

# **CRIME CIRCUS**

Maxwell Grant

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# CRIME CIRCUS

Maxwell Grant

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## CHAPTER I. THE SHADOW'S SEARCH

"SO Dombo Carlin is still in town, eh?"

The questioner was a stocky, swarthy-faced man. He was seated behind a battered desk in a small office. Detective Joe Cardona – at present an acting inspector – was quizzing a pasty-faced, rat-eyed little fellow who sat in front of him.

"Yeah. Dombo's in town." The little man whined the statement. "But don't let nobody wise that I told you, Joe. They'd croak me – honest they would."

"You're safe, Dowdy," growled Cardona, impatiently. "We pulled in fifty others like you with the dragnet. Nobody will know who talked. That is" – Cardona's gaze narrowed – "nobody will know anything if you tell me all you know."

"I'm tellin' you, Joe," pleaded "Dowdy" earnestly. "Honest, I am. I seen Dombo Carlin aroun' at a coupla of the joints. He was smart enough to dodge the net, that's all. He an' those three gorillas that are stickin' wid

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him."

"And you think we could grab him tonight?"

"Sure. But don't use the net. He's too wise for that, Joe. But don't ask me to go with you. I ain't no stoolie."

"You'll stay here" – Cardona eyed the little man steadily – "until after we've checked up on what you've told me. If you've been handing us a stall, Dowdy, it won't be good for you."

"I ain't been stallin', Joe –"

The rat-faced speaker stopped suddenly. He was staring at the detective across the battered desk, where the scratched woodwork showed the dull reflection of the ceiling light above. Into the sphere of light had come a shade of fleeting blackness. It was like the passage of a cloud in front of a brilliant sun.

Dowdy turned nervously. A man had entered the office.

TALL, stoop-shouldered, the intruder bore a dull face as pasty as Dowdy's own. The man was clad in old clothes. He was carrying a mop and bucket.

Dowdy stared; then turned back to Joe Cardona. The detective was chuckling.

"Who's that?" questioned Dowdy, in a hoarse tone. "What's he doin' here?"

"He's the regular janitor," returned Cardona. "Going his usual rounds." Then, to the stoop-shouldered arrival: "Hello, Fritz. Another one of your early nights, eh?"

"Yah."

Dowdy was watching as the janitor spoke. He observed the man's expressionless stare. He saw the fellow clank bucket on the floor and lift the mop to begin his scrubbing in the corner.

Fritz had moved from the central range of light. Yet his tall, stooped figure still caused a manifestation of his presence. Stretching across the floor beside the bucket was a long streak of blackness that ended in a hawkish silhouette. Dowdy failed to see the darkened splotch. He was studying the janitor's face.

"Don't mind Fritz," came Cardona's injunction. "All places are alike to him. He wouldn't know the difference between headquarters and the morgue. Would you, Fritz?"

"Yah."

The expressionless tone curbed Dowdy's qualms. The rat-faced product of the underworld turned toward Cardona. Eying the little man steadily, Cardona resumed his quiz.

"I'm going to get Dombo Carlin," announced the detective sternly. "I'm sending out thirty men to look for him and his gorillas. I'll be on the job myself. It's going to mean a lot of trouble, Dowdy. If the tip you've given me is phony –"

"It ain't phony, Joe," insisted Dowdy. "I tell you, I seen Dowdy an' I know he ain't worryin' about no dragnet."

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"I'm taking your word for it. But it sounds like a stall."

"Why?"

"Because Dombo Carlin is too wise a mug to stick around for no good reason."

"He's got a reason, Joe!"

"He has, eh?" Cardona's gaze narrowed. "So there's more than what you've already told me? I thought so. Come on, Dowdy. Spill it!"

"I don't want to make trouble for nobody," whined the rat-faced prisoner. "But I ain't tryin' to stall you, neither. I thought maybe you'd know why Dombo was stickin' aroun' town, Joe. He's after Beef Malligan."

"Beef Malligan?" Cardona laughed gruffly. "Say, Dowdy, what's this you're handing me now? Beef Malligan cleared town a month ago – or more – along with his pal, Croaker Zinn."

"Croaker got out, Joe, but Beef didn't. He's still here in town, hidin' out somewhere."

"What's he hiding out for? I'm not looking for him – or Croaker, either. I thought the two of them had dived for the sticks, along with those mugs that used to work with them before their bum racket busted."

"Croaker cleared out," explained Dowdy, "an' so did the muscle men. I don't know where they went, Joe. There ain't nobody in the know. But Beef stayed aroun' – alone."

"Why?"

"To send the gorillas along to Croaker. They've been sorta slidin' out one at a time. It looks like Beef has been hearin' from Croaker."

"And sending the old boys along the line, eh? Well, that doesn't bother me. The more that clear out, the better. But why is Beef keeping under cover?"

"So Dombo Carlin won't find him."

"I get you now, Dowdy," nodded Cardona. "Why didn't you spill this story in the first place? Let's see" – the detective paused thoughtfully – "first the racket goes haywire. Croaker Zinn leaves town. He finds some happy hunting ground and Beef Malligan stays here to steer the mobsters along to join Croaker."

"That's what it looks like, Joe."

"And all the while, Beef is hiding out. He's afraid of Dombo Carlin. Now we're looking for Dombo and his best bet is to take it on the lam. But he's sticking around a while hoping that he can take a shot at Beef."

"That's the dope, Joe."

CARDONA arose and paced across the floor. Dowdy eyed him with an anxious gaze. All the while, Fritz continued with his slow, methodical mopping.

"Do you think Dombo has located Beef?" queried Cardona, suddenly.

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"Yeah," responded Dowdy. "That's what he's stickin' aroun' for, ain't it?"

"It looks that way, according to your story. If your dope is correct, Dowdy, Dombo is likely to come out of some dive with three gorillas at his heels. He'll be starting on the war-path to get Beef Malligan."

The detective paused abruptly. He stalked to the door and shouted for Sergeant Markham. A burly detective arrived in response to his call.

"Take this fellow back to a cell," ordered Cardona, indicating Dowdy. "We're giving him another night's lodging."

"I'm gettin' out in the mornin', Joe?" pleaded Dowdy.

"Maybe," responded Cardona. "It will probably be healthier for you tomorrow, Dowdy."

"You mean –"

"That I'm following your tip. I'm leaving the joints alone. But if Dombo Carlin and his gunners start out to get Beef Malligan, they'll find a wrecking crew tagging them."

Cardona was chuckling at his own plan while Markham was leading Dowdy away. The clatter of a bucket handle reminded the acting inspector that he was not alone in the office. Cardona turned to see Fritz picking up the bucket. Mop in hand, the janitor headed toward the hall.

"Good night, Fritz," remarked Cardona.

"Yah." With his dull response, the janitor departed from view.

CARDONA thought no more of Fritz. Joe had important plans that now concerned him. The capture of Dombo Carlin was paramount.

The dragnet had failed to land the wanted crook and his three gorillas. Raids on underworld dives would probably prove fruitless. But to intercept Dombo and trail his crew while they were seeking Beef Malligan seemed a logical and effective course.

While Cardona was planning this procedure, Fritz was shambling along the dismal corridor. The janitor reached a secluded spot. He opened a locker, removed his overalls and placed them on a shelf.

Hands drew black cloth from the locker. Rising arms released a garment. The folds of an inky-hued cloak settled over stooped shoulders. Then a slouch hat topped the bowed head. The faint whisper of a laugh sounded by the locker.

A transformation had taken place. No longer was Fritz, the janitor, in view. In his place stood a tall, spectral being. Burning eyes blazed from beneath the hat brim.

Fritz had become The Shadow!

With gliding, noiseless tread the phantom figure moved from the locker. The whispered laugh was repeated as The Shadow made his way to a side exit. A blackened shape merged with the darkness of a street. From then on, The Shadow's course was untraceable.

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HALF an hour later, a stalwart man of chiseled countenance entered an obscure store near an East Side elevated. He stepped into a telephone booth and dialed a number. A voice came over the wire:

"Burbank speaking."

"Marsland," informed the chiseled-faced man.

"Report."

"No trace of Beef Malligan."

"Any signs of Dombo Carlin?"

"Yes. He's at the Black Ship."

"Instructions." Burbank's voice was a monotone. "Watch Dombo. He and his mob are after Beef. Learn if they have located him."

"Instructions received."

Leaving the store, the stalwart young man wended his way through the darkness of narrow streets that were walled with decadent buildings. Cliff Marsland, agent of The Shadow, was well acquainted with the underworld. Cliff had a rep among mobsters. It enabled him to keep tabs on new gang movements.

Yet until tonight, Cliff had gained no lead that might enable him to locate "Beef" Malligan. Cliff knew certain facts that Dowdy had reported to Joe Cardona, namely, that Beef was hiding out and that he was evidently sending gorillas to "Croaker" Zinn. But the news that Beef was evading "Dombo" Carlin was something that Cliff had learned for the first time.

Cliff reached the Black Ship. The place was a notorious dive. Cliff had left the joint earlier in the evening; his return excited no comment, for he was known in the place. There was nothing extraordinary in the fact that Cliff chose a table close by a corner where Dombo Carlin and three cronies were gathered.

Minutes passed while Cliff sat stolidly staring toward the wall. He could hear Dombo's growl; at times, he glanced sidewise to observe the man's ugly, unshaven countenance. Then came a query from a gorilla that brought Cliff to attention.

"Time we was leavin', ain't it, Dombo?"

"Not for a half hour yet," was the growled response. "It ain't far over to Clipper's."

"But we're goin' in the back –"

"Sure. That's where he is, ain't it? On the second floor? Keep your shirt on, mug. I'm running this."

"I get you, Dombo."

Cliff Marsland shoved away a bottle and glass. He arose and strolled from the Black Ship. "Clipper's," to Cliff, meant an old hotel near The Bowery. It was called the Hotel Santiago, but mobsters called the place "Clipper's" in honor of its hard-boiled proprietor.

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Cliff had never thought of the Santiago as a potential hide-out for Beef Malligan. The crumbling hotel was but one of many others in its vicinity. Dombo Carlin had not mentioned Beef Malligan's name, but Cliff, with Burbank's information, was sure that he knew whom Dombo sought.

It took Cliff seven minutes to reach a secluded telephone. In the quiet corner of a little cigar store, Cliff called Burbank. He passed the word to the contact man; then hung up and leaned against the wall in response to Burbank's order to wait for a reply.

Five minutes passed. Cliff lifted the telephone receiver a second after the bell began to ring. He spoke in monosyllables to acknowledge Burbank's instructions. Sauntering out into the night, Cliff headed in the direction of the Hotel Santiago.

The Shadow's search was ended. For two weeks, the black-garbed master had been keeping Cliff Marsland on duty to gain some trace of Beef Malligan's whereabouts. Through Dombo Carlin, Beef's hide-out had been learned.

Joe Cardona sought Dombo Carlin. Hence Joe would be in the game tonight, with detectives at his heels. But The Shadow's quest concerned Beef Malligan. The Shadow was depending upon Cliff Marsland as his lone aid.

Amid these different purposes, Dombo Carlin and his gorillas were out to get the man whom The Shadow sought. Plans and counterplans were in the making; and the Hotel Santiago was to be their focal point!

## CHAPTER II. THE SHADOW'S AGENT

HALF an hour had elapsed since Cliff Marsland's departure from the Black Ship. During that interval, nothing had occurred to disturb the quiet that surrounded the old Hotel Santiago.

Situated on a side street, half a block from The Bowery, the old brick-walled hotel stood away from the rumble of traffic and the clatter of the elevated. Staring from its plate glass window was Clipper, the hard-boiled proprietor.

Though riff-raff formed the patrons of the Hotel Santiago, the challenging proprietor was strict regarding guests. Clipper knew many mobsters by sight. If they were wanted by the law, they were not welcome in his hotel. Clipper had no yen for police visits.

It was because of this policy that Beef Malligan had chosen the Santiago as his place of residence. Seated in a tawdry upstairs room, Beef was smoking a cigarette while he read the contents of a letter. Thick-lipped and ugly-faced, Beef leered with satisfaction.

Beef was not wanted by the police; nor were the gorillas who had previously formed his racketeering crew. Hence Beef enjoyed security and had the privilege of receiving the visitors whom he desired.

Those whom Beef did not want to see – specifically, Dombo Carlin and his crew – were in wrong with the law. Hence Clipper, with no welcome for Dombo and his ilk, was unwittingly serving as a sentinel in behalf of Beef Malligan.

Beef Malligan knew of the rear entrance to the Hotel Santiago. He had, however, given it but little thought. Confident that no one had breathed the news of his whereabouts, Beef felt quite free from intrusion.



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In fact, he saw no reason to lower the torn shade that was rolled above the only window in his room. The window opened on a low roof at the side of the building, and Beef was convinced that no prying eyes would appear from that direction.

Blackness alone greeted Beef's gaze as the thick-lipped ruffian happened to glance toward the window. Rising from his chair, Beef tore up the letter that he had been reading. He applied a match to the fragments and crumpled the ashes after the flame had died. He turned to let the charred remnants fall into a lop-sided wastebasket.

It was then that eyes appeared where blackness had been. Blazing orbs flashed from the darkness beyond the opened window. Vaguely, the outline of blackness upon blackness manifested itself in the form of a sinister shape that Beef Malligan did not see as he swung past the window.

The Shadow, like a specter of the night, was looking in upon Beef's hideout.

EYES vanished as Beef made a turn toward the window. The ex-racketeer saw nothing there but blackness. Then his stare turned suddenly toward the door. The sound of a muffled footstep caused Beef to become suddenly alert.

Beef had left the barrier unlocked. Impelled by instinctive nervousness, he stepped forward to turn the key. He was too late. The door swung open as he reached the center of the room.

A sour twist showed on Beef's thick lips. With Beef's expression came a snarl from the door. A heavy, unshaven intruder shouldered his way into the light. Beef Malligan was face to face with the man who sought his life: Dombo Carlin.

"So this is your hide-out, eh?" growled Dombo. "Figured I wouldn't get by Clipper, did you? Well – you figured wrong."

Beef had no reply. He could see other men beyond the doorway. He knew that his enemy was backed by a squad of gorillas.

"Guess you thought I'd taken it on the lam," sneered Dombo. "Well – that's just what I'm going to do – after I finish with you, mug. Maybe I'll run into that side-kick of yours, Croaker Zinn. If I do, I'll hand him the same dose that I'm giving you right now."

"Lay off, Dombo," pleaded Beef, in a hunted tone. "I ain't doin' nothin' to queer your game."

"You're right, you ain't," rasped Domino. "You did enough – you and Croaker – when you muscled in on my racket, six months ago."

"The racket went sour, Dombo. It wasn't no good to any of us."

"Yeh? Says you? I thought it was good enough. When you guys queered it for me, I had to go into the stick-up game. That's why the bulls are on my trail. That's why I've got to head for Chi – but I'm squaring with you before I start."

"That won't do you no good, Dombo," Beef continued though pleading seemed useless. "If you put me on the spot, the bulls will have somethin' new on you."

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"Huh?" Dombo snorted. "Listen, bimbo, you won't be the first mug that got the works from me. The bulls didn't wise up the last two times. They won't wise this time. Three is my lucky number."

Beef stared as he saw Dombo coolly raise his gun to a steady level. For the first time, he had learned that Dombo was a murderer. Quaking, Beef eyed the muzzle of the .38. He saw an eager finger resting on the trigger. He stared into Dombo's sullen, evil eyes. To his amazement, Beef saw those optics bulge with sudden alarm.

Dombo Carlin was staring past his victim. A chance shift of gaze had enabled him to see the figure that Beef had not observed. Beyond the opened window, Dombo caught the glare of burning eyes; he saw the outline of a sinister shape that commanded recognition.

The Shadow!

LIKE other hardened rogues of scumland, Dombo knew the menace of The Shadow. He had heard gasped utterances of rats who had tried to combat this superfighter. He had listened to coughed stories from dying lips – tales of an avenger clad in black who had struck down those who deserved to die.

With a snarl from his ugly lips, Dombo Carlin raised his gun. His aim was shifting from Beef Malligan to that figure at the window. Dombo's finger yanked the trigger. The .38 crackled its prompt message. A bullet, whistling past Beef's ear, found its resting place deep in the battered woodwork of the window frame.

Dombo's shot had come from a moving gun. The crook had fired before the muzzle was squarely toward the window. With a quick snap of his recoiling wrist, Dombo sought to despatch another bullet, less than a second after he had delivered that first wide shot.

The action was too late. The Shadow, dealing in split seconds, sent his answer within the brief interval. An automatic roared from the darkness of the window. Dombo faltered. His revolver fell from his hand. His convulsive finger snapped at emptiness. No trigger remained for it to pull.

Three gorillas were springing in to their leader's aid. While Dombo Carlin staggered, half slipping toward the floor, flashing revolvers showed in the hands of ugly-faced mobsmen who had seen The Shadow at the window.

Revolvers barked quick, wild shots. Like Dombo, these minions were shooting while they aimed. But The Shadow's response was perfect in both timing and precision. The staccato bursts of his automatics sounded a knell to evil foemen.

One mobster staggered back toward the door. A second slumped to the floor. The third was marked for doom when Beef Malligan, leaping desperately forward, locked in conflict and tried to wrench the gorilla's revolver from his grasp.

An arm swung. Beef rolled away as the gun glanced from his head. Dropping behind Beef's slumping form, the gorilla snarled an oath as he aimed for The Shadow.

An automatic spoke from the window. The gorilla sprawled to the floor. In aiming, he had peered from beside Beef Malligan's shoulder. He had received The Shadow's bullet through his brain.

The first mobster, wounded in the left shoulder, had jumped for the hall under cover of the struggle between Beef and the third gorilla. Out of The Shadow's range, this mobster raised his gun to fire at the stairs, where a newcomer had put in a sudden appearance.

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It was Cliff Marsland, armed with an automatic. Cliff's arm came up with the speed of the gorilla's. Revolver and automatic echoed simultaneously.

Either because of haste, or weakened by the wound that he had received from The Shadow, the gorilla fired wide. Cliff's shot, however, was well placed. The last of Dombo Carlin's crew rolled on the floor.

Cliff reached the door of Beef's room. He saw Dombo Carlin and two gorillas lying motionless. Beef Malligan, on hands and knees, was trying to rise from the floor. He was groggy from the blow that he had received.

Then came the blare of a whistle. Shouts from outside. Pounding squads at the rear door of the old hotel. Cliff knew the answer. Police, trailing Dombo Carlin and his crew, had heard the gunfire. Bluecoats and detectives were already on the stairs.

A HISS came from the window. Cliff stared. He saw the figure of The Shadow. A pointing finger, projecting into the room, was directed at Beef Malligan's form. With a nod, Cliff grabbed the ex-racketeer under the arms and hoisted Beef's body up to the window.

The Shadow gripped the burden. With a quick sweep, he whipped Beef's body through to the darkness of the roof. Cliff scrambled after. He could see The Shadow's shape, silhouetted against a dull glow from the front street. Across the blackened shoulders was the form of Beef Malligan. The Shadow was carrying Beef like a bag of hay.

Following, Cliff reached an opened window in an old house at the other side of the low roof. He dived through the opening. The window sash came down with a dull thud. The Shadow's hand drew Cliff away from the window.

The action was timely. Already, police had reached Beef's room in the Hotel Santiago. Flashlights were sending sweeping gleams across the roof. A glare focused through the window of the old house and made a luminous circle on the further wall; but it revealed none of those who had arrived there. The beam moved away.

"Come."

In response to The Shadow's whisper, Cliff groped his way through a door and down a flight of stairs. A door swished open; Cliff found himself stumbling across the cracked cement of an abandoned court; then through the door of another old dwelling.

Another path through darkness. Then came a hand that stopped Cliff. The Shadow's agent heard Beef Malligan slump groaning to the floor.

"A coupe in the alley." The Shadow's whisper was close to Cliff's ear. "Take him to your place. Await instructions while you talk to him."

"Order received," responded Cliff, in a low tone.

A slight swish as The Shadow moved away. Groping, Cliff found a door. He threw his arm around Beef's body. As he raised the ex-racketeer, he heard Beef grumble incoherently. Then, with Beef stumbling beside him, Cliff moved through the door into the quiet of a little alleyway.

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The coupe was standing beside the door. With an effort, Cliff hoisted Beef into the seat. He slammed the door of the car, hurried around, and gained the wheel. The motor purred as Cliff pressed the starter. The car moved forward and shot out into the traffic of The Bowery.

"Hey, you –"

Cliff jammed the accelerator as he heard the call. A police whistle blared two seconds later. But Cliff had already picked his spot. Negotiating a swift left turn, he cut across the path of a looming truck and sped to safety as the driver jammed his air-brakes.

It was a quick get-away and Cliff followed it with a tortuous course that he knew would baffle any pursuers. He turned corners, doubled on his course and threaded a speedy way among the East Side streets that he knew so well.

At last he reached the quiet of an isolated street and brought the coupe to a stop. He nudged Beef Malligan.

"Who – who are you?" blurted the racketeer, rubbing his head.

"Never mind," responded Cliff. "You'll be safe if you come along."

He shoved Beef from the coupe, grabbed the man before he fell and dragged him through a secluded stairway; then up a flight of stairs to a room on the second floor. This was Cliff's lodging in the underworld.

Beef slumped in a chair as Cliff guided him to it, but when Cliff turned on the light, Beef seemed very much alive. He stared at the man who had brought him here. His eyes widened with recognition.

"Cliff Marsland!" he exclaimed.

"The same," responded Cliff, calmly.

"Say" – a gleam showed on Beef's face – "you're the bird that plugged Dombo Carlin. Ain't you?"

Cliff nodded. He was standing by the door. Beyond Beef, who was facing the door, was a window that led to a low roof above a rear porch.

"He was goin' to croak me, Dombo was," announced Beef. "Only you come in an' handed him curtains. Him an' his mob. Say, Cliff – you're a regular."

"Never mind the thanks, Beef. I had it in for that false alarm. I wasn't going to see him hand you a final ticket. Getting Dombo wasn't the tough part, though. I had more trouble pulling you out before the bulls arrived."

"Say" – Beef's expression showed alarm – "do you think they trailed us?"

"Not much chance. But Joe Cardona was with them. I heard his voice. He'll be looking for me."

"Why for you?"

"Because I came through the front." Cliff made this statement so emphatic that Beef nodded in belief.

"Clipper saw me. That was while Dombo and his gang were coming through the back."

"That don't matter, Cliff. We can use this joint as a hide-out, can't we?"

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"You can, Beef. You were hiding out at the Santiago anyway, weren't you?"

"Yeah."

"Well, keep this place then. You'll be safe here. But two of us – well, that would be taking too big a chance. I'd rather scram, Beef. New York's getting too hot for me anyway."

Beef rubbed his bruised head. He smiled. He preferred to hide out alone; the offer was to his liking. He saw a double advantage in acquiring this unexpected friend.

"Listen, Cliff" – Beef's tone was inquiring – "where do you figure on heading?"

"No place in particular," responded Cliff. "Just out of New York, that's all."

"Croaker Zinn knows you, don't he?"

"He ought to. I saw him at a lot of places while you and he were working together."

"That makes it jake. Have you got any dough, Cliff?"

"Enough to clear town."

"Great. How would you like somethin' soft at the end of your trip?"

"I wouldn't mind it. What's the lay?"

BEEF MALLIGAN motioned to a chair by the door. Cliff Marsland sat down to listen. Beef leaned forward and spoke in a confiding tone.

"I'm stickin' here, Cliff," he explained. "because I'm still workin' with Croaker. He's in on the best racket you ever heard of. I've been diggin' up the old mob, one by one, an' sending 'em along to Croaker. He needs some good torpedoes, see?"

"I get you, Beef."

"I was waitin' for a guy to show up tonight. I won't see him on account of what happened. So the job's yours if you want it."

Beef dug in his pocket and pulled out a small envelope. He handed it to Cliff, who opened it. Cliff stared as he pulled out slips of paper.

"What are these?" he questioned.

"Passes to a circus," returned Beef with a grin. "That is, one of 'em is a pass to the circus; the others will take you in to the other shows."

"Larch Circus and Greater Shows," read Cliff, as he looked at the slips of paper. "Pass one. This one is signed by Tex Larch – here's one with the signature Captain Guffy –"

"The circus is playin' at a town called Marlborough," broke in Beef. "That's where you go, Cliff."

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"And what do I do there?"

"Use those passes."

"Is that all?"

"No. Somewhere along the line, you will hear somebody say the word 'Ceylon'. That's your tip-off. You ask that person: 'Where is Ceylon?' – an' then you'll get told what to do next."

"Have you gone screwy, Beef? Let's see where that gorilla slugged you."

"Listen Cliff" – Beef's tone was impatient – "this is on the level. Maybe it sounds screwy, but it ain't. I'm lettin' you in on a racket that's got a load of gravy. I've sent plenty of the real guys along to get in on it. This is your chance. I ain't forgettin' that you took me off the spot tonight."

Cliff Marsland stared toward his ugly-faced companion. But his gaze saw more than Beef's thick-lipped countenance. Beyond the racketeer, framed in the opened window, was a shrouded figure of blackness. The Shadow had followed. The Shadow had heard.

A gloved hand projected into the room; instead of pointing, it moved up and down. The action symbolized a nod. Cliff Marsland rose to his feet and thrust the envelope into his pocket.

"All right, Beef," he declared firmly. "You're on. It sounds like a good lay – even though I don't know the details. I'm taking it."

"You're wise, Cliff. I'm tellin' you, it's real."

"Keep this hide-out. I'm beating it. The sooner I get started, the better – before Joe Cardona gets on my trail."

Cliff thrust out a hand. Beef shook it. The Shadow's agent turned and opened the door. He closed the barrier behind him and descended to the street.

CLIFF was wearing a smile as he reached the coupe. He had no fear of Detective Joe Cardona. His pretence had been for the purpose of gaining the very result that he had attained.

Following The Shadow's lead, Cliff Marsland had learned facts that he had previously known only as rumors; namely, that Beef Malligan was shipping gunmen on to Croaker Zinn.

More than that, Cliff had carved his way into the select outfit. He had taken credit for The Shadow's work. He had passed himself as Beef Malligan's rescuer. He had received his reward.

A secret agent of The Shadow, Cliff Marsland was on his way to learn the inside working of hidden crime. As The Shadow's emissary, Cliff would send back word of the game which concerned the notorious Croaker Zinn.

Cliff Marsland had received the order of The Shadow! While Beef Malligan remained secure in the hide-out which Cliff had offered him, The Shadow's agent would be at work uncovering crime instead of abetting it.

Such was the work of The Shadow's agent. Behind it lay the strategy of The Shadow himself!

## CHAPTER III. ON THE LOT

"THIS way to the big show! Buy your tickets to the big show! Only five minutes before the show starts!"

The barker's cry rose strident above a medley of sounds. The mechanical music of a carousel; the puffing motor of the Ferris wheel; the wheezy tones of a calliope – all became a background to the call.

People were moving along the "midway" that formed an avenue to the big tent. The circus was the magnet that was drawing the crowd at present. The other shows, housed in smaller tents, were quiet while the barker sought to bring the throngs into the big top.

The Larch Circus and Greater Shows formed the chief attraction in the town of Marlborough. Yet of the many people who had been drawn, mothlike, by the attraction of the lights, few were actually buying tickets. Most were idlers who had merely come to look on. The actual customers formed a mere trickle past the ticket booths.

Back near the entrance to the circus grounds, two men were alighting from a large sedan that was parked behind a fringe of tents. One was a gray-haired individual, whose face showed a stern dignity. The other was a stubby, silent fellow who wore a chauffeur's cap. Both were looking toward the circus tent.

"Come along, Lennox," ordered the gray-haired man. "Be sure to lock the car first."

"Yes, sir."

The chauffeur performed the action; then jaunted to catch up with the gray-haired man, who was choosing a course behind the nearest tents.

"There's the office car," remarked the older man, as the chauffeur caught up with him. "See it?"

He pointed between two tents. Lennox nodded.

"A little further on," said the gray-haired man, "and I can cut through to go directly there. I don't want to be too conspicuous."

"Of course not, Mr. Wilbart."

"This is the best time to come," added Wilbart. "Every one is inside, or busy, so there is less chance of talk. I don't care to have all the people with this show telling that Jonathan Wilbart came to hold another conference with Tex Larch."

"I understand, sir."

"They might think that I was overanxious to buy this show, Lennox," added Wilbart, pausing as he stepped between two small, darkened tents. "Well – I'll buy it on my own terms, or not at all. It's a tawdry outfit, Lennox. It does not compare with the smallest circus in my chain. What do you think, Lennox?"

"I agree with you, Mr. Wilbart."

