counterthrusts.

Tonight, Herb Waylon was to figure heavily in such a move. It was the chance that he had long awaited. Nothing – so Herb thought – could put these plans awry. So Herb believed, not realizing how chance, plus his own weakness, might thrust an unexpected hand into the game.

It was dusk when Chet Soville dropped into Waylon's room again. The chunky crook motioned Herb to the window, pointed to a trim coupe that stood on a side street.

"There's your buggy," declared Chet, "and here's the keys. Get started any time you want. But remember – you're due at the Avenue Garage by eight."

Herb nodded.

"Here's the license number of the truck," added Chet, passing over a slip of paper. "Just climb in it and get started. Forget your car. We'll look out for it."

After Chet had gone, Herb dressed hurriedly. Unseen, he descended by the hotel stairway, to reach the coupe. For Herb had a plan of his own in mind; a plan that seemingly could not conflict with The Shadow's orders.

With several hours to spare, he intended to accept the invitation from Joan Gramley to visit the North Side apartment that her father used as town residence. For several days, he had been anxious to meet Peter Gramley, the wealthy banker who was fortunate to have so lovely a daughter.

Herb wasn't at fault in having that urge. He had heard from Joan, through Harry Vincent, and she had repeated the invitation for Herb to call. Joan had always wanted to introduce Herb to her father; all that she

had demanded was that Herb first acquire a job.

Though his career as Reether's chauffeur had been a short one, and a frame-up as well, Herb had at least convinced Joan of his willingness to work. Moreover, in entering The Shadow's service, Herb had done something that was well worth while.

Of course, there was his promise to The Shadow. Herb intended to keep it. There was no reason why he had to mention his present work to Joan. She would be proud of him, later, when he was free to tell the full facts.

For the present, Joan's love was all that counted. She had demonstrated it with that visit she had made. She would be thrilled when he called this afternoon, even though Herb's stay would be a short one.

Herb was counting on those coming minutes, when he parked the car across from the big apartment house. When he entered the lobby, he gave his name to an attendant and asked for Miss Gramley. The call went upstairs and brought back news that Joan was at home. The attendant told Herb to go up to Apartment 5B.

Scarcely had Herb found the apartment door, when it opened. A tall, stoop-shouldered man brushed out and ran squarely against the incoming visitor. The fellow lost his derby hat in the jostle. Picking it up, he gave Herb an angry glare.

Who the fellow was, why he was here, Herb didn't bother to guess. He took it for granted that the man hadn't been calling on Joan. He looked like some visitor who had been calling on her father, and had evidently had a bad time of it.

The servant who had ushered out the visitor was prompt in admitting Herb. Conducted to a sumptuous reception room, the young man had only a minute to wait. At the end of those sixty seconds, two curtains parted. Joan Gramley stood smiling on the threshold, more beautiful than ever.

She took one look to make sure that Herb was alone. Then Joan was in his arms. To Herb, that moment was more thrilling than any that had ever gone before. He had found the happiness he wanted. It was the summit of all his hopes.

Never could Herb Waylon have believed that this reunion was to end with the greatest misery that he had ever undergone; that from it, he was to lose all the confidence that he had gained.

A test was due, wherein Herb's only wish would be to forget all that had ever passed, including his promise to The Shadow!

CHAPTER IX. CRIME'S HOUR

LOVE had produced many difficulties for Herb Waylon and Joan Gramley; enough to make them practical minded. There were reasons why their future depended upon Herb's meeting with Joan's father.

Old Peter Gramley had decided that his daughter would benefit greatly from an extended trip abroad. Methodical as well as domineering, he had scheduled that voyage and all the details that would keep Joan in Europe for an entire year.

Joan had managed a few postponements, for she could be as firm-set as her father. But it was that very fact – Joan's own determination – that had caused her to insist on Herb establishing himself before she would marry him.

Thus Joan was in a serious dilemma; but, at last, she could see the end of it.

"Dad will understand," she told Herb. "Once you meet him and he learns that I love you, he won't insist on my trip abroad."

"There will still be the other problem," reminded Herb. "A banker's daughter marrying a chauffeur."

Joan gave a merry laugh.

"Dad wouldn't object," she insisted. "He admires industry in young men. He has often said that I could marry a ditch digger, if I wished. The only men he doesn't like are the playboys in our social set."

"But I won't tell dad that you were a chauffeur, because you aren't any longer. The matter of a job was my own test, Herb, and you proved you could get one. So I'll tell dad what you really are a young architect with large ambitions."

Herb liked Joan's final statement. He did have big ambitions, and felt that he could realize them. For Herb knew that he could look forward to an honest reward in return for his services to The Shadow.

JOAN led the way to her father's study. They found Peter Gramley at his desk, munching the end of a fat cigar as he thumbed through sheaves of papers. Gramley was a gray-haired man of forceful appearance. The flash of his steely eyes denoted understanding; the moment that he saw Herb.

Rising from his desk, Gramley shot out a powerful hand that Herb received with friendly clasp.

"I thought so," declared the banker. "At last, Joan, I have met the young man that you have been telling me about!"

Joan was nonplused.

"Why – why" – she blinked as she stammered – "I never – why, I didn't say a word!"

"Of course not!" chuckled Gramley. "But you showed many symptoms that proved you were in love. Well" – he was still pumping Herb's hand – "aren't you going to introduce us?"

"This is Herb," declared Joan. "Herb Waylon. He's an architect. He doesn't have any present connection, dad, but he knows how to get a job when he has to find one."

Gramley had finished the handshake. He motioned Joan and Herb to sit down. His smile showed that he approved of Herb on sight. Leaning back in his chair, he spoke in fatherly fashion.

"Willingness is what counts," he declared. "I can't say that I could find a present opening for an architect, but I know of other opportunities for a young chap of your type, Waylon, if you need them."

"I don't think I do," declared Herb, frankly. "Even Joan doesn't know it yet, but I have excellent prospects. I believe that I shall realize something, very shortly."

Gramley seemed pleased by Herb's manner. Then, abruptly, the banker asked:

"What was your last job?"

"I was a chauffeur," replied Herb, bluntly.

"Very good!" approved Gramley. Then, in mild curiosity: "Who was your employer?"

Herb had hoped to dodge that question. Since it was asked, he had to meet it. Joan gave a quick nod, which indicated that she thought her father would probably fail to connect Herb with last week's accident.

"I worked for a man named Reether," said Herb, in an indifferent tone. "Arthur Reether, a commission merchant."

There was a slow closing of Gramley's eyelids, accompanied by a tightening of his lips. That expression faded. The banker swung about in his swivel chair.

"Pardon me a moment," he said. "I have forgotten an important telephone call."

He dialed a number and asked for Mr. Larrivan. Learning that the man was absent, Gramley left word for him to call back. Hanging up the receiver, he swung back to the desk. He was thumbing through papers, as he put a question that seemed casual.

"Tell me, Waylon," asked the banker. "Did you ever hear of a man named Larrivan?"

"No," replied Herb.

"He was here not long ago," added Gramley. "I thought that you might have seen him."

Herb remembered the stoop-shouldered man with the derby hat who had bumped him in the hall. He described the fellow. Gramley nodded.

"That was Larrivan," declared Gramley. "He brought these papers. Very important papers, Waylon, to you as well as myself. Because" – the banker was coming to his feet – "here is one that bears your name."

"Look at it!" Gramley slapped the paper in Herb's hand. "Let Joan see it. That report has you listed as a hospital case, with injuries that should keep you there for the next six weeks. It states, also, that you were paid fifteen hundred dollars because of those supposed injuries!"

THE room seemed to swim about Herb's head. In the middle of that swirl was Joan's face, with a gaze that showed shock and bewilderment. Out of the confusion boomed Gramley's voice, scornful in its accusation.

"You didn't know that insurance companies were borrowing to meet their claims, did you, Waylon?" jabbed Gramley. "That's why they sent Larrivan, their investigator, to talk to me. The law is getting to the bottom of this false claim racket."

"Your claim was listed as bona fide. I recalled it, the moment that you mentioned Reether. Your own presence here proves that you are in the racket. So you want to marry my daughter! I don't think that can be arranged, Waylon. They don't hold weddings in State prisons!"

Gramley was out from behind the desk, ready to grab Herb if he tried to make a break. For a moment, Herb's mind was set on flight as his only alternative; but he soon gave up that thought.

The banker could have him blocked before he was out of the apartment house, and that would end Herb's chance to cooperate with The Shadow. His only hope was to make Gramley listen to some plea.

CHICAGO CRIME

There wasn't any use in trying to explain matters. The banker wouldn't believe Herb's talk of The Shadow. It would seem sheer fabrication, if Herb declared that he was working for a mysterious being who was actually putting the skids under the accident racket.

Besides, there was Herb's own promise to The Shadow. It had to be kept.

Desperately, Herb did the best he could. He stammered partial truths, hoping that Gramley would believe them whole. He hadn't known of the racket, so he said, when he took the job as chauffeur. There had been an insurance claim – that, Herb admitted – but he had assigned the check to a friend.

All that made it worse. Gramley wanted to know the friend's name. Herb wouldn't give it. Maybe the friend was all right; maybe he wasn't. Herb promised to find out. All he wanted was a few days' freedom. After that, he would report back to Gramley.

The banker's manner became contemptuous. He was classing Herb as a frightened rat. Even Joan's faith seemed to waver, until, suddenly, the girl offered the solution that Herb needed.

"You can't send Herb to jail," she told her father. "Whatever he has done was on my account. Herb isn't crooked – but he is weak."

Joan meant it. But it was pity, not love, that apparently inspired her.

"So you want to marry a thief!" Gramley was scornful, as he turned to Joan. "That's what Waylon is, regardless of his motive."

"Not legally a thief," reminded Joan, "unless you brand him as one. In that case, I shall stand by him."

"And if I let him go?"

"Then I am willing to forget him."

Gramley stood rigid. Slowly, he began to nod. He knew the determination that Joan could display. The test came when the telephone rang. Gramley lifted the receiver, recognized the voice.

"Hello, Larrivan," he said. "Yes, I called you. But it was nothing of importance. Just forget it. Drop in to see me tomorrow..."

Joan had opened the door. Her face was stern, her eyes seemed to look right through Herb, as he passed. All that he wanted was one flash of real sympathy, but it wasn't in Joan's gaze.

HERB didn't realize that Joan's attitude might be for her father's benefit. His head was still in a whirl, an angry, hopeless one, as he went from the apartment house. He saw his car across the street and groped toward it in the dusk.

There was a shriek of brakes. Herb felt himself lifted by the fender of a halting car. He took a hard fall on the paving; came to his feet shakily, as an anxious driver sprang out beside him.

"Are you hurt, fellow?" The words seemed far away. "Maybe I'd better get you to a hospital!"

Herb shook away. A hospital! The one place where he couldn't go! Funny thing, getting socked by a car just the way the accident fakers did. Herb was dazed; more so than he realized, for his head had jolted the curb.

Groggily, he thought his mental whirl was due to that interview with Gramley.

A cab had stopped close by. It was empty. On sudden impulse, Herb entered it, muttering thickly that he hadn't been hurt. He told the driver to take him to The Loop.

They were near the central section of the city when the cabby noted that his fare had slumped down in the rear seat. He stopped the cab, jumped out to see what was wrong. Herb came out of his coma. He saw the lights of a taproom across the sidewalk.

"I need a drink," he grumbled. "Yeah, a couple of drinks! Here" – he shoved two dollar bills into the cabby's hand, money that Chet had given him – "keep the meter going. I'll be back."

Steadying, Herb entered the tap room and ordered a straight drink. Finishing it in a gulp, he called for another. One thing he'd always kept away from was liquor, no matter how down and out he had been. But that didn't count in this case. Since Joan was through with him, he was through with her.

There was a clock above the bar and despite his muddled condition, Herb kept watching it. The hands were creeping close to eight o'clock, a fact that roused Herb, even after he had gulped his fifth drink.

"Eight o'clock," he mumbled. "Gotta be there. Yeah, sure I do! I'll show Joan – yeah, and her old man, too! He called me a crook and she let him get away with it!"

Flinging a bill to the bartender, Herb staggered out to the cab. His head ached from the bump he had taken when the car struck him, but it was the liquor that made him reel. Herb had lost his wits and realized it, but he was trying to get over that befuddlement.

The taxi driver heard Herb mutter the address of the Avenue Garage. The cab started for that destination. But as it rolled along, the watchful driver could see his passenger huddled in the back seat, apparently fallen into a new stupor.

Herb Waylon had remembered his promise to The Shadow. There was a question, though, whether or not he would be able to go through with his present assignment. Circumstances, plus Herb's own indulgence, had altered the coming situation.

Without Herb's aid, The Shadow's measures could prove a boomerang to the master fighter who had planned them!

CHAPTER X. CROSSED SIGNAL

GUISED as Lamont Cranston, a well-known clubman in New York, The Shadow was seated in a corner of the Club Miche. No one had recognized him, for most of the brawling waiters were still in jail. Only they and Kid Dember had gotten a close look at Cranston on that first eventful night in Chicago.

Keenly, The Shadow watched a bulky, bushy-browed man who sat at a near-by table. The man was Richard Korber, regular patron at the Club Miche and a person with whom Kid Dember had conducted certain negotiations.

During the past few days, The Shadow had been looking into Korber's affairs, with definite results.

Though reputedly worth much money, Korber had very few sources of large income. He was a director in

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various companies, and had considerable pull with certain politicians. His specialty, however, seemed to be that of a business adviser.

There was, for instance, the matter of the Tri-City Traction Company, with which Korber had long been a director. That corporation had suffered losses through embezzlements and had never managed to lay hands on the culprits. There had even been a robbery, in which fifty thousand dollars had been mysteriously removed from the traction company's vault.

Detectives had been unable to trace the stolen funds, and the company's officials had gone totally witless. It had been Korber who had suggested a shake-up of all departments, with the result that crooked work had entirely ceased. Many employees had been discharged; presumably, the culprits were among them.

Similar incidents had marked Korber's connection with other companies; and doubtless, he had been privately reimbursed for his valuable services. In The Shadow's opinion, those facts did not give Korber a high status.

A man so capable at halting criminal activities could easily be concerned in the dirty work itself. It was odd that Korber should chance to have connections with almost every corporation that was bothered by untraceable losses.

The Shadow was not the first person who had observed that oddity. Kid Dember deserved earlier credit.

The dead con man had often gone in for blackmail schemes, and he had always gotten the facts before he started. He must have found out plenty, to go after Korber. In fact, The Shadow's recent investigations proved that Kid certainly had opportunity to pick up much information.

