

THE CRIME CULT

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I. SEALED LIPS

A SUDDEN chill swept over Don Hasbrouck as he reached forward to place his hand upon the bell. He hesitated. He looked upward to the black windows and strange turrets of the old stone house. The cold, driving rain pelted into his face. The night or the dismal, sinister mansion itself brought instinctive fear deep into the man on the steps.

Hasbrouck straightened his shoulders. He couldn't tell, for the life of him, why he hesitated, or from whence came that eerie feeling.

He was at the end of a trail, ready to enter a place that he knew well. There was no one in the gloomy house who could harm him. Reason told him that. But instinct, some age-old secret dread, fought against reason.

A shrill night wind whistled through the narrow uptown street, as if to shriek a warning. And, suddenly, Hasbrouck, in the midst of Manhattan, felt isolated and insecure.

Hasbrouck's finger crept forward. Deliberately, he pressed the bell. The wind had died down. Now, from the depths of the house, he heard a single, muffled note, like that of a ghostly gong struck in somber silence.

The sound quickened Hasbrouck's qualms. As he waited, he felt a sudden desire to turn and dash down the

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stone steps behind him. The darkness of the night seemed safer than the gloom that lay ahead.

He waited. The door creaked slowly open. With a quick effort, Hasbrouck stepped into the dimly lit vestibule.

Before him, a quiet, pale-faced young man a servant, to judge from his black garb moved noiselessly aside to let him enter.

"Good evening, Mr. Hasbrouck," said the young man, in a monotone. "Mr. Glendenning is expecting you. He has stayed up to see you. I shall tell him that you are here."

Standing in the gloomy hallway, Hasbrouck watched the young man ascend the stairs. The regularity of the man's step made him appear like a mechanical figure.

Now, within the portals of the old house, Hasbrouck strove to fight off that fearful impression which had gripped him so surprisingly. But it remained.

Hasbrouck turned quickly, in response to an unknown impulse. He stared at the dark velvet curtains that hung in front of the entrance to a side room. He reached forward and pressed his hand against one curtain. The heavy cloth wavered beneath his touch.

What lay in the darkness beyond?

A shudder shook Hasbrouck's shoulders. His hand dropped quickly to his side. From the direction of the stairway came the sound of footsteps. The young man was returning. Hasbrouck assumed an attitude of composure.

"Come right up, Mr. Hasbrouck," said the calm voice.

Hasbrouck felt less uneasy as he ascended the stairs and reached the second-story hall. A door was open at the front of the building. Passing the young man, Hasbrouck entered the front room alone.

An old man reclined in an easy-chair, propped up by pillows. He was attired in a dressing gown. His thin, gray hair heightened his aged appearance. A crop of white stubble covered his face. This was the recluse, Clinton Glendenning. His face was lined with marks of gloom and discontent.

The sight of this individual was momentarily reassuring to Don Hasbrouck. Clinton Glendenning was a man whom one might pity, but certainly not fear.

Hasbrouck, tall and hawklike, loomed like a human scarecrow in the center of the room. He felt a certain superiority over his host, as he went to the chair toward which old Glendenning motioned.

"Come in, Larkin!" rasped Glendenning.

The quiet-faced man at the door obeyed. He closed the door behind him, and stood within, in the attitude of a servant awaiting his master's next order.

AN oddly assorted trio! Larkin was the only one who presented a neat appearance. He was virtually self-effacing as he stood beside the door. His pale face formed a marked contrast to the dark, well-pressed suit he wore.

"Well?" questioned old Glendenning shrilly. "What do you want, Hasbrouck? Why have you come here?"

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"The usual matter, Mr. Glendenning," replied Hasbrouck, in a deliberate tone. "I am still searching for Robert Buchanan."

"Why annoy me, then?" responded the old man testily. "I have told you several times that I have no idea where he may be."

"I thought perhaps that you might have received some news. It has been two weeks since I last called to see you."

Glendenning's eyes flashed suddenly. The steely glint surprised Hasbrouck. His gaze dropped to the arms of Glendenning's chair, and he observed the old man's clawlike hands as they gripped the arms.

There was strength in Glendenning's thin, curved fingers remarkable strength. It was something that Hasbrouck had not noticed before.

He began to feel uneasy again. Sensing hostility on the part of his unwilling host, Hasbrouck sought to give an explanation of his visit. He glanced toward Larkin, at the door. The pale-faced man had not changed his position.

"I do not wish to annoy you, Mr. Glendenning," said Hasbrouck. "At the same time, you must understand that it is my business to trace young Buchanan."

"So far, I have uncovered only one important fact. Robert Buchanan was engaged to your niece, Margaret Glendenning. The girl favored an early marriage. You opposed it. The last night that Buchanan was seen was the night he came here to discuss the marriage with you –"

"Why go into that?" demanded the old man angrily. "We talked about that the last time you were here. That's true, isn't it, Larkin?"

The quiet-faced man nodded.

"Why annoy me, then?" repeated Glendenning, turning to Don Hasbrouck. "Larkin is my secretary. He attends to such minor matters as this. Should we hear anything from Robert Buchanan" there was biting sarcasm in the old man's tone "Larkin will inform you. I have your card, here."

Glendenning reached in the pocket of his dressing gown and produced a card, which he held so Hasbrouck could see it. On the card was inscribed:

DON HASBROUCK

Hasbrouck Detective Agency

Hasbrouck watched while old Glendenning fumbled with the card. A sinister expression played upon the gray-haired man's lips. Seeing it, Hasbrouck felt a return of that dread which had almost overpowered him before.

What were the thoughts in the old man's mind? What did he know that he had not told? Hasbrouck was determined to learn. Trying to catch Glendenning unaware, he sprang a sudden question.

"Did you ever hear of a man named Jerry Middleton?"

Glendenning looked up.

"No," he replied. "I do not recall any person by that name."

"A friend of Buchanan's?" prompted Hasbrouck.

"I never heard of him."

"The reason I asked," explained Hasbrouck, "is because Buchanan and Middleton were close friends. Before Buchanan came to this house on that last night he spent a few hours with Middleton."

"I suppose Middleton is missing, also," said Glendenning, dryly.

"He is," admitted Hasbrouck, "but there is no mystery about that. He is always a difficult man to find. Middleton is a young man, of considerable wealth. He goes in for the unusual. Always seeks new thrills. He becomes bored in New York, and travels about the country.

"The last I knew about him, was the same night that Buchanan vanished. Middleton left for Florida that very night."

"Perhaps Buchanan went with him."

There was a subtle tone in the old man's remark.

"Perhaps," agreed Hasbrouck. "But there is no proof of it; and Buchanan does not have Middleton's habit of dropping out of sight. However" he paused, then decided to continue "that matter will be settled to-night.

"Middleton is coming to New York. He has an appointment with a friend. I expect to meet him at the friend's home and learn what he knows."

THERE was a ringing challenge in Hasbrouck's voice. It seemed as though the detective was offering a last chance to Glendenning, giving the old man an opportunity to reveal whatever he might know.

There was no response from Glendenning. He merely stared. Hasbrouck shot a glance toward Larkin. The secretary's face was immobile.

"This interview," said Hasbrouck, "may be our last meeting, Mr. Glendenning."

"It will be our last," replied the old man coldly.

Hasbrouck did not like the tone. His gaze wandered slowly about the room. He took in its simple furnishings. He meditated for a moment, and the howling of the wind disturbed his thoughts. It reminded him of the menace he had felt when he stood outside the house.

"Our last interview," he said quietly. "Very well, Mr. Glendenning. That brings me squarely to the point at issue. It concerns your niece – Miss Margaret Glendenning."

"Well?" asked the old man querulously.

"She was engaged to Robert Buchanan," said Hasbrouck. "Therefore, she might furnish a clew. I should like to speak with her."

"There is no reason for that," declared Glendenning emphatically.

"I disagree with you!" retorted Hasbrouck.

The old man glowered. He looked fiercely toward the detective; then turned suddenly to Larkin.

"Call Miss Margaret," he ordered. "Tell her I would like to speak to her. We shall end this matter now!"

Hasbrouck smiled as the secretary left. He had won his point. On his previous visits, Glendenning had refused to let him meet the girl. Now the wish had been granted.

Neither man spoke during the interim of waiting. The silence troubled Hasbrouck. Why had Clinton Glendenning suddenly capitulated?

It was obvious that the old man did not wish to give out any information upon the subject of Robert Buchanan. Margaret Glendenning was the important key. From her, Hasbrouck might expect statements which her uncle would not make.

But another thought disturbed the detective's mind. Had Margaret Glendenning been schooled for this pending interview? If so, her remarks would be of little value. Suppose she did talk what then? It would antagonize the old man toward Hasbrouck.

The detective pondered as he considered such a situation. Were his fears forebodings? Would Clinton Glendenning use some method to thwart him, if he learned facts that the old man did not want him to know?

The arrival of Margaret Glendenning put an end to these thoughts. The girl entered the room, accompanied by Larkin.

She was remarkably beautiful, but the black lounging pajamas that she wore gave an added pallor to her white features. The girl stared directly at the visitor, and Hasbrouck noticed a sad look in her brown eyes.

"What do you wish to know?" the girl inquired, without waiting for the formality of an introduction.

Hasbrouck had risen from his chair. He sat down as Margaret Glendenning took a seat opposite him. He responded immediately to her question.

"I should like to know anything that you know concerning Robert Buchanan," said the detective. "Anything that might help me in my efforts to locate him."

"I do not know where he is."

The girl's voice was level each word uttered in a hushed, solemn tone.

"You have not heard from him since the last night he was here?" Hasbrouck questioned further.

"Not a word," answered the girl, with a far-away look.

"He said nothing that might give you an idea where he has gone?"

"Nothing at all," declared Margaret solemnly. "He" a slight expression of fearfulness appeared in her eyes, as she looked toward her uncle "he said nothing of his plans."

"And you were engaged to him?" asked Hasbrouck quietly.

"Yes," answered Margaret, "but that is ended now."

"Why?"

"My uncle disapproved. He said that in his opinion I was too young to marry. I am not yet twenty-one. But" her eyes turned again toward Glendenning "he did not interfere. After Robert went away, without a word, I decided that Uncle Clinton must be right. That is all."

"Do you know Jerry Middleton?" inquired Hasbrouck.

"No," replied the girl. "I have heard Robert speak of him. They were friends. But I did not know Mr. Middleton."

WHILE Don Hasbrouck was considering another question, Margaret Glendenning arose abruptly and walked from the room. The sudden action perplexed the detective. Hasbrouck turned to speak to Glendenning.

"Regarding Middleton," he said, "I might mention that the man is wealthy, and a very good friend of Buchanan's. When I tell Middleton, this evening, that his friend has disappeared, he will leave nothing to chance in conducting a thorough search.

"I have been employed by Buchanan's relations. I am working on this case alone. I have assembled some data, and all my previous findings have been recorded. I shall include my interviews with you and Miss Glendenning in the report that I expect to make."

"I hope that your notes may prove illuminating," said the old man. "I also trust that you will find your interview with Middleton a productive one. But in view of the man's tendency to go and come as he pleases, you should not count too much upon finding him tonight!"

With this statement, Glendenning used a tone of finality. He raised himself from his chair, moved abruptly to a corner of the room, and passed through a door that evidently led to his bedroom. Hasbrouck was alone with Larkin.

The peculiar emphasis of Glendenning's parting words brought a new feeling of insecurity to the detective. He stared at the chair that the old man had vacated.

Why had Glendenning left so abruptly?

Hasbrouck glanced at Larkin. He wanted to quiz the secretary, but he feared that the old man might be listening.

With a shrug of his shoulders, Don Hasbrouck arose from his chair and walked toward the door. Larkin went before him. In the hallway, the detective felt more uneasy.

He had interviewed Clinton Glendenning in the past, and each time this man Larkin had been a silent witness. What did the fellow know about the secret? Could he explain the reluctance that both Glendenning and his niece had shown?

Hasbrouck knew that he would have to search for information elsewhere. He had mentioned the name of Jerry Middleton, hoping that it might bring results. And it had failed.

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But Jerry Middleton himself would not fail when the detective met him tonight. Hasbrouck knew where Middleton would be. He intended to go directly to that place.

In the dim light of the lower hall, Hasbrouck found himself once more fighting the sense of impending danger of some unknown peril that lurked in that house. Foolish, he knew, for in a moment he would be out.

Larkin, here, was certainly no menace. Neither was Clinton Glendenning, for that matter.

He stifled a contemptuous laugh. How ridiculous! Here, in a house inhabited only by an old man, a pasty-faced weakling, and a girl, Don Hasbrouck was worried! He looked at Larkin as he donned his coat. The secretary bowed a silent good night.

Hasbrouck, standing by the velvet curtain, watched the young man go upstairs. He was left alone, to leave the house at his leisure. It was another sign of the abruptness that all the occupants of this residence displayed.

He sensed that Larkin wanted to avoid any chance for an interview. Hasbrouck shrugged. He could not blame the secretary. The fellow had to do old Glendenning's bidding. He could take no chances with his job.

AS Larkin's footsteps echoed at the top of the stairway, Hasbrouck pulled a card from his pocket and glanced at a written address which told his next destination; the place where he would find Jerry Middleton.

He put the card back in his pocket, and once more glanced up the stairs. His hat was in his right hand; the fingers of his left sought the knob of the vestibule door. His back grazed the nearer of the two velvet curtains.

Something brushed over Don Hasbrouck's shoulder. It felt like a wirelike cord, moving swiftly sidewise. The invisible object had fallen over his head. It was moving slowly upward, toward his collar.

It might have been the imperceptible touch of this cord; it might have been a sudden thought that had flashed through Hasbrouck's brain – at any rate, the detective shuddered.

He held his breath and stood still as he sensed a motion behind him. Then he slowly drew his left hand from the doorknob and pressed it against the curtain.

His fingers encountered a solid object through the velvet! Hasbrouck started to move forward. He stopped abruptly.

A wild look came upon his face. His eyes bulged, and his hands shot toward his throat. The tiny cord was there, tightening into the flesh! The detective's clawing fingers could not loosen its terrifying pressure!

A gurgle sounded in the doomed man's throat. His gangling form toppled backward and slumped against the curtain. Hasbrouck went down slowly, his fall governed by that cord which bound his neck. The cruel thread was biting strangling killing!

Invisible hands came from the curtain. Hasbrouck's inert form was drawn into darkness. A short, sizzling sound came from behind the velvet curtain. Then all was silent in the hall.

Ten minutes later, Larkin came downstairs and locked the front door. The secretary turned and went upstairs, passing the spot where Don Hasbrouck last had stood. There was nothing to indicate that the detective had not left the house.

Detective Hasbrouck's forebodings had been realized. Here, in this great, sinister, silent house, he had met his

fate. His lips were sealed by death!

CHAPTER II. THE SOCIETY SUICIDE

A QUIET-FACED man was seated in an office on the ninth floor of the Badger Building. The door of his private room was open. Beyond was a stenographer at a desk.

The glass-paneled door at the outer entrance bore the number 909, in reverse figures. Beneath it, also in reverse, was the inscription:

RUTLEDGE MANN

Investments

The man at the desk was somewhat rotund in both face and body. Like most persons of his proportions, he was inclined to be leisurely.

He picked up a letter from the desk, handled it thoughtfully; then arose and closed the door of the private office. He returned to his desk, cut the envelope with a letter cutter, and took out a folded sheet of paper.

The paper bore a coded message which Rutledge Mann perused without difficulty. Even as he finished reading, the ink on the letter began to disappear. Mann tore up the blank sheet and deposited it in the wastebasket.

He picked up the telephone and called the office of the New York Classic. Connected with the editorial department, Mann asked for Clyde Burke. He spoke a few cryptic sentences into the telephone, then hung up.

Some twenty minutes later, there came a rap at Mann's door. The stenographer opened it.

"Mr. Burke is here," she said to the investment broker.

A young chap of medium height entered the room. He was plainly dressed, but presented a neat appearance. His eyes were keen as he closed the door behind him.

"The Andrews case?" he questioned, in a low voice.

"Yes," responded Mann. "What do you make of it?"

"Plain as the nose on your face. George Andrews got hit in the stock market. Discharged his servants and took a little apartment. Broke. Things became worse. He hung himself."

Mann fingered a clipping on his desk. It told the story.

George Andrews, young society man, had committed suicide by hanging himself from the hook of a skylight in his studio apartment. With his neck in a dangling loop, he had kicked away the chair on which he had been standing.

His body had been discovered by a maid who had entered in the morning.

Friends of Andrews had stated that the young man had been depressed because of money matters. This was all covered in the early editions of the evening newspapers.

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"Too bad," observed Mann. "I was talking this morning with a chap who knew Andrews well. He said that he had seen Andrews yesterday afternoon."

"What did he say about him?" Burke asked.

"Well, Andrews was certainly hard up. But he was somewhat cheerful at that. He told my informant that he was expecting a visit from Jerry Middleton."

"The polo player?"

"Yes," Mann went on. "Middleton is a great traveler. Andrews evidently expected him back in New York last night. Middleton has money. Perhaps Andrews thought Middleton would lend him some."

"But –"

"Either Middleton refused, or did not arrive as expected," the man at the desk ignored the interruption. "I incline to the latter opinion."

"Why?"

"Because I called up Middleton's town house, and they told me that he was still away, and not expected to return. They said that they didn't know where he was."

"Well," commented Burke, "it looks plain enough. Andrews needed dough. That's why he killed himself. But, of course" he hesitated thoughtfully "there may be some other reason in back of it. A man isn't too quick to take his own life."

"What about this case, Clyde?" asked Mann, changing the subject.

HE drew a clipping from the desk drawer. Burke looked at it. The account was a few days old. It told of a small motor boat found adrift in Long Island Sound. The owner, a sportsman named Dale Wharton, was missing. It was assumed that he had fallen overboard and drowned.

"There may be a mystery here," observed Burke. "They're expecting the body to turn up any time, now. When they find it, there may be a clew.

"Wharton started out at night, alone, for a run over to Connecticut. Left Long Island; that's all they know about him."

Mann nodded.

"A peculiar case," he said, "and there's another one that the newspapers know nothing about. A young man, rather prominent socially, has been missing for approximately two months."

"Who is he?" Clyde Burke's question came in a tone of surprise. Very few such items failed to reach the news office of the New York Classic, the tabloid newspaper with which Burke was connected.

"A man named Robert Buchanan," declared Mann. "His relatives have been disturbed about his absence. He was engaged to marry Margaret Glendenning, who lives with her uncle, a retired manufacturer. No one seems to know where Buchanan has gone."

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"How did you find out about it?" Burke asked.

"I hear many things at the Cobalt Club," declared Mann, with a note of pride. "It's my business as you know to keep posted on matters unusual. I learned of Buchanan's disappearance about ten days ago."

"And then –"

"I sent the information to the proper person" there was a hidden significance in Mann's words "and of course I made notes on the Wharton case also.

"I must admit, however, that I would have seen nothing in the suicide of George Andrews. But to–day, I received instructions."

Burke nodded. He knew what Rutledge Mann meant by "instructions." For both Clyde Burke and the investment broker were the secret agents of that man of mystery The Shadow.

Rutledge Mann, working from the security of a comfortable office, and spending his evenings at the exclusive Cobalt Club, served as a contact man for The Shadow.

Clyde Burke, ostensibly a newspaper reporter with the Classic, in an ideal position to conduct outside investigations, was an active agent of The Shadow.

"I had been expecting instructions," declared Mann quietly, "but until today, all was silence. I read of the Andrews suicide in the newspapers, and I actually passed by it. Then came the word. That is why I called you at the Classic office. You are to get information on Andrews immediately."

"At his apartment?"

"No. That is either unimportant, or has been taken care of. Your investigation must be made at the morgue. You are to view the body of George Andrews."

"That's easy enough," said Burke. "I can go down there right away."

"Good!" said Rutledge Mann. He stared at the wall and spoke as though repeating words which he had read. "Look for anything unusual when you see the body. If you find it, report in full. If you see nothing, report to that effect. Learn all you can."

Mann became silent. Burke knew that the discussion had ended. He arose and left the office.

Mann remained at the desk, studying the newspaper clipping. He put it away in a desk drawer, called the stenographer, and dictated some letters to his investment clients.

AN hour later, Mann was once more alone in his inner office, when the stenographer appeared to say that Mr. Burke had returned. The reporter was soon cloistered with Mann.

There was a tone of repressed excitement in Burke's voice as he related the details of his investigation in the Andrews case.

"I went to the morgue," he said. "I ran into Steve Brill, covering the story for the Classic. Brill took me in to see the body.

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"It was an ugly sight, but that didn't concern me. I was interested in the rope mark about the neck. It left a big welt almost like a scar. You could see the twists of the rope.

"I've seen marks like that before, so I knew what to expect. I had a chance to look at it closely. And that's when I saw something else!"

The reporter leaned forward, and his right forefinger traced a line on the palm of his left hand.

"Right with the rope mark," he said, "was another line so thin you could hardly see it. Just a faint, narrow trace, almost like a thread. It may have been red once; but it's white now.

"It followed the rope mark so closely that it was lost at times. It looked to me exactly as though the rope had been set to cover that very line!"

Mann was listening with implacid countenance to Burke's words. It was not Mann's business to theorize too frequently. He was a collector of facts. Nevertheless, he could see the obvious connection toward which Burke was working. Mann made no comment.

"When I saw that," continued Burke, "I did some more looking. That's when I spotted something else. I looked at the dead man's face. On his forehead, I saw a mark like this." The reporter made a tracing with his finger. "A round spot, no bigger than a dime!"

"A scar?"

"It looked more like a burn," Burke went on. "It was whiter than the surrounding flesh, and I never would have noticed it if I hadn't been looking mighty close.

"Brill wasn't watching me at the time. I heard him speak to some one, and I looked to see Detective Sergeant Cleghorn. He was handling the case. I listened while he spoke to Brill.

"It's just another suicide, in Cleghorn's opinion. He's moving the body out of the morgue. He says that Andrews hung himself, and that all strangled people look a lot alike.

"He's right on that but he's missed his guess about how George Andrews was strangled!"

Rutledge Mann nodded. "Have you made your report?" he questioned.

"No," replied Burke. "I thought you might intend to include this with your own —"

"Yours will be sufficient," interposed Mann, pushing pen and paper to the reporter.

Deftly, Clyde Burke began to write a message of coded characters. He wrote swiftly, and in five minutes his task was done. He folded the paper and inserted it in an envelope which Mann provided.

"I'm going downtown," he said, as he sealed the envelope.

Mann nodded.

Clyde Burke left the office. He reached the street and took the subway to Twenty-third Street. There he entered a dilapidated building, ascended the stairs, and dropped the envelope in the mail chute of a deserted office.

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The door of the office bore a name upon its cobwebbed glass panel. The title was:

B. JONAS

Clyde had never been inside that office. He had never known it to be unlocked. He knew only that a message dropped there was sure to reach The Shadow.

Clyde Burke was meditative as he rode uptown in the subway. He was thinking of the report he had just dispatched; and that report took his mind back to a very definite scene the body of George Andrews lying in the morgue.

As Clyde half closed his eyes, he could picture two sights that rope mark, with the thin white line running through it, and the round white spot in the center of the dead man's forehead. The meaning of those discoveries was now plain to Clyde Burke.

He knew, with all positiveness, that George Andrews had not committed suicide! Andrews had choked to death that was true but not because of the rope that had been found around his neck.

He had been strangled with a slender cord, that had left its narrow indelible trace. And the murderer, whoever he might be, had implanted his mark upon the dead man's forehead as a ghastly symbol of his evil deed!

Very shortly, another would know the truth about the death of George Andrews. Clyde wondered what this amazing information would mean to his mysterious chief The Shadow!

CHAPTER III. WATCHERS OF THE NIGHT

THE following afternoon, Rutledge Mann was again seated in his office in the Badger Building. Once more he was considering a newspaper clipping. This one told of a more startling case than the death of George Andrews.

The body of Dale Wharton had been washed ashore on Long Island. This was a step toward the solving of the mystery which had shrouded the disappearance of the wealthy sportsman. But both police and journalists had met with disappointment.

The latest report the one on Mann's desk said that the police could find no evidence of foul play.

Wharton, it was known, had been under the influence of liquor when he had started on his trip through Long Island Sound. Two bottles, one empty, the other nearly so, had been found in his pockets:

Everything indicated that Wharton had fallen overboard from his boat and had drowned. This solution was both simple and practical.

An intoxicated man, at the helm, might well lose control of the craft. A sharp turn, and overboard he would go. That, the authorities said, was what had happened to Dale Wharton.

Yet this case was not a closed issue so far as Rutledge Mann was concerned. The investment broker was patiently awaiting a report from Clyde Burke.

In response to instructions from The Shadow, Mann had dispatched the alert reporter to Long Island. Burke had found no difficulty in convincing his city editor that a look into the Wharton death might be advisable.

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The afternoon was waning. Burke's report should be there soon. Mann showed no signs of impatience, but he was actually anxious to obtain progress in this matter.

The telephone rang. Mann answered it. He recognized the voice of Clyde Burke. The reporter's message consisted of a single, cryptic word that came over the wire.

"Identical!"

That was all that Rutledge Mann heard. It produced immediate action. He called a telephone number and repeated the word to the man who answered. After that, Mann waited.

It was nearly five o'clock when the stenographer entered the private office, carrying an envelope.

"This came through the mail chute," she said.

Mann took the envelope. He closed the door after the girl had gone. Then he began to read a message from The Shadow another of those strange, fading notes that told its story in cryptic code, then disappeared so no prying eyes could study it.

REACHING for the telephone, Mann called the Metrolite Hotel. He was connected with a guest named Harry Vincent. In a quiet voice, Mann inquired to whom he was speaking; then said:

"This is the Sea Breeze Realty Corporation. Our building plans offer a man a real opportunity at small investment. Once you have studied our offer, you will be interested."

"I don't think so," came Vincent's voice. "I spend my summers in the Middle West. I'm not interested in beach lots."

Rutledge Mann hung up the telephone. In that short conversation, he had sent a very definite order to Harry Vincent. He had emphasized certain words. Phonetically, those words declared: "See R. Mann at once!"

Fifteen minutes later, Harry Vincent appeared in Rutledge Mann's office. Like Clyde Burke, Harry was admitted to the inner room. For he, too, was one of The Shadow's trusted agents.

Rutledge Mann placed two clippings in Harry's hand. One told of the death of George Andrews; the other was the story of the finding of Dale Wharton's body.

"Yesterday," declared Mann quietly, "Clyde Burke saw the body of Andrews. To-day he has seen Wharton's body. Upon the throat of each man was a thin, almost invisible white line. Each forehead was seared with a faint, round mark. Both men were murdered; both were stamped by the man who killed them.

"You will observe that Andrews and Wharton were both socially prominent. There is a third man missing one whose absence has not yet reached the newspapers. He, too, is socially prominent, and may have suffered death at the hands of the same murderer. The missing man's name is Robert Buchanan."

"Is there any trace of him?" questioned Harry.

"None to our knowledge," Mann said, "but there is one place where an investigator might learn something concerning him.

"Robert Buchanan was engaged to a girl named Margaret Glendenning, who lives with her uncle. The old

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man is a recluse. Clinton Glendenning is his name a retired manufacturer.

"This afternoon, following Burke's report, I received an important message, instructing you to call on Clinton Glendenning and question him in reference to Buchanan. This should be a surprise visit, during the evening. Here is Glendenning's address."

HARRY was warmly enthusiastic. He had worked often in the service of The Shadow. He loved adventure, and here was another opportunity for it.

Matters had been quiet during the past month, and Harry had been considering a short trip to his Michigan home in the little town of Colon. Now, with The Shadow calling him to duty, he would remain in New York.

"After dinner," said Mann, "go to Glendenning's home. Interview the old man and, if possible, talk with the niece."

The conference ended. It was nearly six o'clock. A myriad of twinkling lights could be seen from the window of Rutledge Mann's office.

