

CITY OF CRIME

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I. CROOKS IN AMBUSH

IT was gala night in the city of Westford. Streets were strung with brilliant lines of colored electric lights. Store fronts were illuminated, throwing their brightness upon festooned posts and displaying the elaborate decorations of their own windows. Tourists, driving through the main streets, gained the impressions that this city of two hundred thousand was engaged in celebration.

As the boosters phrased it, Westford was a "live town" that was definitely "on the map"; the city attracted visitors from every town within a hundred miles. Business was booming in Westford; it was predicted that good times were here to remain. Thanks for the prosperity belonged to Westford's "live wire mayor", Elvin Marclot. His administration was hailed as the greatest in the history of the city.

There was one man who viewed all this dourly, as he sat in a small ground-floor office that gave him a

slanted view of the main street. He was a husky, square-jawed individual, with weather-beaten face and short-clipped hair that was well streaked with gray. He was attired in a blue uniform, that stretched tight as he sat erect. His insignia marked him as a lieutenant of police.

Nearly everyone in Westford knew James Maclare. A veteran police officer, he had gained a reputation for honest and efficient service. His record was one of blunt, painstaking toil, rather than that of brilliant exploit; yet no one had ever said that Lieutenant Maclare lacked brains.

Though slow to decision, Maclare invariably formed the right opinion. When matters perplexed him, he thought them over and waited until he had the answer. During that process he kept silence; when the time was ripe, he acted.

There was one man in whom Lieutenant Maclare placed confidence. That man was another officer, as straightforward as Maclare himself. He was Sergeant Cassley, Maclare's chief subordinate. Together, they had charge of the first precinct; and, of necessity, Maclare frequently told Cassley the trend of his half-formed plans. Cassley was Maclare's man Friday; never did he pass along a single word that he had heard from his superior.

TONIGHT, Cassley was sitting across the desk from Maclare, watching the lieutenant as he stared from the window of the precinct office. Though slow of thought, Cassley was positive that opinions were due. He was right. They came.

"This whole thing is the bunk!" announced Maclare suddenly, emphasizing his gruff statement with a ponderous punch upon the desk. "Look at those lights; all that tinsel! What do they mean to Westford? Nothing except trouble!"

Cassley looked puzzled. He was a bulky man; his wrinkled uniform made a contrast to Maclare's smooth blue coat. His beefy, flat-featured face displayed its bewilderment. The sergeant needed more statements, in order to grasp the full import of Maclare's objections. The lieutenant noted the fact and formed a wry smile.

"I know what you're thinking, Cassley," he told the sergeant. "You've fallen for the talk of business coming into town. Sure! Westford is prosperous. But what's come on with all this excitement? I'll tell you – a lot of riffraff who think that Westford is the right spot for any crooked game they can cook up!"

Cassley nodded slowly. He was tabulating a list of recent crimes. Maclare was right; there were crooks in Westford, plenty of them. But when Cassley thought further, his nod ended. He could not see just where the law had failed to battle crime.

"What about the Flying Squadron?" queried the sergeant. "It's been moving fast, lieutenant, ever since Director Borman organized it. They were on the job quick, those fellows, after that last bank robbery."

"But the crooks got away," reminded Maclare. "Don't forget that, Cassley."

"You can't blame Director Borman for it."

"I'm blaming Kirk Borman for nothing," returned Maclare, leaning across the desk. "You know what I think of Kirk Borman. I say that he's the best police director this town ever had. Elvin Marclot, as mayor, made the best choice anyone could have, when he picked Kirk Borman for the job."

"But Borman hasn't stopped the rackets. He can't, even though he's got full charge of that Flying Squadron. The job rests with precincts, like ours here. We've got to raid the places where the crooks hang out. Clean

them up before they have a chance to make trouble."

Sergeant Cassley sat silent. Lieutenant Maclare began to strum his desk; then spoke in rueful tone.

"We've drawn a blank every time we've tackled the Club Adair," he admitted. "We know that Lance Gillick runs it as a gambling joint; but when we blow in, it's always an innocent-looking night club. We're going there again, though, Cassley. Only, first, I'm planning to hand Lance Gillick a jolt that he won't forget."

"How will you manage that, lieutenant?"

MACLARE smiled at Cassley's question. Picking up a pencil, he indicated an inkwell that rested on his desk; drew an imaginary circle around it.

"That's Lance Gillick," stated Maclare. "Working inside his circle, the Club Adair. We know what his racket is, don't we?"

"Sure," nodded Cassley. "Gambling!"

"All right." Maclare began to tap all around the desk with his pencil. "Here's a lot of stores, pool rooms, flop-houses – all through the city. They've got slot machines, punchboards; they're running the numbers racket on the q.t. The State has legalized a lot of that stuff; neither Mayor Marclot nor Director Borman can break it up. But it's gambling, isn't it?"

Cassley nodded.

"Agreed," added Maclare. "Therefore, it's a sure bet that Lance Gillick is behind it. He's the big-shot in this town."

"Say!" exclaimed Cassley. "If you could hook all that on to Lance –"

"It wouldn't do a bit of good," interposed Maclare. "But I tell you what we can do. Since the rackets belong to Lance, all those fellows who collect on the machines and numbers must be working for him."

"That's sure enough," agreed Cassley. "They stick together, too. They all hang out down at the old Mississippi Hotel, near the railroad terminal. That hotel is running wide open, even though it's got no license."

"That's just it," chuckled Maclare. "So we're going to raid it, tonight. We'll make a round-up and bring in that whole bunch of hoodlums. The only fellow who could spring them will be Lance Gillick; and he won't dare do it, because it would show that he was behind the rackets."

Sergeant Cassley arose, grinning broadly. He queried:

"How soon do we start?"

"Get the squad ready," ordered Maclare, briskly. "Have the wagons come along with us. We'll go out the back way, keeping off the main streets. No one will know where we're bound until we get there."

As Cassley turned toward the door, Maclare picked up the telephone. He made a brief remark, before he lifted the receiver.

"It's a straight precinct job," asserted Maclare; "but we mustn't forget standing orders. I'm calling Director Borman, to let him know that we're starting out. He wants it that way, so he can have the Flying Squadron cover up afterward."

SERGEANT CASSLEY went out into the patrol room, closing the lieutenant's door behind him. He snapped orders to a group of bluecoats; paraded them and sent word to bring out the patrol wagons. Lieutenant Maclare arrived from his office; surveyed the dozen men who were standing at attention.

"We're raiding the Mississippi Hotel," announced Maclare. "Sergeant Cassley will enter from the front, with a detail of four men. We'll let them think it's a minor raid; whoever comes out by the back doors will find our main force."

"We'll have the wagons with us, to gather up the lot of them when they reach the back street. I'll be in charge of the main squad. Further orders when we're on the ground. All right, men. Ready for inspection."

Soon the entire squad was marching from the station house; Maclare, at the head, was leading the advance through dingy, poorly lighted alleys that had been neglected in Westford's campaign of bigger and brighter lights. As they reached a corner, Maclare gave the command to halt. Sergeant Cassley told of his four-man detail. Lieutenant Maclare gave him final orders.

"Don't get far inside the front door, Cassley," Maclare advised. "We want them to come through the back. Director Borman is sending the Flying Squadron. They'll show up about ten minutes after we strike. The Flying Squadron will roll up on the front street. After that, you can let anybody go out through the front door. Remember: put up a big show. We've got a right to arrest anyone who comes out the back while you're inside. We'll charge them with resisting arrest."

Cassley and his men marched away. Maclare moved the remainder through an alleyway; then along an ill-paved street that was flanked on the right by coal yards, with the railway tracks beyond. As he and his men stationed themselves in back of the decrepit Mississippi Hotel, two darkened patrol wagons coasted into view. Officers opened the doors of the black Marias; stood beside them, ready for the surge that was to come.

Tense minutes passed. A police whistle shrilled from the front street. Commotion began within the old hotel. Until that moment, it had been a quiet-looking frame structure, its dim windows silent except for the jerky music of an overloud player piano. But the whistle blast that marked the beginning of raid was like a spark igniting dynamite.

Shouts burst from the hotel. Tables clattered; lights blinked on and off. Gunfire sounded; heavy footsteps pounded. Doors ripped open at the back of the building; the vanguard of a horde of hoodlums appeared. As three men leaped from rickety steps. Lieutenant Maclare snapped a command to his main squad:

"Take them as they hit the street!" The bluecoats spread, fanwise. With Maclare in the center, they closed upon the back doors of the hotel. The first fugitives dropped against the steps, raising their arms in surrender. Footsteps told that more were coming; Maclare and his men were ready to bag them the instant that they arrived.

Then came the unexpected. From the low-roofed buildings of the coal yards, searchlights poured a sudden glare that made the street like day. Huge beams of light showed the entire squad of police, flat-footed on the sidewalk, against the paintless back wall of the hotel.

Maclare, swinging about, stood scowling from the center of his raiders.

Snarled oaths sounded from fences and roofs, delivered by thugs who were out of sight behind the searchlights. A harsh voice barked an order. Revolvers crackled from the darkness. There was a sharp rattle; the opening outburst of a machine gun. It ended almost instantly, for the trigger man had started it too soon.

That warning sound told how hopelessly the police were trapped. Crooks had surprised the raiders. Hidden in ambush, men of crime were equipped to wipe out Lieutenant Maclare and his entire squad at an instant's notice.

CHAPTER II. SCATTERED HORDES

THE menace of the situation was but partially grasped by Lieutenant James Maclare. He and his men had faced about; they were blinking at the blinding searchlights. None had been hit by the first revolver fire; the machine gun had stopped without delivering death.

It occurred to Maclare that ambushed crooks had intended no more than a warning; that they were afraid to deliver heavy fire because their own men were coming from the hotel. Looking about, Maclare saw that a dozen fugitives had arrived; but they were no longer in flight. They were a leering, contemptuous throng, massed upon the back steps of the hotel.

Like the thugs behind the searchlights, these crooks had the police covered. The inference seemed plain to Maclare. If the police stood by and let the crooks from the hotel make their get-away, there would be no massacre.

Maclare was partly right in this conclusion. He was to learn later just how far he was wrong. Sizing the situation, the lieutenant realized that he could not count on aid from Sergeant Cassley; he knew also that the Flying Squadron would not arrive for ten minutes. Much though he hated to see crooks gain their way, Maclare could not forget the welfare of his men. He saw no use in allowing the slaughter of his squad.

Scowling, the lieutenant lowered his revolver and stepped out into the middle of the street. His move was an order for his men to spread away and let the armed men from the hotel make a calm departure.

It was not until he had detached himself from his squad, that Maclare realized another purpose behind the ambush. Hardly was the lieutenant standing entirely alone before a rasped voice called from a low roof top:

"Get Maclare!"

One man alone was marked to die; that was Maclare himself. Crooks wanted the raiding lieutenant dead; they were contemptuous of the policemen who formed the squad. Maclare, by his own action, had placed himself in the very spot that his enemies wanted.

Bluecoats, like crooks, heard the death order. The cry electrified them. They responded more quickly than the gloating thugs. They were loyal to Maclare; the danger that threatened him was to be theirs. Almost as one, the policemen raised their guns. Some aimed blindly for the coal yards, along with Maclare; others wheeled about, to fire at men whom they could see. Their targets were the massed thugs on the steps.

The scene was set for massacre. The street looked like the stage of a theater, beneath the glare of a spotlight. All eyes were focused upon Maclare, with the bluecoats clustering about him. The patrol wagons, standing deserted on either side, were like the wings of the stage. All was dim beyond those vehicles.

DURING these tense moments, an event had occurred offstage. Unseen, a figure had come up to the far side of a patrol wagon, almost beneath the shelter of a coal yard fence. Like an actor expecting his cue, this silent

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arrival had risen on the running board of a black Maria. His head and shoulders projected above the wagon top, where they were outlined dimly by the fringe of a searchlight's path.

That head was topped by a slouch hat. The shoulders were shrouded by a black cloak. Two black-gloved fists projected from the cloak; each gripped the heavy handle of a .45 automatic. Those guns were leveled at the instant the hidden crook shouted the word to get Maclare.

As policemen leaped to Maclare's side, ready to die with their leader, that strange marksman loosed the fire of one gun from atop the black Maria. His target was a large one; he picked the glass front of a blazing searchlight. As his trigger finger tugged, a bullet ripped to its mark. The searchlight vanished with a clatter of glass.

Crooks gazed toward the patrol wagon. They saw no one, for the marksman had picked the nearer searchlight and was no longer in the edge of the glare. But mobsters saw the next token that came from the blotted wagon top. It was another stab of flame, loosed from the second automatic.

Another crash marked the finish of the second searchlight. The street looked black; feeble lamplights and illumination from the hotel were pitiful at best. They were completely inadequate as an aftermath to the glare that had been so promptly extinguished.

From the sheltering patrol wagon came a sudden sound that belonged with darkness. It was the strident burst of a sinister, mocking laugh, that brought alarm to every thug who was straining his eyes to offset the gloom.

Men of crime knew that taunt. It was the laugh of The Shadow!

Black-clad master who battled evil, The Shadow was here in Westford, covering the very spot where slaughter had been ordered. His first coup had been to deprive crooks of their most important weapons: those searchlights on the coal yard roofs. With two strategic shots, The Shadow had equalized the battleground.

True, crooks outnumbered Maclare and his squad; they also had machine guns in readiness. But the law had gained an ally whose strength could offset a score of foemen. The Shadow was on hand, prepared for instant battle.

Again, the automatics spoke. From his vantage point, The Shadow fired along the fence top. Lieutenant Maclare shouted an order. Policemen dived everywhere, firing as they took to cover. Revolvers spat from the coal yard; machine guns began a hasty rattle. Thugs at the doorways of the Mississippi Hotel came leaping down the steps, cutting loose with their revolvers.

Those mobsters in ambush fired for the area where Maclare and his men had clustered. They fired uselessly, for the police had spread. Those coming from the hotel sizzled futile shots in the direction of the patrol wagon. They, too, were late. The Shadow had sprung to the fence; come up to the top and slugged down a lone thug who was stationed on the flank.

All that carried menace were the machine guns, for they began to spray their fire. There were two of them, clicking like typewriters from a roof top midway along the fence. One rattling weapon ceased, as The Shadow blasted a fusillade at the gunners behind it. He had picked them by the spurting fire.

CROOKS fired for The Shadow; but their shots were wide. He had come up to a roof top; there, he ripped another barrage, that settled the men who handled the second machine gun. Both weapons were silenced; everywhere, crooks were springing to the ground, to avoid the enfolding fire that The Shadow had begun.

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By outflanking the foe, The Shadow had routed all but a few; they were the ones upon the very roof top where he had so suddenly arrived.

Three in number, those crooks leaped forward with swinging revolvers, hoping to beat down the fighter whose shape was vague before their eyes. An automatic thudded against a skull; the other .45 spat its singeing flame between the eyes of an attacker. The third crook dived for the ground as his companions sprawled.

Meanwhile, Maclare and his squad had done gallant duty. Flattened in the street, some had aimed for the fence and roof tops, while others had delivered quick fire toward the open doors of the hotel. This choice had been a smart one; the officers who took it gained massed targets. Thugs who had wasted opening shots at the patrol wagon were caught against the framed light of doorways. Four sagged in quick succession.

Scattering crooks had paused to aim for the low roof where The Shadow had handled three foemen. They blazed for that darkened spot, again to no avail. The Shadow had dropped from the back of the roof; he was crossing the tracks of the railroad yard. His quick shots clipped two marksmen who were firing at the roof.

A hoarse voice shouted from between two buildings. It was the same leader who had issued the command to get Maclare. His new order was a command for flight. All thugs who were able, dashed for the street, crossed it and made off through alleys toward the front. Others sprang back into the hotel.

Lieutenant Maclare shouted for pursuit. Two of his eight men had fallen in the fight; leaving a pair to care for them, Maclare headed through the hotel, followed by the remaining four.

Inside, thugs were making for the front; Cassley and his detail let them go through. Loud-whining sirens were announcing the arrival of the Flying Squadron.

Crooks should have found a new trap; but when Lieutenant Maclare reached the front door of the hotel, he witnessed a wild get-away. The Flying Squadron, a score of men in pursuit cars and on motorcycles were coming in from the left. Scattered crooks had converged to the right; there they were boarding an assortment of automobiles that were parked beside an old brewery.

As the Flying Squadron pulled up, Maclare bellowed the news and pointed past the brewery. Promptly, the picked squadron took up the chase.

The brief delay had served the crooks. Cutting through to another street, a dozen of them made a get-away, in three cars that contained four men each. The three automobiles took different routes within the next few blocks, to split the pursuing squadron. Maclare, fuming at the door of the raided hotel, heard the sirens fade in the dim distance.

THERE was a fourth car that had fled; it had taken a route of its own. Rounding the brewery, this machine had followed a street that led across the railroad tracks, a block away from the Mississippi Hotel. Swinging past a freight siding, the crooks – three in number – were greeted by shots from the shelter of a steel freight car.

Wildly, they fired in return. Their bullets flattened on the steel wall of the freight car. The driver, clipped by a slug from darkness, lost control and swung from the crossing. His sedan jolted down a low embankment, slewed sidewise and crashed against a signal tower.

There was no stir within the car, when it halted. Distant policemen heard the crash. Footsteps racing upon sidewalks told that they were coming to witness the result. One car-load of fugitives had been bagged, even

though the other three had outraced the Flying Squadron.

Blackness moved from beside the freight car. The purple light of a switch signal glowed upward to show a shrouded form, tall in its guise of black. Gloved hands dipped mammoth automatics beneath the front of a flowing cloak. Unseen lips voiced a grim laugh from the muffling front of an upturned collar.

Weird, chilling tones betokened the final stroke of the night's victory. The sardonic mirth faded, as the cloaked figure passed from the purplish glow. The battle was ended; The Shadow had left the field to the law.

OUT of darkness, The Shadow had arrived to deal with crime in Westford. Into gloom, he had returned – after his efforts had saved the life of Lieutenant Maclare and a squad of officers. Yet the chill of his eerie laugh seemed to hover; for that spectral tone had carried a touch that seemed to concern the future.

Like Lieutenant Maclare, The Shadow had recognized the significance of tonight's episode. Fierce though the fray had been, it scarcely scratched the surface of the evil that lurked deep within this prosperous city.

Crime and death would be due again in Westford. Here, evil was organized far beyond the extent that Lieutenant Maclare had guessed. There would be need for more and greater effort before crime and corruption could be banished.

The Shadow knew those facts. His appearance in tonight's battle was but proof that he had long been present in Westford, investigating the iniquity which held the city in its grip.

CHAPTER III. BEHIND THE SCENES

HALF an hour after the raid on the Mississippi Hotel, Lieutenant James Maclare arrived back at the first precinct station. Muffled oaths and dull clatter greeted Maclare when he crossed the patrol room. The sounds came from the cell room, where policemen had housed an assortment of hoodlums unloaded from the patrol wagons.

There had been many captures following the raid. Cornered riffraff had thrown away their guns, to surrender, denying that they had carried weapons. Practically all of these were men who had been inside the hotel at the beginning of the raid.

Lieutenant Maclare felt pleased as he took a seat at his desk and began to prepare a report. Armed resistance had made the case against the prisoners a stronger one. Maclare could see jail terms awaiting many of the participants. Maclare's pleasure increased, when Sergeant Cassley knocked at the door to announce a visitor. The arrival was none other than Kirk Borman, the police director.

Maclare was on his feet when Borman entered. Tall, heavy of build, the police director was as much a fighter as Maclare. Borman's face was sharp-featured; his lips showed a broad smile between his hooked nose and his pointed chin. Advancing to Maclare's desk, Borman thrust a congratulating hand across the top, to grip Maclare's hand in a solid shake.

"Fine work, Jim," commended Borman, in a short-clipped tone. "You cleaned out a nest of bad eggs. Carry on with it. Go after the gilt-edged places in this precinct."

"You mean the Club Adair?" queried Maclare. "That's one place I'd like to get, Kirk. Lance Gillick has a gambling joint somewhere in back of that fancy night club front."

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"Go after it, tomorrow night," ordered Borman. "Telephone me first, though. I have two headquarters men watching things over there. I'm going to drop in there this evening and look the place over for myself."

"Lance Gillick will probably see you," remarked Maclare. "If he does, he'll pass you a lot of smooth talk."

"All the better," decided Borman. "If he thinks I'm the man he has to deal with, he won't be expecting you tomorrow."

Kirk Borman clapped his hand upon Lieutenant Maclare's shoulder; then turned about and strode from the office. Policemen saluted, as the director passed through the patrol room. Outside the station house, Borman stepped aboard an official limousine and told the chauffeur to take him to the Club Adair.

LOCATED just within the limits of the first precinct, the Club Adair fronted on one of Westford's main streets. The club itself was on the second floor, over a row of shops.

Alighting from his car, Kirk Borman entered a pretentious doorway and ascended a broad flight of thick-carpeted stairs. At the top, he left his hat and coat at a check room. Attired in tuxedo, the police director entered a glittering night club, where tobacco smoke clouded a thick throng of dancers who occupied the center of the floor.

An orchestra was producing strident music. Buzzed conversation, bursts of laughter sounded everywhere. The place was doing capacity business; a bowing head waiter was apologetic when he ushered the police director to an obscure table, behind a pillar. It was one of the few tables that remained vacant.

A heavy-jowled man spied Borman immediately and came over to the director's table. He was one of the headquarters men; he reported in an undertone:

"They've been going through that door over there, a lot of em. Looks like the gambling joint's on the other side –"

Borman whispered an interruption. The headquarters man silenced as the head waiter approached the table. Directly behind the head waiter came a man in full evening clothes. The arrival was Lance Gillick.

The night club proprietor was tall and long-limbed. His manner was polished; his speech was suave. His features were handsome, despite their sallowness. His wavy black hair, his pointed mustache gave him a debonair air.

"Good evening, Director Borman," greeted Gillick, with a bow. "It is not often that I have the pleasure of meeting you here. I somewhat expected your arrival tonight" – Lance smiled, as he looked in the direction of the headquarters man – "because I saw two of your advance agents. This gentleman and the other, over by the wall."

Borman turned to the headquarters man.

"Go over there, Thompson," he ordered, "and bring Rhine here. I want both of you to come along with me."

Lance Gillick arched his clipped eyebrows, as he heard Borman give the order. When the two headquarters men arrived at the table, Borman snapped brisk words to Lance:

"We're going through that far door, Gillick! You can conduct us there!"

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"With pleasure," said Lance, with a bow. "Come at once, director."

LANCE led the way to the door in question. He rapped a signal; the door opened. Borman and his men followed through into a large room, where some twenty people were seated at tables, laughing as they chatted and drank. All were well attired; the men in evening clothes, the women in evening gowns.

The room, itself, was magnificent. Its walls were adorned with huge oil paintings; the windows were covered by expensive velvet draperies. Lance conducted Borman and the others to a far door; he opened it, to show a small office with oak furniture and paneled walls to match.

"My private office," explained Lance. "The large room through which we came is simply an exclusive dining room for my more important guests."

"It passes muster," decided Borman. Then, eyeing the office: "I suppose you are very careful in your bookkeeping, Gillick?"

"I am," replied Lance, smoothly. "Perhaps you would like to see my books?"

"I would."

"Step into the office, director."

Borman hesitated; then turned to the headquarters men, with an order:

"Go back to the night club proper. Take my table. I'll join you there."

Thompson and Rhine departed, out through the door by which they had entered. Lance Gillick ushered Kirk Borman into the oak-paneled office. Closing the door, the night club proprietor grinned. He pressed a wall panel; it slid open, to reveal a darkened passage.

"Step in there, Kirk," chuckled Lance. "Take a look through the back of the big painting on the far wall."

Smiling, Borman followed directions. Looking through a peek hole, the director saw a quick transformation in progress.

Waiters were lifting the top of a huge buffet; as they rolled the bulky object forward, its sides fell away and it became a roulette table. Small tables were pushed in line; their covers whipped away. They produced the green board upon which players could place their bets.

Other waiters were bringing boxes loaded with playing chips, serving them to guests in return for credit slips. The chips began to click; a waiter took charge of the wheel and it began its spin. Director Borman stepped back into Lance Gillick's office. Lance closed the panel.

"They think it's hot," laughed Lance. "As soon as you're ready to go out, they'll see the lights blink. It will just be tables and drinks again, when you go through. A great set-up, eh, Kirk?"

KIRK BORMAN nodded. Lance caught a troubled look on the director's face. Quickly, Lance questioned:

"Something went sour tonight?"

Borman nodded.

"What was it?" quizzed Lance. "Didn't they rub out Maclare?"

"Maclare made a clean-up," answered Borman. "He and his squad bumped off more than half dozen of the mob. About the same number went to the hospital. Maclare hauled in pretty near twenty of the bunch that were in the Mississippi Hotel."

Lance glared sourly. "I can't figure why that outfit didn't get Maclare. As soon as you gave me the tip-off, Kirk, I phoned Beezer Dorsch and told him to be on the job. Beezer should have gotten Maclare."

"Smart work, using Beezer," commended Borman. "He's the one real mobster in town who's supposed to be at odds with you."

"Sure!" Lance laughed as he spoke. "That covers me perfect, in case Beezer gets recognized! Say, have you seen Maclare since the raid?"

Borman smiled; then nodded.

"I told him to blow in here tomorrow night," informed the director. "When he and his squad find nothing, they'll owe you an apology, Lance. Only, be ready to duck the roulette layout so deep that they'll never find it."

"I won't run the gambling joint tomorrow," stated Lance. "I'll tell the customers to stay away, on account of you being here tonight. Maclare and his crew of flatfeet won't even find a gambling chip. All the stuff will be out of the place."

Lance sat down at his desk, brought out a box of expensive cigars. Borman helped himself to one of the perfectos. Lance lighted up also.

"Let's forget Maclare," decided Borman. "There's something bigger to think about. We've got to worry about Prescott Dunson. If he runs for district attorney, we'll have a tough guy to deal with."

"Then it's up to Stephen Ruthley," decided Lance. "As the big reform champion of Westford, he can find fault with Dunson. No one has even guessed that you and I are working together; that Mayor Marclot is also with us. So how can they ever figure that Stephen Ruthley, the big philanthropist and reformer, is the man we all take orders from?"

KIRK BORMAN shook his head.

"A lot of reformers like Prescott Dunson," he said. "Therefore, Ruthley can't move against him. Ruthley has to put up a bigger front than the rest of us. There's only one thing to do, Lance. Bump Dunson!"

"My specialty" laughed Lance. "Tip me off to where Dunson is. I'll do the rest. Say, though" – he stroked his chin ruefully – "I wish I'd kept Trig Callister here."

"Who is Trig Callister?"

"A bird who was here to see me last night. He's a one-man arsenal, that guy. Packs a couple of gats and knows how to use them. I let Trig go back to New York. I'll get hold of him again, though, before next week."

"We won't have to rub out Dunson before then. It will take a while to find him, too. You're right, though, Kirk. We've got to put Dunson on the spot. With him out, there'll be no opposition to Louis Wilderton running for re-election."

Borman chuckled at Lance's reference to Wilderton, the man who was, at present, district attorney.

"Wilderton is a babe in the woods," laughed the police director. "Any smart lawyer can tangle him into knots. But Wilderton means well."

"It also makes it easy for us," concluded Borman. "Wilderton is under Ruthley's thumb. Comes running to him for an opinion on everything. Like a kid visiting a department store Santa Claus, around Christmas time."

With this comment, Borman arose, as indication that he was ready to leave. Lance reached beneath his desk and pressed a hidden button, to blink the lights in the gaming room. Rising, he walked to the door with Borman, and stopped there for a few moments.

"Wait until they've had time to cover the wheel," reminded Lance. "Then put on your act when we go through the room. Don't forget about Prescott Dunson. Tip me off when you've located him."

"I'll have every copper in town on the lookout," returned Borman. "When I give the order, I'll state that it's for Dunson's own protection."

IN his office, the big-shot gambler grinned, as he took a long puff from his perfecto. Leagued with Mayor Elvin Marclot and Police Director Borman, Lance had little to fear from the law. Moreover, he knew that he could rely upon a leader more powerful than either of those two; namely, Stephen Ruthley, Westford's champion of reform.

The future looked rosy to Lance Gillick, despite the fact that crooks had failed tonight in their effort to slay Lieutenant James Maclare.

Lance Gillick had not yet learned that The Shadow's hand had been responsible for crime's failure.

CHAPTER IV. INTO THE SNARE

TWENTY-FOUR hours had passed since Westford had been stirred by the law's combat with crime. Lieutenant James Maclare had been heroized for his raid on the Mississippi Hotel. Westford's chief newspaper, the Daily Banner, had been loud in its acclaim. A great quiet had settled upon the city, as an aftermath to Maclare's exploit.