No one person could tell much about Korber, but stray bits from here and there built themselves into a definite indictment of the man's methods.

Kid, however, had suddenly "laid off" Korber, and the reason – as stated by Kid himself – was because Korber was a "sucker who was getting hep". The Shadow hadn't forgotten those earnest words that Kid had spilled not long before his death.

Long Steve Bydle had given orders for Kid to lay off. That was because Long Steve had expected to use Kid later, in other activities; not because Steve had learned that Korber was dangerous. In fact, there was no reason why Long Steve should consider Korber as anything more than a sucker, since only The Shadow had heard the true facts from Kid Dember.

The Shadow could see profit through a meeting between Long Steve and Korber. Nevertheless, he intended to prevent one. Korber was a case to be handled separately. There was no reason why he should suffer at the hands of Long Steve Bydle.

WATCHING Korber, The Shadow could see worry on the man's bluff face. He had made two telephone calls in the past fifteen minutes and they didn't seem to please him. The Shadow knew why.

Lately, Korber had suspected that someone had pried into his affairs. He had even been disturbed by an elusive intruder who had entered his home, but who had vanished as mysteriously as the funds of the Tri-City Traction Company.

It would have amazed Korber, had he guessed that the person responsible for those investigations was seated only a few tables away. Korber's unwanted visitor had been The Shadow.

Yet, tonight, Korber, a rogue in his own right, was under The Shadow's protection!

Dinner finished, Korber left his table, stopping long enough to get his hat and coat. That short halt at the cloak room gave The Shadow sufficient time for a move of his own. Plucking black garments from a chair beside him, he left by the side exit.

Once in the outer darkness, The Shadow smothered the identity of Cranston beneath slouch hat and enveloping cloak.

Nearing the street in front of the Club Mische, The Shadow picked out salient features. Several cabs were ranked in front of the club; behind them was a low-built touring car, very muffled in the darkness, for it was away from the glare of street lamps.

Beyond a corner crossing, The Shadow saw a hulking sedan. Down the side street were the dim lights of a truck. Everything was set for the special surprise party that Long Steve Bydle had provided for Richard Korber.

Cars were swishing past. The Shadow could count them without watching, for each one gave a click-clack as it struck a loosened manhole cover in the center of the crossing. Those cars were averaging about four a minute; not enough to produce traffic complications when the test came.

Korber came from the night club. Immediately, a man darted out from the wall and hopped into the first waiting cab. That brought the second taxi ahead. It was the one that Korber entered.

There was something about that ancient taxi that reminded The Shadow of the dead Barney Heaslip's rattletrap coupe. When Long Steve Bydle sacrificed motor vehicles, he always used old ones.

As the taxi eased forward, the touring car edged out from its parking space. The sedan came to life, from the other side of the crossing. There was a blink of the truck's lights, down the side street. The big vehicle rumbled into motion.

Long strides took The Shadow to the corner. The slow-motion scene was gaining rapidly. The sedan was shoving out to block Korber's taxi. The touring car was moving up behind. In a few moments, the cab would be boxed directly in the path of the onrushing truck.

All exactly as Herb had stated it would be!

This was the moment for The Shadow's signal. Once Herb heard it, he would go through with the job according to The Shadow's order; not those that Chet had brought from Long Steve.

WHISKING an automatic from beneath his cloak, The Shadow pointed the muzzle upward. One shot would mean that Herb should swerve the truck and bear down upon the blocking sedan. Two shots would tell him to smash the touring car instead, thus disposing of the reserve crew.

Whichever he left to Herb, The Shadow would take out the other. Either course meant that Korber's taxi would go unscathed.

The Shadow pulled the trigger once.

Not waiting to see Herb veer for the sedan, The Shadow sped for the touring car. He was upon its step before the crew had guessed the source of the unexpected shot. With one hard stroke, The Shadow downed a man

beside the driver, then dived for the fellow behind the wheel.

Smothering the driver, he poked two gun muzzles into the rear seat, brandishing them under the noses of two startled mobbies.

The raucous yells that the thugs gave were drowned by a terrific crash that The Shadow did not witness. The hurtling truck had found its target, with an impact that could be heard for blocks.

Quivered air seemed to settle. Steadily, The Shadow kept the two thugs covered. He was nudging the huddled driver with his elbow, telling him to get the car started. No need to glance through the windshield behind his back to see how well Herb had done the job; at least, so The Shadow supposed.

It was the huddled driver who proved The Shadow wrong. With a sudden shout, the fellow made a grab for the cloaked fighter's neck. The men from the rear seat came to action. They were diving forward, ignoring the muzzles of The Shadow's guns.

Mockery came taunting from The Shadow's lips, as he showed how well he had prepared for such a surge. With a sidelong shove, he bowled the driver out into the street, rolling with him. Nimbly gaining his footing, The Shadow spun about, while two thugs fired blindly. Guns in his fists, The Shadow aimed for the touring car to deliver a return barrage.

Revolvers barked a sudden fusillade. Bullets whimpered past The Shadow's ear; one slug sliced the folds of his flowing cloak. With those shots came The Shadow's first view of the actual scene.

Wrecked near the center of the crossing was the taxicab. Its driver was gone; Richard Korber, sole victim of the crash, lay sprawled half through a window. Beyond was the sedan, intact. It was from that car that the barrage came. Crooks had sighted The Shadow.

In an instant, The Shadow knew that Herb had failed his important duty; and with that realization, the cloaked fighter gained a partial explanation. He saw the truck, the driver who was clambering from the big machine.

The man wasn't Herb Waylon. The truck driver was Chet Soville. Crime's lieutenant had accomplished one outrage, and was intent upon another. His face wore a leer; his hand was on the move, bearing a quick-drawn gun.

Chet had seen The Shadow. Counting upon two crews of gunmen to aid him, Chet intended to end crime's greatest menace, otherwise The Shadow!

CHAPTER XI. DOUBLE BATTLE

IN two seconds, The Shadow could have finished off the thugs in the touring car. He didn't waste those precious moments. Instead, he took an immediate dive that blackened him against the paving.

That sprawl was just in time. Bullets were ripping through the space where The Shadow had been. Through quick calculation, he had found it preferable to avoid gunfire, rather than attempt to outshoot his foemen.

They had the edge, along with numbers.

There was double strategy, however, in The Shadow's dive. Not only did it produce the impression that The Shadow had been clipped; the cloaked fighter finished it with a roll that carried him underneath the touring

car.

When Chet arrived, expecting to blast bullets into a crippled foe, he stopped short, blank in amazement, to find The Shadow gone.

Then came Chet's hard-voiced shout to the men in the touring car. They turned, warned in time to see The Shadow loom upon the step at the other side of the car. Together, they lunged for him, aiming as they came.

Chet heard muffled shots. He didn't know that automatics had produced them until he saw his own men settle in the car. Chet dived away as The Shadow reached the wheel.

Its motor still running, the touring car offered a means whereby The Shadow could keep up a running fray, drawing crooks to their own destruction. Bullets were pinging close as he sped the car forward, but none found their cloaked target.

There was one crook, however, who was able to match The Shadow's move.

The sedan's driver hadn't left the wheel. He had his car in gear when the touring car wheeled forward. Dropping low, the fellow pressed the accelerator, launching the sedan straight into The Shadow's path.

The two cars collided near the middle of the crossing. The touring car was lighter; it overturned. As it teetered, The Shadow lurched over the door, but he was partly trapped beneath the car's folding top.

That weight lay on The Shadow's left shoulder. It had no crushing effect, but the blow was numbing in its force. As he dragged his left arm free, The Shadow saw his own hand, empty. One gun was lost somewhere in the wreckage.

There must have been blank moments in The Shadow's consciousness, for out of the crash he still seemed to hear the loud clank that had come when the cars hit. Somehow, recollection of that sound remained despite the eager shouts of approaching mobsters.

Moreover, when The Shadow looked up from the street, he had proof of lapsed moments. An apish face was poking over the touring car. The driver of the sedan had found time to climb across the wrecked machine and look for The Shadow.

With a savage grin, the thug poked his gun downward, taking sure aim toward The Shadow. He didn't see the motion of a gloved right fist, as it turned a lone automatic upward. The .45 spoke while the crook was steadying his aim.

Others, coming up to find The Shadow, saw the apish man straighten on the overturned car. With spinning motion, he flung backward, to strike the street. That sight showed that The Shadow's sting had not been ended.

FROM the curb, Chet shouted an order. His followers deployed, skirting those two cars that formed a big "V" near the center of the crossing.

A beetlish figure was working toward the upper side of the touring car. One thug spotted it and unwisely shouted the news before he fired. The Shadow's gun spat first; the gunman was diving for cover when he pulled his own trigger, hence his return shot went wide.

Then others were ducking, as The Shadow laced shots along the line. This time, he had the edge and used it; but amid those shots, Chet Soville gained a wild elation.

The Shadow was shooting, but he wasn't scoring hits!

True, the range was long; but that didn't matter to The Shadow, from all that Chet had ever heard. This meant that The Shadow had taken a hard jolt in the crack-up. He wasn't performing in his accustomed style.

Shouting encouragement to the others, Chet took quick aim. As he fired, he saw The Shadow take a sideward roll; but Chet wasn't fooled. That drop had started before Chet pulled the trigger. The Shadow, recognizing his own plight, had dropped into the temporary shelter offered by the inside of the "V".

Chet had forty feet to go to reach him; the others had a longer run. The lieutenant paused long enough to shout orders to his cohorts. Then, with a surge, half a dozen killers were on their way.

The Shadow hadn't been idle during those moments. Landing beside the body of the sedan's driver, he had found the answer to the one thought in his mind: the clank that had sounded when the cars collided.

Right in the middle of the "V" was the loosened manhole cover that marked the center of the crossing.

A loose edge was toward The Shadow. He jabbed his emptied automatic beneath the metal surface, giving a hard upward pry. The cover tilted, as if on a hinge. The Shadow propped it with his shoulder.

Shoving his automatic beneath his cloak, he reached for another object that glimmered close beside him. It was the revolver that the crook from the sedan had failed to fire. Hooking that weapon with his left fist, The Shadow twisted downward into the manhole just as Chet and the thugs arrived.

They saw the black form disappearing below. They opened fire, but the manhole cover was turned in their direction. It was The Shadow's shield when bullets struck. Sharp clangs told that killers had missed their mark. Then the steel disk settled into place.

Crooks tugged to lift the cover. It came upward. With it, a revolver muzzle poked into sight, delivering a stab of flame. One thug took the bullet that the sharp thrust carried. He gave a gulp, as he coiled to the street. The others dived away; the manhole cover clattered back where it belonged.

Chet's oaths didn't stir his mob to action, and the lieutenant knew the reason. Maybe The Shadow was groggy, but he couldn't miss at arm's-length range. Handling that manhole cover was like playing with a rattlesnake.

There would be more bites every time the crooks tried it, and each man could figure his own turn as the next one. If Chet wanted to get at The Shadow, he would have to think of a better way.

Time was too short to puzzle out an answer to the problem. Chet could hear the wail of police sirens and knew that they were coming toward this battleground. He snarled orders to the remnants of his mob. They obeyed willingly, for Chet had commanded a retreat.

While mobsters were scattering, Chet and one other man hurried to the wrecked taxi. Wrenching open the crumpled door, they hauled Korber's bloody, senseless form to a coupe parked a short distance away.

With Korber between them, Chet and his companion were speeding from the scene before the police arrived.

THE next fifteen minutes produced considerable commotion outside the Club Miche. Witnesses who had watched the fight from windows were prompt to give their testimony to the police. But all those stories boiled down to very little.

A truck had smashed a taxicab. After that, a touring car had collided with a sedan. There had been shots, plenty of them, right from the start, with fighters all around. The crowd had finally scattered, except for the half dozen who had tasted too much lead.

Looking over the victims, the police came to an obvious conclusion. Two rival gangs had met at this corner and gone out for carnage in a big way. It reminded the cops of the old days, when any corner in Chicago could have become a dueling ground.

True, there had been trouble in the Club Miche not very many nights ago. But that had been a brawl; this was a battle. The police decided that there was no connection between the two frays.

They did consider the matter of the insurance racket, which had come into prominence within the last few days. That angle was worth investigation, because this trouble had begun with an automobile crash.

But the police, to a man, laughed down one witness who said he thought that fighting hoodlums had been shooting at a single human target. That was ridiculous! One man couldn't have stood up against an entire mob, let alone account for all the thugs who had fallen in the fray.

The two-mob theory was the only answer that made sense; and the police were too busy looking for vanished hoodlums to worry about the manhole cover. They searched the smashed cars and the truck. By the time that they had finished, wrecking cars pulled up to haul away the debris.

When all that was over, the manhole cover tilted upward. From beneath the disk, keen eyes studied the crossing, deserted except for occasional passing cars. Each time one approached, the cover settled back into place until there was a lengthy stretch between two oncoming cars.

That was when The Shadow gave the disk a powerful upward heave. Rolling out from the lip, he eased the cover down again, then glided quickly to the sidewalk to escape the revealing glare of the next car.

From that darkness, The Shadow whispered a grim laugh, almost a reminder of the battle that had gone before. For, in that mirth, The Shadow was promising more ill fortune to Long Steve Bydle and all who served the big-shot.

CHAPTER XII. DEATH'S DEAL

AGAIN on the move, The Shadow's first concern was for Herb Waylon. Making a convenient stop, The Shadow called the Southlake Hotel and held a brief conversation with Harry Vincent.

No outside listener could have suspected the purpose of that call. The Shadow spoke in the tone of Cranston, and the talk was brief. It meant, however, that Harry could expect a later call, in a drugstore a block from the hotel.

Boarding a cab, The Shadow gave a West Side address. Though perplexed by so sudden and mysterious a passenger, the cabby soon recovered from his puzzlement. He decided that he had merely been dozing when the fare stepped in.

The cabby was due for a real surprise at the end of the trip.

Finding the address to be an old boarded-up and shuttered house, the cabby turned to inform his passenger of such. Except for a bill that lay on the rear seat, the cab was quite as empty as the house where it had stopped.

How and when the passenger had left the taxi, the driver couldn't guess. He gave a glance at the old residence, muttered something about spooks and started on his way.

Curiously, in regarding that house as haunted, the cab driver was merely expressing the opinion of the neighborhood.

Recently, the old building had been a place of peculiar manifestations, which several persons had reported but which none could prove. One chance passer had sworn that a ghostly figure had been swallowed by the blackness close to the old house. Another declared to have seen a gleam of light at an upper story window, where the boards had cracked open. There was also talk of a batlike shape that had been glimpsed upon the roof.