Harry Vincent descended to the street and went back to the Metrolite Hotel. After dinner, he set out for Clinton Glendenning's home.

Harry sensed no danger as he rode northward in the taxi. On the contrary, he felt that he was bound on a very tame mission. It was one that might require shrewdness; that was all.

Because his errand was a secret one, Harry discharged the cab near the address to which he was going and walked the remaining distance.

The street on which the dismal Glendenning house stood was quiet and deserted. To-night it was undisturbed by the storm which had marked Don Hasbrouck's visit. Nevertheless, Harry, like the detective, felt tense as he climbed the steps to the door of the house.

All about was shadowy blackness. Harry could not shake off the feeling that some one lurked in the darkness, watching him. But, as he remained in front of the door, the sensation diminished. Harry pressed the bell and heard the lonely, gonglike note.

The door opened. Harry's path was blocked by a young man who stood in the dim vestibule.

"I would like to see Mr. Glendenning," said Harry.

"I'm sorry, sir," was the reply. "I cannot disturb him. You should have called to make an appointment."

Harry edged his way into the vestibule.

"My name is Harry Vincent," he declared. "It is urgent that I see Mr. Glendenning. I will not require much of his time."

"I'm sorry –"

An interruption came from the head of the stairs. Clinton Glendenning's querulous voice reached the men in the vestibule.

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"Who's there, Larkin?"

"A gentleman named Vincent," called the secretary.

"Does he wish to see me?"

"Yes."

"Bring him upstairs."

The old man was back in his room when Harry entered with Larkin. Curiosity, rather than welcome, was apparent in Glendenning's attitude. He was seated in his chair, and he eyed Harry sharply.

Harry sat down and looked at the old man. Larkin took his self-effacing stand within the door. In a friendly tone, Harry stated the purpose of his visit.

THE moment that Robert Buchanan's name was mentioned, a change came over Clinton Glendenning. An angry expression appeared upon his face. His hands clawed the arms of his chair. Then the old man quieted.

"I do not know where Robert Buchanan is," he said slowly. "He went away some time ago. He happened to be here the night before he left. For that reason, I have been annoyed frequently by a man who is trying to locate him.

"The fellow came here two nights ago, and I was forced to tell him once more that I knew nothing of Buchanan's whereabouts.

"If your visit is a subterfuge, you are not welcome. If you have really come to inquire fairly about Robert Buchanan, you have heard my answer.

"I have no idea whatever where the young man may be!"

"I am sorry to have caused you any trouble," said Harry quietly. "I am not in New York all the time in fact, I had expected to leave town to-night. But it is urgent that I should meet Buchanan. I was told that he was engaged to your niece –"

"He was," interrupted Glendenning. "That's all forgotten. Robert Buchanan disappeared two months ago. That ended the engagement. Robert Buchanan is no longer welcome here. You will have to look elsewhere for him!"

"No one seems to know where he is," said Harry gloomily.

"I understand that," said the old man, softening a trifle. "Two nights ago a detective named Hasbrouck was here. He is a private agent, employed, I believe, by Buchanan's relatives. They, too, are wondering where the young man is."

"A detective named Hasbrouck?"

"Yes. Don Hasbrouck. He went away when I assured him that I had no idea where young Buchanan might be. Perhaps if you communicated with Hasbrouck –"

"My time is rather limited," said Harry. "I shall look up Hasbrouck – but you say that he does not know

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where Buchanan can be found?"

"He may know by now," declared Glendenning. "He told me he was going to see a friend of Buchanan's a man whom he expected in New York night before last. Let me see" Glendenning tapped his forehead thoughtfully "what was that friend's name? What was it, Larkin? Do you remember?"

"Not offhand, sir," replied the secretary hesitatingly.

"I have it!" exclaimed Glendenning. "Hasbrouck was going to see a man named Jerry Middleton! That's who it was! I have heard nothing from Hasbrouck since. There was no reason why I should."

"Jerry Middleton," repeated Harry Vincent thoughtfully. "I'll remember that name. It's very important that I find Buchanan. Perhaps –"

He paused and arose as Margaret Glendenning suddenly entered the room. The girl was attractively gowned, and Harry was immediately impressed by her beauty. But he also detected a worried, unhappy expression in her eyes. She looked at Harry; then at her uncle.

"My niece," was Glendenning's introduction. "Sit down, Margaret. Mr. Vincent and I were just talking about Robert."

"Has he been found yet?"

There was a peculiar tone in the girl's question. It seemed to carry a note of suppressed anxiety.

Harry saw the situation in an instant. The girl, evidently, was worried about Robert Buchanan. At the same time, she was probably trying to keep in her uncle's good graces.

The old man did not care for Buchanan. The girl, to please her uncle, was trying to forget the man she had loved; but past memories were difficult to overcome.

"I am trying to find him," declared Harry.

He was looking toward the girl as he spoke. Harry noticed that Larkin was no longer in the room. Then he became intent upon the girl's next statement.

"We have no idea where Robert is," said Margaret. "I think that he should have let us know where he went. Perhaps" her voice broke momentarily "perhaps something has happened to him."

"I do not think so," interposed Glendenning. "We would have heard about it long before this. People do not vanish into thin air unless they have a good reason to depart for places unknown. Buchanan left town because he wanted to get rid of you to let you down!"

THE harsh statement caused Harry to feel a dislike toward Clinton Glendenning. Harry looked at the girl sympathetically. She seemed almost on the point of tears. Larkin came back into the room while Harry was studying the girl.

"The best plan for you, Margaret," said Glendenning, in a tone that was not unkindly, "is to forget Robert Buchanan. I never regarded him as worthy of you. You have promised to forget him."

"I know it," said the girl bravely. "Good night!"

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She left the room hastily with eyes averted. Harry fancied that he heard her sobbing as she went down the hallway. The girl's emotion was genuine. Did she know more than she had said?

Harry watched Larkin. The secretary's face was grave. Harry felt that he would like to quiz this man.

"That is all," said Clinton Glendenning coldly. "I bid you good night!"

He rose from his chair and left the room, leaving Harry alone with Larkin. The interview was over, but Harry knew that he had gained by it.

He knew that a detective named Don Hasbrouck had visited Clinton Glendenning as recently as two nights ago. He knew that Hasbrouck had intended to communicate with a man named Jerry Middleton. Both items were valuable as information.

Accompanied by Larkin, Harry went downstairs. He felt a distaste for this gloomy old house. He donned his hat and coat, and while he was standing in the hallway, Larkin went up to the second floor, leaving the visitor to find his own way out.

Harry's sleeve brushed against something; he turned quickly and stared suspiciously at a velvet curtain beside him. Acting upon impulse, he raised the curtain and stared into the blackness of the room beyond.

Then he laughed at his own suspicion of danger. He dropped the curtain.

Opening the door, Harry stepped forth into the night. There was no cab in sight, so he began a walk toward the corner.

Ordinarily, Vincent would have been very much alert. Before he had entered the house, he had been suspicious of his surroundings. Now, his thoughts were so occupied with the facts he had learned that he paid no attention to anything near by.

But before Harry had gone a dozen paces, there was a movement on the opposite side of the street. A man was lurking on the other sidewalk, keeping pace with Harry's stride. When Harry reached the corner, he crossed the street to hail a cab.

It brought him close to the corner of a darkened building. The man who was following stood silent, sheltered by the corner. Harry never looked in his direction.

"Hotel Metrolite," said Harry to the cabman.

The words were loud enough to be heard by the concealed observer.

As Harry's cab rolled away, the watching man came into the light. He was of medium height. He was wearing a dark overcoat, which had made his form indistinct in the darkness.

In the light of the avenue, the man's face was visible. It formed an evil, sinister countenance, with wicked lips that grinned maliciously.

The man whistled to a passing cab. The vehicle pulled up to the curb. The watcher entered.

"Hotel Metrolite," he ordered. "Make it quick!"

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The cab shot away. Then, from the thick darkness of the side street, another form emerged. A tall figure in black came into view. He was attired in a flowing cloak that hung from his shoulders. His visage was concealed beneath the broad brim of a slouch hat.

From an unseen post in the darkness, this man of the night had seen all that had transpired. Now, with long, swift strides, he was moving along the avenue, toward the kiosk of a subway station, a block away.

The tall, black-clad figure disappeared into the subway. Less than a minute later, an express rumbled into the station and stopped at the platform beneath the street. It was bound downtown.

THE next trace of the man in the black cloak was when he appeared in front of the Metrolite Hotel. His soft hat was turned down over his eyes. He merged with the blackness at the side of the building.

Scarcely had he taken his stand, before brakes screamed as a taxi pulled up to the curb. Out of the cab stepped the man with the evil, wolfish face. He walked a few paces away and assumed the attitude of an idler watching the street.

Another cab arrived. Harry Vincent alighted. He went into the Metrolite Hotel, and the shrewd-faced man watched him closely. The fellow laughed sullenly as he observed Harry's features. That laugh meant that he would recognize Harry Vincent when he saw him again.

The man turned and walked along the street.

From the blackness of the building came another laugh. It was soft and mirthless scarcely audible.

A phantom shape emerged and trailed the man who had been watching Harry Vincent. The following form was almost invisible as it took up the pursuit.

Upstairs, in his hotel room, Harry Vincent thoughtfully made out a report. He was reciting the facts that he had learned to-night.

In the back of his head lurked a suspicion that some key to the disappearance of Robert Buchanan could be discovered at the home of Clinton Glendenning.

Harry was totally oblivious to the fact that he had been followed on his return to the hotel. He did not know that a hidden man had tracked him in the dark.

But The Shadow knew.

The Shadow was at work!

CHAPTER IV. THE SHADOW HEARS

THE man who had watched Harry Vincent enter the Metrolite Hotel now wended his way toward Broadway. When he reached Manhattan's most famous canyon, he mingled with the after-theater crowd and followed a rapid, devious course.

He became an insignificant figure among thousands, and so artfully did he weave his path that even the most capable sleuth could not have kept upon his trail.

For the wolfish-faced individual was a man who knew the methods of the underworld, and he used a definite

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routine wherever he went. He entered a speakeasy, several squares above Forty-second Street.

There he paused a few moments, and left by a side entrance known only to the chosen few. At last, satisfied that no one could possibly be noticing him, he swung again from Broadway and strode westward until he arrived at an old apartment building.

Here, after a quick, covert glance, the man entered a darkened hallway and moved noiselessly up carpeted steps, disdaining to use the automatic elevator in the building.

Halfway up the stairs, he threw another suspicious glance back in the direction from which he had come. He saw only the silent, dark hall. As he reached the head of the stairs, he grinned wolfishly.

Perhaps that grin was in acknowledgment of his own cleverness. But if so, he had grinned without good reason.

The moment after he had disappeared from the top of the stairs, there was a movement in the hallway. A shadowlike form detached itself from the darkness and flitted toward the stairway. Up it came, moving with amazing swiftness, following the very path that the man had taken.

The course led upward; for the man ahead was mounting to the fourth floor. He reached his destination and paused. He stood beside a little window that opened into a high-walled courtyard. He remained there, peering out into the dim, vague light that gave but slight visibility to the narrow area.

While he was standing there, a mass of blackness grew behind him; then became as motionless as a statue. The man at the window turned. He stared almost directly at the peculiar form close beside him, but his eyes saw nothing.

Then the sharp-faced man walked to the nearest door, a few paces down the corridor, and tapped softly. The door clicked; stealthily it pushed open an inch then two. The man brushed inside. The door closed silently.

Even as the trailed one stepped into the apartment, the black form in the hallway swept toward the window. The sash glided upward. Then the figure of a man projected itself outward. The window moved softly down.

The dim glow of the courtyard revealed a shadowy mass, poised upon the courtyard wall. A long arm crept sidewise like a living creature. It found an ornamental shaft of brick. The entire form followed the arm.

Foot by foot, the black shape pursued a lizardlike course along the perpendicular side of the wall!

The man with the wolfish face was not present to view this miraculous occurrence. He was safely in the apartment.

While events were taking place upon the wall of the courtyard, he was hanging his hat and coat on a hook at the end of a small entryway.

That accomplished, he stepped into a dimly lighted room. It had two windows, side by side, opening on the courtyard. Shades were drawn over the windows.

THE room already had one occupant. A man was sitting in the corner beside a table. The table bore a telephone. The man was directly beneath the light of the shaded lamp which illuminated the room.

Well-dressed, smooth-faced, and quiet in appearance, he might have been a prosperous business man, just

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returned from the theater. He was reading a magazine.

"Hello, Dip," he said, without raising his eyes.

The wolfish-faced man grinned. He walked halfway across the room, pulled a chair from beside the wall, and sat down. He waited a few minutes. The man in the corner tossed the magazine aside. Then "Dip" spoke:

"Here I am, Flash," he declared. "I followed the guy. I found out what I wanted!"

No two men could have appeared more different than this pair. No student of facial characteristics would have placed them in the same category. Yet actually, the men were similar in nature. "Flash" Donegan and Dip Riker were known as the Siamese twins of gangdom. They were cronies.

Dip, with his wolfish face and ugly, leering smile, was not the type of man to excite admiration. In appearance, Flash was quite the opposite.

The gangster beneath the light had a calm and composed expression. His straight nose, his thin, well-formed mouth, his narrowed, green eyes, made him a type the racketeer de luxe. It was the mastery over his expression alone that gave him a superiority over his companion.

Flash expressed a very definite interest when Dip spoke. His eyelids narrowed, his eyes sparkled. It was this odd flashing of his optics that had given the man his nickname. More than one gun toter had quailed before that sparkle. Some had gone to the big beyond while facing that sinister gaze.

"He lives at the Metrolite Hotel," declared Dip, resuming the subject that he had mentioned. "I beat him there in a taxicab. Waited for him to come in. Looked him over close. I'll know him again any time I see him."

"He was alone?"

"Yeah. I don't know how to figure him. He may be a dick he may not. He's in Room 506 at the Metrolite under the name you said he had Harry Vincent."

"You followed him into the hotel, then?" Flash asked.

"I did not!" Dip's voice was ridiculing. "What was the use of that? I spotted him when he went in; then I beat it. I stopped off at Frankie Gull's you know, the speak where we met Pete Boutonne and I buzzed the Metrolite Hotel from there. Got Vincent's room number."

Dip Riker waited for his companion to make some comment. Instead of replying, Flash Donegan frowned as he looked toward the window. He arose, walked by Dip, and raised the window shades slightly. He examined the window on the left; then slipped his hand beneath the shade and felt the lock.

"What's the matter, Flash?" questioned Dip.

"Thought I saw the window shade move," returned Donegan. "Funny I generally keep this window locked. Seemed like some breeze was blowing against the shade. Couldn't have been, though. The sash is down."

He raised the shade, opened the window, and peered out into the courtyard. Still not satisfied, he leaned from the window and looked about.

His gaze turned downward, to the concrete area four stories below. Quizzically, Flash surveyed the inner

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walls of the building. His gaze was sharp; but he did not detect a shadowy shape that clung close to the wall beside and above the window. The shape resembled a huge, batlike creature. But it was utterly silent and motionless.

Flash pulled down the window and locked it. He lowered the shade, but left a tiny space, so that he could see the bottom of the sash. He left the other window the way he had found it. Then he strode back to his chair.

"Acting like you've got the jumps, Flash," was Dip's terse comment.

"Jumps, nothing!" declared Flash. "I'm sitting pretty, Dip, and so are you because you're sticking along with me. Ours is the sweetest racket in New York all gravy and very little trouble."

"I'm taking your word for it, Flash. But I've got to admit I don't know what it's all about."

"Don't be a sap, Dip. You know what we're doing. Keeping these uptown warehousemen free from trouble. That's simple enough, isn't it? Why do you think I put Marty Jennings and Pete Boutonne on the job? Just to give them something to do?"

"Don't try to kid me, Flash," retorted Dip. "I'm with you I don't have to tell you that. But I'm not falling for a lot of hokum. I know the rackets too well. Lookit, Flash: Why do you take these guys on, keep them a while, and then let them go?"

"Pete was with you two months then he drifted away. Marty has been with you a little less than that. You're talking about letting him go. Want me to promote another guy to take his place. The same way with those other fellows you had —"

"Listen, Dip." Flash was talking with the smoothness that had gained him his reputation in gangland. "You know me well enough to know that I work different from these other gazebos. I've got my methods."

"Why keep a bunch of gorillas and let them get cocky? I use brains. Give a guy a soft snap. Treat him right. Pay him plenty. Then, when you need him, he'll jump with you right away without asking questions."

"I've got two birds working for me right now. Marty Jennings and this fellow, Lance Bolero, who came back when Pete Boutonne left. Three, I've got counting you. That's enough. When I want more, all I've got to do is send out a hurry call."

"The old boys will be back and they all know their onions. They're glad to work for Flash Donegan."

"That's a good line, Flash," grinned Dip. "But it ain't the way you used to work. Your idea was always to get bigger and bigger. I was to have my mob under yours. Then you wise me up, a while ago, that you've landed the best racket going."

"Instead of getting more gorillas and keeping them, you cut and change all the time. No strong-arm stuff no 'collecting' nothing to bother about."

"Well, the dough comes in, don't it?"

"Right! I'm satisfied. I ain't saying nothing to nobody. But I know you well enough to talk to you, Flash. I get your idea. You're pulling something different and you're afraid to keep a guy working for you too long."

"I ain't asking you to tip me off to the lay. I'm just telling you what I see being on the inside. That's all,

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Flash. You get me, don't you? I –"

AN oath came from Flash Donegan's lips as he leaped to his feet. Dip Riker thought that he had incurred his pal's displeasure. Wheedling words were upon Dip's lips; then he saw Flash moving toward the window. This time, the racketeer pulled up the other shade.

With a puzzled look upon his face, he raised the window. Once again, he stared out into the courtyard. He closed the window and lowered the shade.

"What's the matter, Flash?" questioned Dip.

"This thing's giving me the heebie–jeebies," came the reply. "Here I make sure one window's locked and keep my eye on it; then the other curtain begins to move. That window's unlocked. Am I goofy, Dip?"

"We're up here on the fourth floor," laughed Dip. "There can't be nothing working at those windows. What's the matter? Afraid of some guy?"

Alarm sounded in Dip's voice, as he went on. "You ain't pulled a double cross on nobody, have you, Flash?"

"I'm no double–crosser, Dip."

"I know that, Flash. I didn't mean nothing like that. I just wanted to make sure you were O.K. that nobody might be gunning for you –"

"Listen, Dip." Flash spoke seriously. "You're sure nobody followed you when you came here?"

"Sure, Flash. You know how I dodge all the time! I don't take no chances!"

"Well" Flash seemed dubious "I can't figure it. It looks mighty like some bird was prying around those windows!"

"Any fire ladders out in the court?" asked Dip, with a raucous laugh. "A guy would need one to be peeking in up here."

"Don't be a sap, Dip."

Flash unlocked both windows and opened them.

"Take a look out here. No wait! We'll slide out in the hall and get a look from there!"

He led the way to the door of the apartment. He and Dip entered the dark hall, leaving the door ajar. A soft, squidgy sound came from the direction of the windows.

The dim glow of the courtyard was blotted out by a blackish mass that spread over an opened window. The mass became a human form a man garbed in a cloak, his features hidden by the brim of his hat.

The Shadow stooped forward. He removed two circular devices from his hands and slipped his feet free from two more. Upon the floor lay four rubber suction cups, each six inches in diameter. With these, the man in black had clung to the wall, moving along it like a fly.

THE man in black was clear of the window; hence he could not be seen by Flash Donegan and Dip Riker as

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they made their observation from the lookout post at the head of the stairway.

The Shadow's keen ears heard a sound from the hallway. Sliding the rubber cups beneath his cloak, he made for the half-opened door. Then his spectral form blended with the darkness of the small entry. He became almost a part of Dip Riker's coat, which was hanging from a hook.

Flash Donegan was returning. He moved by the hidden form without seeing it. He walked to the window in his apartment. He peered out and signaled to Dip Riker. Then Flash closed the windows, locked them, and drew the shades. Dip Riker came into the apartment, after closing the door behind him.

"Satisfied, Flash?" he asked.

The racketeer nodded, and his eyes sparkled grimly. He took his accustomed chair and sat back, with a slight frown upon his face.

"It may seem funny, Dip," he said, "but I'm taking no chances. You're right I'm playing a game. But keep that to yourself, and don't ask questions. Get me?"

"O.K. by me."

"This game is so safe," declared Flash, "that it's too good. Did you ever figure anything that was too good? It's got me woozy at times, Dip. I've been waiting waiting waiting just for something to happen. It would ease me up a bit, Dip, if we had to unload a few gats!

"There was one job well, it was soft; and there's likely to be others like it. It didn't suit me. Now, to-night well, maybe you've started something. If you have, we may get some of the action I've been itching for."

"That sounds good. But listen, Flash! I don't get the lay at all! We're sitting here to-night Marty Jennings is uptown along comes a phone call next thing I know, I'm waiting for a guy named Harry Vincent to come out of an old house on –"

"Never mind talking about it, Dip! You know what this fellow Vincent looks like, don't you?"

"I'd pick him out a mile away, Flash!"

"Great! Well, get a line on him easylike, you know. Don't hang too close to him. Remember what he looks like, and also remember that house where you trailed him from. Get me?"

"Right!"

"See if he goes snooping around there. Don't watch him close enough so he'll get suspicious. But be on the job Thursday night. We don't want him snooping up there then. Keep him away from there!"

"Leave it to me, Flash."

"I'm leaving it to you, Dip! Remember, you've got a funny-looking mug, and it's not a good idea to show it around too much. I'm going on the job, Thursday up with Marty Jennings. You take care of your end. That's all!"

"What about Marty? Thought you were going to drop him."

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"I am but not until after Thursday. Wait until that's past then you can dig up a new gorilla. I'll give Marty the tip to scam. He's in bad right now!"

"Lance Bolero is O.K.?"

"Sure thing. He'll be on the job, too. No chances Thursday night. No questions, either! Keep this mum that's your specialty!"

Dip grinned. He watched Flash Donegan get up from his chair and go to the window. This time the inspection was satisfactory. There had been no motion of the shades. Both windows were locked.

Dip arose and stretched himself. He stared at Flash a moment; then seeing that there were no further instructions, he gruffly announced that he was leaving.

"You know where to get me, Flash," he said. "Leave it all to me, boy. This guy Vincent will be soft pickings for me, if he starts any trouble."

DIP was on his way to the entry as he spoke. His head was turned back over his shoulder. Reaching his destination, he swung directly toward the spot where his hat and coat were hanging. Because of this, he failed to notice that the door was closing.

That fact would have surprised Dip Riker. For the door had been shut and latched from the inside by Dip himself. But the wolfish-faced gunman did not see the door in motion, nor did Flash Donegan, who was standing back in the room.

Hat and coat on, Dip opened the door. Flash was beside him now. Dip gave a knowing nod, and a whispered comment, as he stepped into the hall.

"Leave it to me, Flash," he said. "I'll take care –"

"Ps-s-t!" warned Flash. "Keep mum!"

Flash watched his underling go down the hall. As Dip turned the corner to the stairway, Flash closed the door. The racketeer went back into his apartment, a satisfied smile upon his face.

He was here. Dip was on his way to the street; all was settled for Thursday night!

But Flash Donegan could not see beyond that closed door.

Nor could the departing Dip Riker know what was happening in the silence of that darkened hall, for Dip was now nearing the second floor.

From the blackness outside of Flash Donegan's abode came a mirthless, quivering laugh a gibing laugh that made very little sound, yet which awoke whispering echoes from the gloom.

The man who laughed was invisible. He could not be seen as he stood by Flash Donegan's door. He was naught but a form of blackness as he moved along the hall toward the stairs, following the very path that Dip Riker had taken.

The sound of his mysterious mirth continued an echoing trail that moved toward the floor below. No one was near to hear that strange, uncanny laughter, nor to seek the man who uttered it.

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It was The Shadow who laughed The Shadow, master of darkness, terror of the underworld!

His laugh was a foreboding laugh. It meant no good to the racketeers who had just discussed their affairs in private meeting. For Flash Donegan's fears of a listener had been caused by a living presence. He had spoken only when he was sure that no one was near enough to catch his words.

But The Shadow had heard.

The Shadow knew!

CHAPTER V. A MAD MESSAGE

A STOOP-SHOULDERED, bearded old man tottered along the corridor of an office building. His white beard and flowing white hair gave him a patriarchal appearance. He might have been a prospector returned from a search for nuggets of gold.

He leaned heavily on a cane and seemed to find great difficulty in moving along. Yet the old man's eyes were keen, and he had a semblance of youth that is rare in one so aged.

People in the lobby of the building had smiled when he had entered. The elevator man had grinned when the ancient personage had inquired in a crackling voice if this was really the sixteenth floor. The operator had politely pointed out the way to the office which the old man desired.

The old chap arrived at a door, and curiously examined the name that appeared upon the frosted glass. It was evident that he had difficulty in reading the inscription. A telegraph boy, coming up the corridor, stopped to help him. Leaning on his cane, the old man pointed with his free hand.

"Is this the law office of Charles Blefken?" he inquired, in quavering tones.

"This is it, pop," said the boy, with a grin. "You want to go in here?"

"Indeed I do!" returned the old man. "This is the place my stepson told me to come. This here city is a big one, but I guess there's not a lot of lawyers with a name like Blefken! I reckon he's the one I want to see!"

The boy opened the door, and the old man tottered into the outer office of Blefken's suite. It was a busy place.

Three or four stenographers at desks; three men and a woman waiting in chairs along the wall. Half a dozen doors to private offices made up the farther wall. They bore names of different attorneys.

The old man went forward and began to study each door, looking for the name of Blefken.

One of the stenographers approached him.

"Whom do you wish to see?" she questioned.

"The lawyer," replied the old man.

"Which lawyer?"

"Charles Blefken."

THE CRIME CULT

"Did you have an appointment?"

The old man looked puzzled. There were signs of repressed mirth among the other stenographers and the persons who were waiting.

"You don't understand," said the girl. "I mean has Mr. Blefken arranged to see you?"

"He'll see me, all right!" retorted the old man. "Just you tell him that John Kittinger's stepdaddy is waiting out here. He knows Johnny, all right. They were buddies in the army, they were."

"Sit down," said the girl, indicating a chair.

The old man threw a triumphant glance along the row of waiting clients. He seemed to take pride in what he had just said. He was mumbling as he sat down, and he stared boldly toward the door which the girl entered.

Half a minute went by. Then the girl reappeared, a look of surprise upon her face. She approached the patriarch.

"You can go right in," she said. "Mr. Blefken is ready to see you."

Triumph shone in the old man's face as he arose and hobbled toward the door of the private office. He turned, and his beard wagged as he looked back at the other people.

The girl turned the knob. The door opened, and John Kittinger's stepfather was ushered into the private domain of Charles Blefken, the prominent corporation lawyer.

A FIRM-FACED man was seated at a desk. He was dictating a letter to a stenographer. Charles Blefken appeared about fifty years of age a man of dynamic personality and high reputation.

He ignored his visitor until he had finished the last lines of the letter.

"That will do, Miss Smythe," he said. "I'll call you later."

The girl smiled as she noticed the old man, with his flowing beard and wavy hair. She pictured him as a modern "Buffalo Bill," particularly because of the broad-brimmed hat, which he had not removed from his head.

The girl went out, closing the door behind her. The lawyer immediately went over and locked the door. He turned to his visitor as he was walking back to the desk.

"We won't be disturbed," he said in a low voice.

The white beard and the mass of spreading hair tumbled from the old man's head, along with the picturesque hat. Staring at Charles Blefken was the swarthy visage of Joe Cardona, ace detective of the New York police department.

Cardona was grinning broadly. Blefken joined with a slight smile.

"Great to get rid of those moth-grabbers," observed Cardona, in a low tone. "This Santa Claus stuff is a terrible racket."

THE CRIME CULT

"When you go in for disguise, Joe," said Blefken, "you certainly make a good job of it."