"You always do, Lennox," chuckled Wilbart. "Well – look around the midway until I come back. The ballyhoo will begin on the smaller shows after the circus gets started in the big top."

## CRIME CIRCUS

STROLLING out into the midway, the gray-haired man shouldered his way past clustered idlers and crossed to a spot where a light truck was parked between two tents.

Attached to the truck was a trailer that looked like a small, shortened bus. This car had a rear door marked "Office." Two steps led up to the entrance.

Reaching his objective, Jonathan Wilbart ascended the steps and opened the door. The interior of the car formed a larger room than one would have expected from a view of the exterior. It was furnished with seats attached to the wall; at the front end were two desks also fixed in position, beyond them a small, curtained window.

A broad-shouldered man was seated at one of the desks. He heard the door close as Wilbart entered. He swung around and showed a thick-jawed countenance, with pudgy nose and quick eyes.

"Hello, Mr. Wilbart!" he exclaimed.

"Hello, Stuffy," rejoined Wilbart, advancing to receive the man's handshake. "Where's Tex Larch?"

"In New York," responded "Stuffy."

"Again?" Wilbart's tone seemed incredulous. "It seems as though I never manage to find him with the show. Let me see – he was in New York the last two times I came to talk with him."

"He isn't exactly in New York tonight," corrected Stuffy. "He's on his way here, Mr. Wilbart. Might be in at any time. If you want to wait here –"

"I'll stay a while," interposed Wilbart. "What are you doing, Stuffy? Running things while Tex is away?"

"Kind of," replied Stuffy. "It ain't exactly my regular job, but I'm sort of a head handy man with the outfit. Here you are."

He reached in his pocket and pulled out some printed cards. He handed one to Wilbart, who had seated himself. The visitor smiled and nodded as he read it:

STUFFY DOWSON

General Agent

LARCH CIRCUS GREATER SHOWS

"Everybody knows me as Stuffy," remarked the general agent. "Wouldn't do to have put my real moniker on a card. Everybody in the show business would have thought it was someone else. They've called me Stuffy ever since I was a punk."

"I envy your past, Stuffy," commented Wilbart. "I came into the circus business as an owner – only a few years back – and I am scarcely used to the smell of sawdust. The real way to learn a business is to grow up with it; not to buy into it."

"Maybe so, Mr. Wilbart," returned Stuffy, as he stepped toward the door of the office. "But I notice that some of the old timers in the game are finding the sledding tough, while your shows are bringing in the dough. It looks to me like the fellow that knows business better than he does a circus is the best guy to run a circus



## CRIME CIRCUS

business."

With this statement, Stuffy opened the door and stepped toward the ground. He motioned to the visitor to remain in the office.

"I'll be back in ten minutes," informed Stuffy. "Just going out to pass the word to the shows. They can start their 'bally' now that the big top is working."

STUFFY closed the door as he reached the ground. The show had started in the circus tent; only a few late customers were passing through the turnstiles.

A big, glowering man was standing on the platform in front of the side show, ready to start a ballyhoo. Others were waiting expectantly in high ticket booths outside of other tents.

Stuffy started for the midway. He stopped as a rangy man blocked his path.

"Where are you going, Stuffy?"

"Hello, Tex." Stuffy stopped as he recognized his chief. It was "Tex" Larch, back from New York. "Say – don't go in the office for a minute. I want to tell you something."

Tex stared from beneath the broad brim of a felt sombrero. His gaze was quizzical. Cold gray eyes flashed from a weather-beaten countenance.

"Wait 'til I start the talkers, Tex," pleaded Stuffy. "They're sitting tight until I flash the word for the bally."

With these words, Stuffy hurried out to the midway and waved his arms toward the man on the platform in front of the sideshow. Immediately, the big fellow began a sonorous spiel, while idlers gathered to form a crowd. Other talkers followed along the line. The midway became a babble of barkers.

"Cap Guffy was waiting like a hawk," chuckled Stuffy, as he rejoined Tex. "Did you see him there, outside the Ten-in-One? Say – he can't wait for the show to start in the big top. I never saw a guy like him –"

"All right, Stuffy," interrupted Tex, standing with a suitcase in his hand. "Forget about Cap Guffy. What's the matter in the office? Some rube sheriff putting up a squawk? I paid a fixer to square things in this town –"

"The sheriff ain't in there, Tex." It was Stuffy's turn to interrupt. "Everything's jake. Wheels running like clockwork along the midway."

"Well who's in there then?"

"Jonathan Wilbart. That's who."

TEX'S stare became a glower. It was plain that he was not pleased by the information. Stuffy watched a grim twist appear on the circus owner's lips.

"I told him you was in New York," began the general agent. "Then I said you'd be back tonight. Wilbart said he'd wait."

"You're a fine palooka," sneered Tex. "I told you to keep your mouth shut about where I'd gone."

## CRIME CIRCUS

"I ain't told anybody on the lot, Tex. But I thought you wouldn't mind Wilbart knowing –"

"Wilbart! He's the biggest heel in the business. He don't belong in the show game. I missed him the last two times he was here. But there's no chance to dodge him this trip. What does he want? Trying to buy my show again?"

"He didn't say."

"That's what he's after. He's a fox, that guy is. It's just like him to blow in while playing a bloomer. That's the first thing he'll talk about – the bum business that this show is doing."

Stuffy waited while his boss stared speculatively toward the door of the office. Then Tex Larch shrugged his shoulders and handed his suitcase to the handy man.

"Lug this kiester over to my tent, Stuffy," ordered Tex. "I'm going in to see what Wilbart wants."

Stuffy nodded as he took the suitcase. He headed off among the tents while Tex ascended the steps and pushed back the door of the wheeled office.

The fragrance of expensive tobacco brought a sniff from Tex. Wilbart, seated at the side of the office car, looked up to see the owner of the Larch Circus.

"Hello, Tex," greeted the visitor, dryly. "I've been waiting to see you. Stuffy told me you would be in from New York."

"Stuffy's a good talker," returned Tex, removing his big hat and tossing it on one of the desks. "Maybe I ought to use him on a bally platform."

Wilbart smiled at the suggestion that Stuffy had talked too much. He watched Tex go to a desk and look over mail that was lying there. He waited for some remark. None came; so Wilbart made one of his own.

"How is business this week?" he questioned.

"Take a look for yourself," rejoined Tex. "The door slides to the right. You can see the whole midway."

"I mean business in the big top."

"I don't know. I just got in from New York. Maybe you can figure it better than I can; you were here while the crowd was going into the big top, weren't you?"

Wilbart smiled but made no comment. Tex turned from the desk and faced his visitor. Wilbart returned his stare.

The two men formed a contrast as their eyes exchanged a steady gaze. Tex Larch looked the part of an outdoor showman. His face, toil-worn and deep-lined, seemed to tell the story of a rigorous career. Jonathan Wilbart, dignified even to his mode of puffing his cigar, gave the impression of a successful business magnate.

It was Tex who broke the silence. He studied his visitor coldly; and his eyes flashed with an iron glint as he spoke:

## CRIME CIRCUS

"The show's not for sale, Wilbart."

THE visitor chuckled. He seemed to enjoy the blunt manner in which the circus owner had come directly to the subject. Wilbart pulled a cigar from his pocket and offered it to Tex. The circus owner grunted; then accepted the perfecto and bit off the end of the cigar.

"I want to buy your show, Tex," stated Wilbart, quietly. "I know that you don't want to sell. You told me that before. But people have the privilege of changing their minds, even when they are in the circus business."

"Change yours then."

"I own five shows, Tex. I can use yours. You should be glad to receive an offer, with the poor business that you are doing."

"The show's doing all right."

"You are exaggerating, Tex."

"Maybe you've been checking up. All right, Wilbart, have it your own way. We've had some bloomers on this tour. A lot of them. This week is a bloomer. But there's some red ones coming."

"I wish you luck, Tex. It's preferable to make money on the lot than to run into New York looking for new angels."

Tex scowled. The remark had hit home. Wilbart had made the logical assumption regarding his trip to New York. Several seconds passed before he countered:

"So you think I'm on the rocks, eh? This show looks like a bum bet, does it? Well, if that's the way it is, why do you want to buy the outfit? You've got five shows of your own. Why look for another headache?"

"The headache is yours, Tex," remarked Wilbart. "I am trying to ease it for you. I do not intend to keep this show running after I buy it."

"You want to scrap it, eh?"

"Precisely. You only own the circus. The other shows are independent, although they are presumably under your management. I can absorb your equipment into my own shows."

"What about the star attractions?"

"You've hit it, Tex," smiled Wilbart. "They are what I am after. I want the two main acts. To obtain them, I am willing to buy the entire show."

"I thought so." Tex chewed savagely at the end of his cigar. "You won't be satisfied, Wilbart, until you've crowded all the real showmen out of the circus business. There were a lot of good small shows working until you came into the game with your idea of a new combine."

"There were small shows starving," commented Wilbart. "I took them over and put them on a paying basis. Acts like Eric Wernoff and Lucille Lavan would bring money to one of my shows. But they aren't drawing for you."

## CRIME CIRCUS

"I admitted that this week is a bloomer."

"My shows stay away from towns like Marlborough."

"Why waste time, Wilbart?" questioned Tex, in a challenging tone. "Eric Wernoff, the Animal King, stays with the Larch Circus. So does Lucille Lavan, Queen of the High Wire. That's final!"

"Even if you have to go to New York," smirked Wilbart, "when you need money to move the show."

"So that's what you think, eh?" demanded Tex, suddenly. "Well, take another guess. I'm raising dough – you're right about that – but the reason is that I'm expanding. I've got this outfit motorized. That was my first step. My next is to buy Cap Guffy's Ten-in-One and some of the other shows on the midway. The Larch Circus and Greater Shows will be all one by the end of this season!"

Jonathan Wilbart rose, smiling quietly. It was plain that he did not believe Tex Larch's statement. He made no comment, however, to indicate that disbelief.

"I shall visit you again, Larch," he remarked. "I think that you may decide to change your mind. Particularly" – Wilbart's smile broadened – "after your show arrives in Hamilcar. That town is the worst bloomer on the map. You will have to dig deep in the savings fund – if you have one – to move out of Hamilcar."

TEX LARCH stood glowering while his visitor stepped from the office. Jonathan Wilbart closed the door behind him; still smiling, he strolled across the midway. Lennox joined him near a small tent. The chauffeur followed his master toward the car.

"Any luck, sir?" inquired Lennox.

"No," responded Wilbart. "Tex Larch refuses to sell. Evidently he has found an angel in New York."

"He was in New York the last two times we were here, sir."

"I know it." Wilbart smiled. "Well, he may have to make some more trips there before he is finished. How did business look, Lennox?"

"Very poor at the big top, sir."

"Did you watch the turnstiles closely?"

"Yes, sir. There were plenty of 'shills' going through. But they didn't bring many followers."

The two men reached the parked sedan. Lennox unlocked the car and Jonathan Wilbart entered. Then Lennox took the wheel and the sedan pulled away.

Wilbart looked toward the rear seat; his gaze followed through the back window for a last glimpse of brilliant circus grounds.

"I would like to know the game that Tex Larch is playing," was the magnate's final comment to Lennox. "That show of his is not breaking even. There is something in back of his persistent refusals to sell."

The car turned a curve in the road. The lights disappeared from view. Jonathan Wilbart settled in his seat with a grunt that Lennox understood. The utterance was more than an expression of disappointment. It was an

indication of future action.

Lennox knew the persistence of his employer. The chauffeur was convinced that his purpose would not end. Sooner or later – Lennox was positive – the Larch Circus and Greater Shows would be under the banner of Jonathan Wilbart's combine.

## CHAPTER IV. THE PASSWORD

WHILE Jonathan Wilbart was taking a last glimpse of the circus which he hoped to buy, another man was gaining his first view of the Larch Circus and Greater Shows. This was Cliff Marsland, newly arrived in the town of Marlborough. The Shadow's agent was passing beneath the canvas arch that marked the entrance to the midway.

Hands in coat pockets, Cliff was thumbing the paper slips that Beef Malligan had given him. Cliff had reached Marlborough later than he expected. He knew that it was too late to see the circus. The passes to the smaller shows could be used tonight, however.

"Step in folks! See the strangest freak in captivity! Jubo, the wild man from Java! Jubo, with his friends the reptiles! One dime, folks! Ten cents!"

Cliff stopped beside a small tent where the barker was ensconced in a high ticket booth. A light showed through the canvas; long, raucous growls were coming from within. Curious passers were idling by the entrance; ticket sales, however, were lacking.

"Jubo the wild man! Jubo and his hideous reptiles!" The blatant cry persisted from the ticket booth. "See Jubo, folks. He plays with snakes! He talks with snakes! He lives with snakes!"

Two men were standing close by Cliff. They looked like circus roughnecks. Listening Cliff overheard their muttered conversation.

"Are you goin' to shill for Jubo the Geek?" questioned one.

"Yeah," responded the other.

"Let's start in," suggested the first.

"Wait a couple of minutes," rejoined the second. "Give the talker a chance to get 'em started."

"That guy? Say – he's the cheesiest talker on the lot an' that's sayin' plenty. If we don't shill pretty quick, there won't be nobody left to follow us."

"You don't need a good talker on a geek show. See 'em gatherin' around? Those hicks are listenin' to the squawker. It'll draw 'em."

Cliff decided that the 'squawker' must be the device that was producing the fierce, prolonged growls from within the tent. His conjecture was proven by the next statements that he overheard.

"They keep on fallin' for the squawker," laughed one of the roughnecks. "It's a great gimmick. A guy sittin' out of sight at the front of the pit, pullin' on a tarred rope hitched to a keg. You wouldn't think it would make them heavy growls, would you?"

## CRIME CIRCUS

"Who's runnin' the squawker here in the geek show?"

"Some punk that was hangin' around the lot. The talker slipped the kid four bits for the evenin'."

"He'll be lucky if he takes that much in at the gate. C'mon. Let's shill."

THE roughnecks started for the ticket booth. Cliff pulled his passes from his pocket and found one that was marked 'Jubo.' He followed the other two men and stopped while they reached their hands up to the counter to make a pretence of paying a dime.

"Shill," Cliff heard them say. The ticket seller nodded and motioned toward the tent. He resumed his talking to the crowd as Cliff approached and delivered the pass.

The growl of the squawker became louder as Cliff entered the little tent. As the roughnecks had remarked, it came from the front of a pit. The rope-puller was hidden from view by canvas curtains. The pit was also surrounded by old, grayish canvas. Cliff leaned on a wooden rail to survey its occupants.

Jubo the Geek, as the roughnecks had termed him, was seated on a torn canvas that lay on the ground. He was a wild-looking monstrosity, clad in black tights. His face and hands were a deep brown; Cliff fancied that it was stain, not a natural color.

A mop of crinkly hair showed on the wild man's head. His eyes stared vacantly at the handful of people who watched him and his lips kept spreading to display an idiotic grin. Half a dozen snakes were squirming lazily about the pit. Cliff recognized them as large, but harmless "bull" snakes.

The geek, in the midst of his facial contortions, broke suddenly into an apish chatter and pounced upon one of the reptiles. The snake's wriggling indicated that it was anxious to get away from its captor.

Jubo babbled as he twisted the snake about his arms and neck; then, like a child tired of a toy, he threw the reptile to the ground and leaped to grab another of his squirming pets.

Cliff watched the inane proceedings for five minutes. A few customers had filed into the tent; it was plain that Jubo the Geek intended to do no talking other than his inarticulate gibberish. Cliff strolled from the tent.

A ballyhoo was ending at the big sideshow. Cliff joined the throng, just as a cortege of freaks stepped from the platform and went back into the tent. Over the entrance, Cliff saw the statement:

CAPTAIN GUFFY'S

TEN SHOWS IN ONE

A lumbering man was still standing on the platform; his yachtsman's cap indicated that he must be Captain Guffy. Guffy appeared to be the talker as well as the manager, for he was winding up a fervent spiel that referred to the collection of human curios inside the tent.

THE crowd was pressing close. Captain Guffy gave a sweeping gesture. Two ticket sellers took up his cry from their booths. Cliff saw the men who had shilled at Jubo's show as they went up and pretended to buy the first tickets.

They were followed by others – also shills – and the regular customers began a march as Captain Guffy stepped impressively from the platform.

## CRIME CIRCUS

Cliff pulled out a pass marked 'Circus Sideshow.' He delivered it to a ticket seller and moved inward with the throng. He decided that Captain Guffy's ballyhoo must have been a good one, for this show was drawing in a crowd.

The interior of the Ten-in-One was divided lengthwise by a wooden rail. Beyond the barrier were the freaks, all but their heads obscured from view by canvas that hung from the railing. Captain Guffy was approaching one end of the tent; the crowd was following. Gawky customers thronged about as the manager began his lecture.

Baby Liz was the first freak. Guffy described her as the "fattest of all fat women" and went into particulars regarding her age and weight. Baby Liz smiled complacently from above a triple chin and nodded in response to Guffy's statements.

When the 'Captain' moved along to the next platform, Baby Liz began to talk in a high-pitched voice, offering picture post cards of herself at a dime apiece.

Cliff lingered; then moved along to the platform where Guffy was discoursing on his "Happy Family." He had reference to a large cage which contained a jabbering monkey, a sad-eyed poodle, a Maltese cat, a white rabbit and a squawking parrot. The fact that these creatures behaved in friendly fashion seemed sufficient to make them a curiosity.

While Guffy was talking, the monkey made a bound toward the cat. The parrot squawked and Guffy grabbed a stick to deliver a savage poke into the cage. The monkey jumped back to a corner and the cat settled down to another nap. Evidently the family kept happy under proper supervision.

On the next platform, Cliff observed a most curious individual. A pasty-faced man was reclining on an army cot. His eyes were half closed; when they opened at Guffy's urging, the man gazed indolently at the spectators.

He reached to his lips and weakly removed a cigarette stump that clung there. He let it drop into a metal wastebasket beside the cot; then made a feeble gesture.

Captain Guffy plucked a fresh cigarette from a large box and placed it between the reclining man's lips. An attendant sprang forward with a light. Eyes closing, the pasty-faced occupant of the couch began to puff new clouds of smoke.

"This is Cleed," announced Captain Guffy, in a sorrowful tone. "Behold him, ladies and gentlemen: Cleed, the Cigarette Fiend. His story is a tragic one. He is a freak with a strange history. The child of a wealthy family, he began the use of tobacco at the age of five years.

"Nicotine took complete hold of his system. He is saturated with it, folks. His growth was not affected; nor was his constitution weakened. But his senses dulled. His craving for tobacco became a mania. Look at him; you see him as he is. In every waking moment, he demands a puff of the weed. Only when stupor seizes him does he cease from his perpetual smoking."

As Guffy completed his blatant lecture, Cleed finished another cigarette. The glowing stump dropped from his hand. The attendant hastened to place a fresh cigarette between the pasty lips. Cleed puffed as though his life depended upon a new supply of smoke.

"Hokum," growled someone in the crowd, as Guffy moved on to the next platform. "That story don't go with me."

## CRIME CIRCUS

"Maybe the fellow's a dope fiend," suggested another spectator. "It looks like something was wrong with him."

"He's been smoking steady ever since we came into the tent," remarked a third spectator. "Looks like he can't get along without puffing a cigarette."

"Quiet, please!" came Guffy's call. "Here we have Luke, the Tattooed Man. He is a living picture gallery, covered with works of art from head to foot –"

Cliff studied the tattooed man while Captain Guffy continued to spiel his story. No grumblers classed Luke as a fake. The man fitted the description that Guffy had given him: he was a living picture gallery.

Removing his shirt, Luke revealed a broad back that was covered with samples of tattooed art – huge designs in blue and red. Facing the spectators, he displayed a gold-toothed grin; then exhibited arms and legs to show smaller designs in permanent ink.

COMPLETING his lecture with the statement that Luke was a specialist in tattooing, Guffy proceeded to the next platform. Luke, still smiling, looked for customers among the crowd. Two men began to bargain with him. Cliff listened to their conversation; then strolled to the next platform in the line.

Here, Captain Guffy introduced a man who wore a tawdry dress suit. This was Professor Solva. The professor drew back a curtain; a tall, thin woman appeared to take a bow. She was introduced as Madame Solva.

The pair put on a mind reading act that lasted for several minutes. While they were selling horoscopes to the crowd, Guffy approached a pit. Cliff joined the early arrivals and saw a woman seated on a chair, a snake coiled about her arm.

"Princess Marxia," introduced Guffy. "Queen of the Reptile World. No poisoned fangs can harm her. Man-killing snakes obey her word. Step this way, folks. Princess Marxia is about to begin her astounding performance."

The snake charmer was a hard-faced woman. Her eyes carried a glare that seemed as venomous as the beady optics of the snake that writhed from her arm. After allowing several snakes to crawl about her head and shoulders, she cast the reptiles aside and lifted a box that lay in a corner of the pit.

The sharp crackle of a rattler came in immediate response. Princess Marxia stepped back and pointed to the coiled snake that had been beneath the box. She did her own talking to the crowd.

"The rattlesnake," explained Marxia, in a harsh voice, "carries deadly poison in its fangs. The noise that you hear is its warning. It is a sign of death to any one who comes too close."

With that, the woman approached the snake step by step. The rattler steadied its beady gaze; yet it did not strike. The charmer apparently knew the danger point; yet she deliberately persisted in her effort to arouse the reptile's ire.

"The rattlesnake strikes quick," came Marxia's harsh announcement, "but those who know its ways can escape when it strikes. Watch me."

The woman swung quickly toward the snake. A hiss came from the reptile. Its head shot forward with a swift stroke; but Marxia was speedier in her twist. While the crowd murmured in amazement, the snake charmer swung clear of the rattler's vicious stroke.



## CRIME CIRCUS

Stepping away from the corner where the angry snake remained, Marxia opened another box. She reached in and began to draw out the form of a huge black reptile. The creature responded slowly; then its large head came into view. The snake began to coil lazily about the woman's body.

"This is the terrible python," declaimed Marxia. "Its coils can crush the body of a tiger. Human beings are helpless in its grip; but I have power over the python. It will obey me – this big snake from Ceylon."

Cliff Marsland stared. The python was slowly uncoiling. Princess Marxia was forcing its twisted shape back into the box. The customers were moving toward the next exhibit, in response to Guffy's call. Cliff, however, remained. He had heard the word for which he was waiting.

Ceylon!

That was the password that Beef Malligan had ordered Cliff to heed. It had come from the lips of Princess Marxia, the so-called snake charmer. All others had moved along. Cliff stayed. He knew that from Princess Marxia he would gain the order that he had come here to receive.

## CHAPTER V. THE RED CIRCLE

"Where is Ceylon?"

Princess Marxia turned toward the front of the pit as she heard the question. She stared at Cliff Marsland, the person who had asked it.

"What was that?" demanded the woman, harshly.

"I heard you mention that the python came from Ceylon," responded Cliff. "I wondered where Ceylon was. Somewhere near India, isn't it?"

"Do you see that fellow over there?" questioned Marcia, pointing as she placed her elbow on the rail of the pit.

"You mean the tattooed man?" asked Cliff.

"Yeah," stated Marxia. "Well, that guy's been everywhere. His tattoo marks prove it. He's been to Ceylon, along with other places. He can tell you all about it. Go over and talk to him."

"Thanks."

Princess Marxia grinned as Cliff strolled toward Luke's platform. She looked up to observe Madame Solva staring at her. The snake charmer nudged her thumb in the direction that Cliff had taken.

"Another goof," was Marxia's comment. "Did you hear him?"

"I heard," Madame Solva nodded. "What makes all those mugs ask about Ceylon? He ain't the first that sprung that question. Seems like there's been a half a dozen."

"You can't figure these hicks," decided Marxia, eying the mind reader shrewdly. "I guess it's the python that gets 'em wondering where Ceylon is. Anyway, a lot of 'em have asked me."

## CRIME CIRCUS

"Why do you send them to Luke?"

"That guy kids 'em," replied Marxia, approvingly. "He's got a gift of lingo, Luke has. He gets talking about places where he's been and sells 'em a tattoo job. You keep watching – you'll see him do some needlework on that hick before the poor sap gets away."

CLIFF, meanwhile, had reached Luke's platform. The tattooed man was seated beside a table that bore his electrical equipment. He was arguing price with a prospective customer. The haggling reached its finish while Cliff looked on. The customer decided that he could do without tattoo marks.

"Well?" quizzed Luke, as he stared toward Cliff. "So you want some designs done?"

"I want to ask you something," responded Cliff, quietly.

Luke stepped from his chair and dropped over the edge of the platform. He eyed Cliff as if The Shadow's agent were another customer.

"Well?" questioned Luke.

"Tell me something," requested Cliff, in an undertone. "Where is Ceylon?"

The effect of the question was electric. Luke made no immediate reply. Instead, he beckoned Cliff up to the platform. He pointed out a chair beside his own. Cliff sat down with the tattooed man.

"Who sent you to this platform?" asked Luke.

"Princess Marxia," replied Cliff. "I asked her the question first."

"I see. Well" – Luke raised his voice – "maybe I can talk it over with you while I'm doing your design. Take a look at this arm of mine. How does the blue anchor look to you? Good?"

As Cliff stared at Luke's arm, the tattooed man turned his own gaze toward the platform on his left. Cleed, the cigarette fiend, was puffing away in his incessant fashion. He was apparently oblivious to the world about him; yet he caught the rise of Luke's voice. Cleed's head turned sidewise. His eyes opened.

It was not toward Luke that Cleed looked but toward Cliff Marsland. Squarely against the black curtains of the mind reader's platform, Cliff's profile formed a perfect outline. Cleed studied the chiseled profile of The Shadow's agent. After this inspection, Cleed let his eyes meet Luke's.

Slowly, the cigarette fiend rubbed his cheek against the canvas of his cot as he delivered a nod. Luke gave a response of silent understanding. Then the tattooed man spoke to Cliff again.

"That's the one you like, eh?" he questioned. "All right. Pull up your sleeve – the left one. I'll get to work."

Cliff looked puzzled as Luke took the design book from his hands and began to prepare an electric needle. Nevertheless, he drew up his sleeve as Luke had ordered. The tattooed man poised the needle over Cliff's forearm.

"You're from Beef Malligan?" came Luke's question, in a whisper.

"Right," responded Cliff.

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"I thought so," whispered the tattooed man. "Well, this is part of the racket. Hold your arm steady. I won't take long."

THE needle began its jabs. Each puncture of the implement left a tiny dot of red. Cliff watched the procedure while he listened to Luke's next statements. The buzz of the electric machine covered Luke's subdued voice.

"This puts you in the outfit," informed the tattooed man. "You're just a home-town guy from here in Marlborough. Got the bug to join up with the circus. See?"

Cliff nodded. The needle was moving along the arc of an imaginary circle, forming the beginning of a red ring on Cliff's forearm.

"Hoof it down by the big top," resumed Luke. "Ask for Hank. Tell him you want to join up. Just another roughneck for the crew. Let your sleeve slide up while you're talking. Then Hank will know you're with it. Savvy?"

"I get it," responded Cliff.

"Don't go shoving this mark around under people's noses," warned Luke, as he continued with the needle. "Just keep flashing it, here on the lot, whenever you run into a new gazebo. Let the guy lamp it if he's looking for it. Get the idea?"

"Right."

"Then you won't need a visiting card. Get me? You'll know the crew and they'll know you. If any trouble starts, roll your sleeves up. Then's the time to make sure we all know each other. But in the meantime, just pass along any word when you get it and be on the job when you're needed. That's the why for this red circle."

The buzz stopped as Luke finished speaking. On Cliff's arm was an indelible circle of red. Luke made a gesture. Cliff pulled down his sleeve. The tattooed man arose from his chair.

"Come around tomorrow if you want any more work done," informed Luke, again using his louder tone. "We ain't moving for a couple of days yet. If there's any local boys want some good work reasonable, tell them to come up here."

"Sure thing," responded Cliff.

Cliff slid down from the platform and sauntered to the entrance of the Ten-in-One. The show had finished; Captain Guffy had returned to the platform to begin another bally. With him were The Solvas, and Princess Marxia, and other performers whom Cliff had not seen during his interrupted trip.

REACHING the midway, Cliff paced toward the circus tent. He glanced at the huge painted banners outside of the Ten-in-One as he walked along. Luke, Cleed, Princess Marxia, Baby Liz – all were portrayed in mammoth exaggeration upon the gaudy, painted sheets of canvas.

Cliff passed concession tents where "percentage" wheels and other games were drawing customers. He watched patrons make unsuccessful attempts to knock down ten-pins with swinging bowling balls. He saw a big farmer swinging a sledge hammer against the springboard base of a "high striker."