The newspaper headlines were of huge interest to a man in shirt sleeves, who sat in an easy chair, surrounded by the quiet of a modest parlor. The house which contained this room was a small suburban home in one of Westford's residential districts; but the man, himself, looked out of place in such an ordinary room.

His bulky frame; his huge, bulging forehead, denoted him as a man of action. His bushy eyebrows, with flashing eyes beneath, showed that he was tired of seclusion. This man was Prescott Dunson, long known as a challenger among political circles.

Across from Dunson sat a weary-faced, middle-aged woman, busy with her knitting. She looked up as she heard Dunson grumble aloud. She shook her head and sighed. Dunson mopped his huge forehead and smiled indulgently.

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"It's too bad, Martha," he declared, in a booming tone, "that you had to marry a man who went in for politics; particularly in this rotten town. But I am determined to go through with what I started. I intend to be the next district attorney of this county. And Westford is nearly all the county."

"Is it worth the risk, Prescott?" inquired the woman.

"Yes! Westford is in the hands of rogues!" boomed Dunson. "Mayor Marclot is a smug pretender! Director Borman is a traitor, in league with criminals! I can prove those facts, Martha! And I have a suspicion there's a big-shot above them all!"

Dunson's wife stared, amazed.

"As for Louis Wilderton," added Dunson, "he is a know-nothing. A puppet, acting as district attorney. What chance is there for justice, while he holds office?"

"I can't believe all that, Prescott," protested Mrs. Dunson. "It sounds incredible! If I won't believe it, how can others? They will say that you are a fanatic; they will laugh at your assertions."

Dunson thrust a big hand into his coat pocket; drew out a folded letter and held it aloft in his right hand.

"This came from a man who knows the truth," he announced. "A man whom I have never met; but who told me enough in his previous letters. He signs himself Theo D. Shaw; he has not only promised me more facts, he has offered to take me to a place of absolute security. With his aid, I can lift the lid. I can not only tell the truth; I can prove it."

STOOPING, Dunson picked up the newspaper that he had dropped. He opened it to the editorial page; pointed to a paragraph.

"Look, Martha," he said. "Already, they state that they expect to hear from Prescott Dunson; that I have promised to throw light on hidden corruption; to name men who have bled this city. When I officially and publicly announce myself as candidate for district attorney, I shall wither the rogues whose names I mention. I shall –"

Dunson broke off. A telephone bell was ringing in the hall. With a nod to his wife, Dunson lowered his tone and ordered:

"Answer it."

The woman laid aside her knitting; she went to the telephone, held a brief conversation. She came back into the room, to whisper:

"Someone wishes to speak to you, Prescott. He says that his name is Shaw."

Dunson bounded across the room. In the hall, he seized up the telephone, began a quick conversation.

"Yes, yes..." Mrs. Dunson heard all that her husband said. "Of course, Mr. Shaw... I knew that you would learn where I was living... Yes, I have my car here... The garage...? Right in back of the house... Certainly. I understand.

"Twenty minutes..." Dunson nodded as he spoke. "Yes, I can make it in that time... Parking lot beside the Majestic Hotel... Up through the fire tower... Room 304... Very well, Mr. Shaw. I shall be there within a half

hour."

Hanging up the receiver, Dunson came into the parlor. He told his wife the import of the call.

"Shaw wants me to meet him at the Majestic Hotel. I'm going straight up to his room. Pack my bag at once, Martha."

"Is it safe, Prescott?"

"Absolutely! I am to park my car by the side of the hotel, in that parking space that we've used so often. I'll go in by the side door; up the fire tower to Shaw's room. I'll call you, after I have talked with him."

Donning coat and vest, Dunson clapped a battered hat upon his head. He went out through the kitchen, while Mrs. Dunson started upstairs to pack the suitcase.

Five minutes later, Mrs. Dunson arrived downstairs, carrying a light bag. She heard the kitchen door slam; Dunson arrived, fuming incoherently. Taking the bag, he explained the reason for his annoyance.

"The battery is dead," he told his wife. "I'll take the trolley into town."

"Didn't Mr. Shaw tell you to drive in your car?"

"Yes. Probably, because I said that I had one available."

"Perhaps you should call him at the hotel."

"No. That would be unnecessary."

Kissing his wife good-by, Dunson stepped toward the door. He paused long enough to add a last assurance.

"The trolley stop is only one block from the Majestic Hotel," reminded Dunson. "That block is a quiet one. I can walk along the left side of the street, in front of Judge Benbrook's old house. Then I get past there, I can cross over to the parking lot, and enter the hotel as Shaw suggested."

LEAVING the house, Dunson took to a secluded sidewalk. The suburban street was deserted; Dunson felt secure as he paced in the direction of the car line. He reached the car stop; stood under the darkened shelter of a large tree. In a few minutes, a jouncy trolley car came along the street. Dunson stepped into the glow of its headlight and halted it.

There were only five passengers on the trolley car. None noted Dunson particularly. Setting his bag on the seat beside him, Dunson shoved his hat back from his bulgy forehead and stared from the window as the car rolled along.

After a few blocks, the car halted. A policeman stepped aboard the back platform, grunted a "hello" to the conductor. The car started on; the officer remained on the rear platform. The trolley had traveled another block before he happened to glance in through the door.

"Say!" exclaimed the bluecoat, to the conductor. "Isn't that Prescott Dunson, the fellow that's going to run for district attorney?"

"Guess it is," rejoined the conductor, peering through the door. "Looks like the pictures I've seen of him."

The cop whistled.

"We got orders tonight to watch for him," he informed. "On account of that battle last night, the police director's taking no chances. Guess he figures there'll be crooks looking for Dunson. Ring for a stop at the next corner. I'd better put in a call to the precinct."

"Want me to hold the car for you?"

"Naw! I'll take the next one. I wasn't told to go along with Dunson. Orders were to report if I saw him."

The conductor signaled the motor-man. The trolley stopped long enough for the policeman to drop off; then resumed its jerky course. Coming into the heart of the city, it was halted frequently by traffic lights; but took on few passengers.

After ten minutes, the trolley neared the corner where Dunson intended to get off. The conductor, staring toward the street, noted that a touring car was loitering along beside the trolley; but he quickly forgot the fact. The trolley swung into a one-way street; Dunson arose and pressed a button. When the car stopped, the big man alighted at his corner.

DUNSON'S first move was to cross the street. This brought him to the left side of a short block. To his left was the looming bulk of an old-fashioned mansion, the residence of Judge Martin Benbrook, who was long retired from the bench. There were two gates in the iron picket fence that ran in front of the old house. One offered access to the front door; the other led to a side passage that ran to the rear of the house.

Just past Judge Benbrook's home, the remaining half of the block was composed of buildings with lighted fronts. Across from them was the Majestic Hotel, on the right side of the street. Nestled against the hotel were parked cars, scarcely discernible in the darkness of the parking lot.

Dunson strolled along at leisurely gait; he saw that he could easily cross the street unnoticed, after he had passed Judge Benbrook's.

It was when Dunson neared the second gate, that the first token of danger came. A touring car had swung the corner which the trolley had left. Its lights flashed suddenly from dim to bright. Dunson's walking figure was outlined in their glare. For an instant, the big man paused, hoping, the lights would swing away. They did, but in their place came the vivid glow of a spotlight.

Prescott Dunson was caught in full view, turned half toward the side gate in the picket fence. He was clutching his suitcase, blinking into the brilliance that had so plainly revealed him. To his startled ears came the sound of a rasped command, that delivered two words only:

"Give it!"

The suitcase dropped from Dunson's shaky hands. In that tense instant, the doomed man realized that he was on the spot.

Prescott Dunson had walked into the snare of death.

CHAPTER V. DEATH DELIVERED

OTHER eyes than Dunson's had seen the sudden glare of the revealing spotlight. They were eyes that were not blinded by the unexpected brilliance. Across the street, but beyond the spot where Dunson stood, a

lurking figure was watching from the shelter of cars stationed in the parking lot.

To that observer, the spotlight told its story. He saw the helpless man caught in the path of light. With a quick spring, this watcher came from his place of security. Street lights showed him as a shrouded shape. The Shadow was again on hand to offset crime.

Before thugs could obey the command of their leader, The Shadow's fists came up. With quick fingers, he pulled the triggers of automatics; dispatched whining bullets straight for the death car that lay almost between him and Prescott Dunson. Cries came from the slowly moving touring car. The Shadow had scored hits upon human targets.

Those shots saved Dunson for the moment. They gave the doomed man a needed opportunity. Close beside Dunson was the gate to the side passage that led beyond Judge Benbrook's house. Had Dunson dropped his suitcase and pressed through the gate, he could have gained the shelter that would save him.

Instead, Dunson stood rooted. He seemed hypnotized by the light that blinded him. The death car veered, to escape The Shadow's bombardment. While the automatics still tongued, a clatter began from within the touring car. One crouching machine gunner had lain below The Shadow's fire, was pushing the muzzle of the death gun through the opening of a half-opened door, on Dunson's side of the street. That killer profited by Dunson's lack of motion. He let the doomed man have it.

The touring car sped forward, while bullets still streamed from its side. The driver was low behind the wheel; the machine gunner was crouched on the rear floor. Others were hanging from the side of the car while it ran the gantlet of The Shadow's fire. One in the front seat, the other in the rear, two thugs had stopped the bullets that had entered the right side of the car.

The Shadow boomed last shots at the driver. They failed to get him; for the rolling form of an intervening thug shielded the man at the wheel. As the touring car wheeled leftward to the main street, The Shadow put a bullet through the gasoline tank; but the automobile kept onward and disappeared from view.

THE SHADOW started across the street, to the darkness where Dunson's body lay. Before he arrived, he heard light, quick footsteps. As he came up in the darkness, he found a girl bending over the bullet-riddled man. The Shadow saw a white face in the darkness, as the girl listened to Dunson's last words.

"Tell – tell Shaw!" gasped Dunson. "I should – should have done as he – he said –"

The sentence ended with a sigh. Prescott Dunson was dead.

Bravely, the girl raised the man's head; felt it drop back from her grasp. At that instant, she sensed that someone was beside her. Looking up, the girl viewed a blackened figure almost at her elbow. She saw the burn of steady eyes. Frightened, bewildered, she tried to scream an accusation.

"You – you killed him!"

An approaching car had swung the corner. The Shadow saw it across the girl's shoulder. He knew that it was bringing a second crew of gunmen. Shoving one gun beneath his cloak, he seized the girl about the shoulders. Hurling his full weight against the gate, he rammed it open; then launched the struggling girl along the passage beside the house.

The Shadow performed this action with a complete spin that brought him again facing the street, a ready gun in hand. He had whirled the girl more than a dozen feet away; she was in a spot of safety. New battle was

due; the click of an automobile spotlight foretold it. Standing at the gate, The Shadow was fully revealed by a stream of light.

Though spotted as Dunson had been, The Shadow was prepared. His laugh sounded its fierce challenge. Standing above the body of the murdered man, The Shadow loosed quick bullets from his single .45; though few, those shots were perfect. This time, The Shadow had the range he wanted.

His first bullet was straight for the rear door of the car. That door, like the previous one, was partly opened. The Shadow dropped the man who was behind it. His second bullet stabbed the spotlight, finishing its glare. As the driver gave the car the gas, The Shadow ripped a final bullet for the steering wheel. A cry told that he had clipped the hoodlum at the wheel.

The car zigzagged wildly. An unwounded thug managed to control it and yank it into the parking lot, where it sped through a path between parked cars.

The Shadow whipped forth the gun that he had stowed away; but he did not aim toward the car that had fled. He had a new target; this was a sedan that swung in from the other direction.

COMING from the main street, the sedan was plain against the lighted front of the Majestic Hotel. The Shadow saw a gun muzzle thrust from a rear window; he blasted away before the driver was ready to turn on a spotlight. Bullets that spat from darkness were too much for this crew. The driver wheeled the sedan to the left; took the route that the second car had followed, through the parking space.

Before The Shadow could make another move, he heard the whine of sirens. They came from both directions. The Flying Squadron was coming to the scene of battle. To others, that arrival signified the law. To The Shadow, it meant something else.

The Shadow knew the extent of crime in Westford; he knew that the Flying Squadron was a bluff. Crooks would make their get-away amid wild pursuit; the squadron would gain credit for prompt action. That was exactly what had happened last night, after Lieutenant Maclare's raid.

The Shadow knew more. He had guessed the personnel of the picked men who formed the Flying Squadron. He knew that they were as dangerous as crooks; otherwise, they would not be party to the fake pursuit that they so often staged.

Because of that, The Shadow saw danger in his own position. His guns were empty; he would have no chance to battle uniformed men who merely pretended to uphold the law. They, however, would be pleased at the opportunity to drill The Shadow.

Already, cars and motorcycles were swinging into view, converging toward the very spot where The Shadow stood; a fact that signified that they knew where to find Dunson's body. The Shadow had one lone path to safety. That was the passage past Judge Benbrook's house, the route along which he had sent the girl.

Turning, The Shadow swiftly entered the passage, swinging the gate shut behind him. Hardly had he started through the darkened space before he heard a siren stopping on the rear street. One of the Flying Squadron's cars had arrived there; Borman's men were coming through from the back.

Quickly, The Shadow swung into the shelter of an alcove at the side of the house. He stumbled a short flight of steps; as he caught himself against the wall, he heard a whispered voice just above his head. The voice gave question:

"You – you're safe?"

It was the girl who spoke. She had taken this shelter ahead of The Shadow. She had guessed that the person stumbling in darkness was the one who had saved her from death. The Shadow gave quiet response.

"I am safe," he whispered. "Remain silent until everyone has gone."

"I have my key," began the girl. "If I could only unlock this door –"

Almost instantly, The Shadow blinked a tiny flashlight. By the glow, he saw the key that the girl was holding; her hand was shaking as she tried to fit it into a door. Quickly, The Shadow plucked the key with gloved fingers. He found the lock; opened the door and thrust the girl inward.

Following, The Shadow closed the door behind him, inserted the key from the inside and turned the lock.

LOOKING about, The Shadow found himself in an entry that led to a dimly lighted hall. The girl had gone through; she was staring back, trying to discern the man who had so promptly aided her with the door.

The Shadow stepped forward into the light. The girl gasped, as she saw his weird, cloaked figure. She silenced, as The Shadow gave a whisper. Fascinated, the girl met the gleam of The Shadow's burning eyes. She heard him speak; not a question, but a statement.

"You are Judge Benbrook's daughter?"

The girl nodded.

"Estelle Benbrook," stated The Shadow. "I have heard of you."

Though more amazed than ever, Estelle Benbrook found her voice. She thanked her rescuer.

"You saved my life," declared the girl. "You have my gratitude! But – but –"

The Shadow waited for the girl to continue. Estelle finally expressed her thoughts.

"But the police are now outside!" blurted the girl. "Why did we need to avoid them?"

"They are as dangerous as the others," replied The Shadow, calmly. "Criminals were ready to eliminate all who saw Prescott Dunson die. These police would willingly do the same."

Estelle Benbrook continued to watch The Shadow's eyes. When the girl spoke, her tone was, one of conviction.

"I believe you," she declared, firmly. "I recognized Prescott Dunson, when I saw his body. My father has said that matters were wrong in Westford; but I have never repeated his statements. He is an old man; his mind seems tired. Yet I have known that he speaks the truth."

The girl paused; then added:

"I have never spoken this before; not even to Louis Wilderton. He would not believe me. He thinks that all is well in Westford. If Louis could only understand –"

"He will learn," interposed The Shadow, quietly, "when the right time arrives. Until then, you must remain silent."

"I promise," declared Estelle. "I shall say nothing of what I saw tonight. Terrible though it was, it has given me courage."

The Shadow stepped back into the passage. He listened at the side door; he heard the shuffle of departing feet. The members of the Flying Squadron had completed their search in the passage beside the house. They had gone forward to join the ones at the front.

The Shadow turned the key in the lock: Estelle saw the motion of his hand as she joined him in the passage. Anxiously, the girl queried:

"Are you sure that the way is safe?"

The Shadow's response was a whispered laugh; mirthless, it was scarcely audible in the darkness. It betokened ill for any who might block his path.

Estelle, as witness of The Shadow's mighty battle, understood the grim significance. As The Shadow drew the door inward, Estelle reached forward; she found the key and plucked it from the lock.

"Take this key," pleaded the girl "I have another. Sometime, you may wish to return. Perhaps – perhaps there may be new danger, greater than that which you faced tonight."

Gloved fingers grasped the key. Estelle released it. She sensed that The Shadow had moved outward; but she expected him to speak again. It was not until half a minute later that she realized that The Shadow had departed. Silently, he had closed the door behind him. Estelle Benbrook stood alone.

SLOWLY, the girl went through the lighted hall. She reached a front room and turned on a desk lamp. The glow showed her well-formed face, attractive despite the paleness which dominated it. The darkness of her hair made her pallor seem more evident; for Estelle Benbrook was a pronounced brunette.

The girl had steadied since her ordeal. Her hand had no tremble, as it found another key in the desk. Steadily, Estelle returned to the side door and inserted the key. She found the door locked. The Shadow had silently attended to that detail from outside. Estelle managed a slight laugh, as she went into the hall and placed the key in her hand bag.

A puzzled frown appeared upon her forehead. She would have liked to have learned more concerning this mysterious stranger from the night. She recalled rumors that she had heard this very day, concerning the raid made last night, by Lieutenant Maclare. There was talk of persons unknown, who had sided with the law.

Estelle believed that rumor; but she was convinced that one fighter, not a group, had been responsible for the aid that Maclare had received. Estelle could form that opinion from her own observation. She was still overwhelmed with admiration for The Shadow's prowess in tonight's battle.

As she closed the hand bag, Estelle smiled. After all, The Shadow had taken the key that she had offered. That seemed more than courtesy. Sometime – soon, she hoped – the black-clad stranger might return.

In her thoughts, Estelle pictured this house as a real haven in the heart of Westford, should The Shadow need the refuge that it could afford. Such need seemed likely to Estelle, when she considered the odds that this lone fighter faced. Circumstances could arise to make The Shadow's return imperative.

Though Estelle Benbrook did not guess it, such circumstances were already in the making.

CHAPTER VI. CROOKS CONNIVE

NOT far from the center of Westford stood a large apartment house that fronted on a boulevard. This new and pretentious edifice had supplanted part of a row of old brick houses. The remnants of the row began at the side of the apartment house and continued to a corner. Deserted and dilapidated, they were ready for demolition.

The front windows on the second floor of the apartment house were heavily curtained, all in the same style. They gave the impression that they belonged to one apartment, which they did. That apartment was the residence of Stephen Ruthley, the wealthiest man in Westford.

Ruthley called the apartment his town home; and he considered an entire floor necessary for comfort, although his family seldom occupied the apartment with him. They preferred a country house, some miles from Westford. They lived there during the short intervals when they came home from Newport, Florida, or Europe.

Hence, Stephen Ruthley lived alone, except for a retinue of servants; and he liked this second floor apartment near the heart of Westford.

Recognized as the city's most prominent citizen, Ruthley enjoyed his prestige. He gained acclaim for his philanthropies and his constant stand for reform. His real pleasure, however, lay in the fact that never a whisper had passed concerning his actual capacity. None but his most trusted lieutenants knew that Stephen Ruthley was the real political boss of Westford.

Beginning with half a million dollars gained from honest enterprise, Ruthley had increased his fortune to ten times that amount by backing graft and crime. He had covered this procedure by expanding his legitimate businesses and making them look prosperous, though they cost him more than he gained. Ruthley considered this essential. As overlord of Westford, he maintained his security by keeping his real activities unknown.

There were two reasons why none of Ruthley's associates had ever dared to expose his game. First, because no one would have believed them; second because they were in too deep. Ruthley took care of his tools; saw to it that they gained their share of the spoils. That kept them satisfied, and maintained their loyalty to their evil chief.

ON this night, soon after The Shadow had rescued Estelle Benbrook, Stephen Ruthley had a visitor. The caller was a stuffed-shirt henchman, who was at present Ruthley's most useful figurehead. He was Elvin Marclot, mayor of Westford, whom Ruthley had carried into office on a sweeping wave of so-called reform.

The pair were seated in Ruthley's den, a room that had windows only at the front, for it was the side of the apartment that was buttressed by the side wall of the first house in the row.

Ruthley's den was a cross between an office and a clubroom. It had a desk in the corner, along with a filing cabinet. Except for those articles of office equipment, it was furnished with deep-cushioned chairs and couches, thick rugs, ornate tables.

The side wall showed a pair of large bookcases, set apart; between them was a huge, life-sized painting that depicted Aramis, of the "Three Musketeers." The bottom of the full-length picture was less than two feet from the floor; the heavy mahogany frame was flush against the wall.

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Ruthley was seated in an armchair, smoking an expensive cigar. Marclot was opposite him, watching him. In appearance, as well as manner, the two formed an absolute contrast.

Stephen Ruthley was elderly, yet active. His face was calm, pleasant, almost fatherly. His eyes, though searching, carried a twinkle; his gray hair added to his genial look. All this was a mask that Ruthley had worn for years; he seldom dropped it, even when he had no need for pretense. In fact, Ruthley prided himself upon the fact that when his temper rose, he could play his friendly, reassuring part to real perfection.

Elvin Marclot was portly, pompous and round-faced; serious of expression, he was ever ready to draw himself up and blubber in righteous indignation. He used that method to cover his crooked nature; it worked well in public, but it was useless in Ruthley's presence. The boss always had the mayor at a disadvantage; for Ruthley's calmness seemed natural, while Marclot's self-importance did not.

Tonight, if Ruthley chanced to be nervous, he did not show it. Marclot, however, was jittery, and could not cover the fact. He had already reported important news; all that he could do was repeat it.

"They've finished Dunson by this time, Steve," insisted Marclot, in a tone that was almost a whine. "Kirk Borman called me, like I told you. I thought I'd better be here when the news came –"

THE telephone bell rang. Marclot trembled as he reached for the telephone, which was on a mahogany table near the door. Ruthley stopped him.

"Let Haija answer it," ordered Ruthley. "He always does."

Marclot sank back in his chair. A Japanese house-man entered, picked up the telephone and spoke in mechanical fashion. He turned about and held the instrument toward Marclot, with the statement:

"Call for Honorable Mr. Mayor."

Marclot took the telephone shakily; gulped as he spoke. Ruthley listened intently to the conversation.

"Yes..." Marclot, always a faker, pretended to be astonished. "What is that, director? A murder?... Not our friend Prescott Dunson?... This is terrible! Terrible!... Yes. It would be wise for you to come here at once..."

Haija took the telephone as soon as Marclot hung up. The Japanese replaced the instrument on the table and stalked from the room. Marclot spoke to Ruthley in a trembling tone.

"They got Dunson!" the mayor quivered. "Borman's on his way here."

"How soon will that be?"

"He said within five minutes."

Ruthley and Marclot dropped their conversation. Just as Ruthley flicked another length of ashes from his cigar, Haija entered to announce that the police director had arrived. Kirk Borman was ushered into the den. As soon as Haija was gone, the sharp-faced police director talked business.

"They chopped down Dunson in front of Judge Benbrook's house," stated Borman. "But there was a lot of fireworks afterward. Some sharpshooter began to pick off the men in Lance's cars; just like last night."

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"Interesting," remarked Ruthley. He puffed at his cigar; then reached for a box and offered a smoke to Borman. Then he asked: "Did the Flying Squadron take care of the troublemaker?"

"They arrived too late to get him," returned Borman, in a rueful tone. "They had to fake a chase after the thugs; and it was tough to bluff it, for they were crippled pretty bad, the thugs were. I thought the whole game was going to be a cinch when Dunson was reported in that trolley; but it wasn't.

"Anyway, Dunson is done for. The Flying Squadron took his body over to the morgue. I saw him laid out there; and I found out something that's worth knowing. Wait until I show you the letter that was on Dunson's body."

Borman began to fumble in his pockets. Marclot took advantage of the lull.

"This will make trouble," insisted the mayor. "Maybe not for us; but suppose that public indignation seeks out Lance Gillick? He is one of us. We have to protect him."

"We shall," stated. Ruthley, with a smile. "Quite easily."

"But how can we laugh off Dunson's charges?" continued Marclot. "He claimed that he could prove corruption in Westford."

"I shall handle the matter," returned Ruthley, still smiling. "Quite easily, Marclot."

Borman had found the letter. The police director was opening it. The paper was reddened at one corner; that stain had come from Prescott Dunson's blood. The fact did not annoy Borman; he was too anxious to divulge the contents of the letter.

"This was from a man named Shaw," he began. "Evidently the fellow had written to Dunson before —"

"Wait!"

STEPHEN Ruthley had heard a slight sound that came from behind the panting on the wall. He arose; went to the picture and pressed a hidden catch in the side of the frame. He swung the picture inward, in doorlike fashion.

Two men stepped over the sill, to join the conference in Ruthley's den.

The foremost was Lance Gillick, sleek in his evening attire. The big-shot gambler indulged in one of his suave smiles. He stepped aside to let his companion enter. The other man was short and squatty; his leering face showed crossed scars on its left cheek. The man looked like a murderer; and he was.

Lance's companion was "Beezer" Dorsch, the mobleader who was supposed to be at odds with the sleek gambler. As Lance had mentioned to Borman the night before, the two were actually in league. Because of that, Lance had brought Beezer to this conference.

The ring of crime-makers was complete. Stephen Ruthley, king of villainy, sat smiling as he viewed the faces of his four lieutenants. With Elvin Marclot to play the part of a pompous mayor; with Kirk Borman to pose as an efficient police director, Ruthley held two aces for a start.

This other pair were quite as essential to his schemes. Lance Gillick served as hidden lieutenant who commanded henchmen from the underworld, while Beezer Dorsch took charge of action in the field. In a

sense, Lance and Beezer corresponded to Marclot and Borman. One pair represented the law; the other pair, crime.

The second duo of aces gave Stephen Ruthley the full hand that he wanted. All were his, to take his commands. Tonight's action had been the murder of Prescott Dunson. The kill had been made. Ruthley was prepared to order further measures to cover up the crime.

CHAPTER VII. THE FINGER POINTS

ELVIN MARCLOT and Kirk Borman were not at all annoyed by the arrival of Lance Gillick and Beezer Dorsch. The mayor and the police director had long since come to recognize those two as companions in arms. There was, in fact, a reason why both Marclot and Borman felt pleased when they learned that Ruthley had summoned his representatives in the underworld. Until tonight, neither Marclot nor Borman had made the actual acquaintance of Beezer Dorsch.

Nearly all contact between these pairs of lieutenants had been when Kirk Borman had visited Lance Gillick, on pretense that he was looking into the gambler's affairs. Marclot and Borman paid their own visits to Stephen Ruthley; but they always entered by the front door. When Ruthley needed to see Lance or Beezer, he had those outlaws come in through the secret entry.

The picture that served as a door covered a passage through the deserted house at the end of the row. Lance and Beezer reached it by entering the old house from a narrow, blind alley, well hidden from the lights of the front boulevard.

Tonight, it was apparent that Lance and Beezer had brought news. Therefore, Kirk Borman postponed his own report. He pocketed the letter that he had found on Dunson's body and settled back in his chair to listen. Lance Gillick picked out one of Ruthley's cigars, while Beezer Dorsch produced a cigarette and lighted it. Lance gave a nod.

"Spill it, Beezer," he ordered. "The boss will want to hear what went sour."

Beezer turned directly to Ruthley.

"I was going to tell you about last night," he began. "Only I got more dope to spring, the way things has happened. We muffed that Maclare job, on account of a guy who queered our set-up. I was wise to who he was. He was The Shadow! And it was him again tonight!"

For an instant, Stephen Ruthley's eyes showed a hard glint. The boss had heard of The Shadow; for he had delved deeply into the lore of crime.

Ruthley turned to Borman.

"Too bad your Flying Squadron was slow," purred the boss. "They could handle this trouble-maker, if they went after him."

"They'll have orders to bag The Shadow," returned Borman, grimly. "When I tell them to look for The Shadow, they'll find him!"

LANCE and Beezer smiled hopefully. Ruthley settled back in his chair to ponder over the facts that he had heard. During the lull, Mayor Marclot suddenly reverted to his former subject.

"We can't forget Dunson," pleaded Marclot. "Something has to be brought to light, to cover the stir he has made."

Ruthley smiled blandly. He arose and went to the filing cabinet in the corner. Opening a drawer, he produced a folder filled with papers. He brought them back to his chair; laid them upon a table. Motioning for silence, he spoke in calm, authoritative tone.

"Prescott Dunson is dead," announced Ruthley. "He was murdered because he threatened to make important revelations concerning graft and crime. The public will want facts; therefore, the public shall have facts. Those facts, however, will be to our own choice."

Smiling, Ruthley opened the folder and brought out the papers. As he spread them on the table, he spoke further.

