

CRIME OUT OF MIND

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I

THE spotlight from the little balcony was focussed on the darkish man who stood in the center of the nightclub floor. He was a commanding figure, this man, with his dark, full face and glinting eyes.

In fact, everything glinted about Planchini.

The great man's turban gleamed with a huge red stone that he termed the Token of Buddha. Similarly, Planchini's regalia scintillated with an embroidery of costume jewelry. Beside him was a silver-rimmed fish bowl, transparent but of a tinted glass that fairly shimmered with iridescence.

Most sparkling of all was the crystal ball that Planchini held in his right hand. No mere glass this, but genuine rock crystal, so clear that it drew eyes with a hypnotic force.

Appropriate, such a ball, for this was the Crystal Room of the Chateau Parkview, one of New York's swankiest hotels. To live up to its name, the Crystal Room was hung with huge cut-glass chandeliers and Planchini had smartly posted himself so that one of these would serve as background in the spotlight, thus adding its glitter to that of his performance.

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For in the eyes and minds of many who watched him, Planchini was a real mystic of the highest caliber. Even now, as Planchini dipped his right hand into the bowl to bring out a folded slip of paper, there was breathless silence among the spectators who thronged the surrounding tables.

"I see the initials 'L. J.,'" declared Planchini, in stentorian tone, his eyes fixed on the crystal ball. "The 'L' stands for the name Louisa and it is the name of someone present."

An audible gasp filled the interval that followed and Planchini, gesturing his right hand imperiously, carried a second spotlight to a ringside table where a portly lady furnished a minor dazzle, except that her jewelry, though less than Planchini's, was real.

"Louisa Jardine," continued Planchini, consulting the crystal. Then, without a glance at the woman who nodded her identity, he added: "Amid that name I see a sparkle. It represents something lost that wishes to return."

"My diamond pendant!" gulped the Jardine lady. "The one I lost – a week ago – unless it was stolen!"

"It was neither lost nor stolen," informed Planchini. "It was given to someone."

"Given!" exclaimed the portly Louisa. "I, give away my diamond pendant!"

"You did not give it away." Fixing on Louisa, Planchini's eyes fairly flashed with fire. "You gave it to a friend for safe-keeping."

"But I don't remember –"

Louisa halted as a companion nudged her arm and whispered something. Then, with a giggly laugh, the portly woman admitted:

"That's right. It must have been the night I was over at the Landworth Apartments visiting Mrs. –"

"No names, please!" Planchini was sharp, deft with his interruption, as though he had purposely held it. "Do not tell me who your friends are. I am the one who tells you who they are."

Louisa gave an apologetic nod.

"You left the pendant there," reminded Planchini. "You may tell me if you remember."

"I don't remember."

Pondering, Planchini consulted the crystal, while portly Louisa, nervous in the spotlight, reached for a champagne glass to take a drink. Again, Planchini was timing matters well.

"Perhaps," he stated, "you were in neither a mood nor a condition to remember."

The audience laughed while Louisa sputtered her champagne. Then, sheepishly, the woman admitted the impeachment.

"It was a party," she said. "Maybe I'd been drinking too much. But Agatha – my friend, I mean – she should have remembered and told me she had the pendant there."

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"I see bubbles," divined Planchini, concentrated on the crystal. "Champagne bubbles, floating up from the past. I gather the impression that your friend's condition was no better than your own."

Louisa concluded her embarrassment with a giggle.

"Agatha would just love that," announced Louisa, "but you're right, Mr. Planchini, one hundred percent right. I mean you're right about the party – I only hope you're right about the diamond pendant!"

"The crystal never lies," assured Planchini, dropping the folded slip back into the bowl. "Now to my mind come the figures three – four – three – two – seven –"

By the time Planchini had completed that slow spoken procession of figures, Louisa was shaking her head, signifying that they meant nothing to her.

"I'm not thinking of the number on a dollar bill tonight, Mr. Planchini."