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Cliff smiled. It was a far cry from the badlands of New York. There was something wholesome in this outdoor atmosphere. Cliff could feel the lure of the show business. He realized that there were rackets among the concessions; that con men might be among the crowds, looking for dupes. But it all seemed mild compared with the environment that Cliff had left.

This feeling persisted in Cliff's mind as The Shadow's agent swung from the beaten path of the midway and headed off toward parked trucks at the side of the circus tent. Then, in a twinkling, Cliff was carried back to the realm of the underworld when a burly figure blocked his course and a snarling voice demanded:

"Where you goin' mug?"

Cliff eyed his challenger. The burly man had stepped from behind a truck. He was evidently with the circus. But his speech and his manner were those of a gangster. Cliff sensed that the fellow must be one of the gorillas whom Beef Malligan had exported from Manhattan.

"I'm looking for a guy named Hank," retorted Cliff. "They said I'd find him down here by the big top."

"Yeah? Well move along. I'll take you to him."

The challenger let Cliff go first. That was another indication of the fellow's origin. The typical circus roughneck would have led the way. This rowdy was following.

A hard-faced, sweated man was standing by the entrance of a lighted tent. The circus grounds were wired with electricity from the Marlborough plant; a cord, hooked to the tent pole, showed the features of this individual. Like the roughneck who was following Cliff, the standing man looked like one of Beef Malligan's old mob.

"There's Hank," came a growl from in back of Cliff.

The Shadow's agent nodded. He decided to forget the fellow who was trailing him. He approached the man by the tent flap and looked him in the eye.

"Is your name Hank?" he questioned.

"Yeah," was the reply. "Who are you?"

"They call me Cliff. I'm from here in Marlborough. Thought I'd like to join up with the circus. Any kind of a job will do. Pulling stakes – pitching tents –"

Other men had appeared while Cliff was talking. Two of them looked like mobsters; the others were apparently bona fide circus roughnecks. Cliff paid no attention to their arrival. As he spoke of doing heavy work, he made a natural gesture of drawing up his sleeves. He flashed the red circle that Luke had tattooed on his arm.

HANK spotted it. He nodded. Methodically, he began to roll his own sleeve. The rising sweater enabled Cliff to glimpse a red circle.

The man who had followed Cliff was stepping into the light. His sleeves were already up. He shifted his arm with the palm outward, so Cliff could catch the quick sight of another circled token.

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"Guess we can use you, bud," growled Hank. "The old man don't kick if we take on a few extra roughnecks – providin' they're husky. Come along up to the office. I'll fix it for you."

They passed another hard-faced fellow as they neared the fringe of the light. Cliff saw Hank make a gesture toward his sleeve. The man flashed a red circle. Cliff did the same. Then came a stretch of darkness. Hank was leading the way to the office.

Cliff smiled. He had become the follower.

Yet there was grimness in Cliff's expression. Already, he was learning the inside of the game. Planted with the circus, traveling with the midway, were agents of crime. Tattooed circles of red were the recognition marks that kept this compact band together. Cliff knew of the comradeship that ruled circus folk; he realized that these rogues were using it as a cover for their crooked purposes.

He also knew that Croaker Zinn must be the head of this secret crew. He had not noticed Croaker on the circus lot; probably the mobleader was keeping out of sight. Hank, Cliff decided, was just one of the gang who had stepped to a position of small authority with the circus. He was the fellow who took on the mobsmen who came from Beef Malligan.

When they reached the office, Hank entered without ceremony, beckoning to Cliff to follow him. Stuffy Dowson was just inside the door. Hank greeted him by his nickname; then spoke to Tex Larch who was sitting by a desk.

"What is it, Hank?" questioned the circus owner, wheeling in his pivoted chair.

"I'm hirin' another roughneck," informed Hank. "Brought him up here with me, Mr. Larch. This is the fellow."

Tex Larch eyed Cliff.

"He looks all right," commented the circus owner. "Sure you need him, Hank?"

"We can use him. Looks like a couple of roughnecks are gettin' ready to blow. We may need more before we leave this burg."

"All right, Hank."

Tex wheeled back to the desk. Hank nudged his thumb toward the door. Nothing further was necessary. Cliff Marsland had become a roughneck with the Larch Circus and Greater Shows.

Outside the office, Cliff and Hank bumped into Captain Guffy coming over from the Ten-in-One. As they sidestepped Guffy, Cliff paused to let a girl walk by. She, too, was bound for the office. Her attractive face and her red hair brought a recollection to Cliff. He fancied that he had seen the girl before.

"Who was the girl?" Cliff questioned Hank, as they were walking toward the circus tent.

"Lucille Lavan," informed the mobster. "The skirt that does the high wire act in the big top."

Cliff nodded. He had seen Lucille's picture on the billboards, coming into town. That was why he had recalled her face. Then his thoughts of the girl dwindled. Cliff's brain pondered on a more immediate subject.

Cliff had reached his goal. He was a member of the crooked band traveling with Tex Larch's circus. Tonight, he would find opportunity to slip down to the town of Marlborough and send a wire to New York.

For Cliff Marsland sensed that crime was already brewing. Wise to the ways of crooks, he could tell that the atmosphere was already charged with some lawless game. More than that, Cliff could see the menace of the future.

Word to The Shadow! That was Cliff's next step. From the inside of the racket, The Shadow's agent was prepared to notify his mysterious chief that he had found a hot-bed of crime!

## CHAPTER VI. SPIES OF THE NIGHT

"TAKE a look around the lot, Stuffy."

It was Tex Larch who spoke. Stuffy Dowson nodded. He stepped from the office and closed the door behind him. Tex Larch was alone with the two persons who had just entered: Captain Guffy and Lucille Lavan.

"What's up, Tex?"

Guffy put the question as soon as Stuffy was gone. He knew that Tex wanted privacy to talk some business. Like Tex, Guffy was blunt and to the point.

"Nothing to worry about, Cap," responded Tex. "Just wanted to talk things over with you. Jonathan Wilbart was in here tonight."

"Jonathan Wilbart!" The exclamation came from Lucille Lavan.

"Jonathan Wilbart in person," declared Tex. "Wanted to buy me out. Like he tried to do before."

"A stubborn fellow, Wilbart is," commented Cap Guffy. "What did he offer you?"

"We didn't get that far, Cap. I told him there was no sale. He walked out."

"You did right, Tex!" put in Lucille. "The nerve of him! After all the years you've been in the show business! I would like to have talked with him!"

"He would have liked to talk with you, Lucille," returned Tex, with a slight smile. "You're one of the two reasons why he wants my show."

"You mean he wants me to star with one of his circuses?"

"That's it, Lucille."

"Never! I'd quit the show business before I'd work for Jonathan Wilbart!"

"Hm-m." Cap Guffy was the one who spoke in response to the girl's outburst. "What do you have against Wilbart, Lucille? I didn't know you went in for grudges."

"I don't." Lucille pouted wistfully. "I know I'm wrong. I wouldn't mind Wilbart if he wasn't trying to buy Tex out. You know how I feel about it, Cap. Tex is – well, he's been like an uncle to me – and I know what this

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show means to him. It's not Wilbart I don't like – it's anybody who'd try to take me away from this show."

"Suppose I should sell out, Lucille?" inquired Tex.

"You wouldn't," retorted the girl.

"But suppose I had no dough," persisted Tex. "Suppose I'd have to fold."

"You'll never fold. You've got too many friends in the business, Tex. If you really had to find money – well, I'd help raise it for you."

"I believe you would, Lucille. I know you would. Well – Wilbart's not buying this outfit. Just the same, it's not easy to talk him out of trying."

"Why not, Tex?" inquired Cap Guffy.

"I'll tell you why," returned Tex. "Wilbart is a man who goes after business in a big way. He deals fair enough; but he gets what he wants. That's why he worries me. He wants this show."

"He says he needs Lucille and Wernoff – wants them for star acts. Wants to put them with his other shows. That part's on the level. But he also says that he would scrap this outfit if he bought it – he didn't say 'scrap'; he said 'absorb' – but it amounts to the same thing."

"He probably would."

"I don't think so. That's where he's trying to bluff me. I think he'd keep on running this show as a small-time outfit. He might build it over and trade on the name of Larch."

"Maybe you're right, Tex."

"Well, that would be his privilege if he bought the show. So he keeps coming around here – and he picks every week that looks like a bloomer. What's the answer? He knows I'm losing money, Cap. He's figuring that I'll have to sell. So pretty soon he'll get the idea that I don't want to sell to him. He'll think I've got a grudge against him."

"Let him think it, Tex."

"I don't want to, Cap. If Wilbart thinks that I'm prejudiced against him, he'll try some other stunt. That's what I'm afraid of."

"You mean he'll go after the midway?"

"Right. Those concessions are paying for their privileges. Suppose they hear that they can open with one of Wilbart's circuses – play better towns and fork over less dough. How long do you think they'd stick with me?"

"I don't know, Tex."

"A couple of weeks, maybe. That's all. What if Wilbart offered to buy your Ten-in-One?"

"I wouldn't sell it. I'm like you, Tex. I'm sticking in the show business."

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"Suppose, Cap" – Tex eyed the sideshow owner steadily – "suppose I offered to buy your Ten-in-One. Would you sell to me?"

"Not a chance, Tex."

"Well, suppose you found you had to quit. Would you let me take over the Ten-in-One?"

"I might."

"That's all I want to know. Listen, Cap: you're doing business even if I'm not. These crowds that pass up the big top seem to like the Ten-in-One. They're bum burgers for a circus, but they're good spots for a sideshow."

"It looked that way tonight, Tex."

"Well – suppose I gave Wilbart the idea that I'd bought out your Ten-in-One. Suppose I told him that what I was losing in the big top, I was making up along the midway. That might make him think a bit."

"It ought to."

"All right. Give me an option on the Ten-in-One. I'll give you a thousand dollars as a deposit. Call it a tentative sale. Date the papers back a couple of weeks. We'll put you down in the pay book as sideshow manager, on a salary."

"I get the idea, Tex. You'll make Wilbart think that you were bringing in the green before he came around to make his offer. Then he'll watch the business at the Ten-in-One. Figuring that you shoved out dough to buy it, he'll think that you're taking in the gravy all along."

"That's it. What's more, Cap, he won't try to buy you out. The option will scare him off."

"Are you going to work the same gag with other people on the midway?"

"Not with the concessions; but maybe with the rides. I think they'll help me out. They're doing pretty fair business. If Wilbart thinks I'm buying up the whole outfit, he's liable to pull in his horns. At least, he will think there is a good reason when I refuse his offer."

"All right, Tex." Cap stared stolidly at the circus owner. "I'll think it over. But remember – I'm keeping my Ten-in-One. It means as much to me as the big top does to you. If all you're trying to do is cover up the real reason why you won't sell out to Wilbart, I'll stick by you."

"Wait a minute, Cap." Tex's voice was hard as Guffy stepped toward the door. "Get this straight. The reason I won't sell is because I belong in the show business. That's all."

"Did I say anything else?" quizzed Guffy, from the door.

"No," admitted Tex, "but it didn't sound so good – the way you spoke. Maybe I could ask why you're so stubborn about hanging on to that sideshow of yours."

"It's bringing me the dough, ain't it?"

"It ought to, with that cheap bunch of freaks you're carrying."



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Guffy's fists tightened. Lucille stepped in to prevent an altercation. Tex had risen in challenging fashion; the girl motioned the circus owner back to his seat. She turned to the door.

"Run along, Cap," she said to Guffy. "Put the freaks to bed and see that the rattlers are tied up for the night. There's no use in you and Tex acting like a couple of punks."

"All right, Lucille." Guffy stared hard at Tex as he spoke. "I'll forget it. Guess there ain't no use in being touchy. I'm minding my business. I guess Tex can manage his."

"GUFFY'S hard to figure out sometimes," growled Tex, as the door closed behind Cap. "If he's so independent, why don't he buy up a few shows and go out on his own? He's socked away some dough, to hear him talk. What does he want to travel along with me for, if he could be the big shot of his own outfit?"

"Cap likes to bluff, Tex," decided the girl. "He always acted like he had money, even when you knew he didn't have a dime. You remember when he first joined us."

"Yeah." Tex nodded. "I liked him because he minded his own business and didn't butt into mine. He was the first sideshow man that was satisfied to run his own top. Maybe it was time I cut him loose. I wonder –"

"What?" questioned Lucille.

"Well" – Tex was speculative – "I ain't just satisfied with the way things are going on the lot. Cap Guffy may be getting too important."

"You've been leaving the show too often, Tex."

"Stuffy's here, ain't he?"

"Yes; but he isn't important enough."

"He would be, if Cap Guffy wasn't around. That's the trouble with promoting a fellow like Stuffy. The gang don't recognize him like they should."

"Why not hire a new general agent?"

"Maybe that would do." Tex nodded, then shook his head. "I guess I'll have to let things slide along, Lucille. The season's pretty well through. I'll make out until we close. Cap will get over his huff –"

Tex paused suddenly as he heard a slight scruffing sound outside the office car. He shot a look at Lucille; then sprang to the door. He called to a pair of roughnecks who were passing.

"See who's sneaking around here," ordered Tex. "Move lively, you fellows."

"O.K., boss."

The roughnecks – hard-faced fellows – sprang into the darkness beside the trailer. Tex stepped back into the office to find Lucille standing beside the little window between the front desks.

"Any one there?" quizzed Tex.

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"I don't think so," replied Lucille. "The glass is out of this window, though. Somebody could have been listening to our talk."

"Sounded like a snooper coming up," declared Tex. "We would have heard him climbing out of the truck if he'd been there at the window. No – I don't think anybody was listening in. Come on. We'll see who the roughnecks scared up."

THE two men whom Tex had despatched for a search had reached the front of the truck while the circus owner was talking to Lucille. There, in the darkness, they had encountered a human form. One brawny, bare-armed ruffian was clutching a crouching figure while the other turned a flashlight on the pair.

"Say!" The exclamation came from the roughneck who had made the capture. "It's Jubo the Geek! What're you doin' here, Jubo?"

Jubo was showing his teeth in a fierce grin. His eyes glared downward toward the arm of his captor. The geek gave a grunt as he saw a red circle tattooed above the roughneck's wrist.

Wriggling his own hands free, Jubo pulled up the left sleeve of his black jersey. His captors exchanged stifled utterances as they saw the same symbol on the geek's forearm. Jubo was obviously a member of their band.

"Scram," growled the man with the light.

Jubo nodded. As the other roughneck released him, the geek slunk off into the darkness. The two roughnecks turned and walked back toward the trailer. A flashlight blinked in front of them. It was Tex, coming from the office.

"Who was it?" growled the circus owner.

"We didn't find nobody," growled the roughneck with the light. "Guess maybe it was just some guy cuttin' through by the office."

"All right," nodded Tex.

The three men moved away.

Gloom persisted beside the truck. Then, from the darkness of the vehicle came a swishing shape. A spectral figure reached the ground and stood silently against the darkened side of the office trailer.

Staring toward the glow of the midway, sharp eyes saw a stalwart figure moving past the steps of the office. It was Cliff Marsland, heading for town to send his report to The Shadow.

A soft, sinister whisper sounded beside the trailer. From his vantage point in the rear of the truck, this invisible watcher had heard the conversation in the office. He had seen Jubo the Geek prowling by the truck; he had witnessed the encounter between the mobsters who passed as roughnecks and the slinking wild man whom they had captured and let go.

Weirdly, a spectral shape moved forth into the darkness. Again, a whispered laugh was confined to a small area. That laugh was a token which none but its author heard. Yet it symbolized strange understanding.

The Shadow had not waited to hear from Cliff Marsland. He had followed his agent to the town of Marlborough. Like a phantom of the night, he had come to the circus grounds to begin a secret investigation

of his own.

The Shadow had listened. The Shadow had watched. Already he had formed conclusions to carry him along the trail of crime!

## CHAPTER VII. THE GAME BEGINS

BRIGHT lights glittered along the midway. A new night had come. Business was good for the Larch Circus and Greater Shows. The outfit had struck a "red one" – a town where customers had cash that they were willing to spend.

Marlborough had been a "bloomer" for Tex Larch. He had welcomed the move to the next town on his route. The tents were pitched on the outskirts of Burnsville, a small but thriving city.

Thanks to a "fixer," the concessions were running at full blast. Percentage wheels were clicking profits for their operators. Crowds were jamming the rider carousel, Ferris wheel and whip. The circus had done good business on its opening and Cap Guffy was jamming them in at the Ten-in-One. The smaller shows – like Jubo the Geek's – were also getting their share.

A tall, hawk-faced man was strolling along with the crowd that was coming from the circus tent. He had seen the show in the big top. Like others, he seemed to be looking for new amusement. His keen gaze took in every attraction along the midway.

The stranger paused to light a cigarette. He was jostled by passers in the crowd, so he stepped aside and stopped by a ticket window where a seller was counting up receipts. His tall form cast a curious shadow along the grounds. It was a splotch of blackness that ended in a sharp, well defined profile.

This stranger was The Shadow. Tonight, he had temporarily abandoned his garb of black. He had become a patron of the circus grounds; already, he had found events of interest. The spot where he had stopped was well chosen.

Two men were standing near the ticket window. They were not circus folk; nor were they part of the pleasure-seeking crowd that thronged the midway. Like The Shadow, these stern-faced individuals were here with a purpose. Moreover, they had managed to render themselves inconspicuous.

A dart game was operating in a concession booth close to the ticket window. The Shadow stepped in that direction to watch the customers throw feathered pointers at tags that were supposed to bear lucky numbers.

A SHILL was having great luck. His well-aimed dart landed on a card that hung from the board behind the counter. The operator pulled out the dart and turned the card to show the number 21. He took a huge kewpie doll from his display and handed it to the shill. A sucker stepped up to aim darts at the tag which the concessionaire had replaced upon the board.

"Hello, Casey. Got any big bills?"

The question came in a woman's voice. The Shadow let his keen eyes turn toward the ticket booth. Madame Solva had come over from the Ten-in-One. She was holding a large stack of one-dollar bills.

"Sure thing," responded the ticket taker. "How many ones have you got there, Madame?"

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"A hundred and fifty. Give me some tens and twenties."

"All right."

Casey took the ones and shoved out the required bills. Madame Solva started for the other side of the midway.

The Shadow saw one watching man nudge the other. A nod; one fellow kept his eye on Madame Solva while the other stepped up to the ticket window. Casey was counting over the bills that the woman had given him.

"Say, Bud," remarked the man who had approached, "give me change for a five spot, will you?"

Casey nodded and counted off five from the bundle of ones. The man passed in a five-dollar bill; then returned to join his companion. Out of Casey's sight – they were at the closed side of the booth – they turned their backs and examined the bills between them.

The Shadow saw the bills go in one man's pocket. He noticed grim, knowing nods. Then the two sauntered out toward the midway, idling in the direction that Madame Solva had taken.

An argument was starting at the counter of the dart game. The sucker had landed a pointer in the lucky card. The operator had turned the tag to show its face.

"Number twenty-seven," he was saying. "Well, friend, that wins you a tin whistle."

"Twenty-seven?" The angry customer growled. "Say – when the last guy stabbed that card, it was twenty-one."

"You must be mistaken," informed the operator. "Look at the card yourself. Number twenty-seven."

The sucker held the card in stupefaction. The Shadow smiled as he stepped toward the midway. He had seen what the sucker had not noticed.

When the shill had landed the card, the operator had displayed it as 21 by holding his thumb over the bar of a 7. Thus the sucker, after aiming a few dozen darts for what he thought was a sure win, now found himself holding a tag that actually bore the number 27. He was grunting in disgust as the operator handed him a two-cent whistle instead of a dollar doll.

The Shadow, meanwhile, was nearing the center of the midway. He saw the destination that the stern-faced men had chosen. They were picking their course to a little tent off in back of the Ten-in-One.

While the pair stopped in front of the closed flaps, The Shadow circled around another tent. He wound up in back of the tent that the two men were watching. He found a hole in the canvas and peered through.

THE SOLVAS were alone in the tent. The professor had opened the drawer of a wardrobe trunk. He was taking the money that his wife had brought. He put the large bills in one partition of the drawer; from another section, he brought out a stack of ones.

"Here's two hundred more," he said, in a low tone. "Take them out and peddle them around the concessions. Don't pass more than fifty at any one joint –"

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The professor broke off suddenly. His jaw dropped. His wife turned to find him staring at the front of the tent. The flaps had opened. The two stern-faced men had entered. One was holding a levelled gun while he displayed a badge.

"Got you, eh?" growled the intruder. "Well – come along. Grab that queer, Dunham. Take the whole drawer-full."

The second man nodded. He shoved The Solvas aside and pulled out stacks of one-dollar bills. The mind readers began a sudden protest. The man with the gun stopped them.

"No talk from you two," he ordered. "You're coming with us. Quietly, too. You and your phony mazuma. Ready, Dunham?"

"All ready, Slade."

"Our car's off past this tent," informed the man with the gun as he eyed The Solvas coldly. "Dunham will lead the way. You'll follow. Come on. We're moving."

The Shadow watched The Solvas make their forced departure. A soft laugh came from his thin lips after the mind readers and their captors were gone. The Shadow had spotted the stern-faced men as secret-service agents. He had guessed their purpose here; he had witnessed the culmination of their efforts.

Looking for passers of counterfeit money, the federal men had found The Solvas. Quietly and efficiently, they had captured the mind readers and were taking them from the circus lot.

THE barker at Jubo's tent was shouting out his spiel as The Shadow again appeared upon the midway. Still in the character of a visitor to the circus grounds, The Shadow walked up and bought a ticket. He entered the tent and studied the freak in the pit.

The hidden squawker was giving raucous roars from its hiding place beneath the canvas. Jubo was grinning from his pit while he clutched viciously at squirming snakes.

The Shadow watched the antics of the geek. He studied the brownstained face. A smile appeared upon the thin lips of The Shadow's masklike countenance.

Leaving the geek show, The Shadow strolled toward the bannered front of the Ten-in-One. Captain Guffy had just finished his last bally. The crowd was entering for the final show. The Shadow bought a ticket and followed.

Inconspicuous in the crowd, The Shadow listened to Cap's lecture on the various freaks. He eyed Cleed, the languid cigarette fiend. He studied Luke, the tattooed man. He noticed Cap Guffy's glower when the lecturer stopped at the curtained platform where The Solvas should have been.

Abruptly, Cap passed on to the snake pit occupied by Princess Marxia. He continued his lecture; but all the while, he kept watching for the return of The Solvas. When he reached the last exhibit, he spoke to an attendant who was standing there. The man nodded and left the sideshow. The Shadow knew that Cap had sent him to locate The Solvas.

The attendant returned as Cap finished his lecture. Guffy caught a shake of the fellow's head. He promptly announced that the show was finished. The crowd headed for the exit.

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The Shadow, however, remained. He watched while Cap Guffy approached Princess Marxia and pointed to the platform where The Solvas should have appeared. The snake charmer shrugged her shoulders. Luke, the tattooed man, came from his platform to join the discussion.

The Shadow drew closer. He could hear Cap Guffy's growl. The owner of the Ten-in-One was angry. Marxia and Luke were nodding in agreement as he spoke.

"I thought they were ready to blow," asserted Cap, "Well – that's the end of 'em. Nobody ever jumps a show of mine and gets back on it."

Cap turned about. He stopped, face to face with The Shadow. He eyed the countenance before him. He stared at the firm, masklike visage of the waiting stranger. He caught the steady burn of eyes that peered from either side of an aquiline nose.

"Well?" queried Cap. "You here to see me?"

"Yes," replied The Shadow, quietly. "You are Captain Guffy, aren't you?"

"Yeah. What about it?"

"My name is Zoda. I came here to see about joining your outfit."

"Yeah? What's your act?"

"Mind reading."

"Huh?" Cap seemed surprised. "Say – you're just the guy I want to talk to. Where's your partner?"

"I work single."

"Single? How do you get away with that?"

"I have my own methods. I require no partner."

CAP stared. This was a new one on him. He was used to double acts on the mind reading platform. He was impressed, however, by Zoda's confident gaze. Cap nodded.

"You're in," he announced. "You can use the tent The Solvas lived in. I'll shove their stuff in one of the trunks. Got your trunk with you?"

"No. I am traveling light. I have a car outside the lot, with some suitcases."

"I'll send a punk to get the kiesters. What about books? You'll need 'em won't you?"

"Yes. Do you have any?"

"Over here" – Cap led the way to the curtained platform and opened a box at the rear edge. "Here's some horoscope books The Solvas were using. I bought the books myself, along with a lot of slum. The Solvas were paying me while they used 'em. You can have what's left.

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"You'll work on salary. Twenty a week and cakes. I was paying The Solvas thirty; but there was two of them. What you get from the books is yours. How does that suit you?"

"Satisfactory."

"All right, Zoda. Any time you want to scoff, go down to the cook tent and charge it up to me. The grub's good. We all scoff there. That's where I'm going now. Want to come along?"

"No, thanks. I had dinner in the town. Show me the tent and I'll move my stuff in."

Cap led the way to the tent that The Solvas had occupied. He shouted for a couple of roughnecks. A thin smile appeared upon Zoda's lips as Cliff Marsland appeared with another man. Cap Guffy pointed the trunk that stood in the tent. It was closed; a detail to which the secret-service men had attended before leaving with their prisoners.

"Shove this on one of the trucks," ordered Cap. "Send some punk in here. I want him to bring some kiesters from a car."

TEN minutes later, Zoda, the mind reader, stood alone in the tent. His suitcases were lying in a corner. His eyes turned in that direction. His lips formed a thin smile. His hand turned out the light that hung fastened to the tent pole.

Then came the click of an opening bag. After that, the swish of cloth. Two minutes later, a ghostly figure emerged from the tent and moved in spectral fashion away from the closing midway.

The gliding form reached a parked coupe. It entered. The motor buzzed. The coupe rolled away. As it struck the road leading into Burnsville, a soft laugh came from the darkness of the car.

Zoda had become The Shadow. Unseen, unnoticed, he was leaving the circus lot upon a secret errand.

## CHAPTER VIII. AT THE HOTEL

A TOWN clock was chiming midnight when The Shadow's coupe rolled to a stop on a side street in the town of Burnsville. Few people were abroad. All the night owls of this nine-o'clock town had gone to the circus and had returned directly to their homes following the closing of the midway.

The only buildings that still showed lights were a small lunch room and a decrepit hotel which bore a battered sign proclaiming it as the "Depot House." Railroad tracks, half a block away, showed the reason for the hotel's name.

Shrouded in the darkness of a side street, The Shadow moved alongside the old hotel. Looking upward, he spied a pair of lighted windows on the third floor. A long arm swished upward and caught the swinging bottom of a fire escape. The Shadow began a silent ascent.

Reaching the third floor, the invisible prowler entered by a fire exit and moved softly along a dim corridor. He passed two doors; then stopped at a third. Cautiously, he applied a keylike instrument to the lock. The door opened with a slight click.

A tiny flashlight beamed. It showed that the room was empty. The Shadow edged toward a door in the corner. Again, his key did its work. The door opened by inches. The Shadow spied the blocking back of a huge

wardrobe that was set catcornered in a lighted room.

People were talking as The Shadow slipped into the hiding place that so neatly suited his convenience. He closed the door under cover of the wardrobe. He moved to the edge of the big object and found a wide space between the wardrobe and the wall. From this vantage point, he commanded a good view of the room.

There were four occupants. Two were Dunham and Slade, the secret-service operatives. The others were The Solvas. The mind readers were sitting sullenly in chairs while they faced their inquisitors. Slade was growling.

"So that's all you've got to say, eh?" he demanded. "Well – we'll see. You'll have a chance to tell your story again. We've got a friend coming. He'd like to hear it, too."

Brief minutes passed. Then came a cautious knock at the door. Dunham opened it to admit a stocky, heavy-set visitor. This was the man whom the operatives had expected. His stern features; his square jaw and cold, steely eyes marked him as a personage of keenness and ability.

THE SHADOW knew the identity of the arrival. This man was Vic Marquette, one of the most capable operatives in the secret service. His path had crossed The Shadow's in the past. The Shadow had expected Vic to appear tonight. He knew that operatives such as Dunham and Slade would be waiting for a chief.

"Hello, Vic," greeted Slade. "Here's a pair we pinched up at the circus. Grabbed them in a tent, along with a drawerful of queer. Want to hear their story?"

"Yes," responded Vic, in a steady tone. "Let's have it."

He eyed The Solvas as they spoke. The woman began to squawk a denial. Her husband growled for her to be silent. He faced Marquette and spoke in a sullen tone.

"You got us with the goods, all right," admitted the man who styled himself Professor Solva. "But we don't know where the stuff come from. We got horsed into the racket, that's all. It came out of a clear sky and it looked too soft to pass up."