"First," he declared, "some killer must be blamed for the crime. Very well; we shall name the man who is actually responsible. There he is" – Ruthley pointed to Beezer – "all ready to take the blame."

"Sure," snorted Beezer, "I'll be the fall guy. Great stuff, boss! Me and Lance is supposed to be on the outs. That'll cover him."

Lance chuckled.

"I already have an alibi," he remarked. "The best in the city. Just at the time when Beezer was rubbing out Dunson, who do you think dropped in to see me? I'll tell you. It was Lieutenant James Maclare. He wanted to see if I had any roulette wheels up my sleeve, so I showed him all around the joint. He drew a blank; wouldn't even take a cigar when I offered it to him. Maclare knows where I was when Dunson was chopped down. Being honest, he'll admit that I was right in my own night club."

Smiles of approval were exchanged throughout the group. Chuckles stilled as Ruthley resumed.

"Beezer will disappear," explained the boss. "The city will be scoured for him. A nation-wide search will begin, with Beezer called a public enemy."

Beezer looked uneasy, until Ruthley added:

"All the while, Beezer will be comfortably located in the one place where no one – not even Lieutenant Maclare – will look for him. He will live in your apartment, Lance."

LANCE nodded his approval. The others joined with nods. They knew the location of Lance's apartment; off the passage that led from his private office. Since Maclare had raided the Club Adair and found no gambling devices, there would be no more raids.

Ruthley made a sweeping gesture with his right hand.

"The matter of a murderer is settled," he declared. "We must, however, consider the subject of corruption. Marclot" – he eyed the mayor steadily – "do you remember those contracts you signed for the proposed exposition buildings?"

"Certainly," nodded Marclot. "Adam Woodstock gained the contracts. He has already received a million dollars of city funds. He gave us our half of the money."

"That was a swell kickback," put in Lance, in an admiring tone. "I'll bet, though, that it doesn't show on Woodstock's books."

"Of course not," declared Marclot. "Woodstock was careful to cover the entire transaction."

"These papers," stated Ruthley, picking some from his stack, "give a comparison of the actual estimates and the false ones. Suppose that they were found in Woodstock's safe, along with other incriminating documents, such as letters signed by Beezer Dorsch –"

Elvin Marclot could not contain himself. Forgetting his pompous pose, the mayor exclaimed:

"People would think that Woodstock was the man higher up! The one who ordered Beezer to murder Dunson!"

"And the contracts?" queried Ruthley, smoothly. "What would happen with them?"

"I could cancel them," returned Marclot, "on claim of fraud perpetrated by Woodstock. His corporation would be held responsible for the funds that Woodstock received."

"Precisely," smiled Ruthley. "A million dollars would be returned to the city treasury; and half of it would be Woodstock's own money. You would then be able, Marclot, to let new contracts to another bidder quite as discreet as Woodstock."

"Meaning a new kickback," chuckled Lance. "Another easy half million!"

The perfection of Ruthley's scheme suited the bevy of plotters. They saw another half million already in the bag. One question came; it was from Kirk Borman.

"Woodstock will squawk," phrased the police director. "How will you handle that, Steve?"

"I shall attend to Woodstock," purred Ruthley. "He will never find an opportunity to raise objection. There is only one detail that must still be considered. That concerns Beezer. We must see to it that he is actually accepted as Dunson's murderer."

"I can fix that," returned Borman. "I'll have some of the boys in the Flying Squadron swear to it that they saw him knock off Dunson."

"That will help," mused Ruthley, "but it would be better if some disinterested witnesses could testify to Beezer's ability as a killer. Charges made by police are sometimes disregarded."

KIRK BORMAN stroked his chin. He was thinking hard; suddenly, he found an answer. Reaching into his pocket, he whipped out the letter.

"I have it!" exclaimed Borman. "This letter shows that Dunson was working with an investigator named Shaw. Chances are that Shaw knew as much as Dunson, maybe more."

"Therefore," pronounced Ruthley, "Shaw must be eliminated. Let me see that letter, Kirk."

Taking the letter, Ruthley noted that it was brief. Scrawled in a clumsy hand, it simply promised new revelations that would be as startling as those previously given. It reminded Dunson to destroy all correspondence that he had received to date. Ruthley pondered over the scrawled signature.

"Theo D. Shaw," he said, aloud. "Where can the fellow be found, Kirk?"

"Probably at the Majestic Hotel," returned Borman, promptly. "That's where we think Dunson was headed when Beezer overtook him."

Ruthley turned to Beezer.

"Get Shaw," he purred. "Take good men with you. Let yourself be seen. As for you, Kirk" – Ruthley swung to the police director – "have your men close on Beezer's heels. Afterward, produce this letter as proof that Dunson knew Shaw."

"That will pin it on me right," grunted Beezer. He seemed pleased by the prospect. "When I dive out, they'll think I'm on the lam for sure!"

STEPHEN RUTHLEY arose; his action signified that the conference was ended. Marclot and Borman prepared to leave by the front door; Lance and Beezer were ready for secret departure. It was Lance who voiced an afterthought.

"What about The Shadow, boss?" he queried. "Beezer is sure that he was the guy who mixed in the last two jobs."

"We can attend to The Shadow later," decided Ruthley, "after we have disposed of this informant, Shaw."

The decision showed that Stephen Ruthley was confident that new murder could be accomplished without The Shadow's interference. The overlord of crime felt sure that the lone fighter had been too hard pressed to rally for new effort; that The Shadow would not expect another murderous attempt so soon after Dunson's death.

Ruthley's four aces shared their chief's belief. Though they knew The Shadow's prowess, they could not credit him with the ability to be everywhere at once. Not even Beezer Dorsch would grant The Shadow that much, though Beezer himself had been the one to face the cloaked fighter in actual combat.

Beezer's leering face showed that he did not expect to meet The Shadow again tonight. The murderer anticipated no opposition when he went to handle the investigator, Shaw. Nor did Ruthley and the others; they were lulled by Beezer's confidence.

Had Stephen Ruthley and his lieutenants given more careful consideration to facts that they held in hand, they might have foreseen real trouble from The Shadow.

CHAPTER VIII. THE TRAP REVERSED

THERE had been excitement in the Majestic Hotel following the murder of Prescott Dunson, for the noise of gunfire, plus the arrival of the Flying Squadron, had been sufficient to create high alarm. Later, the lobby had quieted; but all about were little groups of men who discussed the new crime that had occurred in Westford.

The consensus of opinion showed approval for the police. It was known that crooks had eluded the Flying Squadron; but fully a dozen persons were prepared to testify that the law had reached the spot within five minutes after Dunson's death. Speedy flight by the murderers explained the get-away; no one could find cause to blame the Flying Squadron for failing in the chase.

CITY OF CRIME

One guest at the Majestic Hotel remained apart from the chatting groups. He was a tall, haggard-faced individual, whose eyes were restless, and who frequently took on a listening attitude as he roamed about the gaudy lobby. The clerk at the desk recognized him as a man named Shaw. He looked like one of the many guests who had come down from their rooms to learn the cause of the fray.

After a while, Shaw started for the coffee shop that adjoined the lobby. He stopped at the door, hesitated, then headed for the elevators. The clerk did not see Shaw go upstairs; but he remembered that the man had been in the lobby. He proved this later, when a stranger stopped at the desk and inquired gruffly:

"Where'll I find Mr. Shaw? Theodore D. Shaw is the guy's full name."

"He was here in the lobby, a short while ago," replied the clerk, while he sorted letters. Then, realizing the toughness of the questioner's tone, the clerk asked: "Why do you wish to see Mr. Shaw?"

As he asked the question, the clerk looked at the man who had approached the desk. He saw an ugly, scarred face that one who observed was not likely to forget. The clerk was looking at Beezer Dorsch.

"I'll tell Shaw what I want to see him about," informed Beezer. "Is he still here in the lobby?"

The clerk looked about and shook his head. Turning toward Beezer, he noted that the scarred man was accompanied by a pair of rowdies who matched him for toughness. One of them voiced a growl:

"Get the mug's room number, Beezer."

"A good idea," decided Beezer. "Say, you" – he glowered at the clerk – "where'll I find this guy Shaw?"

"His room number is 304," began the clerk. "Only, he may not be up there –"

The girl at the switchboard offered an interruption. She had heard the mention of Shaw's name; but had turned around to see Beezer and the others. She did not know that the clerk was trying to stall.

"Mr. Shaw just put in a call," stated the girl. "He ordered supper served in his room."

"That means he's up there," grunted Beezer. "All right. I'll go up and see him."

Followed by his pals, Beezer strode toward the elevator. Hardly had the door closed before a house detective approached the desk and inquired of the clerk:

"Did that tough guy give his name?"

"No," replied the clerk; "only one of the men with him called him 'Beezer.'"

"Then he's Beezer Dorsch, all right!" decided the dick. "We just got a call from police headquarters to flag him if we saw him. Where did he go?"

"To Room 304, to see a man named Shaw."

"I'll call headquarters!"

DURING this interim, Beezer and his two companions had reached the third floor. They found Room 304 near the inner end of a short corridor. Beezer tried the door cautiously, to discover that it was locked. He

moved his companions out of the corridor.

"We got to figure some way of getting at the guy," decided Beezer. "Maybe there's a way of reaching a window –"

"Ps–s–s–t!" One of the thugs interrupted. "Scram, Beezer! There's an elevator door opening up!"

Beezer urged his companions into an alcove. They saw a waiter step from the elevator, bearing a tray. The attendant went to the door of 304 and knocked. Beezer saw the door open; he spied a haggard face inside the lighted room. The waiter entered; the door closed.

"I spotted Shaw, all right," whispered Beezer. "He's a sappy–looking guy. He'll be soft. Wait'll the waiter leaves."

Soon the waiter reappeared; he stopped in the hallway to nod, as he listened to a complaining voice from the room.

"I told you to bring lemon for my tea," Shaw was objecting. "Not cream. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. Return at once and bring the lemon. The door will be unlocked. Knock, however, before you enter."

"Very well, sir."

The door closed; the waiter returned to the elevator. Beezer grinned and pulled a revolver from his hip pocket. He whispered instructions to his thugs.

"Stick close," he told them. "Stay outside the door. I'll handle this mug alone; if I want you, I'll call you. Keep an eye peeled for the waiter, or anybody else that shows up."

Creeping forward, Beezer reached the door of 304; waited until his followers were beside him. Imitating the waiter's knock, Beezer rapped upon the door. He heard an impatient voice:

"Who is it?"

"The waiter," replied Beezer, in a tone less gruff than usual. "Bringing the lemon you wanted."

Beezer grinned as he gestured with his revolver, for the benefit of his pals. He was bringing a lemon, all right; one that he fancied would prove more sour than any that Shaw had ever tasted.

"Come in," called the voice within the room. "Don't stand out there in the hall."

Beezer turned the knob with his left hand. He shouldered through the doorway, to find himself in a short passage that led to the main portion of the room. Shaw's table was out of sight beyond the corner; Beezer could hear the clatter of dishes. Carefully, he closed the door; then edged forward.

"Where are you, waiter?"

As Shaw's query came again, Beezer bounded forward. He passed the projecting corner, swung straight for the spot where he believed that the victim would be seated. Stopping short as he gripped his leveled gun, Beezer stared at a table by the wall. He saw the dishes and the food upon them; but the chair behind the table was vacant.

QUICKLY, Beezer looked toward the deeper corner at his left; it was toward the front of the room, a spot that he had passed as he hurried into Shaw's field of vision. As he turned, Beezer was quicker with his eyes than with his gun. As a consequence, he was forced to halt before he had a chance to aim.

Beezer Dorsch was staring squarely into the rounded mouth of an automatic – a massive weapon that he was viewing at closer range than ever before. That .45 was a living threat; for Beezer had heard it speak often during his recent career of crime.

Above the huge weapon were burning eyes, the only features that Beezer could see beneath the shading brim of a slouch hat. Below was blackness that formed a shrouded shape. Beezer saw cloaked shoulders; a thin-gloved fist that gripped the steadied gun.

Beezer's revolver slipped from his numbed fingers. It thudded the floor beside the dish-laden table. Slowly, his hands came up, while he stared at those eyes that seemed to paralyze him with their hypnotic spell. Through a confused whirl of thoughts, Beezer Dorsch grasped the situation.

There was no man named Shaw. Nor was there need to wonder why the person who used that name had learned so much of crime in Westford. Stephen Ruthley and his lieutenants had over-looked the obvious; they had failed to connect the supposed investigator, Shaw, with the one person whose presence they had actual cause to fear.

The supposed Shaw was The Shadow. The cloaked avenger was the being who faced Beezer Dorsch. The Shadow had awaited Prescott Dunson outside the hotel; that was why he had been on hand, to protect the man whom Beezer had murdered.

The Shadow had not forgotten the letter that Dunson held. He had foreseen that Dunson's killer might try to trap him. The Shadow had arranged for it. He had sprung a snare of his own.

The trap was reversed. The Shadow, arch-enemy of crime, had taken Beezer Dorsch into his toils!

CHAPTER IX. THE LAW INVADES

THE SHADOW had arranged his trap with consummate skill. Beezer recognized the fact, as he stared helpless. Between the table and the corner, The Shadow had placed a floor lamp; he had tilted the shade upward so that its glare was focused on the room.

In a sense, The Shadow had employed the device which Beezer had used on two successive nights. The lamp had the effect of a spotlight; the corner behind it, darkened in comparison, was The Shadow's lurking spot. The position of the lamp explained why Beezer had overlooked the corner when he passed it. The crook had not recognized The Shadow's ruse.

The lamp's glare outlined Beezer's face; and the sight was not pretty. It showed the mobleader's ugly profile; his scarred cheek and the knobby, ill-shaped nose that had won him his nickname. Beezer's features were yellowish in the glow; the snarl that came from his gritted teeth would have befitted a rat.

The Shadow had stepped close enough for Beezer to see him distinctly; that move had been essential to The Shadow's plan. His position enabled him to scrutinize Beezer closely; to form his own opinion of the ugly captive that he had snared. A few brief seconds convinced The Shadow that he held the actual murderer who had given death to Prescott Dunson.

Beezer's face showed it. So did his manner; for his attempt at bravado was a weak one. The yellowish tinge upon Beezer's face represented the closest that the murderer could come to actual paleness.

Perhaps The Shadow already knew of Beezer's part. The murderer could not tell; but he learned promptly that The Shadow had gained information concerning persons more important than this prisoner. That became apparent when The Shadow spoke; his tone was an uncanny whisper that produced a shudder in Beezer's squatty frame.

"State who sent you here!" ordered The Shadow. "Name all concerned in your present move!"

It was a command, not a question. Beezer realized the full significance of The Shadow's words. Chances were that The Shadow knew who had sent the killer here; Beezer could see trouble for himself if he lied. The crook tried to snarl an answer; his voice was incoherent. Quailing, he resorted to a whine.

"I didn't put the finger on you," he protested. "Honest, I wasn't sent to make no trouble! It was on account of _"

BEEZER stopped, knowing his whine to be useless. An interruption rescued him; the sound was a cautious rap at the door of the room. Beezer glanced nervously toward The Shadow. Hidden lips issued a command.

"Answer it!" ordered The Shadow, his whispered tone low. "Tell your pals to join you!"

Beezer gulped; then called hoarsely:

"Come in, you guys!"

"Move toward the table," ordered The Shadow. "Keep your arms high!"

Beezer obeyed while the door was opening. He saw The Shadow step back behind the focused lamp. Footsteps clumped inward from the door; one of Beezer's cronies questioned:

"Did you croak him, Beezer?" There was no reply from Beezer. The thugs stopped as they saw their leader, against the wall, his hands above his head. They swung about, looking for an enemy; their hands tightened on their guns, then loosened.

Beezer's pals had heard a sinister whisper. They stared toward the corner; like Beezer, they saw The Shadow. He had stepped into the light; both his fists were equipped with automatics. One .45 held Beezer motionless; the other covered the two thugs. They acted as Beezer had. Two revolvers thudded the carpet together.

Pointing with his guns, The Shadow huddled the three mobsters together at the end of the room. His unseen lips formed a mirthful whisper, as ominous as the strident laugh that crooks had heard earlier upon this night. The meaning broke suddenly upon Beezer Dorsch, as he saw The Shadow put away one gun. A telephone was in easy reach of The Shadow's free hand; his single automatic was sufficient to hold the clustered trio at bay.

"He's going to give us to Maclare!" gulped Beezer. "The guy we tried to croak last night! We're in Maclare's precinct; there ain't a chance for us when he gets us!"

As he gave this news, Beezer started forward. He halted at the threat of The Shadow's gun muzzle. Neither of Beezer's pals had nerve enough to back him in a break for safety. Beezer saw The Shadow reach for the telephone. A second interruption halted the gloved hand.

Another knock was sounding at the door. It became a violent pounding. The Shadow knew that it was not the waiter; so did Beezer. The murderer strained forward, itching to make a spring. A loud voice sounded from beyond the door:

"Open! In the name of the law!"

ONE part of Stephen Ruthley's game had, as yet, escaped The Shadow. That was the big-shot's plan to make Beezer Dorsch a fugitive from justice. Hearing the voice from the corridor; noting the ugly triumph that suddenly appeared upon Beezer's face, The Shadow caught the idea.

He knew that the man who had shouted for entry was not an officer from Lieutenant Maclare's precinct. Outside were members of Kirk Borman's Flying Squadron, here to see that murder went through; prepared to cover the escape of Beezer Dorsch by pretense of a chase.

Instantly, The Shadow whipped out his second automatic. Turning his shoulder toward Beezer and the pair of thugs, The Shadow covered them with one gun, while he jabbed the other toward the door. Between two groups of enemies, he intended to hold unarmed men at bay, while he drove back invaders who would come with ready weapons.

As the door shoved inward, Beezer took a chance. He snarled a command to his pals; this time, they obeyed. Thinking that Beezer was with them, the two thugs made a desperate dive for The Shadow. Surging with full fury, they were upon him with a single bound.

The Shadow had only one course. Fading toward the door, he fired as he dropped. His bullets winged the thugs, sprawled them to the floor. Beezer dropped with them; but his fall was a foxy one. His pals had shielded him; Beezer still wanted them between himself and The Shadow.

That was scarcely necessary. The Shadow had no more time to deal with Beezer. Spinning toward the door, he whirled straight into a trio of policemen, who were clad in khaki, the distinguishing uniform of the Flying Squadron. Had there been a bluecoat in their midst, The Shadow would have let that man dive away. All, however, were khaki-clad. Director Borman had chosen those uniforms, that crooks might know their friends. The Shadow treated them alike.

His long arms were lashing; his heavy guns clipped heads beneath visored caps and sent the trio sagging. In the corridor, The Shadow ripped quick shots at three more members of the Flying Squadron; winged one and sent the others diving for cover. As The Shadow sprang past an elevator, the door clanged open; four members of the squadron saw him and charged. They swung their revolvers; this time, The Shadow was in the midst of a slugging throng.

BACK in The Shadow's room, a shot was fired. One of Beezer's wounded pals had taken a pot shot at Beezer himself. It was in payment for his cowardice, in letting his pals bear the brunt of The Shadow's quick defense.

That shot went wide; it was Beezer who fired the next ones. Savagely, the killer drilled both of his pals, sprawling them dead upon the floor, to leave no witnesses who might proclaim his treachery throughout the

underworld.

Springing to the hall, Beezer arrived to see The Shadow wheeling away from four foemen. Beezer dived for a stairway; The Shadow paused to deliver halting shots. A khaki-clad foeman pounced upon him; knocked down his gun arm. The Shadow whirled away to avoid a clinch. Shaking off another attacker, he reached the door of a fire tower.

All along the hall were members of the Flying Squadron, coming to hands and knees, groggy from strokes that they had received. There were others who had dodged The Shadow's attack. They opened fire from corners of corridors. The Shadow saw the fire tower as a vantage point. He took it, slamming the door behind him. Hardly was he on the tower before he realized the value of his move.

Sirens were screeching from below. The entire squadron was out, surrounding the hotel. The Shadow knew what prolonged battle with these disguised thugs would produce. It would bring out the full police force; Lieutenant Maclare first, with the men who patrolled this precinct. They would side with the Flying Squadron. The Shadow wanted no battle with such loyal men.

To avoid that inevitable result, The Shadow hurried down the fire tower. He reached the bottom just in time to see Beezer Dorsch dash from a side door of the hotel. The Shadow had no time to aim for the murderer; Beezer was ducking behind an automobile, pointing to the fire tower as he dived for cover. Two squadron men saw him; they let Beezer go and headed for the tower.

The Shadow swung out upon them. As their guns came up, his came down in two long swings. One man took a blow upon the head; the other dodged, but received a glancing stroke that made him stumble. Hearing shouts from men who had rounded the front corner of the hotel, The Shadow sprang off between parked cars. Dodging back and forth, he reached a coupe and boarded it.

Another car had pulled away from the other side of the parking lot. The Shadow heard the whine of its gear and knew that Beezer had made his getaway. That flight was by arrangement with the law. The Shadow had no such pleasant prospect. Trouble began anew, as he sped his car toward the street.

A SQUADRON car shot in to block The Shadow's coupe. The Shadow tongued a quick blast from his automatic; to avoid the fire, the driver of the squadron car veered. The Shadow wheeled away from bright lights; as his coupe roared past Judge Benbrook's house, three khaki-clad men on motorcycles took up the chase.

The Shadow veered left at the trolley tracks; rounded the block, sped his car through an alleyway. A patrol car sighted him; it followed. Another block, two policemen in blue uniform saw the chase and commandeered a sedan to join the pursuit.

Again, The Shadow turned his course, headed back toward the city's center. Finding a side street, he took it, to avoid another squadron car that was coming straight toward him.

As The Shadow whizzed past a corner, he went by an automobile that had pulled up to the curb. The man behind the wheel of that car sat watching, as police cars and motorcycles sped by. When the wild parade had faded in the distance, that watcher slid from his car and shuffled toward an alleyway that offered direct access to the rear door of Lance Gillick's Club Adair.

A street lamp gave a momentary glimpse of the shuffler's ugly face. The man was Beezer Dorsch, grinning from ear to ear. He had expected a pursuit before he could head back to Lance's perfect hide-out. With so many dumb cops in Westford, there was always a chance of trouble, as Beezer viewed it.

Circumstances had turned out well for Beezer Dorsch. He could forget the fact that he had failed to murder Shaw. After all, Shaw was The Shadow; and others could take the job of bagging him. As Beezer recalled it, Mayor Marclot and Police Director Borman had agreed to handle that particular task.

They had made a good beginning. The pursuit that Beezer had witnessed was a real one. The Shadow had put himself in wrong with the law. He had made Beezer's fake flight an easy one; and had given the Flying Squadron a real trail, for a change.

Beezer Dorsch was hopeful that the Flying Squadron would show its real ability tonight.

CHAPTER X. THE LOST TRAIL

THE chase that Beezer had witnessed was actually a hot one. The Shadow realized it as he sped toward the city limits, picking a course through the winding streets of one of Westford's suburbs. Pursuers had spread out, picking parallel streets. At every corner, The Shadow heard sirens that told of foemen on both sides.

Horns were honking from a hundred yards behind. They represented commandeered cars. More of the regular police had joined in the hunt. Like the members of the Flying Squadron, they would give The Shadow plenty, if they gained the opportunity. Questions and explanations would come afterward.

The Shadow's coupe was no speedier than the cars of the pursuers; but he knew this section of Westford. He had chosen it on that account. At intervals, The Shadow chose short-cuts, where angled streets afforded quick routes to other thoroughfares. These shifts put him farther ahead of the cars upon his trail.

Making a quick turn at a corner, The Shadow threaded through a maze of streets and gained a highway that led from the town. Speeding toward the open road, he saw the glare of two sets of headlights, coming straight toward him, side by side. Instantly, The Shadow knew that a radio call had been given. Patrol cars on the city's outskirts were heading in to block him.

Quickly, The Shadow chose the first side road that offered itself. The coupe jolted over bumpy paving; then came a muddy lane where a pair of ruts offered the only progress. Taking it at rapid speed, The Shadow saw the end of the road. He stopped the coupe on the very fringe of a small pond. Dropping to the ground, he looked back along the lane. He saw headlights bouncing as cars took the ruts. Half a dozen automobiles had neared this finish of the chase. One minute more would bring them to the spot where The Shadow stood.

High above, off to the right, The Shadow saw a glow of light. It came from the top of a huge water tower, its rounded bottom forming a bowl upon long, spindly struts. With long strides across scraggly ground, The Shadow covered the distance. He reached the bottom of the tower just as the police cars pulled up beside his abandoned coupe.

The glow from the tower came from lights beneath a projecting flange around the top. There, lights were concentrated to display a sign painted on the tower, stating that it belonged to the Westford Electric Co. A platform at the base of the tank itself cut off the light, so that all beneath was darkened.

Stopping by the first steel leg, The Shadow found that the support was equipped with a ladder. Without a moment's hesitation, he began an upward climb.

FORTY feet up, the ladder ended. In its place, The Shadow discovered a catwalk that led to the center of the tank, ending directly underneath it. Probing farther in the darkness, he discovered a side ladder that went to the top of the tank; but he chose the catwalk instead. His choice was a good one. Some of the pursuers had come over toward the tower and were flashing electric torches from the ground.

Reaching the end of the catwalk, The Shadow felt the bottom of the tank. He discovered supporting girders, shaped to the tank itself. Gripping the edges of a girder with his hands, The Shadow swung his feet upward and gained a toe-hold. Crawling face upward, he followed the outside of the huge bowl, until he was halfway to the platform that girded it. There, The Shadow paused; bracing his arms, he clung motionless.

Pursuers were coming up the ladder. Some reached the catwalk; followed its downward curve to the center of the tank. Others went around the platform. A few ascended the second ladder and flashed lights on the smooth surface of the conical top. The search took several minutes; it covered everywhere, except the under curve of the water tank, on The Shadow's side. No one suspected that a person could hide on that precarious portion of the tank.

Clangs from the ladder told that the police were making their descent. Slowly, The Shadow reversed his course along the girder. His arms and legs were tired, but the course was downward and required less effort than his climb. He reached the catwalk and settled to its surface.

From his high lookout, The Shadow watched the search along the ground. At least twenty men were beating the brush, as they circled the shores of the pond. Flashlights bobbed in the direction of a house, two hundred yards away. Lights appeared in the house itself. The Shadow knew that the police had roused the occupants, to make a search inside.

It was nearly an hour before the hunt ended. Even then, the terrain did not clear entirely; a few watchers were posted along the ground. None was near the tower; The Shadow moved along the catwalk and descended silently by the ladder. There, he waited in darkness, watching the blink of flashlights. Soon a pair came in his direction.

Sidling away from the tower, The Shadow listened while two men went up the ladder. They were choosing the very lookout that The Shadow had occupied, so that they could keep in contact with the men below. Evidently, the police intended to keep guard all night.

A clouded sky had rendered the darkness almost complete. That suited The Shadow. Silently, he made his way toward the house. He paused close beside the building while muffled feet tramped past him. A flashlight blinked, but did not turn in his direction. When the guard had passed, The Shadow crept to the wall of the house.

THE building was a frame structure; a trellis showed vaguely in the darkness. The Shadow used it as a ladder and made a quiet climb to a kitchen roof. He found a darkened window above; used it to reach a ledge. He was outside a third-story window; the shape of the roof indicated that this story of the house was an attic.

The window was a round one, on a pivot. The Shadow swung it to a horizontal position, using his cloak to muffle any sound. Head first, he wriggled through the half opening; came to the rough, unfinished floor of the attic. Using a tiny flashlight in guarded fashion, The Shadow studied the room, foot by foot.

The attic had been searched by the police. Pieces of old furniture had been shoved about; trunks had been pulled away from the wall. The Shadow reached a flight of steps; crept downward, to a door that was locked from the other side. This discovery pleased him. As long as that door remained locked, neither the house-owners nor the law would bother with another search. This attic could be The Shadow's refuge as long as he chose.

Eventually, he would have the choice of two exits: the window by which he had entered; or the door at the foot of the stairs. Though the door was locked, The Shadow could easily open it. His picks, lock-opening instruments expertly handled, had overcome barriers that were far more formidable than that lower door.

Back in the attic, The Shadow made himself comfortable. He found an old couch that was thick-cushioned, despite its shabbiness. Opening a trunk, he discovered blankets. Rolling one as a pillow, he used the other for bedding; and stretched himself upon the couch.

From where he lay, The Shadow could see through the window. He watched the motion of flashlights through the darkness. They would continue until dawn; then there would be a search by day. That hunt would cover many places; but it would not reach this attic, except by some freak of chance. If the search came here, The Shadow would be ready. If not, he would remain in the attic throughout the day.