"I receive the letter 'J,'" Planchini insisted. "With it the figure four –"

Noting that Louisa had started talking to the persons at her table, Planchini waved for the spotlight to circle the audience.

"Someone is thinking of that number," boomed Planchini, "the serial number on a dollar bill!"

The spotlight finally fixed upon a wan-faced man who had half-risen from a rear table. The man was holding up his arm and nodding so emphatically that his chin almost disappeared into his oversized tuxedo collar. That satisfied Planchini.

"The number has been identified," announced Planchini, dropping a slip that he had started to lift from the bowl. "And now" – deliberately, with a grand display of showmanship, the mystic drew another folded piece of paper – "we come to a very happy subject: 'Love.'"

A slight wave of Planchini's hand and the orchestra, lost in the darkness of its platform, began to play the soft harmony of the wedding march, while Planchini chimed in with a modulated tone:

"I can foresee the happy event. It will take place within the next fortnight. The impression comes from that direction" – the spotlight followed as Planchini pointed – "and there is no reason to blush, young lady. You are not yet a bride, though you soon will be. May I congratulate the lucky man, since he is now with you?"

The spot had fixed upon a girl who smiled as she reddened slightly in its glare, then hid her face behind a menu, while the young man with her acknowledged that Planchini was right as to the date of their prospective wedding, by waving both hands, then clasping them as a sign of self-congratulation.

With a gesture, Planchini ended the music and brushed away the extra spotlight. He dipped his hand for another slip of paper while his face assumed an air so serious that the chuckling audience hushed. Planchini had the knack of being impressive when he wanted and it went far toward convincing the spectators.

That was, with certain exceptions.

Two of those were a pair of men at a table near the door. Even in the gloom, their faces showed a contrast. One was undersized and slouchy, yet keen-eyed and wise of face. His companion was both suave and sleek, to the point where he was oily on both counts.

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They were here in a professional capacity, or such they would have termed it: Val Varno, the sleight-of-hand king and Glanville Frost, magic's great creative mind. At least so they considered themselves and neither disputed the other's argument.

Pausing in the midst of a one-hand manipulation of some slips of paper, Val Varno thumbed toward the floor where Planchini was still working.

"From corn," summed Varno, "and strictly."

"At fifteen hundred a week," remarked Frost, smoothly, "I would say the corn is ripe."

"But what does the guy do?" demanded Varno. "Somebody collects slips in a fish bowl and takes them away fifteen minutes before Planchini shows. Anybody could get to the questions and read them."

"People don't worry about their questions," returned Frost. "They are interested in the answers."

"So what does Planchini give them? Numbers off of dollar bills and a prediction of a wedding that every columnist has written up."

"The business about the diamond pendant was good."

"Straight hoke," gruffed Varno. "The dame will never find the thing."

"She might," considered Frost, "and it would be a swell break for Planchini if she does."

That brought a scoffing comment from Varno.

"Sounds like you're going mental," he said. "Soon you'll be believing there's something in the stuff."

"There is something in it," reminded Frost. "Otherwise you wouldn't be practicing at handling slips yourself. There's fifteen hundred dollars in it, every week."

Varno gave a very wise grin.

"Soft money for either of us," Frost added, "or both. With your skill, Val, you could swipe slips right under their noses. As for my presentation, it would begin where Planchini leaves off."

"Sounds right," assured Varno. "When do we begin?"

"After we really know Planchini's system," replied Frost. "Don't bluff yourself, Val; the fellow has something ultra with those smart answers. We'd better nail it first."

Frost shifted as someone pressed by his chair. With an upward glance, Frost recognized the passer and gave him a nod. Then to Varno, Frost undertoned:

"Remember him?"

"Lamont Cranston," returned Varno. "We ought to remember him, even though we only met him once."

"I met him before that," stated Frost. "I used to see him at the meeting of the Universal Wizards Association before they expelled me because I ran for Second Vice-President ahead of my turn."