"Go ahead."

"We was working in the Ten-in-One show. Had a platform there, along with a box-load of books. The Madame, here, went to get some books one night and found a note, along with a one-dollar bill. She showed me the note and the one spot. I tore up the note."

"What did it say?"

"It told me the dollar bill was phony. It said that for every ten bucks of real mazuma I could get fifty of the queer. Told me to put the good money in the book box and leave it there after the show. Said that I'd find the other stuff in its place."

"So you tried it, eh?"

"Sure. We loaded up with the counterfeit stuff. Took the phony ones and kept them in our tent. Every night, my wife would go around the grounds and hand out one-spots for bigger bills. We was building up big when these guys grabbed us."



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"What's your name?"

"Harry Gruck. I call myself Professor Solva. This is my wife, Mamie. She's Madame Solva."

"Listen to me, Solva. I want to know who gave you the queer money. It will be easier for you if you tell me the whole story."

"Wisht I could." Solva spoke in earnest. "I ain't got no love for the guy that horsed me into this mess. But I don't know who he is. Honest, I don't. We fell for the gag – my wife and I – but we played it straight because it looked good."

"All right." Vic Marquette was standing with hands in pockets. "Take them away, Slade. I want to talk with you and Dunham."

Handcuffs clicked as the lesser operatives applied them to the wrists of the prisoners. Vic Marquette alone remained in The Shadow's view as Slade and Dunham led The Solvas into an adjoining room. Then came the thud of a closing door. Slade and Dunham returned.

"A FINE pair, you two," spoke Vic Marquette to the other operatives. "One more big mistake to your credit. I thought I told you to lay off making a grab until you heard from me."

"What could we do, Vic?" protested Slade. "You didn't show up here last night like we expected. We went out to the lot just to look around. We happened to see the dame shoving the queer and –"

"So you grabbed her and the man," interposed Vic. "Why didn't you leave them alone? They would have kept until tomorrow. Listen, boys. The first pinch was all right. You took in a concessionaire four weeks ago. You had the goods on him. He told a story that sounded on the level."

"The same one as these people," growled Slade.

"Yes," responded Vic. "So you went back two weeks later and picked a fellow out of the cook tent. He gave you the same line, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"Well, that was when I told you your mistake had been proven. But you were still itching to make another grab. You've done it. This time you've landed two more small fry."

"They were shoving the queer, Vic."

"Of course they were, you simpleton. But they aren't in the know. They're like the others that you grabbed – nothing but blinds. All the while I'm trying to spot the real people in the game you're making it harder for me."

Vic paused to pace back and forth across the room. He waved his fellow agents to the chairs that The Solvas had vacated. Then, in a cold, steady tone, he began to lay down his orders.

"There's a ring behind it, men," voiced Vic. "They are operating with the Larch Circus. They have flooded every town with plenty of the queer. It goes out through ticket windows. It shows up in salaries. It passes over concession counters. It filters in through purchases of supplies."

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"There are dozens in the racket and they know we're after them. So to cover up, they pick dupes. Like the concessionaire you grabbed. Like the fellow at the cook tent. Like these people – The Solvas.

"The crooks figure out just what operatives like you would do. They knew that you would come to the circus lot and look for somebody who was passing the queer. You did; you grabbed the ignorant dupes.

"Suppose you had pinched fellows at the ticket windows? Suppose you had questioned others like the concessionaires? They would all have given you the same story. They would have said that people like The Solvas had come to them to give change for large bills.

"Don't you see the game? Take that fellow at the ticket window tonight. You saw him get the queer from The Solvas. You figured that he was all right. Maybe he is. On the contrary, maybe he belongs to the organization.

"If he does, he's getting plenty of the queer and passing it out from his booth. But if you grabbed him – right or wrong – he'd give you the one story. He would protest his innocence and back up his statement by pointing out that you saw The Solvas work their game on him."

Silence followed Vic's denunciation. Slade shifted uneasily and grumbled. Dunham echoed his companion's utterance. It was Slade who spoke.

"I KNOW you're right, Vic," he admitted. "Come to think about it, there's so much queer around these towns we've been to that we can't lay it all on the suckers that we grabbed. But what are we going to do? Pull in the whole circus?"

"No!" Vic was emphatic "We're going to the heart of the thing. Let me tell you something. This gang is organized. It's loaded with thugs. They're ready for business. It's like a mob, with a leader passing word around the crew.

"But in back of it" – Vic paused to wag a knowing forefinger – "is a hidden big shot. He sees that the queer starts its rounds. He collects the real cash that the mob turns in. It's all done between the mobleader, who is one of the circle, and the big shot, who keeps aloof."

"I get you, Vic," acknowledged Slade. "Who do you think is the big shot?"

"I don't know," admitted Marquette. "What I'm trying to find is the mobleader. It's like an endless chain, that ring of crooks. If I can really spot the one man who sends orders around the circle, I can concentrate on him. By watching the mobleader alone, I'll find the big shot when the two make contact."

"Great stuff, Vic."

"It was great, Slade, before you two fellows made this bull tonight. I don't know what will happen now."

"Why not? The game will go on, won't it? It kept on after we grabbed the first fellow – and the second –"

"I'm afraid this grab is one too many. The ring quit shoving the queer after you took in the fellow from the cook tent. That is, they quit for a few days. I think they'll quit again this trip. If they do, I'll have to wait a while."

"What'll we do, then?"

"Sit tight. Follow the show wherever it travels. Don't make a move until you hear from me. If the ring keeps on working, I'll know it before you do."

The other operatives nodded sheepishly from their chairs. Vic Marquette paced toward the door and stood with his hand on the knob.

"Hold The Solvas," he ordered. "Make them write a letter to Captain Guffy, who runs the sideshow. See that the letter is posted from New York.

"Have The Solvas tell Guffy that they jumped because they had a better offer. Tell them to send money along so that their luggage can be shipped to New York. Use an address where Guffy can send the baggage checks. General delivery in some small town between here and New York would be the best bet."

"All right, Vic," responded Slade. "We'll do it right. Nobody on the circus lot will know that The Solvas were grabbed."

"They may not know it," retorted Vic, "but they will suspect it. Just the same, it's the best that we can do to make up for your mistake. Remember: sit tight until you hear from me."

With that, Vic Marquette opened the door and stalked from the room. The closing barrier was the final mark of his departure.

But Vic was not the only one who chose a convenient portal through which to leave the room where Slade and Dunham remained.

Silently, The Shadow had opened the door behind him. Like a gliding specter, he passed through the unoccupied room and made his way to the fire escape. He descended by the fire tower and formed a blackened shape beside the parked coupe.

A laugh came from that same car as The Shadow rode in the direction of the circus grounds. The master sleuth was returning to resume his role of Zoda, the new mind reader. Like Vic Marquette, The Shadow was planning to uncover the big shot behind the game of crime.

## CHAPTER IX. WORD TO THE SHADOW

ANOTHER prosperous evening had ended on the circus lot. The remnants of the crowd were strolling from the midway. The front of the Ten-in-One was closed. Freaks and performers had left their platform, with the exception of the new mind reader. He was arranging his books while Cap Guffy was closing up.

The flaps at the entrance were pushed aside. Guffy, about to bark a challenge at the intruders, stopped as he saw Tex Larch coming in. With the proprietor of the circus was Lucille Lavan. Following them was a thick-faced man: Eric Wernoff, the Animal King.

"Hello, Cap," greeted Lucille. "We just came up from the office. I wanted to see this new mind reader that everybody is talking about."

"He's finished his act," informed Cap, gruffly. "There he is, though, over on the platform. Come on over if you want to meet him."

Cap took the visitors to the platform. Zoda gave a profound bow as he was introduced to Lucille Lavan. The

girl stated the purpose of her visit.

"We've heard a lot about your act," she said. "They say that you work it single. How in the world – well, how do you manage it without someone in the crowd to have people ask them questions?"

"I let persons write their questions," came Zoda's steady response. "For instance" – he reached to a table on the platform and stepped down to the rail – "take this pad and pencil. Write any question that you wish. Then tear off the paper."

"And give it to you?"

"No. Keep the paper in your own hand. That's right. Look at the words that you have written. Raise your hand toward your eyes."

The girl followed the directions, keeping the writing toward herself. Zoda shook his head. His lips formed a thin smile.

"A bit higher." He reached forward and grasped the girl's right wrist lightly. "On a level with your eyes so that you can read and concentrate. That's right."

A mirror glimmered from the palm of Zoda's left hand. The mind reader was the only one who saw it; for the back of his hand was toward the others. His keen eyes saw the reflection of the words that Lucille had written. They were in reverse; yet Zoda read them with a glimpse. He stepped back to the platform.

"Fold the paper," he ordered. "Press it lightly against your forehead – thus."

Lucille nodded and copied Zoda's action. While she held the paper slip, Zoda stared steadily toward her eyes; then spoke in a solemn tone.

"Your question," he stated, "is a simple one. You wish to know if the future holds luck for you. I can answer it. Your fortune is already made. Others know what you have not yet learned. That is all."

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Lucille. "This slip of paper was never out of my hand! What do you think of it Tex – and you, Eric?"

"Very goot," responded Eric Wernoff. "I haff seen nothing so clever before this time. Very goot."

It was plain that the animal trainer had not detected Zoda's smooth trickery. The action of touching Lucille's wrist had been well accomplished, in a most natural fashion.

Tex Larch was baffled also; but it was plain that he was thinking of something that Zoda had said. His weatherbeaten face was stern as his shrewd eyes studied the masklike visage of the mind reader.

"Let's go back to the office, Lucille," suggested Tex, gruffly. "I've got some business there. Come along. We'll see you later, Cap."

"I'll walk along with you," responded Guffy. "I'm going down to scoff. I'll keep on to the cook tent."

He started to follow the others; then paused and waved them ahead. He turned back to speak to Zoda.

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"Those boxes of yours are in town," he told the mind reader. "They came into the station tonight. I'll send down for them in the morning. What're you going to do? Rig up this platform different?"

"Yes. I intend to place pillars by the rail; with steps leading down to them. My act will be different then. I shall be closer to the spectators."

"That sounds like a good flash. Your act is a knock-out, Zoda; it was a break for me when The Solvas jumped the show."

"Have you heard from them?"

"Yeah. They wrote in saying they were going to join up with another outfit. Said I'd hear from them later, so I could ship their stuff."

"Mr. Larch has left," reminded Zoda, in his even-toned voice. "Weren't you going with him, Cap?"

"No," responded Guffy. "I was going along down the midway; that's all. I changed my mind, though. I'm not talking much with Tex Larch right now. He's a good scout – a trooper like myself – but he's got his business and I've got mine. Going to scoff with me down at the cook tent, Zoda?"

"Sorry," replied the mind reader. "I am very seldom hungry after the show. I shall see you later, Captain."

Guffy left the tent by himself. Zoda remained on the platform for a short while; then followed and made his way toward the tent that had formerly been the living quarters of The Solvas.

WHILE The Shadow – as Zoda – had been demonstrating his act to Lucille Lavan, other events had been moving on the circus lot. Cliff Marsland, down by the circus tent, had run into Hank, the first man who had shown him a red circle.

"See that tent?" Hank pointed out an isolated spot where a faint glow showed through brownish canvas. "We're covering it. Sneak over to the side of that first truck. Don't go any closer to the tent – and see that nobody else does."

"Right," agreed Cliff.

Reaching the truck, The Shadow's agent posted himself as a member of the guarding group. He knew that others who carried the red circle must be in the vicinity. Most of the lights had been turned off along the midway; pitch blackness reigned in this portion of the lot, except for the dull light from the secluded tent.

Until tonight, Cliff's only inkling of crime had been the presence of the mobsters who formed part of the circus crew. He knew that some of the Malligan-Zinn gang were established as ticket sellers and concessionaires. Cliff knew nothing about the counterfeiting end of the game, for the roughnecks were not used as passers of the queer currency.

Cliff had decided that Croaker Zinn was with the outfit. Yet Cliff had not seen the mobleader. The only two persons who might have contact with Croaker were Luke and Princess Marxia, for they had steered Cliff into the red circle. Mobsters – all pretended roughnecks – were covering the lighted tent. To Cliff, that meant that a meeting must be under way. Hank's order not to approach too close to the tent was indication that even the mobsmen were to remain in ignorance of the persons at the meeting. Cliff knew that the mobsmen would obey the order to keep their distance.

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That was the very reason why Cliff decided to approach. He was one of a cordon stretched around the tent. The darkness was thick. It offered opportunity. Easing away from the truck, Cliff dropped to his hands and knees and groped his way toward the dull light.

He reached the tent without encountering any obstacles. Crawling with hand against the canvas, Cliff found the flap as he listened to the mumble of voices from within the tent. Lying flat on the ground, Cliff raised a tiny peephole and peered into the lighted interior.

Facing him was Luke, the tattooed man. At Luke's side was the woman called Princess Marxia. Cliff was not surprised to see them here. But the sight of a third figure brought a silent gasp to his lips. Seated cross-legged on the ground was Cleed, the Cigarette Fiend!

The man began to speak as Cliff watched. The harsh tone of his voice – it was giving the first words that Cliff had ever heard Cleed utter – was enough to reveal the man's identity. Cleed, the pretended dope, was Croaker Zinn!

CLIFF suddenly realized why his acceptance into the band had been a prompt one. Cleed's platform was next to Luke's. Thus Croaker Zinn, disguised by his pasty face, had looked Cliff over and passed the word of approval to Luke.

"The Feds are watching all right," came Croaker's growl. "They grabbed The Solvas like they did the other saps that we used for blinds. That makes the third grab."

"The Solvas can't tell 'em nothing," put in Luke. "I don't see how it hurts us. Leave a note for another sucker, with one of those phony dollar bills. How about one of the guys on the Ferris wheel?"

"We've got to quit shoving the queer," decided Croaker. "The Feds ain't dumb, like dicks. Getting the same story from three people will show them that there's something bigger than they thought."

"We're laying off on the queer until I talk it over with the big shot. The vacation won't hurt anybody. We'll wait a while. That's all."

"But you've got to keep on feeding dough to your gorillas," protested Luke. "Sending real mazuma around the circle ain't going to please the big shot while he's got nothing coming in. I know he's leaving you handle the mob so he don't have to look like he's with it; but he didn't pin any medal on you the last time you quit shoving the queer."

"No?" questioned Croaker. "Well, guess again, Luke. I'm handling things with the big shot. I'm close to him. We figured this would be coming. We've got something else beside the queer. Listen – these gorillas that are working as roughnecks ain't just ornaments. It's going to be their turn while we're laying off the queer."

"You know the password – both of you. The one I told you to keep until you needed it. Well, I'll tell you when to start it. When it goes round the circle, there'll be five gorillas who will know what to do. Neither of you know the game that I've been holding up my sleeve. It's just as well you didn't."

"We don't have to shove the queer. This new gag will do the business. You'll get my tip in a couple of nights, Luke. Pass it to Marxia; then both of you shoot the word along. We'll pull in as much dough as we've been getting with the queer."

Croaker arose. He reached for the light. Cliff Marsland wriggled away from the tent as Luke began to ask some question. Cliff was almost back to the truck when the light went out. He gained his objective and

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waited there.

A sound came to Cliff's ears. The Shadow's agent fancied that he heard someone moving near the truck. Was it a spy, sent around the cordon, to make sure that all the watchers had remained at their posts? As Cliff listened, the creeping ceased. Then came a flashlight, blinking toward the truck.

"Are you there?"

It was Hank's voice. Cliff grunted an affirmative response and received a growled order to move along. Hank went on his way. Cliff realized that Hank had been watching the light in the tent. He had allowed time for the occupants to move out; then he had come to disperse the watchers.

LUKE and Marxia, with Cleed – otherwise Croaker – were waiting somewhere in the darkness. With the cordon gone, they would sneak back toward the Ten-in-One, unseen by friends as well as enemies. Cliff sauntered off through the darkness, obeying Hank's injunction.

Heading toward a tent that he occupied with other roughnecks, Cliff stopped suddenly. He was sure that he heard footsteps following his own. He moved along and stopped again; once more, he sensed an echo.

When he reached the tent, Cliff turned on a light and looked around. None of the other roughnecks were here. Empty cots, suitcases and boxes were all that Cliff saw. After a suspicious glance toward the flap that he had closed behind him, Cliff pulled a sheet of paper from his pocket. Producing a fountain pen, he wrote a coded message and sealed it in an envelope which he pressed upon the top of a box.

The envelope lay before him as Cliff was putting the pen back in his pocket. A faint rustle showed at the tent flap. Forgetting the envelope, Cliff pounced to the front and thrust his body through the canvas. He seized a moving form and grappled with it.

Catching his antagonist off balance, Cliff whirled the fellow around and sent him sprawling into the tent. Pouncing in, Cliff crouched above the man whom he had captured. He found himself staring into the brownish face of Jubo the Geek!

As Cliff stood ready to resume the attack, the grinning wild man plucked at the sleeve of his jersey. As the garment crept up, Cliff saw a red mark on Jubo's arm. It was the circle that showed its owner to be one of Croaker's band.

Cliff pulled up his own sleeve, Jubo saw the tattoo mark. Rising, the geek grinned again as he moved in crouching fashion toward the tent flap. Cliff allowed him to go unmolested. He heard Jubo slink off through the darkness.

Cliff was perturbed. Why had Jubo followed him here? Until this encounter, Cliff had not suspected that Jubo belonged to the crime crew. Cliff's worry began to increase. It was possible that Jubo had been working as a rover, going the rounds to watch the cordon.

Against this was the fact that Hank had made no provision for such a prowler. Jubo in circling the conference tent, would naturally have been challenged by every one on watch. Then it occurred to Cliff that Jubo might have been another watcher. The geek could have heard Cliff crawling by the truck and followed him to make sure that he was a member of the band.

Cliff smiled. He felt that his red circle had squared him with Jubo, just as the geek's tattoo mark had made it right with Cliff. That point settled, The Shadow's agent remembered his important envelope. He swung

toward the box; then stopped short.

A hand had raised the side of the tent by the box. An arm was coming inward from solid blackness. Gloved fingers were resting on the envelope. As Cliff watched, the hand moved away, carrying the envelope with it.

The Shadow! Cliff's chief had come to gain the report prepared for him. He had been waiting to get this message before Cliff left to mail it to New York.

A smile of confidence crept over Cliff's features as the side of the tent dropped to cover the departing hand. With The Shadow close at hand, Cliff felt ready for any emergency that might arise.

Five minutes later, a swishing sound occurred in a small tent. Then came the clicking of the clasp on a suitcase. A hand pressed the light switch. Zoda, the mind reader, was revealed by the glare. His hands opened an envelope and read an inked message. The writing faded. Zoda tore up the blank sheet.

The Shadow had received Cliff Marsland's message. He had learned that Cleed and Croaker Zinn were one. He had gained a report of the conference in the tent. Cloak, hat and gloves were packed away. As Zoda, The Shadow was prepared for coming crime.

## CHAPTER X. MOBSMEN MOVE

IT was the last night in Burnsville. Business was good in the Ten-in-One. Zoda was working with his newly arranged platform. He was the big attraction in the sideshow. Wearing a turban above his full dress suit, the mind reader was holding the crowd with his marvels.

"Whisper a question to any of your friends," he told the throng. "Let them be ready to confirm the thought that is in your mind. That is all I ask, as I stand here upon my small platform. Proceed –"

Zoda indicated a lady in the audience. The woman spoke in the ear of a man beside her. A suave smile appeared upon Zoda's lips, as his eyes met the woman's gaze.

"That gentleman is your husband, madame," announced the mind reader. "You mentioned the name of your child and wondered if I could catch the thought. The child is a girl. Her name is Myrtle."

A buzz passed among the spectators as the woman's gasp showed that Zoda's answer had been correct. The mind reader turned to a man who was standing by himself.

"Choose someone," ordered Zoda. "Tell that person your name – the date of your birth – any bit of information that you care to give. I shall divine the thought."

Thus speaking, Zoda turned to pick up a crystal ball from its pedestal. Staring into the clear sphere, he announced:

"You are thinking of your birthday, sir. September the twelfth, 1897. You are also concentrating upon your name. Since you have mentioned it to the person beside you, I shall announce it. Your name is Herbert" – Zoda polished the crystal – "Herbert Ranger."

The man nodded. There was further buzz. Zoda singled out more persons and answered their questions. Then as Cap Guffy signaled from beside Princess Marxia's pit, Zoda produced his supply of books and began to sell them to the crowd.



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One man remained after the others had passed along. It was Cliff Marsland. He had come into the Ten-in-One as a skill. He had also started the book sale by making one of the first purchases. He was reading his horoscope as he stood by one of the pillars that Zoda had set up in front of the platform. The mind reader, up on the platform, was arranging his books on a table at the rear curtain.

"The password went around." Cliff moved his lips in a faint whisper. "Everybody in the circle sent it along. The word was 'pyramid.' I don't know what it was for, or who was supposed to act on account of it. But I think it went to some of the fake roughnecks."

Cliff thrust the horoscope book into his pocket and strolled along past Marxia's pit.

EVERY word that he had whispered had reached The Shadow's ears. For Zoda, the mind reader, was wearing a pair of earphones in his turban.

Wires ran beneath his suit to metal plates on his shoes. These formed contact with copper nails in the platform. The nails, in turn, were connected by wires to microphones in the pillars out in front of the platform. The tiniest whisper from near those pillars was audible to the mind reader.

This was the secret of the startling act that The Shadow had performed in the guise of Zoda. He had arranged the hook up while the Ten-in-One was empty. But his work had not stopped with the placing of the microphones in the pillars.

Along the ground ran other wires. One terminated in a mike by Marxia's pit; another was set beneath Luke's platform; the third was under the little stage where Cleed was resting. Thus The Shadow was ready to hear anything that the conspirators might say.

He knew that the word had been passed along. Just after the first show, he had caught a low grunt from Cleed. Luke had left his platform to sneak to Marxia. Both had spoken – individually – to lounging roughnecks who had worked as skills.

Hence Cliff's report had been unnecessary. It had told The Shadow neither more nor less than he had already heard. No one had given any explanation for the word "pyramid." It had merely been started along the chain, through Luke and Marxia, at the instigation of Cleed.

A roughneck was approaching Luke's platform. Zoda moved away from the table with the books. He sat down in a chair and let his feet rest upon a definite spot. Words clicked through the earphones, muffled by the protecting turban. The roughneck was talking to Luke.

"I've got a job for you," the roughneck was saying.

"Tattooing?" questioned Luke.

"Sure." The roughneck laughed. "That's your work, ain't it? Get busy. I'm the first, I guess."

"What kind of a design?"

"Anything. Only make it quick. And spread it over this red circle."

"What?"

"You heard me. Say – ain't you in the know?"

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"Sure thing." Luke laughed. "Only I got to look like I'm surprised, ain't I?"

The buzz of the electric needle began. The smile showed on Zoda's thin lips. The Shadow knew from Cliff's previous report that tonight's plans were between Croaker Zinn and certain mobsters whom he had probably prepared in advance. The chosen ones were the only members of the circle who had understood the meaning of "pyramid." They were following instructions. For some reason, they were having the red circles obliterated.

A few minutes later, Cap Guffy came along the line, followed by Princess Marxia. He noticed that Zoda had become suddenly busy with his books. Cap passed the mind reader's platform. He stopped to watch Luke at work on the tattoo job.

"Go ahead, Luke," decided Guffy. "I was going to use you on the bally stand; but since you're doing a job, you can stay here."

CAP moved along to Cleed's platform. Zoda, obscured by a curtain, promptly moved to a new location. The conversation that followed was audible through the earphones. It was an odd conversation, for Cap Guffy was the lone speaker. He was talking to Cleed and the answers from the pasty-faced man were nothing more than weary signs with his head.

"Come on, Cleed. I'll use you on the bally... What's that?... No?... When I say come along, you come along... Don't want to, eh? Well – I get the idea. You're supposed to be too dopey to get up... That's right. You gave me the nod that time... Well, keep on nodding. Get off that cot. You can act like you are a hop-head when you're on the bally platform... Still saying no, eh? Listen. I'll call a couple of punks and have them grab you when you start to collapse. It'll look good... Yes? That's better. Come along."

Zoda was looking from his platform when Cap Guffy conducted Cleed toward the front of the tent. The Cigarette Fiend was leaning heavily on Cap's shoulder. Cap was talking to him as they walked along. Cap's words, however, were inaudible to The Shadow, for they had passed the range of the microphone.

Luke had finished his tattoo job when the acts came back from the bally platform. Cleed had evidently pulled his collapse stunt, for two roughnecks were carrying him into the tent. Customers were buying tickets in frantic haste, anxious to see what had happened to Cleed.

The roughnecks dropped their burden on the army cot. One of them sauntered away. The other climbed up on Luke's platform. Again, the earphones served The Shadow. This fellow wanted a new design to cover up the red circle. He was showing Luke a butterfly design on his right forearm. He wanted it matched with one on the left.

THE show went on. Luke paused in his tattooing to display his pictured back to the crowd while Cap Guffy lectured at the platform. Then, as the throng moved along, Luke resumed his work. When the round had been completed, Cap bellowed out for Marxia and Zoda to come out for a new bally.

The snake charmer brought along a pair of bull snakes. Zoda looked impressive with turban and crystal ball. Cap, as an afterthought, added Cleed and instructed the fake freak to "do another flop."

Luke was again eliminated. He had finished with his second customer; but a third had promptly arrived. The bally finished; and another show went on. The procedure continued. When the last show was in progress, Luke had supplied five roughnecks with new tattoo marks to cover their red circles.

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Cliff Marsland was a shill on the last show. He lingered in front of Zoda's platform and whispered his report into the mike. Cliff had been watching the roughnecks along the midway. He had not witnessed the tattooing done by Luke.

"Five of the mob have slipped out," informed Cliff. "I watched them pull away in an old car. I don't know what they're up to."

There was no response from Zoda. Cliff went back to the midway. He was needed at the circus tent, for roughnecks were getting ready to pull down the big top and load it for tonight's jump.

A recent message from The Shadow had instructed Cliff to pass his information to Zoda. Hence Cliff had a hunch that Zoda and The Shadow were the same. He realized that to play his part successfully, The Shadow had been forced to let the five mobsters embark upon their trip. Cliff, however, could see purpose in The Shadow's action.

Already, the counterfeiting game was known. But it had been put on the shelf, at Croaker's order. The best way for The Shadow to learn Croaker's new game of crime was to let it go unmolested on the first attempt.

THE big top was coming down. Cliff joined other roughnecks on the stakepuller. This was a long shaft that projected from an axle between two wagon wheels. A roughneck grabbed a chain that hung from the other side of the axle and wound it around a stake that had been driven deep in the hard ground.

Then Cliff and the others grabbed the high end of the shaft and bore it downward. The leverage yanked the heavy stake clear of the ground. The wheels revolved as the roughnecks rolled the stake puller along to make another hitch.

While Cliff was aiding on this job, the last show finished in the Ten-in-One. The freaks departed from their platform. Princess Marxia's snake boxes were carried from the tent.

While Cap Guffy was out calling for roughnecks, Zoda remained alone. Unobserved, he detached the microphones and packed them. Then he strolled out along the midway, where the concessionaires were packing up their joints.

Jubo the Geek was working with the ticket seller who ran his tent. He had become a very tame wild man; but that excited no comment among the circus folk. They knew that all geeks were fakes. Thus Jubo, rolling canvas, was an object of interest only to the few townfolk who were staring from the fringes of the circus lot.

As Zoda's tall figure stopped near a tent close by the office trailer, Cap Guffy strode into view. Tex Larch was talking with Stuffy Dowson outside the office. Cap came up with an angry scowl on his face.

"Say, you!" he hurled his challenge at both Tex and Stuffy. "What about them roughnecks that's supposed to be tearing down my top? Where are they?"

Tex Larch stared. Neither he nor Cap Guffy had patched up their differences since they had left Marlborough. Both had been reasonably cordial, but Guffy's outburst looked to Tex like an effort to widen the breach.

"Don't stand there like a couple of hicks," roared Guffy. "Where's the roughnecks? It's your job to supply them. That top of mine is ready to come down."

"What about the roughnecks, Stuffy?" questioned Tex, turning to the general agent.

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"They ought to be up at the Ten-in-One," returned Stuffy. "I had eight men on Cap's top."

"Hear that, Guffy?" challenged Tex. "You've got eight roughnecks waiting for you."

"Have I?" demanded Cap. "Have I? Well, you go up and count them. Maybe you can make two and one add up to eight. There's three roughnecks using the stake puller. That's all I've got."

"Take a run up there, Stuffy," ordered Tex.