For The Shadow expected no more trouble in Westford until tomorrow night. His present policy was to let matters cool there. Word would go around that Beezer Dorsch had fled the city; the same would be said about The Shadow. Crooks would be bluffing when they spoke of Beezer; they would think that they told the truth, in the case of The Shadow.

Thus the stage would be set as The Shadow wanted it, when he returned. Again, he could thrust from darkness; meet crooks and stagger them. To date, The Shadow had steadily progressed. He had saved Lieutenant Maclare; only Prescott Dunson's own mistakes had spoiled The Shadow's efforts toward a second rescue.

Likewise, chance had favored Beezer Dorsch, when The Shadow had trapped the murderer. The same chance had driven The Shadow to this place of refuge; but he had not lost ground in his battle against crime. Every fight had crippled more foemen; always, The Shadow had come through unscathed, departing into darkness.

Tomorrow night, The Shadow's plans called for a greater thrust; a move to the very place where crime was fostered. His investigations in the city of Westford had given him close knowledge of all who were concerned in crime.

Unfortunately, The Shadow had not been present at that conference between Stephen Ruthley and his four associates. The Shadow's absence from that meeting had caused him trouble when he trapped Beezer Dorsch. It was due to provide him with more difficulties when he again went into Westford.

HAD The Shadow gained an inkling of the next move that Stephen Ruthley intended, he would not have considered it wise to remain in this secluded attic. His policy would have been to slip the cordon of watchers and return to Westford on this very night.

As yet, The Shadow had dealt only with those lieutenants who served the overlord of crime. He had not encountered Stephen Ruthley in action; nor did he expect to meet the master villain on the move. Ruthley, as The Shadow sized him, was a cunning brain who could sit back and let others follow his command. Past events had backed The Shadow's opinion. The future, however, could tell another story.

Stephen Ruthley, at this very moment, was completing a plan of crime that would give The Shadow new and different evidence of the master villain's ways.

CHAPTER XI. WITHIN THE LAIR

EARLY the next evening, an automobile stopped in front of Stephen Ruthley's big apartment house. The man who parked the car appeared to be a privileged person, for the curb where he pulled up bore the sign: "NO PARKING."

Entering the apartment house, this visitor walked up a broad flight of stairs to the second floor. He rang a bell, at the imposing door that formed the entrance to Ruthley's apartment. Haija answered the ring; the Jap

bowed when he saw the visitor.

"Good evening, Honorable Mr. District Attorney," said Haija. "Honorable Master expect you."

The district attorney followed the house-man to Ruthley's den. Ruthley received him with outstretched hand; the gray-haired boss accompanied the gesture with his most genial smile.

"Good evening, Wilderton!" greeted Ruthley. "Sit down; have a cigar. Make yourself right at home."

Louis Wilderton took a chair opposite the portrait of Aramis. The glow of a floor lamp showed the prosecutor to be a man in his thirties; a serious chap who tried to appear older than he was. Wilderton was frail of build; light-haired and peaked of face. His pointed nose supported a pair of large spectacles that gave him an owlsh expression.

"Trouble, Wilderton?" Ruthley purred the question in a fatherly tone. Wilderton nodded.

"Don't worry about Dunson's death," remarked Ruthley. He picked up a copy of the Daily Banner and pointed to the headlines. "It's up to the police to arrest this killer, Dorsch. When they once find him, you will have no trouble convicting him of murder."

"I know that," vouchsafed Wilderton. "It's something else that bothers me, Mr. Ruthley. Prescott Dunson intended to run against me, for district attorney. People haven't forgotten that."

"He would not have gained the support of the reform party," remarked Ruthley. "You have proven yourself competent, Wilderton."

"Thank you, Mr. Ruthley. Just the same, Dunson had many supporters, chiefly those who expected him to make startling revelations. That puts it up to me."

"To do what?"

"To disclose the facts that Dunson promised to reveal. I must find the man higher up; the one whom Dunson intended to attack."

Stephen Ruthley nodded in commending fashion. Approaching Wilderton's chair, he clapped the district attorney upon the shoulder.

"You have a great head, Louis," approved Ruthley. "I admire your foresight. Yes, you must make every effort to find the man who ordered Dunson's death."

LOUIS WILDERTON produced a sheet of paper and handed it to Ruthley. It bore a list of names, written in pencil.

"This is confidential," stated Wilderton, in a strained tone. "I have written down the names of a dozen men, any one of whom might have had reason to fear Dunson. I would like your opinion on it, Mr. Ruthley."

Ruthley studied the list solemnly. As he expected, his own name was absent; so were those of Elvin Marclot and Kirk Borman. Even Lance Gillick's name was missing; for, today, Lieutenant Maclare had openly testified that he had raided the Club Adair prior to Dunson's murder and that Gillick was there at the time the killing took place.

CITY OF CRIME

The names on the list were those of small-fry politicians; also a few local contractors. Ruthley suppressed a pleased smile as he noted the name of Adam Woodstock.

"Understand, Mr. Ruthley," remarked Wilderton, "I have no evidence whatever against any of these men. I have merely assumed that someone in Westford must have wanted Dunson to die."

"I understand." Ruthley placed the paper on his desk. "Wilderton, I think that the best course is to wait. This matter will smooth itself."

"How so?"

"If one of those men is responsible," returned Ruthley, indicating the list, "he will soon lose his nerve. Dunson's murder has raised a huge cry. The fact that the police so promptly identified Dorsch as the killer will make the man behind the murder feel uneasy. He will do something that will prove his part in crime. Your problem will be solved."

"I hope that you are right, Mr. Ruthley."

"I feel confident that I am right. Be tranquil, Louis. Sit tight – let us say for the next two days – and if nothing has occurred within that time, come to me again."

Wilderton arose. He smiled wanly; pleased by Ruthley's reassurance. Glancing at his watch, the prosecutor remembered an appointment. Ruthley showed him to the door.

AS soon as Wilderton was gone, Ruthley returned to his desk. He picked up the list; chuckled as he read it. The names were written on a sheet of paper that bore Wilderton's name, printed in the upper left corner. Ruthley turned the paper downward. He picked up the telephone; stroked his chin as he tried to remember a number. He put the telephone back on its table, picked up the directory instead.

Turning to the "W's," Ruthley found Woodstock's number. He repeated it aloud: "Marvin 6384." He was about to reach for the telephone when he heard a ring of the doorbell; Haija's prompt footsteps followed. Ruthley stepped to the desk, and made a notation on the back of Wilderton's paper.

The memo that he wrote was: "Woodstock. Marvin 6384."

Haija appeared, to announce Kirk Borman. The police director entered. Ruthley leaned against the desk, to hear what he had to report. Borman was both prompt and brief.

"Just gave another interview to the Daily Banner," said the police director. "Stated that we are looking for Theo D. Shaw, as an accomplice of Beezer Dorsch. Our theory is that Shaw lured Dunson to the Majestic Hotel, so that Beezer could kill him on the way."

"Good business," approved Ruthley. "What else?"

"Finding Shaw's note on Dunson," continued Borman, "the police went to question the man. Found that Beezer Dorsch was there ahead. Surprised Beezer and Shaw in conference. Both made a get-away; but we bagged two of their accomplices."

"Fine!" chuckled Ruthley. "Beezer was wise to get rid of those fellows. Go on, Kirk."

"Still searching for Shaw out by the water tower. The Flying Squadron is watching for him, as well as for Beezer. They know that he is The Shadow; but they're keeping that to themselves."

"You've added more men to the squadron?"

"Yes. Lance Gillick brought in a new bunch today. We gave them the phony examination, to qualify them. It gives us a force of forty."

Another chuckle from Ruthley. One of the smartest moves in the master crook's game had been the formation of the Flying Squadron. To a man, that outfit was recruited from thugs whom Lance Gillick had called to Westford. All gave false addresses, pretending that they came from this locality.

Director Borman, in his call for "picked men," invariably gave these camouflaged thugs a high mark when he examined them. Other applicants were always rated low; thereby rejected.

"They'll chop down The Shadow, if they see him," declared Borman. "Too bad we didn't guess that he was Shaw, last night."

"We should have," purred Ruthley, his eyes showing a glint. "Look at this, Kirk."

STEPPING to his desk, Ruthley picked up a pencil. Beneath Woodstock's telephone, he printed the name: "Theo D. Shaw." Crossing out letters in irregular fashion, he spelled the name: "The Shadow."

Kirk Borman whistled.

"I get it!" exclaimed the police director. "He faked that name for Dunson's benefit. So that if Dunson began to study it closely, he would catch on to the idea. No wonder Dunson trusted Shaw. He must have guessed that he was The Shadow."

"Just as we should have guessed it," returned Ruthley. He glanced at the paper. "Wait a minute, Kirk, while I call Adam Woodstock."

Noting the telephone number again, Ruthley made the call. He completed a brief conversation; crumpled the sheet of paper and tossed it into an empty wastebasket.

"Woodstock is waiting to see me," Ruthley told Borman. "I called him this afternoon; told him to stay at home tonight, and see to it that he was alone."

"Is he?"

"Yes. His family has gone out. By the way, did you get those notes I wanted?"

Borman nodded; he pulled folded papers from his pocket.

"I went to the Club Adair right after dinner," he stated. "My pretext was to make a final check on Lance's alibi. I gave him a clean bill of health. I saw Beezer, in Lance's office, while we were alone. He had the notes all ready."

Ruthley pocketed the notes. He nudged his thumb toward the door.

"You go out the front way, Kirk," he told Borman. "I intend to use the secret passage. I have a car parked in the back alley."

"Good luck to you, Steve. I'll be at my office in city hall, ready for any phone calls."

Kirk Borman departed, out through the front door. He descended the stairs and reached the street. He stepped aboard his official car. The chauffeur drove away.

THE front of the big apartment house was recessed and, therefore, dark, except at the door, where two lights glowed. Kirk Borman had glanced casually along the front wall, as his car rolled away; but he had noted nothing unusual. It was after the director's car had gone that the unusual occurred.

Blackness moved from the darkened building front. At a moment when no cars were passing on the boulevard, a shrouded figure stepped in front of the lights by the door. For one second only, a complete shape was revealed. The lights showed The Shadow, cloaked in his garb of black.

With quick glide, The Shadow entered the lower hallway of the apartment house. No attendant was on duty; even had one been present, he could easily have failed to spy the intruder. Though the large hall was lighted, its walls were dark-paneled and therefore dim. The Shadow's silent course was along the wall. He seemed no more than a mammoth blot, as he moved toward the stairs.

Reaching the second floor, The Shadow stopped by the door of Ruthley's apartment. He set to work with a pick; he performed his task with nicety, although it required several minutes to properly probe the lock. At last the door yielded; The Shadow stepped into the apartment and closed the barrier behind him.

Beyond a dim hallway, he saw the half-opened door of a lighted room. Advancing noiselessly, The Shadow reached that goal; he drew an automatic from beneath his cloak as he peered into Ruthley's lighted den. After a few moments, The Shadow stepped across the threshold.

The room was empty. The Shadow had reached Stephen Ruthley's lair, only to find that the master crook was absent.

CHAPTER XII. THE SHADOW'S CLUE

THOUGH The Shadow had anticipated a meeting with Stephen Ruthley, he was not disturbed to find the master villain gone. It merely meant that the meeting would be postponed; to a degree, that would prove to The Shadow's advantage.

Through various forms of investigation, The Shadow had labeled Ruthley as the master of crime in Westford. Until tonight, he had considered it good policy to wear down the forces at Ruthley's command; to weaken them, in preparation for a final conflict with Ruthley himself.

The death of Prescott Dunson had partly altered The Shadow's decision. He knew that other victims might be slated for the spot; therefore, it was no longer wise to hold back a final stroke. Moreover, The Shadow's own position had become precarious last night. Hunted by the law, he had needed his most stealthy tactics to leave the house by the water tower tonight.

Coming into Westford on foot, The Shadow had seen many signs of the increased Flying Squadron that was covering all portions of the city. He knew that the number of his enemies had been increased. Hence he had ventured onward, to strike directly at Ruthley, knowing that if he boxed the master of crime, the whole evil structure would collapse.

Since Ruthley was absent, The Shadow intended to remain until he returned. Meanwhile, he had an excellent opportunity to gain new facts regarding Ruthley, through an examination of the latter's papers. The desk and the filing cabinet offered possibilities, if searched. Stepping past an armchair, The Shadow reached the desk, to begin there.

As he placed his hand upon the handle of an upper drawer, The Shadow saw the wastebasket beside the desk. Conspicuous within the basket was a crumpled sheet of paper. Stooping, The Shadow picked out the paper and smoothed it. He saw immediately that he had made a find.

The paper was stationery from the office of Louis Wilderton; The Shadow recognized the district attorney's precise handwriting, for he had seen it on official documents. Studying the list of names, The Shadow understood their significance. These were persons whom Wilderton wanted to investigate. The prosecutor had come to Stephen Ruthley for advice on the matter.

Turning the paper over, The Shadow saw the penciled notations on the back. Again he recognized a handwriting that he had seen before: Stephen Ruthley's. The Shadow read the notation: "Woodstock. Marvin 6384." Below it, he saw the name, "Theo D. Shaw," with the letters crossed by lines. The Shadow's lips phrased an almost inaudible laugh. He had supposed that by this time Ruthley would have guessed the significance of the signature of Theo D. Shaw.

Most important was Ruthley's notation of Woodstock's name and telephone number. Knowing that graft was rampant in Westford, The Shadow had held suspicions of all persons who had undertaken city contracts. Woodstock's name, however, had been but one of several.

The Shadow had seen no reason to investigate the contractor, in preference to others. This notation, however, showed clearly that Ruthley intended contact with Woodstock. Since Ruthley was absent, it followed that he could have gone to Woodstock's home.

HAVING seen Kirk Borman leave the apartment house after a definite visit, The Shadow knew that Ruthley must have been at home while the police director was here. Therefore, Ruthley must have chosen another exit.

For the moment, The Shadow did not consider the large painting on the wall; for it seemed likely that Ruthley could have gone out by a back door of the apartment itself. The Shadow decided to look for such an exit. Before he did so, he went to the telephone, lifted the receiver and dialed Woodstock's number.

The only response was a busy signal. It meant either that Woodstock was talking over the telephone or that the contractor had taken his receiver from the hook. Hanging up, The Shadow went out through the hallway of the apartment, to begin a stealthy search for another outlet.

The Shadow had not proceeded far before he found reason to abandon his search. As he turned the corner of a hallway, he heard the creep of footsteps. Gliding through the doorway of a darkened room, The Shadow found another opening and reached the hall near Ruthley's den. Again, he heard a guarded creep.

Someone had heard the click of the telephone dial when The Shadow had used it. That person had visited the den following The Shadow's departure. His presence known, The Shadow had need of strategy. His best course was to return to the den, since the vigilant guard had already been there. The Shadow crossed the hallway. His tall form threw a long silhouette upon the floor, almost to a corner beyond the door of the den. Gliding into the lighted room, The Shadow neared the desk, intending to pass beyond it. A sound made him wheel; he faced the doorway just as a wiry attacker sprang into view.

It was Haija. Almost as stealthy and as observant as The Shadow, the keen Japanese had spotted the silhouette upon the hallway floor. Coming from beyond the corner, he had reached the doorway of the den. Seeing The Shadow, Haija was leaping to prompt attack. The fact that The Shadow swung to meet him did not perturb the speedy Jap. Haija was grinning as he came.

With nimble hands, Haija caught The Shadow's right arm, as it swung toward the front of the black cloak. Haija thought that The Shadow was reaching for a gun. His guess was wrong. The Shadow had recognized a jujitsu thrust; his move was a bluff to counteract it.

As Haija performed a back-spin, expecting to speed The Shadow over his shoulders, a gloved left hand hooked cross-arm, to clutch the Jap's neck. Haija jolted short. The Shadow whipped backward; his long arms were like tremendous levers, as they hoisted Haija from the floor. Releasing his grip, The Shadow let Haija hurtle over an armchair; shoulder foremost, the Japanese bashed against the side of the heavy framed painting that adorned the wall. The canvas quivered from the thud; instantly, The Shadow recognized that it served as a door.

HAIJA lay motionless on the floor, stunned by a bump his head had taken when he sprawled. The Shadow stepped to the telephone; again, he dialed Woodstock's number, to get another busy signal. Hardly had he finished with the dialing when he heard sounds from elsewhere in the apartment. Ruthley had servants beside Haija. They had heard the crash of the Jap's fall; they were coming to learn its cause.

For a moment The Shadow paused, ready to begin new fray. His gloved fingers, dipping beneath the cloak, crinkled the paper that he had placed there.

The Shadow changed his plan. Stepping over toward Haija's prone body, he tried the edge of the picture frame. He found the catch; shoved Haija aside with one foot as he drew the portrait toward himself. Listening, The Shadow noted that there were no approaching steps. Probably the servants were conferring among themselves, reluctant to advance until they knew more.

Leaving the big portrait ajar, The Shadow hurried from the den. He reached the hallway; gained the outer door and opened it, making a clatter as he did so. Giving the door a slam. The Shadow wheeled back toward the den. As he passed the unconscious form of Haija, he heard the pound of footsteps.

Servants knew at last that there was an intruder in the apartment. They thought that the unknown visitor had fled by the front door. With courage gained, they were making a pursuit. Calmly, The Shadow stepped through the opening behind the portrait; closed the doorlike painting and heard the catch click automatically.

Stephen Ruthley, when he returned, would never guess that The Shadow had found the secret exit. Haija would testify to a battle in the den; the other servants would swear that an invader had fled through the front door. As for the crumpled paper that he had gained, The Shadow doubted that Ruthley would even remember it. The master crook had considered it of no importance.

THE SHADOW however, regarded the paper as valuable. He pocketed it securely, as he picked his way by flashlight through the interior of the vacant house. That paper was evidence of a sort that could be used, when the proper time arrived. There was a chance, though, that it might never prove necessary.

For The Shadow was taking a shortcut to reach Stephen Ruthley. He was convinced that the master crook had gone to the residence of Adam Woodstock. Knowing Ruthley's ways. The Shadow was positive that he would find the rogue engaged in secret parley with the contractor. If the two were hatching a new scheme of graft, it would be worth The Shadow's while to listen; then deal with Ruthley afterward.

Reaching the blind alley in back of the row of houses, The Shadow followed devious turns until he reached an obscure garage that was well away from brightly lighted streets. An attendant was dozing in the office; he did not awaken when The Shadow entered a small roadster and coasted the car to the street.

This was a reserve automobile, that The Shadow had purchased from a "used-car" lot in Westford. He was employing it to reach Adam Woodstock's home, on the other side of town. The Shadow knew the location of the contractor's residence; it was one of the largest houses in Westford.

All that disturbed The Shadow was the fact that it had taken him a dozen minutes to reach the garage where he had placed the old car. That interval had delayed his start to Woodstock's. There was a chance that the conference might be ended before The Shadow arrived at the contractor's home.

Had The Shadow learned the real purpose of Stephen Ruthley's visit to Adam Woodstock, he would have realized that the odds were badly against him. Though he was to profit by his present mission, The Shadow was faring into new and greater hazards than those that he had previously faced in Westford.

CHAPTER XIII. DEATH'S FALSE TALE

EVEN before The Shadow's combat with Haija, Stephen Ruthley had reached the home of Adam Woodstock. Admitted by the contractor himself, Ruthley had gone to a room on the second floor, there to confer with the man he had come to see.

Adam Woodstock was a dreary-faced individual; his bloodless countenance was almost as gray as the thin fringe of hair that surrounded his bald head. Seated at a desk in the room that he called his study, Woodstock assumed a listening attitude while Stephen Ruthley spoke. Woodstock had an odd habit of tilting his head to the right; Ruthley noticed it particularly tonight.

Across the desk from Woodstock, Ruthley was purring a persuasive story. It concerned the contract on which Woodstock had already paid back the half million dollars that had been required of him.

"There are several of us in this deal," confided Ruthley. "Marclot and I are not alone. That is why I have come to see you, Woodstock. These papers explain the situation."

Spreading the documents that he had brought from his own files, Ruthley chose one and passed it across the desk to Woodstock.

"This is the most important one," declared Ruthley. "It contains an itemized statement that you gave to Marclot. The bottom line lists five hundred thousand dollars under the head of excess profit."

"Quite right," returned Woodstock, in a drawly tone. "I listed my own profit as one hundred thousand; ten per cent of a million. The five hundred thousand represents the amount that I turned over to Marclot."

"We know that," nodded Ruthley, "but some of my associates have doubted the authenticity of the figures."

"But Marclot received the half million —"

"True. Nevertheless, we have only his word for it that your figures are correct."

Adam Woodstock blinked. In unbelieving tone, he questioned:

"Do you mean to say that someone has suggested that Marclot and I might have worked a side deal of our own?"

"Just that," replied Ruthley. "Of course, it sounds ridiculous. I said so myself. But the others did not think so. They had a reason for their doubts."

"What could that be?"

"The fact that you did not sign the statement."

Woodstock delivered a short laugh. Head still tilted, he reached for a pen that lay beside his desk telephone. Ruthley noted that the telephone was off its stand. He had suggested that Woodstock leave it so, in order not to be troubled by outside calls.

"I typed this statement myself," asserted Woodstock. "I have no objections to signing it."

Woodstock flourished the pen; he hesitated before applying his signature. His drawly tone was troubled as he remarked:

"This may be a mistake after all. I can't sign this statement, Ruthley. It would become an incriminating document if I did."

"Hardly," smiled Ruthley. "Not while it remains in my hands, Woodstock."

"I did not pay the money to you."

"You paid it to Marclot."

"The statement does not say so. It indicates that I could have retained the funds myself."

Ruthley reached for the statement. He studied it; nodded his agreement with Woodstock's opinion. Observing the contractor's typewriter on a table, Ruthley inserted the statement in the machine. At the bottom of the sheet, he typed two dotted lines, one an inch and a half below the other.

Here." Ruthley spoke briskly, as he laid the paper on the table. "Let me have your pen, Woodstock. I shall sign the statement also, to give it my approval."

He took the pen; it slipped slightly between his fingers. Ruthley tightened his grip; signed his name on the lower line. He handed the pen to Woodstock, who placed a much-used blotter upon the signature; then prepared to sign his own name, by taking the pen from Ruthley's grasp.

In order to sign the lower line, Ruthley had come over beside the contractor. He stood there, one hand upon the table, while Woodstock signed the upper line.

Ruthley was on Woodstock's right. He thrust his hand into his right coat pocket as Woodstock was reaching for the blotter. His head still tilted to the right, Woodstock did not spy Ruthley's move. The contractor simply planked the blotter upon the statement; pressed it firmly with his fingers.

There was a glimmer as Ruthley's hand moved upward. Coming from cover was a .32 revolver. Taking advantage of Woodstock's tilted head, Ruthley jabbed the gun muzzle squarely against the contractor's temple and pulled the trigger. He stepped away as he felt the slight recoil of the weapon.

For a full second; Adam Woodstock's body remained rigid; blood seemed to hold back from the gaping wound that the bullet had blasted in his temple. Then the tilt of Woodstock's head began to overbalance him; he sagged in Ruthley's direction. Stone dead, Woodstock would have sprawled to the floor, had Ruthley not intervened.

WITH his left hand, Ruthley thrust Woodstock's right shoulder in a forward direction, so that the dead man slumped upon the desk. As Ruthley expected, Woodstock's right hand shoved out ahead of him. Ruthley waited until the motion had ended. In deliberate fashion, he placed the revolver in Woodstock's hand, carefully clamped the dead man's fingers about the weapon.

Ruthley was not disturbed by the noise that the gun shot had made. Woodstock's house was isolated; the windows of this room were closed. Nor did Ruthley bother about wiping the handle of the revolver to remove fingerprints. He knew that there were none of his own prints upon the gun.

This was explained when Ruthley held his hands palms upward in the light of the desk lamp, to give them brief examination. The glow made the murderer's finger tips look glassy.

Ruthley chuckled. Before beginning this expedition, he had taken the precaution to dip his fingers in collodion. That liquid had dried, leaving a smooth, gelatine surface upon the fingers. The presence of collodion explained why the pen had slipped slightly from Ruthley's grip. With larger objects, especially the revolver, the collodion did not matter.

Stepping to the far side of the desk, Ruthley reached across and whisked away the statement that he and Woodstock had signed. The paper slid easily from beneath Woodstock's left hand; but the blotter could not be so easily gained. It was beneath Woodstock's elbow.

Ruthley observed the projecting blotter edge; decided not to disturb it. The blotter was an old one, its upper surface showed enough ink smears to cover any recent marks.

Coming around beside Woodstock's body, Ruthley opened a desk drawer on the dead contractor's right. There he found objects that he wanted. The first was a long pair of scissors, that served as paper shears. Ruthley used these on the signed statement; he carefully clipped off the lower portion of the paper, just beneath the line that bore Woodstock's signature. Ruthley's own signature was removed with the clipped-off portion.

Crumpling the strip of paper, the master crook tucked it in his vest pocket.

From the desk drawer, Ruthley took a ring of keys. He walked across the room and stopped in front of a metal strong-box, where he knew that Woodstock kept important papers. Unlocking the box with the proper key, Ruthley found a suitable pigeonhole into which he tucked the signed statement.

Returning to the desk; Ruthley gathered other papers that he had brought with him. He pocketed some; carried others to the strong-box and placed them there. From another pocket, Ruthley drew a small wad of letters. Checking them over, he smiled as he noted Beezer Dorsch's signature. Choosing another pigeonhole, Ruthley planted the fake letters. He closed the door of the strong-box and locked it.

THE murderer's task was almost finished. Ruthley went back to the desk, replaced the scissors and the keys. He picked up the telephone and put it on its stand.

Ruthley looked around the room; smiled in pleased manner as he observed the drawn window shades. He made a last survey of Woodstock's position at the desk; in precise fashion, Ruthley shifted the dead man slightly, so that his position would better suit the killer's design.

The set-up was perfect. Adam Woodstock looked as if he had braced himself for an ordeal; then pressed a revolver against his right temple. Assuming that Woodstock had been leaning forward, a bullet from his own hand would have produced the present result. It looked like a positive case of suicide.

Two details more; Ruthley attended to them. One was the matter of the pen, which had dropped from Woodstock's hand. Ruthley replaced it on the rack. The other was the drawer, that Ruthley had closed. Carefully, the murderer opened it again. From his pocket, he brought out a small box of cartridges, to match those in the death gun. He buried the cartridge box deep in the drawer.

Ruthley left the drawer open, to create the impression that Woodstock had reached into it for the gun. No other details were necessary. The suicide picture was complete; an examination of Woodstock's strong-box would fully support it. The signed statement; the letters from Beezer Dorsch would be as good as a written confession.

After a long, cold glance toward Woodstock's crumpled body, Ruthley turned and left the study. In a darkened hallway, he chose a flight of stairs that led to the back of the ground floor.

Descending, Stephen Ruthley went out by a side door.

The master crook was deliberate, even in his departure. In fact, he had almost decided to linger a while longer upon the scene of his crime; for he was confident that no intruders would arrive until he wished them.

Though Stephen Ruthley did not guess it, luck favored him immensely when he made his chance decision to depart. Had he stayed two minutes longer, his false tale of death would have been rendered useless.

For Stephen Ruthley had unwittingly left a trail that led to this very house. The Shadow, master of vengeance, was close upon it.

CHAPTER XIV. ON THE SCENE OF CRIME

ADAM Woodstock's large house fronted upon a broad, but little-traveled, avenue. It stood well back from the street, and was almost surrounded by trees. Access to the house was gained through a broad driveway that began at the front avenue.

A small roadster had halted across from the entrance to the driveway. Keen eyes saw an empty lot, directly opposite Woodstock's house. Relaxing the clutch pedal slowly, the driver of the roadster urged his car between two trees; parked it in the lot and alighted.

All this was done in darkness, with the roadster's lights extinguished. As the arrival from the roadster crossed the avenue, he was silent and invisible. His feet did not even crunch the gravel when he entered Woodstock's driveway.

The Shadow had staged a perfect arrival at this house where crime had struck. Advancing on foot, he intended to make a stealthy entry; he was choosing the front door because it was nearest. It was not until he was almost to his objective that The Shadow halted.

He had heard the sound of a motor, throbbing on the other side of the house. It was followed by the muffled whine of a high-pitched second gear, a sound that faded almost instantly. For a moment, The Shadow expected to see an automobile come around the corner of the house; then he detected that the car had driven in an opposite direction.

Swiftly, The Shadow skirted the house. He glimmered a tiny flashlight upon the gravel of the driveway. The light showed that the driveway formed a circle; it was one that afforded two exits. In addition to the drive that came up from the avenue, there was another that led to a rear street. It was in that direction that the car had gone.

Noting a side door, The Shadow entered the house. There were no lights on the ground floor; but faint rays from a stairway indicated illumination on the second story. The Shadow ascended; arrived at the half-closed door of Woodstock's study. Peering inward, he saw the dead contractor slumped across the desk.