"A smart apple, Cranston" – Varno's eyes were following the man in question toward the door – "and I'm wondering if he was here checking on Planchini's act."

Val Varno wouldn't have wondered, had he followed Lamont Cranston in person, instead of merely with his eyes. Outside the door of the Crystal Room, Cranston crossed the spacious lobby, strolled past the cigar stand and entered a telephone booth that bore a sign:

"Out of Order."

There, Cranston blended with blackness. The reason was that within the booth, he slid himself into a waiting cloak that was black in hue, with a slouch hat to match. A few moments later the door of the booth slid open under a parting kick to reveal something even more remarkable.

The telephone booth was actually empty. Lamont Cranston had become The Shadow and with that transformation he was gone!

CHAPTER II

VAL VARNO and Glanville Frost weren't the only skeptical pair of gentlemen who were watching Planchini's act.

Over in another corner of the Crystal room, near a door marked "Exit" were two other guests clad in the customary tuxedos required at the Chateau Parkview.

One was a man who wore a half smile that seemed a perpetual part of his rather broad face. He was youthful in appearance, but the low lights of the nightclub helped that illusion, because at close range, his features bore deep lines that could be charged to age rather than dissipation.

Those lines hardened his face, giving a ruthless background to the amiable expression which his lips falsified. All that this character needed was a name to describe him properly and he had it.

His name was Smiley Grimm.

The other man was thin of face with a tall forehead, accentuated by the thin hair that topped it. His features were dryish, even to his eyes, which were roving but not shifty. Those eyes, if they met others, remained steady until they established a certain indifference.

But when those eyes fixed upon something that interested them, they narrowed and their very sharpness seemed to stab the object of their gaze. As for a name, this man was also well-equipped.

His name was Keene Marker.

They looked like old friends, this pair, but they were of comparatively recent acquaintance, though they had heard of each other through underground channels. Both were confidence men who had varied their swindling careers by turning professional gambler when occasion called.

Certainly no man could boast a better poker face than Smiley Grimm, with his half-indulgent surface masking his hard interior. His manner, too, was a cover for that certain deftness required in running up a poker hand or ringing in a cold deck.

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Conversely, Keene Marker was the sort who could not only probe the faces of others, but was sharp enough of vision to detect any difference in cards that might become slightly nicked in play. This in turn made it a logical conclusion that Keene would live up to his other name of Marker should a pack demand the tampering that would provide the necessary nicks.

They'd never met before, Smiley and Keene, because each made it a habit never to stay in one place too long.

Fast-moving swindles were their specialties. Smiley preferred selling stock in Canadian gold mines while Keene could fairly pour the goods when Oklahoma oil wells were concerned. They were fast-movers personally, as soon as the con game was worked, and they used their gambling skill to pay for expenses during their long itineraries.

Indeed, the two had become almost legendary figures, even to each other and now they had met, Smiley and Keene, on a common ground that demanded their collaboration.

Each was wise, so wise that he would not reveal too much to the other. Who had brought them here, neither cared to state, each simply intimating that he had received a good tip from some private source.

But it was no secret why they were here. They had work to do and of a daring sort.

At present that work was to check back on Planchini's act. The mystic was just finishing his turn, so the summing up was due.

"Only eight questions," spoke Smiley, with a slight laugh. "Easy work for his dough."

"Easy work for our dough," acknowledged Keene, "particularly as I'm already picking number five as the one that counts."

"You mean that question about the diamond pendant?"

"That's right, except I'm wondering about the bill reading that followed."

"Why?" demanded Smiley. "Planchini gave the bill number, didn't he?"

"Yes and no," retorted Keene. "The guy that spoke up was a stooge. I've spotted him before, saying a question was meant for him, when Planchini got jammed."

Planchini's act was finished and the dark-hued mystic was salaaming himself off stage. Lights were beginning to glow from the big chandeliers and Keene gave a quick side-glance at Smiley, who had a pencil and notebook lying in front of him. Reaching beneath the table, Keene produced a newspaper and opened it to the sporting page.