Cardona shrugged his shoulders.

"A lot of foolishness, as a rule," he said. "But here's the way I figure it: I don't care so much whether people suspect or don't suspect. You can't stop that. But it's a sure bet that nobody could figure who I was under that pile of bushes.

"I also figured that you're liable to have a lot of crazy ducks coming in here, anyway! So I made a good job of it!"

"I'm just as glad you did, Joe. Maybe it's all foolishness on my part; but I'm worried, and I want to get it off my chest. Have a cigar" he tendered a box "and listen to what I've got to say."

Joe Cardona lighted the perfecto and leaned back contentedly, his discarded whiskers resting in his lap.

"We've worked together before this, Joe," began the attorney. "You know what I think of you. You're not only the best detective in New York you're the only one in your own particular class. You look into the future always anticipating everything.

"When you caught that fellow who was making all the trouble for the Kingsley Company, a year ago, you told me that if I ever needed you on the quiet there was a way I could get you. Just by calling the Harvard Printing Company and ordering a supply of letterheads on their Triple-A stock.

"I remembered that. I called them yesterday, and gave the order. Here you are. Early in the morning, too!"

"I was out of town," interrupted Cardona. "Otherwise I would have seen you yesterday afternoon. I hope the delay hasn't –"

"No harm at all, Joe. Let me tell you why I sent for you:

"I received a letter yesterday noon. If it was written by a sane man, there's some mysterious danger threatening not only threatening, but actually gripping myself and other persons so closely that it forms a virtual mesh!

"At noon, yesterday, a young man came into the office and demanded to see me. He said he was a taxi driver which proved to be true, so far as I can learn and that he was going to sue a client of mine. His story sounded so convincing that the girl in the outside office was alarmed."

JOE CARDONA smiled. He remembered the indifferent way in which he had been received by that very girl. He pictured the same taxi driver as a glib sort.

"When the fellow came in here, Joe," continued Blefken, "he refused to give his name. He admitted that his story was a bluff. His real purpose was to deliver a letter to me, in person and he made it plain that I must let no one know about it!"

"What was the letter?"

"I'm getting to that. The taxi driver said that it had been given to him by a man in the dark. The fellow had approached him, and had seemed very nervous.

THE CRIME CULT

"The stranger had told the driver to get the letter to me before the next evening and in payment, he had given the man a hundred-dollar bill. The taxi driver produced it. He wanted it changed."

Cardona laughed. He scented a hoax.

"No, Joe!" said Blefken, with a faint smile. "It wasn't a counterfeit bill. I sent it out to be changed told the girl to take it to a certain teller at my bank.

"I didn't say a word about where I had gotten the bill. But I know that particular teller well. If it went by him, it would be genuine. It went by. The change came back.

"Meanwhile the taxi man was convincing me that he was playing the game fair. He said that the man who gave him the letter had climbed into his cab to plead with him.

"The stranger said the letter must get to me; that he was afraid to mail it; that lives were at stake; that he trusted the driver to bring it here. He suggested the story that the driver told, and the fellow certainly went through with it convincingly.

"The result is that I have the letter, and I'm positive that no one – except yourself knows that I received it. That is, no one except the bearer and the man who sent it, although I doubt that the writer has seen the taxi man since."

"Did the cab driver describe the man who gave him the letter?" asked Cardona.

"No. He simply said he was nervous, and seemed in earnest in his pleading. He wouldn't tell where the event occurred. He was under full instructions."

"You should have kept him here!"

"I should have. But I was anxious to see the letter, and the man seemed straight in his story. I let him go. Then I read the letter. Here it is."

Reaching in his pocket, the lawyer produced a crumpled sheet of blue paper and an opened envelope. He gave both to Cardona.

The detective looked at the envelope first. It bore no marks. Then he referred to the letter. It was written in a hasty scrawl, some of the words being almost unintelligible. Cardona's eye went to the bottom of the page. An exclamation burst from his lips. He looked up in astonishment.

"From –"

"Shh," warned Blefken, alarmed at the loudness of the detective's tone.

"From Jerry Middleton!" whispered Cardona.

The lawyer nodded.

"You're sure it's actually his handwriting?"

Blefken nodded.

THE CRIME CULT

"I happened to have a letter from Middleton," he replied. "It was in connection with a legal case, and I looked in the file. I don't think that any one but myself would have recalled the fact that the old letter was here in the office.

"The signature is genuine; what is more, it is signed 'Gerald Middleton' and the man is usually spoken of as 'Jerry Middleton.' So much so, in fact, that I was surprised to see the signature in this form, and was anxious to check with the other letter!"

"You know Middleton?" Cardona questioned.

"No. I think perhaps I have met him. That is all."

"That accounts for the signature."

There was silence as Cardona read the letter. Then, as though forgetting that Blefken had also perused it, the detective read the message in a low voice that was scarcely audible:

"DEAR MR. BLEFKEN:

"You will be suprised to receive this note from me. Take it seriously. Tell no one!

"There is great danger. I cannot tell you where. I know, and yet I do not know. I must see you, but am afraid. Not for myself, because I have passed that stage of apprehension. For you.

"I have tried to warn others. My warnings mean death. So keep this to yourself, I beseech you. I am afraid to write what I want to say, because you would not believe it.

"I shall come to your home to-morrow night. Be there unless you see danger. Then be away. I leave it to your judgment.

GERALD MIDDLETON."

"WHAT do you make of it, Joe?" questioned Blefken.

"A strange letter." Cardona's reply was thoughtful. "Strange, from a man like Middleton. He's worth money! Educated! A traveler! I thought he was back in town. Have you inquired?"

"No, indeed," replied the attorney promptly. "I took the letter seriously, Joe. I'm leaving it to you to investigate."

Cardona nodded. He was still studying the letter. Now he shook his head, in a puzzled way.

"What is it, Joe?" asked the attorney.

"Bad spelling," commented Cardona. "He writes 'surprised' without the first 'r.' Also, 'seriously' without putting in the 'u' –"

"I noticed that," responded Blefken. "But notice such words as 'apprehension' and 'beseech.' The whole letter appears to be the work of an intelligent man, whose mind ran faster than his pen, except when he wrote unusual words. They are more carefully inscribed than the others.

THE CRIME CULT

"I know something of handwriting, Joe! A scrawl like that shows education. An ignorant faker would have avoided certain words. An intelligent forger would have been more careful.

"See, also, how the sentences change. All the man's thoughts are not registered. A lot can be implied."

"That sounds logical," admitted Cardona. "Perhaps the man was under some great nervous strain –"

"Unquestionably."

"Or else –"

"What?" Blefken waited.

"A drug addict!"

"Hardly! The letter is not flighty enough for that."

"You missed my point," said Cardona. "I have seen plenty of dope fiends. When they are not under the influence of the drug, they are nervous, changeable, and annoyed. I'll bet this fellow's a 'coke!'"

The detective's words were so emphatic that Blefken nodded his agreement.

"Well," said Cardona, "if he really means what he says, we can find out a lot about him."

"How? By tracing the cab driver?" asked Blefken.

"No. By waiting for him at your home to-night."

"You think he'll be there?"

"We can see."

"Hm–m–m," observed Charles Blefken thoughtfully. "To-day is Thursday. I'm not doing much to-night, Joe. I expected to have a bridge game with three other men. Serious bridge, you know. Could you be there?"

"Certainly! But in what capacity?"

"Not as Santa Claus," said Blefken, smiling, referring to the whiskers. "It wouldn't be well for you to be in evidence, disguised or not disguised.

"I'll tell you what! You come early and we'll find a place to keep you out of sight."

"Just one point," objected Cardona. "This fellow Middleton isn't going to show up if there's a lot of people at the house. You know that. I can't picture him walking in the front door."

"Why not? He doesn't say anything about a secret meeting in the letter."

"No; but we can take it for granted that he expects you will be by yourself."

"I'll fix that, Joe. You've been in my house. There's a number of rooms on the first floor, you remember. One we call the card room. I'll be in there with the crowd.

THE CRIME CULT

"I'll tell my man to show Middleton into the lounge room when he comes. It's across the hall, past the side door. I'll have you in there, to overhear what Middleton has to say."

"Great! We'll try it, anyway."

CARDONA picked up the letter which he had placed on the desk. He studied the writing once more. Without a word, he tossed the message to Blefken.

Rising, the detective scooped up his whiskered mask, and in a few seconds he again presented the appearance of the old prospector.

There was no need for further discussion. Charles Blefken unlocked the door of the office. He shook hands cordially with his visitor as the disguised detective leaned on his cane.

"Good-by, sir," declared Blefken, for all listeners to hear. "Good-by, and remember me to your stepson. A great boy, he is. Stop in any time, and tell him to do the same."

Cardona flung a bewhiskered grin at the prim stenographer as he left the office. Down the corridor he hobbled, still playing the part of the old man. But beneath the scattering wig that adorned his head, the star detective was thinking of more than trivialities.

His mind was still upon that mad message the strange letter that Charles Blefken had received from Jerry Middleton.

"To-night!" muttered Cardona, as he waited for the elevator. "Tonight! And unless I miss my guess, Middleton will be there. There's dynamite behind that note even though I didn't say so to Blefken!"

CHAPTER VI. DIP TRAILS TROUBLE

DIP RIKER had one misfortune: his face. Had it not been for his ugly, fang-toothed features, he might have been the leader, and his friend Flash Donegan the underling. But Dip, wherever he went, was a marked man. That was the reason why he exercised extreme caution whenever he had any special task to perform.

This evening Thursday he had a definite duty. He was to watch and follow the man who had paid a visit to the old house where Clinton Glendenning lived. Harry Vincent was Dip Riker's quarry.

Flash Donegan had assigned Dip to the job because he knew that Dip could do it. At the same time, Dip labored under a handicap. He was afraid to show himself too often in the lobby of the Hotel Metrolite, where Harry Vincent spent most of his idle hours.

It was after six o'clock when Dip, realizing that the important evening was at hand, decided that it would be best to keep a closer watch on his man. He had spied Harry in a lounging chair, in the hotel lobby, by looking through the revolving door. The young man seemed half asleep.

Dip entered, keeping his face turned away. He went directly to the cigar counter, and purchased a newspaper. Sitting down, he hid his features behind the outspread pages, and managed to keep a sly watch on Harry without running risk of being noticed.

Dip's hunch proved a good one. Within ten minutes after his arrival, he heard a boy paging Mr. Vincent. Harry looked up and inquired. The boy pointed to a telephone on the lobby desk.

THE CRIME CULT

Here, again, Dip was in luck. The telephone was not more than fifteen feet from where he was sitting.

Harry Vincent appeared to have trouble being heard when he spoke. Dip drank in every word. By the time the conversation was well begun, the wolf-faced gangster was gaining useful information.

"Yes," Harry declared, "I'll be here... At seven o'clock? Sure... Yes, I can wait until half past... Eat with you here?... All right, Bill... I want to get away shortly after eight o'clock... No, I can't take in a show tonight... Sorry... I'm going out, I say... Out... Not before eight o'clock... All right... Between seven and seven thirty..."

Harry complained to the clerk about the bad connection; then asked for the key to his room. His parting admonition was that he would be in his room until some one called; after that, he could be found in the hotel dining room. Then Harry strode toward the elevators.

Dip Riker slipped from the lobby. His mind was settled now. No use to be seen around the Metrolite until eight o'clock. That gave him time for a run up to Frankie Gull's place.

It was damp to-night. Dip decided that a swallow of bootleg liquor would be good for his constitution.

THREADING his way up Broadway, Dip employed his customary plan of baffling all followers. He stopped at a crossing, as though about to go to the other side of Broadway. But his eyes were secretly watching the cross street. He was getting ready to throw an obstacle in the way of any follower.

Just as the signal was given for traffic to cross Broadway, Dip darted over the side street. A surging mass of automobiles shot forward. Dip, hurrying up Broadway, was free from pursuit, for the hurtling traffic barred all followers.

Thirty yards on, Dip utilized another trick. He doubled into an arcade, and swung back to the very side street which he had crossed. He arrived there just as traffic ceased, and slipped back to the other side. Then he timed his course and crossed Broadway exactly as he had originally planned.

Up past the arcade which Dip Riker had entered, a husky, heavy-set man growled to himself. He had been following Dip Riker. He had been baffled by the foxy gangster.

Although he had lost the trail, this pursuer was evidently informed on Dip's habits, for he lost no time in wending his way toward Frankie Gull's.

When the husky chap entered the place, he found that his hunch was correct. Although he had lost the trail a short distance from the Metrolite, he had picked it up here.

He spotted the mean-faced gangster standing at the end of the crude bar. Without more ado, the newcomer sidled over and nudged against the man at the bar. Dip flung him a sullen look. The stranger grinned.

"Say" his voice was low "you're Dip Riker, aren't you?"

"Yeah," growled Dip. "What of it?"

The newcomer leaned close and whispered into the gangster's ear.

"I've been looking for you," were his words. "Just came in from Chicago. Ran into Pete Boutonne in Buffalo. He told me to look you up."

THE CRIME CULT

"Yeah? Why?"

"Gravy, fellow, gravy! Pete tells me you don't like these rods that hang around New York. Said you fixed him up with a job, because he was clear of all the mobs. Then he had to scam out of New York, so you let him go. Thought he'd be doing you a favor if he sent me to see you."

Dip Riker was interested. He remembered that Flash Donegan was on the point of letting Marty Jennings go. When that would occur, it would be Dip's job to bring in a new gunman.

Dip had no one in mind at the present. It was worth while to become acquainted with a Chicago gat-wielder who was recommended by one of Donegan's old standbys.

"What's your name?" asked Dip.

"Cliff Marsland," was the reply.

Dip's eyes opened. Cliff Marsland! Dip had heard of him in the bad lands. Cliff Marsland was known there as a killer a man who had done a stretch in the Big House called Sing Sing.

After his release from prison, Marsland had mixed in the New York rackets; then he had disappeared. The rumor was that the town had gotten too hot for him. Dip wanted to make sure.

"I've heard of you," he said. "Why did you scam?"

Marsland laughed.

"It wasn't the mobs that worried me," he declared. "I mixed it with a few of them, but the bad boys were all wiped out about that time. It was the cops that made me scam. They were watching for any guy that had been up in the Big House.

"A couple of my old pals went the route, and I thought maybe the cops would hook me up with it. So I beat it for Chi.

"Now I'm back. It was all a false alarm. I could walk into headquarters to-morrow, and there wouldn't be a squawk."

The words rang true. Furthermore, they explained a point about Cliff Marsland that Dip Riker had heard discussed. Gangsters had wondered where Cliff Marsland had gone. He had dropped out of the underworld with surprising suddenness.

So he had been in Chicago! That settled the matter.

DIP, usually of sound judgment, was positive that Cliff Marsland's story was correct. But he was miles from the truth.

Neither Dip nor any other gangster knew the real truth about Cliff Marsland. They had no idea that Cliff was actually an agent of The Shadow that he was not a killer by profession.

Cliff was married to the daughter of a theater owner. His wife and his father-in-law were now in Europe. During their absence, Cliff Marsland was back in service with The Shadow.

THE CRIME CULT

It was true that Cliff had been convicted, and had served time in Sing Sing. He had not, however, committed the crime for which he had paid the penalty. That was a secret which only Cliff and The Shadow knew.

"How do you like this joint?" questioned Dip, anxious to make the acquaintance of the notorious Marsland.

"Terrible," growled Marsland. "Don't come up to the joints they've got in Chi. I can show you a better dump than this right here in New York."

"Where?" questioned Dip.

Cliff named an address. Dip reflected. The place mentioned was nearer to the Metrolite than Frankie Gull's. Dip had an idea it would be a better place to be located.

"Come along," suggested Cliff.

Dip acquiesced. The two men sauntered from Frankie Gull's. It was not yet half past six. Dip decided to spend half an hour with Cliff, to sound him out.

Cliff took Dip to a dark door on a side street, near Sixth Avenue. No ceremony was necessary. Cliff simply opened the door, and they went in, to find a bar larger than the one at Frankie Gull's.

There were tables in the corner, and the two sat down at one of them. A waiter brought drinks and sandwiches. Dip gulped down the contents of his glass. Cliff held his glass poised at his lips.

"Good place, eh?" he questioned. "Look at those imported bottles on the shelf."

Dip glanced behind him. When he had finished a quick inspection, he turned again to Cliff Marsland. The firm-faced man was setting his glass upon the table empty. Dip had not seen him pour the liquor against the wall.

Conversation began, and both men talked briefly. Dip took a strong liking to Cliff Marsland. Dip Riker was closemouthed and seldom told all that he knew, and Cliff appeared to be a man of the same stripe. The one great difference lay in their appearance.

With Cliff, as with Flash, Dip was at a disadvantage. For Cliff Marsland was a man of well-chiseled features. His face showed strength and purpose; it bore none of the characteristics that marked the ordinary gangster.

Another drink was served. Cliff took advantage of Dip's glance at the clock to again decorate the wall with the contents of his glass. It was nearly quarter of eight. Dip Riker shifted in his chair.

"Guess I've got to be goin', Cliff," he said. "You ain't leaving town right away, are you?"

"No. Not if there's anything stirring here," Cliff informed him.

"Where can I find you?"

"How about Frankie Gull's?"

"O.K. Listen, Cliff, I'll see you there to-morrow. Drop in around six o'clock. I'm not saying that there'll be anything doing not for a while, anyway but we can talk then. I've got to see to see another guy, you know. Maybe Pete told you that."

THE CRIME CULT

Marsland nodded. "Yes. That's what he said. Pete's a great guy. When he left you, he slid out of the racket. Running a garage up in Buffalo, now."

THIS information impressed Dip. He had not heard from Pete for some time. He did not know that the man's whereabouts were well known to some of his old pals in New York, and that Cliff Marsland had obtained the information through The Shadow.

"To-morrow night, then," declared Dip.

"O.K. Have another drink before you go," Cliff urged.

Dip stepped up to the bar to accept Cliff's invitation. The man from Chicago paid for the drinks, and Dip gulped his liquor. Cliff set his full glass down as the bartender gave him some money in return.

"How about this?" demanded Cliff. "trying to short-change me, eh?"

The bartender thrust out his jaw in defiance.

"What're you tryin' to pull?" he demanded. "I ain't no sap!"

"Look at this, Dip!" exclaimed Cliff, turning to his new friend, and holding out the money. "Trying to knock me off for half a buck. What do you think of that?"

The altercation caught the attention of the only other men in the room four tough individuals who were sitting at a table. One of them came forward. Dip was not acquainted with the place.

He did not know that this man was the proprietor; and that the other three were his friends. Cliff was familiar with that fact, however. He saw that Dip resented the interference, so he turned to the bartender, leaving the proprietor to Dip.

Quick words followed. The proprietor gripped Cliff's shoulder. Cliff turned and pushed him aside; then swung quickly back toward the bartender, who was weighing an empty bottle between his hands.

"Try to club me, will you?" demanded Cliff.

With that, he flung himself over the bar and seized the man in the white apron.

Dip looked just in time to see the bartender swing his arm back with the bottle. He thought that Cliff was trying to save himself. He did not realize that Cliff was actually the aggressor.

The proprietor made a grab for Cliff. Again, Dip misunderstood the action. He did not know that the interfering man simply wanted to prevent a fight. Dip swung a powerful punch to the fellow's jaw. The proprietor dropped like a chunk of heavy wood.

Cliff was grappling with the bartender, wresting the bottle from the man's hand. Dip started to pull a gun from his pocket, but he never got that far.

The three men at the table were upon him as one. Down he went, beneath a whirl of flying fists. A hard object cracked him in back of the ear, and Dip Riker knew no more.

When he came to his senses, he was lying on a bench in a back room. Cliff Marsland was bending over him.

THE CRIME CULT

Beside Cliff, Dip recognized the features of the proprietor. Seeing Dip's eyes open, Cliff explained the situation.

"This fellow owns the joint," he said. "You shouldn't have slugged him. I was wrong making a pass at the barkeep. He got my goat, that was all; when he picked up the bottle, it made me mad. After I took it away from him, the fight was all ended.

"But the boys had to jump on you, or the cops might have come in. They don't want any target practice around here."

"It's O.K. now," volunteered the proprietor. "I wasn't going to hurt your friend here. Cliff knows me well."

Dip sat up and rubbed the back of his head. He sank down again. This went on for several minutes. Then the groggy gangster sank into a half doze. A while later he opened his eyes once more.

He began to understand fully what had happened. He shook hands with the proprietor, and leaned back against the wall.

"What time is it?" he questioned.

The proprietor consulted a watch.

"Nearly nine o'clock."

An oath came from Dip.

"I gotta be goin'!" he exclaimed. "No" he paused to reflect, and nodded stupidly "it's too late. Got a phone in this joint?"

THE proprietor pointed to another room. Dip rose and staggered in that direction. He was too dazed to think of closing the door behind him. He did not realize that Cliff Marsland was capable of hearing every word he uttered. Dip dialed a number and received an immediate reply.

He spoke to Flash Donegan.

"Hello, Flash," were Dip's words. "Listen. I'm too late to get that guy... Yeah, this is Dip. I got knocked cold, Flash. I'm still groggy."

There was a pause, during which Dip evidently heard condemning words from the other end of the wire.

"You know where he's goin', Flash," Dip protested. "Why don't you get up there an' nick him?... I getcha now! Marty an' Lance are goin' to take him for a ride. You're stickin' where you are. They're callin' you before they give him the works, eh?"

Dip hung up the receiver. Tottering, he made his way back into the outer room. He sat on the bench alone. Cliff Marsland was no longer there.

Cliff had slipped into the barroom the moment that Dip's conversation had ended. He was thinking grimly. His work was to watch Dip Riker, so Harry Vincent could go his way unmolested. Another enemy Flash Donegan, was being covered by The Shadow himself.

THE CRIME CULT

But from Dip's conversation, Cliff divined that Flash was laying low tonight that Harry Vincent's real menace consisted of two unknown hoodlums – men to whom Dip had referred as Marty and Lance!

There was no time to lose. Cliff had double work to do. He must put Dip Riker out of the picture; he must send a warning to The Shadow, so that Harry could be saved.

More than that, Cliff realized, his warning must be specific. He must learn where these two gangsters would be. There was one man who might tell. That was Dip Riker. A quick plan flashed through Cliff Marsland's brain.

He stepped up to the bartender. The man was grinning in a friendly manner, now.

"That friend of mine," said Cliff. "He's pretty groggy. Mix up a drink for him. Make it snappy."

While the bartender was complying, Cliff's fingers went to his vest pocket. There he opened a little box and obtained two small pills.

Receiving the glass from the bartender, Cliff went to the room where Dip was sitting. On the way he quickly dropped the pills into the glass.

These were knock-out drops that Cliff had brought along in case there would be no other way to handle Dip Riker. Cliff knew the potency of those pills. Four of them would put a man to sleep. Two, Cliff was sure, would produce dizziness. He intended to make Dip Riker speak without knowing it.

"Drink this," said Cliff.

Dip imbibed the fluid with eagerness. He roused a trifle; then began to rub his forehead.

"Feelin' bum again," he complained. "Wait'll I flop on this bench. My head feels like it was crackin' open –"

Dip was lying down, holding both hands to his head. He seemed to be losing all sense of where he was. Cliff leaned close, and spoke in a convincing tone.

"Say, Dip there's a fellow named Flash calling you on the telephone. Says he's got to speak to you, right away."

Dip sought to rise, but sank back on the bench.

"You talk to him," he said wearily; "tell him I'm sick –"

Cliff went to the other room and returned.

"He wants you to go up with Marty and Lance," he said. "He wants you to start right away."

"I can't go," said Dip weakly. "Can't go, I tell you. Can't get away from here –"

"I'll put you in a cab," responded Cliff. "The air will do you good. Tell me where the place is, so I can give the address to the driver."

"Place where Marty is?" asked Dip. "It's way uptown. Way up, by –"

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Drowsiness had overcome the gangster. His words became an incoherent mumble. Cliff shook him by the shoulders. The man must talk! Harry Vincent's life depended upon it. There was not an instant to lose. Dip Riker must complete that sentence!

But Cliff's efforts were futile. The gangster lay dead to the world. The knock-out drops had worked too well!

Wild schemes came to Cliff. Should he call Flash Donegan, pretending that he was Dip Riker? Cliff knew the number, but realized that the plan was useless.

Harry Vincent on his way to certain death not knowing that danger lay in his path. How could he be saved?

Valuable minutes passed. Cliff, for the first time, realized that he had not informed The Shadow. That was the least he could do to save Harry, even though The Shadow, without knowledge of where Marty and Lance were, would be as handicapped as Cliff.

SCURRYING to the other room, Cliff seized the telephone and dialed a number. Despite his hurry, he was wise enough to close the door behind him.

A quiet voice came over the wire.

"M reporting," announced Cliff, in a low tone.

"Burbank," was the reply.

Burbank was The Shadow's inactive agent, a man who seldom left his station, but one who handled the threads that connected The Shadow with such operatives as Cliff and Harry.

In tense words, Cliff gave his information. His voice was hopeless, for he knew that even when Burbank had relayed the message, it could be of no use, unless a faint hope The Shadow knew where Marty and Lance were located.

This was hardly likely. Cliff had been told to obtain all available information. Evidently The Shadow had not yet discovered the workings of the gang that Flash Donegan ruled.

Burbank's voice seemed reassuring, but all hope faded with Cliff when he hung up the telephone. Harry Vincent was on his way to an unknown snare. Flash Donegan would be informed of his capture. The racketeer would deliver the death sentence.

Before The Shadow could possibly act, Harry Vincent would be no more!

All because Cliff had overloaded Dip's drink with knock-out drops. If he had only used one, instead of two! But that was too late to rectify.

Cliff hastened to the other room to find Dip Riker still insensible. Vainly he strove to rouse the man. The dose had been too potent. Knowing the power in those drops, Cliff groaned. Dip would be unconscious for another hour at least!

A feeling of intense helplessness swept over Cliff Marsland. It was mingled with a sense of blame and remorse.

Cliff had failed in his task. Harry Vincent was going to his doom! And where was The Shadow?

CHAPTER VII. MARGARET SEEKS A FRIEND

THE clock on Clinton Glendenning's mantelpiece struck nine. The old man opened his eyes at the sound. He had been dozing in his easy-chair. He saw Larkin standing before him.

"What is it, Larkin?" growled the old man.

"You remember, sir, that I was going out to-night. You said that nine o'clock would be all right."

"I recall it, Larkin. Go along, go along! Where is Miss Margaret?"

"I think she has gone out, sir. To call on some friends, I believe."

"That's good!" Glendenning rejoined. "Time she ended her moping. She hasn't been out of the place more than a couple of times during the past month."

"Of course, sir," said the secretary, "if you think that it's not best for you to be left alone –"

"Rubbish!" declared the old man fiercely. "I wanted you to go out. I said so. And I told Miss Margaret to go out to-night. I've been telling her that every night. I want to be alone once in a while. And, Larkin –"

The secretary turned as he was starting for the door.

"What is it, sir?"

"Take the bells off the telephones. Downstairs and up. I don't want to be annoyed. Somebody may call up about some useless matter. Wanting to know if I have seen Buchanan or that detective, Hasbrouck. I don't want to hear either of them mentioned. I've had enough of it! Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

Larkin silenced the bells on the telephone box. He left the room, and the old man heard him go downstairs. Clinton Glendenning sank back for another nap.

The secretary stopped before he reached the front door. The velvet curtain rustled beside him. Larkin heard a whispered voice. He spoke softly. Margaret Glendenning stepped from the other room.

"Is it all right, Larkin?" she questioned.

"All right, Miss Margaret. Your uncle thinks you have gone out."

"I can go with you, then?"

"Yes."

"But wait a moment, Larkin." The girl's hand trembled as she pressed the secretary's arm. "You are sure that this man will be willing to see me?"