The Shadow entered, to examine the grim result of Ruthley's conference with Woodstock. Even to The Shadow, this outcome was something of a surprise; but its purpose dawned upon him the moment that he saw the scene of crime. The Shadow had foreseen that Stephen Ruthley would take measures to cover his own misdeeds; but he had not expected the master crook to deal in actual murder.

In fact, The Shadow had supposed that Ruthley had come here to ask Woodstock's aid in the important matter of quelling public sentiment regarding the death of Prescott Dunson. In a sense, Ruthley had done just that; but he had made Woodstock give aid without request. It did not take The Shadow long to recognize that Woodstock had become the scapegoat, upon whom would be placed the blame for Dunson's death.

CLOSE beside the desk, The Shadow studied the set-up of Ruthley's perfect crime. It looked like suicide; it would pass as such. The opened desk drawer was an excellent touch. Any ordinary investigator would have decided that Adam Woodstock had reached into it to bring out his own revolver.

Keys shone from within the drawer. The Shadow plucked them up, examined them. He saw the strong-box; went to it and unlocked it. Stooped before the metal container, he began a search for planted evidence. He found it. The very items upon which Ruthley banked so heavily were the ones that won The Shadow's immediate suspicion.

The letters from Beezer Dorsch were pointed. They referred, in crudely veiled words, to a "job" that would be done as ordered. That meant the death of Dunson. One note spoke of "D," declaring that he would be no trouble. The Shadow left these letters where he found them.

Woodstock's signed statement explained still more. It gave The Shadow immediate knowledge of Ruthley's double-edged plan. The public would fall for the idea that the half million "excess profit" represented Woodstock's own harvest; but The Shadow knew its exact significance. That money was graft, paid back to Stephen Ruthley and the fake reformers who ran the present city administration.

Woodstock's corporation would have to disgorge the sum from its own funds. There would be a new contract; new graft, managed by Mayor Elvin Marclot who would raise his hands in amazed horror when he learned how Woodstock had tried to "swindle" the city of Westford.

One detail of the statement caught The Shadow's eye. The paper was slightly shorter than a usual typewriter page. Holding the paper to the light, The Shadow examined its texture; he saw its odd, wavy-lined watermark: the letter "W." It was a special bond paper, that Woodstock had evidently ordered direct from the manufacturers.

Approaching the desk, The Shadow found other paper in the drawer. It was of the same bond; but the sheets were of normal length. Placing one blank sheet in Woodstock's typewriter, The Shadow tapped a few keys to observe the peculiarities of type and ribbon color. He saw at once that Woodstock's statement had been typed upon this machine.

Comparing the big shears with the statement, The Shadow saw how its lower edge had been clipped. He noted that the space was very slight below the line that bore Woodstock's signature. The Shadow laughed softly; he had gained an inkling of how Ruthley had induced Woodstock to sign the statement.

THE SHADOW replaced the statement in the strong-box; he locked the heavy door. He kept the sheet of paper that he had typed; placed it beneath his cloak. He dropped the paper shears into the desk drawer, along with the keys. Looking over the flattened shoulders of Woodstock's huddled body, The Shadow saw the much-used blotter that projected from beneath the dead man's arm.

Inch by inch, The Shadow worked the blotter free. He saw at once why Ruthley had left it on the desk. The blobby surface of the blotter could afford no clue. When The Shadow turned the blotter over, however, he made a simple discovery that had totally escaped Ruthley's notice.

The blotter was double surfaced. Woodstock, until tonight, had used the upper side. Tonight, he had begun with the blank side of the blotter. Its fresh surface showed only two marks. One was Woodstock's own signature, reversed; quite plain, for the contractor had pressed heavily with his pen. The other was lighter; but The Shadow recognized it. The second mark bore a distinct resemblance to Stephen Ruthley's signature.

The master crook had overlooked one small item in his arrangement of the suicide scene. Just as he had left evidence at his own apartment, indicating that he had gone to visit Woodstock, so had he left a clue which proved that he had actually come to the contractor's home. This blotter could nullify the evidence that Ruthley had planted in Woodstock's safe.

Ordinarily, The Shadow would have left the blotter on the desk. Circumstances caused him to do otherwise tonight. The Shadow had gauged Stephen Ruthley too well, to believe that the murderer would leave anything to chance. Though Ruthley thought his crime was perfect, he would certainly count upon the opinion of a man well qualified to judge.

This crime would be discovered. Police would arrive; with them, Police Director Borman. Knowing Ruthley to be the perpetrator of crime. Kirk Borman would be on the lookout for every minor detail. If Borman found the blotter, he would promptly dispose of it. As evidence, the blotter would never serve, if left upon the scene of crime. Therefore, The Shadow kept the blotter; he placed it beneath his cloak, along with other items that he had acquired upon this night of investigation.

The Shadow was ready for a return visit to Stephen Ruthley's apartment. He knew that he could enter there, through the secret passage, to surprise Ruthley in the latter's own den. Almost ready for departure, The Shadow paused on the far side of the desk, to lean across and make a last inspection of Woodstock's body. It was while The Shadow stood in this position that he heard a sound from somewhere in the house.

BOARDS were creaking, as though invaders were creeping up the front stairs. Wheeling from the desk, The Shadow crossed the room. He gained the hall and reached the top of the back stairs, to listen for sounds from the front. Audible whispers reached The Shadow.

"Maybe it was a crank call," came one comment. "The guy that phoned headquarters may have just thought he heard a shot."

"We can't take any chances, though," was the response. "Director Borman said to move in, softlike, and investigate."

"Yeah. He's outside, too, waiting for us to report."

"That's why we'd better take a gander into that lighted room."

The approaching men were detectives from headquarters. A call had been made there, reporting a gun-shot heard within Woodstock's house. Probably, Ruthley had made that call, soon after his departure. Kirk Borman had been at his office, expecting it. Since Borman was outside, it was likely that members of the Flying Squadron were with him.

The Shadow decided upon stealthy departure, in order to head for Ruthley's without trouble on the way.

The two detectives went past. As they neared the door of Woodstock's study, The Shadow began his descent of the back stairs. He was only half-way down when a shout came from above. The dicks had discovered Woodstock's body. They were pounding out into the hall, to raise a loud alarm.

Instantly, there was a response from below. Footsteps clattered near the bottom of the back stairs. There was a click; a flashlight gleamed upward; the light was furnished by another detective, who happened to be near the back stairs when he heard the shout. He, too, raised a cry.

The dick below had made a discovery of his own. Straight in the path of his upward glare, he saw The Shadow. The detective's shout was spontaneous. He told all, as he cried:

"There's a guy on the back stairs! Get him!"

More footsteps below, as new arrivals hurried to join the detective who held the light. Shouts from above, as the two who had found Woodstock's body reached the back stairs to see The Shadow against the brilliant glare.

The Shadow's chance of stealthy departure was ended. Trapped between two forces, he was faced by a situation more pressing than the one he had encountered the night before.

CHAPTER XV. FOILED HOUNDS

ONE factor favored The Shadow. Though trapped, he had been found by men who were not of a criminal sort. Director Borman, knowing that Adam Woodstock's body was to be discovered, had used smart policy. He had sent ordinary detectives into the contractor's house; men who had long been on the Westford force. He had decided that their preliminary reports would be better than those of the outsiders who formed the Flying Squadron.

As yet, The Shadow had not clashed directly with any of the city's loyal police. Bluecoats had joined the khaki-clad squadron men in last night's chase; but The Shadow had been speeding away when the regular police took up the chase. Hence, he was an unknown factor to the real supporters of the law in Westford.

These headquarters men were like the police of Lieutenant Maclare's precinct. They were capable, but slow-witted. Director Borman preferred such officers. The Shadow knew that fact; he took advantage of it. Despite his trapped position, he saw chance for a quick getaway.

As usual, The Shadow did the unexpected. His natural course lay downward; but he spurned that route. His prompt decision was based on the fact that men were better prepared below; moreover, there was no way to guess instantly their number. Above were but two men; they were in the throes of a second surprise, for they had just found Woodstock's body. They did not expect The Shadow to come in their direction.

That direction, however, was the one that The Shadow chose; and he took his course with amazing speed. Wheeling on the stairway, he came upward with long bounds, swinging his arms high; each hand held an automatic. The detectives were drawing guns; but they ducked as The Shadow came upon them. Sweeping his arms sidewise, The Shadow carried the pair half across the hall.

He was clear of the light from below. The startled dicks were sprawled; despite the fact that The Shadow avoided damage with his sweeping blows. One headquarters man took the back of a gloved fist upon the chin. That swing, weighted with an automatic, was a knock-out punch.

The other detective swung at The Shadow, missed him in the darkness and fired two wild shots at nothingness. A swinging forearm staggered him to the top of the back stairs, where he did a downward dive, into the arms of men who were dashing upward.

The Shadow sped down the front stairway, turning the landing just as the flashlight stabbed in his direction. A detective fired two useless rounds. The Shadow was gone before the fellow tugged the trigger.

THE SHADOW had made a perfect start; but he knew that it was but preliminary to the struggle that was to come. Revolver shots had been heard outside; shock troops were prepared to answer the alarm.

As The Shadow hurled the front door open, a spotlight glared full upon him. The shouts that went up were delivered by hoarse-voiced members of the Flying Squadron.

Nearly a third of that outfit was on hand. Those sharp-shooting thugs were dangerous with their guns. Knowing it, The Shadow did not pause to fire at the focused light; instead, he sprang off toward a front corner of the house, getting away from the glare in an instant.

The light swung about; it did not show The Shadow. He had cut in back of thick, intervening shrubbery.

Guns began to bark; bullets whistled through foliage, thudded the house walls. A challenging laugh sounded from off beside the house. Raucous-voiced crooks shouted harsh epithets, as they heard The Shadow's weird mockery. They fired toward spots whence they thought the sinister mirth had issued. Their bullets were wide by yards.

No one could place The Shadow's laugh in blackness. Those who tried, merely rendered their gunfire useless, as The Shadow wanted it. The real tokens of The Shadow's position came when automatics tongued streaks of flame, straight for men who had revealed themselves by the spurts from their own revolvers. Groans, not bullets, answered The Shadow. In four shots, he scored two hits.

The Shadow was on his way again, circling off through darkness while his enemies fired blindly. A loud command was issued; it was in Kirk Borman's voice. The police director recognized the futility of the tactics that his thugs had taken. He was ordering them to follow a better method.

Khaki-clad thugs spread away, toward the hedges that formed the boundaries of Woodstock's property. There were patrol cars in the avenue and on other streets. Each automobile served as a base; men with flashlights passed from car to car.

Borman joined the detectives inside the house; he put men on guard at each door. A few of the Flying Squadron lugged in the pair of wounded men whom The Shadow had clipped; after that, they hurried to carry out Borman's latest orders. Those were instructions for the cordon to close inward.

CITY OF CRIME

SOMEWHERE in the darkness was The Shadow. He had paused, expecting the move that came. It suited him; for his intention was to find an opening and depart while his enemies made futile search. That was possible, if he moved at the right time.

Two minutes passed, while surrounding men crept closer; searchlights began to sweep from patrol cars, like a barrage above the head of the advancing men.

Wisely, the men in the cars kept the lights high, hoping to disclose The Shadow without revealing the positions of the men who closed in upon the cloaked fighter. The Shadow saw his opportunity and took it; close to the ground, he moved rapidly outward, just before a flood of light came in his direction. He escaped the path of the gleam.

The cordon could not function fully until it tightened; the creeping men were expecting The Shadow to lurk until he neared them. One lone fighter, sought by many, would ordinarily have let the circle close about him. The Shadow's tactics were different. He was actually on a line with the closing men; beneath the gleaming lights, like themselves.

The Shadow, however, was moving in an outward direction. Moreover, he had chosen the simplest path as the one that would be least guarded. He was creeping along the driveway to the avenue.

The Shadow was almost to the gate before he was discovered; even then, he was noted by accident. Reinforcements had come up; among them, men on motorcycles. One of these was ordered to ride through to the house; to form new contact with the police director. Obeying instructions, the man on the motorcycle chugged for the driveway. As he took the curve, his headlamp threw a glare inward from the gate.

Squarely ahead, the rider saw The Shadow rising in his path. The man gave a shout; whipped a revolver from his holster as he applied the brake. He gained no chance to fire. The Shadow was launching forward; as the fake cop's gun came up, The Shadow hurdled the handle-bars in a long plunge.

The Shadow's left arm clamped the man's shoulder; as the fellow spilled to the gravel, The Shadow came with him. The Shadow's right hand clutched a .45; it was poised for a swing, if the foeman made trouble. No blow was needed; the rider struck on the back of his head and rolled over, just away from his toppling cycle.

The Shadow sprang to his feet; he was just in time. The cry had been heard; searchlights were flooding toward the driveway. Men on the lawn heard shouts, as those in the cars spied The Shadow. All wheeled about to begin a barrage. Through sheer speed, The Shadow escaped them. He was leaping through the gate as the fusillade began.

Guns barked from the patrol cars; but the bullets were scattered. The men in the cars had the double task of keeping The Shadow spotted with light and continuing the fire until their companions arrived. They were not equal to the twofold effort. The Shadow was across the avenue before guns ripped away in earnest.

BOUNDING into his old roadster, The Shadow pressed the starter. The motor roared as he sped the car off between two houses. His lights blinked into view; the men from the cordon saw the roadster careen to another street, headed away to flight. Shouting, the khaki-clad thugs boarded their patrol cars and started in pursuit.

The Shadow reversed last night's procedure. Though pressed by swift cars and motorcycles, he headed into the city instead of making for the limits. The roadster lacked speed, but it was ideal for the tricky course that The Shadow took. He whizzed the small car around the sharpest corners; shot it through driveways, past houses, out through hedges. Three times he cut back upon his course, like a hare outrunning the hounds.

Shots ripped every time pursuers spied him; and The Shadow answered with bullets of his own. He crippled the driver of the closest patrol car and put that machine out of the chase. He picked another foeman from a motorcycle, just as the pursuer sped in from another street to block The Shadow's turn.

The Shadow knew that if he could outrun these foemen, he could reach the goal that he sought. If he arrived at Ruthley's to confront the master rogue, The Shadow could force the big-shot to call off his hounds, under threat of instant death.

As the pursuit continued, The Shadow gained more distance; but new factors intervened to offset his purpose.

By heading toward the heart of Westford, The Shadow was running into new details of the Flying Squadron. Radio calls were humming through the ether. New units came in view at nearly every block. Sheer nerve was all that saved The Shadow from disaster; twice he ran the gantlet of cars and motorcycles that sought to head him off, relying each time on quick stabs from his own guns to make the opposing marksmen falter.

Each time it worked; for the thugs who served as members of the Flying Squadron knew the identity of their dread foe. Drivers instinctively changed course when The Shadow's big guns tongued. Crooks could not fire accurately from their veering cars.

At last, a double circuit brought The Shadow to the railroad tracks. He sped the roadster across, planning a last dash in the direction of Ruthley's apartment house.

Then came the trouble that The Shadow had hoped to avoid. Shots flashed from a side street; to elude them, The Shadow drove into an alleyway. New guns barked from straight ahead. All came from men on foot. The Shadow had entered Maclare's precinct. The lieutenant and his bluecoats were answering the alarm that they had received just prior to The Shadow's arrival.

THE SHADOW jammed the roadster against the curb. He dropped from it; darted back into the street that he had just left. He saw an alleyway opposite; he took to it just as a burly man in uniform opened fire from beneath a street light. It was Lieutenant Maclare; The Shadow could easily have dropped him where he stood. But The Shadow's quarrel was not with loyal men.

Maclare bawled an order to his men. Though he did not realize it, the lieutenant was shouting for the death of the very fighter who had saved his own life two nights ago.

Bluecoats responded; they chased along the alley that The Shadow had taken. The Shadow had outrun them, but two police cars spotted him in the next street. Recognizing these as belonging to the Flying Squadron, The Shadow stopped to deal with them.

He halted the first car with well-directed bullets; but he could not stop the second. Bullets hailed from its windows; The Shadow gave a last volley, put away his emptied guns and dived for a space between two buildings. A bullet clipped him as he sprang. The thugs in the police car saw him falter. They leaped to the ground; chased into the alley where The Shadow had gone.

More of the Flying Squadron arrived; so did the regular police. Khaki uniforms mingled with blue; flashlights lighted space to show a blind alley that terminated in a high board fence, topped with barbed wire. There were boxes and packing cases stacked all about; any of them might conceal The Shadow.

Lieutenant Maclare arrived to shout an order for men to advance and rout out the fugitive. Before the order was obeyed, it was countermanded by a higher authority. Director Borman had arrived; in harsh tones, he ordered the police to riddle the boxes at the end of the blind alley.

While bluecoats hesitated at the murderous order, Borman's khaki-clad henchmen opened fire. Guns echoed between walls; bullets sprayed through boxes toppled stacks of them from in front of the fence.

With Maclare following, Borman strode forward. He knew that The Shadow had been wounded; he expected to find the cloaked fugitive dead. Nearing the fence, the director grabbed up the lowermost boxes and hurled them aside. He stared, as Maclare's flashlight showed a jagged hole in the corner of the fence.

The Shadow had dived beyond those boxes; with one good arm, he had bashed the decayed boards at the lower left corner of the fence. He had sledged those blows with an automatic; a few powerful strokes had done the necessary work. The Shadow had shouldered through, while his pursuers had massed at the entrance of the alley.

Blobs of blood stained the cement at the bottom of the fence. Those marks were new proof that The Shadow had been crippled. Kirk Borman restrained a snarl as he turned to his men; in booming tones, he gave an order for a prompt search throughout the district.

Eyeing the bloodstains once again, Kirk Borman indulged in a sharp smile of triumph. He was certain that The Shadow could not have traveled far; he knew also that the crippled fighter would not be able to put up a fight, when discovered.

Kirk Borman was sure that he would have good news for Stephen Ruthley tonight. News that the menace of The Shadow existed no longer.

CHAPTER XVI. NEW REFUGE

MORE than an hour after The Shadow's disappearance, the first show ended at the Criterion Theater, one of Westford's most elaborate motion picture houses. Among the throng that filed from the theater were Louis Wilderton and Estelle Benbrook. The district attorney was speaking apologetically, when they reached the sidewalk in front of the theater.

"I'm so sorry that we couldn't stay to the beginning of the feature picture," stated Wilderton, "but I am terribly rushed with work at the office, really, I shouldn't have come to the theater at all tonight."

"I understand," said Estelle. "I do not mind, Louis. Come; let us walk over to the house. You can leave me there and pick up your car."

As they walked along, Estelle added an afterthought:

"Your work is your most important duty, Louis. It will continue to be, until you have brought the murderer of Prescott Dunson to justice."

Wilderton blinked in owlish fashion; then formed a slight smile.

"You spoke like your father, Estelle," he remarked. "Do you know, people often speak of the fact that you so resemble him. They hold a high opinion of Judge Benbrook in this city."

The statement pleased Estelle; Wilderton saw it; he questioned suddenly:

"What is your father's real opinion of me? Does he favor my re-election? Or was he partial to Dunson's candidacy?"

"Father expressed no preference," replied Estelle, soberly. "He said, however, that Westford needs a man of courage in the office. A man who can do more than wish for results; one who can gain them."

Wilderton winced. The words were a criticism of his own ability, or lack of it, but he was aware that the statement was justified. When he spoke again Wilderton's tone was sincere.

"I could step aside for the right man," he declared. "I could not have dropped from the contest on Dunson's account; but if a man of greater prestige should run for the office –"

"Such as my father?"

"Yes, Estelle, a candidate of your father's caliber would help Westford. I would not run for re–election, if he sought to become district attorney."

"Unfortunately, father cannot return to public life," remarked Estelle, ruefully. "He seems wearied; it takes a physician's care to preserve what strength he still has. I appreciate what you have said, Louis; so will father, when I tell him."

"Your father was always a champion of reform," reminded Wilderton. "The name of Judge Martin Benbrook would sway the public. Such ardent reformers as Stephen Ruthley; such men as Mayor Marclot, Director Borman, and others of this fine administration – all would support Judge Benbrook's candidacy. I repeat again, Estelle; your father is one man for whom I would gladly postpone my ambition to remain as district attorney. If –"

WILDERTON paused. They were at the corner opposite the Majestic Hotel. People were halting at the sounds of sirens. A police car whizzed by; two motorcycles whirred and chugged as they swung the corner. Everywhere were the khaki uniforms that denoted Westford's Flying Squadron.

"It looks like a man hunt!" exclaimed Wilderton. "Possibly they have caught the trail of that murderer, Dorsch. Wait here, Estelle, while I inquire."

Two bluecoated policemen were searching doorways. Wilderton approached them; they recognized the district attorney and saluted. After a brief parley, Wilderton returned to where Estelle stood. He explained the situation while they continued toward the girl's home.

"Trouble at the home of Adam Woodstock," said Wilderton. "He was found dead, Woodstock was, apparently a suicide. The coroner is out there. When the police arrived however, they found someone in the house. They think that it was Shaw, the accomplice of Dorsch."

"Did they capture him?" inquired Estelle.

"No," returned Wilderton. "They say the fellow was rigged up in some kind of attire that helped him hide. He dashed away from Woodstock's. They pursued him into town; trapped him in a blind alley."

"He was cloaked in black?"

Wilderton looked puzzled as he heard Estelle's strained tone. Nodding, he replied:

"Yes, of course, he was in black. That was why he managed to escape. They riddled the blind alley with bullets –"

"To shoot him in cold blood?"

"Why not, Estelle? That was the way Dunson was slain. He never had a chance for life, poor chap."

Estelle tightened her lips, resolved to say no more. Wilderton concluded with the final information that he had gained from the policemen.

"Somehow, the fugitive managed to slip from the trap," declared Wilderton. "He was wounded, though; here and there, they found bloodstains on the sidewalk. The fellow must have been shrewd enough to stanch his wounds, at least temporarily. The trail of blood was lost. So they are making a general search."

Wilderton and Estelle had reached the girl's house. The young prosecutor started to accompany the judge's daughter through the side gate. Estelle stopped him; pointed to Wilderton's car, parked in front of the house.

"You have work to do, Louis," she reminded. "These new events may push you even more. You must hurry to the office. I have my key; I can enter the door without trouble. Good night, Louis."

As Wilderton headed for his car, Estelle hurried along the passage to the door. Her hand trembling, she tried to insert the key in the lock. It slipped from her fingers and clanked to the bottom of the steps.

Estelle leaned down to hunt for the key. Her fingers encountered moisture.

With a gasp, Estelle tugged a handkerchief from her hand bag; placed it upon the cement and pressed it to absorb the stain that she felt sure was blood. She found the key during the process. Hurriedly, she put it in the lock, to find that it would not turn. The door was already unlocked.

Estelle opened it, stepped into the entry. She saw the dim light of the hall and was ready to start for it. Then she remembered to lock the door.

That done, Estelle moved toward the hall. She stumbled across something on the floor; caught herself as she tripped forward. There was a candlestick on a hall table, with a few matches beside it. Shakily, she lighted the candle and returned to the entry.

The long, wavering flame showed the sight that Estelle had dreaded. Huddled face downward on the floor was a black-cloaked figure, as silent as if dead. The rescuer of the other night had returned. Hunted by hordes who sought his life, he had found this last haven. Here, his strength had failed him.

Was The Shadow dead?

For the moment, the girl feared the worst. Then, bravely, she determined to learn. Estelle Benbrook was resourceful; she had proven that in the past, by caring for her invalid father without the aid of servants. Experience as a nurse had also brought her knowledge of how to aid the injured.

Estelle lifted The Shadow's head; his slouch hat fell away, to reveal a hawkish visage, pale despite its masklike contour. The Shadow's face was well-formed, distinguished in appearance. Yet Estelle scarcely observed it.

Her hands had found the blood-soaked shoulder of The Shadow's cloak. Easing away the black cloth folds. Estelle discovered the nature of the wound. A police bullet had winged The Shadow's left shoulder; but not badly enough to halt him. Loss of blood had overcome the wounded fighter, after he had gained this refuge. A wadded handkerchief showed that The Shadow had managed to stanch the flow; but only in temporary

fashion.

THE SHADOW stirred as Estelle tried to lift him. His eyes opened wearily; he sensed his surroundings. With the girl's aid, he managed to come to his feet. Estelle supported him as he wavered, through the hallway, into a dim front room, where the girl guided him to a couch.

Estelle went out; she returned with scissors, bandages and a basin of water. Placing chair and table beside the couch, she set to work to attend The Shadow's wound.

The task was a painful one, although The Shadow gave no indication of the pangs that he suffered. When Estelle had finished the work, The Shadow's left shoulder formed a white-banded expanse. The girl had drawn away his cloak; she had cut apart the cloth beneath, in order to apply the bandage.

She noted that The Shadow's eyes were looking beyond her; that his thin, straight lips were about to move, as if to ask a question. Before The Shadow could speak, Estelle heard a footfall. She turned about, uttered a startled cry as her father stepped into the room.

Judge Martin Benbrook was a man of seventy. He stood square-shouldered and erect, despite the fact that he leaned his weight upon a heavy cane. His face was rugged; his features, though overlarge, were distinctive, for they were as firm as if chiseled by a sculptor. Flowing gray hair added to the judge's fine appearance.

He was dressed in attire that suited him well. An old-fashioned frock coat matched his cuffless trousers; his shirt was stiff-fronted, set off with a low-cut waistcoat. A large four-in-hand tie accompanied the wing-tipped collar beneath his smooth-shaven chin.

The judge's eyes were brilliant as they stared toward The Shadow. A responsive glint came from The Shadow's eyes. Those were flashes of mutual recognition; each was a fighter who could tell another of his kind. Estelle saw the exchange of silent greetings. A glad smile wreathed her face. Rising, she approached the judge.

"Father," said the girl, "this is the stranger whom I spoke about. The one who rescued me from death –"

"He is no stranger." Judge Benbrook pronounced the words as solemnly as he had given verdicts from the bench. "He is a person who stands for right. As such, he is our friend."

With slow but steady stride, the judge approached The Shadow. In his same solemn tone, he added:

"I have read beyond the headlines in these reports of crime. I have known that someone, here in Westford, stood for justice against overwhelming odds! You are wounded; but in whatever battle you fought, yours was the right cause!"

AS HE finished this pronouncement, Judge Benbrook began to sway. Estelle hurried to him; helped her father to the chair beside the couch. The judge smiled; gave a slight nod to indicate that the spell had passed.

"Stay here, father," said Estelle. "I shall bring your medicine."

As the girl left, Judge Benbrook spoke quietly to The Shadow.

"You have seen the reason for my inactivity," he declared. "Each day, my strength seems to return. At evening, it fades. My malady perplexes me; I cannot understand it. Nevertheless, it prevents me from waging the battle that I should like to undertake."

Pausing, the judge eyed The Shadow closely. He saw the pallor of the wounded fighter's face.

"Your pain is great," declared the judge. "You must rest. Sleep will aid you, until I summon my own physician to –"

Estelle had returned in time to hear her father's words. She interrupted with a cry of alarm that halted Judge Benbrook's statements. The girl shook her head as she placed a bottle of pills upon the table, along with a glass of water.

"No father!" she exclaimed. "We cannot trust Doctor Lunden to preserve silence. I have often asked you to choose another physician. Your own condition has not improved under Doctor Lunden's treatments."

Judge Benbrook motioned for silence. The Shadow's lips had moved. In low, but steady tone the wounded fighter spoke:

"Telegraph to New York. Summon Doctor Rupert Sayre –"

The Shadow paused, closing his eyes; but both Estelle and her father nodded. They understood that Sayre must be The Shadow's own physician.

The Shadow's eyes opened; they met Judge Benbrook's gaze. At close range, The Shadow noted a largeness of the judge's pupils; a certain fixation in his stare.

Estelle was tipping three capsules from the medicine bottle. The Shadow reached forward with his right hand.

"Give me two," he requested. "One only for Judge Benbrook."

Estelle looked puzzled; but she followed the request. The Shadow swallowed each pill in turn, following with gulps of water from the glass which Estelle handed him. His head performed a slight nod, to indicate that he had made a correct supposition.

"These pills contain an opiate," declared The Shadow, looking toward Judge Benbrook. "As such, they will relieve my pain. They explain why your strength has failed you."

"You mean that I have been doped?" claimed Judge Benbrook. "That the increased dosages, given to me by Doctor Lunden have been keeping me an invalid?"

The Shadow nodded.

"Take only one," he repeated. "Ask Sayre about them when he comes tomorrow. He will reduce the dosage. Say nothing to your own physician."

JUDGE BENBROOK took a single pill and swallowed it. Watching The Shadow, he saw proof of the latter's statement. The Shadow's eyes had dulled; his eyelids closed. A relieved smile showed upon the thin lips. Judge Benbrook arose from his chair, faced his daughter with a triumphant gaze.