Stuffy nodded. He departed.

Neither Tex nor Cap knew that Zoda was watching them as they resumed a silent feud. Each showman was curbing his temper. Cap Guffy stared sullenly while Tex Larch bit the end from a cigar and applied a match to the stogy.

A FEW minutes passed; Stuffy came back on the run.

"Cap's right, Tex," informed the general agent. "Only three roughnecks there."

"What do you say to that?" quizzed Guffy.

"Nothing much," retorted Tex. "When you need roughnecks, ask for them. If you give us reasonable notice, we'll have them when you want them."

"I didn't know they were gone," growled Cap. "I saw them around a while ago. They came in the Ten-in-One. They shilled for the shows. They didn't blow until the top was ready to come down."

"That's just the time when they would blow," returned Tex, coolly. "Go down to the big top, Stuffy. Yank five roughnecks off of it and send them up to the Ten-in-One. Does that suit you, Guffy?"

"All right." Cap's tone seemed mollified. Turning on his heel, the owner of the side show stalked back toward his tent. Tex Larch grinned sourly as he watched Cap's departure.

Zoda was not the only witness of the scene. Peering from between two trucks, another person was looking on. The keen eyes that burned from Zoda's masklike countenance saw the pasty face of Cleed. The man whom The Shadow knew as Croaker Zinn turned suddenly and headed back toward the Ten-in-One.

Cliff Marsland, coming up with four other roughnecks whom Stuffy had delegated to the Ten-in-One was just in time to observe Zoda's tall form moving into the tent that had once been The Solvas'.

But neither Cliff nor any of the others saw the tall, black-garbed figure that later emerged from the canvas flaps. When they had finished tearing down the Ten-in-One, they dropped the small tents also. Zoda's bags went aboard a truck along with the rolls of canvas.

Once more, The Shadow was strolling unseen about the circus lot. His figure was invisible as it kept away from the scattered spots where lights aided the roughnecks who were loading the trucks.

Five men had left the lot tonight. The Shadow knew that they had fared forth on crime. But The Shadow was unperturbed. Like Vic Marquette, he was biding his time. Like Vic, The Shadow was waiting to spot the big shot whose hidden hand was guiding the deeds of Croaker Zinn.

## CHAPTER XI. CRIME'S AFTERMATH

"LAST town was a red one. This will be another bloomer."

Cap Guffy made the statement from the front of the Ten-in-One. The show was on the new lot, outside the town of Hamilcar. Evening had arrived; yet the crowd was straggling.

"There's an hour yet before the big show starts," observed Stuffey Dowson. He was standing beside Cap Guffy. "You've got to give 'em a chance to come on the lot."

"Yeah?" questioned Cap. "On opening night? Say – this midway ought to be jammed. Look at it, though. There ain't a wheel clicking. Listen, Stuffey; sometimes I've squawked because Tex wouldn't let me start my show until after they got going in the big top. But I ain't kicking tonight. It won't need big figures to count up the 'take' that's coming in tonight."

"Tex wants to see you down in the office, Cap," remarked Stuffey, in a conciliatory tone. "Thought maybe I'd better tell you a while before you opened."

"All right by me," returned Cap. "Say – does Tex think I'm still sore about them roughnecks? I ain't. This new crew is better than the old one."

"That's good, Cap. No, the roughnecks don't matter with Tex. I guess some of the five that blew are back again. We weren't short-handed when we set up the big top today."

"Moving around, eh? Well, that's the way with roughnecks. You can't count on them."

"Hank may have taken on some new ones," admitted Stuffey. "He's the guy that keeps tabs. Well – it's up to him. That's one job he can keep – watching the roughnecks. I don't want it."

As Cap Guffy strolled in the direction of the office, keen eyes spied him from a tent beyond the Ten-in-One. That was Zoda's tent; but it was a different shape than Zoda's that moved forth into the thickening gloom.

A blackened shape against the darkening sky, The Shadow was moving toward the truck to which the office trailer was attached. He was choosing that vantage point to observe what happened in the office.

Other forms appeared among the tents after The Shadow had followed Guffy's path. One was that of Jubo the Geek. Another was the figure of Cleed. Passing roughnecks chanced to observe these prowlers. They paid no attention to them. It was customary for the freaks to stay away from the midway while the crowds were gathering.

CAP GUFFY entered the office with a bang. He let the door slam as he closed it. Tex Larch looked up from one of the desks and gave an affable nod. He laid a newspaper aside. Cap approached and glanced at it.

"Reading about that Almsburg robbery, eh?" questioned Guffy. "Say – those birds pulled something, didn't they? Got away with about fifty thousand bucks. Almsburg's near here, ain't it?"

"About thirty miles away," responded Tex. "I wasn't reading about the robbery, though. It don't interest me. Sit down, Cap. I want to talk to you."

"Maybe you was reading about this," chuckled Cap. "More hokum about that missing heiress, Lucy Aldon."

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Girl out in Cincinnati claims to be the girl, eh? Well, it don't look like she's getting away with it. Here's a statement from the Aldon lawyer – look at the name of the gazebo – Adoniram Towne."

"Forget the paper," growled Tex. "It's the bunk. Here. Give it to me!"

He yanked the newspaper from Cap's hands. Guffy's fists began to clench. Tex pulled a cigar from his pocket and began to chew on the end.

"Getting kind of grouchy, eh, Tex?" quizzed Cap. "What's the idea – grabbing a newspaper while I'm reading it? Hand it back to me. I want to see the rest about the Aldon millions."

"She ain't the gal," returned Tex, crumpling the newspaper and throwing it under a desk. "That lawyer with the funny name said she ain't. It's just some more of that bunk you read in the papers. That robbery don't mean anything to us, either. Almsburg's thirty miles away. Those fellows that blew the bank safe won't be over to spend their money on this lot."

"Guess you're right about that, Tex," declared Cap, forgetting his animosity as he grinned. "We'll be lucky if we pull in a crowd from right here in Hamilcar. Say, Tex – how long have you been in the show business?"

"Thirty years. Why?"

"Well, I just figured it would take experience to pick a bloomer as bad as this one. I couldn't do it."

"It's worse than I expected," admitted Tex. "It's mighty bad, Cap. That's why I wanted to talk to you. It's no time now for us to keep on being sore. I've got to run into New York."

"You need dough, eh?"

"I will before we finish this stand."

"Can you get it?"

"Yeah. I'm leaving on the next train. But I'm not telling Stuffy where I'm going."

"Why not, Tex?"

"Because he don't know how to keep his mouth shut. He's all right with the folks on the lot, but he begins to talk if anybody important shows up."

"Like Jonathan Wilbart?"

"Yeah."

"I see." Cap sat down and nodded speculatively. "You're expecting Wilbart, are you?"

"I am," announced Tex. "That's why I'm leaving tonight. I want to be out of here when he comes around. I'm going to tell Stuffy to let him talk to you. Remember that proposition, Cap, that we were talking about when we got sore in Marlborough?"

"About my saying I'd sold out to you, Tex?"

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"That's it. Well – there's no papers to show it, but you stick to the story, will you? Maybe you're still sore at me, Cap, but just the same –"

"I know. We're both showmen and Wilbart ain't. I get it, Tex. Well, I'm agreeable on that score. If we've got a grudge, it ain't big enough to keep us from helping the other guy kid Wilbart. That's settled, Tex. What do you want me –"

Cap stopped as the door slid open. It was Stuffey. Another man was following the general agent into the office.

TEX LARCH stared as he saw Jonathan Wilbart. The circus magnate had arrived sooner than Tex had expected.

"Good evening," greeted Wilbart. "Am I interrupting a conference?"

"No," growled Tex. "Slide out, Stuffey. Stay here, will you, Cap? Sit down, Wilbart."

"It doesn't look so good on the midway," observed Wilbart, as he settled in a seat. "I told you this would be a bad town, Tex."

"We had a red one," returned Tex. "We're due for a bloomer. How about it, Cap?"

"Maybe this town won't turn out bad," was Guffy's comment. "You can't never tell, Tex."

"You are both optimists," decided Wilbart. "Well – if you feel that way, Tex, I suppose there is no use trying to buy your show tonight."

"Not tonight or any night," retorted Tex. "I'm staying in the business, Wilbart. With this show, too. In fact" – he shot a look toward Guffy – "I'm doing some buying of my own."

"What?" exclaimed Wilbart. "Another circus?"

"A sideshow," answered Tex. "Cap Guffy's. I'm taking over his Ten-in-One. I've got an option on it."

"Where's the money coming from?" questioned Wilbart, narrowly.

"I've got all I need," returned Tex.

"It didn't come in through your turnstiles," argued Wilbart. "What's more, you can't tell me that the concessions are making up the deficit."

"I'm making money out of this show," asserted Tex, emphatically. "I'm satisfied with business. If you want to stay around town until we move, you'll be here to see me hand one thousand dollars to Cap Guffy."

"So you're making money, eh?" chuckled Wilbart, wisely. "That's a good one, Tex. Best I've heard yet. All right. I shall take your word for it. The Larch Circus is showing a profit. That is established. That means the other shows are making money, too. Yours, for instance, Guffy."

"That's right," responded Cap.

"You're making money, are you, Guffy?" questioned Wilbart. "Then why are you selling out to Larch?"

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Tex scratched the lobe of his left ear. He looked at Cap Guffy, who had no reply. Then he turned to Jonathan Wilbart.

"Cap's ready to retire," explained Tex. "Figures that he's been in the show business long enough. How about it, Cap?"

"That's right," responded Cap. "I've made my sock. With what Tex is offering, I won't need to stay on the road."

"That is another excellent story," commented Wilbart. "If you have money, Guffy, it didn't come through the front of your Ten-in-One. Well" – Wilbart paused to nod – "it's possible that one of you is right."

"How do you mean?" questioned Tex, in an uneasy tone.

"Well," resumed Wilbart, "you may have struck a gold mine on one of the circus lots. Maybe you do have money, Tex. Or" – Wilbart turned to Cap – "perhaps you are the man who has been finding nuggets, Guffy."

Cap shrugged his shoulders. He did not appear uneasy. Jonathan Wilbart arose. He stepped toward the door and delivered a quiet smile.

"I shall come back, Tex," he declared. "Perhaps you will have a different decision before you have finished with the town of Hamilcar. Or" – the smile increased – "should I say before Hamilcar has finished with you?"

ALTHOUGH angered by Wilbart's friendly sarcasm, Tex seemed unable to make a retort. He shifted uneasily by the desk. Cap Guffy said nothing. He seemed to be thinking deeply as Jonathan Wilbart prepared to leave. Before the magnate had reached the door, however, the barrier slid back and a burly, big fisted man stamped into the office.

"I'm Sheriff Howard," he announced. "Are you Tex Larch?"

He put the gruff question to Jonathan Wilbart, who shook his head. The magnate pointed to Tex and stepped toward the door. The sheriff stopped him.

"Are you going off this lot?" demanded Howard.

"Certainly," replied Wilbart, in a tone of surprise. "Have you any objection?"

"Who is this gentleman?" questioned the sheriff. He indicated Wilbart as he spoke to Tex. "Does he have anything to do with this show?"

"He wants to buy it, that's all," replied Tex. "He's Jonathan Wilbart. Owns five shows of his own. Just came in here to see me."

"That's all right, then," acknowledged the sheriff. "Sorry to hold you back, Mr. Wilbart. Wait a minute." He scrawled with a pencil on a slip of paper. "When you get outside the grounds, hand this to one of the men that stops you. That's all. You've got a car, haven't you?"

"Yes," said Wilbart. "And a chauffeur."

"They'll let you drive by," declared the sheriff.



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Wilbart looked perplexed. Then, seeing that Howard was waiting for him to leave, he nodded to Tex and Cap. Stepping to the ground, the magnate closed the door behind him.

"What's the trouble, sheriff?" inquired Tex, affably. "You aren't going to slough the wheels, are you? I thought we were going to be allowed to run all the games in this town."

"That's not what I'm here about," stated the sheriff. "Who is this fellow here with you?"

"Captain Guffy," introduced Tex. "He runs the Ten-in-One – the side-show."

"He's with the show, then. Helping you run it?"

"He owns the Ten-in-One."

"All right. He can hear what I have to say. Nobody's going off this lot tonight without my permission."

"The customers?" inquired Tex.

"There's no more coming in. We've looked over the ones that are here. They're mostly folks from Hamilcar. We know them."

"Who do you mean by 'we'?"

"The men in my posse. I've got sixty of them, all around the grounds. Just posted them."

"What's up?" demanded Tex, furrowing his forehead in worried fashion. "I don't get it, sheriff."

"There was a bank robbery in Almsburg last night," explained Howard. "The robbers got away; but a watchman saw them. He took the number of their car. We found it this afternoon, near this lot. We think the crooks are hiding out with your circus."

"That's no reason to keep people away from the show," retorted Tex, hotly.

"No?" queried the sheriff. "Well, I think different. You've heard my orders. You can tell your people to stay in bounds."

"I can't tell them anything," pleaded Tex, suddenly. "Listen, sheriff. This show is going broke. I don't want it to fold. I have to go into New York on the next train to see if I can raise some money. It's all the more important, now that you're killing the little business that we might do tonight."

"Go ahead," agreed the sheriff. "I'll let you past. You're the head man of the outfit. You can leave. Will Captain Guffy be in charge?"

"Yes," replied Tex. "He and my general manager, Stuffy Dowson. Wait a minute. I'll call Stuffy."

He stepped to the door and called for Stuffy. The general manager appeared for instructions. The sheriff looked over Tex's shoulder to get a view of Stuffy.

"Get my kiesters, Stuffy," ordered Tex. "They're all packed. Hurry them up. I'm leaving town."

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"One of my men will drive you to the station," informed the sheriff. "Come along with your bags. We can get a car out in front of the lot."

Stuffy showed up with the suitcases. There were two bags; both large and heavy. Tex took one and ordered Stuffy to carry the other. Cap Guffy waited at the door of the office while the sheriff walked with Tex and Stuffy to the entrance of the midway.

INTENT as he watched Tex's departure, Cap Guffy did not sense a slight motion at the window in the front of the office. Nor did he see the phantom shape that reached the ground beside the truck.

That form was still invisible when it reached the fringe of the circus lot. Enshrouded in gloom, The Shadow watched Tex and Stuffy place the heavy bags into the rear of a parked sedan. Tex took the seat beside the driver. The sheriff gave an order and the car rolled away.

Pacing men with rifles formed a large encircling cordon about the circus lot. The glare of the lights was sufficient for these sentinels to distinguish moving figures. But their eyes failed them when a spectral shape glided noiselessly toward the roadway. In the gloom, that form was nothing more than an elongated splotch of blackness.

A creature of the night, The Shadow was proving his power to pass unseen. His soft laugh was no more than a whispered echo. It marked the end of Zoda. The Shadow had resumed his cloak of blackness.

Finished with his temporary role, informed of the situation which existed, The Shadow was ready for the aftermath of crime. On the lot and off, he was preparing to play his part in the events that were due tonight.

Circling the pacing members of the posse, The Shadow again displayed his uncanny spell. With the glide of a grim ghost, he chose another opening and retraced his course back toward the office where Cap Guffy awaited the return of Sheriff Howard.

## CHAPTER XII. ONE MAN MISSING

WHEN Sheriff Howard returned to the office he promptly began to issue orders to Cap Guffy and Stuffy Dowson. The veteran showmen listened soberly while Howard explained his plan for rounding up the bank robbers.

"Run the circus as usual," the sheriff said to Stuffy. "You do the same with your show, Captain. My posse will see to it that everybody stays on the lot. Meanwhile, I'll be strolling around with the watchman and a couple of my deputies."

"Looking for the crooks?" questioned Stuffy.

"Yes," replied Howard. "We'll go into the circus tent like we were regular customers. Give us seats in the box right in front of the main ring. We'll be looking over the whole tent. If we don't see the men we want, we'll go to the other shows and look in the concessions."

"And if you don't find them then?"

"We'll scour the lot. Line up everybody. I could do that to begin with; but I don't want to. It's better as a last resort. You see" – Howard paused craftily – "I reckon that those robbers don't know the watchman saw them. If they're here with the circus, they've probably got the swag hid somewhere. So they'll try to stand pat, not

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knowing that we've got the goods on them."

Cap Guffy was seated at a desk. He was weighing the sheriff's words. Cap had no comment. He kept strumming on the woodwork while he stared toward the speaker. Stuffy Dowson, however, did not keep silent.

"Say" – Stuffy wagged a finger toward the sheriff – "maybe those roughnecks was in on that bank robbery. There was five of 'em blew on the night we was leaving Burnsville."

"Last night, eh?"

"Yeah."

"Are they back with the show?"

"I don't know. We can't keep tabs on them roughnecks – leastwise, I can't. But the five of 'em was supposed to tear down Cap's top. They wasn't there when we needed 'em."

"Are they back with your tent now?" questioned the sheriff, turning to Cap Guffy.

"No." Cap shook his head emphatically. "The boys that set up my top was the ones that Stuffy brought up instead of the bunch that blew."

"Where would the fellows be then, if they returned?"

"I don't know."

"Maybe with the big top," put in Stuffy. "They could have slid in with that crew. If they don't know nothin', you're likely to see 'em while the show is on."

"Good," decided the sheriff. "Now we've got to do something to explain why I've got a posse here. You two chaps go out and spread the news that this town is hot. Tell your people that a lot of toughs tried to bust up a carnival that played here a couple of weeks ago.

"Tell them that's why I'm on the job. I want to stop any riots that may start. That's why all the circus folks have got to keep in bounds. We're protecting them as well as the town people.

"That story ought to hold them – all except the five guys that we're after. And if the five try to beat it, we'll nab them easy. And listen: while you're spreading the news, check up and see if any hands are missing."

THE three men left the office. Stuffy headed toward the big top. Cap went in the direction of the Ten-in-One. He spoke to concessionaires as he passed them. He stopped and talked to the ticket seller outside of Jubo's tent. This fellow nodded and went inside to speak to the geek.

When he reached the Ten-in-One, Cap found a few of the freaks gathered inside. He made a general announcement for their benefit.

"We're opening late tonight," said Cap, gruffly. "The 'tin star' is on the lot and he's got a bunch of deputies on the job. He thinks there's going to be trouble, so he's looking out for us. Some of these townies think they're tough and the tin star wants to make it soft for us. Guess he's afraid we might yell a 'Hey Rube.' So keep on the lot – all of you."

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The freaks nodded. Since the show was opening late, they began to leave the tent. Cap went over to Cleed's platform, where the pasty-faced man was lying on his cot. Cleed was the only one who had not heard Cap's announcement.

After Guffy spoke to him, Cleed arose lazily from the cot and nodded. While Guffy remained alone in the silence of the tent, Cleed followed the other freaks. They had gone out through the back canvas.

TEN minutes later; Cliff Marsland, carrying a bucket past the big top, was encountered by Hank. The big mobster spoke to Cliff in an undertone.

"Shove that bucket," he ordered. "Cover by the truck. There's a meeting in the tent."

Cliff nodded. He stowed the water bucket under the stake puller. He made for the truck and took his stand there. Dusk had settled early, for the day was cloudy; yet the gloom was not thick enough to risk another crawl to the dimly lighted tent that stood one hundred feet away.

In fact, Cliff fancied that he could make out the figures of other roughnecks whom Hank had posted as a cordon. His watching eyes caught sight of a stooped form crouching outside the circle. It looked like Jubo the Geek. Cliff saw the figure move away.

Then his eyes became transfixed. Moving along the ground within the circle was a splotch of blackness. It was a strange, uncanny shape that suddenly passed from view. When Cliff glimpsed it again, the shape had become a motionless streak against the side of the lighted tent.

No challenge came from any watcher. Cliff realized that he alone had seen that weird manifestation of a living being.

Cliff smiled grimly. He had not dared venture toward the tent; but there was one who had taken the chance, with success. The Shadow had slipped through the cordon of mobster roughnecks. The master of darkness was listening in on the new conference.

INSIDE the little tent, Cleed was talking in the growl that characterized Croaker Zinn. Luke and Princess Marxia were listening to his statements. Their faces showed apprehension; but Croaker's faked countenance was emotionless.

"You heard the story that Cap Guffy is passing around the lot," stated Croaker. "Well – we know the real dope. Cap's just handing out the line that the hick sheriff told him to spread. They're really after the bunch that pulled the robbery in Almsburg. I know it and so does the big shot.

"We've got to give those five gorillas a break. At the same time, we're not going to bust up the racket on their account. I saw this coming; that's why I had the five cover up those red circles by letting you use the blue needle, Luke."

"I figured that," responded the tattooed man. "Say – it had me stumped when the first guy came in. But after that – after you gave me the nod –"

"Never mind," interrupted Croaker. "Let's talk about tonight. Those five gorillas have got to stick together. We'll let them fight for themselves and scam together. If they have trouble getting away, we'll shout a 'Hey Rube.' But I don't think we'll need it."

"Why not?"

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"I'll tell you. First of all, you pass the word to Hank. He knows who the five gorillas are. Have him shove them on the cat cage."

"For Wernoff's animal act?"

"Yeah. There's plenty of guns used in that part of the show. They're to keep under cover until Wernoff goes on. They'll be the crew that rolls the cat cage into the room. Then when –"

Croaker broke off suddenly. He had heard a noise outside. He sprang to his feet and turned off the light. He growled to Luke to beat around the side of the tent.

The Shadow was moving away before Luke acted. He, too, had heard the noise. What was more, he had located it. Moving stealthily along the ground, The Shadow could see a crawling figure making its way toward a stack of crates.

Members of the cordon were closing in, following the signal of the extinguished light. Motionless, The Shadow saw the figure rise from among the boxes. He recognized the bouncing gait of Jubo the Geek.

The prowler had slipped past the cordon. It was The Shadow's turn to do the same. He moved toward the truck where Cliff Marsland had been stationed. He gave a low hiss as his agent came in toward the darkened tent. Cliff paused as The Shadow glided past.

One minute later, the light clicked on in the little tent. Croaker and his aids were resuming their interrupted conference. Roughnecks moved back to their posts. Two minutes followed; again the lights went out.

Once more the roughnecks inspected; then moved away. This time, the freaks stole from the tent. Croaker had completed his instructions. The Shadow had not gained the opportunity to hear the final statement of the mobleader.

A soft laugh came from beside the truck that Cliff had left. The Shadow had no need to return. He had heard enough. His keen brain had divined the rest. Noiselessly, The Shadow glided away from the truck.

THE freaks were returning to the Ten-in-One. Marxia and Cleed were preparing to enter through the back canvas. The snake charmer paused to speak to her companion.

"What about the swag?" she whispered, "If those five have to scam with –"

"The big shot's got the swag," came Croaker's low growl. "Don't worry. He's taking care of it. The sheriff may make trouble for the gorillas, but he won't find the swag on this lot. Keep mum, Marxia. Remember: I'm Cleed; not Croaker."

The two entered the tent. Another figure moved from twenty feet away. It was Jubo the Geek.

Scarcely had he departed when Luke arrived and entered the back of the tent. The tattooed man went to his platform. He nodded as he looked toward Cleed. It was Luke's signal that he had seen Hank. The orders would be followed.

Cap Guffy was striding along in front of the rail. He was wearing a frown as he looked toward the platform next to Luke's. He turned to the tattooed man.

"Where's Zoda?" demanded Cap.

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"Haven't seen him," returned Luke.

"His outfit ain't here," snorted Cap. "Say – I bet that guy blew the show. I'm going to find out."

Cap strode toward the entrance. A tent flap rose as he neared the spot. In stepped the sheriff. Cap stopped short.

"What about your crowd?" asked the sheriff. "Checked up on them?"

"There's one man missing," replied Cap. "I was just coming to tell you."

"Who is he?"

"Zoda, the mind reader. A new act. Came on the show back in Burnsville."

"Do you think he's on the lot?"

"No. He must have cleared out with his stuff before you put the posse on the job."

"Where do you think he went?"

"I don't know. Maybe he headed for the station. Tex started early for that train. It hasn't gone out yet. Say – suppose I run down there in my car and see if Zoda is waiting for it."

"Where's your car?"

"Right out back."

"All right. Take one of my deputies with you."

Cap and the sheriff moved out through the back canvas. They found Cap's car – a coupe – standing near the tent. A wardrobe trunk was resting in the rumble seat.

"Say" – Cap turned to the sheriff – "I'd forgot about that trunk. It gives me an idea. It belongs to a pair that jumped the show – The Solvas – and I got a letter from them asking me to ship it to New York."

"Well?"

"Well – I ain't had time to ship it. Suppose, now, that Zoda is down at the station. He may be on the look-out. But if he sees me drive up to the baggage room and unload this trunk, he won't think I'm after him."

"What then?"

"I can sneak out of the baggage room and squint along the platform. He won't know it."

"That sounds all right. Wait here until I get a deputy."

Cap Guffy grinned as he looked at the trunk in the rumble seat. His idea evidently appealed to him. The sheriff's approval seemed to his liking. The deputy arrived promptly; he and Cap entered the car and started for the station.

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CAP pulled up at the baggage room. He and the deputy unloaded the trunk. Cap checked it and dropped the check in his pocket. He watched the trunk go aboard the baggage truck. The baggage master started the truck along the platform just as a whistle sounded to announce the approach of the train. Rails began to click.

"What about the fellow we're looking for?" questioned the deputy, anxiously.

"Now's the time to spot him," responded Cap. "Come with me."

The pair edged to the platform just as the train arrived. Brakes brought the string of cars to a grinding stop. Cap saw Tex Larch step aboard, lugging his heavy bags. He looked in the opposite direction and observed the trunk going in the baggage car.

"All aboard!"

The conductor's cry brought a shake from Cap's head. The owner of the Ten-in-One turned to the deputy and spoke in a disappointed tone.

"Zoda didn't get on that train," he announced. "I'd have spotted him, sure. We'll have to look for him back on the lot."

"And if he isn't there?"

"One man missing," stated Cap, as he took the wheel of the coupe. "It'll be the sheriff's job to find him."

Cap smiled grimly as he phrased this decision. The deputy nodded as they started back along the road to the circus grounds. Cap's manner seemed to indicate that the disappearance of Zoda was a matter of grave consequence.

A watching figure was shrouded in the darkness behind the Ten-in-One. Keen eyes saw Cap Guffy wave the deputy away. They watched the showman lift the canvas and enter the rear of the tent.

Those were the eyes of Zoda, the missing mind reader. They were also the eyes of The Shadow. Noiselessly, the blackened figure moved away. The Shadow was heading toward the big top, where the shouts of barkers were urging the slim crowd into the show.

The sheriff and three other men were entering the main tent when The Shadow spied them from a darkened spot near the office. Two of the sheriff's companions were deputies. The other was a squatty individual – the bank watchman who had come to identify the robbers.

A soft laugh whispered from hidden lips as The Shadow circled past the big top. Grim duty faced The Shadow. He was seeking a wedge with which to plan a counterthrust to coming crime.

### **CHAPTER XIII. THE SHADOW'S CHANCE**

THE path which The Shadow had taken was fraught with danger of discovery. Tenseness ruled the circus lot tonight. Flashlights glimmered here and there about the big top as roughnecks maintained a ceaseless vigil.

This was the circus custom. It was the duty of the roughnecks to keep a clear space about the big top. Usually, they nabbed boys who were trying to crawl under the canvas. Such captures were followed by admonitions of "Beat it, you punk." But the roughnecks – whether genuine circus folk or camouflaged

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mobsters of Croaker's crew – were apt to deal harshly with adult prowlers.

The fact that the circus lot was virtually under quarantine had caused much speculation around the big top. Stuffy had instructed all the roughnecks to grab any one who had no business near the main tent. This had followed a suggestion by the sheriff. It was a ruse to cover up the fact that he was searching for crooks among the people who belonged on the lot.

The Shadow, as he glided onward, was cunning in his stealth. He was seeking to avoid any encounter; as a result, he chose a zigzag path to escape the patrolling roughnecks. A light glimmered from ahead; one showed from the other direction. The Shadow chose the cover of a wheeled cage.

Human beings had not discerned The Shadow's presence. But in his present move, the black-garbed venturer came within sight of huge green eyes that glowed from within the cage. A roar resounded in the night. Massive paws clanked against the bars at the front of the cage.

"Ganges," the ferocious tiger, knew that someone was lurking close by. The rumble from his furry throat told of his discovery. The vicious growl was repeated. Then came a low hiss that reached the tiger's ears.

The creature dropped back from the bars. The hiss came again, in a low, commanding tone. Muffling his growls, Ganges backed angrily away from the bars. He did not roar again. His eyes were blinking as he squatted, half cowering.

A GLOVED hand rattled the padlock that held the door of the tiger's cage. A steel pick clicked while The Shadow probed. The lock yielded.