Tonight, all those weird happenings were in operation, although totally unseen.

The Shadow moved into a space beside the building; the gloom engulfed him. Scaling a dark wall, he opened the broken shutter and eased inward. Once he had closed the shutter, he blinked a tiny flashlight.

A telephone appeared in the narrow beam. It was connected with an outside line, for The Shadow had attended to that some days ago. Dialing a number, The Shadow heard Harry Vincent answer from a pay station. In quick, whispered tones, The Shadow asked regarding Herb Waylon.

Harry had something to tell. He had been in the lobby when Herb had arrived at the Southlake Hotel, assisted by a cab driver. A bellhop had helped Herb to his room. From all appearances, Herb had been drinking heavily.

There had been no later results. It was evident that Chet and others in the racket knew of Herb's condition. Overindulgence in liquor was a light offense among crooks. In Harry's opinion, Herb had not put himself in wrong with the gang.

The Shadow agreed. It was certain that Herb would not be under suspicion because of The Shadow's own appearance outside the Club Miche. Criminals would figure that if Herb had been working for The Shadow, he would surely have kept that appointment.

ENDING the call with brief instructions to Harry, The Shadow followed the thin rays of the tiny flashlight, until he reached a top-floor skylight. There, the beam was extinguished. The shadow emerged upon a roof.

His course demanded progress across a short open stretch. That accounted for the story that a batlike figure had been seen upon the house roof. The Shadow looked the part of a gigantic night creature, as he moved toward the next patch of darkness.

At the rear of the roof, The Shadow listened. From below, he could hear the shuffling footsteps of a patroller who paced between this house and the one behind it.

A crook was on guard duty, like others that The Shadow had seen in the next street when the cab had passed along it. Waiting until the footsteps shuffled away, The Shadow stretched out into space. His gloved hand gripped a wire, drew inward toward the eaves.

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By daylight, that wire appeared to be a radio aerial. At night, it served another purpose. Under the eaves of the empty house was a double-wheeled trolley, only six inches in length. Gripping the little car with one hand, The Shadow gave a hard shove with the other.

The power of that heave proved that the numbness had gone from his left arm. The taut wire whirred; The Shadow rode a level route through space that brought him beneath the overhanging roof of the other house.

He huddled there, to make sure that the sound had not been heard. There was no stir from the patrolling crook below.

Worming through a loosened window, The Shadow groped his way across the storeroom. Thin luminosity cleaved the darkness as he settled the flashlight upon a keyhole. Unlocking the door with a plierlike instrument, The Shadow came into a gloomy hall.

This house was occupied, but The Shadow was familiar with its interior. It was the home of Richard Korber, who had previously received visits from The Shadow. Usually, The Shadow could proceed with only ordinary caution; but tonight, he navigated Korber's home with the utmost stealth.

The reason was evident when he reached the second floor. A lurking crook was on duty, covering the stairs that led down to the ground floor. Had he turned at the right moment, he would have seen The Shadow glide along the second-story hall; but The Shadow timed that maneuver to perfection.

Reaching a room that looked like an office, The Shadow closed the door behind him. He flicked the flashlight upon a small, but modern, safe that occupied a corner. The beam wavered over the entire surface, finally settling on the combination.

The safe appeared to be untouched.

Dousing the flashlight, The Shadow approached a streak of light that lined the floor, marking a connecting door to another room. A key was in the lock, on the other side, but The Shadow twisted it by inserting the narrow, long-pointed pliers into the keyhole.

In half a minute, he had eased the door a trifle inward and was viewing a grotesque scene.

Richard Korber lay propped upon a bed. His eyes were wide open; so was his shirt front. Rough bandages were packed about his chest. The bluff-faced man was breathing in long, heavy wheezes as he faced two men who looked like inquisitors.

Those two were Long Steve Bydle and Chet Soville. Behind them, keeping in the background, was Doc Ruttler.

"GOT it through your noodle, Korber?" questioned Long Steve, harshly. "We know you've got fifty grand of traction company dough. Kid Dember told us. You're coughing up with it!"

Korber supplied a cough of a different sort. The effort produced a spasm. His face went purplish, then the color subsided to a whiteness that matched the pillow.

Doc Ruttler plucked Long Steve's sleeve. The big-shot told Chet to talk to Korber for a while. Doc drew Long Steve over beside the door where The Shadow watched. Both were too intent to notice that dim corner.

"It's curtains for Korber," confided Ruttler. "You'd better work fast."

"I thought you were a good croaker," growled Long Steve, "even though that diploma of yours is a phony!"

"Oh, I know the business," assured Ruttler. "The man is as good as dead! He is suffering from internal hemorrhages."

Long Steve Bydle glowered toward the bed. His ugly gaze showed no sympathy for the dying man. Watching Long Steve's face, The Shadow saw shrewdness register. Long Steve started over to talk to Korber, beckoning Ruttler along.

"Watch this high-pressure stuff," The Shadow heard Long Steve mutter to Ruttler. "It will turn the trick."

This time, Long Steve drew Doc Ruttler into the light. Korber looked at the physician, seemed to recognize him. That didn't surprise The Shadow, since Ruttler had evidently applied the hasty bandages that were lessening Korber's blood flow.

"Here's the whole story, Korber," rasped Long Steve. "You've heard of the insurance racket. All right, I'm the big-shot. My name is Long Steve Bydle; and this guy – Doc Ruttler – is my ace in the hole.

"He's the examiner who puts the O.K. on the phony claims. We've got the whole thing sewed up tight – only, lately, we've needed a fall guy. So we picked you to take the rap, unless you're willing to buy us off."

Korber's eyes showed understanding, beneath their bushy brows.

"You're insured heavy," reminded Long Steve. "You ought to collect about five grand for the crack-up you took tonight. But suppose that doc here decided the claim was phony; and suppose we planted a lot of framed evidence to prove it. Where would you stand?"

Korber muttered something about his injuries being real. That brought a laugh from Long Steve.

"Sure, they're real!" he giped. "So are a lot of others, that are crooked! You can't help real accidents once in a while in this racket. You'll be labeled as the big-shot, and to clinch it, we'll produce the taxi driver.

"You know what he'll tell them? He'll say that you hired him to shove that cab of his in front of the truck. That'll make it a sure case against you. Say, Korber" – Long Steve's tone became contemptuous – "you're a cluck if ever there was one! We're giving you a cheap buy at fifty grand."

With one hand, then the other, Steve beckoned to Chet and Ruttler, indicating that there was no use wasting time.

"Let the guy lay," he told his lieutenant. "He'll be a cinch to frame. It will be worth fifty grand to have him take the rap."

The bluff worked. Korber's head came up from the pillow with an effort. He licked his lips anxiously, almost eagerly. He felt that he had held out too long; he wanted to make the most of his last opportunity.

"I'll – I'll give you the money!" he panted. "I've got it – right here – in the safe – in the next room –"

The effort made Korber's head drop back, but his lips still moved. Long Steve, leaning close, caught the combination that the dying man spoke.

"All right, Korber," gruffed the big-shot. "It's a deal. We'll pick some other fellow to be the fall guy." Then, to Ruttler, Long Steve added: "You stay with Korber, doc."

THE SHADOW had closed the door. His pliers turned the key with almost the same motion. Sweeping across the room, the black-cloaked watcher reached a closet before Long Steve arrived with Chet.

The pair left the door open behind them. Over their shoulders, The Shadow could see Korber, eyes closed, a wise smile on his pale lips. Chet looked back; noting the grin, he mentioned it to Long Steve, who was working on the combination.

"Let him smile," sneered Long Steve. "He thinks he can get back at us because we've given him the lowdown. But he hasn't got a chance! Doc says he's due to croak most any minute."

The safe came open. Fishing through bundles of papers, Long Steve came upon the only pile that interested him – a stack of crisp currency. He turned toward the door to count the money. It totaled fifty thousand dollars.

"Kid was right," Steve told Chet. "This was one sock of mazuma that Korber didn't stick in the bank. The neat part is, that nobody knows he's got it. Leave everything else just like it is."

A rattling cough came from the other room. Long Steve swung to see Korber, head tilted back, going through a sudden agony. A hopeful chuckle slipped from the big-shot's lips as he watched the spasm end.

Doc Ruttler turned and gave a nod, a smile upon his dryish features. That cough had been Korber's last.

The crooks wasted no more time. They looked about long enough to make sure they had left no traces of their visit. Headed by Long Steve, the trio departed without bothering to turn out the lamp above Korber's bed.

Edging from the closet, The Shadow could hear Long Steve's voice from the stairs, as the big-shot summoned the various guards that he had stationed on the premises. Soon afterward, there was a thud from a side door on the ground floor. Long Steve and his entire band were gone.

Like a ghostly visitant, The Shadow stepped to Korber's bedside to study the dead man's haggard features. Pallid lips clung to a semblance of a smile, as though Korber, in death, still expected to settle scores with the rival criminals who had pillaged him of his stolen wealth.

A solemn laugh crept through that death room. It was low, uncanny in its whisper. The Shadow's face was hidden; no observer, had there been one, would have credited the weird mirth to the spectral figure that stood beside the bed.

Seemingly, The Shadow's laugh came from the dead, half-grinning lips of Richard Korber!

CHAPTER XIII. TWISTED FACTS

NEXT day, Long Steve Bydle had further reason to congratulate himself upon the death deal that he had worked with Richard Korber. A servant, returning to the house at midnight, had found Korber's body. The police, when summoned, had discovered nothing that pointed to foul play.

Korber was correctly identified as the man who had been in the wrecked cab outside the Club Miche, but the evidence indicated that the taxi had been accidentally boxed by other cars that contained feuding gangsters.

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Evidently, Korber hadn't realized the extent of his internal injuries. He had aggravated them by making a trip to his home, instead of going to a hospital. All of Korber's affairs were in good order. There wasn't a shred of evidence to link him with crime.

That gave Long Steve Bydle many chuckles when he read the newspapers. He had not only profited to the extent of fifty thousand dollars; he had removed the evidence that would have branded Korber as a criminal.

All through the day, Long Steve sat in his wheel chair benignly gazing at the bathers who flocked the beach beyond the boulevard. As J. M. Cruke, the big-shot fancied himself completely covered.

It was late afternoon when Chet Soville dropped in to compare figures in the little black books. That done, Long Steve inquired suddenly about Herb Waylon.

"I can't quite figure the guy," declared Chet. "He showed up in a cab last night plastered to the gills! It's lucky I was out at the Avenue Garage, to make sure he hadn't gone yellow. If I hadn't been there, he'd have tried to drive that truck."

"Lucky he didn't!" put in Long Steve. "With The Shadow bobbing up, it would have been a mess, a drunk handling the truck."

"It was a mess, anyway," argued Chet. "But we gave The Shadow a dose that he won't forget. But let's get back to Herb Waylon."

"What about him?" demanded Long Steve. "It was his first job. Maybe he had cold feet and took a few drinks to get over it. So what?"

"I've been talking to the guy today," returned Chet. "He isn't just bothered with a hangover. Something else is wrong with him."

Long Steve became interested. He began to pop questions, and Chet answered them.

First, there was the matter of the car that Chet had loaned to Herb. The taxi driver had said that he brought Herb from an address on the North Side, so that was where Chet had looked for the car.

He had found it opposite a large apartment house, far off the route that Herb should have taken to the Avenue Garage. Besides that, the taxi driver had said something about Herb stepping in front of a car.

"I thought maybe the guy was kidding," declared Chet, "unless he knew something about the racket."

"In that case, he wouldn't have mentioned the matter," argued Long Steve. "Didn't you figure that?"

"I did, finally. But that's a hot one – Waylon stepping in front of a car!"

"He was drunk, wasn't he?"

"No. He got plastered afterward, according to the taxi driver."

Long Steve gave a shrug from the wheel chair.

"Have Doc Ruttler see him," ordered the big-shot. "He's dropping in here soon. There's another guy coming, a little later. Stick around. I want you to meet him."

CHICAGO CRIME

WHEN Ruttler arrived, Chet met him in the hotel lobby. The two went up to Herb's room, to find him stretched out on the bed, dressed. Ruttler turned on a corner floor lamp. Herb blinked, rubbed his hand across his forehead.

"Hello, Chet!" he said. "I see you've got Doc with you. I guess I won't need him. I'm feeling better."

Ruttler began to examine Herb in professional fashion. His probing fingers found the bump at the back of the young man's head.

"How did you get this?" inquired Ruttler.

"A car smacked me," replied Herb. "I must have cracked the curb. I didn't want to go to a hospital, so I hopped a cab. But I was dizzy, and figured a few drinks would help."

Chet's face showed satisfaction with the story, and Herb observed the expression. Doc Ruttler finished the examination with a nod.

"A slight concussion," was his diagnosis, "but you're all over it, Waylon. You'd better rest, though. Don't try to use your eyes."

Ruttler lowered the lamp so that its glare wouldn't shine toward the bed. He and Chet made their departure. Immediately, Herb rolled from the bed. Reaching the closet, he undertoned a favorable report into the microphone there.

Harry Vincent answered, then held a brief conference with someone. Harry finally told Herb to follow Ruttler's advice, but to leave the closet door slightly open. By that arrangement, the sensitive mike could pick up any further conversations from the room, thus making it unnecessary for Herb to leave the bed.

Below, Harry turned off his own microphone, so that no sounds would carry from his room to Herb's, which was on the ninth floor. Harry's room was almost dark, but there was a vague shape standing by the window.

That form spoke in the quiet tone of Cranston.

The Shadow intended a brief trip to Doc Ruttler's private hospital, which was located on the South Side. The place was only a few miles from the hotel, and this was a good time for an inspection tour, with Doc Ruttler absent.

The fake medico was still harboring a horde of pretended accident victims, crooks of Crawler's ilk. Soon, they would begin to leave that refuge – some discharged with settled claims, others sneaking away like the thieves that they were.

All that would cover Doc Ruttler. He might be blamed for laxity, in letting the fake cases get away; but he would, at least, be credited with having picked the real from the phony.

It was The Shadow's intention to spring a surprise before that exodus began. The task would be easy, provided that crooks did not suspect his coming move. However, The Shadow wanted to postpone his scheme as long as possible, hoping that he could deliver a simultaneous thrust against Long Steve Bydle.

Doc Ruttler was the important link.

CHICAGO CRIME

If the law could be roused to rapid action at the proper time, Ruttler would be exposed as a crook, along with the patients at his hospital. Since J. M. Cruke was Ruttler's prize patient, police would be brought to the Southlake Hotel.