"He will sleep!" exclaimed the judge. "Soon, he will be well. Meanwhile, my malady will end; for this true friend has discovered its real cause. We shall handle Lunden wisely, Estelle. We shall keep him ignorant of the fact that we have learned his treachery."

Proudly, the old judge walked to the door of the room; turned to survey The Shadow, who was deep in a drowse. In imposing tone, Judge Benbrook spoke for himself and The Shadow.

"Together," he predicted, "we shall win this struggle! Truth shall prevail in Westford! When it does, crime will end!"

Those prophetic words must have reached The Shadow, just as he was sinking into a comfortable lethargy. Estelle Benbrook, watching beside the couch, saw thin lips form another smile.

CHAPTER XVII. THE BOMBSHELL

FIVE days had passed since the tempestuous night when The Shadow had found refuge in Judge Martin Benbrook's home. All had been quiet during those days.

Doctor Rupert Sayre had come from New York. During a brief visit, he had put two patients on the road to recovery. He had attended The Shadow's wound. He had reduced the opiate dosage that Judge Benbrook had unwittingly been taking. This, Sayre accomplished through a prescription of his own.

Outside of the judge's house, other matters had reached a settlement. The coroner had declared the death of Adam Woodstock to be suicide. His verdict had been based on definite evidence; the papers found in Woodstock's strong-box stood as clear proof that Woodstock had been the man "higher up" who hired Beezer Dorsch to slay Prescott Dunson.

The coroner was an honest official, though an unimportant one. He did not belong to Stephen Ruthley's ring; but he had been bluffed by the master crook's game.

Prescott Dunson had promised to reveal truth concerning corruption linked with crime. Apparently, all could be laid upon Woodstock. The dead contractor's own statement proved that he had swindled the city of Westford. All this evidence had been placed in the hands of Louis Wilderton.

The young district attorney had stated that he would force Woodstock's company to disgorge its half million of excess profit. The corporation was wealthy; it had promptly paid up without argument. Thus Mayor Elvin Marclot had received the fund in question; it was back in the city treasury. Money that did not belong there; but which would not stay long. Marclot was already looking for another fat corporation, headed by another of Woodstock's ilk; a man who would "play ball" and kick back the required graft in return for the contract.

One thing had caused trouble. The Shadow's presence at Woodstock's had made the coroner hesitate in his verdict of suicide. Director Borman had handled that; he had talked headquarters detectives into swearing that The Shadow had been entering the house when they trapped him. Hence, he could not be blamed for Woodstock's death. The crooks would have relished a decision that classed The Shadow as a murderer; but they preferred to have Woodstock's death pass as suicide.

None of the headquarters men had gained a good look at The Shadow; nor had Lieutenant Maclare or his bluecoats. Only the fake cops who formed the Flying Squadron knew who it was that they had fought. They testified that the intruder had been the mysterious man called Shaw. Thus it was decided that Shaw had served as go-between for Adam Woodstock and Beezer Dorsch.

Like Beezer, Shaw was wanted; and neither had reappeared. Ruthley and his fellow crooks decided that The Shadow had gained his fill of Westford. Nevertheless, Lance Gillick expressed the view that The Shadow might some day return. Ruthley decided to take no chances. Through Borman, the master crook had arranged for members of the Flying Squadron to keep guard about his apartment house.

Ruthley did not know that The Shadow had found the secret entrance through the adjacent house; nevertheless, he wanted absolute security. The Shadow's path to Ruthley's was blocked, even if he should choose to use it.

Beezer Dorsch was hiding out in comfortable fashion at Lance Gillick's apartment. Popular belief had it that Beezer had fled Westford, the night of Dunson's death.

WHAT most concerned the quieted city on this particular day was a meeting of the Civic Club, the chief reform organization in Westford. That meeting was scheduled for late afternoon, in the club's own headquarters. When the hour arrived, the place was thronged. The chairman was Stephen Ruthley himself.

Standing on the rostrum, Ruthley beamed at the audience. In dulcet tones, he commended the city officials for their successful war against crime and graft. There were plaudits from the crowd; bows from Mayor Marclot and Director Borman, who were seated on the platform behind Ruthley. Finally, Ruthley's tone became sorrowful; he began an eulogy for Prescott Dunson.

"We must not forget one man who stood for a cause," droned Ruthley. "That man was Prescott Dunson! Though he had not fully gained our support, we were prepared to give it, in return for his promise to end corruption. I believe that our present district attorney" – Ruthley turned to Wilderton, who was seated near by – "would have stepped aside for Prescott Dunson. As it is, Dunson's work has been completed. He was a martyr to the cause of reform!

"Fearing Dunson, the man who was behind corruption overstepped his bounds. I refer to Adam Woodstock, who hired murderers to do his evil bidding. Woodstock himself weakened under the strain. His suicide was the result. It has cleared the atmosphere. All is well in Westford.

"We can carry on as we have in the past, our courage strengthened by the noble example that Prescott Dunson set for us. Someone must hold the office that Dunson sought. I can think of no one better than Louis Wilderton, the present incumbent. I call upon you for unanimous support –"

Stephen Ruthley halted, disturbed by a commotion at the rear of the auditorium. His words were drowned. Men were rising to cheer an unexpected arrival, a man whose entry came as a bombshell to Stephen Ruthley.

Striding down the center aisle, step firm and carriage erect, came a man with keen face and flowing hair. Like a crusader from the past, his very appearance awoke thunderous applause. Wildly, the reformers were cheering Judge Martin Benbrook.

As the judge reached the platform, Ruthley stepped aside, bowing and smiling; for he knew that he must side with enthusiasm. As the judge stepped forward, a hush fell upon the audience. In brief words, the elderly jurist announced his purpose.

"I have come," he declared firmly, "to announce my return to public life. I intend to be a candidate for the office of district attorney!"

The crowd went wild again. Judge Benbrook waited for the enthusiasm to end. Stephen Ruthley retained his forced smile. Mayor Marclot and Director Borman restrained their nervousness. As the hubbub ended, the judge added:

"I hold high regard for the present district attorney." He turned toward Wilderton as he spoke. "Yet I feel that he has been handicapped through adverse conditions. My experience on the bench will enable me to carry through thoroughly the functions of the office. As my foremost assistant, I shall need Louis Wilderton."

Roars of approval. Wilderton was on his feet; shaking away from Ruthley, the young county prosecutor sprang forward and clutched Judge Benbrook's hand. The pact was sealed; Ruthley's hopes were spiked. As champion of reform, his part was to uphold such accord.

When new silence came, Judge Benbrook began a speech. His statements were mild at first; gradually, they carried veiled accusation.

"The death of Prescott Dunson was the cause of my decision," the judge told the reformers. "He promised to reveal the truth of crime and corruption. He promised to drive them forever from Westford. Have we proof that Dunson's hopes have been fully accomplished? No! You would like to hear the reason; therefore, I shall give it.

"There is laxity in our city government." The judge paused to let his words carry home. "If it had functioned to its full, crime and corruption would never have gained a foothold. Where were our police, when they allowed murderers to infest this city? What happened with our higher officials, when they permitted such contracts as Adam Woodstock's to be signed?"

The words were indictments of Mayor Marclot and Director Borman. The two officials winced; looked uneasy as they shifted in their chairs. Judge Benbrook drove home a final statement.

"As district attorney," he announced, "I shall make a full inquiry into every department of our administration! I know that our honest officials will welcome such investigation. They were elected on a reform ticket. I trust that they have stood by their pledges and done their utmost to further good government."

Cleverly, the old judge had softened his impeachment. His words gave Marclot and Borman a chance to regain their tottering favor. Both were too jittery to see the opportunity; but Ruthley was quick to grasp it.

Smiling in his best fashion, the master crook started a new round of applause, lifting his hands to bring the audience to its feet. He managed a nod to Borman, who nudged Mayor Marclot. The two came up, joined enthusiastically in the tribute to Judge Benbrook.

OFF in the judge's own home, The Shadow was seated in the parlor, listening to a radio hook-up that brought Judge Benbrook's voice to his ears. The meeting of the Civic Club was being broadcast throughout Westford. The tumults of applause told their own story of the reception that the judge had gained.

The Shadow turned off the radio; ascended the stairs to the second floor. Judge Benbrook had followed a course as outlined by The Shadow. It had brought results. Through the judge's cooperation, The Shadow had thrown confusion into the ranks of crime.

THE meeting had ended at the Civic Club. Mayor Marclot and Director Borman were the first to shake Judge Benbrook's hand, hoping thereby to prove that they were foremost of the honest officials whom he had mentioned. Stephen Ruthley pressed forward; commended the speech in flowery tones. As members of the audience thronged the platform, Marclot and Borman made an inconspicuous departure.

They headed for Ruthley's apartment. They were there when the boss arrived, to announce that he had left Judge Benbrook still surrounded by enthusiastic admirers. Ruthley stopped their questions with impatient gestures.

"I called Lance on the way back," he told them. "I asked him where the slip-up was. Doc Lunden was supposed to keep the old judge on the shelf."

Marclot and Borman nodded, worried. "Something went sour," purred Ruthley, maintaining the pose that he could keep best when angered. "We'll have to find a way to amend the new situation."

"Before the old judge talks too much," put in Borman. "He nearly spilled the beans today, Steve."

"He knows more than he told," asserted Marclot, fearfully. "He is holding back real information; though how he gained it, I cannot guess."

"We can handle this," announced Ruthley, "through Lance Gillick. He provided the way by which we reached Doctor Lunden. That kept Judge Benbrook on the shelf for a long while. Lunden has failed us; but that was his fault, not Lance's."

"Remember, we have kept Lance in the clear. He had a clean bill of health; we have strengthened him by our policy of pinning crime on Beezer Dorsch. Lance will be here within an hour. I shall confer with him, alone. Meanwhile, keep up the front that you have used so well in the past."

Stephen Ruthley waved his hand in dismissal. Marclot and Borman steadied themselves, made their departure with new confidence. Ruthley had reassured them; they were positive that the big-shot had picked the right way to stave off threatening disaster.

Ruthley watched his lieutenants depart. His smile was one of actual confidence.

Possibly, the master crook's smile would have vanished had he known that The Shadow was the motivating force behind Judge Benbrook's appearance from retirement. Ruthley would have been troubled further had he guessed that The Shadow had also foreseen that Lance Gillick was the one man upon whom the big-shot could at present depend.

CHAPTER XVIII. LANCE FINDS THE ANSWER

SOON after Stephen Ruthley had broken the bad news to Mayor Marclot and Director Borman, a package was delivered at the home of Judge Martin Benbrook. Estelle received it; she knew that it was intended for The Shadow. The girl carried the package upstairs; she knocked at the door of a front room. A quiet voice told her to enter.

Dusk had fallen; the room was almost dark; but against the window, Estelle saw a cloaked figure. As the girl entered, The Shadow turned; he stepped toward Estelle and took the package. He laid it upon a chair and beckoned the girl to the window.

The Shadow drew two envelopes from his cloak. He gave them to Estelle; then told the girl, in whispered tone:

"These are for your father. He is to open the smaller envelope and read its contents. It will explain the nature of the evidence which I have placed in the large envelope."

Estelle nodded; took the envelopes and hurried downstairs to meet her father. The judge was shaking hands on the front steps; he waved good-by to the reformers and entered the house with Estelle. The girl gave him the envelopes; entering the parlor, the judge opened the smaller one and read its contents.

His eyes lighted. He crumpled The Shadow's note and tossed it into a fire that was burning in the fireplace. Looking about, he chose a music cabinet as a place to keep the larger envelope. He unlocked the cabinet, put the envelope in the lower drawer.

"It will be safe there," the judge told his daughter. "Later, I shall turn it over to Louis Wilderton and explain its contents. Perhaps" – the judge looked toward the stairway – "yes, I believe that I should confer with our friend upstairs, even though he explained matters quite completely in his message."

Before the judge could follow his plan to visit The Shadow, there was a ring at the front door. Thinking that members of the reform club had returned, the judge waited while Estelle answered the door. A moon-faced man entered, removing his hat to display a baldish head. He saw the judge and bobbed forward with an exclamation.

"Ah, Judge Benbrook!" ejaculated the arrival. "You have again gone contrary to my advice. I must insist that, as my patient, you refrain from new exertion –"

"Come, come," snorted Judge Benbrook. "You forget yourself, Doctor Lunden. I have paid you to make me a well man. You have succeeded. I need no more advice."

"But the medicine that you have taken –"

"Has proven beneficial. Let me see, doctor; I recall that you once told me that my improvement would be remarkable. You stated that when my weary spells ended, I would be free to exert myself again."

"Provided that you kept on with the medicine," added Estelle, nodding toward her father. "That was what Doctor Lunden told you."

Lunden winced. He remembered that he had made such optimistic statements.

"Very well," he decided. "But I warn you, judge, if you experience another turn of illness, I cannot be held responsible."

UPSTAIRS, The Shadow was busy before a mirror. He had donned a new suit from the package that Estelle had brought him; the attire was garish, but it did not conflict with The Shadow's countenance. He had taken another object from the package: a small, flat make-up box. With deft hands, he had already altered his face.

The Shadow's new visage was long, blunt-nosed and coarse. He had filled his eyebrows so that they hung heavy, and gave him a permanent glower. The window was open; The Shadow heard a slam of the front door. He peered out into the dusk, to see Doctor Lunden making his departure. The Shadow's thick lips moved, as he whispered a significant laugh.

Placing a brace of automatics in holsters under his arms, The Shadow donned hat and cloak. He picked up a small hand bag, carried it with him and went downstairs.

Judge Benbrook and his daughter had returned into the parlor. The Shadow heard Estelle laugh, as she congratulated her father on the way he had managed Lunden. The Shadow passed the doorway and made a silent exit. His course led out into the darkness, through the side door to which he had a key.

Doctor Lunden had walked away from the house. Had he glanced behind him, the physician might have suspected that someone was on his trail. That is, if Lunden had been keen enough to note a strangely flitting streak of blackness that occasionally glided beneath a lamp light. Few persons, however, had the keenness to detect such a silent token of a follower; and Lunden, at present, was too intent with his own thoughts even to suspect that his trail had been taken.

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The physician reached the Club Adair. He entered, went to a table near the far door. He signaled to the head waiter, who nodded.

Lunden was ushered through to the gaming room, which was doing business. The baldish physician eyed the roulette wheel eagerly; then curbed himself and went to the door of Lance Gillick's office. He knocked briskly. The door opened.

LANCE smiled sourly when he saw his visitor. The sallow-faced gambler beckoned Lunden into the office; closed the door and snarled unpleasantly.

"Well, croaker," he questioned, "how did you make out?"

"No luck, Lance," whined Lunden. "The judge won't listen to advice."

"No? All right, sawbones. That means you're through. No chance of any dough for you."

"But I owe you twenty thousand –"

"That's written off. I got orders tonight from – well, never mind who gave them. Anyway, your gambling debt is cancelled. You don't get a bonus, that's all."

"Then I can leave town?"

"You'd better. You've bluffed the medico fake too long. If it hadn't been for me fixing things, they'd have questioned your phony license long ago."

Lunden seemed relieved to know that he was getting out of his uncomfortable situation. He stepped toward the door; Lance stopped him.

"Just a minute," said Lance. "You've given me the real lowdown on that dope gag, haven't you?"

"I swear it, Lance!" returned Lunden. "Three tablets were the absolute maximum. More would be fatal; if Judge Benbrook died, the coroner would surely learn the cause of his death."

"Then the old boy simply got used to the big dose and shook it off?"

"That seems the only answer. He is still taking his prescription. With a man of his age, the drug habit is not easily formed. The effects of a drug that is regularly administered may be lost. Nevertheless, I could not risk a greater dosage."

"O.K. You've got your walking papers. Take them."

"But if anything happens to Judge Benbrook –"

"You won't be blamed for it. Anyway, you'll be on the lam. Better start tonight."

AS soon as Lunden had gone, Lance returned to a task on which he had been working. That was the wording of a telegram, addressed to a man named Roger Callister, otherwise "Trig" Callister. Lance had mentioned that individual to Police Director Borman. Tonight, in conference with Stephen Ruthley, Lance had again spoken of Trig.

In fact, Lance had just returned from Ruthley's, with instructions to bring Trig Callister back to Westford. Trig had been around a lot, just before crime's heaviest outbreak. He had left Westford prior to the night of Lieutenant Maclare's raid on the Mississippi Hotel. Lance had intended to bring him into town again; but had postponed that plan because it had seemed unnecessary.

Right now, Trig would prove most useful, chiefly because he had been absent from Westford during the recent episodes. That meant that Trig would have a clean slate when he returned.

Just as he was finding the right words for the telegram, Lance heard a knock at the door. He thrust the telegram into a drawer, called for the person to come in. The door opened and closed; Lance turned about in his swivel chair. His sallow lips emitted a pleased ejaculation. The man who had entered was Trig Callister himself.

Trig was long-faced and blunt-nosed. His eyes had an habitual glower; yet his manner had a certain smoothness that offset those characteristics. Though he bore a reputation as a killer, Trig was recognized chiefly as a smooth swindler – a confidence man who could handle the most wary dupes.

Apparently, Trig had just arrived in Westford. He was carrying a hand bag that he planked on the desk. Lance pulled out the telegram, passed it to his visitor.

"How did you guess I wanted you here, Trig?" queried Lance. "I thought you were going to wait until you heard from me?"

"I didn't have to be a mind reader," returned Trig, in an even-toned voice. "I read the newspapers, Lance. I saw that things were hot in Westford. Later on, I learned that they had cooled."

"That's sensible," agreed Lance. "Still, what made you think I'd need you?"

"When I heard that Beezer Dorsch was on the lam," explained Trig. "He was your best torpedo, Lance. I knew that you would need somebody to pinch-hit for him."

"Beezer's still good," chuckled Lance, "but he has to lay low. I'm hiding him out, here in my apartment. Listen, though, Trig. Here's the lay."

"WE have to handle an old judge named Benbrook," explained Lance. "We thought he was a has-been, but he has started to kick up some trouble. We can't croak him; we can't snatch him. We have to coax him away for a while; long enough to make people lose confidence in him."

"Won't he make trouble when he comes back again?"

"We'll fix him, if he does. Once he's lost his strangle hold on these club reformers, they won't care so much about what happens to him. Here's the idea, Trig: You're to go and see Judge Benbrook; to talk him into going somewhere with you."

"Easy enough," decided Trig, promptly. "I know one dodge that will work. These old gazebos always fall for a request to come to Washington and give expert testimony before a congressional committee."

A pleased gleam reflected itself from Lance's eyes.

"Try it with Benbrook," decided Lance. "Only you won't have to take him to Washington. We'll have a place all set near here, where you can sidetrack him."

Trig considered; then shook his head. "That won't work, Lance," he objected. "That is, not unless you let me handle it my own way."

"How do you mean?"

"Keep your bunch out of the picture. Let me bring in some workers of my own. They're smooth; they look like dudes. Only they can be plenty tough, in a pinch."

"All the better," chortled Lance. "This will be a perfect set-up! We can stage the stunt tomorrow. Duck out of town tonight, Trig; stay somewhere under a phony name. Call in your outfit; stop back to see me tomorrow. We'll frame the deal just the way you want it."

Soon afterward, Trig Callister made his exit, carrying his hand bag. Lance Gillick did not remain long in his office. He left the Club Adair, to pay another visit to Stephen Ruthley; to tell the boss of Trig Callister's timely arrival.

Lance regarded Trig as a "con man" deluxe. A good estimate, since Trig had duped Lance himself. Not for an instant did Lance even begin to suspect the true identity of Trig Callister.

Lance would have been astounded had he known that Trig was The Shadow.

Actually, there was no such person as Trig Callister. The Shadow had assumed that character some time ago, in order to contact Lance Gillick and gain preliminary facts concerning crookedness in Westford. Knowing that Lance might consider Trig useful at present, The Shadow had wisely assumed the role again.

Lance Gillick thought that he had gained an answer to a pressing problem. He was sure that his plan of handling Judge Benbrook, through Trig Callister, would appeal to Stephen Ruthley. The real answer behind Trig Callister's visit had eluded Lance; therefore, it would escape Ruthley also.

Tonight, Ruthley and Lance would discuss the final details of the game which they intended, making due allowance for Trig Callister's suggestions. Crooks were playing squarely into the hands of The Shadow.

CHAPTER XIX. THE NEW GAME

EARLY the next evening, Lance Gillick again received Trig Callister in his office. Still oblivious to The Shadow's disguise, Lance came immediately to business. He spread a road map on the desk; pointed out a route leading to a spot some ten miles from Westford.

"The house lies right here," stated Lance. "It's an old mansion, but a swell one, that's just been fixed up great. It was for rent, furnished. We took it."

The Shadow nodded, in Trig's style.

"You've got to bluff the judge into thinking it's your place," remarked Lance. "How will you pull that, Trig?"

"Easy," returned The Shadow, in a boastful tone that suited the part of Trig. "I'm a special government representative; at least, that's what I'll tell the judge. I've come from Washington to investigate conditions in Westford. I want the judge to go down there with me; to make a preliminary report."

"All right so far. Go on."

"We start out in my car, the judge and I. Then I suggest stopping at the house that I've rented near Westford. When we get there, I decide that we ought to prepare a long report. One of my outfit is a secretary, who can take down everything that the judge dictates."

"How long will that last?"

"A couple of days, at least. I'll be making fake long-distance calls to Washington, getting requests for more and more details in the reports. I can follow that by getting phony word that the committee meeting has been postponed."

"Good enough. How long will it take to move your outfit into the house? The place is empty, waiting for them."

The Shadow picked up Lance's telephone. He put in a call to a neighboring town. When he gained the connection, he gave terse instructions in Trig's style, naming the location of the house where he intended to take Judge Benbrook. Finished with the call, The Shadow reported tersely to Lance.

"They'll be there inside a half hour," stated The Shadow. "It will only take them a little while to get settled."

"Fine," declared Lance. "I'll order all the gorillas in town to get out there an hour later."

The Shadow's eyes glinted. In a gruff tone that suited Trig, he objected:

"You'll queer the dodge, Lance, if you shove in a crowd of tough-looking eggs. They won't fit with my high-class outfit."

"They won't go to the house," explained Lance. "They'll stay in a couple of cottages near there. They ought to be out of Westford anyway; and they'll keep a circle around the house, to look out for your bunch. You know how it is, Trig. We can't tell when some G-men are likely to barge into town."

THE SHADOW knew what was behind Lance's suave explanation. The gambler was acting under instructions from Stephen Ruthley. Though the boss had liked the idea of using Trig Callister, he was taking no chances. He wanted Lance, as his own ace, to control the situation.

The Shadow was not surprised by this turn of events; in fact, he had expected something of the sort.

"They'll pass you through, Trig," argued Lance. "What's more, they won't bother your inside crew. It's for your own good; and it leaves us ready to grab the judge, if we have to get him later on. Just give me the license number of your car; it won't even be stopped when it comes along the road."

The Shadow nodded his approval.

He wrote the license number on a sheet of paper, and handed it to Lance. The gambler picked up a copy of the Westford Daily Banner.

"See this?" he queried, pointing to a headline. "It says that the Civic Club will hold another meeting – a special one. The date hasn't been mentioned yet. The fellow who is going to set it is Steve Ruthley, the biggest reformer in Westford."

"I guess I told you before that Ruthley is playing a dodge with that reform racket. He's the big-shot in this whole game. You'll probably meet him later, Trig. Anyway, as soon as you have stowed away Judge

Benbrook, Ruthley is going to call the meeting for the next night."

"So the judge won't be there," remarked The Shadow, with a smile. "Good stuff, Lance! Only one trouble, though. Suppose the judge wants to see a copy of the day's newspaper, to know when the meeting is coming off?"

"That will be handled," returned Lance. "Ruthley can fix it to get hold of a fake copy of the newspaper; just like the regular edition, except that it will carry a phony story about the Civic Club meeting."

"Saying that the meeting won't be held for a while?"

"That's it. We'll deliver a fake copy of the paper, out at the house where you're staying with the judge."

"Better let me come in and get one."

"All right. Any way you want it, Trig. Anyhow, that will satisfy the judge. He'll stay out there with you; and he'll never get to the meeting. With the judge out, Ruthley can swing that mob of reformers to suit himself."

The Shadow arose; he glanced at his watch and decided upon a visit to Judge Benbrook. Before starting, he suggested that Lance go out to the mansion and meet the inside outfit.

"Ask for Vincent," explained The Shadow. "Tell him who you are. He'll fix it so you can see me blow in with the old judge. I'll hoax him tonight, Lance. You can count on me."

TEN minutes later, The Shadow rang the doorbell of Judge Benbrook's house. Estelle answered; she stared at the unfamiliar face of Trig Callister. Adopting a smooth pose, The Shadow asked to see Judge Benbrook. While Estelle hesitated, the judge himself appeared in the lower hall.

"Come right in, sir," invited Benbrook. "My door is always open. I am Judge Martin Benbrook. Your name, sir?"

"Callister," replied The Shadow. "Roger Callister. I drove here from Washington, judge, especially to see you."

The judge ushered The Shadow into the parlor and closed the door. Estelle remained in the hallway, troubled. She was suspicious of this visitor, whose smooth manner so contrasted with his hardened features. She wondered what The Shadow would think of Mr. Roger Callister.

Unfortunately, The Shadow was not in his room. Estelle had knocked at the door a short while before, only to find that he was absent.

Twenty minutes passed. The door of the parlor opened. Judge Benbrook came out; his face wore a beaming look.

"I am leaving for Washington, Estelle!" he exclaimed. "Mr. Callister wants me to address a congressional committee, on the subject of civic reform. My return to activity seems to have caused national comment."

The judge started for the stairs, adding that he would pack his bag at once. Unable to stop him, Estelle turned to The Shadow.

"My father cannot leave here, Mr. Callister," protested the girl. "He has to speak at an important meeting that may be held tomorrow night."

"The judge told me that," responded The Shadow, in Trig's tone. "I assured him that he will be back for the meeting, whenever it is held. It is only a few hours drive here from Washington."

"But if he leaves with you, tonight will –"

"He will have a good rest at a Washington hotel; and will be ready to meet the congressional committee in the morning."

While Estelle was thinking of other possible objections, Judge Benbrook arrived from the second floor. He had packed a suitcase in rapid time; he was carrying the bag with him. The Shadow took the suitcase, bowed to Estelle, and conducted the judge out to the street. Estelle watched the two enter a large sedan and drive away.

LESS than a half hour later, the same sedan reached a dirt road in the country. After a few hundred yards, it turned between two gates and stopped in front of an old, but well-preserved, mansion. A coupe was parked beyond the house; it was Lance Gillick's car. The Shadow and the judge alighted; they entered the house and went up to the second floor.

There, a clean-cut young man met them. The Shadow introduced him as Mr. Vincent, added that the man was his private secretary. Vincent ushered them into a comfortable-looking study, where a portable typewriter stood unlimbered on a table.

"This should suit you admirably, judge," remarked The Shadow, in Trig's tone. "Tomorrow, you can dictate full statements to Vincent. I shall call Washington, to tell them that you will meet the committee on a later date."

"A good plan. Mr. Callister," agreed the judge. "I can work better here than at home. I shall send a letter to my daughter, telling her not to be concerned about my absence."

"I can mail it for you, judge. Don't worry about the Civic Club. We are close enough to Westford to get in there when the meeting is scheduled."

"We must remember to look for a notice in tomorrow's newspaper."

"I shall attend to that, judge."

Leaving Benbrook with Vincent, The Shadow went from the study and closed the door behind him. Immediately, another door opened; Lance Gillick appeared and joined The Shadow with a grin. The two went downstairs. At the door, Lance whispered.

"Vincent stowed me in the next room," he told The Shadow. "I heard you hand the hokum to the judge. He fell for it just the way we wanted. Say – this fellow Vincent looks great! If the rest of your crew is as good as he is, you've got a swell set-up!"

"They all know their business," remarked The Shadow. "I've used them on plenty of smooth jobs before this, Lance."

CITY OF CRIME

The Shadow's statement was correct, though not in the sense that Lance took it. The men whom The Shadow had brought to this house were his own agents, who had aided him often in his battles against crime. Beside Vincent, The Shadow had brought into the house three whom Lance had not seen: Marsland, Burke and Burbank.

A huge African servant appeared to unlock the door for The Shadow and Lance. The man's size brought a smile of approval from Lance; he would have liked to have the African as a bouncer in one of his tough gambling joints. He asked about the man when they stepped outside.

"His name is Jericho," said The Shadow. "He makes a good servant; and he comes in handy if a brawl starts."

Another man appeared outside the house; he was small, stoop-shouldered and wizened-faced. This fellow watched The Shadow walk along with Lance to the coupe; then the wizened-faced man sidled to the front door and knocked for Jericho to admit him. Both he and Jericho were aids of The Shadow also.