The door of the cage moved inward. Ganges growled but made no move as The Shadow silently closed the door and sprang the lock in place.

The hiss sounded close beside the tiger. With a catlike whine, the big beast shifted its position. It raised one paw, as though in final protest. The hiss was repeated. Ganges moved to the bars and settled there; his striped head between his paws.

Four roughnecks had reached the cage. Their flashlights glimmered upward between the bars. They revealed the crouched body of Ganges; but they did not show the shaded figure that was stooped against the solid back of the cage.

Sight of the new intruders inspired Ganges to lift his head and show his teeth in a whining growl. He clattered at the bars with one big paw. A roughneck jumped back at another's warning.

"Look out for Ganges!" The tone showed dread. "He's a man-eater, that cat. Even Wernoff has trouble handling him."

"He's a killer," came another comment. "So it's Ganges that was growlin', eh? Huh. He'd raise a roar if he saw a shadow. There ain't nobody around here."

Lights were sweeping along the ground about the cage. Every bit of area was being covered. The roughnecks resumed their conversation.

"Say," suggested one, "maybe somebody hopped in the cage."



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"With Ganges?" The man who answered gave a snort. "If he did, there's no use botherin' about him. He's dead."

"The door is locked," put in a third speaker.

"Come along then," decided the first. "That cat was just actin' mean."

"Like he usually does."

The men moved away. As the lights flickered, Ganges arose to deliver a parting roar. He paced angrily. Then came the commanding hiss. The roughnecks were too far away to hear it. They were also too distant to witness the effect on Ganges.

As a blackened hand loomed before the tiger's nose; as hidden lips repeated their weird hiss; as burning eyes met the tiger's greenish gaze, Ganges cowered in complete submission. He watched the eyes move backward toward the door. He heard deft hands click at the lock. The door opened as The Shadow moved outward. The door swung shut; the lock clicked in place.

The master of the night was gone; yet Ganges remained cowed. The tiger was a killer; like humans who dealt in death he had felt the dominating power of The Shadow's amazing presence. Other animals in near-by cages seemed to know that Ganges had been vanquished. Complete silence persisted as The Shadow moved forward into the night.

NEW glimmers blinked as The Shadow neared a long, low, lighted tent. The Shadow avoided them by raising the canvas. He glided inward and came up behind a row of trunks and boxes.

These were set across the end of the tent. The curve of the canvas wall produced a space between the trunks and the end of the tent. Thus The Shadow was totally concealed as he listened to voices from the other side of the trunks.

Clowns were making up. They were talking among themselves as they painted their faces in front of mirrors that were attached to trunks and boxes. Then came an interruption. It was the voice of Stuffy Dowson:

"Hey there, Koko."

"Hi there, Stuffy," responded a chuckling voice. It was "Koko" Thoden, the chief clown. "What's on your mind, my boy?"

"All your gang here?"

"All presented and discounted for," kidded Koko.

"All right," returned Stuffy. "Keep 'em all on the lot after the show."

A buzz began as soon as Stuffy had gone. Mumbles included mention of the sheriff; then the posse; finally someone spoke of "bank robbers." It was plain that the clowns had guessed the reason for the quarantine.

"Say, gang." The buzz stopped as Koko spoke. "Maybe that yap with the tin star does have the idea that some safe crackers are hiding out with this show. All right. If he does, let's kid him. I've got a stunt that I've been holding back. This would be a good time to pull it."

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"Let's hear it, Koko," came an eager chorus.

"You know that old dummy safe we used to use?" questioned Koko. "Well – a couple of you fellows dig it out. Have it ready while Lucille is doing the aerial act. That's when we come in."

"While they're setting up the big cage."

"Right. Go ahead and do your regular stuff. Then four of you put on bandanna handkerchiefs for masks and get ready to run the safe down in front of the main ring."

"What about you, Koko?"

"I'll be by the safe. I'll give you the word when to start with it. Then I'll follow you, with a couple of guns."

"Goin' to wear a tin star, Koko?"

"No. I've got a better gag than that." Koko arose and unlocked a drawer of his trunk. "Did you fellows ever hear of The Shadow?"

"Sure. We've read about him. He's the bird with the creepy laugh. Goes around in a black cloak and hat. Shoots down crooks."

"You've got it right," declared Koko, as he opened the drawer. "Well, gang, take a look at this layout."

"Say!" came an exclamation. "Ain't that a daisy. You've got a black cloak – a hat – even a pair of gloves. What'll you be, Koko? The Shadow?"

"You guessed it," affirmed Koko. "I'll duck out while you boys are clowning. I'll put on this rig and come back to the runway. Have the safe ready."

"You'll have to work quick, Koko. They won't hold up Wernoff's act just for us."

"That won't matter. You fellows keep on lifting the safe and setting it down whenever I come close to you. I won't do any shooting until we get in front of the boxes."

"If they turn out the regular lights and throw the spot of Wernoff's cage before we get in front of the boxes, just set down the safe and stick where you are. I'll wait with you."

"Then as soon as the cat act finishes and the lights come on, we'll pick up where we left off. That way we won't have to cut any of our regular stunts. Got the idea?"

"Sure thing, Koko."

A call came from the front of the tent. Clowns sprang to their feet and finished their make-up. They jogged forth toward the big top, ready to begin their first array of stunts. The big show had begun.

The steamy melody of a calliope came faintly to the emptied tent as a figure arose from behind the row of trunks. The head and shoulders of The Shadow loomed and cast a shaded silhouette upon the opened drawer of Koko's trunk.

The burning eyes of The Shadow spied the blackened garments that the clown had laid upon a chair. A soft laugh sounded in uncanny tones from the hidden lips beneath those blazing optics.

Koko's stunt had gained the approval of the clowns. It had won The Shadow's approval also. Chance had served to aid The Shadow's plans. Within this very tent, The Shadow would make his first step to counter new and desperate crime.

## CHAPTER XIV. SAWDUST AND SHOTS

"THAT'S Lucille Lavan, eh? Boy! Look at the way she balances on that high wire!"

"Best act I've ever seen."

The speakers were two deputies, sitting beside Sheriff Howard. Their comments brought a growl from their chief. He and the squat bank watchman were watching the rings – not the high wire.

"We're looking for some tough guys," the sheriff informed his deputies. "You won't see 'em up there at the top of the tent. Keep your eyes down."

"All right, chief."

The sheriff turned to the watchman beside him. The squat man needed no injunction. His one purpose here was the identification of the robbers. He seemed determined to complete it.

"See any suspects?" questioned the sheriff.

"Not one," returned the watchman, soberly. "I could tell any of the five, sheriff. I saw them clearly when they made their get-away."

"Too bad you didn't shoot a couple of them."

"I was excited, sheriff. I saw them unexpectedly while they were escaping. But tonight" – the man shifted his hand to his pocket – "I'm ready to help you when we see them."

"If we see them," returned the sheriff ruefully. "It looks like we'll have to search the grounds after this show is over. There's been a lot of faces out there; but you haven't picked even one."

The sheriff's sentence ended just as an outburst of applause came from the small audience. Lucille Lavan had completed her act. Dropping from the high wire, the slim girl landed in a net. Her red hair formed an attractive, tousled mass as she bobbed her head to the plaudits of the crowd.

As Lucille walked from the ring, shouts arose and a flock of clowns came bounding along the track. The spectators began to laugh at their capers – all except the sheriff and the bank watchman. The sheriff's face was steady; the watchman studied every clown without a smile. He was looking for the robbers in this band of funmakers.

"Say," growled the sheriff. "If those robbers are working as clowns, it's going to be tough to spot them. You couldn't recognize your own uncle in back of a lot of paint like that. If we don't see the birds we want, the first bunch we'll look over after the show will be the clowns."

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The watchman nodded. He was forced to admit that the painted makeup made it impossible for him to view the clowns successfully. Yet he persisted in watching their merry-making. He was studying the gait of different clowns, trying to find some token of identity that might enable him to pick a rogue from among them.

ROUGHNECKS were rolling in the big cage. Then came the smaller cages, with the lions, tigers and leopards. Eric Wernoff appeared; he was greeted by applause. While attendants aided him, he saw to the opening of cages.

One by one, the growling "cats" responded to his prods. Armed with sticks and gun, Wernoff was forcing his dangerous pets through doors from small cages to large.

This work completed, the smaller cages were wheeled away. Wernoff, stern-faced and imposing, was ready to enter the big cage. He was eyeing Ganges while he waited. The big tiger, usually defiant, was acting in subdued fashion – something that Wernoff could not understand.

Cavorting clowns were finishing their stunts. They were scamping along the track, getting out of the way before the animal act commenced. The spectators were already forgetting them. The ring master was waiting to make his introduction.

Off by the runway, four clowns were mumbling among themselves. They had placed blue bandanna handkerchiefs across their eyes. They were peering through holes that they had cut in the cloth. Beside them rested a bulky wooden box, painted in imitation of a safe.

"Where's Koko?" queried one.

"Don't ask me," growled another. "He ought to have been here three minutes ago. Say – maybe we ought to hold this stunt until after Wernoff has finished in the cage."

"We will hold it if Koko doesn't show up pretty quick."

"Here he is now!"

The other clowns turned as the last one spoke. They stared at sight of the black-cloaked figure that had appeared in the runway. Tall and sinister, the mysterious form of The Shadow stood before them. A gloved hand was stretching from the cloak; its forefinger pointing toward the track.

"Come along," gasped one of the clowns.

The four grabbed the fake safe and carried it out into the track.

A LAUGH greeted them from a sprinkling of spectators. The clowns faked a stumble and dropped their burden. They looked over their shoulders. The cloaked figure was following them. Frantically, the clowns seized the box and staggered forward.

"Say," panted one. "That rig of his is spooky. It gives me the creeps."

"Act like you was scared," suggested another.

"Like I was scared!" retorted the first. "Say – if I wasn't sure Koko was under that cloak I'd be so scared I'd hop in the big cage just to get away from him."

## CRIME CIRCUS

The clowns did another stumble further along the track. Laughter was greeting them. It died as the spectators spied the pursuing figure. Something in the carriage of that swiftly stalking shape made the observers stare in wonder.

"Say" – a clown gasped as he helped hoist the wooden safe – "Koko's working it good. He's got the hicks woozy. Look at him."

The others looked back as they prepared to run. One of them spoke in a voice that sounded serious.

"He's got me woozy, the way he's comin' after us," the fun-maker declared. "That walk of his! He's comin' as fast as we're runnin'."

The next stumble was a brief one. The cloaked figure was looming closer. Gloved hands were swishing from the black garments. Businesslike automatics appeared in rigid fists.

"Lug it 'til we get in front of the cage," gasped a clown. "That's where he's goin' to spring the 'shootin'."

"Too late," returned another. "There go the glims. Drop the box."

The clowns were only a dozen yards from the box where the sheriff was seated with his deputies. The officials were turning to view the cause of excitement on the track, when the lights were suddenly extinguished.

DARKNESS was only momentary. An instant later, a mammoth spotlight hurled its brilliant glare from across the ring. The steel bars of the cage glistened. The ring master mounted a pedestal and waved toward Eric Wernoff.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" came the ring master's bellow. "Before you stands the king of all wild animal kings. He is the celebrated trainer whose name is known throughout the civilized globe whenever –"

The four clowns were not listening to the coming introduction. They had dropped the wooden safe at the very fringe of the spotlight's glare. They formed a clustered, whispering group as they gazed toward a spot a dozen feet away.

There, at the inner edge of the track, stood their black-garbed pursuer. His vague form was barely discernible in the rim of brilliant light. There was something spectral in the figure's bearing. The clowns could catch the flash of glittering eyes that were turned toward the big cage.

"Look at the way the light hits him," gasped one clown. "Say – his eyes are brighter than the big tiger's!"

"Whew!" exclaimed a second, mopping his painted brow with the bandanna that he had wrested from his temples. "If it wasn't Koko –"

"Maybe it ain't Koko!"

The other clowns laughed at the suggestion; but their mirth was feigned. Something in the statement worried them. They gathered close about the wooden safe. Not for an instant did they cease to gaze at the strange figure which stood so motionless before them.

"Presenting the same famous performance" – the ring master's announcement had reached its highest pitch – "that he has given before the crowned heads of Europe and Asia. Ladies and gentlemen. I take pleasure in

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introducing – Eric Wernoff!"

Cheers and handclaps came with enthusiasm. The ring master stepped from his pedestal and mopped his forehead with a huge silk handkerchief. Wernoff gave a short bow; then turned to enter the cage.

Roughnecks who wore the coats of uniforms approached with poles and revolvers, to take their stand about the cage. Wernoff entered a door and closed it behind him. He was in a little compartment. He received a whip; opened the next door and stepped into the center of the cage.

A lion opened its jaws to growl. A leopard leaped down from its pedestal and prepared for a spring. Wernoff snapped his whip. The lion's growl ended; but the leopard remained crouched. Another whip snap failed to make the beast retire. Wernoff fired a blank straight for the spotted cat's face. The leopard snarled; then turned back toward its perch.

Even the sheriff had forgotten his mission here. With the deputies, he was staring tensely at the cage. The watchman alone remembered his appointed purpose. He plucked the sheriff's sleeve.

"Look!" he exclaimed. "That man at the side of the cage! Outside – by the right corner –"

"Holding a revolver?"

"Yes. He's one of the robbers. And the fellow next to him – the one turning this way – he's another of the bunch. Look! There's a third!"

The sheriff was rising. His badge caught the flash of the spotlight and returned it with a brilliant glitter. The watchman was pointing out another pair of roughnecks.

Eric Wernoff was cracking his whip with savage fury inside the cage; but the act no longer thrilled the sheriff and the men with him.

The sheriff had growled a command. Deputies and watchman were reaching for their guns. Their rising forms were conspicuous before the spotlight. They did not realize the mistake that they were making.

THE roughneck who had turned uttered a sharp cry. Like a flash, his four companions turned toward the box. Gleaming revolvers showed in their fists. One gun barked its first, quick warning. A bullet whistled past the sheriff's head.

The roughnecks had become furious, leering mobsmen. Hard-fighting gorillas, they were whirling to beat the sheriff and his men in a quick duel of shots. The guns that they held were not charged with blanks. They were loaded with bullets, in readiness for this fray.

A second shot ripped splinters from the back of a chair beside the watchman. The sheriff and his aids were caught flat-footed, with their hands fumbling for guns. They were helpless targets for desperate murderers. Five guns were aiming toward them before they had drawn a single weapon!

Three of the clowns by the fake safe had turned toward the ring at the sound of the first gunshot. Only the fourth man had still kept his eyes upon the black-cloaked figure that they thought was Koko. It was his cry that brought the eyes of the others toward the same spot.

"Look! Look quick!"

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As gorillas fired, the tall black figure stepped suddenly forward. Above the crackle of revolvers; above the roars from the big cage came a laugh that rose with weird crescendo. Like a mammoth moth within range of an attracting flame, The Shadow stood revealed with outstretched arms.

It was The Shadow – not Koko. The flames that belched from his huge automatics were tokens of that truth.

An aiming mobster slumped as he turned to meet the menace that the taunting laugh had warned was present. The gangster had picked the sheriff's glittering badge as his target, but he never fired the shot that he intended.

The other gorillas snarled as they swung their leveled gats. Revolvers crackled while the automatics thundered. Certain in aim, The Shadow dealt with crooks as they deserved. One – two went down as their wild bullets sped past the living target that they sought.

As the last pair aimed, shots burst from the box ahead. The sheriff and a deputy had gained their revolvers. Their bullets dug up sawdust in front of the big cage. These were hasty shots that went wide of the fighting roughnecks; but they served a vital purpose.

The Shadow was dealing with spreadout foemen. Had the mobsters been clustered, his rapid fire would have vanquished them entirely. These last two gorillas, however, had gained the edge while The Shadow was mowing down their pals.

The fire of the sheriff and the deputy gave The Shadow a momentary respite. Both mobsters faltered for an instant as the new shots broke in their direction. The Shadow, acting in fifth of seconds, performed a sidewise drop as the gangsters pressed triggers with fingers that had rested for a fractional interval.

Bullets whistled past the tall form as it rolled in the sawdust of the track. The shots were high as they sped above the cloaked left shoulder. Yet, as he performed his fade-away, The Shadow guided the sweep of his left hand. Its automatic barked as The Shadow struck the ground. One mobster staggered, wounded.

The other swung to new aim. He was twenty paces distant from his pal. The Shadow's right hand poked its gun upward from the sawdust. A gloved finger pressed the trigger.

The Shadow's aim, however, was not directed toward the last gorilla. In the split second that he had to fire, he aimed for a more certain target – the spotlight.

GLASS shattered as the light went out. The last mobster blazed away in darkness. He was shooting at the spot where he thought The Shadow was; but the total blackness played havoc with his aim. His shots found sawdust – not The Shadow.

Chaos reigned within the big top. Shouts of men – screams of women – the roars of maddened beasts within the cage – above all these came the barks of guns as the desperate mobsman turned his aim toward the box. Shots from the sheriff, the watchman and the deputies – delivered toward the ring – were answered by the last gorilla.

Flashes of guns were the only targets for these fighters who numbered four against one. Yet the gorilla held the advantage. His enemies were clustered in the box. He was moving across the ring. A deputy groaned as he sank wounded.

The mobster thought that he had finished with The Shadow. He was wrong. An unseen shape was moving from the sawdust. The Shadow was picking the moving target by the spurts of the revolver. Cool amid the

## CRIME CIRCUS

darkness, he gauged the gorilla's speed by the interval between two shots.

An automatic spoke. Its flash came an instant after a shot from the ring. Sheriff Howard and two companions kept up their fusillade. There was no reply from in front of the big cage. A weird laugh whispered from the track. It seemed to trail as it faded into nothingness.

Flashlights were appearing. Their beams swept toward the ring, the center point of all attention. Then, of a sudden, the tent lights came on. Gasping spectators stared toward the ring. It showed a scene that captured all attention.

Eric Wernoff had gained the safety of the little entry to his cage. He was away from the roaring, snarling beasts that were fighting and sprawling in the space behind the bars. On the sawdust in front of the big cage lay three motionless mobsters. Two others were on hands and knees, seeking to regain their guns.

The sheriff and the unhurt deputy came leaping from the box. The wounded gorillas tried to aim at them. Sheriff and deputy each picked a man. As mobster guns came up to fire, the men of the law shot point-blank. Riddling bullets dropped the two crooks whom The Shadow had crippled in the final moments of his fight.

Standing in the ring, the sheriff looked all about. So did the four clowns who were cowering by the wooden safe. Spectators followed their example. They were looking for the weird, blackclad warrior who had brought down the desperate mobsmen.

None found the object of their search. The Shadow had departed. Blood stained the sawdust where dead gorillas lay; but no token remained of the one who had vanquished the bullet-riddled crooks.

The trailing laugh had marked The Shadow's swift passage to the runway. He had left the big top just before the lights came on. The results of the brief warfare remained as evidence of his mighty prowess.

Coming from darkness, The Shadow had won the conflict single-handed. He had left the fruits of victory – represented by the murderous gorillas – where the law could find them. The sheriff had found the robbers that he sought. Dead, they could offer no resistance.

The Shadow – his work accomplished – had returned to the darkness from which he had emerged to strike down fiends of crime.

## CHAPTER XV. GATHERING CLOUDS

"WELL? What about it, Stuffy?"

"We can open tonight, Cap. The tin star says it's all jake."

"It's time he made up his mind about it. The crowd – or what there is of it – won't stick around much longer."

The conversation was taking place in the office of the Larch Circus and Greater Shows. Cap Guffy and Stuffy Dowson were done. One day had passed since The Shadow's battle with the mobsters in the big top. A new evening had begun.

"You can't blame the tin star, Cap." Stuffy Dowson spoke as Guffy was about to leave the office. "He's a regular sort of a guy. But he can't let the law slide just on our account."



## CRIME CIRCUS

"We ain't stopping him, are we?" growled Cap. "Say – what does the yap want? He landed the five bank robbers, didn't he?"

"But he didn't find the dough they swiped, Cap."

"He searched the lot, didn't he? Him and them rube deputies – say, they even tapped the tent poles to make sure they weren't hollow. That swag's off this lot, Stuffy. The tin star might as well make up his mind to it."

"He has," declared Stuffy, "and he wants to talk to you about it."

"Why me?" queried Cap, staring hard.

"On account of that fellow Zoda," stated Stuffy. "It looks sort of phony, Cap, that guy blowing the way he did. The sheriff tells me Zoda never set up his 'props' last night."

"That's a fact," declared Cap. "I told the sheriff about it, though. He thought it was worth looking into, but that was all."

"He was still thinking about the robbers," explained Stuffy. "It wasn't until after he'd nabbed those five heels that he began to worry about the swag. Let me give you the lay, Cap. I ain't had a chance to talk much about it."

"You heard about the trouble in the big top. That fight was a pip. It would have been too bad for old tin star if the guy in black hadn't got in his say."

"Who was the guy, Stuffy?"

"We don't know. He was gone when the lights came on. Four of the clowns said he was supposed to be Koko. So we went over to the dressing tent and the first thing we seen was a guy in a black cloak and hat, laying in a heap by one of the trunks."

"Was he the fellow?"

"No. We thought so at first. I figured he'd got shot during the fight. We grabbed off his cloak – and who do you think it was?"

"Koko?"

"Yeah. But he wasn't the fellow that had been in the big top. It was Koko that we found; and he was tied up with a couple of belts. He had a bandanna gagging him. He couldn't tell us what hit him. He said he'd been going to pull a stunt on the track. He was supposed to be a guy called The Shadow, chasing four crooks. Just when he was leaving for the big top, somebody landed on him like a load of bricks. It was another guy with a black cloak and hat."

"The Shadow?"

"Guess it must have been – only we don't know who The Shadow is. Well, after we found Koko, the tin star decides to search the lot. There wasn't nobody had got away. The fight in the big top was over quick; the sheriff's crew was still on guard. The bank watchman picked the five dead heels as the robbers. So the search begun."

## CRIME CIRCUS

"You got to hand it to the tin star, Cap. There wasn't no chance for any swag to go off this lot. They watched all the townies that left. They've been searching all day. But still they ain't found the dough they're after."

"When did they give up the search?"

"About an hour ago – that's all. Say – here comes the tin star now."

THE door was opening as Stuffy spoke. Cap turned to see Sheriff Howard. The official's face was gloomy. A curt nod was his greeting as he sat down at one of the desks.

"So you're letting us open, eh?" questioned Cap.

"Yes," responded the sheriff. "I've given the word that the search is over. Start your shows when you want."

"Still keeping your men on the lot?"

"Yes. Enough of them to be ready if there's any trouble. There's just one guy they're looking for."

"Zoda?"

"That's right. If they get any suspects, Captain, I'll bring them for you to look over."

"What about the fellow that did the shooting?" inquired Stuffy.

"How're we going to find him?" demanded the sheriff. "We didn't get a look at his face. What's more, he was on our side. If he shows up, I'll shake hands with him."

"I've been talking with this fellow Hank that works for you. He looked over the five dead men. He says they look like the bunch that jumped the show and came back. The watchman says they're the robbers."

"Hank gave me their names. He told me the towns where they joined. I've sent fliers out to those towns to get a line on them. I don't think it will do much good though. The whole five were probably traveling under fake names."

Neither Cap nor Stuffy had any comment to offer on this subject. When Stuffy spoke, his words related to a more pressing matter.

"I'm going down to the big top," he informed. "Got to get ready to put on the show tonight. See you later."

"I'm heading for the Ten-in-One," decided Cap. "Those freaks of mine don't know there's going to be a show. Like as not I'll have to travel all over the lot to round them up."

Both men left. The sheriff remained alone. His face retained its glumness. At times, he muttered to himself.

The failure to regain or trace the spoils of the bank robbers was wearing on Sheriff Howard. He had felt elation after the battle in which the five gorillas had been slain. His triumph, however, had faded.

"If only one of them was still alive," muttered the sheriff. "One that could talk –"

THE door opened as the sheriff mumbled this wish. Howard looked up to see Tex Larch.

## CRIME CIRCUS

The circus owner nodded and dropped his two suitcases on the floor.

"Well?" questioned Tex, gruffly. "What's the latest, sheriff?"

"Just get in from New York?" queried the official.

"Yeah," returned Tex, "but I read about the trouble in a newspaper. First time anything like it has ever happened with my show. So you got the robbers – but not the money."

"Yeah."

"I was talking to a couple of the concessionaires when I came along the midway. They told me you'd quit searching the lot."

"I have. We did a thorough job. The money isn't on this lot."

"Sorry you had bad luck, sheriff." Tex turned toward the door, just as Stuffy reentered. "Hello, Stuffy. Say – run these kiesters over to my tent, will you?"

"Sure thing, Tex." Stuffy picked up the suitcases. "Your old friend just blew in, Tex. Do you want to see him?"

"Who do you mean?"

"Jonathan Wilbart."

Tex scowled. Observing the sheriff's gaze, he changed his expression.

"All right, Stuffy," he decided. "I'll talk to Wilbart."

Stuffy departed and Wilbart entered a minute later. Tex shook hands with the magnate. Wilbart nodded to the sheriff. It was Tex who spoke first.

"Suppose you heard about the trouble here?" he questioned.

"Yes," responded Wilbart. "That is why I came to see you. I thought perhaps that it might temper your decision regarding the sale of your show."

"Maybe it will," remarked Tex, in a meditative tone. "But I can't talk about it tonight, Wilbart. Things are in a mess. Right now I'm worrying about tonight's show."

"You are going to open?" inquired Wilbart, in a tone of surprise.

"I guess so," returned Tex. He looked toward the sheriff, who nodded.

"Well, that's a help," declared Tex. "Listen, Wilbart: suppose we talk matters over some other time. How about the end of this week?"

"While you are still here in Hamilcar?"

"Yes."

## CRIME CIRCUS

"Very well, Tex. I shall remain at the Hamilcar Hotel for a few days. You can communicate with me there, if you wish."

Tex nodded. He turned and left the office. He failed to close the door behind him. Wilbart and the sheriff saw him walking across the midway toward the tent where Stuffy had taken the bags.

"I am glad that you are letting Tex open his show tonight, sheriff," observed Wilbart. "He certainly needs whatever business he may get in this town."

"Show on the rocks, eh?"

"Not far from it. Of course" – Wilbart smiled – "if Tex has poor business this week, he may be more willing to sell his show to me. However, sheriff, I do not care to profit by another man's misfortune."

The sheriff nodded.

"Of course," resumed Wilbart, "I am counting on his misfortune in a sense. Tex Larch has been experiencing poor weeks – 'bloomers,' we call them – and I have considered that fact in making my offers. But those are natural hazards, actually of the man's own making. Poor business judgment is different from unexpected situations such as the trouble that this circus encountered here."

"I've given Larch a break," announced the sheriff. "We've been searching the grounds here and we haven't found the money that was stolen from that Almsburg bank. By right, I could close this show. Instead, I'm letting it open. I'm through, so far as further search is concerned."

"Your men are still here, are they not?"

"Only to preserve order. Also in case some clew bobbed up. But I don't think there will be any. We got the bank robbers."

"Are you sure they were the only crooks with the show?"

"Yes. I'm looking for one fellow – a mind reader called Zoda – who might have been in with them. But he's gone. If he shows up on the lot, maybe we'll grab him."

JONATHAN WILBART nodded. He extended his hand and received the sheriff's shake. He walked from the office and was joined on the midway by his chauffeur, Lennox. The two men went between tents toward the spot where Wilbart's car was parked.

A few minutes later, Sheriff Howard stepped from the office and looked along the midway. Tex – Cap – Stuffy – all had gone their separate ways. Ticket sellers were raising their raucous cries. Scattered groups of people were turning toward the big top.

Turning, the sheriff saw a tall, firm-faced stranger who was standing a few feet from the entrance to the office. The sheriff's gaze met those of a pair of steady eyes that peered from a masklike countenance. The stranger raised a cigarette to his thin lips and drew a long puff as the sheriff turned and walked away to talk with members of his posse.

In that moment, the sheriff had unwittingly glimpsed two personages, both of whom he would like to have met. One was Zoda, the missing mind reader whom the sheriff sought; the other was The Shadow, who had saved the sheriff's life.

## CRIME CIRCUS

The sheriff had never dreamed that Zoda and The Shadow could be one; nor did he realize that this keen-eyed observer – who looked like neither Zoda nor The Shadow – was the double personality who had played so stirring a part in the happenings on the circus lot.

Two men were stopping near the spot where The Shadow stood. One was Cliff Marsland; the other was Hank, the pretended roughneck. Hank's low growl came clearly to The Shadow's ears.