"We'll act like we're picking horses," undertoned Keene. "We don't want anybody to know about those notes you're checking."

"Who wants to know?" Smiley demanded.

"A couple of mugs over there." Keene was looking toward Val Varno and Glanville Frost at the other side of the club. "They're taking notes too."

Smiley became interested.

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"Yeah?" he inquired. "Why?"

"Because they're a couple of magicians," informed Keene. "One of them is doing the coin roll" – Keene was referring to Varno, who was causing a half-dollar to somersault along the backs of his fingers – "and the other is wearing a color-changing necktie" – Keene's sharp eyes were studying Frost, who was leaning forward, writing something on the tablecloth – "and the thing has slipped. It's half green and half yellow."

"And why should the magic boys be taking notes?" persisted Smiley.

"Because they want to mooch into the mental racket," explained Keene. "Fifteen hundred a week is better than fifteen bucks a show, isn't it?"

"Should be."

"Well, that's the difference between a mentalist and a magician, even though they both do the same tricks."

With that, Keene let his gaze rove elsewhere and specifically to the wide door that formed the entrance to the Crystal Room. Eyes from that direction might be too observant, Keene decided, because the doorway was packed with persons who were looking for tables. With Planchini's act over, some of the customers were leaving, but there was more of the floor show to follow. Hence some of the people at the door were moving out to the lobby rather than be jostled and finding that they weren't glancing his direction, Keene decided to look them over.

"There's Sidney Maywick," confided Keene. "He lives here at the Chateau Parkview."

"You mean Baldy with the Van Dyke beard?" queried Smiley, without looking up. "Who's with him tonight?"

"Nobody. He's looking around as if he expected some friends."

"Spot them if you see them. All of Maywick's friends have dough. I'll match you whether we sell them gold mines or oil wells."

"Why not sell Maywick?"

With the question, Keene stared at Smiley who expected the gaze and looked up to meet it.

"Maywick handles stock himself," explained Smiley, "and it's all gilt-edged. He wouldn't buy an oil well if it poured out molten gold. But we might get some of his friends to trade in what they bought from him for something that we have to sell. Get it?"

Nodding, Keene turned for another look at Maywick, but the man with the Van Dyke had been shunted to the lobby along with other disappointed customers. Nor was there a chance of glimpsing him beyond the throng for at that moment the lights in the Crystal Room went out and a spotlight centered on a dance team that came blossoming on the floor to an accompanying crescendo from the orchestra.

Settling back in the semi-darkness, Keene gave a low significant whisper to Smiley.

"Planchini ought to be up in his room by now."

"What's more important" – Smiley tilted his head toward the balcony that was almost above them – "is that the projection guy is up there instead of in his office."

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Smiley gestured his hand toward a door near the exit. The door in question was closed and bore the word "Private" in large letters. It was a combination office and property room where the projection equipment was kept and the operator stayed between shows.

Right now that room was unoccupied, which was why Smiley and Keene happened to be at their particular table. It was also why the shrewd pair began to listen and intently.

It came, the ring of a telephone bell, sounding muffled through the door from the room where nobody was.

Together, Smiley and Keene counted the rings of the telephone. The progression ended with five, indicating that whoever was calling had hung up after listening to that number of rings across the wire.

"I was right," undertoned Smiley. "The fifth question. The one about the diamond pendant."

"Belonging to Louisa Jardine," whispered Keene, "who was visiting somebody named Agatha."

"Mrs. Agatha Somebody," added Smiley, striking a match so he could see his notes. "She lives at the Landworth Apartments."

"And what does that tell us?" side-toned Keene, while Smiley was using the match to light a cigarette. "We can't burst into the Landworth and yell for Agatha."

"Naturally not," agreed Smiley. "We want that pendant and anything with it, but we don't know where or how to get it —"

"Listen, Smiley!"

The interruption that Keene croaked was tuned to another ringing of the telephone in the closed office. Together, Keene and Smiley counted the new succession, which ended with the sixth ring.