"Positive, Miss Margaret. He phoned and asked for you, one afternoon. You remember, the day you had gone out to the store, and your uncle was asleep? I talked to him, then."

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"He was a great friend of Robert's," said Margaret. "Robert often spoke about Henri Zayata. He must be a wonderful man. He is an invalid, you know."

"Yes," replied Larkin. "I have heard Mr. Buchanan speak of him also, so I knew who he was when he called up. He said some things over the telephone, Miss Margaret. It made me wonder about —"

The secretary paused as though suddenly conscious that he had said too much.

"Made you wonder about Uncle Clinton?" Margaret prompted.

Larkin did not reply. He looked at the girl; then, apparently governed by an impulse, he nodded his head.

"Larkin," said Margaret quietly, "I, too, have wondered about my uncle. I cannot understand his hatred of Robert.

"That night the detective came here, I wanted to speak, but what could I say? After all, Uncle Clinton loves me at least he thinks he is doing the best for my welfare. He never liked Robert, though, and now that Robert has gone I —"

THE girl placed her fingers upon her lips, as though to stop words she did not have the heart to utter. Larkin's eyes were sympathetic.

"Larkin" Margaret's voice became a soft, quavering whisper "I have weird thoughts every time I talk to Uncle Clinton, concerning Robert. You have been there; perhaps you have sensed it also. I feel that something is being kept from me."

"You still love Robert?" Larkin asked.

"Yes, and no. I love him because he was sympathetic. But if he has left me, I could never feel the same toward him again.

"If I could find a man who understood me as Robert did; then, perhaps, I could forget my old love for a new. If I could break away from here, I would be better off. But unless I knew that Uncle Clinton was an evil man, it would not be right for me to leave him.

"I am going with you to-night, because I would like to talk to Henri Zayata. He was Robert's friend. From him, I may learn the answers to those problems that puzzle me."

Larkin nodded in understanding.

"It is not wise to remain here, Miss Margaret," he said softly. "Let us start."

The pair went out into the damp night. The gloom of the street made Margaret Glendenning shudder. She and Larkin walked toward the corner through the thickening fog.

Once, Margaret looked across the street and thought she saw a man sidling through the mist. She dismissed it as a phantom of her imagination.

At the lighted avenue, Larkin threw a cautious glance back along the way which they had come. He helped the girl into a cab, and gave a low order to the driver, who nodded and muttered a low reply. Margaret did not catch a word that was exchanged.

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As the cab drove away, a young man materialized out of the mist and hailed another taxi. He clambered into it quickly and spoke decisively to the driver.

"Follow that cab!" he ordered.

The driver glanced back suspiciously.

A ten-dollar bill was thrust into his hand. Without further ado, the driver shot away in hasty pursuit.

HARRY VINCENT was the pursuer. He peered through the partition and watched the chase over the shoulder of the driver. He realized quickly that the cab ahead was taking a circuitous and bewildering course.

"Hm-m-m," mused Harry. "This promises to be interesting. There's something phony about this."

The leading cab made sharp turns through dingy streets. Harry's driver lost the trail; at last he sighted his quarry a block away, when an avenue was reached. He made speed, turned a corner, and suddenly applied the brakes.

"They've stopped," he said.

"Out with your lights!" responded Harry quickly. "Turn off the motor!"

The driver obeyed both commands. Harry saw Larkin and the girl alight from the cab ahead. The secretary paid the driver.

Evidently the man had made some mistake in the destination, for Larkin and Margaret walked ahead and took another cab which was standing in the street. The new vehicle came into view when the old pulled away.

"Turn on your lights," Harry told the driver. "Get going!"

Once more the trail was an uncertain one, but this journey was not as long as the other. The leading cab stopped in a side street. There were no other vehicles in sight, so Harry was certain that this was the final destination.

Harry's driver turned out the lights and stopped the motor without being told. Seeing Larkin and Margaret alight, Harry opened the door and slipped to the sidewalk.

"Keep the ten-spot," he said to the cabman. "Pull away after the other car goes. Make it look like you were simply running past."

Lurking in the gloom of a large warehouse, Harry saw the first cab move off. His own cab followed and swept along the street as though it had bustled in from the avenue.

Harry started operations. He angled his way toward the spot where he was sure the other two persons were standing. He caught a momentary glimpse of them moving along the street. Then they disappeared.

Larkin and the girl had entered a passageway between two warehouses. Margaret spoke in surprise as they came into the sudden darkness.

"Are you sure this is where we are going, Larkin?" she asked.

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"Absolutely," replied the secretary. "Mr. Zayata told me how to come here. He has a private entrance to his place."

As Larkin spoke, his hand took the girl's elbow, and he urged Margaret toward what appeared to be a blank wall.

Under Larkin's touch, a door swung inward, and they entered a dark corridor. Margaret shuddered, but kept on. Another door opened, and they were in a long, lighted passageway that seemed to be hewn through solid concrete walls.

The girl was too astonished at her surroundings to wonder how Larkin was so familiar with the place. Halfway down the corridor, the secretary led her into what appeared to be a yawning square chasm in the wall.

Before Margaret realized it, there were two sharp clicks. The first closed a door she could feel the air; the second turned on a small light. They were moving upward in a little elevator!

OUTSIDE, Harry Vincent was groping his way between the two warehouses. A small flashlight came from his pocket. He went through to the next street; then retraced his course.

Here was a mystery. Somewhere in that narrow crevice between the buildings, he had lost track of those ahead.

Harry uttered a quick exclamation as his light revealed a crack in the side of the wall. It looked like a door. He would try it. He pressed. It did not yield.

He pressed again. He was sure that the others had entered at this spot but now the barrier was tight against him.

Harry's light was turned full on the wall. He did not see what was happening beside him. Two men were creeping up one on each side.

In another instant, powerful fingers had gripped Harry's arms. He was drawn back, pinioned. Something hard cracked against his ribs he knew it for the muzzle of an automatic.

"One grunt out o' you, an' you're through!" came a voice. "Just one grunt. Savvy?"

Harry did not move.

"Hold him, Lance. I'll gag him," came the same voice.

A grimy rag was forced between Harry's jaws. Prodded by the automatic, he was forced down the narrow way. The trip ended before they reached the street. The man with the revolver opened a door in the side of the other warehouse. In another minute, Harry was bound upon the floor.

A light had been turned on. They were in a small room that served as a garage. An old touring car stood in the center.

Harry could see his captors now. Both were brute-faced mobsmen of the underworld. They seemed to gloat because they had him in their power.

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"Quick work, eh, Lance?" The speaker was the uglier of the two. His face bore scars, and Harry, noticing his hands, saw that one finger was missing from the left.

"Soft, Marty," said the other, a fellow with a swarthy, foreign look. "Lend a holt here. We'll heave him in the buggy."

Harry was deposited roughly in the back seat of the touring car. The men moved away. He tried to struggle with the ropes. They bit into his wrists. His feet, too, were firmly bound.

"Well, he's all set for his last ride," came Lance's voice.

"Yeah" Marty's reply was a growl "but we're not goin' just yet. The boss has got somethin' to say about this.

"Wait'll I fix that tail light. We don't want no cops botherin' us. Then I'll buzz Flash, an' we'll be ridin' high an' wide."

Harry Vincent shut his eyes in resignation. So this was to be his finish! He realized that this occurrence had not been anticipated that for once The Shadow was not here could not be here to help him!

CHAPTER VIII. DEATH IN THE CARDS

"EXCUSE me, gentlemen," remarked Charles Blefken, rising from the bridge table. "Being the dummy this hand, I beg the privilege of finding out why that long-distance call from my wife has been delayed."

The other three men laughed. The subject of the long-distance call had been discussed between hands during the evening. All the visitors were close friends of Charles Blefken.

One was Winthrop Morgan, another lawyer. James Rossiter was a physician. Felton Carew, the last of the group, was a gentleman of leisure a wealthy clubman whose ability as a bridge player made him a welcome addition to any table.

"Charley's been a bit restless all evening," observed Morgan, when Blefken had left the room. "Hasn't been playing as good a game as usual."

"Worried about his wife," said Rossiter. "She's out in Cleveland. She hasn't been well, you know."

"Your lead, Rossiter," said Carew.

Charles Blefken had crossed the hall between the cardroom and the lounge. There was a dim light showing through the open door of the latter room. Blefken entered and spoke in a soft whisper.

"All set, Joe?" he asked.

A grunt came from behind a massive chair set in the corner. Joe Cardona was hiding there, wondering why he had bothered to come on this mission.

His faith in Middleton's appearance was waning. Like Blefken, he was beginning to think that the writer of the note was a creature of fantastic imaginings.

"It may be pretty soon, now," said Blefken encouragingly. "Guess it seems long to you, though."

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"It seems hours since your friends were in here with you," came Cardona's response. "How's the game going?"

"I'm out twenty dollars so far. Can't keep my mind on it."

"What's the time now?"

"After nine," said Blefken. "Around nine thirty, I guess."

He pressed a bell. In less than a minute a servant appeared. Joe Cardona was quiet now. No one could possibly have suspected that he was in the room.

"Remember, Stokes," ordered Blefken, "if any one comes to see me, show them in here. You understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Also remember to tell me that long distance is calling."

The lawyer left the room a few moments after the servant had gone. The hall was dark; he had purposely left it so. He and Cardona had agreed that too much illumination might worry the eccentric Middleton.

Blefken went by the little hall that led to the side door. Perhaps Middleton would ring at that entrance. It was not unlikely. People familiar with the house often came in that way. In fact, Cardona had come by that entrance tonight. So had Morgan and Carew.

Doctor Rossiter had rung at the front door. Perhaps his practice of making professional calls had brought him there from force of habit. Rossiter was Blefken's family physician.

Minutes ticked by slowly for Joe Cardona after the lawyer had gone. Then, the patient detective heard the servant's footsteps in the hall. He fancied that Stokes was on his way to the front door.

This speculation was correct. Two persons entered the room. Cardona did not risk peering from behind the chair. But he recognized the servant's voice.

"Wait here, sir," Stokes said. "I shall call Mr. Blefken immediately."

"All right," came a low, nervous voice.

The tone impressed Cardona. The detective felt sure that this must be Jerry Middleton.

The servant was gone now the newcomer was pacing the floor nervously. His heavy breathing showed that he was unquestionably perturbed. The silent sleuth sensed the situation.

He was glad now that he was here. Whatever Middleton's purpose, it must be important.

A HEAVY step arrived. The pacing man stopped. Cardona knew that Blefken had come. The door closed. Cardona heard the lawyer's voice. It signified more than a greeting.

Blefken's "Hello" was uttered in a carefully rehearsed manner. He and the detective had set it as a sign. It meant that Middleton was facing the other way.

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Cardona edged toward the side of the chair. He obtained a vantage point. He could see what was going on.

The newcomer was sitting a few feet away. Joe could see his pallid face, although Middleton was turned so that his profile was not quite visible to the man behind the chair.

"You received my letter?" Middleton's voice was plaintive.

"Yes," answered Blefken quietly. "I am still puzzling over its significance."

Cardona managed to sight the lawyer. Blefken was standing at the opposite side of the room, his hands behind his back. He was studying Middleton with the practiced eye of an attorney.

"I'm glad I'm here," announced Middleton nervously. "Glad because I've come in time for once!"

There was a significant note in the pronunciation of the two final words. Blefken detected it.

"Just what do you mean?" inquired the lawyer.

Middleton's breath came in quick, short gasps.

"Blefken," he said, "I can't be cross-examined. Please make allowances for that. I've actually come here against my will come because there is danger!"

"Who is after you?"

"Please don't question me. Don't worry about me. Think about yourself. Your life is in danger terrible danger!"

"I have received no threats," Blefken responded. "I have no enemies of consequence. I have nothing to fear. What is this all about, Middleton?"

"I see you don't trust me," declared Middleton bitterly. "If you knew what I have undergone what I know what I have tried to prevent how I am bound how terrible it all is –"

"Easy," remarked Blefken quietly. "Take it easy, old chap! Let's quiet down a bit. We don't want to be overheard. You're safe here –"

"I'm safe, yes," exclaimed Middleton, in an excited whisper. "I'm safe, always until my page is turned. My page you understand? It's a long way yet, in the book. But yours is next the last one was turned. Your page is open now!"

Cardona slipped his automatic from his pocket. He was covering Middleton now. He felt that the man was dangerous. Still, he was not ready to act until Blefken should give the word.

"Middleton," said the lawyer, "you've got to quiet yourself a bit. Your nerves are shattered. I'm with you, old fellow. I know that you have something important to say. Don't worry. I'm safe, here in my own home –"

"You're not safe anywhere right now!" said Middleton earnestly. "I tell you, Blefken, this thing is unbelievable! You think that I've lost my senses. I have, in a way.

"I tried to be calm for a long while, but" his voice became extremely low "when I saw that I couldn't stop

it after I tried to forget –"

"You tried to forget?" Blefken's tone was kindly.

"Yes," answered Middleton. "I'm taking it easier now, Blefken. You must make allowances. Let me talk generally I can't give you facts all at once.

"I knew there was danger. It was coming to me, too, unless I promised to play my part. I agreed wrongly, of course. Then I broke away and tried to forget. Do you understand?"

"I follow you, in a way," said Blefken frankly. "Go on. I am interested."

"I could forget, for a while, because well, I was able to forget. Then I began thinking about my page about the danger that would be mine some day. Just because I had gone away sick of it all.

"I'm a criminal, Blefken; not by action, but in spirit. I stopped before it came to deed instead of wish. When I began to think about my own danger, I worried about others.

"One lightning shaft struck. I waited. Two more were in the making. I tried to stop them. I failed. That frightened me. Then I appealed to you.

"Why to me? You have many friends in New York," the lawyer spoke.

"Friends? I had renounced them. I was ready to betray them once. But I wanted to square myself. You had to be reached at once. So I sent you the letter. Don't you understand?"

"I understand."

THE lawyer's voice was not only reassuring to Jerry Middleton. It also relieved Cardona's qualms. The detective was high in his admiration for Charles Blefken.

Middleton was going to open up; that was evident. The man was under a tremendous strain. He was rapidly becoming more coherent.

"I understand," repeated Blefken. "I would not be here listening to you if I did not understand. I can assure you, Middleton, that I am quite safe. Take my word for that; I will take yours for whatever you have to say. Consider me as your attorney for the time."

"I never placed much trust in lawyers," declared Middleton suddenly, "but I know I can count on you, Blefken. What I have to say weighs very heavily on me. I'm beginning to feel better now, though. Give me a few moments."

"Middleton," said the lawyer, "I am not alone here to–night" Joe Cardona repressed a gasp, fearing that the lawyer was about to commit the mistake of betraying his presence "not alone. I have friends, in another room. They do not know that you are here. They think I am telephoning."

"Friends?" quizzed Middleton. "A man has no friends!"

Joe Cardona felt relief because Blefken had not made the error which he feared. But he was also surprised by the bitterness of Middleton's reply.

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"I can trust these friends," said the lawyer. "One of them is my family physician. Perhaps you would like to see him; he might be able to prescribe something that would make you feel more like yourself –"

"No! Nothing!" gasped Middleton. "Nothing can help me, except" he hesitated "except what I can never get! I have tried, Blefken. I took morphine down in Florida. It made me feel terribly. It only made matters worse. You'll understand after I talk. Let me rest a few minutes."

"All right."

Blefken stood silent while Jerry Middleton placed his head in his hands and became quiet. The lawyer studied his visitor.

Middleton was a young man, but he appeared much older than he actually was. His face, pale and haggard, seemed ghastly when compared with his dark, roving eyes. Those eyes carried a haunted look. They were closed now.

"Middleton," said Blefken quietly, "I'm going in the other room just long enough to tell my friends that I will be busy for a while. Wait a moment –" He rang the bell and stood until Stokes entered.

The arrival of the servant made no impression upon Jerry Middleton. The young man was motionless, scarcely breathing. Blefken stopped his man, just within the door.

"Stokes," said the lawyer, "go into the cardroom and tell them that my call has been interrupted. Tell them that we will have a recess of half an hour. Serve refreshments. I am coming there immediately."

When Stokes had left, Blefken advanced and laid his hand upon Middleton's shoulder. He cast a knowing glance at Cardona, signifying that the detective should remain hidden where he was.

"You're all right here, aren't you?" Blefken questioned Middleton. "All right for say, five minutes? Not longer?"

"I can wait five minutes," said Middleton.

"Good," answered Blefken. "If you want, you can come in and meet my friends. It might do you good to chat a while; then we can talk later."

"I'd rather talk now –"

"Very well. Sit here and rest."

The lawyer opened the door and stepped into the hall. He closed the door behind him. It was an ideal arrangement.

Under any other circumstances, it would have been unwise for Blefken to leave Middleton alone. But with so capable a person as Joe Cardona for a hidden observer, matters could not be better.

The detective smiled at the caginess of Blefken's action. He watched Middleton with alert eyes.

FOR a few minutes, Jerry Middleton did not stir. Then he groaned and sat bolt upright in his chair. He stared straight ahead as though trying to place his surroundings. Then he laughed softly but nervously. He arose, and Cardona slipped back into his hiding place.

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Middleton paced up and down the room, mumbling to himself, but Cardona could make nothing of his words. At length the young man said something that sounded like: "He ought to be back by now."

With that, Cardona heard him go to the door and open it. The detective was on the point of emerging from behind the chair when he heard Middleton again pacing the room. At times the pacing ceased, and even the man's breathing was soundless.

One of these pauses occurred. A full minute went by. Cardona moved upward. The room was empty. The half-opened door showed where Middleton had gone. Probably in search of Charles Blefken.

Cardona was surprised at the stealth which the man must have used. He knew that Middleton could not have been gone more than sixty seconds, and that perhaps he was already with Blefken.

But Cardona knew that every second was precious, when crime was in the offing. Middleton and his talk of danger savored of crime. Pushing the chair aside, the detective hurried into the hall.

He slipped into the shadow of the door, for he knew that Middleton might return, and the sight of a stranger would make him believe that he had been betrayed.

In another second, Cardona was standing before the little passage that led to the side door of the house. The detective was suspicious of that passage. He waited, while his eyes became accustomed to the darkness.

He wanted to investigate in that direction. He also thought of hiding there, should Middleton return.

Suddenly, Joe Cardona realized that something was lying in the passage a bulky shape that appeared very much like the form of a man. It must be Middleton! Had the man started to leave the house and fallen? Or was he crouching there for some unknown purpose?

Cardona moved to the corner of the passage. He listened intently. He heard no sound of breathing; no one was approaching.

The detective's flashlight clicked. Its rays revealed the form of a man a body lying on its side. The form did not move.

"Middleton," was the name framed by the detective's lips, as he stepped quickly forward.

Then he saw the face!

Never before, in all his years on the force, had Joe Cardona met with such an amazing thing. It was not Middleton lying there. The body was that of Charles Blefken!

A hideous look was spread upon the lawyer's features. Upon his throat were the marks of deep-pressed fingers. Blefken's collar had been ripped away, leaving his neck bare.

FOR an instant, Cardona was dumfounded. Then his shrill whistle sounded the alarm. The response was immediate. Footsteps came crashing from the cardroom. There was a burst of light as the door opened; then a bright glare as some one pushed the switch of the hall lights.

Cardona was on his feet, his coat back. His badge glimmered in the glare. He was counting four men before him all had come from that single room. Three, he knew, were the lawyer's guests. The fourth was Stokes, the servant.

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"Where's Middleton?" demanded Joe Cardona.

"Who?" came a startled reply.

"Middleton. The man who was here."

"We have seen no man here," came the voice of Morgan, the attorney. "Who are you?"

"Detective Cardona, from headquarters. You were all in that room?"

"Every one of us."

"Was Blefken with you?"

"Until five minutes ago."

"He has been attacked," declared Cardona, stepping aside, so all could see the body plainly. "Outside, all of you! We've got to get Jerry Middleton! Hurry, you three" he indicated the guests "and you, Stokes, get headquarters."

Morgan was the first to respond. He advanced, stepped past Blefken's form with a hasty glance, and dashed out through the side door. Carew followed him. Stokes scurried to the telephone in the lounge. Only Doctor Rossiter stopped, as he neared the body of Charles Blefken.

"I'm the physician," he said quietly.

"Right," replied Cardona.

Rossiter was leaning over the body, making a close examination. Cardona stood back and watched him.

"Shouldn't you hold every one here?" the physician questioned coolly.

"Ordinarily, yes," was Cardona's blunt response. "But I see situations quickly. You were all together. You were all alarmed. I know what was going on. I have been here all evening. That's my business, doctor; I'm attending to it. You have your business. I hope you can be of aid."

"Not now," came the doctor's quiet voice.

"Not now?" quizzed the detective.

"No," was the reply. "Our friend Blefken is dead!"

CHAPTER IX. THE MAN WITH THE EYES

"HERE we are," declared Larkin, with a slight smile.

Margaret Glendenning breathed a sigh of relief. She had been totally perplexed by the strange trip that she had taken with her uncle's secretary.

The ride up in the elevator had been an unusual experience. They had traveled slowly, for many feet, up through a shaft that seemed cut in a solid pillar. Stepping out, they had passed through another dimly lighted

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corridor, with a black entrance at the side. Then through a small room, completely dark.

At last, down steps, which wound in a narrow spiral, where Larkin had preceded her, to show the way. Then a sliding door had opened, and they had entered a small room, papered with a grotesque design. The door had closed behind them.

They stood there, in a room that seemed to have no outlet save that through which they had come. Then the room itself moved upward at a snail's pace until it came to a stop.

So here they were waiting in what seemed to be a doorless box.

Larkin's words told that the trying journey was over; but as the seconds went by, Margaret began to feel worried again.

She was sorry that she had come on this amazing visit. At first the experience had been interesting, but now it was too much so.

She had no idea where she might be. Not only had she become lost in New York; she was also totally confused in regard to the building they had entered.

She did not know whether they were below the level of the street, or above. She decided that they might be above but how far?

She began to think of her uncle, back in the old house. Had it been right for her to leave him there, alone?

Then she half smiled at her own thoughts. At least her uncle knew where he was, while she had no idea of her location. Margaret looked at Larkin; the secretary caught her smile and returned it. That was better!

After all, Larkin knew what he was about, and she felt that she could trust him.

"Look!" said the secretary.

The side of the room was opening half going downward, half upward. Margaret had not noticed the break in the center of the wall. The spreading portions disclosed an oak-paneled anteroom, with a door at the other end. That, the girl felt, was helpful.

She stepped forward with Larkin, and turned to watch the wall of the moving room close behind them. Larkin stood looking at the door ahead. The girl was sure now, that he had been here before. Her gaze joined with his.

The particular spot at which Larkin was staring was adorned with a peculiar carving slightly above the center of the door. It represented the solemn head of a lion, nearly half a foot in width. The mouth was opened, and the projecting tongue of oak gave the carving a realistic touch.

Margaret was fascinated. She looked at the creature's eyes black, hollow spots; then at the tongue; then back at the eyes again.

At that final glance she gasped in horror. The lion's eyes were black no longer they were human eyes, greenish eyes of a living being, staring furtively forth!

LARKIN caught the girl as she stepped back. His clutch brought her a sense of safety. Still, she could not

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speak. She could only point, terror-stricken at what she had seen.

Before Larkin could explain, the door moved sidewise, and Margaret saw the cause of her alarm. Ordinarily, it might have startled her, but now, in contrast to the living carving, it was a welcome relief.

A brown-skinned man was bowing obsequiously from behind the spot where the door had been. It was his eyes that Margaret had seen. They had been peering through peep-holes formed by the lion's eyes. Margaret saw the greenish glint again, as the man stood upright.

He was a strange figure, clad in some Oriental attire, wearing a turban with a tall, straight plume. It gave the man an appearance of being much taller than he actually was. Margaret recognized that fact when he stood aside and she entered with Larkin.

They were in the most luxurious surroundings that the girl had ever seen. The room began as a narrow hall, then opened to thrice its original width. On both sides were carvings and tapestries of grotesque design.

A small fountain tinkled at the end of the wide hall. Beyond it was a shield adorned with jewels that sparkled through the falling water. The girl felt as though she had been transported to a rajah's palace.

It was restful, there. Time passed easily. Many minutes slipped by, but the girl did not sense the fact.

The servant approached silently and bowed. First to Margaret, then to Larkin. He spoke, in a soft voice that seemed modulated to suit the surroundings.

"The master will be glad that you are here," he said. "I go to tell him."

He moved halfway along the hall and turned between two hanging draperies. Margaret, looking from an angle, saw a polished black slab rise as the man approached. He passed beneath it. The barrier closed. The girl turned to Larkin.

"You have been here before?" she asked.

Larkin nodded in response to the direct question.

"You did not tell me so," the girl said reprovingly.

"I could not, Miss Margaret," pleaded the secretary. "It would have meant too long an explanation. You will understand when you meet the man who lives here."

"Henri Zayata?"

"Yes. I think, Miss Margaret," the secretary said smilingly, "that you would prefer to know that I have been here now that you have seen the place."

"It's uncanny," said Margaret, in a low whisper. "It's so frightfully uncanny and very wonderful. I like it, Larkin. Yet it fills me with awe."

"It has that effect," replied Larkin, "but I think you will understand —"

He did not complete the sentence. The servant had returned. He was bowing low, indicating that the visitors should enter the gateway to the right the barrier being wide open. Larkin turned to Margaret.

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The girl walked to the doorway. She passed through it and stopped, her eyes wide with wonder.

The marvelous hallway was trivial, compared to the room which she had entered. The apartment was a marvel of Oriental splendor.

Gorgeous golden cloth adorned the walls. Priceless bits of statuary stood in abundance. Wonderful cushions lay everywhere upon the floor.

The rug beneath the girl's feet seemed inches thick. From a brazen burner, a curling thread of incense wound upward toward the ceiling. The glory of the place was overwhelming. Margaret stood entranced.

Her gaze traveled everywhere. But at last it centered on the principal spot of the room a divan in the farther corner. There, reclining in state, was a man of dark complexion. The divan was a sort of bed.

The man was sitting up, beneath a pile of robes. He wore an Oriental jacket that sparkled with emeralds, set upon red velvet. His head was covered with a mass of thick, black hair. His sallow cheeks were clean shaven.

THE man possessed a handsomeness of countenance that attracted the girl instantly. As his head inclined in a slight bow, Margaret lost all sense of her surroundings. She could see only the divan and its occupant.

The man held out a jeweled hand and indicated a pile of gold-covered cushions that made a chair beside him. Understanding the motion, Margaret advanced and sat beside the couch. She extended her own hand. The man received it with a friendly clasp.

"You are Henri Zayata?" questioned the girl.

"Yes." The reply came in a smooth tone. "You are Miss Glendenning."

"Margaret Glendenning."

"Margaret," replied the man with a smile.

"You are Robert Buchanan's friend?" asked the girl, staring toward the man.

"Yes."

Margaret's eyes met those of Henri Zayata. The result was immediate fascination. The girl had never seen such eyes.

They were dark, yet it was impossible to determine their hue. Beneath the soft light of the room light that came from invisible lamps Zayata's eyes were puzzling. Only their expression was constant, and they seemed to invite confidence. Before that gaze, Margaret Glendenning felt a sympathy and understanding that she had never before known.

"I am glad that you have come here, Margaret," said the man in his soft tone. "I have long wished to see you. In fact, I have anticipated your visit. I want you to remember it."

He looked across the room. Margaret, released from his fascinating stare, followed his gaze. Henri Zayata clapped his hands, and the turbaned servant advanced, bowing as he came. In his hands he held a small golden box.

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He tendered it to Zayata, who, in turn, placed it in Margaret's hands. The girl gasped as she looked at the beautiful design of the box. She realized that it was Zayata's gift to her, and she raised her head to express her gratitude for his kindness.

"Open it!" said Zayata.

Margaret lifted the lid of the box. Her lips opened as she saw what was within. The box contained a ring, upon which was mounted an exquisite emerald a stone of wonderful brilliance and of great value.