That could result in the trapping of Long Steve Bydle, with Chet Soville and other followers. But the whole campaign would require concerted action. Numerous details had to be weighed beforehand.

THE shape stirred from the window. Harry heard the door close. Soon afterward, he saw a car move out from a parking space behind the hotel. The Shadow had started on his dusk-shrouded route.

Listening at the receiving end of the wire, Harry heard no sounds from Herb's room. The Shadow's agent settled back for what seemed to be a useless vigil. There wasn't anything that could break wrong at the hotel, in Harry's opinion. Nevertheless, The Shadow had ordered him to his routine duty and Harry intended to faithfully observe it.

Had that hookup been connected with Long Steve's apartment instead of Herb's room, Harry would have gotten a different impression. Up in the twelfth-floor apartment, the pretended J. M. Cruke was seated in his invalid chair talking to Doc Ruttler, as patient to physician.

There was a signaled knock at the door. Chet Soville was also present, and Long Steve motioned for the lieutenant to answer the summons.

Chet admitted a stoopish man, who came directly to the wheel chair. Long Steve knew the fellow and told him to sit down. The stoopy man was evidently well informed on matters that concerned Long Steve, although he addressed the big-shot as "Mr. Cruke".

"This is Larrivan," announced Long Steve, in the slow, wheezy tone of Cruke. "An investigator for several insurance companies. He has been on our pay roll for quite a while."

Larrivan supplied a grin. It faded, a moment later, when Long Steve demanded with sudden sharpness:

"What have you found out?"

"Nothing much." Larrivan was toying nervously with his derby hat. "I've been to see a big banker named Gramley, but he doesn't seem to know much. Unless —"

Larrivan hesitated. Long Steve forgot his Cruke manner, to urge with an ugly rasp:

"Unless what?"

"There was a guy came to see Gramley yesterday," replied Larrivan, "just as I was going out. When I got back to the office, I found that Gramley had called me."

"So what?"

"Well, I called Gramley back," continued Larrivan, "but he said it wasn't important. And today, when I went to see him, I kept hinting about that call. But Gramley dodged my questions."

"Who do you think the fellow was?"

"Maybe some inside guy that's working for Gramley's bank. They've loaned plenty of dough to the insurance companies. If they've been using an inside man, that could account for all the tip-offs that have been giving us trouble."

Finished with that statement, Larrivan watched Long Steve with an anxious eye. He was afraid that the big-shot would be angry because he had not received more information. Instead, Long Steve accepted the news as sufficient. Turning to Chet, he snapped:

"Better have a couple of guys case the joint where Gramley lives. We'll find out who it is that comes there!"

Chet asked Larrivan for the address. The stoopish man gave it. Chet's eyes popped as they turned toward Long Steve. The big-shot was also electrified. Forgetting that he was Cruke, Long Steve was half out of the wheel chair, an oath snapping from his lips.

"Hear that address, Chet?" demanded Long Steve. "That's the one the cab driver gave you. It means that Waylon could have been the guy that Larrivan saw at Gramley's!"

Chet nodded. Like Long Steve, he was twisting facts to a wrong conclusion, but one that was just as serious as the right one. Both men had missed the link between Herb Waylon and The Shadow, but they were putting a wrong interpretation upon Herb's meeting with Peter Gramley.

Long Steve, sure that Herb must be Gramley's agent, began a buzzing undertone that brought the others close about him. Grins showed on the hard faces of the listeners.

Trouble was due for Herb Waylon and it was coming in a hurry. Without realizing it, crooks were picking the perfect time to move.

They were ready to act during the absence of Herb's invisible protector, The Shadow!

CHAPTER XIV. CRISSCROSSED CRIME

LYING on his bed, Herb Waylon was keeping his eyes shut, as Doc Ruttler had suggested. Much though he disliked the phony physician, Herb realized that Ruttler knew his stuff. Doc Ruttler had certainly managed to slip plenty past the real doctors who mistook him for a fellow practitioner.

With his eyes closed, Herb seemed to sense sounds more readily. He wondered whether his hearing was actually acute or whether he was still troubled by mental confusion. Perhaps it was a recollection from the past that made him fancy he heard footsteps outside his door.

It suddenly struck him that the sound was no illusion. Opening his eyes, Herb saw the door open. He swung about on the bed, staring in disbelief.

On the threshold stood Joan Gramley!

The subdued lamplight tinted Joan's lovely face, formed a background like a halo, against her dark, fluffy hair. Her eyes were expressive. They were limpid orbs that carried no rebuke; only sympathy.

For a moment, Herb's own eyes reflected Joan's expression. Then he decided that the girl had come here to chide him.

"There's no use, Joan," said Herb, thickly. "I don't want to talk to you. Not after the way you looked at me last night."

Joan came closer. Her hand rested on Herb's arm. Herb was standing now. Her lips were breathing words that no one could have resisted.

"Poor darling!" whispered Joan. "Couldn't you understand?"

"Understand what?"

"That I still love you?"

"Then why –"

Herb halted. His mind was clearer; groping, it began to find the answer. As if from far away, Herb heard Joan explain:

"It was on account of dad. He wanted to arrest you. I knew that he would drop that plan if I scorned you. You didn't realize it, and I couldn't explain. It was better, at the moment, to have you believe that I was through with you."

Herb began to mutter apologies. Joan silenced him with a tiny finger pressed against his lips. She breathed that she had been waiting, longing, for this time when she could see him again.

His arms encircling Joan, Herb leaned forward to receive her kiss. That was the moment when he heard another sound; one that brought an immediate warning.

Herb looked toward the door too late.

In the doorway stood Chet Soville, eyes rigid, lips fixed in an unlovely leer. The crook had a drawn revolver and he wasn't alone. Behind him were two others; one was Doc Ruttler. The other man looked familiar to Herb, though his face was somewhat shaded by the derby hat that topped it.

CHET stepped into the room.

"Just a couple of love birds, huh?" he sneered. "So this is the dame that you're goofy about. Maybe it was on her account that you got soused last night. Who is she?"

Herb didn't reply. He eased Joan to a chair beside the bed. Silently, Herb faced Chet with challenging eye.

It was Larrivan who supplied the answer that Chet wanted. The derby-hatted man popped into the room excitedly.

"Gramley's daughter!" voiced Larrivan, hoarsely. "I get it – she's the go-between!"

Joan stared blankly, but Herb understood. Despite a dizziness that whirled his tired brain, he could understand exactly what the crooks thought, for he recognized Larrivan as the man that he had seen at the Gramley apartment.

Larrivan – the investigator that Joan's father had called by telephone. The fellow who wasn't supposed to know that Gramley had branded Herb a crook. It was plain that Larrivan had not been told.

Again Herb was trapped by a false situation that he could not possibly explain.

Chet motioned Ruttler to the telephone, told him to call Cruke's apartment. Doc held a short confab with the big-shot. Turning about, Ruttler gave orders to Chet.

"Keep Waylon here," he said. "The bunch can take care of him. The less noise, the better."

"And the moll?" demanded Chet.

"This will fix her." Ruttler grinned dryly, as he drew a hypodermic needle from his pocket. "A shot of dope like we gave Waylon, when we brought him here. We're taking the girl over to my hospital."

Joan didn't flinch as Ruttler approached her. Her eyes were brave as they looked toward Herb. She was worried about him, not about herself. Herb, in turn, was thinking only of Joan.

Chet Soville was watching Doc Ruttler. That gave Herb a sudden chance. With a lunge, Herb came from the bed edge, flinging a hand for one objective: Chet's gun. Herb caught the fellow's fist, jerked it before Chet could pull the trigger. The crook snarled as he fired; too late.

That bullet cracked the window. Herb was shoving Chet for a corner, but the crook had his gun straight up and was twisting his wrist clear for a slash at Herb's head. That satisfied Larrivan; the stoopish man turned to another task.

Joan was tearing away from Ruttler. Larrivan blocked her. One scrawny hand locked Joan's arms behind her, the other stifled her frenzied cries. As Larrivan held the girl helpless, Ruttler jabbed the needle in her flesh.

Already dizzyed by exertion, Herb hardly felt the glancing blow that Chet landed beside his ear. Staggering, Herb reached the foot of the bed. He wavered there while the whole scene became a nightmare.

Ruttler and Larrivan were gone, carrying Joan with them. To Herb's whirling gaze, they seemed to disappear when his eyes blinked. He wanted to follow, but his legs wouldn't move. Breathing heavily, Herb scarcely felt the cold roundness that pressed his temple. That icy object was the muzzle of Chet's revolver.

"Here's where you croak, double-crosser!" sneered the crook. "You asked for it, so you're getting it! You forced me to fire one shot, so another won't matter. It's easier to get rid of a stiff, anyway."

There was a pause – only an instant, but it seemed an eternity to Herb. He expected it to end with a burst from Chet's gun. Instead, a cool voice ended the silence. The tone came from the doorway.

"Hold that trigger, Soville!" it said. "I've got you covered!"

CHET'S gun hand dropped. He whipped about to stare into the throat of an automatic gripped by Harry Vincent. Who The Shadow's agent was, Chet didn't know; but he certainly meant business. Chet voiced a defeated snarl.

It was Herb who gulped news to Harry:

"Joan – Joan Gramley! They've taken her – two of them –"

"Go after them," ordered Harry. "Pick up Soville's gun when he drops it."

CHICAGO CRIME

Harry juttred his automatic forward. Chet let the revolver hit the floor. Despite his grogginess, Herb found that he could act again. Clamping his aching head with one hand, he stooped and clumsily picked up Soville's gun.

Harry watched Herb steadily. The Shadow's agent stepped aside, intending to let him pass. Then came sudden footsteps from the hall; they were sneaky, but rapid in their approach. Harry changed tactics.

"Cover Soville!" he snapped to Herb. "I'll take care of this!"

Wheeling out into the corridor, Harry suddenly faced a trio of armed bellhops. There was a burst of shots wherein Harry's gun talked first. Herb heard a figure plop in the corridor, while others scampered for cover.

That same instant, Herb had his hands full.

He was covering Chet, but the crime lieutenant took a chance. He dived for Herb, snatching at his gun hand. Herb yanked away to aim, but his elbow hit the bedstead. His shot sizzled wide.

Chet didn't wait to grapple. He hurled himself through the doorway; a bad move, for Harry was down the corridor and saw him come through. But before Harry could clip the crook, the two remaining bellhops opened fire from their doorways.

Dropping back, Harry missed his aim at Chet. His shot whistled wide as the sallow crook dived for a stairway.

There, Chet met other hoodlums coming up. With raucous voice, he ordered them into the fray. Harry heard the shout and gave a call to Herb. Moving forward, Harry opened rapid fire.

Then Herb was with him. Together, they were driving along the hall, scattering mobsters ahead of them. They didn't stop when they reached the stairs, for gunners were dropping back to the shelter of a landing. Instead, they reached the turn of the corridor and halted, panting, just beyond it.

That sortie had accomplished results. Two of the fake bellhops lay wounded, while Harry and Herb were unscathed. But an attack was coming soon. Harry could hear shouts from the stairs. Coolly, he reloaded his automatic, telling Herb to stand back and be ready with the few reserve bullets that his revolver contained.

Leaning toward the wall, Herb pressed against a double door. His elbow jogged a two-inch crack between the sliding halves. Herb could hear a rumble below. He recognized it as the service elevator.

"They're taking Joan down!" gulped Herb. "We've got to stop them, Vincent!"

Harry scarcely heard Herb's words. He was busy watching past the corner. Frantically, Herb performed the first action that came to his maddened mind. He grabbed at the halves of the elevator door, pried them apart.

Just then the new attack came. Harry began to fire at Chet's enlarged crew. A dozen gunners were launching for the lone defender, zigzagging, taking to shelter as they came. Harry clipped some; others rolled to safety. One man, however, made the entire route.

Rising right up from the floor, the fellow lunged past the turn and bowled Harry flat. Sprawling, Harry gave a yell to Herb; with it, he glimpsed his companion at the open elevator shaft. Herb was taking hurried aim, but Harry's attacker shoved a gun upward, to fire first.

The bullet pinged the steel side of the door frame. Instinctively, Herb shifted. He forgot the open shaft. He cried out as he stumbled backward; made a frantic lurch that failed. A second later, Herb had gone from sight, down into that nine-story shaft!

HARRY'S head sank back. A gun muzzle pressed between his eyes. He could hear a rumble blending with the harsh oaths of other arriving killers.

Then a sharp click.

Harry thought it was a gun hammer striking on an empty cartridge. He was wrong. That click was followed by the sudden, hollow thunder of a big gun.

There was a howl, as Harry's captor rolled away. Cold steel left Harry's forehead. Shouts of attackers, their hurried gunfire – all seemed puny against new roars from twin automatics that blazed destruction upon skulking thugs.

Above that mighty, devastating barrage came the mocking laugh of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XV. CROOKS VANISH

IF ever there had been a perfect ambush, The Shadow had provided it. How he had managed that coup, Harry couldn't guess, although he was soon to learn. All that counted at the present moment, was the fact that The Shadow had crooks on the run.

They were diving back beyond the corridor's turn, plopping like chunks of snow flung aside by a living plow, in the person of The Shadow. Not only did the black-cloaked fighter clear away that crew of shock troops; he stopped the arrival of reserves.

When The Shadow reached the stairs, to jab final shots to the landing, Chet Soville dived below. The Shadow could hear the rush of many feet, taking to more distant cover at Chet's order.

Taunting a laugh that sped the flight, The Shadow turned to find Harry Vincent beside him. Questioning his agent, The Shadow learned all that had happened.

When Harry told the final detail – of Herb's plunge down the elevator shaft – The Shadow gave a grim laugh in response. Something in that tone roused Harry to sudden hope.

The Shadow led the way back to the elevator shaft. Once there, Harry gasped a sudden understanding.

The rumble that Herb had heard had not come from a descending car. Like Harry, Herb had lost sight of the time element during those exciting minutes. The elevator carrying Ruttler and Larrivan, with Joan as their prisoner, had gone down a good while before.

What Herb had heard was the rumble of the elevator coming up again!

The occupant of that darkened car had been The Shadow. Arriving several seconds after Herb's fall, he had been in time to prevent Harry's death. With that as his first stroke, The Shadow had gone on to further victory.

There was another death that he had halted, though his action had been a sheer coincidence.

Stepping into the elevator, The Shadow lowered it beneath the floor level. Harry gave a glad cry, On the elevator's broad top was a sprawled figure that stirred into life. A few seconds later, Harry had hauled Herb Waylon to safety and was calling the news to The Shadow.