"That was Hawkeye," remarked The Shadow. "I told Vincent to keep him outside. He looks too much like a torpedo. He's too useful, though, to do without."

"What a set-up," chuckled Lance, as he boarded the coupe. "This outfit of yours would be a good one to have waiting for The Shadow."

"If he comes here," replied The Shadow, in Trig's harsh fashion, "my crew will know it soon enough."

Lance drove away. The Shadow returned to his sedan and followed into Westford. The outside cordon was set; The Shadow saw signs of lurking men along the dirt road. They let both cars go through; for Lance had told them that Trig Callister was not to be stopped. He had given them the license number of the sedan that The Shadow was using.

LATER that same evening, Estelle Benbrook again knocked at the door on the second floor. She had not heard The Shadow come into the house; but she felt sure that he must have returned.

The door opened; The Shadow stepped out into the hall. He was wearing his black cloak and slouch hat. Estelle could not distinguish his face, except for the burning glow of his eyes.

In troubled tone, Estelle reported the details of her father's departure. She described Trig Callister as a man whose sincerity she doubted. The Shadow reassured the girl with quiet, low-toned speech. He told her not to worry until the next day. He added that he would see to it that no harm came to her father.

Remembering The Shadow's prowess, Estelle was satisfied.

Back in his room, The Shadow indulged in a whispered laugh that was scarcely audible. He had not told Estelle the facts concerning her father; because, although he knew the judge was safe, The Shadow did not believe that Estelle would think so. It was better that she should learn the details after The Shadow's present plan had progressed further.

The Shadow was correct in that opinion. He had chosen the course that offered the least difficulty, so far as Estelle was concerned. Nevertheless, there was a chance that the girl's ignorance of the situation might prove a stumbling block.

The Shadow was to encounter real evidence of that fact, before this episode was ended.

CHAPTER XX. THE LAW'S TURN

AT dusk, the next day, Lance Gillick was seated at his desk, drumming nervously. In front of him was a copy of the Daily Banner, effectively faked with a false paragraph that announced postponement of the Civic Club meeting. Actually, the meeting had been called for this very night, by Stephen Ruthley.

What troubled Lance was the fact that Trig Callister had not yet arrived. To Lance, that meant that something might be wrong at the country mansion. Lance stopped his drumming, to pick up the telephone. He intended to chance a call to Stephen Ruthley, though as a rule the boss objected to such mode of contact.

Before Lance could dial the number, the door of the office opened. Lance grinned as he saw Trig Callister.

"Wondered where you were, Trig," voiced the gambler. He picked up the faked newspaper. "Here's the news sheet, ready for you to take out to the judge. Is everything all jake?"

"Just the way we want it," replied The Shadow. "The judge is getting jittery, though. I'll have to hurry the newspaper out to him."

"Slide along then, Trig."

The Shadow paused, as he folded the newspaper and pocketed it. Lance noticed that Trig had his hand bag with him. He supposed that Trig had forgotten to take it to the country, the night before.

"There were some cops out front when I came in," stated The Shadow. "They looked me over pretty closely, Lance."

"Some of Maclare's bunch," snorted Lance. "He always keeps a flatfoot near here. Sometimes two or three. He's still sore because he never pinned anything on me. He had to give me an alibi once; I guess he's never gotten over the shock."

"Maybe you'd better steer me out by the back way," suggested The Shadow. "The cops may be suspicious at seeing me come out so soon. I don't want to be slowed up by an argument with a couple of dumb harness bulls."

Lance nodded agreement. He opened the panel in the wall; urged The Shadow into the passage beyond it. They followed along the passage to its end. At the left was a large door that served as the only entrance to Lance's secret apartment, in an adjoining building. At the right was a stairway. Lance led The Shadow downward.

There they found a small entry, with a steel door beyond it. The entry was dim; it was guarded by a huge bruiser who was almost the size of Jericho. In fact, Lance had compared the huge African with this particular husky when he had viewed Jericho and admired the latter's bulk.

"Open the gate, Boscul," ordered Lance. "Lock it up as soon as Trig goes out."

"So long, Lance," remarked The Shadow. "Don't bother to wait. I'd better come in this way, though, when I come back."

"Give three quick raps. Then two slow ones. That's the signal, Trig."

With this information The Shadow was quite willing that Lance should wait around. The gambler, however, followed The Shadow's suggestion and went upstairs. That made it even better. While Boscul was still drawing back a series of big bolts, The Shadow laid his hand bag on the floor. Tightening in a crouch, he prepared to spring.

THE lookout must have caught some sign of the attack that was to come. He spun suddenly from the door; his dull face lighted in a glare. Boscul gave a snarl just as The Shadow sprang forward. With hamlike hands, the big husky met The Shadow's onrush.

Boscul thought that he was dealing with Trig Callister. That, perhaps, gave him more courage than he would have shown against a cloaked attacker. Boscul beat back The Shadow's thrust before long fingers could gain the clutch they wanted. With a fierce cry, he hurled the limber attacker across the entry.

Fortunately, Lance Gillick was too far away to hear that shout. The Shadow had enough to do, handling Boscul. He managed to ward off a punch that the big lookout swung in his direction. He followed with a quick jab that bobbed Boscul's head backward, even though it failed to stagger the huge fighter.

The two locked. Boscul's arms tightened like the grip of a python. He hoisted The Shadow from the floor, intent upon crushing the supposed Trig Callister into submission. Swinging one wrist free, The Shadow squeezed choking fingers about Boscul's throat. The fellow gurgled; relaxed his fierce grip.

From then on, it was The Shadow's fight. Gaining a footing, he beat off Boscul's clutch; drove the lookout across the floor with a series of slashing blows. Again, they grappled; this time, The Shadow clutched Boscul as he had gripped Haija in that fight at Ruthley's.

The husky's bulk was greater than that of the Japanese; but it did not save him from disaster. Like a mongoose overpowering a cobra, The Shadow whipped his giant antagonist headlong toward the steel door. Boscul crashed the barrier. He slumped to the stone floor.

Opening his hand bag, The Shadow brought out his black garb. He donned cloak and hat, eyed Boscul while he added gloves to his attire. The husky was groggily trying to rise. The Shadow spilled him to one side and opened the door that Boscul had already unbolted. The door came inward; its outer surface showed only battered wood, not steel.

Viewed from the outside alley, that door excited no suspicion. Its steel-sheeted interior, however, made it immune to ordinary attack.

The alleyway was darkened. The Shadow was invisible as he edged into its space. Producing an automatic from its holster, he pointed the .45 upward, fired two quick shots in the air. Immediately afterward, he swung back into the entry, took quick concealment behind the opened door.

There was commotion in the alley. Pounding from the darkness came half a dozen men; with them was Lieutenant James Maclare. The raiders were blue-uniformed police. Their presence was explained by Maclare's own shout.

"Keep going, men!" ordered the lieutenant. "I thought this tip-off was on the level! Those shots were the signal we were told to wait for! We'll have the goods on Lance Gillick this time!"

Opposition came, as the police surged into the doorway; but it was not long-lived. Boscul had found his feet; he tried to grapple with the foremost bluecoat. Another officer swung a nightstick; he clubbed the groggy lookout into insensibility. Maclare and his men dashed up the stairs, never stopping to look behind the

opened door.

They found the passage to Lance's office; reaching the end of it, they saw a glimmer of light through the back of the painting. Maclare took one look through the peep hole; then ripped through the canvas, followed by his squad.

SHRIEKS arose from the gaming room, where play had started for the night. Croupiers were trapped at the roulette wheel; money and chips scattered everywhere as the police rounded up snarling waiters and frightened customers.

The door of the office opened; Lance Gillick peered at the scene. He bobbed from sight, slamming the door. Maclare leaped for it, ordered officers to slash the barrier with axes. One of the bluecoats gave a sudden shout:

"There goes Lance!"

The gambler had opened the office panel, to reach the passage. The policeman had spied him through the ruined painting. Maclare sprang away from the office door, led the chase with a pair of bluecoats following. Lance reached the door of his apartment, yanked it open. Peering from the entry below, The Shadow saw another man spring out to join the gambler.

It was Beezer Dorsch. Lance had feared that the killer would be trapped. The police had passed the apartment door in order to raid the gambling joint, but their return was imminent. Lance's pressing thought was to make a getaway with Beezer.

The pair dashed down the stairway, just as revolvers blasted along the passage above. The Shadow dropped behind the door. He let the fugitives get past, then bobbed out to follow them. He could easily have halted the two rogues; but he had a reason for permitting their escape.

Dashing along the alleyway, Lance and Beezer ducked through an opening in time to avoid policemen coming from the front street. The Shadow was close behind the crooks; but the clatter of their own footsteps drowned the slight sounds of his pursuit. Lance and Beezer reached a garage; they rushed in and boarded a coupe.

By the time the coupe swung into sight, The Shadow was in a small roadster, much like the car that he had used in his last flight from the Flying Squadron. He took up the chase; within two blocks Lance and Beezer knew that they were being tagged.

Recognizing that by the burst of speed that the coupe showed, The Shadow unlimbered an automatic and dispatched two quick shots after the coupe. Bullets whistled close enough for the crooks to guess who was on their trail.

"The Shadow!" snarled Lance, as he gripped the wheel of the coupe. "Lucky he didn't bag Trig Callister. He must have barged in before Boscul had time to lock the back door."

"Yeah," growled Beezer, "and he tipped off Maclare to raid your joint. We gotta shake him, Lance."

"You bet we have to! We don't want him to know where we're headed."

"Where's that?"

"To Ruthley's. Where else would be safe for you to hide out, Beezer?"

Again, Lance Gillick was playing into The Shadow's hands. In this pursuit, The Shadow could have overtaken the crooks as easily as he could have dropped them on the stairway. His plan, however, called for their get-away. He wanted them to be at Ruthley's later; for The Shadow intended an end to crime tonight.

WITHIN the next few blocks, The Shadow was prepared to slow his pursuit; to give Lance the very chance that the gambler wanted. Once in the clear, Lance would head for Ruthley's apartment house; duck from his car and take Beezer along with him, straight to the big-shot's lair.

Oddly, luck was to trick The Shadow. Had he ended his pursuit a few blocks sooner, all would have gone well. However, during the last stretch, Lance Gillick became jittery. He started to express his worryment to Beezer; then stopped short as he saw a sign that read: "Century Garage."

"What a break!" ejaculated Lance. "Just the place for us in a pinch, Beezer!"

Beezer recognized the sign.

"Yeah!" he agreed. "It's the joint the boss told us about, in case we needed to use it. Head in there, Lance."

Lance spun the wheel, jerked the coupe suddenly from the street, straight into the open doorway of the garage. He shouted as he applied the brakes; a waiting garage man caught his words and yanked a lever. A door slid open at the far wall.

The Shadow reached the front; jamming the brakes of the roadster, he saw the thoroughfare. In that instant, he thought that the far door had been open when Lance entered the garage; for the coupe was speeding through it. To give a last zest to his pursuit, The Shadow swung his roadster into the garage, intending to drive clear through and follow the crooks a few blocks farther.

He realized his error, as he sped his car through the front doorway.

The rear door slid shut before The Shadow could reach it. Jamming the brakes, The Shadow shoved the gear-shift lever into reverse. Again, he was too late. The front door slithered shut before The Shadow could back out through it.

Lights showed the garage devoid of cars. A stone-walled room some sixty feet square, it formed a sealed snare, once the doors had closed; for they were of metal. More ominous still were two small, boxlike rooms at each side of empty garage. They were sheeted with metal; their closed doors were fronted with loopholes.

The tiny rooms were pill-boxes – safe spots from which hidden sharpshooters could riddle anyone who occupied the center of the garage floor. Once the barrage began, it would spell instant doom for The Shadow.

CHAPTER XXI. THE SHADOW'S EXIT

IN a single instant, The Shadow sized his situation. Big doors had clanged; to leap from the roadster and attempt to open them would be the worst move possible. The Shadow knew that machine gunners were sequestered in the pill-boxes, ready to begin their fire the moment that he bobbed into view.

Even the roadster offered but temporary safety. Bullets would spray it soon. Yet, for some reason, the opening hail had been delayed. Quick to note that fact, The Shadow looked for the answer; and found it. A glance from the side of the roadster enabled him to see a scudding man in overalls, making across the stone

floor for the pill-box on the left.

It was the attendant who had pulled the levers to close the garage doors. The fellow was still inside the garage; the men in the pill-box were giving him time to join them. The door of the pill-box was moving open, ready to admit the scudding thug.

The Shadow had an automatic handy. He could have dropped the rowdy as he ran. Such a move would have been futile. If their pal fell, the men in the pill-boxes would have no further need to delay their machine gun fire.

Nor would The Shadow gain by blazing bullets into the doorway of the pill-box when it opened. Unless he clipped every occupant, the door would slam again. Even if he did wound that crew of sharpshooters, the men in the second pill-box would make up for it. Not for an instant did The Shadow forget that he lay between two bands of murderers.

Without reaching for the .45 that lay on the seat beside him, The Shadow staged a prompt surprise. His move was totally unexpected; for that reason, it left his enemies momentarily bewildered. The thug who was dashing for the pill-box had thirty feet to go. The Shadow resolved to block him off; to keep him in a spot of danger as bad as The Shadow's own predicament.

With his left hand, The Shadow jerked the roadster's wheel. He rammed the gear shift into low, with his right. His foot thrust the accelerator to the floor. The roadster leaped as if alive, skewed to the left and roared like a thunderbolt straight for the pill-box, just as the door of that tiny stronghold slid wide.

The Shadow passed the running thug in a split-second. Jamming the brakes, he again yanked the wheel to the left. The roadster halted with a screech, squarely between the startled thug and the opened door of the pill-box.

Again, The Shadow pulled a surprise. As the man in overalls heeled about and dashed in the other direction, The Shadow let him go. Diving to the right, The Shadow banged the roadster's door outward, with his left hand; while his rightmost grabbed the automatic from the seat. In one continuous leap, he hurtled onward, straight through the opened door of the pill-box.

Two startled hoodlums, crouched in darkness, saw the cloaked avalanche whirl in upon them. Dropping their machine gun, they sprang to meet The Shadow. His right arm swished downward; the automatic smashed a thug's skull. As the fellow sprawled, The Shadow swung a side blow, clipped the second gunner and rolled him out through the door of the pill-box.

The first thug partly blocked the door. Stopping, The Shadow seized his shoulders and pitched his senseless body out beside the dazed man who had floundered on the step of the roadster. That done, The Shadow grabbed the handle of the door and clanged the barrier shut. Safe in the pill-box, he peered through the tiny loophole.

The Shadow had completely tricked the gunners in the far pill-box. His car had blocked their view of his rapid action. They learned what had happened too late to defeat it. Their knowledge came when the thug on the roadster's step suddenly grabbed his unconscious pal and dragged him out in front of the halted car.

It was stalemate: a trio of crooks in one pill-box; The Shadow in the other. The abandoned roadster made a barrier in between; but it meant nothing. The Shadow, like the crooks, had a machine gun and could fire through the open sides of the small car. Volleys would prove useless, however, for both The Shadow and his opponents were safely entrenched.

True, there were three men somewhere on the garage floor; two of them were now dragging a third toward the front door. The Shadow could have picked out those crooks and finished them; but they were unimportant. He needed some way to break this stalemate; to leave the pillbox and be on his way to other tasks. That was The Shadow's real dilemma.

Had crooks recognized the situation, they would have let matters remain as they were. They, however, disliked the condition for reasons of their own. They knew the identity of their foeman. They were incensed because they had let The Shadow nullify their advantage.

Hoarse shouts came from the far pill-box. The words were incoherent to The Shadow, due to the echoes from the barren walls. To the men who were in the open, the cries were understandable. One dropped the senseless man whom he was lugging, leaped for a wall and pulled a light switch. The garage was plunged into darkness.

ON the face of it, this move seemed merely a protection for the men who were still at large. Crooks naturally expected The Shadow to stay where he was. Instead, The Shadow found the handle of the pill-box door. He slid the door open, slowly and cautiously. His move was just in time.

The thug by the outer door had found another switch. He pulled it. The result was sensed immediately by The Shadow. His pill-box began a descent into the floor, lowering like an elevator. The smooth action was accompanied by the rhythmic hum of hidden machinery.

Had The Shadow still been behind a closed door, he could not have left the descending pill-box; for it went down into the floor so steadily that the delay of opening the door would have been fatal. However, The Shadow had already attended to the detail of opening the door. His quick brain caught the need for immediate action.

With both hands, he grabbed the edge of outside floor when it was just waist-high. With a long, forward leap from the floor of the descending pill-box, he shot headforemost through the closing space; performed a quick roll that brought his legs clear, just before the top of the pill-box doorway could trap them.

The pill-box stopped its descent with a sharp click. Reaching along the garage floor in the darkness, The Shadow found that the roof of the pill-box was coated with cement; that formed a perfect level with the floor. He knew that the other pill-box must operate in the same fashion; and the reason was obvious. With the pill-boxes lowered into their pits, the garage floor would appear quite ordinary; and would therefore excite no suspicion when not in use as a trap.

Some crook had seen a smart way to render The Shadow's capture of the pill-box worse than useless. The pull of the wall switch had turned the stronghold into a prison, as close-walled as a tomb. Harsh, gleeful cries amid the darkness told that men of crime were sure that their ruse had worked. A raucous voice called for lights.

Quickly, The Shadow rolled beneath the roadster. He lay there, face downward, clasping an automatic in each fist. The lights came on; crooks piled from their pill-box to join the others on the floor. Together, they surged to the wall beside the roadster; they tramped roughly on the leveled roof; they bent to shout jeers that they hoped The Shadow would hear within his tomb.

While thugs made merry, The Shadow prepared to end their revelry. The far side of the roadster was deserted, except for the one thug who lay unconscious. Three from the pill-box; two from the floor, had all assembled above the tight-sealed prison where they believed The Shadow trapped. Edging outward, The Shadow was almost ready to come to his feet, when an interruption sounded.

Someone was pounding at the front door of the garage. For beyond that heavy barrier came the shouted order:

"Open! In the name of the law!"

THE SHADOW abandoned his plan to surprise the clustered, crooks who stood flat-footed by the wall. He had recognized the shouting voice. The tone was that of Lieutenant James Maclare. Half to his feet, The Shadow dropped low again; he edged beneath the roadster as crooks scurried from the wall.

He saw one man reach the door and yank a switch that controlled the far pill-box. It descended; the thug at the switchboard pulled a lever to open the rear door of the garage. Two crooks picked up the unconscious thug; the lights went out to cover their departure by the opened rear door. Only two remained, to pass as garage attendants when they admitted Maclare and his bluecoats to the innocent-looking garage.

The Shadow had new opportunity in the darkness. He took it. Rolling from beneath the roadster, he moved swiftly to the rear door. Crooks were away before he reached it; The Shadow slid through just as the door was closing.

The rear alley was darkened; groping, The Shadow found a passage that led through to the front street, between the garage and an empty store. He took this route; stopped just before he reached the front. Peering from the corner, The Shadow was witness to the next scene.

Lights were on again in the garage; the front door had been opened to admit Maclare. The lieutenant had made a brief inspection; he had called the thuggish attendants out front, to give them a brief quiz.

"Nobody came in here tonight?" demanded the police officer. "You're sure of it?"

"Nobody, lieutenant," replied one of the thugs. "This garage is closed for repairs. We're storin' no cars, here, right now."

"Humph! Who does that roadster belong to, then?"

"It's my own car, lieutenant."

"All right," decided Maclare. "The men we're after were reported riding in a coupe. Last place we spotted them was near here. We thought maybe they'd made into your garage."

A siren sounded as Maclare finished. Two motorcycles chugged up; then a police car. Members of the Flying Squadron stepped to the street. An official car arrived. Director Kirk Borman alighted. He talked with Lieutenant Maclare.

"I'll take charge here," decided Borman. "Good work, lieutenant! I heard about your surprise raid."

"I meant to notify you, director," stated Maclare, "only we weren't sure of the tip-off –"

"I understand," put in Borman, brusquely. "Results are what count, lieutenant. You gained them. That's all that matters. Better get back to your precinct. The Flying Squadron will find Lance Gillick."

MACLARE saluted; he departed with his bluecoats. The honest lieutenant was grim. For once, he had kept back facts that he might have given to the police director. The tip-off that Maclare had received had specified that no one, not even Director Borman, be informed beforehand. Rather than miss his opportunity to catch Lance Gillick red-handed, Maclare had agreed to the terms. He had trusted the mysterious voice that had

come over the wire to his precinct office.

Director Borman went into the garage, while members of the Flying Squadron spread out to fake a search of the area. The Shadow saw chance of new encounter, which he wanted to avoid. In darkness, he whipped off his cloak and hat and folded them under his arm. Choosing a moment when no khaki-uniformed men were near, he walked out from his hiding-place and approached Director Borman's car. He opened the door, tossed his garments into a corner of the rear seat.

The chauffeur turned about; saw only the features of Trig Callister. The Shadow whispered gruffly, stating that he wanted to see Director Borman. The chauffeur was one of Borman's trusted aids. He knew that the director had dealings with characters of Trig's sort. He motioned The Shadow into the car.

Kirk Borman returned soon afterward, a pleased smirk on his sharp-featured face. As he entered the car, The Shadow spoke again.

"I'm Trig Callister," he gruffed. "Say – did they get The Shadow?"

"He's where we want him," chuckled Borman. "Buried alive! We'll leave him there until he croaks! That won't be long; he's in an air-tight spot."

The Shadow's disguised face was visible by the glow of a street lamp. To Borman, those features answered Lance Gillick's description of Trig. Nevertheless, Borman questioned suddenly:

"How did you get here?"

"I hopped on the back of Lance's coupe," returned The Shadow with a slight guffaw. "I was in a bad spot when that raid hit. A worse one, when The Shadow tagged Lance. I had to drop off to keep from getting hit when he busted loose with those gats of his. I was too busy to yank a rod of my own. It's tough holding on to the back of a coupe, going the speed Lance was driving that one."

The story clicked. Borman told the chauffeur to drive along. He was not suspicious when The Shadow questioned:

"How about Lance and Beezer? Did they make it to Ruthley's O.K.?"

"They did," acknowledged the police director. "That's where we are going at present."

"You'll have to drop me on the way," objected The Shadow. "When we get to the place where I parked my sedan. I've got to get out in the country and keep the old judge bluffed. Tell Lance I made my get-away. Everything is jake."

BORMAN nodded. Events had worked out better than he hoped. With Lance and Beezer in a safe hide-out and Trig at large, all was well with men of crime. Maclare's surprise raid had made trouble. Borman was sure that it had been instigated by The Shadow. The Shadow's return had brought recompense, however; it had spelled the finish of the black-cloaked warrior, according to Borman's positive belief.

The Shadow spoke as they neared his parked sedan. Borman ordered the chauffeur to stop; he chuckled good-by to Trig Callister. He saw his companion alight; but he did not notice the small bundle beneath Trig's arm. The Shadow was careful to keep his wadded cloak and hat away from the police director's view.

The Shadow whispered a prophetic laugh as he boarded his sedan. His plans had worked tonight. He had slipped the trap without losing too much time; and with that exploit, he had left crooks confident that they had bagged their greatest foe.

That, in particular, was to The Shadow's liking. The greater the confidence among men of crime, the greater would be their consternation when The Shadow delivered the final stroke of his campaign.

CHAPTER XXII. ESTELLE'S DISCOVERY

DESPITE his quick departure from the toils of crooks, The Shadow had lost many valuable minutes. He had purposely clipped the time element to a minimum, that he might complete his campaign while his enemies were retarded. The episode at the garage trap had therefore been damaging to The Shadow's schedule.

One vital phase of The Shadow's game was a trip to the country mansion – there to meet Judge Benbrook and bring him back to town. That would be easy; as Trig Callister, The Shadow could pass the outer cordon of thugs without question. But it was necessary to have Judge Benbrook in Westford well before the time at which the meeting of the Civic Club was scheduled.

If all went well, The Shadow would have another bombshell waiting for Stephen Ruthley when the pretended reformer arrived at the meeting. All could still go well; but time was short. A speedy ride to the country and a rapid return trip had become essential.

Delay, however, had already caused one difficulty. Just when The Shadow was embarking on a free, swift course, trouble began without his knowledge. The place where it occurred was the one spot where it was least to be expected: in Judge Benbrook's own home. The person who provided the chance element was Estelle Benbrook.

The Shadow had foreseen that Estelle would be worried over her father's absence. The night before, he had mailed her a letter, written by the judge himself. Estelle had received the letter this morning; it had partly ended her worry.

Later, though, Estelle had read the true item in the Daily Banner, stating that the Civic Club would meet tonight. She had prepared dinner for herself and her father, thinking surely that the judge would return.

Judge Benbrook had not returned. Ending a lone repast. Estelle experienced a great increase of alarm. There was only one person in whom she could confide her fears. That person was The Shadow. On the faint hope that The Shadow had entered the house while she was eating dinner, Estelle went upstairs to rap at the door on the second floor.

There was no response. Estelle's spirits sank. She felt hopeless and confused; for once, her usual self-confidence was gone. The girl pounded wildly upon The Shadow's door. At last, in desperation, she opened the door. She entered the room and turned on the light.

Hopeful that she might find some message from The Shadow, Estelle looked about the room. She saw a bureau drawer that was slightly open. Peering into the drawer, Estelle glimpsed a flat box that she mistook for a writing case. Thinking that it might contain a notebook or some written memoranda, Estelle nervously drew the box from the drawer. She opened the box; stared with wide-opened eyes.

THE box was a make-up kit—one that showed signs of recent use. It explained to Estelle why The Shadow's face had seemed so masklike. The girl remembered that The Shadow could not have carried this make-up kit when he first came to the house. She realized that it must have come in the package that had been delivered

long after his arrival.

Hastily, Estelle looked in the closet; there she saw a dark suit, with torn coat sleeve.

It struck Estelle that The Shadow must have received new clothes; certainly the package had been large enough and sufficiently heavy to contain a suit. But why had The Shadow needed the make-up outfit?

Estelle was intuitive; moreover, her mind was concerned with her father's disappearance. For the first time, she felt a sudden doubt of The Shadow, for she remembered that, last night, he had expressed but little concern over her father's disappearance. Her mind was strained to the point where she could connect only a few definite thoughts; in that state, Estelle pictured two persons: The Shadow and the man named Callister, who had induced her father to leave the house last night.

A horrified gasp came from Estelle's lips. Through a chance thought, inspired by her discovery of the make-up kit, the girl guessed the truth. The Shadow and Trig Callister were one!

Reasoning from a false assumption, Estelle concocted a theory that she promptly accepted as fact. She thought of The Shadow as a man of crime; one with a lone game, who had run into trouble the night that Prescott Dunson was slain. True, The Shadow had saved the girl's own life; but there were many crooks who might have been as gallant, under similar circumstances.

Perhaps The Shadow had foreseen how useful that rescue would prove. It had enabled him to avoid the law, by entering the house with Estelle. It had won Estelle's confidence; later, The Shadow had found sanctuary in this house. As Estelle saw it, he had pretended friendliness in order to gain her father's confidence, as well as his own.

Ready for some crooked game, The Shadow had come here as Callister. He had taken her father as a hostage. He had some reason to keep Judge Benbrook from Westford. It all seemed a scheme of double dealing, even though Estelle could not fathom its full purpose.

Firmly, Estelle resolved upon some move. While she tried to find some possible way of counteracting purposes which she thought were evil, the girl heard the doorbell ring. For a moment, her worries vanished; she almost dropped the theory that she had built up against The Shadow. Estelle was hopeful that her father was back; hurriedly, she dashed downstairs and opened the front door.

On the threshold stood Louis Wilderton.

THE district attorney was anxious-faced.

"Where is Judge Benbrook?" he inquired. "I must see him at once, Estelle."

"I don't know," gasped the girl. "What has happened, Louis?"

"Lieutenant Maclare has raided the Club Adair. This time, he found a gambling room in operation. He has pinned crime on Lance Gillick –"

"But father? Where is my father?"

Estelle fairly shrieked the questions. Wilderton's eyes popped. He stammered: "Your – your father isn't here?"

"No," replied Estelle. "Something has happened to him, Louis!"

"Just before this important meeting?"

"No! It was last night! But it began before that. I have to tell you the whole story, Louis. There was a man who came here – a man cloaked in black – he was wounded –"

"When was this?"

"The night that Adam Woodstock committed suicide. That was the second time I saw him. That was the night that he was wounded –"

"You mean Shaw!"

Estelle nodded.

"You took him in here?" demanded Wilderton. "The man who was wanted as an accomplice of the murderer, Dorsch?"

"This man talked to father," explained. "He convinced father that he was not engaged in crime. He persuaded father to come from retirement. He acted as a friend – until last night."