"Place it on your finger," suggested Zayata.

He did not wait for the girl to act. Reaching forward, he gently removed the box from her hands and set it in her lap. He then slid the ring on the little finger of the girl's left hand.

Margaret sighed as she saw how pitifully her diamond engagement ring contrasted with this gorgeous gift. For she was wearing the token which Robert Buchanan had given her months before she always wore it when her uncle did not know.

"But but" Margaret was stammering "I can't accept such a wonderful gift –"

"It is a trifle," declared Zayata. "You have gone to a great deal of trouble paying me this visit. I want you to feel that you have been rewarded."

THE girl made no further protest. Somehow, she seemed in a new world. It was like a dream from the "Arabian Nights" and she seemed incapable of making any effort of her own accord.

Before she knew it, she was speaking to Zayata, pouring out thoughts that she had intended not to say.

"Robert told me that you were an invalid," was her sympathetic statement.

Zayata nodded solemnly; then smiled. "My arms and hands" he outstretched them as he spoke "are well. But I am virtually helpless, otherwise."

"It is too bad," commented the girl sadly.

"Too bad?" questioned Zayata. "Not at all when I can forget. Forget as I am forgetting now. How could one think of troubles with you in view?"

The girl smiled. There was a sincerity in Zayata's tone that enabled her to accept his comments without objection.

The exotic atmosphere of this amazing room seemed to have enveloped her. All was new and wonderful even to the odd fragrance of the incense.

Time passed. Margaret found herself talking of many things of her worries during the past months; of the hopes that she had lost.

The dreary appointments of her uncle's home seemed miserable. This place was heaven in comparison. She said so, and Henri Zayata smiled.

The girl had no idea how long she had remained. At times she was conscious of Larkin's presence. The

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secretary had seated himself at the foot of the couch. But on other occasions, he was gone she did not know where, and she did not care.

Coming here had seemed an ordeal. Leaving seemed impossible. At length, she noticed Larkin returning. The fact that brought it to her attention was Henri Zayata's gaze. The man on the divan was looking toward Larkin. Margaret saw the secretary nod slowly.

"Margaret" it was Zayata speaking "I am glad that you have talked to me to-night. You have been unhappy. So have I. In that, we understand one another."

"Your trials must have been greater than mine," Margaret sympathized.

"No. For mine have passed; while yours are yet to come. I have always had a home and wealth."

"I have had a home and comfort," the girl said slowly.

"You have had a home," corrected Zayata. "But there are reasons why you should not return to it."

He clapped his hands, and the servant came forward.

"This is Chandra," declared Zayata. "He is a Burmese. He will obey your commands as he obeys mine. Chandra open the door of the guest suite!"

Bowing, Chandra advanced to the wall. He pressed an unseen lever. A space opened, and Margaret found herself viewing a miniature apartment every bit as wonderful as the room in which she was sitting.

She arose and went to the entrance. She looked in admiration at the luxurious, comfortable furnishings the beautiful divan, the ornate decorations.

HENRI ZAYATA was speaking. The girl returned to the cushioned seat. Glancing over her shoulder, she saw that the door of the suite was still open.

"Do you like it?" questioned Zayata.

"It is wonderful!" exclaimed the girl.

"It is yours," said the man.

"I I don't understand." Margaret was looking toward Larkin. "What does it mean –"

"You do not understand me," said Zayata's voice, beside her. "When I say it is yours, I mean that it belongs to you; that you are free to keep it although, unlike the emerald ring, it cannot be carried with you. I mean that, should you need a home, you are welcome to that one!"

"But but I have a home –" Margaret objected.

"You intended to leave it."

"When?"

"When Robert Buchanan was ready to provide another one."

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"Of course. But Robert is no longer here. I wonder where he has gone –"

"Robert will not return," said Zayata sadly.

"But my uncle –" The girl was puzzled.

"Suppose," said Zayata softly, "that your uncle would no longer be in his home. Suppose that, if you lived in his house, you would be alone, friendless, worried, extremely unhappy –"

The girl was nodding, even though she did not understand.

"– where would you go?" came Zayata's question.

"I do not know."

"Would you come here, knowing that no one could harm you, knowing that you would be free from worry –"

"I I suppose so," the girl admitted.

"Margaret," said Henri Zayata firmly, "when you leave here, you will go to the greatest unhappiness you have ever experienced. Sadness – difficulties misery all await you. You can avoid them all."

"How?"

"By not leaving here," Zayata answered.

"But my uncle he would wonder about –"

"He will not wonder. You can write a note. Larkin will leave it in your room at your uncle's house. Poor Larkin! He must go back, because he knows –"

"Larkin knows –"

"Yes!" Zayata pointed to the secretary, who was nodding solemnly. "Larkin knows the truth, and he must be there to tell. You know nothing. You can stay away."

"I still don't understand," protested the girl.

"I must tell you, then, even though it will hurt you. Suppose you realized that it would be unsafe for you to live in your uncle's home; that you would be called upon to speak against him. Suppose you knew that you could no longer trust your uncle; that you would be called upon to revile him –"

"I could not do that," Margaret protested.

"But if you knew that all those things were threatening," his voice persisted, "what then? Would it not be better to stay away? To disappear? To be free from scorn and misery? To be here, happy and secure?"

"Yes," admitted Margaret.

"You would stay here, if you were convinced that all that was not only possible but present?"

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"I would," said the girl, in a dazed voice.

"Bring the pen and ink, Larkin," ordered Zayata.

"But I can't write anything," protested Margaret. "Not unless I know know that all these awful things could really be. Tell me tell me –"

"The truth?"

"Yes. The truth!"

HENRI ZAYATA reached forward and pressed the girl's hands between his own. There was something in his touch that reassured Margaret, even though she dreaded what he might have to say. The end of her little world was in sight, although her understanding was vague. Here was sanctuary, while at her uncle's home lurked what strange perils?

"The truth should never hurt," Zayata was saying soothingly. "Never – when it is told by a real friend."

Margaret nodded and bit her lips.

"My uncle –" she began, but went no further. Words failed her.

"Your uncle," said Zayata softly. "Your uncle is a murderer!"

"A murderer?" Margaret's voice was faltering and far away.

"Yes!" Zayata's tone was still quiet. "A murderer. The murderer of – of Robert Buchanan!"

The girl could not even gasp. The words dazed her. She looked away and saw Larkin, standing with paper and pen. The pale-faced secretary was nodding solemnly, his face tinged with sadness.

Margaret Glendenning looked into the eyes of Henri Zayata. Even though this man had told the terrible truth, she felt that he had done it through regard for her. Those dark eyes were full of understanding. Margaret was sure that they were the eyes of a sincere friend.

CHAPTER X. KILLERS AT WORK

CLIFF MARSLAND was correct in his assumption that The Shadow was watching Flash Donegan. Cliff knew, after hearing Dip's vague speech over the phone, that Flash was secure in some room, with no thought of going abroad that night; and he pictured The Shadow close by the spot.

But in that, Cliff Marsland was wrong. The Shadow was far from Flash Donegan's abode.

When Cliff had called Burbank, tonight, he had used a new number. That was not unusual. Burbank changed his number frequently. The old one was always forgotten, and each of The Shadow's agents kept the new one constantly in mind.

Burbank's location was always a matter of the greatest secrecy. So Cliff had thought nothing of the fact that Burbank was in a new place. Yet therein lay the secret of The Shadow's watchfulness over Flash Donegan.

Burbank was sitting in the dark room of an apartment. He had moved in there that very afternoon. The

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apartment was in an old building, where tenants were few, and new ones were welcomed with very little question.

It had not been difficult for Burbank to obtain the very apartment he wanted. As a result, The Shadow's quiet-voiced agent was located in the room directly beneath Flash Donegan.

Before him, on a table, Burbank had two telephones. One had been in the apartment an outside connection used by the previous tenant. It had been restored to service that morning.

The other phone was of Burbank's installation. It had a wire running upward toward the ceiling. Beside it was a switch box. Burbank had been listening over that telephone before Cliff had called by the outside wire.

Burbank was now dialing the outside phone. He had called a number before he had heard from Cliff, but had received no response. Now, with Cliff's call ended, the man in the darkness again dialed.

He heard the ringing; then a low, whispered voice came from the receiver. Burbank replied.

"Burbank reporting," he said.

"Report," came the voice.

A flashlight glimmered. Its tiny spot showed a sheet of paper covered with shorthand notations. Burbank began to read. His report was a complete account of the telephone conversation between Flash Donegan and Dip Riker.

But, unlike Cliff Marsland, Burbank was able to report both ends of the conversation. His statements were verbatim.

"No calls made by Donegan?" came the whispered question, when Burbank had finished speaking.

"None."

"I am standing by. Connect when Donegan receives a call."

"Right!"

Burbank hung up the outside phone and remained silent. He was a patient waiter; it was his business to wait. Yet, this very afternoon, Burbank had indulged in other work.

Flash Donegan had gone out during the afternoon. Burbank had learned of the fact through a call over the outside wire. It was then that Burbank had entered Donegan's apartment, with the aid of a special key that had been left for him.

The Shadow, master of locks, had not neglected to study the fastening on Flash Donegan's door the night on which he had paid his unseen visit.

In Donegan's, Burbank had worked swiftly. When he had finished his labors, not a clew remained. Flash Donegan's wire had been tapped and hooked up with Burbank's second telephone in the room below. It was through this medium that Burbank had listened to every word that had passed between Flash and his subordinate, Dip Riker.

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WITH Burbank at his station, The Shadow was free to conduct other operations. The man who moved swiftly by night was endeavoring to locate Flash Donegan's base of operations the spot where Marty Jennings and Lance Bolero were on duty.

This was no easy task. Only two men could have revealed the place. They were Flash Donegan and Dip Riker. Others, who might have told, were no longer in New York.

There were good reasons why The Shadow did not care to question either Donegan or Riker; but now, since the conversation that Burbank had overheard, it was important that The Shadow should know at once.

Burbank continued his patient waiting. He knew the situation thoroughly.

The Shadow, in his search for Donegan's underlings, had not yet achieved his objective. Perhaps he might be in the vicinity; but he was not actually there.

Marty Jennings and Lance Bolero were in waiting for whoever might come their way. Harry Vincent was en route. A phone call to Flash Donegan would report the capture of The Shadow's agent.

Time went by. A light glowed on the plug box beside Burbank. Instantly the man became active. Flash Donegan was receiving a call!

Burbank dialed The Shadow's number. The response was immediate. Burbank spoke a word of explanation.

Quickly, he inserted plugs. The Shadow, on the outside, was cut in on Donegan's wire. Burbank was adjusting a double-head phone. Through one ear, he could hear Flash Donegan's conversation. Through the other, he could listen to The Shadow.

"That you, Marty?" said Donegan's voice.

"Right, Flash," came the gruff reply.

"What news?"

"Good! Got him!"

Upstairs, Flash Donegan was grinning as he sat at the telephone. A half-emptied bottle of liquor stood beside him.

Flash had been drinking, but his faculties were keen. He prided himself on the quantity he could imbibe without feeling the effects.

"The ride's next," Flash spoke.

"O.K., chief," said Jennings. "We're goin' right now!"

A buzz sounded in Burbank's right ear The Shadow was giving an order. Burbank responded. His deft fingers changed the plugs.

But now the situation was different. Three men were on the wire. Flash Donegan, Marty Jennings, and The Shadow. Neither Flash nor Marty knew what had transpired. The conversation had taken a strange turn one which did not surprise Marty, but which puzzled Flash immensely.

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For Marty Jennings was still hearing the voice of Flash Donegan; but he did not hear what Flash was actually saying!

The answer to this paradox was simple. Marty was listening to another person a man who simulated Flash Donegan's voice so closely that Marty could not detect the difference. Marty Jennings was talking instructions from The Shadow!

Upstairs, Flash Donegan was growling in the mouthpiece. He could hear Marty's replies and interruptions. But they did not make sense. Flash could not understand it. Had his henchman gone crazy?

"Give him the bump, quick!" said Flash.

Marty did not hear it. Instead he heard a voice which he took to be that of Flash which said:

"Have you made the guy talk?"

"No," replied Marty. "We haven't tried."

"Haven't tried!" exclaimed the real Flash Donegan. "I said to give it to him I didn't ask if you had finished the job."

Again, Marty did not hear the utterance. Instead, the false voice reached his ears.

"Maybe he knows something, Marty. We ought to make him squawk."

"O.K., chief," answered Marty. "How do you want it done?"

"Done!" exclaimed Flash Donegan angrily. "You know how to do it. Don't act so dumb. Take the ride quick."

But, instead, "Better hold him until I get there," was the statement that came to Marty from what sounded like Flash's voice.

"O.K.," replied the gunman. "We'll wait for you here."

"I didn't say to wait!" blurted Donegan, confused and angry. "I said to get going. Start now!"

BUT Marty Jennings did not hear the protest. The other voice the voice that was every bit Donegan's was taking another course, prompted by what Flash had actually said.

"It may not be safe to keep him there," were The Shadow's next words. "Take him out, and I'll meet you, on the way to where you're going."

"That's the stuff, chief!" was Marty's enthusiastic response. "You know that alley in back of Howley's old garage on One Hundred and –"

"That will do," came the false voice.

The words served two purposes. They satisfied Marty Jennings that his chief understood. They were also a signal to Burbank. The quiet man switched the plugs.

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The voice of the real Flash Donegan was coming through, to Marty. But Burbank was in readiness. His hands were waiting to again change the lines, should he receive another signal. That proved unnecessary.

"We'll be there in fifteen minutes," Jennings was saying, when Flash himself made an interruption.

"Lay off that talk, Marty," said the racketeer. "Lay off don't you hear me?"

"Sure thing, I hear you," responded Marty. "I've been hearing you all along. I got you straight, chief –"

"Then get going! Do you understand that?"

"You bet. Lance is ready with the buggy. We're hustling."

"That's all, then. Don't waste any time with the guy."

There were two sharp clicks one when Jennings hung up; the other from the receiver in Flash Donegan's room. Burbank made an adjustment of the plugs, and spoke in a low voice over the outside wire.

"They have finished," was all he said.

There was a sibilant reply. Burbank heard a click in his right ear. He removed the head phones. Again, he waited in the darkness of the silent room.

Upstairs, Flash Donegan was talking to himself.

"What was the matter with Marty?" he grumbled. "All he had to do was get the O.K. from me. Asking me how I wanted the guy bumped off. Saying they'd wait for me, when I told him this afternoon that I didn't want to mix in when they caught any snoopers.

"Talking about going to the alley in back of Howley's well, that's a good place to unload a smoke wagon! Nobody near there to hear the shots. Funny how Marty got balled up; well, anyway, he's wise now."

So saying, Flash Donegan helped himself to another drink.

The fate of Harry Vincent was no longer of concern to him. That young man was to pay the penalty for treading within Flash Donegan's domains.

The racketeer had disposed of the matter in the simplest fashion, leaving it to such capable killers as Marty Jennings and Lance Bolero.

WHILE Flash was enjoying his grog in his apartment, Marty Jennings was passing instructions along to Lance Bolero.

"Open the door, Lance," he said. "I'll drive the buggy out. You hop in beside me."

"What's the lay, Marty?"

"Flash thinks we ought to make this guy squawk."

"All right. That's a cinch."

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Lance began to step toward the back seat of the touring car, as though he already had a method in mind.

"Not here, Lance," warned Marty. "Flash is takin' care of it. He's goin' to meet us back of Howley's."

"He didn't say nothin' about it before," said Lance dubiously. "I don't see why –"

"This guy ain't no ordinary bird," responded Marty. "He's got somethin' in mind or he wouldn't have come in right after the others. You know the lay, Lance. After anybody comes along with the sign, we gotta watch close."

"Maybe you'd better call Flash again and –"

"Not on your life! He was sore because I talked as much as I did. He started the gab, though. Go on open the door!"

A minute later, the touring car rolled out through a door that led to the street. Marty Jennings swung the machine westward. Lance Bolero was staring into the back seat to make sure their captive was still well bound and gagged.

"I'm for bumpin' him quick," he growled. "That's what Flash said to do. Knock him off in back of Hawley's an' then travel. There won't be no mistake if we do. I can make a guy squawk; but sometimes it ain't easy to –"

"That would be a fine idea, wouldn't it?" ridiculed Marty. "Suppose Flash should come along afterward –"

"Flash oughta be there as soon as us. He's got his bus ready. It won't take him much time –"

"He might be delayed."

"Listen, Marty." Lance was insistent. "Maybe you got mixed up on this. You should 'a' let me talk to Flash, too. You know what he told us. Get any guy out quick –"

"Yeah, but he told me to tip him off to–night, if we nabbed anybody. We did. That's what he says: wait.

"But suppose we fix it this way, Lance: I'm takin' my time gettin' to Howley's. If Flash ain't there, we'll know he ain't comin'. Give him a few minutes then the works for this gazebo!"

"Now you're talkin', Marty!" agreed Lance, pleased at the compromise.

The touring car rolled on in silence. At one spot, it passed close by a traffic officer, who gave it no attention. Finally, the automobile turned into a small side street, and Marty, after an alert glance in both directions, piloted it into a narrow alley.

The place widened out after twenty yards. It was an open space in back of a deserted building the old garage which had been abandoned. The structure was awaiting the wreckers.

"A good spot," commented Lance. "We were comin' here, anyway. Just as well that Flash liked it. But I don't see him around."

"Lay low," replied Marty, as he parked the car at the side of the open space. The lights were out, and the automobile was practically invisible. "Wait a couple of minutes, Lance."

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Silence reigned while Marty Jennings stared straight ahead. Lance reached back into the rear of the car and prodded Harry Vincent to make sure the captive was still under control.

"I'm takin' a look," whispered Marty.

He slipped from the front seat, and Lance could hear the soft crunching of his feet. Marty was walking around the car. Lance felt uncomfortable. He did not like the delay. Silently, he drew his automatic and inclined it toward the form in back.

A few shots in the dark that would end the wait! Marty would be back in the car in an instant. They would have to leave in a hurry. Lance could explain that the captive had been releasing himself.

With an evil chuckle, Lance pressed his automatic against Harry's body. He felt the muzzle nudge against the helpless man's ribs. The temptation was enough.

"Here goes!" muttered Lance, as he placed his finger upon the trigger.

AT that instant, a hand caught the gunman's wrist. The door of the car had been opened so softly that Lance had not known it.

The clutching hand was invisible a thing of blackness that had come as if from nowhere. It swept Lance Bolero's arm upward. The shot from the automatic shattered the rear window of the car.

With an oath, Lance was grappling for his unseen opponent. Down came another hand, swinging a heavy revolver. Lance purely by accident dodged the blow as he shot forward over the back of the seat.

Lance Bolero was stocky and heavy. He was one of the toughest rowdies in gangdom. His attack was delivered with a mad fury, for he no longer held his automatic. It had clattered to the floor, twisted from his grasp. A form came up to stop him, but Lance had launched himself forward and downward.

The other man went back as the gangster's body struck him. Together, they hurtled from the side of the car to the ground below. Lance was on top, his eager fingers clutching for the other man's throat. The body beneath him took the full force of the fall. Lance was sure that his enemy was stunned.

Then came amazement for Lance Bolero. He heard metal click against the paving his antagonist's revolver had dropped. Even as Lance clutched the other's throat, two powerful hands were upon the eager gangster.

A forearm came behind Bolero's neck. The two-hundred-pound form of the fighting gangster turned a complete somersault, and was hurtled, back upward, a few feet away.

The back of Lance's head crashed against the paving. Flung as though he had been a man of straw, Lance Bolero was stunned and helpless.

Some one was climbing in the car from the other side. It was Marty Jennings. Kneeling upon Harry Vincent's body, the gangster knew that Bolero had been attacked by a stranger from the dark.

A flashlight glimmered in Marty's hand. It disclosed the scene before him. Lance Bolero was on the ground, dazed. Beside him, closer to the car, was a man in black, half rising from the ground.

The sable cloak of the man gave him a weird appearance. He seemed a shapeless mass, topped by a slouch hat. In a twinkling, Marty saw a black-gloved hand reaching to the ground. The hand was after a revolver

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that lay there.

Marty fired for the head that topped the cloak. "Shoot 'em in the face!" was his motto.

He knew that a bullet through the head would spell certain doom for the man who had overcome Lance Bolero. But the man in black had divined Marty's act to the split second. He seemed to collapse as Marty fired.

The gangster's bullet clipped the top of the slouch hat. The automatic swung from the ground and spat flame as it rose.

Had The Shadow's shot been wild, he would never have fired again. For Marty Jennings was aiming a second shot that could not have missed its mark.

But The Shadow's marksmanship was unerring. There was but one spot at which he could fire, and be sure of hitting his target. His bullet found that spot the flashlight in Marty Jennings's left hand.

THE electric torch was shattered. Marty's left hand fell, numbed and helpless. That stopped his shooting for the moment. Then he began to pepper away, his bullets ricocheting from the cement below.

Where was The Shadow? It seemed incredible that the man could have arisen and fled from the spot in so few seconds!

Marty was leaning forward, firing another shot when a revolver answered from below. The Shadow had rolled beneath the touring car. The final flash of Marty's automatic had shown the position of the gangster's body.

Again, The Shadow's aim was true. The bullet shattered Marty's shoulder. He lost his balance and hung from the side of the car. The Shadow's gloved hand wrested his gun away. The man in black arose and flung the crippled gangster from the car.

The motor started. The car shot forward; then backward. It headed forward again, and made a wide swerve toward the narrow alley. Its headlights illuminated the scene.

Marty Jennings was groaning on the ground. Lance Bolero, raised to his elbow, was scrambling to escape the oncoming headlights. The car shot by the disarmed gangsters. Harry Vincent, still bound in the rear of the automobile, could see none of this.

But he knew that he had been rescued by The Shadow. He knew that his release was close at hand. For, as the car roared its way toward the street, he heard a sound that he had heard before a chilling sound that he dreaded even though he had no cause to fear it.

It was the mocking laugh of The Shadow the weird, sardonic laugh that brought terror to all creatures of the underworld.

The Shadow, carrying Harry to freedom, was jeering the men whom he had conquered jeering them with triumphant merriment!

CHAPTER XI. CARDONA TRACES MURDER

THE sensational death of Charles Blefken was the greatest crime news of the year. The dead attorney had been a man of high repute. The killing that had taken place in his own home, with friends and a detective present, was evidence that a bold and relentless killer was at work.

Cardona had been busy on the case all that night. The next noon found him at headquarters. A few short hours of sleep had renewed his vigor. Grim-visaged as ever, the star detective spoke with thin, firm lips as he talked to the reporters.

"I was there because we expected trouble," was Cardona's admission. "But get this straight, boys: Blefken walked into it! He did the wise thing when he called on me. His mistake was in what followed. If he hadn't left that room, he'd be alive to-day!"

"Look here, Cardona," said one of the police reporters. "We've printed your statement. We've been sent down here to get more if you've got anything else to say. There's one point they're all asking. Why did you let Middleton get out of that room?"

"Let's see one of the morning newspapers," retorted Cardona. "I haven't had time to look at any of them."

A reporter pulled a newspaper from his pocket. Cardona spread the sheet and stared at the front page. All of the reporters were eyeing him closely.

A frown appeared upon Cardona's swarthy visage. The detective's lips grew tighter, and for a moment he appeared on the point of rage. Then he gave vent to his feelings by crumpling the paper and casting it in the corner. His fists tightened as he glared at his inquisitors. After that, his natural calmness returned.

"I've come in for a panning, eh?" he questioned. "That's a nice play-up you've given this case. Making me look like a dummy! Incompetent, eh?"

"It's not my fault, Cardona," retorted the reporter who had spoken before. "I'm sent out to get facts. Maybe you're right about Blefken walking into trouble. But look at the facts that's what we're after.

"You let the murderer get away. Your statement shows that Middleton was dangerous. We've printed the letter he sent to Blefken. The time element is bad, too. One minute you said he was gone. Yet he managed to choke Blefken and make a clean get-away while you were finding the body and raising a holler –"

The speaker stopped short. Cardona's eyes were blazing with suppressed rage. The reporter knew it was not wise to go on. The others shifted uneasily. They did not know what to expect.

"My statement still stands," declared Cardona firmly. "That's all I care to say. My statement stands!"

"All right." The talkative reporter shrugged his shoulders and left the room. The others waited.

"See Inspector Klein, if you want more," bawled out Cardona furiously. "See him. See if he thinks I'm incompetent –"

He caught himself, realizing that this scene would do him no good in print. He smiled sourly; then sat down at his desk and began to study some reports.

Men left the room, and when their footsteps died away, a wan smile came over Cardona's rigid features. He

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fumbled among the pile of papers and produced a photograph.

It showed a reproduction of a thumb print. Next, Cardona brought out an envelope. He stopped before opening it. He looked around, conscious that he was being watched. He saw Clyde Burke standing near.

"What are you doing here?" demanded the detective. "I thought you'd gone out with the rest of those news hounds."

"I've stayed to talk with you, Joe."

"You heard what I said. That's sufficient!"

"Not for me!" Burke smiled broadly. "I know you too well, Joe."

"What do you mean?"

"That poker face of yours. It wouldn't have slipped up when you saw the newspaper, unless –"

CARDONA was staring with keen interest as Clyde Burke paused to let his words make a definite impression.

"– unless," resumed Burke, "you were thinking of something else. Unless you were so sure of yourself that the wisecracks in the newspapers would come as a surprise."

"So you think I've got something up my sleeve?"

"I know it," returned Clyde. "Positively! I was sure when the others left; I stayed on that account. I've been watching you."

"You're a good guy, Burke," declared Cardona, gazing speculatively toward the wall. "You've always treated me right. So I'm going to return the favor. I'm going to let you have a story for the Classic that will knock the daylight out of these phonies."

Burke grinned at Cardona's reference to the other newspaper reporters.

"They're panning me," declared Cardona, "because I let Middleton get away. They're already calling Middleton the 'society slayer.' That's what the headline said on that newspaper."

Cardona wagged his thumb toward the corner, where he had thrown the paper. Burke nodded knowingly.

"Well," continued Cardona, "they're all wet all but you, Burke. Picking my statement to pieces. Saying I've committed myself as incompetent not one of them seeing that my statement itself proves that I didn't have a chance to get the killer."

"How's that?" Burke was interested.

"Look at the time element," retorted Cardona. "The very factor they hold against me. I followed Middleton in less than one minute after he was gone. Less than one minute, mind you, Burke. Have you seen the body?"

"Yes," replied Burke, wondering why Cardona had so suddenly shifted his discussion.

"Did you see the marks on the throat?"

"Yes."

"Those deep thumb prints?"

"Yes."

Cardona paused to give Burke time to reflect. The reporter was pondering, but his thoughts were far different from what Cardona supposed.

Clyde was thinking of a thin white line an almost invisible mark – that had girdled the neck of Charles Blefken. He was also recalling a dim spot on the dead man's forehead.

Clyde Burke had observed both of these, because he was looking for them; but it was evident that Joe Cardona had not seen them.

"The thumb prints," repeated Cardona expressively. "Pretty deep, weren't they? Lots of pressure, wasn't there? Now just figure it out. Middleton was in that little room. When he left, I followed –"

"I got you, Joe!" cried Clyde, a sudden intelligence dawning. "Middleton had only one minute to get out in that hall, murder Charles Blefken, and make his get-away –"

"You've got it! Give him half a minute at the most to choke Blefken. He couldn't have done it, Burke. Impossible.

"Furthermore, it was more than five minutes closer, maybe, to ten – from the time that Blefken left the cardroom until his body was found. Where was he all that time? He was due back in the lounge. There was nowhere else that he could go."

"Then some killer was waiting for him –"

"That's it, exactly."

"In the little passageway." Burke was picturing the scene. He had been to Blefken's house that morning.

"Which was pitch-dark," prompted Cardona.

"And the killer got him!" Burke went on. "Caught him as he was coming back. Choked him to death. Long, heavy pressure. Then the murderer must have left, very quickly."