The elevator came up. Harry noted that it was slow, geared to carry heavy loads.

Herb's plunge had been a short one, no more than a dozen feet. The elevator had been too slow to provide an added impact. Had Harry been looking toward the shaft a few seconds after Herb's fall, he would have seen the saved man rising up through blackness, his return heralding The Shadow's immediate arrival.

IT didn't take Harry long to get Herb to his feet. The jolt had been a hard one, but it had jarred some of the cobwebs from Herb's brain. When The Shadow came back from a short reconnoiter, he found two men ready to follow his commands.

The Shadow announced that there was chaos on the lower floors. Police had invaded the Southlake Hotel and were blocking off the escape of mobsters. The place would no longer serve as a criminal resort, after the law had finished with its occupants.

Unfortunately, the situation made it difficult to pursue Joan's captors. Both Harry and Herb thought that The Shadow would attempt that task, despite the complications; hence they followed him eagerly into the service elevator.

Instead of starting the car downward, The Shadow took it to the twelfth floor. Herb started an excited objection, that Harry quickly silenced.

The Shadow had chosen the one way to offset the strategy of Long Steve Bydle. That was to capture the big-shot himself. If any man could risk bluffing the police, it was Long Steve, for he still could pass himself as Cruke, a helpless invalid.

Whatever harm crooks might plan for Joan Gramley, it would be offset if they learned that their own chief was a prisoner, held as hostage by The Shadow.

Battle hadn't reached the twelfth floor, for the course of strife had traveled downward. Silence gripped the corridor outside of Long Steve's apartment. No guards were present. It was likely that the big-shot had begun his bluff.

Leaving Harry and Herb on guard duty outside, The Shadow opened the door. The living room was lighted; by the window, he could see the wheel chair faced out toward the balcony. A breeze was whipping in from the open window, but Steve was not there to enjoy it. The chair was empty.

A light showed from a side room. There was a mumble of voices. Long Steve appeared lugging a large satchel. He placed it on a table, began to open drawers and take out papers. Most important was a bundle that The Shadow recognized as Korber's fifty thousand dollars.

Though he was willing to bluff it out as Cruke, the big-shot certainly intended to be ready for a prompt getaway, if needed.

Long Steve's breath came in hard-sucked hisses. He was cursing Chet Soville for all the trouble that the lieutenant had made. From those oaths, it was evident that Steve hadn't been informed of The Shadow's entry. He merely thought that Chet had done a blundering job in settling Herb and Joan.

CHICAGO CRIME

In fact, Long Steve did not immediately recognize the sound that crept from a space behind him. It sounded like a shivery laugh, but it was vague. Steve listened a moment, then turned toward the wheel chair.

The laugh came closer; therefore, it seemed louder, though it was still in the sinister whisper that reached Steve's ears alone.

Long Steve flipped about, then gave four quick, backward paces. His right hand stopped halfway from his pocket. His stringbean shape went into the huddly crouch of Cruke.

The pretense was useless. The big-shot was looking into The Shadow's gun muzzle.

It wasn't the first time that Long Steve had faced a similar threat, but never before had he seen a black shape in back of it. He ignored the gun, to meet the burn of eyes that told him fight would be of no avail.

A FLUSH of anger showed on Long Steve's face, offsetting the chalky layer that went with the guise of Cruke. He heard the words that came in steady whisper, commanding him to move toward the door. Long Steve knew what The Shadow intended.

Luck suddenly came Long Steve's way.

There was a stir from the inner room. Two helpers, posted here, were ready to do an outward sneak. Long Steve had already guessed that The Shadow wanted him as hostage. Since he had a while to live, he could afford a risk.

With a fierce shout, Long Steve made a sideward dive for the wheel chair. He twisted as he hit it; the chair spun about. Its roller-bearing wheels sent it on a fast trip toward the side wall, carrying Long Steve from under the quick swing of The Shadow's gun hand.

Two thuggish hotel attendants bounded in from the other room. The Shadow met them with a sudden drive. He slashed a cross-armed blow at one; as the fellow staggered, The Shadow finished the stroke with a trigger pull.

The muzzle of the .45 was pointed directly toward the second crook. The fellow took the bullet with a grunt. Still wheeling, The Shadow faced the corner where Long Steve had landed.

Again the big-shot was on the move. He hadn't wasted time to clamber from the wheel chair. Shoving both legs against the wall, Steve had driven his vehicle backward. It was spinning in a long fast trip to the outer door. As The Shadow followed with his gun, the wheel chair hit the wall beside the entry.

The chair was turned about, when it struck. Steve's bearish form was precipitated in a long hurtle out into the corridor. With him went the satchel that his left hand had never relinquished. The wheel chair became an obstacle to block The Shadow's aim.

Whistles were sounding from far below, out toward the boulevard. The Shadow's shot must have been heard; and observers could have spied the brawl near the open window. Those factors didn't matter for the moment. The Shadow's task was to overtake Long Steve.

Reaching the wheel chair, The Shadow yanked it aside, letting it go into another long roll that ended with a crackle against the wall. By the time the chair thudded, the cloaked battler was in the corridor, viewing a fierce scuffle near the stairs. Harry had grappled with Long Steve, and Herb had joined in the fray.

In hanging on to the valise, Steve had placed himself at disadvantage. He sprawled, sending the satchel ahead of him, toward the elevator. The Shadow saw Long Steve's gun bounding from his fist. It went a dozen feet along the floor, to a spot where the big-shot couldn't reach it.

Right then, Long Steve's chances of farther flight were only one in a thousand. He made a wild scramble on hands and knees, but it wasn't taking him anywhere, until chance again played a part. There was a clang; an elevator door shot open. The operator saw Long Steve and poked out a revolver.

Harry yanked Herb back. They aimed together. The elevator operator ducked inside the car. In those quick moments, Long Steve Bydle snatched his precious satchel and made a wild dive into the elevator.

The big-shot was gone before The Shadow could aim. His own aids blocked the path of fire. True, Harry was shooting at the elevator and Herb was joining the fire, but Long Steve Bydle was out of reach.

Doors slammed tight. The elevator was off on a quick trip to the lobby.

Immediately, there was another clatter. The door of the next elevator came open. Harry dragged Herb forward, hoping to capture the car; but this time, the guess was bad. Out from the elevator piled a pair of officers. Taking Harry and Herb for crooks, they tried to grab them.

The Shadow opened fire from the corridor.

Each spurt of the big .45 sent a bullet close to a policeman's ear. The Shadow could be as expert at missing targets as at hitting them. The cops couldn't see where the shots came from, and they didn't care to investigate.

They dived back into the elevator as warning slugs ricocheted from the metal door frame. Slamming the doors shut, the officers used the car as a fort, poking their gun muzzles through the narrow slit between the doors. From that position, they couldn't find a target.

When they finally opened the doors wider, the corridor was empty. The Shadow had taken to the stairway, his companions with him.

Though Long Steve Bydle had escaped, The Shadow had formed plans to regain the big-shot's trail.

CHAPTER XVI. CRIME'S CITADEL

A FEW floors below, The Shadow conducted his companions to the service elevator and sent them downstairs. Their orders were to watch for a chance to get through the police cordon. Before rejoining them, The Shadow wanted to learn more about Long Steve's flight.

Using the stairway, The Shadow reached the side passage to the lobby. Police were in charge, with a flock of captured hoodlums, some wounded, herded in the lobby. A purplish-faced police captain was questioning an honest-looking clerk.

"That last batch that got away," questioned the captain. "Did you recognize any of them?"

The clerk shook his head.

"What about the fellow with the suitcase?"

"I saw him," replied the clerk, "but I don't know who he was."

"Humph!" The police captain tilted his head to listen to an officer's report. Then: "What about the shooting up in 1224? Who lives up there?"

The clerk's reply branded him as a member of the crooked outfit, although the police captain didn't recognize it. The fellow was faking innocence well.

"That suite was empty," lied the clerk. "The guest, Mr. J. M. Cruke, left the hotel two days ago."

"What was Cruke's business?"

"None. He was a helpless invalid who spent all his time in a wheel chair. His health became worse. His physician ordered him to a hospital."

One of the police reported that a wheel chair had been found in the apartment. That gave J. M. Cruke a clean bill, from the law's standpoint. But The Shadow, sidling from the darkened exit, had formed different conclusions from the clerk's testimony.

The statements fitted with The Shadow's own theory.

Even in flight, Long Steve Bydle could still revert to his part of Cruke. He had planned for this emergency. If the police looked for Cruke, they would find him in the hospital, under charge of a physician who would swear that the supposed invalid had been there long before the trouble at the Southlake Hotel.

There was only one hospital which could serve in that bluff. It was the fake establishment managed by Doc Ruttler.

That was where Joan Gramley had been taken; it was the place where Long Steve Bydle had fled. Captor and prisoner were under the same roof. That fact made the place The Shadow's next objective.

Thanks to the large area covered by the Southlake Hotel, the police had been unable to form a tight cordon. Harry and Herb had picked a route through it and were waiting near a suburban station of the Illinois Central, when The Shadow met them.

THE SHADOW was driving an old sedan that Harry didn't recognize when it pulled up alongside. It was The Shadow's whisper that identified him as the driver. His companions boarded the car. The Shadow drove them southward.

They reached the borders of a residential district, beyond which lay the unsavory odor of the stockyards. Night was complete; when The Shadow parked the dark-painted car on a side street, it became a part of the surrounding gloom.

Picking a route between two buildings, The Shadow found the back door of a rickety, deserted house. With his tiny flashlight, he led his companions through to the front. The light extinguished, The Shadow opened the slats of a shutter.

Across the street stood a building that had once been a pretentious mansion, its grounds surrounded by a low, picket-topped wall. The house had ceased to be a residence when this section became less desirable.

CHICAGO CRIME

There was a driveway leading in between two pillars; it was closed off by a heavy gate. The arch above the gateway bore a sign: "PRIVATE HOSPITAL," while the gate itself was tagged with a smaller notice that read: "AMBULANCES ONLY."

Dull lights showed through barred windows of the building. The place was a stronghold, and little wonder. It was the hospital controlled by Doc Ruttler.

At The Shadow's whisper, Harry and Herb followed him up to the second floor. Getting a view across the picket fence, they could glimpse occasional sparkles that came with the brief glows of fireflies.

Men were patrolling the grounds with flashlights. Any intruders who worked within that wall would be due for immediate difficulties.

Battle within those grounds would not only produce an instant alarm inside the hospital; it would also put invaders in trouble with the law. Doc Ruttler, taking orders from the pretended invalid Cruke, could barricade the hospital, then summon the police.

A large front door served as main entrance. It was visible from the window of the house across the way. But Herb gave a groan when he saw white-jacketed attendants on duty. He knew that anyone who tried to pass those portals would have to come with the approval of Long Steve Bydle.

Though Herb Waylon knew that Joan Gramley was safe for a while, he also realized that there was no guarantee of her future welfare. Whatever her eventual fate, it could be prevented only by moving to her rescue; and under the circumstances, that seemed hopeless.

No move could be worse than an attack. Once it began crooks could dispose of Joan, to prevent her testimony. Doc Ruttler could easily fake it that she had died while a patient, and give valid reasons for her death.

To call the police into it would be equally fatal. The law could be stalled while Ruttler accomplished his dirty work. One course alone seemed plausible. That was for someone to work from the inside.

That person, however, would have to be capable of strong battle, in a pinch. The Shadow was one being who could provide such measures.

But The Shadow wasn't in the citadel of crime.

THOUGHTS of The Shadow caused Herb to turn about. He wanted to speak to his mysterious protector. The Shadow had at least found this observation post across from the hospital. Perhaps he had other tricks stowed in the capacious sleeves of his flowing cloak.

In the darkness, Herb sensed suddenly that The Shadow was gone. It was Harry Vincent who spoke from the darkness.

"Stick here, Herb," advised Harry. "Our turn will come later. We want to be ready when we are needed."

"The Shadow!" exclaimed Herb. "Is he trying to get inside, over across the way?"

"I think so," returned Harry. "He usually chooses the best move. He said to wait for his signal."

"But how can he make it without giving himself away?" queried Herb.

Harry admitted that he didn't know. He said that The Shadow had made previous trips into Ruttler's hospital, but that was before the guards had been placed on duty. There was a chance, so Harry declared, that The Shadow had some secret route of entry.

That possibility pleased Herb. He didn't guess that Harry had suggested it merely to ease Herb's strain. Actually, Harry was quite as perplexed as Herb. The Shadow had given Harry a complete plan of the hospital and the grounds about it, in case his agent needed them. Those plans didn't show a single loophole that Harry could recall.

Nevertheless, The Shadow's ways were many. Time and again, Harry had seen his chief crack situations as tough as this one. Passing through a cordon of quick-witted gunners ready to shoot on sight, was The Shadow's specialty.

Harry suggested that they go downstairs. When Herb asked why, Harry's reply was a simple one. Sooner or later – Harry was sure of it – there would be a signal from The Shadow. When it came, their job would be to join him.

"And the place he will want us," added Harry, as they groped their way down the stairs, "will be inside that hospital; not here."

"How will he signal us?" queried Herb, eagerly. "With a flashlight from one of those barred windows?"

"Either that," returned Harry, grimly, "or with gunfire. Once things break loose, The Shadow will need us. I've seen it work before."

The prospect had a depressing effect upon Herb. He didn't relish gunfire in any place where Joan was a prisoner. His spirits rose, however, when Harry reminded him of events at the Southlake Hotel. There, The Shadow's guns had taken over the odds, and the cloaked fighter still carried that same brace of automatics, fully loaded.

When they reached the lower window, Harry told Herb to make sure his own gun had its quota of cartridges. He held a flashlight while Herb made an inspection. Then came blackness; with it, silence. Long minutes lapsed, while the tense young men watched the dull, unchanging lights of the disguised fortress across the way.

Crime's citadel stood grim against the blackness of the trees surrounding it. Seemingly impregnable, manned by picked fighters from the underworld, that stronghold flung a silent challenge to all who might venture near its formidable walls.

Crooks had found a final refuge secure against all attacks, even from The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVII. CROOKS MAKE PLANS

INSIDE the hospital that served him as a stronghold, Long Steve Bydle sat staring from a deep-set window. The space was too deep, the room too dim, for him to be observed by outside eyes. Nevertheless, the big-shot was taking no risk.

Once again, he had become J. M. Cruke. He was propped in an invalid chair, his gaze listless, his face smeared with chalkish substance that seemed a part of his skin.

CHICAGO CRIME

From a half-opened door came mumbled conversation. The next room was a large one; it contained half a dozen patients in cots and chairs. Doc Ruttler termed that room, and the others like it, a ward.