"Stick by the truck," the big man was informing Cliff. "Wait until you see the light in the tent. It's comin' pretty soon – same as before."

Cliff nodded. He and Hank were pulling down their left sleeves. In accustomed fashion, they had flashed their red circles. The two men moved away. A smile appeared upon the thin lips of the watching stranger.

The Shadow knew that last night's battle had not marked the end of crime. New clouds were gathering; further evil was afoot. Again, the might of The Shadow would be needed.

### CHAPTER XVI. PLANS FOR CRIME

"WHERE'S Cleed?"

Cap Guffy asked the question as he stood in the Ten-in-One tent. The other freaks and performers were present, clustered about the platform where Baby Liz, the fat lady, sat in solemn state.

When the gang joined in pow-wow, they chose Baby Liz's platform as a meeting place. It took three men to hoist the fat lady to her platform; once there, she remained. Hence, social gatherings among the freaks were held in her vicinity.

"Cleed?" Luke, the tattooed man, echoed Cap's question. "I seen him around about twenty minutes ago. Guess he went to his sleeping tent."

"We're going to open tonight," growled Cap. "I hope Cleed ain't off the lot. With Zoda walking out on me and all –"

"Cleed's around all right, Cap. How soon are we goin' to open?"

"In half an hour."

"I'll look around for Cleed."

Luke scrambled from the fat woman's platform. So did Princess Marxia. Cap beckoned to the snake charmer. He spoke as she strolled along with him toward her pit.

"I'm driving down to the depot," announced Cap. "They sent word up about that crate of rattlers. They came in this afternoon."

"Time we got some more," returned Marxia. "You should have ordered them a couple of weeks ago, when we got the bull snakes."

"Couldn't get 'em," informed Cap. "These are the kind you want – the ones that ain't had the poison taken out of 'em. You won't be able to use these rattlers right away."

## CRIME CIRCUS

"That's all right." Marxia looked into the snake pit. "I've got enough of the harmless ones to last for this stand. When we get to the next town, Luke and I can fix the new ones."

"You're welcome to the job," decided Cap. "You won't find me trying it."

"It's better to extract the poison ourselves," insisted Marxia. "Them saps that shift the rattlers don't always do the job right. When Luke and I get through with a rattler, we know he ain't going to hurt nobody."

Cap nodded. He looked about but saw no sign of Cleed. He was frowning as he walked toward the closed entrance of the Ten-in-One. Marxia strolled to the back of the tent. She raised the canvas and ducked out, as Luke had done just after talking with Cap.

ACROSS the midway, Cap saw a crouching figure moving on the far side of a tent. He thought it was Cleed; he watched as the figure stopped. Then Cap realized that the stooped form was Jubo the Geek.

Oddly enough, Jubo was also looking for Cleed. He was noting a figure behind some tents further down the midway. As Jubo watched, he saw Cleed slink into view from in back of Tex Larch's tent.

Cleed straightened. He dropped his slinking role long enough to move across the midway, avoiding people who were going into the big top. Then he resumed his slinking pace past tents and trucks as he headed for the Ten-in-One.

Jubo turned and headed toward the midway. His own tent was beside a concession booth. Jubo ducked under the canvas just as Cap Guffy recognized him. Cap was still eying Jubo's tent with keen suspicion when the flap moved at the entrance of the Ten-in-One.

Cap turned to see Cleed peering from the opening. He turned and walked into the tent, growling as he joined the cigarette fiend.

"Time you showed up," Cap announced, as he closed the flap behind him. "We ain't opening for half an hour yet, but I wanted to make sure you was around. I'm going down to the depot to get a box of snakes that come in this afternoon. Be here when I get back."

Jubo the Geek, when he had ducked into his tent, had not entered the pit. Instead, he had gone to the front flaps. Peering through the opening, he had watched the man who had been observing him. Thus Jubo had seen Cleed's face at the flaps of the Ten-in-One. He had seen Cap Guffy turn to go in with the cigarette fiend.

Jubo remained on watch. His eyes roved from left to right. They saw Cap Guffy's car roll into view from the left side of the Ten-in-One. They also noted Cleed sneaking forth from the other end of the tent.

Shifting his position, the mop-headed geek looked toward a distant tent that he could barely see from the new angle. It was the isolated canvas wherein Cleed and his cronies met. While Jubo watched, a light glimmered from within the tent.

The glare of the midway was tempered by the pinkish rays of sunset. Jubo could distinguish forms of roughnecks moving to form a loose cordon about the tent from which the signal had come. The meeting was an early one. There would be little chance for prowlers to escape the observation of the guarding roughnecks. Jubo moved back into his tent and began to let snakes loose in the pit.

## CRIME CIRCUS

CLIFF MARSLAND, standing beside the truck where he was stationed, had come to the same decision as Jubo. Cliff could see the lighted tent plainly; also the ground between his position and the meeting place. Though dusk was settling rapidly, Cliff felt that tonight's watch was a mere routine.

Should any prowler appear; should any roughneck move from his position, every member of the cordon would promptly notice it. This fact, to Cliff, was alarming. He sensed that this meeting must be important. He was positive that The Shadow – even if present on the lot – would be unable to approach the watched tent.

Something stirred in the truck above Cliff's head. The Shadow's agent did not notice the fact. No sound betokened the unseen movement. Crouched behind the sides of the truck was the tall stranger whom the sheriff had noticed near the office. This uncanny personage was drawing a small flat bag from beneath a seat of the truck.

Blackness enveloped the crouching form. Cloak and hat made the stranger a form of darkness. Groping toward the rear of the truck, The Shadow dropped easily to the ground without a sound. Crouching, he began the task that Cliff Marsland had classed as impossible. The Shadow was making his way toward the meeting tent.

Of all the watchers, Cliff alone saw moving blackness on the rough ground. Yet the form that he observed was no more than a shapeless, crawling mass. Cliff saw this token of The Shadow because he was watching more intently than the other roughnecks; also because he was closest to The Shadow.

Wisely, The Shadow had chosen to begin his creep from the spot where his own agent was established. But as The Shadow progressed; as dusk brought a slightly deeper gray to the terrain, Cliff lost sight of the form that he was watching.

INSIDE the tent, Cleed had dropped his air of silence. Again, he was talking in the evil snarl of Croaker Zinn. Luke and Marxia were listening intently to his words. None realized that The Shadow was without.

"So we're quitting the racket this week," Croaker announced, with emphasis. "Those five mugs queered it. They got what was coming to them for being so dumb. If that watchman hadn't seen them, they'd never have been traced to this lot.

"We were going to play the racket all along the line. Those five gorillas knew their stuff. I had them set to crack a crib each time the show made a jump. Out and back the same night. But they pulled a boner on the first trip."

"It's lucky you had me change them tattoo designs," put in Luke. "Say – those red circles would have made plenty of trouble. But those butterflies and other junk didn't mean nothing to the sheriff when he saw them."

"Of course not," declared Croaker. "Tattoo marks are common on a circus lot. But it wasn't luck, Luke. I saw what might be coming. That's why I had you cover up the red circles. What's more – that's not all that I figured on.

"Those five gorillas handed me the swag after they brought it into camp. I had it ready for the big shot. When the yap sheriff showed up and put his hick guards around the place, it looked like we were getting in a swell jam.

"But I slipped the swag to the big shot. He took it out right under their noses. So when the sheriff finally got around to looking for it, it wasn't on the lot. The big shot's put the swag in a safe place."

## CRIME CIRCUS

Croaker paused to laugh harshly. Then an evil laugh came from his lips. It was an odd laugh for one who still wore the pasty make-up of Cleed.

"The sheriff is a sap," decided Croaker. "He figures somebody must have copped the swag. He's dumb enough to think it might be Zoda. He hasn't got brains enough to dope out who Zoda really was."

"The Shadow!" gasped Luke, in an awed tone.

"Yeah, The Shadow!" spat Croaker. "Maybe he's still around here, figuring that there'll be another gang go out to crack some crib when we move. But The Shadow, even, won't wise up to what we're going to pull now."

"You got a new game, Croaker?"

"You bet. First of all, we're going to start shoving the queer, beginning late tonight."

"What about the Feds?"

"They won't wise up. We'll use some sap for a blind. Like we did before. Then I'll have the cash we take in and any queer that's left all ready for the big shot to lug off the lot the night we finish this stand."

"And then the gang will blow?"

"Later. After the big shot gets clear, I've got another job to pull. Listen, both of you, and keep mum. You've heard of this missing heiress, Lucy Aldon?"

"Sure." Luke nodded. "Lot of talk about her in the papers. Some lawyer offered five thousand berries to anybody who'd locate her. What's the gag, Croaker? You figurin' a way to collect that dough?"

"FIVE grand!" Croaker snorted. "Say – that Aldon moll is heiress to a million. Listen. I know where she is. I know how to get her. She don't know she's Lucy Aldon. That makes it sweet."

"Beef Malligan is coming here to Hamilcar. He'll be on the lot, the last night. After I pass the coin to the big shot, along with any queer we haven't got rid of, Beef and I are going to blow."

"We'll head for a place where nobody will find us. When we get there, Lucy Aldon will be with us. Then we'll get some guy to act as the voice and we'll tell that old lawyer we've got the million-dollar moll."

"He'll have to come to terms. We'll be sitting pretty. He's never seen the girl – get the idea? How can they find a moll when they don't know what she looks like – when they don't know anything about her?"

"Say!" Luke was keen with his exclamation. "How did you get wise to where this Aldon gal is?"

"The big shot tipped me off," explained Croaker. "He had sort of a hunch to begin with. He used his bean and doped it out. But here's the lay."

"When Beef and I beat it, the rest is up to you. As soon as we get clear, everything has got to go haywire on this lot. Inside of half an hour after we've done a scam, you start a riot, Luke."

"Give 'em a 'Hey Rube'?"



"Yeah. The mob will do their stuff. There'll be a lot of people missing after that scrap is over. Nobody's going to know where they went."

"I get you, Croaker. But – but –"

"But what?"

"What's the 'Hey Rube' got to do with you and Beef grabbing the Aldon gal? Where are you goin' to snatch her from?"

Croaker laughed as he arose and extinguished the light that hung from the tent pole.

"You don't get it, Luke," he growled in the darkness. "Well, it's just as well you don't. I practically put you wise to the lay – yet you and Marxia don't get it. Well, if you don't, after what I've told you, nobody else will."

The discussion was ended. As roughnecks prowled from their posts, the three freaks emerged from the little tent and moved toward the Ten-in-One. They were no more than skulking figures in the deepening dusk.

Silence reigned by the deserted tent. Then came a whispered laugh. It was the suppressed mirth of The Shadow, the unseen listener to the conference of crooks.

In a sense, The Shadow's laugh was an aftermath of Croaker's evil chortle.

For The Shadow had divined what Luke and Marxia had been unable to guess. He had sensed the important point of the fell scheme which Croaker Zinn intended to put in execution.

Tonight, counterfeit money would begin a new flow through the circus lot. Its circulation would persist until the final night in Hamilcar. Then would come a stroke of crime that would concern a girl named Lucy Aldon.

The laugh of The Shadow faded. His tall form merged with the descending night. As he had struck before, The Shadow would seek to strike again, with men of crime his prey!

## CHAPTER XVII. THE NIGHT BEFORE

LIGHTS had dulled along the midway of the Larch Circus and Greater Shows. The last of the crowds had departed. Automobiles were heading toward town. Tomorrow would begin the last day of the stand in Hamilcar. One more night would end the worst "bloomer" of the season.

Among the cars that were rolling from the circus lot was Cap Guffy's rickety coupe. Like other vehicles, it was heading toward Hamilcar. When it arrived there, it pulled up in front of an old brick hotel – The Hamilcar House.

Two men alighted. One was Cap Guffy; the other, Tex Larch. Gloomily, the showmen entered the lobby of the old hotel. While Cap strolled about, Tex approached the desk and spoke to the clerk.

"Jonathan Wilbart stopping here?" questioned the circus owner.

"Room 204," replied the clerk. "Who wants to see him?"

## CRIME CIRCUS

"Tex Larch" – the showman paused, then spoke again as the clerk pushed in a switch and raised a telephone receiver – "tell him Tex Larch and Captain Guffy. Two of us."

Tex stood glumly while the clerk phoned the message. The call completed, the clerk turned and nodded. He pointed toward the stairway, to indicate that Wilbart would receive the visitors.

Two guests were in the lobby when Tex and Cap went up the stairs. One was a tall, steady-faced individual, who had registered under the name of Lamont Cranston. The other was a stalwart young fellow who had arrived two days ago, from New York. He was in the book as Harry Vincent.

Lamont Cranston was The Shadow. Harry Vincent was his agent. The Shadow had summoned this new aid from Manhattan. Like Cliff Marsland, Harry Vincent was one upon whom The Shadow could depend when crime reached its climax.

Within two minutes after the pair of showmen had gone upstairs, Lamont Cranston arose and followed the same course. He did not, however, go to his own room. He chose Harry Vincent's, which was on the second floor.

The tall stranger did not turn on the light. Instead, he groped across the room and found a suitcase that lay beneath a bureau. Black cloth swished. A shape appeared by the open window. Weirdly it moved outward. In batlike fashion, the figure of The Shadow crept along the brick wall at the side of the hotel.

Soft, squidgy sounds announced the progress. With rubber suction cups attached to hands and feet, The Shadow was making safe advance along the vertical surface. His passage ended outside an opened window. Voices sounded from within a room. Jonathan Wilbart was talking to his visitors.

"WHAT is your decision then?" Wilbart was questioning. "Are you ready to sell, Tex?"

"I don't know," Tex spoke in gruff rejoinder. "This stand has been a 'bloomer,' Wilbart. Worse than I expected. I haven't got the cash to move my show."

"Then a sale should be to your liking."

"Not until I hear from New York. I sent a letter there. I ought to have a wire by tomorrow night."

"And if it comes?"

"Then my answer will be definite. Either yes or no."

A pause followed. Jonathan Wilbart was speculating on the possibilities. He put another question.

"Suppose, Tex," he suggested, "that you receive no word from New York. Does that mean you will sell?"

"It means that I'll have to go to New York," responded Tex. "I can't sell until I get some word."

"But you won't be able to move the show."

"I know it. I'll have to leave the outfit on the lot."

"With Stuffy in charge?"

## CRIME CIRCUS

"Yes."

"I see." Wilbart nodded as he spoke. "Then I can remain here in Hamilcar and receive your answer."

"Yes. If I have to go to New York, I'll wire you from there."

"Very well. Then the best time for me to see you is just before train time. Is that right?"

"Yes. I'll be in the office up to the last minute. If I have to go to New York, I won't leave until after the big show starts."

Wilbart puffed at a fat cigar while he studied Tex. Then he seemed to remember that Cap was also present. He looked at Cap; then turned to Tex.

"What if you sell?" questioned Wilbart. "Where does Guffy's show come in? Does it go along with the deal?"

"It don't." The answer came from Cap. "That option is off. I'm keepin' my show. Tex Larch ain't got nothing to do with it. That's why I'm here – to stand up for my rights."

"Lay off the squawks, Cap," growled Tex. "Nobody's trying to do you out of anything."

"You're right they ain't," asserted Cap. "Wilbart might as well know the facts. That option business was a fake. Nothin' but a stall to hold you off, Wilbart."

"Is that right, Tex?" inquired Wilbart, in surprise.

"Yeah," acknowledged Tex. "Cap didn't have to come in here and yell it out. But there's no harm done. He's just sore because this week's been a 'bloomer' for him. He can't take it, that's all."

"I ain't used to squawkin'," put in Cap. "I can take tough sleddin' any time. But this wasn't a bloomer – this town wasn't – if you hadn't made it one, Tex. Them crooks wouldn't have been along with your show if you'd been on the job.

"I'm through with your outfit, that's all. My show is packin' up tomorrow. I'm takin' the road on my own. I've got enough dough to handle the 'nut' for a month, anyway. If I have to hook up with another guy, I'll find one that stays on the lot instead of commutin' into New York.

"My show won't open tomorrow night. It goes on the trucks and it moves out when it's packed. Not your trucks, neither, Tex. I've hired my own. They'll be in by six o'clock."

TEX LARCH was wearing a scowl. Cap Guffy's bluff face was challenging. Jonathan Wilbart prevented further discussion. Rising, he approached to shake hands with each man in turn.

"I shall see you tomorrow night, gentlemen," he remarked. "Let me suggest that you forget your difficulties in the meantime. You have been on the road together for the past season. Why not part good friends?"

While Tex and Cap were giving their gruff agreement to Wilbart's suggestion, The Shadow had turned his gaze back toward the window from which he had come. A tiny glow was showing at the opening. It was the lighted tip of a cigarette.

## CRIME CIRCUS

Harry Vincent had come upstairs. His cigarette was a signal that concerned The Shadow. Slowly, the blackened shape shifted along the wall. Then the form moved upward. Following a vertical angle, The Shadow was rising toward a lighted window on the third floor.

New voices – low in tone – greeted The Shadow as he reached his objective. His keen eyes, peering inward from the blackness of the night, discerned three men. Two were the federal agents: Dunham and Slade. The third was Vic Marquette.

Harry's signal had announced Vic's arrival. Harry had seen the secret-service operative pass through the lobby. Thus The Shadow had left one finished conference to listen in on another that was just beginning.

"So you've been out on the lot again, eh?" Vic was questioning. "And you'd like to grab the fellow that runs the knife rack? Well – lay off him."

"He's shoving the queer, Vic," insisted Slade. "Doing it just like the mind readers that we took in."

"Sure he is," retorted Marquette. "He's a blind, like they were."

"I was watching him count queer bills," argued Slade. "I stood there for five minutes, while Dunham was chucking rings at the knives."

"Chucking rings?" queried Marquette. "What for?"

"Trying to land one over the knob of a carving knife," admitted Dunham. "There was a .45 hanging from it. I would have won it, if I'd landed a ring."

"Just a couple of saps," snorted Vic. "That game's 'gaffed'; yet you walk in and try to play it."

"Gaffed?"

"Sure. The heads of those knobs are turned away from you. You couldn't drop a ring on one of them in a million years."

"The guy did it."

"Of course he did; but he twisted the knob to the front when he chucked the rings. But that's not the story. We're going to forget the fellow with the knife rack. We're going to get the real people."

"When?"

"Tomorrow night."

Vic spoke with confidence. His statement silenced his companions. While The Shadow listened, Marquette began to give the details of a compact plan.

"I've been watching that circus lot," he stated. "I've been there every night. I know the inside of the outfit that's handing out the phony mazuma. I told you that before. I told you there was one man in charge – a fellow who must be making contact with the big shot.

"I've located the first man. I'm going to watch him. Tomorrow night. You fellows be there, alongside the Ferris wheel. When I slip you the word, be ready. I'm not going to talk to you. I'll send someone with a note.

All he will say is 'O-blai!'"

"O-blai?"

"Yes. Hog-Latin for 'blow.' That word won't sound funny along the midway. So when some fellow – no matter how funny he looks – says 'o-blai,' you ask him why. Then he'll say 'ops-kay!'"

"Cops?" asked Slade.

"You're getting the lingo." Vic laughed. "Then you ask him for the lay and he'll either tell you or slip you a note. Follow instructions and you'll find the queer. If the big shot isn't there, wait for him to show up. Get him. I'll join you later. Don't go until I join you."

"O-blai," muttered Dunham. "Ops-kay."

"Stick tight," added Vic. "Because there's a riot due tomorrow night. It's liable to come pretty quickly after you get my word. Do you understand?"

"Right," responded Slade.

Vic Marquette's instructions were complete. Brief words followed; then a closing door announced the operative's departure. The Shadow was already moving along the wall. His creeping form arrived, beetlelike, at an open window on the third floor.

A soft laugh sounded from the darkness of Lamont Cranston's room. The last pieces in the picture had been set in place. Others had stated their plans. Others were ready. So was The Shadow!

## CHAPTER XVIII. THE SILENT SHADOW

THE show was on in the big top. It was the last night of the circus in Hamilcar. Straggling groups were drifting along the midway. They were the remnants of the small crowd that had gone into the circus tent.

Most of those who had come to the lot were idlers. Some of the concessions were doing business; but several of these "joints" were packing. In this, they were setting the example of Cap Guffy. The spot where the Ten-in-One tent had been now formed a barren stretch of ground. Idlers were watching Cap superintend the loading of the trucks that he had hired.

Tex Larch had supplied the roughnecks for the loading. Cliff Marsland was among this crew. He was the only one who wore the tattooed red circle. The others were genuine roughnecks, not members of Croaker Zinn's mob. A spirit of pessimism dominated their palaver.

"Cap's started it by pullin' out," one fellow said to Cliff. "Look over there. Jubo the Geek is packin'. When that show quits, business must be lousy."

Cliff nodded. He saw the ticket taker pulling down the geek's tent. Jubo was aiding while a wise-cracking group of town boys commented on the tame appearance of the wild man from the snake pit.

"There's another 'grifter' foldin'," continued Cliff's companion. "That guy's been runnin' a two-way joint. Say – when a grifter can't make nothin' when he's workin' the game strong, it's a sure bet there's no dough on the lot."

## CRIME CIRCUS

Cliff nodded his understanding. He had picked up the midway lingo. He knew that a 'grifter' was a concessionaire. He also knew that by a 'two way joint' was meant a game that could be run on the level or fixed to trim the suckers. The operation of a 'two way joint' was called working 'strong.'

"Say" – the speaker was a concessionaire who had come across the midway – "can one of you fellows give me a lift? I'm loading some stuff aboard a truck. Can't hoist it alone."

"I'll give you a hand," responded Cliff.

"Thanks."

Cliff walked across the midway with the grifter. He had been looking for a break like this. He wanted to contact with other members of the red circle and none of them were near Cap Guffy's trucks. Cliff knew that trouble was impending. He wanted to be ready when it broke.

"I've been running a 'grind,' pal," confided the grifter, as Cliff helped him hoist a crate aboard a truck. "Get that? Running a 'grind' – working for a five-cent play. They call me a 'nickel gouger' on account of it, but I took in dough until we hit this town. But I've went broke in this burg. Look" – the crate was aboard the truck when the grifter pointed down the midway – "there's a fellow taking down his 'flasher' When those jumping lights don't bring the dough, it's time for everybody to quit."

STROLLING down the midway, Cliff encountered a roughneck headed in the opposite direction. The fellow plucked at his left sleeve. Cliff did the same. Tattooed circles came in view. The roughneck spoke in a low tone.

"Have your gat ready," he advised Cliff. "When it breaks, the mob is goin' to cut loose."

"I'm set," returned Cliff.

As he turned away, The Shadow's agent ran shoulder to shoulder against a tall personage who was standing near a tent. As he stared into a calm, impassive face, he caught the glare of steady eyes. Lips that barely moved gave Cliff a weirdly whispered order.

"Watch Jubo the Geek." A cigarette moved up to the lips. "Keep him from the mob."

Cliff turned toward Jubo's tent. The canvas was down. He saw the geek staring across the midway. Cliff turned to nod to the stranger who had spoken. The tall visitor had moved away. Cliff, however, needed no further injunction. He had received an order from The Shadow.

"Watch Jubo the Geek."

Oddly, The Shadow was not the only one who had uttered that admonition. Off beyond one of the Ten-in-One trucks, Cleed – otherwise Croaker Zinn – was saying the same words to Luke, the tattooed man. A glower was showing on the pasty face of the so-called Cleed as Croaker studied a list that Luke had handed him.

"Watch Jubo?" questioned Luke.

"Yeah." Croaker was emphatic. "Say – it was a good idea to have Hank check up on all the crew. When did you put the circle on Jubo?"

## CRIME CIRCUS

"I don't remember usin' the needle on him."

"You don't eh? Well, that's all I wanted to know. Pass the word along to watch Jubo."

Luke moved away to obey. Cap Guffy approached and beckoned. In the languid fashion of Cleed, Croaker Zinn arose to follow the owner of the Ten-in-One.

"Forget you're a dope," ordered Cap. "Give me a hand while I load this box of rattlers aboard the back of my coupe. I'm not trusting these reptiles to no truck. These babies have hot stingers."

Croaker gave Cleed's sickly grin as he aided with the box. The rattlers whirred from within the box. Neither Cap nor Croaker seemed to be disturbed by the sound.

"All right, Cleed," said Cap. "Go back and take another nap. Come on, you roughnecks. Get a hold of some of those crates. This finishes the load."

JUBO THE GEEK was watching from the spot where his tent lay on the ground. His blinking eyes were following the form of Cleed. He saw the pretended cigarette fiend sneak off in the direction of the meeting tent.

Dropping a strip of canvas, Jubo followed.

The trail led in and out among the circus trucks. The lights from the midway barely showed the outline of Cleed's form. Jubo moved with quick paces from truck to truck, anxious not to lose his quarry. They were approaching the isolated tent. It was dark.

Losing temporary sight of Cleed, Jubo made a stooping sprint to another truck. He arrived there and peered into the darkness. He was panting slightly; that was why he did not hear the sound that occurred behind him. Before Jubo knew that danger was close by, figures from the dark pounced upon him and sent him sprawling to the turf.

"Drag him into the tent." It was Luke who gave the word to Jubo's captors. "I want to take a look at him. Maybe he's a phony."

Roughnecks obeyed. Jubo's body was limp. Swift blows had knocked the geek senseless.

When they reached the tent, Luke turned on the light. Jubo's form plopped to the ground and lay face up. Luke studied the brownish countenance while four roughnecks stood by.

"A phony all right," decided Luke. "Wait'll I take a look at his arm."

He pulled up the sleeve of Jubo's jersey. A red circle showed in the light. Luke grunted. He strode across the tent and shoved a big sponge into a half-filled water bucket. Coming back, he applied the sponge to the geek's arm. The red circle began to fade.

"Dye," announced Luke. "I knew that was no tattoo job. Say – let's look at the rest of your arms while I'm about it."

The roughnecks raised their sleeves. Luke's inspection made him nod with approval. The tattooed man was satisfied with their red circles. He pointed to Jubo's inert form.

## CRIME CIRCUS

"Phony make-up," he announced, "and a wig. But I'm leavin' it on him. When they find this guy full of lead, he'll still be Jubo the Geek. Two of you stay here. If he comes to, tap him another on the bean. When you hear the 'Hey Rube,' give him the works. Get me?"

The roughnecks nodded.

"Who's stayin' then?" asked Luke.

"I'll stay." It was Cliff Marsland who spoke.

"I'll stick," added a roughneck. Luke beckoned to the other two men. They left the tent. Cliff and his companion sat down to keep an eye on Jubo the Geek.

THERE was motion in the darkness outside the tent. A silent figure shifted into the night. It was the form of The Shadow. The tall visitor had donned his sable-hued garments. He, like Cliff, had noted the capture of Jubo. With Cliff on the job, The Shadow was satisfied concerning the helpless geek.

Reaching the office trailer, The Shadow lurked in darkness. His keen eyes commanded a broad view of the midway. Certain figures caught his immediate attention. The first was that of Cap Guffy. His trucks loaded, the owner of the side show was coming toward the office.

From across the midway, a newcomer was heading for the same objective. It was Jonathan Wilbart. The circus magnate was here to make his final offer for the purchase of the show.

As the two men neared the office door, The Shadow's gaze turned toward the big top. There he observed Tex Larch, coming out through the turnstile.

A whispered laugh. The Shadow moved away. He found a space between two concession tents. The joints were close together. The front of the space – not more than two feet in breadth – was blocked by the sturdy form of a lounge who was watching the varied activities of the midway.

The Shadow approached. A soft, weird whisper came from his hidden lips. It brought a nod from the lounge. The Shadow's form faded back between the two small tents. Then it merged completely with the darkness. The Shadow had become a part of the night itself.

The lights of the midway showed the face of the lounge who was standing between the fronts of the concessions. This man was Harry Vincent. He had received The Shadow's order. He knew that he was to act according to instructions already given him.

Sauntering from the idle spot, Harry strolled across the midway and approached the clattering Ferris wheel. He spied two men who were standing a short distance from the huge device. Harry walked up and nodded. The men looked him over in a suspicious manner.

"O-blay," said Harry, in a low voice.

The men exchanged glances. Then one put a growled question:

"What for?"

"Ops-kay," added Harry.



## CRIME CIRCUS

"What's the lay?" quizzed one of the pair.

Harry looked about. No one was watching. The Shadow's agent pulled an envelope from his pocket. It was Dunham who received it. Harry turned away and found an opening between two tents. He ducked out of sight and started a long, circling course toward the fringe of the circus lot.

Slade had opened Harry's envelope. His face became grim as he read the message. He tore the paper into shreds and let the pieces float to the ground.

"From Vic?" questioned Dunham, in an undertone.