"He did leave. Before Middleton came along, as I reckon it," Cardona agreed.

"How do you explain Middleton's action?" asked Burke.

"Simply enough," said Cardona. "He may have gone to find Blefken. I thought that at first; but I figure it different, now.

"I think Middleton was beating it. Nervous. He was on his way to that side door hesitating, maybe but when he stumbled across the body, he kept right on going.

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"Why?" questioned Clyde.

"Why?" echoed Cardona. "Plenty of reason why. He'd have been the goat. What was he doing in the place?"

"He had come to prevent Blefken's murder. He had failed. Only Blefken knew about it; at least, that's what Middleton thought."

"I see," said Clyde. "Say, that all fits together, Joe! You think Middleton was on the level, then?"

"I'm not guaranteeing that," replied Cardona cautiously. "I've seen too many crazy killers to believe everything a man like Middleton might say. Perhaps he was an accomplice. One thing is certain. He wasn't the actual killer!"

CARDONA had begun his statement in a guarded tone. His last words were spoken with positiveness. The detective leaned close to the chair where Clyde was sitting.

"Burke," he said confidently, "I could have told those fellows plenty. I'm telling you, because I'm going to let you stick along with me. Not a line for your paper until I say the word. Then you can blow the works."

"Within an hour, I'll have the man who murdered Charles Blefken!"

Clyde Burke had not expected this startling announcement. The reporter had played a hunch. He had hoped to learn some hidden angle of the lawyer's death. Instead, he had uncovered a gold mine of hot news.

Clyde knew Cardona well. Not for an instant did he doubt the detective's statement. Joe Cardona never counted his game until it was as good as in the bag.

"Take a look at this," said Cardona quietly.

He opened the envelope. From it he drew a folded strip of cloth. He unrolled it. The cloth had been torn from the inside of a man's coat. At the top was a section of a label, bearing the inscription:

HELMSF

Tai

New

"Make anything of that?" quizzed the detective.

"Looks like a clothing tag," said Clyde.

"Not much of a guess, is there?" laughed the detective. "You've probably never heard of the concern. Small but exclusive: 'Helmsford Brothers. Tailors. New York.' That's the complete name."

"Here's something just as important. Notice that bit of gray cloth that came off with the lining?"

Clyde nodded.

"All right," continued Joe Cardona. "This was clutched in Charles Blefken's hand. I found it just after the doctor declared him dead. I took it."

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"The minute I had a good look at it, I knew that Middleton wasn't the man I wanted. He was wearing a dark-blue suit. That bit of gray cloth indicated another person.

"I didn't wait until daylight. At three o'clock this morning, I had James Helmsford, head of the tailoring concern, in his shop.

"Luck was with me, Burke. This Helmsford outfit are a high-priced crowd. They know their cloth when they see it. Helmsford showed me a remainder of the same material.

"He checked up. Found they were keeping it for a man named Clinton Glendenning. He owns two suits of this same stuff. His own private material, you might say.

"I put Williamson covering Glendenning's house from then on. At ten o'clock this morning, a young man came out, carrying a gray suit. He took it to a little tailor's shop a block away. Williamson and his men grabbed him.

"They took him and the suit to the nearest police station, and got in touch with me.

"I've just come from there, Burke. There's a piece ripped out of that suit matches this to a dot!"

Burke could see elation gleaming in Cardona's eyes. He knew that there was more to come.

"They're still watching the house," said Cardona. "I've quizzed the young fellow that they pinched. He wouldn't talk until he saw me. Then he began to let a lot off his mind.

"He's Glendenning's secretary. His name is Elder Larkin. Been working for the old man for several years. He's been worried because of things that were going on around the place. Glendenning sent him out last night, he says. When he came back, the old man wasn't there.

"Came in afterward. Larkin noticed he acted funny. This morning the old man gave him the suit, and told him to have it repaired right away. Said it had been torn in the door of a taxicab.

"Larkin was to go downtown. Not expected back until one o'clock. So I told the boys to hold the pinch until I joined them. I came down here hotfoot, leaving Williamson watching the house.

"We've got the key to the front door. Larkin gave it to us. That secretary's going to be valuable.

"Inspector Klein is to meet me here. He's going up to the place with me. We're timing the entrance close to one o'clock, so, if there's any noise, the old man will think it's Larkin coming in.

"We've got the place covered like a blanket. And when I come in here, all keen, and set to go, what do I run into? A bunch of newspaper punks wanting to know what's the matter with me! They'll find out. You're the only real guy in the crew, Burke."

A MAN entered the doorway. It was Inspector Timothy Klein. Joe Cardona was picking up the photographic sheet as the inspector entered. He rushed over and showed it to Klein.

"If Glendenning's mitts match these, we've got him sure!" exclaimed Cardona. "Let's get started, chief. I'll tell you more on the way up."

Inspector Klein looked disapprovingly toward Clyde Burke. Cardona grinned to show that it was all right.

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"Burke's coming with us," he said. "We're going to let one reporter see how we work. This is one fellow who will treat us right. He deserves the break."

Cardona was buzzing in Klein's ear as the three men rode rapidly uptown in a police car. Burke caught very few words of their conversation. It seemed no time at all before the car pulled up at a corner, and the men alighted.

"Down the next street," said Cardona. "Didn't want to come too close with the car. Not a body in sight. Great! Williamson's doing a nice covering job."

"Stay back. I'll take care of this, chief."

Clyde Burke remained with Inspector Klein. They saw Cardona sidle along the street and step into a doorway. He evidently held a short conference with a man hidden there.

Shortly afterward, the star detective reappeared and moved on to a house with stone steps. He went up and unlocked a door. He disappeared inside.

Two other plain-clothes men appeared as if by magic. They entered the same door, as reinforcements for their leader. Tense moments followed. Then came the shrill sound of a whistle. Half a dozen men sprang into view.

"Come on," said the inspector.

He and Burke jogged along the street and followed the men ahead. The trail led up a flight of stairs and around a corner. They passed men who were opening doors and prying everywhere.

They came into the front room. There, in a chair, sat an old, gray-haired man, his hands raised above his head. His lips were moving. He was uttering incoherent threats.

Cardona was covering Clinton Glendenning with an automatic. As the inspector arrived, the detective motioned to two of his men. They took Glendenning into custody.

For an instant, the old man looked as though he intended to begin a fight. He gripped one of his captors' arms in a viselike clutch.

But the sight of Cardona's automatic brought his hands up again. Handcuffed, he was led away.

"Down to headquarters with him, Williamson," came Cardona's order to a solemn-faced detective who was standing by the door. "We'll be there shortly. Have Larkin there, too."

A bundle of keys lay on Glendenning's table. Cardona jingled them; then spied the door that led to the old man's bedroom. He entered, followed by Klein and Burke.

There were curtains beyond. The detective spread them and uncovered a narrow staircase that led to the floor below. Footsteps sounded from below.

Cardona hailed. It was one of his men. The fellow joined them.

"What's down there?" asked Cardona.

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"Nothing," was the reply. "This is just a short cut to the first floor."

"We'll go down the other way," declared Cardona.

They started along the hall. They stopped at the end, and Cardona tried a locked door.

"Glendenning has a niece," explained Cardona. "This is her room when she's home. The secretary said she went away. The old man doesn't know she's gone."

He tried a few keys, and finally opened the door. The room was plain, but neatly furnished. Cardona strode across to look at something lying on the table. In another minute, he was reading a note, aloud:

"UNCLE CLINTON:

"I have left. I can bear it here no longer. I have been deceived. I know now what has become of the one I loved. I can never forget him. Do not fear that I shall ever tell what I have learned about you. Simply know that I am out of your life forever.

"MARGARET."

THE detective passed the note to the inspector, who studied it close to the window.

"The girl was wise," declared Cardona. "She must have found out the old man's game. Maybe we can trace her."

There was a call from downstairs. Cardona hastened in that direction. Clyde Burke followed. What a scoop this all would be for the Classic!

But even more this thought was Clyde's most important one it would make a report of high value to The Shadow!

"How about this door?" a plainclothes man was questioning Cardona, in the hall at the back of the stairs. "Looks like it leads down to the cellar."

Cardona was busy with the keys. The door opened. The detective's flashlight showed a wall switch. Cardona pressed it, but there was no illumination.

With his electric lantern, the ace detective started down the steps. He reached the cellar with Burke, and the other man behind him.

A nailed-up coal bin caught Cardona's eye. The detective moved forward to investigate. His assistant wrested with the boards, and Clyde Burke lent a hand. An opening was made, and all stepped through.

In the corner of the compartment was a heavy box, fastened with a padlock. None of the keys answered. The man who had called Cardona disappeared. He returned with a hammer.

The lock resisted his first blows; then a well-directed stroke shattered it. Cardona raised the lid of the box and let his flashlight glare into the interior.

The lid of the box dropped. Cardona turned to the other men, who were at the entrance of the bin. Cardona's arm was lowered; the flashlight glared upward, and the detective's solemn face showed strangely as the rays

revealed it.

"What is it?" exclaimed Clyde, startled at the sudden change that had swept over Cardona.

"A body," replied the detective slowly. "A body. The dead body of a man murdered! Another victim murdered by the fiend that we have captured!"

CHAPTER XII. DONEGAN PREPARES

IT was Friday evening. Flash Donegan was glum as he sat in his dim apartment. He stared at the wall of the room, and swore feelingly. For Flash Donegan was not pleased with the way matters had been going.

Some one tapped at the door. Flash recognized the sound. He called out, "Come in!"

The door opened, and Dip Riker entered. Flash greeted his underling with a snarl.

"It's time you showed up!" he growled. "Fine egg you are! Don't stand there gawking. Get in here and sit down. I want to talk to you."

Dip obeyed. Despite the fact that he felt himself the equal of Flash Donegan, the wolfish gangster knew that he was at fault. Something had gone wrong last night.

Dip had not yet learned what it was. He sat down and tried to meet Donegan's glare, but failed. Dip shifted uneasily in his chair.

"You caused plenty of trouble," said Flash accusingly. "If you'd stuck to your job, we'd be all right now. Why didn't you trail that guy Vincent?"

"I did trail him, Flash," protested Dip. "But you know I've got to be careful. It would have been all off if he'd spotted me. I couldn't stick too close to him."

"You weren't doing any good by being in a speakeasy," retorted Flash. "You should have been sticking close to the hotel. Last night was the big night and you asleep!"

"It was an accident, Flash," responded Dip. "Honest. I thought a guy was goin' to slug me, an' I started to pull my gat. Then a whole mob lit on me. I was in a bad jam, Flash."

"There was a guy there helped me out. Say, Flash" Dip was seeking to arouse enthusiasm "there's a bird we can use, any time you need him. Cliff Marsland. He's an ace. He's a friend of Pete's —"

"Don't talk about that now," broke in Flash. "I'm not figuring on who I'm going to get with me. I'm wondering how I can get rid of mugs like you. Think that over!"

Dip Riker did think it over. He sat silently, watching Flash from the corner of his eyes. Rebukes were not to Dip's liking; but he could furnish no retort.

At times, he was on the verge of speaking, but invariably thought better of it. Flash did not reopen the conversation.

Twenty minutes passed, and Dip began to wonder why Flash Donegan had summoned him here to-night. Certainly they were gaining nothing by silence.

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Dip wanted to talk, but every time he opened his mouth, the sight of Flash stopped him. The smooth-mannered racketeer was in an evil humor. Dip had no desire to further arouse his ire.

There was another rap at the door. Flash growled in response. In came Lance Bolero. Flash motioned the tawny gunman to a chair.

Bolero looked at Dip Riker. He sensed the situation. Like Dip, Lance was not anxious to talk.

But Flash Donegan was demanding now. He acted as though he had two miserable offenders before him. He was ready to denounce the pair. He chose Lance Bolero as his victim.

"So you botched it last night, eh?" he quizzed. "Marty's on the shelf, eh? Serves him right for not doing what I told him. You're to blame, too. Why did you let that guy get away? You're yellow!"

Bolero's eyes blazed; but he managed to control himself. A crafty look appeared upon his face. He knew what Flash expected. Excuses. Bolero began on another tack.

"You're talkin' about last night, are you?" he demanded. "Well, that's what I came to see you about. Last night.

"You gave me an' Marty a bum steer. That's all. There's only one way a guy can figure it. You were givin' us the double cross!"

FLASH DONEGAN was on his feet, threatening. His fists were close to Bolero's face. Lance did not quail. He was willing to meet Flash any time.

"You'll take that back," growled Flash.

"Maybe you'll take back what you said," retorted Lance.

"You called me a double-crosser!"

"Well, you said I was yellow!"

Dip broke in with a raucous laugh. The scene appeared to be amusing him.

"Quit actin' like a couple of punks," he said. "There's no use in callin' each other names. What's the matter with you to-night, Flash? You don't give a guy a chance to say nothin'. Be yourself!"

Flash Donegan turned away, disgruntled. He realized that there was common sense in what Dip said; at the same time, he could not forget the bungling that had destroyed his plans.

One reflection, however, persuaded him that he should not be too hasty. It was not Lance Bolero who had done the greatest bungling. Marty Jennings had been the principal offender.

Swinging, Flash looked at the men before him, turning his gaze from one to the other. He finally centered on Bolero.

"All right, Lance," he said quietly. "Let's forget the argument. Maybe I'm wrong. Give me the low-down on why the job flopped last night."

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"It was that phone call, first of all," said Lance, feeling easy now that Flash was mollified. "We were on the job all right. The guy an' the moll went by they gave the signal leastwise the guy did.

"Then the snooper showed up. We grabbed him. Marty called you, like he was supposed to do. When he got through talkin', Marty told me that you wanted to meet us –"

"Marty's crazy!" roared Flash indignantly.

"That's what I thought" agreed Lance pleasantly. "I was for bumpin' the guy right away. But Marty said we were goin' to wait for you at Howley's. That's where we went like he told you when he called up.

"When we got there, he climbed out of the car to look around."

"A fool idea," interjected Flash.

"That's what I told him," insisted Lance. "It gave me the heebie–jeebies. Then I figured I could tie the can on the foolishness. The guy we nabbed was tied up in the back of the car. I pulled my smoke wagon an' was all set to give him the works."

"Why didn't you do it?"

"I would have. Only a guy pops up from nowhere an' grabs me. If Marty had been in the buggy with me, we'd have been all right.

"But the guy gets my gun, an' when I heave him out of the car, he gives me a twist, an' I land on the back of my head. I was knocked cold, Flash."

"So was I," interposed Dip.

"Shut up," growled Flash. "Lance has got an excuse. You haven't! Go on, Lance."

"I got one shot in," continued Lance. "Just one, before I got socked. But the shot didn't do no good, except to wake up Marty, wherever he was.

"While I was lyin' cold, he tried to plug the bird. But the guy got him instead. An' away he goes, in the bus."

"Well, you didn't do so bad, Lance. Marty was to blame. He's out of it from now on."

"You're right he's out of it!" Lance agreed. "He'd be pushin' up posies, if I hadn't been there. I got him off in a taxi an' took him to a medico who don't ask questions. He won't be back on the job for a month."

"We can do without him," said Flash.

"Yeah?" There was a peculiar significance in Lance Bolero's tone that made Donegan stare. "Maybe you could do without me, too. I'm not workin' short–handed not after what I found out. I talked to Marty while he was groanin' in the cab."

"What of it?"

"Well, I found out who it was that got him."

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"Who?"

"The Shadow!"

FLASH DONEGAN stared hard at the speaker. Dip Riker did the same. An expression of unbelief appeared on Flash's face. The racketeer's lips formed a sour grin. His countenance changed, however, when he looked at Dip Riker.

The evil-faced gangster was white. His eyes were those of a hunted creature. The mention of that one name The Shadow had struck terror into his heart.

Flash Donegan became uneasy when he witnessed his henchman's fright. He looked again at Lance Bolero. He saw that the swarthy gunman was as perturbed as Dip.

"The Shadow!" Flash attempted to echo the name with ridicule. But the hushed tone of his voice was ominous.

He laughed shortly; then added: "Somebody's put one over on you, Lance. What did this guy look like?"

"I didn't see him," responded Bolero. "I grabbed him but it was dark. There ain't no ordinary guy can break my strangle hold, Flash. I never run into a bird like this one, before.

"When I came to, I was wonderin' what had happened. Then, when Marty spilled his story, I knew who it was, all right!"

"I've heard a lot of fool talk about this four-flusher they call The Shadow," said Flash, in an even tone. "But I always thought it was punks who were scared of him. Not gorillas like you fellows claim to be.

"Great stuff! Falling for a lot of hokum –"

"Listen, Flash." Dip was talking earnestly. "Lance ain't handin' you no hokum. If Marty Jennings said it was The Shadow, he ain't foolin'. Marty's seen him before.

"He ain't the only one I know that's seen him. If we've crossed The Shadow, it's goin' to be tough for all of us. I'm tellin' you!"

"He's a bad actor," declared Lance. "There's a lot of fellows that ain't around to tell what happened to them, after they tried to buck The Shadow."

Flash Donegan was impressed by these statements. Secretly, he had felt fear when he had heard Lance Bolero's revelation. His pose of unconcern was merely affected to keep his henchmen from becoming more alarmed.

"What did you find out about this guy Vincent?" Flash questioned Dip. "What was his game? Where's he from?"

"I figured him for a dick," replied Dip. "Couldn't get anything on him."

"Well, I'll tell you what he's doing," declared Flash. "He's working with The Shadow, that's what! He must have got there ahead of The Shadow up at the warehouse.

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"Well, The Shadow got him out of a jam, but he won't do it again!"

FLASH began to pace the room, talking in a low voice, as though expressing thoughts to himself. There was a purpose in this action. He wanted to fill Dip and Lance with confidence by giving them an idea of their own importance.

"The Shadow, eh?" Flash was sneering. "Tough guy? Well, he's not tough enough for us. If he's what they say he is, he'll be back up there, snooping.

"It won't do him any good to—night. He couldn't crash that gate without a charge of dynamite. But we're not going to let any chances slip. We're going to get The Shadow!"

He gazed at his henchmen impressively.

"We've only been watching there when something was doing," he continued. "But from now on, it's every night. Marty's on the fritz. That means there's only two of you. Dip can't be there all the while."

"I gotta pal," began Lance.

"We need more than one," declared Flash. "I'm getting up a mob, boys. It's going to be curtains for The Shadow!"

"Now you two keep mum. Be sure of the gorillas you get. Take on some bozos that are quick with the rod, and not afraid to use it. I don't care who we have to bump off so long as we get The Shadow.

"Remember, I'm slipping you fellows some extra gravy, and I'm counting on you!"

"How many rods do you want?" questioned Dip.

"Four. Besides you two," was the answer.

"I'll get two," asserted Lance Bolero. "I'll have Tony Caprona and Gringo Butz on the job to—night. They were goin' to join up with Bush Holman's crew, before Bush got bumped off. I'll have them to—night. Tony an' Gringo, both."

"How about you, Dip?" asked Flash. "I'm interested now in this guy you were telling me about."

"Cliff Marsland? He's an ace, Flash. Just came in from Chi. He's a killer. Smooth with the rod. He's worth any two guys —"

"Get him, then. Find another guy besides. Keep on the job from now on. You take charge, Lance up there. You're to keep me posted, Dip, like you've been doing.

"And look over these rods that Lance is getting. Tell me if they're O.K. Any guy that looks suspicious give him the works."

The two gangsters nodded in unison. Flash Donegan waved them to the door. When they were gone, the smooth-faced racketeer took a bottle from behind the table and poured himself a drink.

"So The Shadow's in this, eh?" he growled. "Well, it's going to be too bad for The Shadow. I know his game.

"The Shadow works alone, as a rule. That's what they say. Well, I don't work alone. When I need a mob, I get one. That's what The Shadow's up against a mob!"

Flash poured himself another drink, and stood grinning with the bottle in his hand.

"Even Dip and Lance don't know," he said in a low voice. "Even they don't know what this racket's all about. If they don't know, The Shadow isn't going to know. The Shadow a big shot nix!" Flash laughed his contempt.

"I'm backed by a bigger guy than The Shadow! A guy that's bigger than The Shadow ever thought of being. Let him come on The Shadow. We're ready for him!"

CHAPTER XIII. THE TEMPLE OF SILENCE

THE next night, Flash Donegan left his apartment and walked around the corner to the parking space where he kept his car. He was cautious, for he was bound on a very definite errand.

It was nearly midnight when he left the apartment, and once Flash was in his car, he sped rapidly northward. Nearing his destination, he parked on a side street and alighted. He sauntered through the darkness until he reached the man-made canyon that ran between the two warehouses.

Flash was alert. He was watching and listening, eager to detect any sign that might denote the presence of the watching men. But all was silent. Flash smiled to himself. This invisible lookout was to his liking.

Flash entered the narrow opening and walked slowly onward. He was listening for any sound. This narrow passageway, with its outlets on parallel streets, formed a perfect trap.

The watchers had their instructions. Any one could enter here; but leaving the snare was a different matter. Harry Vincent had learned that fact. Flash smiled at the thought.

Halfway along the paved alleyway, Flash stopped. His hand came from his coat pocket. A tiny green light glimmered with three distinct twinkles.

This was a signal that Harry Vincent had not seen Larkin give. Flash Donegan turned to his left and pressed against the wall. A door swung inward.

The racketeer entered the pitch-dark passage.

The door swung silently behind him. It blotted out the faintest trace of light that remained the dim whiteness of the warehouse across the alleyway. Flash advanced and went through the second door into the lighted corridor.

He stopped after he had gone a few steps. He had the peculiar sensation that he was not alone. He glanced back toward the door through which he had come. There was only gloom at the end of the corridor, punctuated by small lights in the center of the passage.

Flash stared into the black shadows that obscured the end of the wall. For a moment he felt impelled to go back and probe that patch of gloom. Then he laughed at his folly. His dull mirth sounded hollow in the stone-walled corridor.

Flash turned and went ahead, his footsteps echoing as he walked. He moved into the darkness of the side

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passage. There he waited for a moment. There was no sound.

Flash moved along. He was satisfied now that no person was lurking in the outer corridor. He reached the elevator and entered.

An instant later, there were two clicks, and the door closed, while the light came on. Flash was staring at the walls of the shaft as the lift crept toward the roof.

The racketeer was a trifle impatient at the slow progress. He looked upward and gave no thought to the little compartment in which he was riding.

So close that a mere motion of the racketeer's arm would have warned him of another presence, stood a tall form clad in black. Silently, gliding in like a ghost, the man had entered the elevator in the darkness, simultaneously with Flash Donegan!

The being in black might have been Donegan's shadow, for his entire shape was of that sable hue. Donegan was wearing a soft hat. His coat was open, and a scarf hung over his shoulders.

The solid shadow behind him was almost a replica of his contour. The large hat, the edges of the cloak, the black-gloved hands all these were a fantastic representation. But this shadow was a living one. It was The Shadow!

THE elevator stopped at the top of the shaft. It reached an opening. Flash Donegan stepped out and walked along the dim corridor ahead. Softly, noiseless as any shadow, the man in black followed.

Flash turned into a dark entrance at the side of the corridor. The Shadow kept on and sidled against the wall.

His action was a timely one. The racketeer, acting upon some sudden impulse, leaned back from the opening which he had entered, and threw a suspicious glance back along the corridor to the elevator.

He saw nothing, and the light in the little lift assured him that all was well. With a grunt of satisfaction, Flash moved on to the spiral stairway.

His footsteps clanked upon the metal as he descended the twisting way. Again The Shadow was behind the racketeer, keeping pace with him. But The Shadow's feet made no sound whatever.

Had Flash decided to look up, he would have seen no one. For the sharp curve to the staircase kept The Shadow entirely out of view.

At the foot of the stairway, Flash came to the sliding door. It opened. The racketeer went in. The door closed behind him. Flash looked about the oddly papered room while it was moving upward.

He was actually alone now. The Shadow had not followed here.

Soon Flash Donegan was standing before the carved door that bore the lion's head. He saw the greenish glow of peering eyes. He passed inspection. The door slid aside, and Flash entered the reception hall.

He went no farther. It was evidently unnecessary for Flash to see the man who lived here. Chandra, the Burmese, approached, and Flash pulled a crinkling envelope from his pocket.

"Wait," said the servant.

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He was gone for several minutes. When he returned, he carried a large slate. Upon it, inscribed in closely written words, was a message which Flash perused. It was the answer to the note which the racketeer had sent in to Henri Zayata.

"The master cannot see you now," informed Chandra. "He is busy. This is his reply."

Flash nodded and chuckled. He gave the slate back to the Burmese, and turned toward the oaken door. Zayata's reply was sufficient.

Chandra opened the door, and Flash returned to the moving room. The oak-paneled door closed. Flash descended and alighted at the foot of the spiral stairway.

He saw no one here. It was very dark behind the curving base of the iron staircase. Flash did not give any attention to the narrow space that existed there. He started his upward trip. His footsteps clanked less noticeably as he reached the top.

Then a form emerged from the space at the base of the stairs. It grew from nothingness a black shape that took on the semblance of a human being. The Shadow, tall and mysterious, stood alone.

He advanced to the sliding door in front of the staircase. Here, black-clad hands began to probe. A thin, pliable instrument of steel gleamed dully in the dim light.

A secret spring clicked; the sliding door moved back. The Shadow entered the room with the curious wall paper. There, he remained, silent and unmoving.

Upstairs, Henri Zayata reclined upon the gorgeous divan. Beside him sat Margaret Glendenning. The girl was attired in a sweeping gown a luxurious garment that she had found in the closet of the guest room.

She had enjoyed her stay at Henri Zayata's mysterious and magnificent abode. She sighed as she realized that some time she must leave these delightful surroundings.

ZAYATA heard the sigh. He turned to the girl, a look of grave concern upon his face. His eyes were questioning and sympathetic. Margaret smiled.

"I was just thinking," she said. "Thinking how wonderful it is here. Thinking how much I shall dislike leaving."

"Leaving?" questioned Zayata gently.

"Of course," declared Margaret. "I really should not have stayed at all. I could not leave after I heard the truth about my uncle. But now – well, Henri, it would be a mistake for me to stay longer."

"My dear girl," said Zayata soothingly, "it would be impossible for you to leave at present! Surely you must like it here –"

"Of course I like it!" exclaimed Margaret. "It is wonderful living in those beautiful rooms that you have given me. The hours we have talked together they are wonderful, too."

"But I have been wondering, Henri. Perhaps it would be best for me to go back back with my uncle –"

"You cannot go back, at present," said Zayata firmly. "There is no way –"

"But when Larkin comes –"

"Larkin will not be here for a long time."

"Why?"

"I shall tell you," began Zayata; then he paused as Chandra entered. The Burmese was carrying the slate that he had shown to Flash Donegan.

Margaret watched curiously as Zayata took the slate and carefully wiped off the message with a small sponge that the servant gave him. She had seen Zayata write that message after he had read a note which Chandra had brought.

But Zayata had kept the slate turned so that Margaret had not seen the message. It all seemed curious, but Zayata had volunteered no explanation, so Margaret did not ask for one.

"Chandra," said Zayata, "bring me those newspapers."

The servant bowed and went to a table in the corner of the room. He lifted its toplike lid and brought out some newspapers. He carried them to Zayata, who kept the front pages toward himself.

Then, Zayata selected one of the journals and gave it to Margaret. The girl gasped when she read the headlines.

The newspaper told of the arrest of her uncle. It spoke of him as a fiend. Clinton Glendenning was branded as the slayer of two men Charles Blefken and Don Hasbrouck.

Wildly, the girl's eyes ran down the columns. A paragraph caught her attention. It said:

The finding of Hasbrouck's body has revealed Clinton Glendenning as an archfiend. But the proof that is strongest against the retired manufacturer is the evidence brought forth by Detective Joe Cardona. Glendenning's thumb prints are identical with the marks discovered on the throat of Charles Blefken. A comparison of photostatic reproductions has left no possible doubt.