Most of the patients were faking hurts, like Long Steve was. They included Crawler and others of his sort, who had figured in various traffic accidents.

Doc Ruttler came into the room where Long Steve sat alone. The phony medico closed the door that led into the ward. When he took a chair near Long Steve's, Ruttler showed unsteadiness. A match flame wavered badly, as he tried to light a cigarette.

"Jittery, doc?" Long Steve put the question with a short laugh. "Keep your shirt on! Things are going to straighten out."

"I'm worried about the mess at the hotel," declared Ruttler. "Maybe the coppers will be smart enough to pick up a trail from there."

"Not a chance!" snapped Long Steve. "They didn't see me duck out. Besides" – he reached beside him, picked up his satchel – "I brought this along."

Opening the satchel. Long Steve chuckled as he removed the stack of fifty thousand dollars. He handed the bag to Ruttler, told him to chuck the rest of the contents in the furnace.

"Having dough ain't a crime," declared Long Steve. "I'll keep the fifty grand on me. I don't care who sees it. I'm supposed to be a rich guy, anyway, when I'm J. M. Cruke."

Doc Ruttler still showed worry.

"You ran into The Shadow," he reminded. "Suppose he dopes out that you're here?"

"How's that going to matter?" returned Long Steve. "He hasn't a chance of getting inside. If he gumshoes around this joint, we'll fix him and tell the bulls afterward."

"But if he spills a tip-off –"

"Who's going to believe it? I'll say I'm Cruke, and you'll say I've been here a couple of days. Nobody can prove different."

Ruttler stroked his chin.

"The Shadow had men with him," he said. "You ran up against them in the hall."

"And I didn't get a good look at them," parried Long Steve, "which means they didn't lamp me. Open the window, doc. The heat's bothering you!"

RUTTLE complied. He had hardly stepped back toward his chair, when an outside noise alarmed him. It was the muffled crackle of two colliding cars, accompanied by shouts, all a block away.

"Easy, doc," laughed Steve. "Once in a while, there's real accidents in this burg. If there wasn't, we couldn't make a go of the racket."

Doc Ruttler came back to the subject that really worried him. He began with the statement:

"First, there was Herb Waylon –"

"And he's through," interjected Long Steve. "One of the mob saw him take a spill down the elevator shaft."

"But after that," reminded Ruttler, "there was this Vincent fellow, that Chet told us about."

"But he showed up too late to get wise to anything. Forget it, doc" – the big-shot shook the medico's shoulder – "and tell me what you're going to do about the dame."

Horns were tooting along the front street. A taxi pulled up in front of the hospital drive. Men jumped from other cars and made motions at the gate.

"Somebody got hurt in that smash," remarked Long Steve, as he stretched his head toward the window. "What're the boys going to do about it?"

"They'll take them in," replied Ruttler. His chortle told that his nerve had returned. "That's the best thing about this place. I run it on the up and up. It's a swell break when some real accident cases come our way."

The gate swung open. The taxi wheeled through. None of the other cars were allowed to pass. As soon as the taxi had discharged its human cargo, it returned. The gate was locked after it went out.

Doc Ruttler began to talk about Joan.

"The way she looks right now," he told Long Steve, "I can tell her old man she's an amnesia victim. There's been a couple of cases lately, where persons were wandering around. Lost memory is always a good stall."

"And then?" asked Long Steve.

"I'll advise an immediate operation," replied Ruttler. "I've built up a good name, and I've faked a lot of cures, to make this hospital rate high. Gramley will let me handle the case."

"Good enough," approved Long Steve. "Only, see to it that the dame don't come out of the ether, even. Gramley won't suspect anything when she croaks. Brain operations are delicate."

A telephone bell was ringing. Ruttler brought the instrument to Long Steve, pulling behind it a long extension cord. Long Steve gave a knowing nod to Ruttler, indicating that the right voice was on the wire.

"Hello, Larrivan!" said the big-shot. "So you're over at Gramley's, huh?... O.K. Break the news to the old man... Yeah, tell him his daughter is here, and bring him over right away..."

"What'll you tell him? Tell him she called your office from a pay station... Yeah, you couldn't figure what it was all about, until she had sense enough to give you the number of the pay box. That's how you traced her and brought her to Doc Ruttler..."

"She's got amnesia. Get it – or do you want doc to spell it?... Amnesia, that's right. It means she can't remember anything... O.K., we'll be waiting for you."

WHEN Doc Ruttler was going from the room, Long Steve heard scraping sounds in the hall. He swung about in his chair to see a wheeled stretcher going by, carrying a heavily bandaged burden.

CHICAGO CRIME

A nurse was bending over the silent victim, while an attendant pushed the stretcher. Doc Ruttler drew an interne aside and held a brief conversation. After that, he stepped back into the room and closed the door.

"One patient that's really hurt," informed Ruttler. "If he's insured, I'll keep him on exhibit. I'll let the interne look out for him. I'm going to see the Gramley girl and fix her so she can talk."

"But not so that she can blab too much –"

"Leave that to me, Long Steve."

Soon after Doc Ruttler had gone, Chet Soville sidled into the room. Long Steve motioned him to keep away from the window.

"What're you doing here?" demanded the big-shot. "I thought you were outside watching the grounds."

"I've got the crew posted," replied Chet. "They can take care of anybody, including The Shadow."

Long Steve grumbled that they should have taken care of The Shadow back at the hotel. Chet argued that The Shadow hadn't been expected there, any more than he had been outside the Club Miche. This time, he argued, the mob was set. Moreover, they were on grounds that were entirely their own.

That conversation was scarcely finished, when Steve's keen ear caught the wail of sirens. As the sound came closer, Chet also identified it. He began to get restless.

"You're as bad as doc," sneered Long Steve. "Inside of two minutes, he'll come popping in here. Wait and see."

Long Steve was right. As the sirens swung into the front street, Ruttler hurried in from the hall. He gasped that his fears were justified. The law was making a raid. He wanted Bydle to do something quick.

"Hold off the fireworks!" growled the big-shot. "We can start them when we want. We've got enough guys here to handle fifty cops. But let's wait, first, and see what it's all about."

Two motorcycles pulled up in front of the hospital. Behind them was a limousine, then a police car. His head thrust forward, Long Steve counted six police in all.

"Two on the cycles," he announced. "One getting out of the big buggy, and three more in the patrol car. That makes six – no, wait! It looks like seven."

The seventh was a man that Long Steve identified as an officer, although he was in plain clothes. Chet poked his face warily toward the window and recognized the fellow.

"Inspector Quillon!" he exclaimed. "There's Larrivan with him. And the guy with the gray hair must be Gramley."

They saw the inspector tell the officers to wait outside. Gramley and Larrivan had started up the steps to the hospital's main entrance. Inspector Quillon hurried after them.

"See that?" queried Long Steve. "Nothing to it! Old Gramley was just worried about his daughter and wanted to get here in a hurry. Go and do your stuff, doc."

Ruttler hurried away, much relieved. Long Steve told Chet to take care of the front door, but to keep out of sight. Reaching for the telephone, the big-shot added:

"I'm making a call to learn what's new at the hotel. I'll be seeing you later, Chet."

From the doorway, Chet Soville heard Long Steve chuckle in the fashion that told that the big-shot was well satisfied with matters as they stood.

CHAPTER XVIII. THE GAME TURNS

SOLEMN-FACED, Doc Ruttler led the visitors to the small private room where Joan Gramley lay in bed. The girl's eyes were open, but they had a tired stare. She barely recognized Peter Gramley when he stepped to the bedside.

That, however, was enough. Gramley's face lighted; he tried to make out words that came slowly from Joan's lips. Warningly, Ruttler drew him back.

"She knows you," declared the crooked physician. "That is enough. She is tired; she needs more rest."

His fingers pressed Joan's eyelids. The girl let them close. Ruttler drew the others to a corner.

"I have done all I can," he said, seriously, "but her condition does not seem to improve beyond the stage that you have seen. Other measures might be advisable."

"An operation?" queried Gramley.

Ruttler nodded. Gramley considered, then asked:

"How serious would it be?"

"All operations are serious," replied Ruttler. "In this case, with the patient young and healthy, I can almost guarantee complete success. But there is always a risk."

Gramley paced a bit, came to a decision.

"You have my approval, doctor," he told Ruttler. Abruptly, he swung to Quillon. "And I ask you, inspector, to institute an immediate search for a man named Herbert Waylon. Once found, he may be proved responsible for my daughter's ailment."

Despite themselves, Ruttler and Larrivan exchanged surprised looks. They managed to curb those expressions very promptly.

Gramley's tone rose in indignation, as he turned to Larrivan.

"I should have told you this before," asserted the banker. "Waylon is working with the accident racket. In addition to that criminal connection, he had designs upon my daughter. Joan was foolish enough to fall in love with him."

To the listening crooks, one surprise was piling upon another. Gramley's sincerity was evident. It proved that Herb hadn't been working as an inside man!

Once started on his theme, Gramley didn't stop. He gave all the details of Herb's visit, including the fact that he had shown leniency, on Joan's account.

"But I provided for any consequences," added Gramley. "After Waylon left, I wrote a complete account of every statement that he made and had Joan attest, as witness. The only document the I lack is Waylon's signed confession."

"I'll get that," assured Quillon "when we nab the fellow."

Both Ruttler and Larrivan were figuring that they had made a bad bet in Herb's case, one that had cost them heavily. It seemed too late, however, to make any alterations in their present plans, especially with Long Steve uninformed of Herb's true status.

After all, Herb Waylon was dead. The next step was to put Joan Gramley in the same condition. Doc Ruttler was working to that purpose, when he gestured suddenly for silence. He gave a worried glance toward the bed.

"We must not disturb the patient," he reminded. "Her condition may be much more serious than I suppose. Come, Mr. Gramley, and you inspector. You must both leave at once."

They were moving toward the door. It stood ajar, and Ruttler reached for the knob. Gramley undertoned a question:

"You will operate at once?"

"At once," repeated Ruttler. "I regard the case as urgent"

RUTTLE stopped short, the door swung halfway open. An ugly snarl caused the interruption. On the threshold sat Long Steve Bydle, deep in his wheel chair. The big-shot had used his left hand to roll the rubber-tired vehicle along the hall. His right, however, served another purpose.

In that fist, Steve held a revolver that moved slowly back and forth, covering both Peter Gramley and Inspector Quillon.

The two dropped back, hands half raised, with alarmed glances toward Ruttler. They took Long Steve for some crazed patient. Ruttler didn't, nor did Larrivan. They were reaching for guns of their own.

"Never mind the rods!" snapped Long Steve. "I can handle these two boobs! Say" – he stared coldly above his gun – "did either of you ever hear of J. M. Cruke?"

Inspector Quillon showed enlightenment. He had received details of the battle at the Southlake Hotel

"I'm Cruke!" chuckled Long Steve. "Only, that ain't my right moniker. I'm no invalid" – he was climbing from the wheel chair as he spoke – "I'm Long Steve Bydle! Ever hear that name?"

Quillon recalled it. He was glowering, but he kept his hands raised. The inspector realized that Ruttler and Larrivan could provide plenty of support for Long Steve.

"Long Steve Bydle," announced the big-shot. "The guy that's run the accident racket. But that won't be blamed on me. He's a guy named Herb Waylon who's going to take the rap.

CHICAGO CRIME

"Waylon's not dead" – this information was for Ruttler and Larrivan. "I found that out, when I talked to the desk clerk at the Southlake Hotel. He took a peek down the elevator shaft. The body wasn't there.

"I've just been listening to this blah–blah that Gramley gave you. He talked loud enough for me to hear him outside the door. Since Waylon is loose, we might as well let the bulls catch up with him."

Doc Ruttler still looked puzzled, and Larrivan wasn't any too wise in expression. Long Steve straightened to full length, forming a strange contrast to the huddly shape of Cruke.

"Don't you saps get the idea?" he snarled. "We're going to cut loose with the fireworks. Quillon gets his; so does Gramley along with the girl. Those papers Gramley talked about will pin the goods on Waylon.

"I'll clear out, along with all the fake cripples. You'll stay here, doc, along with Larrivan, to tell your story. We'll hand you a few wallops, only you won't be hurt bad. And remember, both of you, to say that the mob took Cruke with them.

"That'll make it look like I was snatched. Nobody will hear no more of J. M. Cruke. Got it all straight? O.K., that fixes it. As for you two" – he faced Gramley and Quillon – "I'm giving you a chance, just for the sport of it. Get going!"

LONG STEVE lowered his revolver, but his finger was tightening on the trigger. Doc Ruttler saw the big–shot's purpose. As soon as the victims broke through the door, Long Steve would fire a signal.

In wards along the hallway, fake cripples would be ready to greet the fleeing men with a barrage that neither could survive. It was a sure, quick way to put two victims on the spot.

During that bombardment, Long Steve would riddle Joan with bullets, then make his departure with the mob. The police, outside, would stand no chance against the horde that would pour from the hospital.

Perhaps Inspector Quillon scented something of the big–shot's scheme, for he stood where he was. Gramley tried to edge toward the door, but the inspector elbowed him back. Then the momentary mystery cleared.

The police inspector simply wanted to try argument. He thought that he could handle crooks like Long Steve.

"You're taking a long chance, Bydle," gruffed Quillon. "Why not call it quits? Beat it, but leave us here. It won't be murder, if you do."

Long Steve met the argument with a guffaw. His laugh ending, he rasped:

"Get going! It's your last chance!"

The gun was coming up. Quillon grabbed Gramley's arm and yanked him toward the door. Long Steve's eyes followed, glinting their evil pleasure as he timed the moment for the signal.

Suddenly, his trigger finger ceased to tighten.

Long Steve was staring toward the door, like the victims. They had halted, and with good reason. The doorway was blocked by a bulky form in white.

The man who stood there was grotesque. He was swathed in bandages, that increased the higher one looked. His head was almost completely covered, making his face appear like the wrapped visage of a mummy.

Only his eyes showed. They reflected the light with a burning gaze, intensified by the whiteness all about them. Below was a gun, a big automatic, projecting from a bandaged right fist.

One-handed, the white-garbed challenger held control, for his left arm was hung in a sling. One hand, however, was all he needed to hold sway, for that fist shoved its .45 straight between the eyes of Long Steve Bydle.

It was Doc Ruttler who gave an uncontrollable gasp. He realized where this foe had come from. He was the accident victim who had come in less than a half hour go. Whoever he was, he had tricked crooks with their own game.