"The phony question!" came Smiley's hissed whisper. "The one the stooge acknowledged!"

"And we thought it was the number on a dollar bill," purred Keene. "You've got it written, haven't you?"

"I have."

"We'll pick up Dirk on the way."

That was all. A few minutes later, when the lights flooded the Crystal Room so the dance team could take its final bow, the obscure table by the little-used exit was devoid of Messrs. Smiley Grimm and Keene Marker.

CHAPTER III

THE tiny light licked along the gilded wall and paused upon a simple-framed portrait of a plumed cavalier. A whispered laugh sounded from the darkness behind the beam as the light enlarged its circle.

It was coming closer to the portrait, that flashlight, bringing with it the person who carried it, but when its progress stopped, the beam narrowed again to a pencil ray that threw a spot resembling a silver dollar.

Into that glow came gloved fingers to test the framed portrait with a few deft touches. The picture swung open like a door, frame and all, disclosing a wall safe behind it. The safe was a small one, but ample for its

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portable contents: gems.

The fingers busied themselves with the combination: three to the left, four to the right, three to the left, two to the right, seven to the left.

These were the numbers in rotation that someone had not been thinking about in reference to an imaginary dollar bill whose serial had been reeled off by Planchini, the seer of the Chateau Parkview.

The safe door came open and the enlarging circle of the flashlight threw back a dazzle that made the resplendence of the Crystal Room seem trivial.

Again, a whispered tone – the laugh of The Shadow!

The Jardine pendant, valuable though it was, formed but a minor item of this collection. Here in the hidden wall safe of an apartment living room, was a fortune in gems, all the property of Mrs. J. Allison Agnew, whose husband owned a sizeable chain of small-town drugstores which gave him an excuse for seldom being in New York.

There was a touch of whimsy in The Shadow's laugh.

Until a few years ago, J. Allison Agnew had preferred to live here in New York because his wife was always cruising somewhere in the yacht that he had bought her. When the yacht had been sold and later commandeered for coastal patrol, Mrs. Agnew had evidently invested its equivalent in these gems, hoping they would increase in value toward the purchase of a better post-war yacht.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Agnew had taken over the apartment and her husband had decamped. Distance had always been a factor in preserving what trifling harmony existed in the Agnew family.

Little wonder that Mrs. Agnew, whose first name happened to be Agatha, should have suggested that Louisa Jardine leave her diamond pendant here. Even less surprising was the fact that Agatha should have forgotten it, considering how common jewelry was in the Agnew menage.

From a zippered bag, The Shadow produced an inlaid jewel case, but instead of opening it, he placed it in the safe, after he had poured the existing contents of that safe into the bag itself. Drawn tight, the bag, when placed beneath The Shadow's cloak, was a far more secure repository for the Agnew gems than was the wall safe, now that the combination had become public property.

Closing the safe, The Shadow turned the knob and swung the picture back where it belonged, thus setting the scene for the next act in this drama. Moving through the darkness, The Shadow reached a window; there, the dim light from a courtyard blotted itself briefly as he swung out to a ledge.

From there, The Shadow's course was a mere three stories down, since the Agnew apartment was only on the fourth floor in a corner of the Landworth Apartments that included all apartments designated by the letter 'J.'

In his enterprise, The Shadow had been leisurely, taking due time to study his surroundings. As a result, he hadn't completed his work with much time to spare. Hardly had the window cleared itself of darkness that vanished in the style of vapor, when sounds came from the door of the apartment itself.

The man who was making those sounds was Keene Marker. He was showing Smiley Grimm a very clever trick, although Smiley wasn't watching closely. Much though he was interested in Keene's craftsmanship, Smiley still kept darting glances along the hall outside of the door marked J-4.

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Past the automatic elevator that they had used to reach here, Smiley saw the door of a fire tower. The door was slightly open, and as Smiley watched it, he could see it move, though slightly. All that was to the better, because behind that door lurked a watcher named Dirk Elverton, a handy man indeed to keep as a reserve.