The testimony of Larkin has been of immense value to the police. Larkin declared that on the night when Hasbrouck last visited Glendenning's home, the old man retired to his bedroom before the sleuth departed. Larkin remained upstairs while Hasbrouck left.

It is believed that the old man descended to the ground floor by his interior stairs and slew Hasbrouck, strangling him with those iron hands that have surprised the police by their power.

Detective Cardona would not reveal the contents of Glendenning's diaries. He said that he had learned of their existence through Larkin, who had noted the old man making secret entries in a book. Larkin did not know where the diaries were kept.

Cardona discovered them after a long search and now has them at headquarters; The star detective states that the diaries are in Glendenning's handwriting and that they give information which may lead to the discovery of other crimes.

Cardona, although noncommittal, indicated that Robert Buchanan may have been one of the strangle-fiend's victims. He would say nothing, however, about the disappearance of Glendenning's niece.

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Margaret dropped the newspaper. She buried her face in her hands, and began to weep convulsively. Zayata, consoling, put his arm about her, and the girl leaned on the man's shoulder while she cried.

At last, her weeping ended, she looked at her new-found friend with tear-dimmed eyes. Zayata's kindness was encouraging. The girl tried to smile. Then she closed her eyes and rested her head snugly upon the comforting arm.

DURING the silence that followed, Chandra approached and asked a question in a foreign tongue.

"No one else is coming," said Zayata. "close the lift, and raise it, Chandra."

Chandra went out into the hallway. Zayata spoke softly to Margaret:

"You are unhappy," he said soothingly. "Unhappy, aren't you Margaret?"

"Yes," answered the girl dreamily. "But, somehow, unhappiness cannot last long here."

"You will remain?"

"I must remain for a while but then –"

"What then?" Zayata asked.

"I must go, although –"

"Why should you ever leave?" The girl did not reply.

"Why should you ever leave here, Margaret?" persisted the man. "Why should you ever leave the one who loves you?"

The girl's eyes opened wide.

"Yes, Margaret, I love you," came Zayata's voice. "I want you to remain here always here with me –"

The girl's lips tightened. Despite the alluring sound of Henri Zayata's voice, the man's words worried her. The recollection of Robert Buchanan seemed to govern her.

"Do you love me, Margaret?" was Zayata's question.

"I cannot tell," gasped the girl. "Please, Henri please let me consider. I shall stay here for a little while but then –"

"Then you will answer me?"

"Yes."

"How soon?" Zayata insisted.

The girl pondered. She had detected an eagerness in the man's voice, and it made her feel a sudden lack of security.

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"In three days," said Margaret. "Three nights from now, Henri. Then I shall tell you whether I choose to leave, or to stay here, always –"

"You promise to have your answer then?"

"I promise!"

The girl raised her head and gently pressed back Zayata's arm. The man smiled, and waved his hand toward the door that led to the hallway.

"You have seen only part of this place," he declared. "Why not see more of it since it may be yours three days from now?"

"Chandra!" The man clapped his hands. "Show Miss Glendenning the temple. I am sorry, Margaret" his voice was rueful "that I cannot accompany you."

The man's reference to his crippled condition excited the girl's sympathy. She was about to make a kindly reply when she noticed that Zayata was reclining with his eyes closed. Evidently he was tired. Chandra bowed. Margaret arose and followed the Burmese.

He led her into the hallway. He crossed and began to bow before a brazen door that glowed between crimson curtains. It must be a ceremony, Margaret thought.

The door made her think of that entrance at the end of the hall the carved oaken barrier that bore the lion's head. She looked in that direction. To her amazement, she saw the door sliding shut!

Could it have been fancy the door moving of its own accord? The girl noticed a shadowy blackness beside the door, near a huge, dark vase. Then she heard Chandra speak.

She looked ahead and forgot the closing door when she saw the sight before her.

The brass gate was open, and beyond was a most magnificent room a tiny temple of most fantastic appearance. All the other gorgeous apartments of Henri Zayata's home faded into insignificance when compared to this one.

Softly, the girl stole forward. Chandra was beside her as she found her way between piles of cushions and approached a thronelike chair at the far end of the room.

"It is the throne of Charn," said the Burmese, in a whisper. "Do not touch it."

MARGARET looked at the golden carvings of the throne. Then she noticed a huge upright box at the right of the room. It looked like a mummy case. Upon it was the carved representation of a woman's face a solemn face with staring eyes.

"The home of Kali," whispered the Burmese in an awed tone. Margaret noted that the huge case was girded with bands of a silver metal; these were solid bars.

"It shall not be opened," said Chandra solemnly. "Never until –" His voice became a succession of low words in his native tongue.

"Come," said Chandra, as Margaret still stared at the marvelous furnishings of the sanctuary. "Come! The

master does not wish us to stay here long."

The girl followed the Burmese toward the door. Suddenly she stopped. Just within the door, standing beside an Oriental tapestry, the girl's eyes saw a human figure.

It was the form of a man in black a tall shape garbed in a flowing cloak. The head was covered by a soft hat that turned down to hide the eyes.

Was it a strange statue or a living being?

"Come!" Chandra was speaking from the hall.

Margaret stepped between the curtains. She turned to see the brass door sliding down into the opening. Chandra conducted her back to Henri Zayata's living room.

"You have seen the temple?" asked Zayata, with a thin smile.

"Yes," Margaret replied. "It is wonderful."

"It is called the Temple of Silence," replied Zayata.

The Temple of Silence! The name was graphically descriptive. How well it suited! Margaret thought.

"Those who enter it must remain silent," smiled Zayata.

"Those who enter it!" The phrase burned itself in Margaret's brain. She had entered it so had Chandra. But there was another there; one who had remained after they had left!

Vividly, Margaret recalled that strange form clad in black. A silent figure in the Temple of Silence! Who could the man have been?

Henri Zayata was chatting now. His talk was of other matters. Margaret sat on the cushions beside the divan. She still thought of that strange being whom she had seen in the silent temple. But she said nothing to Henri Zayata.

CHAPTER XIV. THE MAN WITH THE CLEW

JOE CARDONA betrayed a smile of satisfaction as he talked with Inspector Klein at headquarters. The Glendenning case was turning out as he wanted it. Even though the old man had declared his innocence, there would be no difficulty in proving his guilt.

"We've got everything on him, chief," declared the detective. "I'll have a confession out of him before I've finished!"

"He's a tough nut to crack, Joe," the superior commented.

"I'll admit that. But he loses his temper when we mention Buchanan or Don Hasbrouck, the private detective hired by Buchanan's family. He admits he hated Buchanan, and he says he never liked Hasbrouck."

"What about Blefken?"

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"Glendenning pretends he never met him. I guess that's because of the thumb prints. Glendenning knows we've got him there."

Klein nodded his agreement with the theory.

"We're going to locate Buchanan's body," declared Cardona emphatically. "Those diaries will point the way. No question about it."

"There was a box shipped out of the old man's house. Larkin told me about it. Sent to an address in Philadelphia. The police down there are working on it. I expect a report to-night. Any time now."

"You're a wonder, Joe! You go after one murder and uncover three. I wish I had a dozen men like you."

"I don't," returned Cardona. "I don't claim to be a wonder, chief. Just use my noodle that's all. I'm not one of those superminds, like –"

"Like The Shadow," suggested Klein.

Cardona smiled. Then he became thoughtful.

"Say, chief," he said. "It's funny The Shadow hasn't appeared in this. Maybe he kept out of it because it was all over so quick –"

"It would be better if he kept out of our business altogether. Maybe he's all right, but –"

"Listen, chief. The Shadow's on the level. Maybe he doesn't work by police methods. I'll grant that. But he's helped me out of some bad jams, just the same."

"Well, we can forget him this time."

The men ceased their conversation as Williamson entered. The solemn-faced detective approached Inspector Klein.

"One of our stools got bumped off last night," he said.

"Where? Who was it?"

"Louie Shunk. 'Crazy Louie,' they called him. He's been watching a couple of tough rod men Tony Caprona and Gringo Butz. He swore they weren't wise to him; but they must have been the ones that got him. His body was found up in Harlem, an hour ago."

"Hm–m–m," mused the inspector. "Have you got another stool who can check up on them?"

"I think so."

"Put him on the job, then; and don't take any chances. Have a plain-clothes man keep tabs on the stool. They're bad boys, Caprona and Butz."

"They are," agreed Joe Cardona. "They're the ones who were signing up with Bush Holman. We've been watching them ever since."

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"You ought to be in on this job, Joe," observed Klein.

"I will be," declared Cardona, "if it gets ripe. Right now, I've got plenty on my mind."

THE phone bell rang. Cardona answered. The others watched him intently. They saw the detective's face light up. His replies were short, quick exclamations.

"You'll call again in fifteen minutes?" was his final comment.

Receiving an affirmative reply, Cardona hung up the phone and turned to Inspector Klein.

"They've found Buchanan's body!" he declared. "And it's in Philadelphia. They're going to call me again, with the details. This is big, chief. Everything I want now, except –"

"Jerry Middleton."

"You guessed it. That and Buchanan's body. Middleton must know the low-down on the whole affair. How, I've no idea. Maybe Glendenning tried to get him. If he hadn't got away, that night at Blefken's –"

"You'll find him, Joe!"

Inspector Klein spoke encouragingly. He knew that the Middleton matter was a sore point. Cardona had accomplished wonders in this case. His blunder had been forgotten, even by the newspapers, and the inspector didn't want to recall the incident.

But the fact still remained that Jerry Middleton would be a useful witness against Clinton Glendenning.

"I'm doing everything I can," declared Cardona. "We're trying to find that taxi driver. He might help us out. It's funny, in a way, that he hasn't showed up. Scared, I guess. That's the only way I can figure it."

"Well," interrupted Williamson, "I'm going on my way. I'll follow your instructions, inspector. I'll look up that stool and see what can be done. If he can trail Caprona and Butz, I'll have John Higby follow him."

The detective went from the room. Before Klein and Cardona could begin another discussion, the telephone rang. The ace answered it, and his face showed disappointment when he discovered that it was not another long-distance call.

"Burke?" he queried. "Yes. Williamson's covering that case... What? Well... No... Oh, you've heard that, eh? Does any one else know it? I mean, any other reporters... Good! Lay off it, then."

"Yes, Crazy Louie was working for us. He was checking up on a couple of gangsters... Yes, that's why I don't want it to get in the papers. It would wise them up. Keep off it, and there'll be a good story for you later on."

"Say, that reminds me, I may have something real to-night. Where are you? At the Classic... All right, stick there until you hear from me."

Cardona clanged the receiver and turned to Klein.

"That fellow Burke's a fast worker," he said. "Checking on Crazy Louie's death already. Had a tip the guy was a stool. You heard what I told him. He'll hold it especially after he gets the news from Philadelphia."

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The detective sat strumming his fingers against the edge of the table. He was waiting for the next long-distance call.

Inspector Timothy Klein was chewing the end of his cigar. There was a noise at the door. Cardona swung around to view a man in a taxi driver's uniform.

"You're Detective Cardona?" asked the newcomer.

"Sure," said Cardona, studying the man closely.

"Well," said the cabman, "I guess you're the fellow I want to see. But listen, you ain't goin' to hold me here, are you? I can tell you where I live anythin' you want to know. I ain't got much to tell you –"

"Say!" exclaimed Cardona. "Are you the man who took that note to Charles Blefken?"

The man nodded.

"Where did you get it?" demanded Cardona. "Tell us all you know about it!"

"You ain't goin' to hold me, are you?" pleaded the man.

"Not if you answer all the questions I want to ask you. We'll let you go. What's your name?"

"DUNC MILLER," said the cabman. He had evidently anticipated the question, for he pulled his identification cards from his pocket.

"I've got my cab outside. I didn't tell Blefken all I knew about the man who gave me the note, because the fellow asked me to keep mum. He came up to me on One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street, over by Eighth Avenue. Gave me the note and the century spot."

"Yes? What did he look like?"

"Good-looking chap. Talked very keen, but nervouslike. He had on a dark suit. He was kinda white his face. Looked like somebody was after him."

"Middleton, all right! Go on."

"That was all then," said the cabman. "When I read about Blefken being killed, I figured this was the fellow you were after. But I thought sure he'd beat it, and I was afraid to butt in. I don't want to buck any gunmen."

"This afternoon, I was reading the papers again, and I see now that you only want him for a witness, and that you've got the real murderer all sewed up."

"Well, I was thinking about telling what I knew, but didn't know whether it would do any good, until to-night well, to-night I see the fellow again."

"Where?" Joe Cardona's voice was eager.

"Right up by the same corner. I followed him along, and he went down a little street until he came to an old house. He went in through the side. I watched, and a light showed in the back room on the second floor."

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"Here's the address." The man fumbled in his pocket and brought out a sheet of paper. "Look, I've drawn the way the house looks. Right here is the door –"

"Great!" said Cardona. He showed the paper to Inspector Klein. "I'm going up there right away. If Middleton's still around, we'll nab him."

"Better take this fellow with you," said Klein.

"I thought you weren't goin' to hold me, chief," protested the cab driver.

"I'll do better than that," said Cardona. "You're going to be here a while, aren't you, inspector?"

"Yes."

"All right, I'll ride up in this man's cab. I'll stop off at the Fourth District and pick up Clark. If that call comes in from Philadelphia, hold it. I'll ring in from the district station."

Cardona and the cabman hurried to the street. The detective climbed into the cab, and the vehicle sped uptown. It had hardly passed the nearest corner before a car shot after it.

Flash Donegan was at the wheel of the pursuing automobile. Beside him was Cliff Marsland. Flash and his companion had seen the cab stop at headquarters. They had seen Cardona come out with the taximan.

Therefore, while Flash evidently had a purpose in trailing the cab, he was not staying too close to it.

Cliff had no definite idea concerning Flash Donegan's purpose. He was now a member of the racketeer's newly formed mob. He had met Flash Donegan the night that Dip Riker had suggested he be added to the organization. He had passed Donegan's keen inspection.

To-night, he had been called upon this special duty. Flash was noncommittal, but Cliff knew that the gang leader was bound upon an important mission. Flash had selected Cliff because he appeared to be the most capable gat wielder of the outfit.

Flash spoke while they were riding uptown. It was one of the first times that the suave man had expressed himself.

"Get ready, Marsland," was Donegan's statement. "We're going to work quick when we get started. I've been on the lookout for this bozo.

"I'll do the talking if I get the chance. You handle the rest. Dip tells me you know how to shove a gat in a guy's ribs and make him savvy. I believe him!"

The trailed taxicab stopped half a block away from the district station house. Joe Cardona alighted and spoke to the driver. Flash pulled up his car a short distance behind. Cliff admired the nerve of the racketeer. They were close enough to overhear Cardona's words.

"Stick here," the detective said. "I'm going inside. If I don't come out right away, somebody else will. After we get near the place, you're finished for the night. All right?"

THE taxi driver grunted an affirmative reply. Cardona disappeared. Then it was that Flash Donegan showed the quickness that had gained him his nickname.

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Nudging Cliff, he clambered from the car. Cliff followed, as Flash approached the taxicab and appeared suddenly beside the driver.

"Get going," ordered Flash, as he opened the door of the cab.

Dunc Miller responded. Flash had one hand upon the handle of the door. His other hand held an automatic. The gun was thrust into the startled taximan's ribs.

Cliff jumped in the taxi, and Flash Donegan followed. Only for a second did he leave the man uncovered. Now, his gun was through the window from the rear seat, jabbing into the back of the driver's neck.

The cab was in motion. As it swung up the street, Flash spoke rapidly. He was giving instructions and asking questions at once. The cab driver was following both.

"Go around the block," ordered Flash. "Now give me the dope. What did you tell that dick?"

"I told him I told him –" the man stammered.

"No stalling!" came Donegan's command. "Spill it quick, or you'll swallow lead!"

"I told him I'd found out where a guy named Middleton lives," blabbed Miller.

"All right," growled Flash, "that's what I want to know. Speak quick! Write this, Cliff."

Cliff Marsland quickly scrawled the address that the taximan gave. Flash continued his interrogation, but by the time the cab was completing the circuit of the block, it was evident that Dunc Miller's supply of information was exhausted.

Flash leaned back from the front seat, his automatic still in readiness. He nudged Cliff Marsland.

"Give me that paper," he whispered. "I'm getting out. You stay with this cab. Make him drive up an alley and give him the bump.

"Pick a spot over by the Club Yama" Flash gave the location of an East Side night club "and meet me in there. How long do you need?"

"How long do you want me to take?"

"Half an hour."

"O.K.," Cliff concurred.

Flash ordered the cab driver to stop. The racketeer leaped from the vehicle at the end of the block where the police station was located. Cliff saw him sauntering to his car. Joe Cardona had not reappeared.

"Move along," growled Cliff.

He was thinking tensely as the cabman obeyed. The big objective to-night was Jerry Middleton. Cardona was on his way to find the missing man.

Evidently, Cardona had been delayed in the detective district. There would be another delay how long, Cliff

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did not know when the detective found the cabman missing.

Flash Donegan was also after Middleton, and he had a better chance than Cardona to get there first. But the racketeer was not going in person. For he had made an appointment to meet Cliff in thirty minutes at the Club Yama.

A race between the forces of law and the hordes of crime! It was Cliff's duty to arrange another entry. Some one must get there for The Shadow and that person must reach Middleton before the others!

CLIFF could not perform the mission himself. He knew that he must not jeopardize his position with Flash Donegan. That appointment at the Club Yama must be kept. There was only one course Cliff must get word to The Shadow!

They were approaching a lighted corner, and Cliff saw a large drug store. Leaning forward, he poked his automatic into the cab driver's ribs. As the man shuddered, Cliff ordered him to stop by the curb.

"Listen, you," said Cliff, in a low, emphatic voice. "I'm supposed to bump you off. See? But I'm going to let you get away. I'm treating you right, see?"

The man stammered his thanks. Cliff paid no attention. He must impress the man with a sense of constant danger.

"I've got a reason for it," continued Cliff, softly and rapidly. "I've got a hunch I can use you some time. Later on. But if this guy that was with me knows you're alive it'll be the end of you. He'll get you.

"Your only chance is to scam. If you squeal to the police, your life won't be worth a nickel. Here's some dough" Cliff thrust a roll of bills into the startled man's hands "but you'll never live to use it if you forget what I'm telling you!"

"I'll do anything!" blurted Dunc Miller. "Anything that you say is best! I don't want to die!"

The man was petrified with fear; he was clutching this one straw of safety. Cliff was sure that he would obey.

"Run your cab in an alley and leave it there," ordered Cliff. "Over on the East Side. Pick a place with empty houses around, so it would look like I could have hidden your body. Then light out for Buffalo.

"Call at general delivery for mail your name will be Willard Watson. You'll hear from me. This thing will blow over. You'll be back in New York. I'll see you get your cab again. Got that?"

"Yeah," replied the cab driver, clutching the roll of bills.

"Then move," ordered Cliff. "And remember, don't slip up on my instructions, or you'll get this." As a reminder, Cliff stroked the muzzle of his automatic across the back of Miller's neck. The cab driver quailed at the touch of the cold metal.

Cliff was on the sidewalk, now. The cab pulled away and sped for the nearest avenue. Cliff hurried to the drug store. He reached an empty telephone booth and called a number. Burbank's voice responded.

In quick, brief phrases, Cliff gave his report. Burbank's quiet, patient voice checked the information. Cliff hung up the receiver.

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The word was in. His job now was to meet Donegan at the Club Yama.

EVEN as Cliff Marsland was leaving the drug store, a telephone was ringing in a room of the Dolban Hotel, near Ninety-sixth Street. Harry Vincent answered it. He had moved up to the Dolban to keep away from observation by Flash Donegan's underlings.

Burbank's quiet voice greeted Harry's response.

"Emergency," came Burbank's warning. "Go direct to One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street. Call back for instructions."

Within three minutes, Harry was on board an uptown subway train. The hidden wheels of The Shadow's secret machinery were clicking. The Shadow's agent was in the race to reach Jerry Middleton not only in the race, but leading the field.

The man with the clew had visited Cardona. Dunc Miller's information was now turned to use for The Shadow!

CHAPTER XV. MIDDLETON SPEAKS AGAIN

THE side entrance of the old house loomed black as Harry Vincent stood before it. There was a dim light upstairs in the back room on the second floor. Otherwise the house seemed uninhabited.

Harry tried the door. It was locked. The young man pulled some keys from his pocket.

Picking locks was not one of Harry's natural accomplishments. But he had learned important secrets of that art during his period of service with The Shadow.

Harry risked the glow of his flashlight, and smiled as he saw that the lock was a simple one. He tried a master key. The lock turned.

Within the house, Harry was more free with his light. He saw a stairway, leading from the front. He followed it to the second floor. In another minute he stood listening outside Middleton's door.

The heavy breathing of a man was audible. The door was locked. Harry tried his key, and found that there was a key on the other side. The clicking of metal apparently caused no alarm.

Harry still heard Middleton's breathing. He was sure that the man was asleep.

Prying with the master key, Harry was quickly rewarded. A dull plop from the other side of the door showed that the inner key had been forced from the lock, and had fallen on a carpeted floor.

Harry opened the door and entered. By a rear, shaded window, a young man reclined in an armchair. There was only one light in the room.

Harry approached and put his arm on the young man's shoulder. The sleeper's eyes opened. A startled gasp burst from his lips. Then his head dropped back. He appeared exhausted.

"Middleton," whispered Harry, "I've come to warn you. The police are coming. I am a friend. We must get out of here."

THE CRIME CULT

"The police?" questioned Middleton. "Let them come. I'm ready to give myself up. I've been afraid to go to them. I hope they'll be here soon."

"Come," said Harry.

He tried to help Middleton to rise. The young man floundered back helpless. Harry realized that the fellow had reached a state of complete nervous exhaustion. It would be impossible to get him out of here.

But that was not necessary. Harry had another plan it involved risk, but he was willing to take it. In a moment, he could tell if it were practical.

"Don't make any noise," he warned.

Harry extinguished the light. He raised the shade beside Middleton, and peered into the darkness. He barely distinguished the outline of a roof over the back porch.

Leaning out, Harry looked upward. The top of Middleton's window projected. Above it was the flat roof of the building. Yes, the plan was feasible.

Harry, strong and agile, knew that he could clamber above the porch and hoist himself to the housetop in less than half a minute. The porch roof spread, and the buildings in the rear were dark. He could make his escape free from observation.

Once on the housetop, the rest was easy. There were several houses in the row; this one was at the end. A flight across the roofs and a clean get-away. All while Cardona and his invaders were looking for Middleton!

HARRY opened the side window. The little door was just below. That was where Cardona would approach. Harry's job was plain. Here, by the side window, he could talk to Middleton.

He would also be on hand as a prosecutor in case one of Flash Donegan's men arrived before the police. When Cardona came, he could have Middleton for the man's information would then be on its way to The Shadow, with Harry bearing it!

Even if Harry should be found with Middleton, there would be no serious consequences. For Harry was not engaged in crime. He could pose as a good Samaritan, who had helped Middleton to his home. The man's weakened condition would make the story plausible.

These possibilities flashed quickly through Harry's keen brain. Now, leaning forward in a chair by the side window, he began his quiz.

"You're worried, old fellow," he said gently. "I'm here to help you. Talk to me."

"You're a friend?"

"Yes."

The tone impressed Jerry Middleton, and the darkness eased his nervousness. He realized that his enemies already knew what he knew. Only a friend would want to hear his story.

"I'll talk to you," he said. "I'll talk. Don't question me. I've got to talk, or I'll go mad!"

THE CRIME CULT

"I knew all about these murders all before they happened. All except Hasbrouck. That was news when I read it in the paper.

"I'm to blame, but I was in it before I knew it. I joined the cult. I believed that crime was right. I brought Buchanan there. I wanted him to be one of us. Then I saw the book."

"What book?"

"The Book of Death. We were all in it. Each had his page a page of death. But we of the faith were immune unless we broke the faith.

"I learned all that, and then I found that Buchanan was not one of us. He had not stood the secret test. He was to be a sacrifice!

"I was afraid then. Afraid when Charn called for me alone and showed me the book. But I took some more of the drink that Charn gave me. It made me happy. I agreed to the sacrifice. I was there. I saw I saw Buchanan die!

"That changed me. I had some of the drink. I knew it was dope hashish, I thought. I left town the next day. I tried to forget. It was all right until the drink was gone. Then I seemed to become mad.

"I tried to get some hashish. I failed. I tried other narcotics. I could stand none of them. Then came terrible dreams dreams with the names of others who were written in the book.

"Dale Wharton's name was among them. I wrote him from Connecticut. He tried to come to see me secretly. He was being watched by Charn. He was killed.

"George Andrews, another. I was going to see him. I arrived too late. He was hanging, dead. Then Charles Blefken. I had to warn him. I thought he was safe when I found him at his home.

"Then, when he left the room, I was frightened. I was afraid to stay. I found his body. I didn't wait an instant. I hurried here. Now I am afraid to leave this place. Afraid afraid –"

Middleton's voice died away in a slow, hoarse whisper. The man's head dropped back in the chair. Harry listened by the side window. He heard nothing. He knew that Cardona could not be entirely noiseless. There were still important facts to learn.

"The mark of Charn," murmured Middleton vacantly. "The mark of Charn. I saw it placed on Buchanan's forehead. The mark –"

He gave a slight cough; then came a whispered gargle. Harry waited for him to speak again. He heard a slight hissing from Middleton, as though the man were exhaling between his teeth.

Then, the dim form of the man by the window slid to the right. Harry could see the whiteness of his face as it fell forward.

ACTING impulsively, Harry drew the shade of the side window. He leaped across and drew the shade at the rear. He turned on the single light. He saw Middleton, slumped sidewise in the chair.

Harry approached and raised the man's head. Middleton was dead!

THE CRIME CULT

Upon his forehead was a small round spot no larger than a dime. Harry knew now what the sizzling had meant. Some unseen assassin of the dark had killed this man, and left the mark upon his forehead.

The mark of Charn!

As Middleton's head dropped back; Harry saw another mark a thin white line that encircled the dead man's throat. Middleton had been strangled by a slender noose. More than that the noose was here!

Upon the floor, Harry's eyes spied a small thread of red. He picked it up and examined it. It was thin, but strong made of a material that resembled catgut.

It was a long moment before understanding dawned on Harry. The method of the murder was obvious. The killer had reached through from the blackened window. Invisible in the dark, he had performed his terrible deed.

But why had he left the evidence? Had Harry's presence frightened him away? No the other murders had been perpetrated as boldly as this one, yet no such clew as this had remained

Then came realization. The murderer had not expected Harry to find the cord of death. It was to lie there, to be found by the police.

Already on the way, the killer had expected the police to discover Harry Vincent, here, at the scene, beside the dead man, with a hopeless story!

He was to be branded as another archfiend perhaps a disciple of Glendenning!

It did not take Harry more than a few seconds to act. Out went the light. He peered from the side window. Leaning, he could see the street, forty yards away. He saw a figure standing there.

Was it Joe Cardona, preparing the attack? Harry did not wait to learn. Softly, he drew the shade of the rear window and slipped out to the porch roof.

He clambered up the side of the house. On the roof, he headed for the other end of the flat-topped row.

Reaching his objective, Harry stopped beside a chimney. He was stooping, and his form could be but dim in the glow that came from the illumined streets. While Harry was standing there, another form appeared, but the young man did not see it.

This was the figure of a man, which rose from a crouched position near the edge of the roof. It approached with a crablike stride. It edged around the side of the chimney. It was close to Harry, now. Its arms were extending, and still, Harry Vincent did not know of its presence!

Something flipped upon Harry's shoulder a light, cordlike object. But at that instant, Harry, intent upon his escape, spied a projecting cornice at the rear edge of the roof.

With a leap, he was away. Over the edge, he went, dropping to safety on the roof of the porch below.