Unhurt, he had faked injuries. Regarded harmless, he had been carried through the cordon of surrounding mobsters. A lone indomitable fighter, he had penetrated to the center of the stronghold to settle scores with the big-shot who controlled it.

No longer had he reason to conceal his identity. He declared it, to bring new consternation to the cornered crooks who faced him.

From lips obscured by swathing bandages came the muffled laugh of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XIX. CRAMPED REFUGE

DULLY, Long Steve Bydle stared at The Shadow. The stringy big-shot was backing slowly from the door, but it wasn't with a purpose. His hand had dropped limp beside him; he was ready to let the gun fall.

All that Long Steve could see were those avenging eyes, as accusing as they had been when he met The Shadow back at the Southlake Hotel.

This time, Steve's wheel chair didn't offer quick transportation. The big-shot had left the chair in the hall and couldn't get to it, with The Shadow blocking the path. Furthermore, The Shadow was wise to the tricky way in which Bydle could manage such a vehicle. The stunt wouldn't work again.

Long Steve licked his dips. Pasty dye tinted his tongue. The big-shot wanted to parley.

"You're on the spot, Shadow!" he voiced, in a tone that was hoarse and ineffective. "We got you boxed this time. You gotta make a deal, that's all."

The Shadow stepped forward. Automatic jabbed close to Steve's ribs, he made a sudden side sweep that knocked the revolver from the big-shot's feeble clutch. The lost gun bounced across the floor, almost to Joan's bed.

A moment later, The Shadow had stepped back. His gun was away from Long Steve, making menacing motions toward Ruttler and Larrivan. That pair cowering, The Shadow concentrated again upon Bydle. His whispered laugh made the big-shot wince.

Long Steve had forgotten one thing. Back at the hotel, The Shadow had wanted him alive, to hold as hostage because Joan Gramley was in the hands of Long Steve's lieutenant. That situation had changed. In gaining control here in the heart of Bydle's own stronghold, The Shadow had reclaimed the captured girl.

Death would be the proper fate for Long Steve, from The Shadow's present viewpoint.

CHICAGO CRIME

Moving to one side, The Shadow nudged Long Steve with the gun point. The crook's chalk-dyed face began to show understanding. The Shadow was going to march him out into the hallway, using him as a barrier against the waiting gunners in the wards across the way.

But Crawler and those others wouldn't guess the game. They'd think that the man they knew as Cruke was simply leading a procession. Doc Ruttler and Larrivan would come along, with Inspector Quillon behind them. Like Long Steve, they wouldn't tell the mobbies different.

It wouldn't help much, having others drill The Shadow, if Steve and his companions went first. What was worse, Crawler and his bunch wouldn't recognize The Shadow, all done up in white.

Probably The Shadow would have Gramley wheel Joan along in the chair that was so conveniently waiting outside the door. Long Steve began to curse himself because he had let The Shadow knock his gun away. If he still had that rod, Long Steve could give the signal, should he find half a chance to do so.

Orders crept from The Shadow's muffled lips – the sort that Steve expected. Rage gripped the big-shot. His muscles tightened, his limber body seemed to telescope. Though he had his own snarl, he looked like Cruke again.

In apish fashion, the big-shot shoved his hands forward, ready for a desperate spring. He halted with a jolt, for he saw The Shadow's eyes, spotted a finger tightening on its trigger.

If the first shot had to come, The Shadow would give it, straight to Long Steve's heart. That was why the big-shot halted his sudden motion.

It happened that Long Steve's temporary defiance was to produce the very break he wanted, but from a different source than he expected.

There was one man who wasn't watching The Shadow's eyes, who failed likewise to see the motion of the bandaged fighter's gun. That man was Inspector Quillon. All that he noted was the forward gesture that Long Steve Bydle made.

The police inspector acted on his own, without stopping to think it over.

Wrongly supposing that The Shadow was partly crippled, Quillon suspected actual menace the moment that Long Steve moved. Fearing that Ruttler and Larrivan would support the big-shot, the inspector decided to take out Long Steve.

Chucking himself forward, Quillon bowled Bydle from the path of The Shadow's aim, sending him hard against the wall beside the door.

As they went, Long Steve's stringy form unlimbered. It recoiled in springy fashion, coming back at Quillon like a boomerang. With a lucky heave, Long Steve bowled the inspector straight against The Shadow, smothering the gun muzzle that was swinging toward the wall.

Ruttler didn't pass up that opportunity. He made a wild spring for The Shadow, and close behind came Larrivan. This was their chance, for The Shadow was against the wall beside the doorway, his gun hand tangled under Quillon's arm.

With their move, the two crooks yanked guns, to open flank fire against The Shadow. They didn't guess the move that was about to happen.

CHICAGO CRIME

There was a rip as The Shadow flung his left arm wide. The sling tore loose from his neck; his arm, rigid from a splint beneath its bandages, pointed straight for the oncoming attackers. There was an explosion from within the mass of cloth that covered The Shadow's left hand.

From those bandages knifed a spurt of flame that pointed for Ruttler's shoulder. A bullet came with it. That wasn't an ordinary splint along The Shadow's wrist. The rigid object was another automatic, gripped in the white-clad fighter's bandaged fist!

With a half-crazed howl, Doc Ruttler spun clear about, like a child's top finishing its twirl. He flopped straight toward The Shadow, to land, half helpless, on hands and knees.

Inspector Quillon was away again, meeting Long Steve Bydle in a sudden grapple. That left only Larrivan, who was almost to the door. Momentarily protected by Ruttler's dropping form, Larrivan bolted through, shouting incoherently as he went.

The Shadow did not aim. It was unnecessary. Nor did he stop Doc Ruttler when the crippled physician came half to his feet, to scramble after Larrivan.

A terrific crackle filled the hall, guns bursting from many doorways. Crawler and his pals had heard the shot that they took for Long Steve's signal. Not knowing Larrivan, they took him for one of the fugitives that the big-shot had promised as a sacrifice for the muzzles of their hungry guns.

Whipped by bullets from all directions, Larrivan withered in the center of the hall.

Doc Ruttler heard that roar as he started out. Madly, the medico tried to halt his dive. He grabbed for the doorway with his right hand, but his wounded arm couldn't stand the strain. Ruttler took a sideways tumble into the hall. His dryish face turned toward Crawler. A plaintive squeak left Ruttler's lips.

Crawler saw the face, heard the screech. He howled for the mob to lay off. Some of those beside him also recognized the fake physician, but killers at other doorways didn't. Pumping guns flayed the floor with lead. Some bullets scored direct hits in Ruttler's body; other slugs ricocheted, to riddle him like dumdums.

Like Larrivan, Ruttler found instant death.

THE SHADOW had turned to handle Long Steve. Two bowling forms hit him like a battering ram. Long Steve was hurling Quillon straight for the door. The best that The Shadow could do in that emergency was yank the police inspector clear, before Steve bowled him into the hall where death awaited.

Bydle twisted, snarling as he made a futile clutch. Then, continuing his spin, he charged on through the doorway. The wheel chair was straight in front of him. Remembering that it had once enabled him to elude The Shadow, Steve piled into it on hands and knees.

His head sticking over the chair back, The big-shot was taking a speedy ride, catercornered across the hallway, while Crawler and his pals gazed in wonderment. Seeing his own door ahead, Long Steve gave a hard yank to a wheel. The chair rolled into the big-shot's own room, to finish with a crash against a metal bed, unseen in the darkness.

Before the hallway gunners could realize all that had happened, a much bandaged figure loomed suddenly from the room that Long Steve had fled. For a moment, the murder squad took him for one of their own crowd, for they, too, were bandaged, faking themselves as crippled patients.

Then came a chilling laugh, a tone that had previously been whispered, limited to the confines of Joan's room. This time, it pealed a full-throated challenge; ringing forth a mockery that no man of crime could fail to recognize.

The laugh of The Shadow!

That rising mirth brought bellows from Crawler and his mob. They jerked their guns toward the figure that they saw. The laugh had reached the high of its crescendo; it was shivering to a fierce finish. Along with that taunt came the staccato chatter of The Shadow's guns.

He was turning, jabbing shots from both automatics, picking a different target with every stab. Aiming crooks were bouncing about like jumping fleas, to land with a sharp clatter on the floor.

They were firing back, but that didn't help. They were too hurried, and The Shadow fooled them with a forward feint, then a quick withdrawal toward the door from which he had stepped.

Crawler and others who had been wisely dodging when they fired were at last able to spot their target. But they were rewarded by nothing more than clicks on emptied gun chambers. They had wasted most of their shots on Ruttler and Larrivan, then spent their few reserve bullets in a hurried outburst against The Shadow.

His guns, too, were empty. That was the only reason why The Shadow backed into the room and slammed the door shut. Another minute, he would have ruined most of Crawler's gang. He had done well, eliminating nearly half of them; but the rest still had teeth. While he reloaded, The Shadow could hear Crawler's braying voice telling his own men to do the same.

Inspector Quillon was beside The Shadow, holding two revolvers – his own and Long Steve's. He heard The Shadow's orders to keep them; to be ready to meet the rush that soon would come. With a quick glance toward the corner, The Shadow saw Peter Gramley beside Joan's bed.

The girl had roused, jolted into wakefulness by the gunfire. Her father was soothing her, telling her that she would be safe. Yet Gramley doubted his own words, until a strange sound inspired him to actual confidence.

That tone was the laugh of The Shadow, whispered in weird sibilance through the square-walled room that had become a cramped refuge for himself and others.

Peter Gramley took that mirth to mean that The Shadow still had ways to deal with men of crime!

CHAPTER XX. THE SHADOW'S ALLIES

ACROSS the street, the sound of battle had come with the suddenness of loudly beaten kettledrums. From their window, Harry Vincent and Herb Waylon had seen the spurts of guns. They hadn't waited to grope their way to the door of the old house.

Together, they ripped open the shuttered window and jumped to the sidewalk, while the rattle of guns still persisted in their ears. Across the street, they saw six officers pulling out revolvers.

The police were ready to charge into the hospital when the roar of gunfire ceased. That didn't deter the officers; from the size of the barrage, they figured that someone had cut loose with a machine gun inside the hospital, and that made quick entry all the more necessary.

What held back the police was the sight of men who suddenly filled the hospital's main door.

Faking themselves as internes, white-jacketed mobsters had been lounging in that doorway. Their guns were out, and they were the first to use them. With bullets spattering the sidewalk, the officers took to the shelter of the picket-topped wall.

Right then, the police were in a serious predicament. There was a clang from the big gate that formed the ambulance entrance. Hoodlums shoved in sight, ready to open an enfilading fire along the outer wall. One volley from half a dozen guns would have put the police out of commission.

Harry and Herb prevented that slaughter. From the curb across the way, they opened unexpected fire on the massed rabble at the gate. Crooks began to plop; their companions dived for shelter. Wheeling about, the officers saw the retiring mob.

The police took that as their cue. They went after the mob with double purpose: first, to rout the retreating hoodlums; again, to gain entry through the open gate.

Herb Waylon gave an exultant shout. He wanted to follow, thinking that the driveway would offer a route into the hospital itself. Harry yanked Herb back.

"We can't get in that way," informed Harry, tensely. "There's only one way. That's through the main door."

"But it's blocked!" Herb vociferated. "Don't go crazy, Harry! You saw how the police ducked."

"That won't matter," snapped Harry. "We're going through! Come along!"

Herb yielded. He was willing for any risk, with Joan helpless in the stronghold where many guns had talked. He guessed that Harry must be following special orders, previously given by The Shadow.

That guess was right.

The Shadow had told Harry that when the crisis came, he and Herb must attack the main door. True, they were to do it cannily, keeping well to cover. But it was important that their effort be sustained. The police, Harry noted, had failed to keep up the attack that they had started. He and Herb wouldn't make that same mistake.

They were spotted by the white-jacketed guards the moment that they neared the entrance. Harry gave Herb a shove to the left, behind a big post that marked the end of the wall. As Herb took that cover, Harry dropped behind the post on the right.

Belated bullets were whistling from the doorway, chipping the edges of bricks that formed the posts. Poking their guns past those same edges, Harry and Herb returned the compliments, with slow but well-timed fire.

The sheltered men had something of an advantage. Herb was a good shot; better, perhaps, than Harry. But the latter had practiced until he was equally good with both hands. Thus, by choosing the post that required left-handed aim, Harry was keeping pace with Herb.

They didn't have to look for a target. They could gauge the direction of the doorway. It wasn't good shelter for the crooks that guarded it, that big wide space with a hall beyond. That was why the defending gunmen became suddenly wary in using their own guns.

CHICAGO CRIME

DEEP in the hallway, crouched at the foot of a stairway, Chet Soville was snarling orders. He and his crew of four fake internes were far away from the battleground on the second floor. Chet wasn't worrying about anything, except the guarding of the door.

One of his four had taken a bullet. The other three were keeping to the vestibule, using the same sniping tactics that served Harry and Herb. That setup didn't please Chet. He never liked a stalemate.

If cops showed up, there would be a rush. His men were wasting bullets. Maybe they wouldn't have a chance to reload.

"Lay off the shooting!" bawled Chet. "Get that big door shut! There's loop-holes in it! Come on you guys – what's holding you? Want help?"

Chet hopped out from his shelter. Like the others, he was wearing a white jacket, that made him conspicuous in the dim high-roofed hall. But Chet was wise enough to keep to the side.

There were calls from above. Chet recognized Crawler's hoarse shout. He couldn't figure what had happened, but it was plain that Crawler wanted reserves and was coming to demand them. All right, thought Chet, he'd have them, as soon as this door was shut. One good sharpshooter could hold it by firing from a loophole.

Crawler's voice was nearer. Chet turned toward the stairs to answer. For the first time, he was actually in a line with those steps. He could see straight up them, and midway, he spied a figure.

Chet yapped a series of incoherent oaths.

The person on the stairs was a woman, dressed in the white uniform of a nurse. Her purpose, however, was not one of helping wounded battlers. She was on hand to add a few more actual cripples to the rapidly mounting list.

She was holding a .32 revolver in a grip that meant business, and the first man that she had covered was Chet Soville himself.

The chunky crook might have seen a ghost, the way he stared; and with good reason. He recognized that blond nurse, and realized she didn't belong among the living.

The chunky thug recovered from his startlement, to figure a more plausible explanation than that of a ghost.

"Maisie Troy!" he snarled. "So Barney Heslip didn't croak you, like he was supposed to. Trying to get even, huh, by crossing us? Why, you –"

Chet's epithet was drowned by Maisie's sharp, contralto tone.