"And then?"

"He dropped his masquerade. He came here as another person, a man named Callister. He persuaded father to leave with him for Washington. He wanted to keep father away from here tonight."

Wilderton raised his hand to halt Estelle's excited utterances.

"You have told me enough," he said. "The man has two aliases. He calls himself Shaw; also Callister. He has abducted your father. This is a matter for the law, Estelle."

"You will notify Washington?"

"After I have talked with Director Borman. The local police should act first. Borman will send out the Flying Squadron, to see if your father is still somewhere in Westford."

Estelle started an objection. Again, Wilderton halted her. The girl tried to blurt out a fact that she had just remembered: the envelope that The Shadow had given her father. Her words were confused.

"This man left an envelope with father," exclaimed Estelle. "One that contained some sort of evidence –"

"Evidence of what?" demanded Wilderton, hoarsely. "No crook would leave a trail behind him. We can come to that later, Estelle. The pressing matter is to see Director Borman."

"You can call him from here."

"No. I shall see him personally, and come back here later. I know where he is at present; both Director Borman and Mayor Marclot are at Stephen Ruthley's apartment."

DASHING down the steps, Wilderton jumped aboard his car and drove away. Estelle stood wearily at the door; then went back into the house. She decided to find the envelope herself. To obtain it, she needed a key to the music cabinet.

There were keys in a table drawer near the music cabinet. As she rummaged among them, finding none that she wanted, Estelle discovered a .32 revolver. It was a loaded weapon that her father had long ago put away and forgotten. Nervously, Estelle gripped the gun; she glanced toward the hallway.

The tension had given her unusual alertness. A sound reached Estelle's ears; it was a key, turning in the lock of the side door. Acting upon sudden inspiration, the girl hurried upstairs; there, she stepped into a side room and waited. Soon, her ears again caught a slight sound. It was the opening of the door to the upstairs front room – the chamber The Shadow had occupied – where Estelle had forgotten to turn out the lights.

The girl sprang from her hiding-place; she saw the door wide open and reached the threshold. She saw a black-clad figure in the room. The Shadow had returned.

He was turned away from Estelle; he was removing his slouch hat and dropping the folds of his cloak. He spun about as Estelle delivered a sharp cry. Face revealed, The Shadow stared into the muzzle of the revolver that the judge's daughter held.

Estelle's cry ended; her grip on the .32 became firm. She was ready to pull the trigger if The Shadow made a move. Estelle Benbrook had gained proof of the treachery that she believed had been The Shadow's.

The face of The Shadow was that of Trig Callister.

CHAPTER XXIII. AMENDED STRATEGY

THE instant that he saw the leveled revolver, The Shadow recognized a situation as crucial as any that he had met in Westford. He had encountered dangers that seemed far greater; but this one carried the worst possible hazards.

Estelle showed by action that she knew how to manage a revolver; she had aimed the weapon straight for The Shadow's heart. The girl's frenzied expression showed that she had lost control of her wits. She was prepared to fire a steady series of bullets on any provocation, real or imaginary.

The Shadow realized the futility of explanations. With her acceptance of fallacies, instead of facts, Estelle might interpret any statement incorrectly. Mere mention of her father's name might drive her to the wild belief that The Shadow had killed the judge. One chance thought would be enough. Estelle would fire to kill.

For one full second, The Shadow met the girl's vengeful gaze. He realized that each succeeding second would increase the risk; that any moment might be his last. It was a time for astounding action; some deed as outlandish as Estelle's imaginary beliefs. Knowing it, The Shadow acted in accord.

His cloak was half from his shoulders, retained by his left hand. He was holding the slouch hat with his right. For a moment, The Shadow seemed to cower; as he shrank away, his body huddled lower.

The move lessened Estelle's vigilance for an instant; then, suspecting trickery, the girl became more frenzied. She stepped forward, thrusting the revolver ahead. Her finger tightened on the trigger.

Huddled, The Shadow spun about; he started a sidelong lunge for a corner of the room. Estelle sped the gun muzzle in the same direction; as the cloaked form faded floorward, she pressed the trigger and stabbed quick

shots.

The cloak crumpled; the slouch hat bounced on the floor. As Estelle fired again, a lithe shape seemed to weave up toward her, as if conjured from space itself.

The Shadow had caught cloak collar and hat brim with both hands; he had shoved them away toward the corner, releasing them as Estelle fired. Reversing his spin, he was swinging back, free from the cloak before the fatal moment.

It was the skillful move of the matador, who whisks free from his cloak at the moment of the bull's onrush. The Shadow's twist was far more speedy and better timed than that of any bullfighter. He had to be away before bullets zipped in his direction. He was away; and his long, returning lunge was below the line of Estelle's aim.

The girl did not have time to fire again. Sighting The Shadow, she tried to aim; his quick clutch caught her wrist and held it numbed. Estelle struggled, still managing to clutch the revolver. As she went backward toward the door, she heard a cry behind her. Arms other than The Shadow's clutched the girl's.

The Shadow plucked away the revolver as Estelle subsided. Looking up, the girl saw the person who had seized her. A happy gasp told her relief, as she viewed the whitened face of her father.

BENBROOK'S whole countenance was tinged with alarm.

Estelle began to sob. Judge Benbrook gazed anxiously toward The Shadow; he saw a smile upon the false lips of Trig Callister. The uncloaked fighter was unhurt. Satisfied on that point, the judge spoke to his daughter.

"You were mistaken, Estelle" he told the girl. "The Shadow is our friend. How you guessed that he came here as Trig Callister, I do not know –"

"I found the make-up box," sobbed Estelle. "I thought – I guessed –"

"Your guess was wrong, my dear." Estelle turned about, to see The Shadow regaining his cloak and hat. He donned the garments; his quiet whisper silenced Estelle as she tried to express her regrets for her mistaken action. Judge Benbrook delivered an interjection.

"You were going to see Stephen Ruthley as Trig Callister!" he exclaimed. "Have you changed the plan?"

"Yes," replied The Shadow. "I believe that Estelle has already disclosed my double identity."

"I have," admitted the girl. "Louis Wilderton was here. I told him my suspicions. He has gone to Ruthley's – to see Director Borman."

"Our hopes are ruined," groaned Judge Benbrook. "Estelle, this was arranged when The Shadow gave me that written message. I knew who he was when he came here as Trig Callister."

"You should have told me, father."

"No. It was better not. Had we returned in time tonight, all would have been well. Tell me, Estelle" – the judge's tone was more anxious than ever – "did Wilderton take the envelope with him?"

Estelle shook her head. The Shadow delivered a whispered laugh that brought immediate encouragement to Judge Benbrook.

"We need new strategy," declared The Shadow. "Come downstairs. We must first obtain the envelope; then be on our way."

The judge and Estelle followed The Shadow downstairs. He had the key to the music cabinet; he unlocked it and tendered the sealed envelope to Judge Benbrook. Noting the clock on the mantel, The Shadow made quick calculation.

"We are leaving here at once," he stated. "You will both remain in a place of safety until you hear from me."

Judge Benbrook was puzzled. He could think of no safe spot in Westford. Nevertheless, he beckoned to Estelle; they followed The Shadow through the side door; thence to the rear street, where they entered The Shadow's sedan.

"Borman will come to the house," declared The Shadow, as he started the car. "To your house, judge. Not finding you there, he will hurry to the country. My work lies there; since my part has become known."

"But you spoke of a place where Estelle would be safe," reminded Judge Benbrook. "One where you wanted me to wait until I heard from you."

"Here is the place."

The Shadow stopped the car in front of the first precinct station. A light was showing from Lieutenant Maclare's office. Judge Benbrook gained sudden understanding of The Shadow's plan. He stepped from the car with Estelle; then asked:

"How much shall I tell Maclare?"

"As much as is necessary," replied The Shadow. "He has already gained an inkling of matters in Westford. You will find him ready to follow any suggestion that you give him."

With that, The Shadow sped away, leaving Judge Benbrook and Estelle to treat with the one man in Westford who could command loyal forces that would fight for the law.

AT the time of The Shadow's departure, events were shaping elsewhere exactly as he predicted. Louis Wilderton had reached Stephen Ruthley's. There, the district attorney had just finished pouring out his news. Stephen Ruthley, his countenance imposing, was quick to deliver a denunciation.

"We owe you much, Wilderton," affirmed the pretended reformer. "I speak for Mayor Marclot and Director Borman, as well as for myself. Come, Borman!" he turned to the police director, who was sitting rigid, in a corner of the den. "You must act at once to find Judge Benbrook!"

"So I must!" exclaimed Borman, coming suddenly to life. "We'll scour the countryside with the Flying Squadron!"

Rising, Borman strode from the den. Mayor Marclot, also a stunned listener, came to his feet and followed. Ruthley purred a smooth comment to Wilderton, who had sunk into a chair, too strained to notice the alarm that had gripped Marclot and Borman.

"No need for Marclot to go also," declared Ruthley. "He should stay with us, to discuss matters. I shall call him back."

Leaving Wilderton, Ruthley overtook Marclot and Borman at the door of the apartment. The three went into a quick huddle. Ruthley, as usual, was the brains.

"Get over to the garage," he told Borman, tersely. "If that pill-box is empty, we'll know that Wilderton is right. If he is, head for Judge Benbrook's, to make sure they haven't rolled in there. The Shadow will be bringing the judge with him."

"Where next?" queried Borman. "Out to the house where we're keeping the judge?"

"Yes. Lance has already ducked out to call the cottage. He heard Wilderton's blab from behind the picture. Leave some of the squadron at the judge's house. Take the rest with you."

Borman hurried from the apartment. Ruthley purred calming words to Marclot. The mayor steadied.

"Keep Wilderton bluffed," reminded Ruthley. "He will prove useful to us. Remember, we have Lance and Beezer covering up. Borman will be back before it's time to go to the meeting at the Civic Club."

Marclot nodded, as they walked back through the hall. He made whispered comment:

"You've got the swag, Steve? In case –"

"It's all in the file cabinet, with the papers. Forget it, Elvin. We've had the best break in the world! The Shadow slipped us; he thinks he got away with it. That puts him right into our hands – this time to stay!"

Mayor Marclot managed to smile in pompous style, as he came back into Ruthley's den to resume the talk with Louis Wilderton. That smile was forced; but the one that wreathed Stephen Ruthley's lips was not. The master crook smiled with real relish.

Often before, Stephen Ruthley had seen his hunches come through. He was confident that another such result was due tonight. To Stephen Ruthley, The Shadow's finish was a settled matter.

CHAPTER XXIV. DOUBLE BATTLE

CREEPING men were closing inward through the darkness. They were the thugs whom Lance Gillick had sent from Westford, to keep a circled watch about the old mansion that had been Judge Benbrook's lodging overnight. Audible comments passed among these armed hoodlums.

Word passed along concerning Lance's call to the cottage. The cordon was to tighten; then drive in hard upon the smaller crew within the house. Crooks knew the identity of the men whom they were to attack. They were ready with a vengeance, these thugs, to deal with agents of The Shadow.

Some were keeping lookout for The Shadow himself. He had come and gone as Trig Callister; they had let the sedan ride through. None knew if Judge Benbrook had gone out on that last trip; there was a chance that he was still within the house. If so, The Shadow would be back. He would fare badly when he came.

First the agents; then The Shadow. As for Judge Benbrook, the finger had pointed toward him also. This was to be a massacre; beginning with a surprise attack upon the mansion that stood so silent within the very center of the creeping horde. The house, itself, was open to attack. Every window would offer entry for invading

thugs.

The tightening process ceased. Evil fighters were ready for command. They were under the leadership of two whom Lance had deputed to such duty. Those two commanded more than a score of gorillas; the dregs of the scum who had so long been rampant in Westford. Some of the crew, in fact, had been members of the horde that had gunned for Lieutenant James Maclare. Brave through power of numbers, they had boasted their wish for another contact with The Shadow.

It was the moment when a command seemed imminent. Thugs waited for rasped orders. Suddenly, the stillness broke; but not with the expected commands. From somewhere, like a ghostly taunt, came a strident, mocking laugh through the darkness.

The laugh of The Shadow!

THE cloaked fighter had arrived. He had left his car a safe distance away; he had slipped through a net of enemies set to watch for him. He was in the circle itself; and hard upon his mockery came the proofs of his actual position.

Automatics tongued from blackness; stabbed flame picked out crouching hoodlums. As snarling fighters spun about, they heard yells from their crippled companions. The Shadow had first located thugs amid the darkness. His first shots counted.

"The Shadow! Get him!"

As a mobleader roared the command, thugs sought to obey. Twenty against one, they had their opportunity; they would spot The Shadow if he fired again. They did not realize the purpose of The Shadow's opening shots; they did not guess that he had withdrawn for the moment. Those shots had been a signal.

An instant later, floodlights glared from the beleaguered mansion. Crooks were bathed in the brilliance that came from upper windows. The Shadow had applied the very method that crooks had found so useful in the past. His agents had set up searchlights, ready to use them when the signal came.

Crooks were as bewildered as Maclare's bluecoats had been, that night at the Mississippi Hotel. Wildly, they turned toward the house. Remembering The Shadow's marksmanship, they fired for the floodlights. The brilliant orbs remained unshattered. These searchlights were equipped with bulletproof glass.

Rifles crackled from below the brilliance. The Shadow's agents were at the ground floor windows, clipping the savage hoodlums who fired back in vain. Like wild tribesmen, thugs started for the house, thinking to dislodge The Shadow's agents with wide-aimed bullets and curdling yells. The rifles crackled on, at close range.

Crooks sprawled; as they kicked up the earth, others broke. They dashed for the limits of the lighted ground, followed by steady shots. Reserves, the ones posted to watch for The Shadow, came up with encouraging shouts; for they were blanketed by night. They were met by another fire: The Shadow's own.

The attack was ended. Those thugs who could, went scattering into the night. The Shadow's strident laugh resounded; it added impetus to the speed of the survivors. It was a signal also; at the sound of the weird call, the searchlights were suddenly extinguished.

TO fleeing crooks, the darkness brought new dread.

Pursuers might be anywhere, everywhere. Each thug who fled fancied himself the only one who had escaped; for more than half the horde had sprawled upon the turf. The same had happened with the cluster of reserves; The Shadow had driven bullets into their very midst. Some thugs found cars; they sped away from beyond the cottages, heading away from the direction of Westford. The others took to the brush, making the best time that they could on foot.

The Shadow had classed these toughs as mass fighters only. They had behaved in typical fashion, once their attack had become a rout. New silence dominated the mansion; then, from a space in front, came a hoarse whisper. It was "Hawkeye"; he had come out to join The Shadow.

The cloaked chief answered. He gave Hawkeye new instructions. Hawkeye slid back to the house. Soon men came stealing outward through the darkness. They were The Shadow's agents, ready for new battle. The first had taken less time than the limit The Shadow had set.

Choosing the banks along the dirt road, The Shadow's agents waited. Their chief had gone somewhere ahead; again they listened for his signal. Lights appeared; police cars and motorcycles came in caravans all manned by the khaki-clad thugs who called themselves the Flying Squadron.

The Shadow waited until the last car was abreast of his position. Again, his strident laugh rang forth.

Cars halted at the startling cry. Automatics tongued an opening message. Fake cops wheeled about, aimed for the spot whence the shots had issued. Again, The Shadow was gone; but his agents took their cue. From the sheltering embankment, they ripped away with automatics, raking the whole line of the halted squadron.

Bullets winged tires, windshields. They found the occupants of cars. Khaki-clad men dived from their machines; left their motorcycles and scattered on foot. This time, floodlights were unneeded. The cars and motorcycles of the unsuspecting squadron were targets enough.

From the rear, The Shadow pummeled shots along the road. Uniformed crooks ran ahead, hoping to join the thugs who had once formed a vanished cordon. The Shadow's aids pursued; keeping along the banks, they harried the newly routed horde and drove them off into the darkness.

Those scattered men would not soon return. When they did, they would find their cars useless. Again, The Shadow and his half dozen agents had routed more than a score. The Shadow's agents held together; their task accomplished, they were returning to the house; to hold it in case enough enemies rallied to attempt invasion.

THERE was one car that had remained unscathed throughout the fray, for the simple reason that it had been left alone. This automobile had come up behind the others. It had stopped at the command of a man in back. It was Director Borman's official car. Borman had told his chauffeur to wait.

Fuming, Kirk Borman recognized all that had happened. The pick of his Flying Squadron had been ambushed. He wanted to get back to town again; to summon other details, particularly the group that he had left idle at Judge Benbrook's house. With a growl, Borman told the chauffeur to swing the car about.

The chauffeur obeyed; as he swung the big car past the verge of a ditch, blackness rose from the fringe of the headlights. The chauffeur alone saw it; he yanked a revolver and jabbed it from the window.

A slugging fist came through, swinging an automatic. The chauffeur's cap was bashed down over his head; the man tilted sidewise; he sprawled to the roadway as the door yanked open.

Kirk Borman made a leap for the front seat. A black-cloaked avalanche came in from space. Springing past the steering wheel, The Shadow met the fighting police director; gloved fingers found their hold on Borman's neck. The police director slumped to the floor by the rear seat.

The Shadow picked handcuffs from a pocket in a rear door. They were useful items in a police director's car; The Shadow had noted them when he had ridden with Borman, in the guise of Trig Callister. He put the bracelets on the director's wrists. Borman offered no struggle; he was still gasping for air.

Leaving Borman sprawled in back, The Shadow dropped behind the wheel. He stepped on the gas; shot the big car back toward town. The tires jounced along the bumpy road, while Borman bounced helplessly about in back, striking his head against the seat and the doors, experiencing new grogginess every time he started to recover.

One laugh of triumph from The Shadow's hidden lips; then the cloaked victor maintained silence. Sooner or later, he would meet roving units of the Flying Squadron. They would let him pass, recognizing the police director's car. The Shadow was traveling far ahead of any reports that would come from the battle ground where he and his agents had dealt with thugs and false upholders of the law.

In effecting his capture of Kirk Borman, The Shadow had topped off a well-planned campaign. He had known that his presence would bring the police director to the scene outside of Westford. The Shadow had counted upon this capture as a final stroke.

Each strategic move had succeeded. Massed hordes vanquished, The Shadow was ready to meet Stephen Ruthley and his remaining lieutenants; to deal with them as effectively as he had with Kirk Borman.

CHAPTER XXV. WITHIN THE DEN

HALF an hour had passed since The Shadow's victory on the road. Stephen Ruthley was standing in the center of his luxurious den, eyeing Elvin Marclot and Louis Wilderton. The mayor and the district attorney both looked troubled; but with different reasons.

"Kirk Borman ought to be back soon," purred Ruthley, staring from a front window to study the lighted boulevard. "He's taken along all the men that he had posted here."

"Men we posted here?" queried Wilderton. "Why was that, Mr. Ruthley?"

"For the same reason that we should have had men at Judge Benbrook's," returned Ruthley. "Any honest man is in danger, living here in Westford. I requested guards; Borman gave them to me."

"He offered to guard Judge Benbrook's house," put in Marclot, taking Ruthley's cue. "But the judge wanted none."

"Director Borman should have insisted upon it," asserted Wilderton. "In spite of Judge Benbrook's protest."

"Do not blame the police for laxity," retorted Marclot. "If criminals were convicted in this town, we would have no need for the Flying Squadron!"

Wilderton winced at the reference to the inefficiency of the district attorney's office. Ruthley clapped the young prosecutor on the back, and smoothed his feelings with honeyed commendation.

"You have done well, Louis," asserted Ruthley. "Which reminds me. We must soon start to the meeting. If Judge Benbrook fails to arrive, we must do our utmost to preserve the fine spirit that he aroused. Unfortunately, his absence will bring adverse comment. He will no longer be acceptable as a candidate for district attorney's office."

"Too bad," remarked Marclot. "It cannot be helped, though. Many persons doubted that Judge Benbrook could stand the strain of reappearance in public life."

"We still have you, Louis," resumed Ruthley, addressing the district attorney. "You are the right man. Your support of Judge Benbrook won you many friends. We shall return to our original plan; your reelection."

Wilderton tried to look pleased, but he was too worried about the references to Judge Benbrook's absence. At last he decided that Ruthley was right. It would be impossible to depend upon the judge. Seeing Wilderton's change of expression, Ruthley strolled again to the window.

"Kirk is back!" he exclaimed. "I see his car outside. He must have returned while we were talking. I suppose the Flying Squadron is still out. I see a few of the precinct police on duty."

The appearance of bluecoats disturbed neither Ruthley nor Marclot. The apartment house was not in Lieutenant Maclare's precinct. As Ruthley stepped back from the window, the doorbell rang. Ruthley heard Haija in the hall. The boss stood waiting for Borman to appear.

Suddenly, Ruthley glowered; his glinting eyes denoted perplexity. Mayor Marclot looked in the same direction and gasped. Louis Wilderton came to his feet with a glad gasp.

Kirk Borman had entered, sober-faced and glum. With the police director was a man whom none expected. Borman's companion was Judge Martin Benbrook.

ERECT and firm of step. Judge Benbrook strode to the center of the room. While Ruthley and Marclot looked to Borman for an explanation, the judge drew a large envelope from his pocket. From it, he drew objects that made Stephen Ruthley gape.

"These are for you, Louis," stated the judge, to Wilderton. "You will recognize this, perhaps. It is a list of names that you gave to Stephen Ruthley. Turn it over, Louis."

Wilderton took the crumpled sheet of paper, turned it over and saw Woodstock's name and telephone number. Judge Benbrook commented dryly:

"Ask Ruthley if he recognizes his own handwriting."

A look of understanding dawned on Wilderton's owlish face. He blinked through his spectacles.

"What does this mean?" he exclaimed. "You called Woodstock, after I was here, Mr. Ruthley?"

Ruthley's glower had faded. The big-shot was smoother than ever.

"I do not recall that I ever called Adam Woodstock," he began. "In fact, I scarcely knew the man by sight."

"Yet you visited him that same night," remarked Judge Benbrook, coldly, "and left your signature upon the blotter on his desk. Along with Woodstock's own signature."

From the envelope, the judge took the telltale blotter. He gave it to Wilderton, who recognized both signatures despite their reversed form. Smiling, Ruthley purred his protest.

"Why should I have signed my name in Woodstock's presence?" he questioned. "On what sort of document would I have placed it?"

"At the bottom of Woodstock's statement," accused Judge Benbrook, in tone of firm denunciation. "The sheet from which you clipped your signature later; after you had bluffed Woodstock into signing the statement himself. Take this paper, Wilderton!" The judge unfolded a sheet and gave it to the district attorney. "It is Wilderton's own stationery; but this sheet is of proper length. Compare it with the clipped statement that you filed in your office files and –"

Stephen Ruthley interrupted with a harsh challenge. He had no more need for smooth procedure. Judge Benbrook was an enemy who had to be eliminated; so was Louis Wilderton, now that the prosecutor's eyes had been opened. Ruthley shot his hand to his hip; he carried a gun there and he intended murder, expecting the support of Elvin Marclot and Kirk Borman.

The mayor was too dumfounded to make a move; but Borman shot his hand to his own pocket, whipped out a revolver and covered Ruthley before the boss could pull his gun.

"THE game is up, Steve," croaked Borman, sourly. "You're wanted for the murder of Adam Woodstock. Marclot and I will have to tell all we know. Don't blame me for it. I'm not acting on my own."

Kirk Borman's words were suddenly explained. A burly man stepped into view from the hallway; he was in blue uniform; he carried a police revolver. The man was James Maclare; the grizzled police lieutenant wore a triumphant expression upon his weather-beaten face. He spoke to Borman; the police director lowered his gun and let Maclare take charge.

Behind Maclare came three policemen from his own precinct. He had brought them with him, and had left a squad outside. In that instant, Stephen Ruthley guessed the answer. The hand of The Shadow was behind this showdown. Ruthley needed no news of the battles that had finished thugs and mowed down the Flying Squadron. He was too concerned with his own Waterloo.

"The graft money is in the filing cabinet, Maclare," informed Borman through gritted teeth. "Millions of it! Ruthley bundled it all, in case we had to make a break from town. With the papers, too –"

"You double-crosser!" snarled Ruthley, "saving your own hide by squealing on the rest of us! I suppose The Shadow shoved you into this?"

Borman caught a glint in Ruthley's eye; one that he understood. The police director's hard lips formed a smile; he gave a nod to show that he was ready. Ruthley bawled a sudden order:

"All right, Lance!"

The picture on the wall ripped inward. Men from beyond cracked the fastening loose as they hit the frame with full force. Headlong into the room came Lance Gillick and Beezer Dorsch. With them, they brought full proof of Stephen Ruthley's guilt.

Though other evidence stood as circumstantial, the presence of Beezer Dorsch, known murderer, in Ruthley's own apartment was a fact that would stand in any court. It showed Ruthley's complicity in every crime that had happened in Westford. It marked him as the big-shot of the crime ring, beyond all denial.

IN that startling moment, however, no one thought of that important detail. Lance and Beezer were straightening, leveling revolvers that they knew how to use. Maclare and the three officers were wheeling toward them; intent on dealing with these enemies, they forgot Stephen Ruthley.

The big-shot whipped out his revolver; at the same moment, Kirk Borman rallied with him. Honesty did not appeal to the police director. Ruthley had guessed that fact; was counting upon Borman to side with him, using the gun that Maclare had allowed Borman to bring along on promise that he would side with the law.

The Shadow had arranged all this; through Judge Benbrook, he had approved of Borman's cooperation. The judge, dropping helplessly toward the wall, gained sudden fear that The Shadow's strategy had failed. Lance and Beezer, breaking past the picture of Aramis, had equaled the odds of crime against the law.

Then came the finish. Police guns ripped. Lance and Beezer never had a chance against them. Maclare and his bluecoats beat the two crooks to the shot; sprawled them with a deluge of bullets before they could recover from their hasty entry.

Judge Benbrook cried a warning. Ruthley and Borman were coming to a counterthrust. The advantage that the police had gained was lost. Borman was aiming for Maclare; the director had gained the bulge on the sturdy police officer.

Death for Maclare – and the others, for Ruthley was a close second with his gun. Such was the intent of crooks; but their purpose never carried. Before a single gun could bark within the room, an automatic spoke from the blackened doorway where the full-length portrait had been.

There stood The Shadow. He had entered by the passage, to watch Lance and Beezer. He had let them crash through; but he was close behind them. He had spared the two, so that the law could have them. His battle was with another pair. First, the double traitor, Kirk Borman.

The Shadow's first shot was aimed for Borman; a spurt of flame delivered a bullet that found the crook's heart. Borman sagged to the floor, his gun unfired.

Stephen Ruthley performed the move that The Shadow expected. He forgot Maclare; swung to deal with his arch-foe, The Shadow.

Two guns spoke at once. The Shadow, as he fired, wheeled away, beyond the edge of the doorway. He was on the move as he snapped the trigger. Ruthley's quick bullet shot inches wide. The master of crime never knew that his shot had missed.

For Ruthley had made no feint. Standing his ground, hoping to beat The Shadow's shot, he received what he had sought to deal. A withering bullet pierced the master crook's chest. Forward, with a long sprawl, Stephen Ruthley flattened to the floor.

THE handcuffs were on Mayor Elvin Marclot. His pompous pose gone, the last ace of the crime ring shivered as he eyed the bodies on the floor.

Lance Gillick, his evening clothes smeared with blood, lay sagged across the rough-clad form of Beezer Dorsch. Kirk Borman's face was rigid in death, scowling its last expression of treachery. Amid them lay Stephen Ruthley, his profile glaring along the tufted surface of an oriental rug.

Weakling of the lot, Elvin Marclot had survived, to do the task that The Shadow had offered Kirk Borman: to gain some leniency through a complete confession of all the crookedness in which he and others had aided

Stephen Ruthley.

While Lieutenant Maclare and his loyal men stood stern and motionless, Judge Benbrook turned to Louis Wilderton. Calmly, the gray-haired jurist reminded the district attorney that the meeting hour had arrived. It was time for them to depart this scene and carry the news of real reform to honest men who had been Stephen Ruthley's dupes.

The space in the wall was blank. The Shadow had not returned to it. From somewhere off in the depths of the adjoining vacant house came a weird, mirthless laugh that might have echoed from another sphere of space. The eerie tone faded, bringing silence.

That laugh was The Shadow's final triumph.

It marked the end of another life-risking battle against crime, and at the same time it presaged greater difficulties ahead. The Shadow, who escaped death a million times, was to face a new kind of death, and a new kind of crime, in *Death by Proxy*, matching his wits against the wits of a master villain, and stacking his two guns against the arms of dozens of hirelings. A strange menace hung over an ancient family home; death struck with uncanny regularity. Into this scene of fear and danger The Shadow must enter; here he must fight anew that justice would not be misled; that criminals get their deserved punishment – death, real death, not *Death by Proxy*.

THE END