"You bet," responded Slade. "Come along. Over past those tents. We've got a job ahead."

DOWN near the big top, a thick-faced, ugly-lipped man was standing alone. He seemed restless as he watched toward the circus tent. The wheezing music of the steam calliope came muffled to his ears. The constant sound made him feel uneasy.

A winsome figure was coming from the direction of the big top. Red hair showed in the light. It identified Lucille Lavan. The queen of the high wire had finished her act. She was humming as she approached the tent and entered. She did not see the ugly-faced stranger who was waiting.

"Beef!" The stranger turned at the sound of the growled whisper. He stared unbelieving at the pasty face of Cleed. A grin appeared upon the dopey visage.

"Hello, Beef," came the repeated whisper. "It's me – Croaker. All set?"

"Sure am," responded Beef. "Say, Croaker. I wouldn't have knowed you by your mug. Was that the moll?"

"Yeah. Come on."

Stooping, Croaker cautiously lifted loose canvas at the side of the tent. He edged beneath and Beef followed. They were in Lucille Lavan's private tent. Ten feet away, the girl was sitting at a small dressing table, applying cold cream to remove her make-up.

Croaker Zinn pounced forward. Lucille, staring in the mirror, spied the face of Cleed. Gamely, the girl swung to meet the intruder. She was too late. Croaker's fingers caught her throat.

Beef Malligan aided in ending Lucille's struggles. Together, they produced leather thongs and bound her hands and feet. A large handkerchief served as an effective gag. Croaker pointed to a couch. Beef placed the girl upon it.

"No rush," chuckled Croaker. "Wait a couple of minutes, Beef, while I get rid of this punk make-up I've been using."

Dipping his fingers in cold cream, Croaker smeared the substance over his pallid countenance. The job was a quick one. A mopping towel finished it. Beef Malligan grinned as he saw the swarthy features of Croaker Zinn supplant the pasty visage of Cleed.

"All right," ordered Croaker. "Out through the back. How far away is your car?"

"A hundred feet."

"You lead the way. I'll bring the moll."

Croaker was chuckling as they neared a darkened sedan. Over his shoulder, he held the bundled form of Lucille Lavan. In an undertone, he was telling Beef Malligan the story.

"They call this jane Lucille Lavan," Croaker was saying. "That's who she thinks she is – Lucille Lavan. That's the name she's always used; but it ain't her right name. She's Lucy Aldon, the million-dollar moll."

"Open the back door, Beef. We'll chuck her in there. That's the stuff." Lucille's huddled form rolled on the back seat. "You take the wheel, Beef. We're going places –"

The two mobleaders were side by side as Croaker's speech came to a sudden end. Something had clicked from the hood of Beef's car. The two crooks were standing in the glare of a flashlight. The torch was held by Harry Vincent.

But it was not the glare that caused the two crooks to stop in their tracks. It was a figure in the range of light that made them cower with upraised hands. There, like a living specter, stood a shape whose power they well knew.

Burning eyes blazed from beneath a blackened slouch hat. The mouths of mammoth automatics loomed like tunnels that boded death. Silent, The Shadow had risen from the dark. The master of vengeance had arrived to conquer crime!

## CHAPTER XIX. MEN ACCUSED

WHILE The Shadow had been laying his trap for the abductors of Lucille Lavan, a brief meeting was going on in Tex Larch's office. Three men – Tex, Cap and Wilbart – had arrived to find the office occupied by a single individual: Sheriff Howard.

The three nodded to the official. The sheriff was persisting in his vigil merely as a matter of formality. He had given up hope of uncovering the missing swag. Tex Larch, worried over matters that concerned his circus, had practically ignored the sheriff's presence on the lot.

It was plain, too, that Tex had little time for Jonathan Wilbart. He shook hands hurriedly with the magnate, then began to take papers from a drawer in the desk. Wilbart, noting a worried expression on the showman's face, was prompt with a question.

"What is the answer, Tex?" he inquired. "Did you hear from New York? Do you intend to sell?"

"No," replied Tex. "That goes for both questions, Wilbart. I didn't get the wire from New York. I don't know how I stand. So I'm going there on the next train. That's all."

"Leaving the show on the lot?"

"Yes."

"With Stuffy in charge?"

"Yes."

## CRIME CIRCUS

"Very well." Wilbart delivered a dry smile. "I shall stay close by. Send a telegram to the Hamilcar House if you intend to sell. Then I can take possession. If I do not hear from you by –"

"What then?" demanded Tex, as Wilbart paused, still smiling.

"I shall negotiate with our friend the sheriff," remarked Wilbart, "when he is authorized to put your show up for sale."

With this statement, Wilbart turned and stepped from the office. Tex watched him cross the midway, where he was joined by his chauffeur. With a growl, Tex turned back into the office.

"I don't like that heel," he declared. "So he figures this outfit is never going to move out of Hamilcar, does he? Well – I'll show him! I'll –"

Tex paused. He noted Cap Guffy and turned savagely toward the proprietor of the Ten-in-One.

"Well?" quizzed Tex. "What's on your mind? I thought you'd got that junk pile of yours off the lot."

"Ready to pull out now," returned Cap, extending his hand. "I'm drivin' ahead in my coupe. The trucks are followin'. So long, Tex."

THE circus owner lost some of his anger. He shook hands cordially with Cap. The side-show owner walked from the office. At the door, Tex watched Cap pace along the midway. He saw him enter his coupe. The little car prepared to pull away.

"Cap Guffy ain't a bad sort," confided Tex, as he entered the office and spoke to the seated sheriff. "The going got too tough for him – that was all. Well – I wish him luck."

The door opened. It was Stuffy Dowson, bringing a pair of heavy suitcases. Tex turned as the general agent spoke.

"Here's your kiesters, Tex," announced Stuffy. "I'm goin' to get a car. It's time you was startin' for the depot."

"All right, Stuffy."

Tex stepped from the office as soon as Stuffy had carried the suitcases from his path. The sheriff followed. Like Tex, he stood on the fringe of the midway, looking here and there.

The showman was counting the blank spaces where concessions had been. The sheriff was picking out the scattered members of his small posse. A dozen deputies were still on the grounds.

Up by the trucks that had loaded the Ten-in-One show, Cap Guffy was speaking from the driver's seat of his coupe. He was talking to Luke, the tattooed man.

"I'm pullin' out," informed Cap. "Got Marxia's rattlers aboard this car. You see that everybody gets aboard the trucks when the drivers are ready to go."

"We're all set, Cap."

Luke turned to Marxia as the coupe rolled from the lot. In a low voice, the tattooed man gave final instructions to the snake charmer.

## CRIME CIRCUS

"Croaker planted the cash," he stated, "along with what was left of the queer. The big shot's got it. That settles that."

"What about Croaker?"

"He and Beef just grabbed Lucille Lavan. She was Lucy Aldon."

"What?"

"Yep." Luke grinned. "They're on their way. Now it's up to me to pass the 'Hey Rube.' The mob is waitin' for the shout. I'm goin' to slide around a bit first. Might as well give the big shot and Croaker plenty of time to get clear."

Luke was looking down the midway. He saw Tex Larch talking with the sheriff. Stuffy Dowson had not yet returned with the car. Luke sauntered off behind some tents. Marxia remained by the trucks.

OUTSIDE the office, Stuffy reappeared beside Tex Larch and the sheriff. He informed Tex that the car was waiting on the other side of the lot. Tex pointed to the bags. Stuffy picked them up. Tex shook hands with the sheriff; then turned to follow Stuffy.

Then came an interruption. A gray-haired man came hurrying from a cluster of idlers. In a crackly voice, he shouted to the departing showman. Both Tex and the sheriff turned as the man called.

"Where are you going, Larch!" came the crackled demand. "Stop! I want to talk to you."

The sheriff saw a clouded look appear upon Tex Larch's face. Then the showman forced a smile to his lips. He extended his hand toward the arrival.

"I was coming into New York to see you, Mr. Towne," declared Tex. "I was waiting here to get a wire from you."

"A likely story!" exclaimed the gray-haired man. "I have lost patience with your dallying, Larch."

"Come on in the office," suggested Tex. "I've been having a lot of poor luck in this burg. I want to tell you that –"

"I want to see the girl!" challenged Towne. "I can abide no further with your constant wish for delay."

"Wait a minute, Mr. Towne –"

The sheriff stepped in to stop the argument. With one big hand, he pressed Tex back. He scented complications; he wanted to know the facts.

"Who are you?" the official asked the gray-haired man. "I'm the sheriff of this county. I want to know everything that's happening on this circus lot."

"You are the sheriff?" questioned Towne. Then, as he caught the flash of a badge, he nodded. "Very well, sir. My name is Adoniram Towne. I am the lawyer of the Aldon estate. I have come here to claim Lucy Aldon, the missing heiress."

"Lucy Aldon!" exclaimed the sheriff. "What's she doing here?"

## CRIME CIRCUS

"Working in the big top," put in Tex, sullenly. "Lucille Lavan – queen of the high wire. She don't know she's Lucy Aldon."

"Mr. Larch came to see me in New York," explained Adoniram Towne. "That was a few months ago. He told me that he was sure Lucille Lavan was Lucy Aldon. He requested that I keep the fact from her until the end of the season."

"The show would have folded without her," put in Tex. "She was the big act. I made a straight deal with Mr. Towne here. I told him it wouldn't be fair to Lucille to tell her who she was before the season ended. She's happy with the show."

"I agreed with Larch," admitted Towne. "I even advanced him funds – as reward for finding Lucy Aldon – so that he could complete his season. But when I read of trouble in this circus I –"

"You wanted to know if the girl was safe," interposed the sheriff. "Sure thing. I don't blame you."

"I want to see Lucille Aldon at once," added Towne. "Without delay."

"You'll see her." The sheriff turned to Tex. "Her act's over, ain't it? Where's her tent?"

"Over by the big top," growled Tex. "But there's no use talking to her yet. Let's go in the office –"

"We'll go to her tent," ordered the sheriff. "Come along, both of you. And you" – he turned to Stuff, who was gaping as he held the bags – "come along with us, too. This is something I'm going to find out about."

WHILE the four were heading for Lucille's tent, a sudden drama was budding in an isolated spot behind the office trailer. Cliff Marsland and the roughneck with him were talking as they sat beneath the light of the old meeting tent.

Jubo the Geek had opened his eyes. Neither Cliff nor the roughneck had noticed it. While the two were chatting in low voices, Jubo moved. On hands and knees, he began to crawl toward the canvas wall.

"Look there!" The standing roughneck spied the moving geek. "He's tryin' a sneak! Get him!"

Yanking a gun from his pocket, the roughneck aimed for Jubo. Cliff acted before the fellow could press the trigger. The Shadow's agent was pulling his own gun; with a downward stroke, he cracked the roughneck's wrist. The fellow's revolver dropped to the ground as Jubo made a dive beneath the side of the tent.

Fuming oaths, the roughneck pounced on Cliff. The Shadow's agent grappled with his foe. It was a vicious struggle that set the two men back and forth across the tent, their heels digging in the soft turf. Then Cliff's hand rose and descended. The steel of his automatic met the roughneck's skull. The ruffian collapsed.

Jubo was gone. Stealthily, Cliff turned out the light. Leaving his adversary unconscious, The Shadow's agent moved through the darkness, picking a course toward the midway. He was too late to trail Jubo the Geek. The mop-headed wild man had made good his escape.

IN Lucille's tent, the sheriff was grimly surveying overturned chairs and upset articles upon the dressing table. Two of his deputies had arrived; they were watching Tex and Stuff. Adoniram Towne was biting his lips.

## CRIME CIRCUS

"Looks like someone grabbed the girl," decided the sheriff. "You'll answer for this, Larch. What do you know about it? Where is Lucy Aldon?"

"I don't know," responded Tex. His face was troubled. "I had no idea –"

"You tried to keep us from coming in this tent," broke in Towne, his voice indignant. "Come, Larch. Have you abducted Lucy Aldon?"

"What do you mean?" Tex's question was savage, "Do you think I'd do –"

"You were the only one who knew who she was," interposed Towne, "The burden of proof is upon you, Larch."

"Others might have known it," retorted Tex. "She's been a trouper ever since she was a kid. Brought up by circus folk. It didn't take no detective work for me to learn the names of her dead parents –"

Tex broke off as a figure bounded up from the side of the tent. A deputy swung his revolver to cover the intruder. A gasp came from Stuff Dowson:

"Jubo the Geek!"

The wild man had thrust one hand to his forehead. With a quick sweep, he ripped off his heavy, moplike wig.

The action brought an instant change to his brownish, made-up features. With his other hand, Jubo drew up the bottom of his jersey. A badge glittered from the shirt that he wore beneath.

"Who are you?" quizzed the sheriff, as he ordered the deputy to lower his gun.

"My name's Marquette," stated the transformed geek, in a steady voice. "I'm Vic Marquette, of the secret service."

"Of the secret service!"

"Yes. Is this man Larch your prisoner?"

"He is. Do you want him?"

"He looks like the fellow I'm after. I need the big shot in a counterfeiting racket that's been following this show of his. Are those Larch's bags?"

"Yes."

"Where was he taking them?"

"To New York."

Vic grabbed a bag and yanked it open. Clothes, office books and other assorted articles went spreading on the ground. Vic seized the second suitcase and sent its contents flying.

"What are you looking for?" quizzed the sheriff, as Vic began to paw through the scattered articles.

"Cash," returned Vic. "Real cash and plenty of it. I'm looking for counterfeit bills, too. The mob that's with this show pulled in all the queer that they were shoving. It was going to the big shot, tonight."

"I'm not the big shot," put in Tex.

"Looks like you're right," admitted Vic, rising from the ground. "Do you know who is?"

"I didn't even know there was a racket with the outfit," growled Tex. "Say – it looks like I'm being framed plenty here tonight. First the girl business. Then –"

"Who else went off this lot?" quizzed Vic, turning to the sheriff. "Who else could have carried the cash and the queer?"

"Cap Guffy left," declared the sheriff. "Drove off the lot in his coupe."

"He's the man, then!" decided Vic, grimly. "I located the mainspring of the mob. He's the fellow that called himself Cleed the Cigarette Fiend. But his crew grabbed me before I saw him contact with the big shot."

"Can you give me a couple of deputies, sheriff? I'm going after Cap Guffy, before it's too late. Had a couple of my own men, here on the lot, but I didn't see them when I came across the midway."

"Keep guard, men," ordered the sheriff, as he stepped toward the tent flaps. "I'll get you a couple of deputies, Marquette. Maybe you'll still have time to grab Captain Guffy."

"Who wants Cap Guffy?"

The tent flaps swept aside before the sheriff could open them. The voice came in challenging fashion from the burly speaker who was entering. The sheriff stepped back and dropped his jaw. Vic Marquette stared.

Into the tent had come the very man whom they intended to pursue. It was Captain Guffy, big as life, demanding to know why he was wanted!

## CHAPTER XX. THE MOB BREAKS

As Cap Guffy stared in challenge, he found himself looking into the muzzle of a stub-nosed revolver. The weapon was held by Vic Marquette. The secret-service operative spoke in a cold, steady voice.

"Where have you taken the queer stuff, Guffy?" questioned Vic. "What about the real dough you took in?"

"The queer stuff?" gasped Guffy.

"The counterfeit money," affirmed Vic. "The game was working from your Ten-in-One tent. I figured you to be the big shot, if Tex Larch didn't prove to be the man."

"Where's the girl?" demanded the sheriff.

"What girl?" blurted Cap.

"Lucy Aldon," stated Adoniram Towne.

## CRIME CIRCUS

"Lucy Aldon?" questioned Cap.

"They mean Lucille Lavan," declared Tex Larch, suddenly. He turned to the sheriff, then to Vic Marquette. "Listen, you fellows" – Tex was serious – "it looks like a double racket was working on this lot. You accused me of being the big shot. Now you're on Cap Guffy's neck."

"Well?" quizzed Vic Marquette.

"You're wrong about Cap," stated Tex, "just as you were wrong about me. Cap's on the level."

"He is, eh?" put in the sheriff. "Well, you and him didn't seem to be such good friends when he was leaving tonight."

"Cap and I had our differences," admitted Tex. "But he's a trouper and a straight shooter. As I get it" – Tex was concentrating on Vic Marquette – "you're after some fellow who has gone off the lot."

"Not just off tonight," insisted Vic. "I want the man who's been on and off. The fellow who could have brought in counterfeit bills and taken away real cash, by contact with his helpers here."

"The fellow who could have carried away the bank funds," put in the sheriff, suddenly. "Like you, Larch, going into New York. Like you, Guffy, going down to the station with a trunk. I'm just beginning to see the game."

"There are my bags," asserted Tex. "Nothing in them. And if Cap was crooked, he wouldn't have come back to this lot, would he? Listen" – Tex narrowed his gaze toward Vic – "I'll tell you who the real crook is –"

"Jonathan Wilbart!" exclaimed Cap Guffy.

"Bah!" put in the sheriff. "Say – it looks like both of you are crooks. Come on, men. We're taking them into town. Get a car –"

"Wait!" The command came from Vic Marquette. "These men may be right, sheriff. Where is Jonathan Wilbart?"

"He left a while ago. But he –"

"Hold these two men, sheriff. I've seen Wilbart's car around this lot. I know where he usually parks it. Let me take a look."

"But he's gone –"

"I don't know about that. Allow me five minutes, sheriff. Let me see if Wilbart is still around."

"All right."

VIC ducked for the side of the tent as the Sheriff gave his agreement. Coming out into dim light, he scrambled off into darkness. He saw a car parked off the lot. He leveled his gun as he noticed a crouched figure. Then came the glimmer of a flashlight. Vic stopped short, caught by the glare.

"Vic!" Slade's voice gasped in recognition of the ex-geek's brownish features. "It's you, isn't it, Vic?"



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"Yeah," returned Vic Marquette. "Where's Dunham?"

"Right here." Slade spoke with satisfaction. "We got your tip. We grabbed the bozos when they came back to the car. Some guy on the lot must have had a duplicate key to this sedan. It was planted with a tin box full of real dough and a couple of packages of queer."

Slade turned the rays of his flashlight. Vic saw two sour-faced men standing at the side of the sedan. Dunham was covering the pair. One was Jonathan Wilbart; the other his chauffeur, Lennox.

"So you're the big shot, Wilbart?" questioned Vic. "I guess you've got the bank swag too, eh?"

"No," growled Wilbart. "I don't know what this is all about."

"I'm not in the game," protested Lennox. "I think I can help you fellows find the swag. It may be in Mr. Wilbart's safe –"

"Shut up, Lennox," ordered Wilbart.

"I'll talk," persisted the chauffeur. "I thought you were an honest man, Mr. Wilbart, until tonight –"

"You can talk later," interposed Vic, grimly. "Hold him here, Slade. I'm taking Wilbart with me. Wait until I return."

Vic planted his gun-muzzle in the center of Wilbart's back. He ordered the magnate forward. Vic was grim as he forced the exposed crook toward the tent where others were waiting. Vic knew that a riot was due to break. But he counted on at least a dozen minutes before Luke gave the call.

EVENTS had been moving rapidly on the lot. Off in another stretch of darkness, The Shadow was still covering Croaker Zinn and Beef Malligan. There was no flashlight glowing, but The Shadow, shrouded in darkness, could view the outlines of the crooks before him. Knowing that they were covered by the automatics, Croaker and Beef were standing with upraised hands.

Harry Vincent was releasing Lucille Lavan. He had taken the gag from the girl's mouth. He was working on the thongs that bound her. Lucille, half senseless, was propped upon the rear seat of the car, and Harry was finding difficulty in working loose the leather bonds.

"Her hands are free," Harry informed The Shadow, in an undertone. "I'm working on the ankle-straps. All right – they're cut –"

Harry stopped short. A long, wailing cry was coming through the night. It was the signal that no one had expected at this early minute – Luke's order – the chaos that was to sweep the circus lot.

"H–e–e–y Ru–u–u–ube!"

Profound stillness followed the long call. Then, like automatic echoes, came answered cries from other portions of the lot. A dozen men had taken up the shout. A revolver shot sounded in the distance.

Hey Rube!

It was the battle cry of the circus lot. It meant that all would rally to a common cause. The real circus folk, not knowing that crooks had started the riot call, would join forces with the mobsters who had prepared this

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climax of violence.

The Shadow was motionless in the darkness. His silence, together with the cry, was inspiration for Croaker Zinn and Beef Malligan. Gleaming eyes had turned toward the tents. With one accord, the two crooks shot hands to pockets and leaped forward, drawing their revolvers.

The Shadow whirled to meet them. Fingers pressed triggers as his black form dropped. Croaker's revolver barked. Its bullet whistled over The Shadow's head. Beef, aiming low, was ready to pump lead into the fading foeman.

Croaker had been too quick. Beef was too slow. As crooks closed with The Shadow, automatics flared from gloved fists. Spitting bullets did double duty. Croaker Zinn slumped before he could take new aim. Beef Malligan collapsed before he could press revolver trigger.

The Shadow hissed an order to Harry Vincent. His tall form rose from beside the sprawled mobleaders. The cloak swished as The Shadow glided swiftly toward the tents along the midway.

LUKE had been watching Lucille's tent. That was the reason for the early cry. From a distance, the tattooed man had seen Jonathan Wilbart coming into the range of light, with Vic Marquette behind him. Luke – like Marxia – shared Cleed's knowledge of the big shot's identity. To aid Wilbart, Luke had given the "Hey Rube."

With that cry, Wilbart had swung. Before Vic could fire, the magnate delivered a punch that sent the operative sprawling. Leaping toward the midway, Wilbart cried to Luke and pointed off in the direction of his car. Luke sent mobsters scurrying in that direction.

Revolvers barked in the darkness. Vic, coming to his feet, opened fire on those who had headed for Wilbart's car. Shots came from the sedan. Vic felt grim satisfaction. He could tell that both Slade and Dunham were shooting. They had given Lennox a chance to prove himself on the level. Lennox was making good.

Mobsters dropped back at the steady fire which came from two directions. The Shadow, passing Vic, knew that the sharp-shooting secret-service men could hold their own. He headed for Lucille's tent, where shouts proclaimed excitement. His tall form raised the canvas at the rear.

Of the men gathered in that tent, only the sheriff and his deputies were armed. The deputies had still been covering Tex and Cap. The sheriff had been watching Stuff. Thus, a surprise from the front flaps had caught them helpless.

Jonathan Wilbart and Luke had pulled back the tent flaps. Five mobsters – all pretended roughnecks – had leaped in at their bidding. These gorillas had covered the sheriff and the deputies. They were waiting for orders.

A harsh laugh was on Wilbart's lips. The officers had dropped their guns. The arch-crook saw no menace. In a sneering, evil voice, he announced his prompt intention. His statement was a revelation of the fiendish nature that lay behind his gentlemanly mask.

"Shoot them down," ordered Wilbart. "Fire when I give the word. Leave none alive. Ready –"

The shape of The Shadow loomed up within the rear canvas. A weird, taunting laugh stilled Wilbart's savage lips. Burning eyes were steady above the barrels of leveled automatics. As mobsters swung startled to face the black-clad menace, the automatics spoke.

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TWO mobsters staggered as the first shots flashed. The Shadow aimed for others of the squad. Crooks fired hasty shots that tore holes in the canvas. A third mobster sprawled. A fourth wavered. He saw Wilbart and Luke diving for the midway.

Sheriff and deputies were grabbing up their guns. Their shots turned the aim of the mobsters. The fight in the big top was being duplicated on a miniature scale. As The Shadow's laugh pealed forth its gibing challenge, the last two gorillas became the targets of two fires.

The Shadow's automatics – the revolvers of the law – these were the weapons that dropped the last pair of crooks. The sheriff and his men leaped forward. Tex and Cap followed, grabbing guns from dying mobsters. While Stuffie Dowson and Adoniram Towne stood rooted, five armed men sprang forth to join the fray on the midway.

Pretended roughnecks – bare arms flashing to show their red circles – were exchanging shots with the rest of the deputies. Circus folk, armed with clubs and iron bars, were joining battle with townsmen still upon the lot.

Shot were coming from beside Lucille's tent. The Shadow had gone outside the canvas. Cutting along the fringe of the midway, he was dropping members of the red circle. From beside the office, Cliff Marsland was doing the same.

Tex Larch bellowed an order from in front of Lucille's tent. Circus folk stopped as they heard the showman's voice. It rose above the spat of guns that the sheriff and his deputies were employing.

"Get those roughnecks!" shouted Tex. "Get the ones with the guns! They're crooks! Get them!"

In a trice, the scene was changed. Circus folk who had responded to the "Hey Rube" ceased their battle with the townies. They became avengers as they smothered the mobsters. Members of the red circle went down under the attack of clubs and rods.

Tex Larch had used his head. Guns seldom appeared in fights on circus lots. His cry, passing along the line, had given immediate understanding. Townsmen, seeing that the real circus people were aiding the outnumbered deputies, came to give further aid. As the sheriff strode out into the midway, the fierce fight was coming to a sudden finish. Men of crime were conquered.

CLIFF MARSLAND had hurried toward the trucks of the Ten-in-One. He had seen two men running in that direction: Jonathan Wilbart and Luke, the tattooed man. Princess Marxia was in the rumble seat of Cap Guffy's coupe. With one arm clinging to the snake box, she was beckoning with the other.

Wilbart reached the car and leaped aboard. Luke clambered to the wheel. Cliff fired wild shots as he cut across the midway. He saw the coupe roll from the lot. Cliff turned toward a sedan that was coming from rough ground. He shouted to the driver. The door opened.

Cliff leaped aboard to find Harry Vincent at the wheel. Lucille Lavan was in the back. Harry shot the sedan forward, to take up the pursuit. They reached the roadway a hundred feet behind the fleeing coupe. Cliff leaned outward with ready automatic. Then he uttered a wild exclamation.

"Look!"

The coupe had slowed to take the first turn in the road. Cliff stayed his fire. For as the sedan shot forward, he saw a black-cloaked figure spring from an embankment and land on the running board of the fleeing car, clinging on to it.

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It was The Shadow! He had sped to intercept the flight. His leap had brought him to the side of the car, face to face with Jonathan Wilbart.

THE thud of The Shadow's form brought swinging guns in his direction. One was gripped by Wilbart; the other by Luke.

Fingers pressed triggers. With split-second speed, The Shadow beat Wilbart to the shot. The arch-crook slumped; his unfired revolver dropped from his hand, while the echo of The Shadow's shot sounded within the coupe.

With one hand swinging the coupe to the straight road, Luke aimed with the other. The tattooed man had acted with less speed than Wilbart. That proved his undoing.

The Shadow shifted as Luke fired. The shot whistled through a fold of the cloak as The Shadow moved sidewise from the door. The automatic barked its answer. Luke crumpled behind the wheel.

From the pursuing sedan, Cliff Marsland uttered a grim exclamation as the coupe left the road. Crashing through a fence, the light car toppled sidewise into darkness as its wheels skidded on the side of an embankment and went down the incline.

As Harry jammed the brakes, Cliff leaped from the sedan. He sprang to the embankment and stared toward the wreck of the overturned coupe. His flashlight showed one moving form. It was that of Princess Marxia, hurled from the smashed car. Beside her lay the snake box, its top broken.

Horror showed on Cliff's face as he saw what happened twenty feet below. Marxia, crippled by the crash, was trying to rise. Rattling noises brought a scream from the woman's lips. Cliff saw the striking heads of poisonous snakes. Moaning, Marxia rolled upon the ground and lay still.

The rattlers, poison unremoved from their fangs, had completed this grim tragedy. Jonathan Wilbart had died. So had Luke. Marxia – as murderous as the two men – had joined her companions in death.

A voice spoke beside Cliff Marsland. It was Harry Vincent's. Cliff turned his flashlight. Harry was nodding and pointing to the sedan.

"The Shadow?" questioned Cliff.

"He's all right," answered Harry. "He landed clear when the coupe took the ditch. He's in the car."

"What about the girl?"

"She has left. I helped her up the embankment. She is cutting across to the lot, to inform them that she is safe."

Cliff followed Harry to the car and joined him in the front seat. The sedan pulled away. Cliff, glancing into the rear, saw only blackness.

But as the car rolled on its way, a weird, whispered sound came to the ears of The Shadow's agents. It made them tremble, even though its author was their friend.

The laugh of The Shadow!

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Shrouded in blackness, traveling away from the scenes where he had conquered crime, the master of the night had uttered his grim triumph.

Mirthless, the laugh rose upon the silence of the countryside; then broke with quivering echoes that seemed to linger with the sighing breeze.

Evil schemes had ended. Minions of crime had died. Their insidious leader had perished. Justice had gained the victory over cross-purposes of crime.

Justice – through The Shadow!

THE END