The other man was in pursuit; but his crablike gait was slow. He stopped at the edge of the roof, and a peculiar whistle followed. It was scarcely audible to Harry, in the alleyway in back of the house the vantage point which he had now reached.

THE CRIME CULT

The creature on the roof swung downward. He became swift when he depended upon his arms instead of his legs.

Down by the porch below, Harry Vincent awaited, ignorant of the menace dropping from above. Again, a sudden impulse saved him. He saw an excellent way to leave this place through a narrow passage that ran between houses on the rear street.

He headed there, swiftly. He came to a little street that led to the right. But it was a blind alley, ending abruptly. It looked like a good way out. Harry turned. Then, from the wall beside him, a man appeared.

Harry saw an upraised arm. He tried to ward off the coming blow. He was too late. He felt a terrific shock at the back of his head. He crumpled on the paving.

When he recovered consciousness, Harry found himself moving upward. He was in darkness, riding in a small elevator. He heard a few words spoken close beside him. Then he lapsed into senselessness.

BACK in the old house, Joe Cardona and another detective were staring at the body of Jerry Middleton. Cardona held the red cord in his hand.

He was gazing at it in perplexity. He and his companion were too intent at that moment to think of the black window beside them.

Even if they had glanced from it, they would have seen nothing. For the form which was peering from outside was as black as the night itself. In an instant, it was gone, upward.

Tracing its course along the roof, the figure stopped by the chimney, where Harry Vincent had been. It advanced to the edge of the roof, and a tiny, coin-sized glow of a flashlight rested on the cornice.

The light went out; the figure slid from the roof. When it appeared again, with the light, it was in the alleyway. It reached the spot where Harry Vincent had been struck down.

There was nothing here now. But that probing light must have revealed minute traces of the conflict.

For amidst the darkness echoed a low, sinister laugh a vague and mysterious sound that would have terrified the ears of listeners. The Shadow had arrived too late. But his intuition had told him all that had occurred.

The Shadow knew; and The Shadow's laugh presaged misfortune for those who had captured Harry Vincent!

CHAPTER XVI. THE CRIME CULT

IT was the following night. Margaret Glendenning sat in the living room of her new abode the glorious guest apartment of Henri Zayata's home.

The girl was restless and ill at ease. She appeared worried. There was a reason. To-night, Zayata expected her answer.

Margaret arose and opened the door. She stepped into Henri Zayata's own reception room. The place was empty. Margaret knew that Zayata must be in a wheel chair pushed by Chandra, the Burmese.

Zayata had spoken of an upper room a study where he sometimes went, by means of the chair and a little elevator. But Margaret had never been there.

THE CRIME CULT

The problem on the girl's mind was a great one. She liked Zayata, and trusted him. But she could not make herself believe she loved him. She knew so little of his history.

He had been a traveler. He had spent many years of his life in India. Chandra had been his servant there. Outside of those few facts, her knowledge of Zayata's past was vague.

Margaret sat on the cushions beside the couch. She looked up suddenly. She fancied that she had seen a shadow flit across the floor.

She looked suspiciously at the curtains beside the door that led into the splendid hallway. But she saw no one.

Again, the girl was lost in thought. This place which had once delighted her was becoming too fantastic.

She glanced toward the door between the curtains, and fancied that she had seen it closed. She went over and tried to slide the barrier. It would not move.

Looking about her, Margaret spied Zayata's table the one with the hinged top. She went there. Curiosity impelled her to raise the lid.

After all, she thought, it was right for her to investigate these surroundings. She might find something to help her in her decision.

Within the table was a black book. Margaret stared at the gold title on the thick, leather cover:

THE BOOK OF DEATH

She opened the book. She turned a few blank pages. Then she stared in wonderment. The book was not printed. Its pages bore beautifully embossed inscriptions. On one page, Margaret saw the name "Robert Buchanan" was the title.

The girl gasped. She was about to read the words that appeared beneath, when she heard a low sound beside her. There, in his wheel chair, with Chandra in back, sat Henri Zayata.

"Let me have the book," said Zayata.

Margaret held the volume close in her arms. Zayata's eyes sparkled. They were no longer kindly. Frightened, the girl gave him the book, Zayata smiled.

"It is not mine," he said, in a gentle tone. "Otherwise I could let you read it."

"Why," demanded Margaret suddenly, "is Robert's name in that book?"

"It is a book of friendship," said Zayata simply.

In response to a signal from his master, Chandra rolled the wheel chair to the far corner. It stopped by the divan, but Zayata did not leave it. The chair was turned so its occupant faced Margaret.

The girl approached and sat on the cushions. Zayata appeared kindly now, and the girl felt no resentment. She realized that she had been at fault.

"To-night," said Zayata softly, "is the night for your answer, Margaret."

The girl nodded.

"You are ready to tell me?" asked Zayata.

Again, Margaret nodded.

ZAYATA was studying her closely. He seemed to read her thoughts. He knew that when the question came, the girl's reply would be negative.

He did not ask the question. He called Chandra, who appeared with a tea table. Zayata offered Margaret some delicious pastries; then he tendered her a glass filled with a thick, white liquid.

"Drink," he said, raising his own glass. "It is a nectar. You will enjoy it."

The girl had never tasted so delicious a fluid. After the first sips, she drank deeply. She placed the glass upon the tea table and watched Zayata.

Time seemed strangely new. Each moment was prolonged. The girl could not understand this mental reaction. She did not know that it was the effect of hashish the drug which Zayata had placed in the liquid.

Long, glowing minutes passed. Zayata extended his hands and gently lifted the girl's wrists.

"Margaret," he said softly. "Now is the time for your answer."

Margaret's reply was on her lips. All doubts had left her. She felt that she loved this man. But before she spoke the word, the girl had a sudden recollection of that page in the Book of Death.

She could not understand it, but a grim thought swept through her brain. She looked squarely into Zayata's eyes. Now, for the first time, she detected a glow that filled her with horror.

"My answer?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Zayata.

"It is 'No!'" declared the girl. "I understand now. You have been deceiving me trying to hide your evil nature!"

The glaring eyes of the man proved that the girl's words were true. Margaret, inspired by a sudden fury, reached forward and struck Zayata full in the face. She arose and tried to go toward the door. But her steps faltered. She fell exhausted on the floor.

"I give you one more opportunity," came Zayata's cold tones. "Time is short. You must answer now. Will you marry me?"

"No!" screamed the girl. "Never! I hate you! I understand it now. You were no friend of Robert's. You were his enemy –"

"Your answer?" came the cold voice.

"No!" cried Margaret. "No!"

THE CRIME CULT

"Then," replied Zayata, "you shall soon know your destiny."

He clapped his hands. Chandra approached and moved the wheel chair not toward the usual entrance, but toward the end of the room. The Burmese touched the wall. A panel opened. He wheeled the chair through, and the wall closed. Margaret was alone.

The girl had no sense of the passage of time. The very walls of the room seemed alive. Tapestried snakes were writhing. Smoke was flowing from painted incense vases. A fantastic dragon blinked its eyes at her. She was powerless to move. Then Chandra appeared.

Aided by Chandra, Margaret rose. She walked slowly, each step an effort, to the end of the room, through the space where Zayata had gone. Another panel opened. She stood in the temple.

Chandra was urging her toward the golden throne. Upon it sat a weird, uncanny being what appeared to be a living idol. The eyes of the creature shone green; Margaret tried to cry aloud, but her voice was gone.

The eyes were the eyes of Zayata, glowing under the light that shone directly from above.

"I am Charn," came a voice, strangely unlike Zayata's. "You have come to learn your fate. Look!"

FOR the first time, Margaret Glendenning fully sensed her surroundings. All the light in the silent temple was centered about the throne. The rest of the room was gloomy and dim; but the girl could see vague figures seated there. Her eyes distinguished them as motionless human beings.

But what impressed her most was the object toward which Charn was pointing. He was indicating the huge mummy case, with the silver bands.

"The home of Kali," said the strange voice. "The temple within the temple. The tomb that has never been opened. It awaits a soul."

The eyes of the strange monster stared at the girl. She followed his gaze in a new direction and a light seemed to go with it. The soft illumination showed the bound form of a man, lying upon the floor.

"The victim of the sacrifice," said the creature on the throne. "The victim of the sacrifice to Kali. He shall die by the hands of Charn, with the threadlike noose –"

The arms unfolded and Charn held a thin red cord between them.

"But before he dies" and the voice was Zayata's now "we shall have a living Kali. A soul for the tomb to remain there, always!"

The arms were folded. Two vague forms arose from the background. They approached the girl and urged her toward the silver-bound case. Margaret was unable to resist. She was going to her doom helpless.

Chandra was unclasping the bands. The Burmese was performing the duty as though it were a sacred office. With the grotesque monster silently surveying the scene, Chandra prepared to open the mummy case. The bands were loose. He but awaited the final word.

"The home of Kali," came the measured, solemn words of doom. "It shall be your home. Now and forever. Once it opens, it shall close, with a living being in its fold. Then we shall have the sacrifice while the occupant of the tomb still lives."

There was a pause; then came the order.

"Open the home of Kali!"

Chandra stepped forward to obey.

CHAPTER XVII. CARDONA ATTACKS

CLIFF MARSLAND and Dip Riker were sitting on the stone floor of a little room. They were in the warehouse directly opposite the secret entrance to Henri Zayata's abode. They had been here for more than two hours, waiting.

Cliff knew that they were on a landing that was situated in a converted air shaft. A hole at the side of the room formed the entrance for the ladder by which they had ascended to this spot at least twenty feet above the alleyway.

But why they were here, and what was about to transpire, were two mysteries which Cliff had not yet solved.

The small room was in darkness. The only opening, other than the ladder shaft, was a narrow slit in the wall, some four feet above the floor. The place was in total darkness.

Some one was coming up the ladder. Instinctively, Cliff reached for his automatic. He felt Dip Riker's hand grasp his arm.

"It's Flash," whispered Dip. "He's come to give us the lay –"

A moment later, Flash Donegan was with the two men. Dip Riker responded to his chief's low greeting. Cliff was tense now. He sensed that an explanation was forthcoming in regard to tonight's strange operations. It was his duty to pretend to work with this gang up to a crucial point; and he felt that the climax was approaching.

"We're all set," declared Flash Donegan. "Things are going to happen soon, and we've all got jobs ahead of us. Listen, while I spring the dope:

"Lance is at one end of the alley. Gringo Butz is at the other. Tony Caprona is in the middle. They've let all the guys through the ones that gave the signal. Now there's trouble coming, and we're going to fight it out.

"A few night ago, Lance and his gorillas knocked off a bird called Crazy Louie. Last night they bumped a guy named Snooper Perry. I'll tell you what those bimbos were. Stools, that's what stools that Joe Cardona sent out to trail Gringo Butz and Tony Caprona."

A surprised ejaculation came from Dip Riker.

"Last night," went on Flash, speaking hastily, "you and I had an important job, Marsland. I called the big shot the fellow that's behind all this and tipped him off. He told me to meet him.

"He and I did the job. He bumped off one guy, and I nabbed another. Listen, Dip: The guy I nailed was that same one you let get away from you."

"Vincent?" questioned Dip, amazed. "The Shadow's stool?"

THE CRIME CULT

"Yeah. I turned him over to the big shot. Maybe he's gotten the works by now. That's why I called you, Dip, and had you meet Marsland, at the Club Yama. I couldn't get there."

MATTERS were clearing up in Cliff's mind. He had been wondering why Flash Donegan had not shown up why Dip Riker had come in his place. The mention of Harry Vincent chilled him.

Was Harry still a captive, or was he dead? Cliff wondered if The Shadow knew.

"Meanwhile," said Flash, "Lance and his gorillas were laying here, and they bumped off Snooper Perry. That gave Cardona an idea about this alleyway of ours, because he had a dick watching Snooper.

"I got a tip-off late this afternoon. That's why I called you, Dip, and told you to bring Marsland up here."

"I getcha," responded Dip. "Cardona's goin' to raid, is he?"

"That's the straight dope," declared Flash emphatically. "What's more, the guy that gave me the tip-off told me something else.

"Cardona got a phone call from somewhere. Somebody wised him up that it would be a good hunch to raid the warehouse across the way. He knows that we're guarding an entrance there."

"Who tipped off Cardona?" quizzed Dip. "The Shadow?"

The question brought a thrill of hope to Cliff Marsland. He knew that no one but The Shadow could have obtained such important information; and also that Joe Cardona would not act on any ordinary word from an anonymous source.

"I don't know who tipped him off," said Flash, "but I've got my orders from the big shot. We're going to blow the works. Any copper that shows his mug goes the voyage.

"Now, here's the lay: I'm going to the end of the alley by the garage room and stay there. You go to the other end, Dip, and stick behind that iron door on the edge of the alley.

"That sends Lance Bolero and Gringo Butz to the center. Tony Caprona is dragging stuff in from my car. He'll have everything ready for the three of them. When the dicks try to crash that alley, they'll hit trouble.

"I think the big shot's going to blow, after to-night. We're going to wipe out Cardona and his squad. That's all there is to it. When the raid starts from my end, I fire a signal. You do the same from your end, Dip.

"Your job is right here, Cliff. You can squeeze through that hole in the wall. You're the sniper of this outfit. Let Lance and his crew take care of the pack. You pick off any stray cops that you see. Get me?"

"Right!" grunted Cliff.

"Come along, Dip," ordered Flash.

Alone, Cliff Marsland went to the narrow window and found that it was just wide enough for his body. He squeezed through and hung above the alleyway.

He waited several minutes. Then he heard a slight murmur from beneath. He knew that Lance Bolero and Gringo Butz had joined their companion, Tony Caprona.

THE CRIME CULT

Cliff could not make out what was taking place, for all was pitch-dark below. He knew that Lance and his gorillas would have a tough assignment, stopping the onrush of massed police and detectives.

Minutes had gone by. All was totally quiet. Peering from his window, Cliff tried to pierce the darkness. Off on one street; he was barely able to see a car stopping at the entrance to the alley. Looking quickly in the opposite direction, he saw another car standing there!

Cliff unlimbered both his automatics. With one in each hand, he waited at his lookout.

Crack!

A sharp report sounded from one end of the alley. It was Dip Riker's signal. Immediately, another bark came from the opposite end. Flash Donegan had sent his warning.

Then the alley was bathed in tremendous light. From the cars in the streets, huge searchlights were trained upon the scene. A dozen men piled into the alleyway six from each end. The police were making a mass attack.

They were firing low and along the walls, aiming for the center of the alley.

Had Flash Donegan trusted to a few henchmen armed with automatics, the odds would have been with the police. But actually, the crafty racketeer had laid a death trap for the forces of the law. Staring straight downward, Cliff saw it all.

Two rows of sanded bags had been stretched across the middle of the alley. Between those lines of defense were Lance Bolero and his men with two machine guns, one trained in each direction!

It was to be a wipe-out, Flash had said. Lance Bolero was at one machine gun; Tony Caprona at the other. Gringo Butz was in reserve, with the ammunition. The police had seen the barricades, but they were charging onward, not knowing the menace that lay behind.

Lance and Gringo were coolly waiting, holding their fire until there could be no retreat for the minions of the law!

Cliff Marsland acted on the instant. Leaning from his window, he opened fire with both automatics not on the police, as Flash Donegan had instructed him but on those safely sheltered fiends of crime!

CLIFF aimed for the hands that were on the machine guns. A shout had just come from Lance Bolero a brutal, snarling shout that expressed the joy of the killer. But before Tony Caprona could respond – before Lance, himself, could start action with his machine gun Cliff's attack had been delivered.

Bullets from Cliff's automatics found their marks. Both men fell wounded. The guns were useless. Lance Bolero made a vain effort to recover. He clutched the machine gun with his left hand. Cliff's next bullet broke his wrist.

Then came quick action on the part of the extra man, Gringo Butz. Not knowing that the menace came from above, Gringo leaped to Tony's machine gun.

Its staccato bark never began. Cliff emptied his automatics at the gunner and the gun. Bullets crashed against the machine gun. Gringo Butz collapsed.

THE CRIME CULT

On came the policemen and detectives. Over the barricades they went, with revolvers spitting fire. They had heard shots, but had not seen from where they came. They piled into the ambush, shooting and stopped in amazement at the sight of the three prone gangsters before them.

Lance and Gringo were dead. Police bullets had finished what Cliff Marsland had begun. Tony Caprona was wounded. While the police were dragging forth their victims, more shots came from the ends of the alley.

Eight officers responded. Cliff heard heavy firing. Reserves, stationed outside, had opened an onslaught on Flash Donegan and Dip Riker, quartered separately within the ends of the warehouse. Reinforced by the attackers who had been in the alley men whom Flash and Dip had thought dead the minions of the law were fighting the beleaguered gangsters to the death!

Cliff crouched below the window. He could hear detectives shouting in the alley. He was safe here; his hiding place was a disused air shaft, with a hidden opening below. From this place of security, he listened to the firing, and also heard men storming at the opening in the warehouse opposite.

The victory belonged to the law but Cliff Marsland, hidden and alert, was the man who had won the fight. The real victory had been gained by the power of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVIII. A FIEND'S END

IN the silent temple, far from the street, the noise of smoking revolvers was unheard. The place itself was like a tomb, as Chandra, the Burmese servant, opened the door of the mummy case the home of Kali to reveal its black interior.

"She must enter!" declared Charn.

A chanting response came from the vague forms on the cushions about the temple. Margaret was urged forward into the fearful chest that Charn had destined to be her tomb.

Before the silent men alongside the girl could move, a strange thing happened. The rays of the ceiling light had turned directly upon the open mummy chest, to show its interior as a mass of solid inkiness.

A sound issued from that spot the sound of a gibing laugh. The blackness moved. Instantly, it assumed a human form.

The Shadow stepped from the home of Kali! A living avenger, he had come to save those who were doomed to die. Full in the light he stood, his face hidden by the upturned neck of his cloak and the brim of his broad slouch hat.

Each of his black-gloved hands held an automatic, and the threatening weapons turned slowly back and forth, covering every inch of that mystic room.

Not a person stirred. All were transfixed. The men beside Margaret Glendenning were helpless. The vague forms in the background dared not stir, cowed by the threat of those hidden eyes.

Chandra was trembling. The man on the throne remained as motionless as an image.

To Margaret Glendenning, amazement was profound. She knew that this man was her rescuer. Through her dazed mind came the recollection of that night when she had seen this figure in the temple, standing almost invisible against the wall.

THE CRIME CULT

To Harry Vincent, bound and helpless, the arrival of The Shadow was another of those marvelous episodes that he had experienced before.

"The home of Kali," came The Shadow's low, ominous voice. "A home prepared for death. I have made it a home of retribution. Your fate has arrived, Henri Zayata you who call yourself Charn. This spells the end of your crime cult and your sordid worshipers of Kali.

"Do you think that I have been idle while you planned?" The Shadow's tones were mocking. "No! I have penetrated to the secrets of your inner shrine. I came here once and finding the way, I came again.

"I have read your Book of Death. I have delved into your hidden tomes. You lived in India years ago. There you learned the creed of the Thugs, from one of the few survivors of that notorious caste.

"You brought your learnings here to America. You found converts they are with you now.

"You love murder but only murder by the noose. Women are immune from that strangling thread. So you arranged the home of Kali for the girl who would not be your wife!

"You, Henri Zayata, a pretended invalid. A strange man, indeed with crippled legs, but powerful arms you, who have killed and killed!

"You slew Robert Buchanan. Not alone because you loved to kill, but because you wished no rival with the woman you sought. You killed Don Hasbrouck to silence him and to place the crime upon a harmless old man, Clinton Glendenning.

"There are other murders at your door and all who have died were betrayed to you by those who pretended to be their friends.

"Larkin is one. He is not here tonight. He betrayed Buchanan. He called you so you could await Hasbrouck and strangle him.

"The police are holding Larkin, now, as a witness against Glendenning. They will keep him as an accomplice in your murders.

"I know others who are here. Winthrop Morgan, who betrayed his friend, Glendenning" one of the men beside Margaret quailed at the words "and I could name the rest. But time is short."

SILENT, The Shadow strode toward Henri Zayata, the man who sat on the throne as Charn. The Shadow did not stop there. He continued to the spot where Harry Vincent lay.

Stooping, he released Harry's bonds but all the while, The Shadow's head was up, and a single, weaving automatic defied those who might attempt escape.

The Shadow stood erect, with both guns, now. Harry Vincent had risen beside him. The man in black spoke in a tone of finality.

"This is the end," were his words. "Listen and you will hear the approach of your captors."

A moment's pause; then The Shadow's prediction proved true. There was a loud knocking at the bronze door. Cardona and his men had arrived, to invade the temple of Zayata's crime cult!

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It was then that the throned man made his great attempt. Reaching to the side of the gilded chair, Zayata pressed a switch. Instantly, the lights were out.

The Shadow's two automatics spat through the darkness. The shots were warning ones. They cowed Zayata's henchmen.

But The Shadow was not firing uselessly. A single bullet the first he fired was aimed with a purpose; and it found its mark in the body of Henri Zayata!

The lights gleamed on. The Shadow was standing by the gilded throne. Henri Zayata had fallen headforemost to the floor. With one contemptuous look at the writhing figure, The Shadow took his seat in the throne of Charn.

It was he who gave the orders now!

Cowed by his automatics, the other men obeyed his command to line against the wall. There, with arms upraised, they stood helpless, from Chandra, the Burmese, to Winthrop Morgan, the lawyer. The worshipers of Kali had found their new master.

At The Shadow's order, Harry Vincent advanced and led Margaret Glendenning to the side of the room. The Shadow pressed another knob on the throne. The wall opened. Harry and the girl entered. The knob was pressed again. The wall closed.

Zayata's intended victims were leaving by a secret elevator, which The Shadow had controlled from the throne. The man in black had discovered Zayata's own exit from the place a path which led to another street, away from the alleyway patrolled by the police.

THE clanging at the metal gate was becoming tremendous. With a soft, taunting laugh, The Shadow touched the final control. The gate slid up. The lights went out as Cardona and his men surged in to make their raid.

Their flashlights revealed the worshipers of Kali lined against the wall. They also showed the prostrate form of Henri Zayata, moaning but motionless.

The lights did not disclose the man in black. The Shadow, master of darkness, had left the throne of Charn, and had disappeared!

Henri Zayata struggled to rise. Failing, he uttered a shrill, weird cry. It was his last hopeless command to his dupes a signal that they should fight for their lives. Freed from the menace of The Shadow, the evil men flung themselves upon the police, in obedience to their master's call.

Some drew guns; others leaped to the wall to seize improvised weapons. The temple was filled with flashes of flame as Cardona and his men resisted this massed attack. It was an amazing effort, but a futile one.

The odds were with the police, but the frenzy of the uprising gave them no alternative. They shot to kill. When the firing ended, three of Cardona's men lay wounded. Cardona, himself, was nursing a dangling arm.

None of the police had been fatally injured, but their adversaries had fought to the finish.

Upon the floor, amidst bloodstained cushions, were the members of the crime cult. All but three were dead; and those three were dying.

Stretched before the golden throne of Charn lay Henri Zayata, a bullet through his evil heart. By his side was the dead form of Chandra, the Burmese.

CHAPTER XIX. RETRIBUTION

THE end of the crime cult created a tremendous sensation on the following day. New Yorkers were amazed to learn that such an insidious organization had existed in the heart of their city.

From the start, Cardona's raid had been spectacular. His men had fought their way into the fire of machine guns, before the gangsters who handled them had managed to resist.

Acting upon some secret information, the star detective had broken into the entrance of the warehouse, and had led his forces through a labyrinth to raid the sanctum of the evildoers.

Somehow, the way had lain open for them. This was attributed to negligence on the part of Zayata. No one knew that The Shadow, familiar with the workings of Zayata's elevators, had tampered with the mechanism so that the raiders could gain immediate access.

Outside, Flash Donegan and Dip Riker had fought a losing battle. The failure of the men at the machine guns had put the chief gangsters in a helpless position. Not knowing what had happened, they resisted to the end; and both died from bullets of the law.

No one knew of the presence of Cliff Marsland. He had remained in his hiding place until after the police were gone. Then he had quietly departed. Nor did any person tell of the three who had left the temple before the police had broken into it: Margaret Glendenning, Harry Vincent, and The Shadow!

The most important angle of the whole affair was the exposure of the crime cult. The ransacking of the luxurious abode of Henri Zayata was directed by Joe Cardona.

The detective found the Book of Death and other documents that showed the inner secrets of the mysterious organization.

Zayata's guilt was proven. A link was discovered between him and the racketeer, Flash Donegan. The members of the crime cult were identified. Winthrop Morgan was the most important of the lot.

Three others were men of considerable prominence in New York. The rest of them were all persons of lesser consequence.

Only one was missing Larkin and he was already being held by the police. The name of Clinton Glendenning's secretary was quickly connected with the crime cult. The Shadow had made sure of that; and he had also foreseen that Larkin would weaken under questioning.

When Larkin learned that his master had been killed that he alone of the cult remained and that practically all was known, he could not stand the strain. He broke down and confessed completely.

Had he failed to do so, The Shadow doubtless would have seen that the police learned all; but that proved quite unnecessary.

FROM the one man in their toils, the police cleared up the last of the mystery. Zayata, they discovered, was a man with a twisted mind. Raised in India, he had imbibed the doctrine of the Thugs, and had adapted it to his own purposes, making it his life's endeavor.

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Those whom he impressed became his converts; those whom he failed to sway were chosen as victims. In his strange character of Charn, he had dominated the group of believers.

It was his task, as leader, to perform the rite of Thugee; to strangle with the cord as an example to the followers who might some day hope to attain an infamy equal to his own.

As a token of achievement, Larkin testified, it was Zayata's wont to leave a mark upon each victim a small, round spot upon the forehead.

With him, Zayata carried a mechanical tube which generated heat. To it, he pressed the smooth surface of a large signet ring. With the latter device, he seared the foreheads of those whom he killed.

The proofs of this fantastic practice were discovered. The tube was found beside the golden throne. The ring was upon Zayata's finger. Tests showed that the metal could be heated in less than a minute, when the tube was applied.

The newspapers made much of this, and included the descriptions of strangle cords found in Zayata's robe. They missed the greatest sensation, however, when they failed to disclose the fact that a victim had been obtained for the last meeting of the crime cult.

Harry Vincent had escaped the cord and the searing ring only because the hand of The Shadow had intervened!

Old Clinton Glendenning was to have been an innocent victim of the crime cult a man meant to bear the punishment of the law in Henri Zayata's stead. The evidence indicated his innocence, except for one point the thumb prints on Charles Blefken's throat.

Larkin, broken down by grilling, revealed how he had aided in the planting of this false clew. He had easily obtained impressions of Clinton Glendenning's thumb prints. The old man slept often and soundly. The secretary had used soft clay to duplicate the marks.

From these impressions, it was believed, Zayata had constructed molds. With them, he had left the marks of Glendenning's thumbs upon the neck of Charles Blefken. Larkin said that he had given the imprints to Zayata.

That statement was sufficient; for it was quite logical to suppose that Zayata had destroyed the telltale molds after he had used them.

Larkin also confessed to planting the evidence of the torn bit of cloth to complete the Blefken crime.

Clinton Glendenning was freed. He went back to his old home. That very day, his niece reappeared, to rejoin him.

Margaret Glendenning was never questioned regarding her absence. Larkin, from whom all statements had been pumped as answers to questions, omitted from his testimony the fact that he had conducted the girl to Henri Zayata.

It was all excellent news copy for Clyde Burke. With other journalists, he extolled Detective Joe Cardona as a hero. The ace took credit for wiping out the members of the insidious crime cult. All agreed that he had dealt death that was deserved.

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In all the columns that were typed, no mention appeared of a mysterious man in black, whose laugh spread terror, and whose might was the unseen bludgeon that had beaten down the forces of the archfiend.

No one except those who had worked with him knew that The Shadow had actually accomplished that mighty deed.

No one else not even Joe Cardona had seen the hand of The Shadow and remained alive to tell!

THE END