Keene was using a tiny but efficient instrument in the form of a needle drill that he had applied to the lock of J-4. It had bitten its way through the metal and now Keene was removing it to supply a circular device with other needles that he termed jabbers. Under the pressure of a small plunger, the jabbers pressed home and the lock gave a barely audible click which meant that it had yielded.

Opening the door, Keene warded Smiley back before he could enter. Smiley's hand went for a gun, but again Keene gripped his arm. All Keene wanted to do was cover the work he had just accomplished, leaving no traces of the holes that he had drilled. Keene did this by applying a special wax that plugged the tiny pin-points.

"Good any time we want to use it again," undertoned Keene. "I have a string of set-ups like this, all over the country."

Smiley's lips broadened their artificial spread a trifle, thus registering approval. Then, eying the special needler that Keene was returning to a plastic case, Smiley commented:

"It wouldn't do for safes."

"No," Keene admitted, "but I've punched strong boxes with it. In this case, we don't have to worry about getting into the safe. All we have to do is find it."

Smiley was bringing a flashlight from his other pocket. In closing the door, Keene gestured impatiently for his companion to put the torch away.

"Guns make funny noises," opined Keene, "and flashlights give funny flickers. Let's act like we belonged here, only first, we ought to be fixed in case we meet somebody who knows we don't."

As a means to that fixing, Keene produced two silk handkerchiefs, each neatly knotted at diagonal corners. He slipped one over his head and drew it down past the blindfold stage until it came to his nose. Instead of being loose, the silk remained taut because it hooked over Keene's ears.

Duplicating Keene's job, Smiley put on the other mask, but with more difficulty, since Smiley's head was broader. Then Keene found a floor lamp and turned it on so that the two masked men could survey the Agnew living room.

It wasn't more than half a minute before a cluck came from beneath the silken folds that draped Keene's chin.

"Take a look, Smiley," said Keene. "That picture over there."

Smiley looked and saw a flattering portrait of Agatha Agnew glaring haughtily from the wall, as though disapproving the operations of these cracksmen deluxe. It didn't happen to be the picture that Keene meant.

"The other wall, Smiley."

Turning, Smiley viewed the plumed cavalier and supplied an indulgent laugh. Squared against the wall, lacking the forward lean that the other pictures showed, and of just the right size to conceal a wall safe, this picture fairly shouted what lay behind it.

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Keene clucked approvingly as Smiley put on a pair of gloves before manipulating the straight-set frame. It wasn't long before the thing came open; merely the fraction of a minute. Inside was the wall safe with its glistening knob. Smiley reached for it.

"Here goes with that one buck combination," announced Smiley. "Only which way should I start – left or right?"

"The first figure ought to mean left," decided Keene. "So if it didn't mean left, that series Planchini called off would have started with a zero. Bills have zeros you know."

Smiley knew and acted accordingly. Three – four – three – two – seven –

At the end of those turns, alternating left and right, the safe opened under Smiley's steady fingers. A satisfied intake of Smiley's breath accompanied his sight of the casket that The Shadow had left. Gripping the object, Smiley extended it to Keene.

Putting on thin gloves of his own, Keene received the casket and held it to the light. He noted that it had no lock; merely a special clamp that held the lid tight shut.

"We'll take what's in it," Keene declared, "and then leave it like we found it –"

Keene was working on the clamp but finding it difficult. He couldn't seem to get a grip on the box and pry it open at the same time. Smiley took hold of the ends of the casket to help him; both masked crooks were bowed above it when the clamp began to loosen.

Success was in their very grasp, or seemed to be, when the pair were greeted by a startling interruption. From across the room came a sharp buzzing sound, signifying that someone was pressing the call button down in the entrance to the Landworth Apartments, some visitor who wanted Apartment J-4!

Freezing, Keene and Smiley stared at each other above their masks. Then as if by common consent, the pair nodded. Keene shoved the jewel box under his arm, while Smiley drew the gun for which he had reached before.