"Drop that gat!" ordered the blonde. "Tell those gorillas to chuck theirs, too. And get back from the door, or else I'll –"

Maisie didn't have to say more, nor did she have time to do so. With a quick whoop to his pals, Chet started for the stairs, pointing his own gun upward as he came.

A slim finger tugged its trigger. Maisie's gun was descending as she fired. She had more than nerve; she knew how to pick a target. Chet Soville jolted, rolled headlong to the floor, clawing for his lost gun.

CHICAGO CRIME

Crooks were swinging from the half-closed door. Bounding down the steps, Maisie was jabbing shots in their direction. One thug took a sprawl. Two others dropped to the shelter of the vestibule, suddenly turning the scene against Maisie.

The blonde tried a dash past the stairs. Chet sped a failing hand to grip her ankle. As the girl went headlong, Chet rattled a death cry:

"Get her! Get the –"

Guns talked above the shout. They spoke from the in-swinging door. Harry and Herb were in the entrance, each picking a would-be murderer who aimed at Maisie. The crooks tumbled, their guns unfired.

THE two invaders didn't linger. They saw the stairs ahead, knew that they afforded a quick route to The Shadow. They didn't even notice Maisie's quick point upward; they were already on their way.

Figures bobbed into sight. They were bandaged fakers who had battled with The Shadow and were coming to summon other crooks for a massed attack. Crawler was in the center of the three, at the head of the stairs. He was the first to see that the hospital had succumbed to new invasion.

Crawler's discovery didn't help him.

He fired hastily; his shot went high, for Harry and Herb were flattening on the stairs. Aiming up the steps, they loosed shots at Crawler and the motley men beside him. Crawler lurched up from between two sinking pals. With a vehement shriek, the snaky crook plunged down the stairs.

Harry pushed Herb aside to let Crawler bound between them. Driving upward, the two invaders reached the floor above. Maisie, by the stairway, saw Crawler land. He lived up to his nickname, the way he writhed along the floor, dragging himself to cover.

This time, Crawler's contortions were not faked. His days of pretended accidents were finished. Mortally wounded, the twisty rat was creeping for some burrow where he could die.

Police were in the doorway, attracted by the battle. Pointing them upstairs, Maisie followed. She was with them when they reached a turn in a long hall and witnessed the fray that proved to be the climax.

Side by side, Harry Vincent and Herb Waylon had opened fire on a grotesque group who were battering a closed door. Snarling mobsters, spry despite their many bandages, composed the throng that scattered under the sudden fire.

The police with Maisie were quick to join fire when the mob went for shelter; but those shots weren't enough. Reaching doorways, the crooks swung about to wreak devastation on their opponents.

Odds were turned; invaders were caught flatfooted. But they, in turn, were to receive timely aid. Open came the door that thugs had hammered. With a laugh of final challenge, The Shadow thrust his automatics into action.

Mere sight of the white-bandaged foemen was enough. Yelling crooks were in flight when The Shadow opened fire. Bounding across huddled forms that had fallen long before, they broke for windows. Shattering glass panes, they bashed at steel bars and tried to wriggle through.

The Shadow had followed. From doorways, he was nicking the last few gunners who offered fight. Others pitched out from windows, still howling as they plunged to the ground. There, officers awaited them. Having finished with outside snipers, the police were ready to complete the round-up.

A last few crooks surrendered. Pitiful remnants of the horde that had once manned this stronghold, they came crawling gunless to the hallway, begging to be taken prisoners.

Alone at the far end of the long hall stood The Shadow. His eyes alone were visible from his bandaged face, above the smoking guns gripped by his thick-wrapped fists.

The Shadow's keen brain was centered upon a final mission; the capture of Long Steve Bydle.

CHAPTER XXI. THROUGH DARKNESS

THERE was something passive in The Shadow's attitude, a manner of calm expectancy. He knew where Long Steve Bydle could be found. There was no haste needed in the search for the missing big-shot.

Perhaps Long Steve could squeeze his beanlike body between bars, the way that others had, but he wasn't the sort to risk it. He had shown himself yellow, more than once. Besides, Long Steve wasn't equipped for battle, if he reached the ground in safety. He had dropped his gun a while ago, and had found no opportunity to acquire another weapon.

Harry Vincent guessed why The Shadow waited, so he did the same. Not so with Herb Waylon. He wanted to find Joan and he was frantic, until he saw a man step from the door where The Shadow had first emerged.

The man was Inspector Quillon, taking charge. Looking into the room itself, Herb saw Joan propped in her bed, with her father standing beside her.

Herb forgot his feud with Gramley. He sprang into the room, hastened to Joan's side. The girl's eyes showed recognition; her lips broke into a smile. When Herb's arms encircled her, she gave a delighted gasp and closed her eyes.

Joan's head upon his shoulder, Herb heard Gramley speak. He turned, to find the banker thrusting out his hand. Herb took the clasp.

"My apologies, Waylon," said Gramley. "At last, we know how you really stood. You have our thanks for all that you have done. What concerns both of us, at present" – Gramley's tone was solemn – "is how soon Joan will recover."

"She's all right," assured Herb. "All Ruttler did was dope her. I saw him use the needle."

Hope flickered in Gramley's eyes. Then:

"But that was before she came here," he reminded. "Perhaps after that –"

Gramley hesitated. Herb, too, was troubled. They were suddenly set at rest. A newcomer had arrived: Maisie Troy.

"I was her nurse," declared Maisie. "Doc Ruttler had never met me, so he suspected nothing. All that he gave her was another opiate. She won't feel it much longer."

CHICAGO CRIME

Many details flashed home to Herb. He knew that The Shadow had paid previous visits to the hospital. He understood why those trips had been made. The Shadow had kept tabs on all developments. He had posted Maisie here to aid him in a pinch.

It had taken The Shadow to start things; and Herb no longer wondered how he had managed it. He remembered the taxi coming in with an accident victim and realized that The Shadow must have wrecked the old sedan.

Once inside, The Shadow hadn't worried about how others would enter. He had settled that before hand, leaving it to Maisie. She had shown her capability.

WHILE that group remained in the room that The Shadow had defended, others were beginning a search for Long Steve Bydle. Inspector Quillon stopped them before they had gone very far. He saw a darkened room along the hall; through its gloom he could make out the shape of a wheel chair.

Reaching inside the doorway, Quillon turned on the light. He and his men shoved the wheel chair to a corner. They looked under the cot, then opened a closet door, shoving the wheel chair farther aside so they could pull the door wide.

The closet was filled with crumpled sheets and blankets. Waylon was about to turn away, when a shape moved up beside him. It was The Shadow, his face still obscured by bandages. In that guise of white, The Shadow was quite as unrecognizable as when cloaked in black. Steadying an automatic toward the heaped-up blankets, The Shadow spoke an even-toned order:

"Come out, Long Steve!"

There was no response. A low, menacing laugh issued from The Shadow's lips. It proved enough. The pile stirred. Out from under it, dragging a sheet halfway with him, crawled Long Steve Bydle.

He looked to be the yellowest rat of all. Sweat had streaked his ugly, longish face, forming paths in the chalkish paste that produced the pallor so suitable to Cruke. When Long Steve wiped his face with his sleeve, most of the whiteness came off.

Long Steve's own complexion looked pasty enough. He knew what the law held in store for him. All that he could do was whine, when two policemen pulled him to his feet. His one flash of defiance came when he looked enviously toward the revolver that Inspector Quillon held.

It was Long Steve's own gun. The big-shot would have liked to regain it.

Something tumbled from inside Long Steve's coat. The inspector stooped to pick up a bundle of crisp bank notes. He counted the stack; the total made him cock his head. From a pocket, Quillon drew a little book.

He compared the numbers of the bills with a list. That check-up resulted in a nod.

"We've been looking for these," announced the inspector. "Cash stolen from the vault of the Tri-City Traction Company! Another of your jobs, eh, Bydle?"

Amazement showed on Long Steve's face, until he met the eyes of The Shadow. Their gaze brought mutters to the big-shot's lips.

He had been wondering, Long Steve had, why The Shadow hadn't shown up at Korber's, after trying to prevent the accident outside the Club Miche. At last, Long Steve began to understand it. The Shadow knew everything.

No wonder Kid Dember had laid off Korber! Kid had found out too much. He had gained a hunch that even if he did blackmail Korber, the fellow would outfox him. What Kid had learned, The Shadow had learned also.

Korber had known that these bills were registered!

That was why he had kept them, just in case of blackmail. Stuff that he couldn't shove himself, would be great to hand to another crook. If Long Steve had tried to pass this dough, it would have bounced back at him.

And Long Steve would have passed it, as Cruke!

Thereby, The Shadow had been prepared to expose the big-shot; or, rather, to let Long Steve Bydle give himself away. The outbreak at the Southlake Hotel had merely hurried the climax.

Inspector Quillon ended Steve's reflections.

"GET going, Bydle!" he ordered, poking Long Steve with the mobster's own gun. "Out into the hall. We're taking you to headquarters. One of you men" – this to the officers – "get ready with a pair of handcuffs. Clamp them on the prisoner."

Two policemen sprang forward, each anxious for the privilege. Long Steve wrenched away, only to get a jab from the gun. This was the pay-off, Steve thought, and he was right. It was strange, though, how a split second could change matters all about.

The next instant proved the most important moment in all of Long Steve's evil career.

Of a sudden, every light was blotted out, not only in that room but throughout the entire hospital. Some dying crook – it happened to be Crawler – had reached the basement and yanked the master switch!

Set back from the street, its windows deep, the hospital's interior caught only the faintest glimmer from the street. In the darkness, Long Steve was out of sight, struggling with men about him. In that melee, he was where The Shadow couldn't get him!

Hard thwacks sounded. The big-shot was flaying everywhere. Blundering men were helping him, for they were scuffling with one another. Though jolted to the floor, Long Steve managed to crawl out from the confusion. His sliding hand hit something cold. His own gun, dropped by Quillon!

A break for the door, and Long Steve could be away along the hall before these boobs got busy with their flashlights. But there was someone upon whom he wanted vengeance first. Not only to even matters, but to protect his future flight.

Long Steve was thinking of The Shadow.

On his feet, against the wall, Long Steve looked into darkness. He could see The Shadow! That was a rare one, sure enough, but it showed that The Shadow wasn't always smart. Tonight he had pulled a fast one, coming in here as a patient. Maisie and a couple of internes had faked him up with bandages, so he could stage his bluff.

But that very stunt was to prove The Shadow's finish, as far as Long Steve was concerned!

Tonight, The Shadow wasn't garbed in black. He was in white! Of all persons in this room, he was the one that Long Steve could spot. There he was, over in the corner crouched down, trying to get out of sight.

Long Steve guffawed.

The Shadow heard that raucous threat but couldn't quite locate it. He was taking chances, though; he was moving in Long Steve's direction. There he came suddenly, still crouched, but with a long, sweeping lunge.

Long Steve cut loose. He was riddling the white-garbed shape with every bullet that the gun possessed. Revolver spurts were cutting through the darkness, sprayed by an expert hand. Men were dropping everywhere, to get under cover.

They didn't need to hide. Long Steve didn't care about them. He had fixed The Shadow. That was enough. All he had to do was turn and duck out. Maybe his shots had shown where he was; but he didn't intend to stay there very long.

That was just another of Long Steve's intentions, the sort that went sour, when The Shadow was concerned.

A gun spoke, its report muffled. Where it came from, Long Steve couldn't guess. He was worrying about the bullet that accompanied it. That chunk of metal was below his left shoulder, just above his heart.

STAGGERING toward the door, Long Steve stumbled. He could hear a laugh behind him, also muffled. It sounded like dying mirth; but that was due to the big-shot's own distorted hearing.

The laugh made others bold. Flashlights shone suddenly, bathing Long Steve as he sank to the floor beside the door. Excited officers saw that he still held a gun. They used their own revolvers. Long Steve writhed under a barrage of the sort that Larrivan and Doc Ruttler had received.

Flashlights spread their beams everywhere. Flat on the floor, Long Steve's eyes reflected an amazed stare, as he gave the convulsive gulp that was to be his last breath. A moment later, he was dead, a snarl fading from his lips.

There was a sight that might have been the cause of that last snarl. Possibly Long Steve saw it.

Halfway across the room stood a bullet-riddled wheel chair, draped with a sheet that had been shot half away. It was the huddled shape that Long Steve Bydle had mistaken for The Shadow; the object that The Shadow, himself, had shoved in Steve's direction.

In those first moments of chaos, The Shadow had recognized his own dilemma. Between the closet and the wheel chair, he had whipped up a sheet and thrown it across the vehicle. Only that had been in sight when Long Steve looked The Shadow's way.

The shot that The Shadow had fired came from the closet. The door was opening under the flashlights' glow. Into sight stepped the white-swathed figure of the living Shadow!

GULPING their relief, silent men watched The Shadow go out through the door. Others saw him, a ghostlike figure, moving along the hall. When he reached the stairs, his form went downward. From below, there came the sound of a trailing laugh – The Shadow's tone of final triumph.

CHICAGO CRIME

A cab driver near the battle-wrecked hospital was surprised when a much-bandaged figure stepped into his taxi. The Shadow gave a destination; during the ride, he peeled away layers of bandages, to emerge as Lamont Cranston. In that guise, he paid off the stupefied driver when they arrived at a central hotel.

Once in his room, The Shadow opened the folder that bore the symbol of the hand. Again, three names showed beneath a focused lamp:

Thumb Gaudrey

Pointer Trame

Long Steve Bydle

The Shadow drew an obliterating line through the bottom name. Another Finger had been cut off from The Hand. A warning to the two who remained, should they ever again deal in crime.

The light clicked off. A cloak settled over The Shadow's shoulders. Hands picked up a slouch hat in the dark. From then on, The Shadow's course was untraceable.

There were those, however, who had not forgotten The Shadow. One hour later, a limousine was wending north along a boulevard. Two of the occupants were lost in their own whispers, that breathed words of love.

Herb Waylon had at last claimed Joan Gramley, never again to lose her.

Proof of that was given by another passenger. Peter Gramley could hear the whispers that stirred behind him. When the lights of the boulevard flickered on his face, they showed the banker's smile of benign approval.

From the window opposite, a man was staring, lost in thoughts of his own. Harry Vincent was scanning the broad, wind-swept waters of Lake Michigan. That tumultuous surface was inky in the night, like the sky above the lake.

There was a purr from high above. Harry saw two tiny lights, red and green, coursing into space. Rapidly dwindling, they became pin points that were swallowed by engulfing darkness. The plane had gone beyond the eastern horizon.

Alone, of all persons in Chicago, Harry Vincent could have named the pilot of that ship.

The Shadow!

THE END