Having decided to act as if they belonged here, these partners in crime were ready to proceed along that chosen course!

CHAPTER IV

LIFE in Manhattan singularly resembles one of those cross-sectional ant-hills encased between sheets of glass, which people used to buy to study the ways and habits of the ant, back in the days before the complexities of the human race reduced such matters to a state of insignificance.

This analogy is needed in order to comprehend the peculiar possibilities that the pressing of a call button in the Landworth Apartments could produce.

Viewed from the outside, the Landworth formed what appeared to be a pyramid; in reality, the building was a hollow square, the step-backs existing only where the outer walls were concerned. Each of the pyramided sides had an arched entrance, one on an avenue, two on side streets, the last on an alleyway that bisected the block.

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Surrounding the interior courtyard, the walls were sheer but broken with indentations that formed wells or shafts, giving light and air to some of the inside apartments.

Among the windows that fronted on a street, one showed a dim glow that rendered it more conspicuous than if it had furnished a brilliant light. This happened to be the window of a room connecting with the Agnew living room; The Shadow had left the connecting door open for this very purpose.

Now cars were creeping into this area, green cars with white tops, the kind the New York police used. They were taking over where The Shadow had left off, acting on a strange mysterious tip-off, the sort that a certain inspector named Joe Cardona always respected and heeded, with satisfactory results.

Naturally, the arriving police were surveying the big apartment building, hence they did not observe the figures that were receding across the street. These were The Shadow's agents, their vigil almost done, since they had been stationed here only to nullify any criminal outposts, should such be in the offing.

There being none, the robbery at Agnew's had become a simple matter for the law to handle. At least so The Shadow's schedule rated it, but there were times when even The Shadow could be wrong.

For one thing, The Shadow hadn't expected a chance caller on the Agnews at this particular juncture; but even allowing for such, he would have counted on some tell-tale reaction within the apartment itself, most specifically an extinguishing of those dim living room lights which were like a signal beacon beckoning the police.

No such reaction occurred.

The person who pressed the Agnew button received a responding buzz from the inner door at that particular entry. Opening that door, the visitor entered and continued to the elevator.

A surprising visitor indeed.

This visitor was a girl, a most attractive specimen. Slightly on the blonde side, she had clear blue eyes that flashed a determination quite out of keeping with her saucy, upturned nose. Her lips were something of a compromise; though they looked determined too, it was through effort, as evidenced by the tightness that showed itself as far down as the girl's well-rounded chin.

The blonde must have expected a party at the Agnews, for she was wearing a blue evening gown, visible only in splotches through the opening of the darker cape that caressed her shoulders. As the elevator stopped at the fourth floor, she tossed back those shoulders haughtily, before pushing open the door, as though determined to make a grand and imposing entrance when she reached the Agnew apartment.

Maybe the lift of those shoulders helped the girl's rapid back step when the door of the apartment opened to receive her. Certainly she was quick, the way she avoided the threatening gun muzzle that a masked man used to beckon her inside, while another snarled, "No noise now!" only to find himself unheeded.

Even more rapid was the girl's action with the beaded bag that matched her blue gown. Out of it she whipped a small-sized automatic so suddenly that she was covering Smiley with the gun muzzle before he could bring his own weapon to bear. Keene swung in from the other angle, sidling the jewel casket as a shield, but unwisely blocking Smiley's aim.

If she'd been as quick with the trigger as with her previous action, the girl could have scored double at that instant, but fright mingled with caution caused her to take a few back-steps more. Nerves taut, she heard a

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surging sound behind her and turned to meet the menace, too late.

The man called Dirk was hurtling from the fire tower door and he was appropriately nicknamed. Big, brawny even to his upraised fist, he clutched a long knife with a glittering blade that was meant for the feminine intruder. Unable to bring her gun to bear, the girl could only shriek and twist away, but her respite was brief.

Dirk's free paw made a huge sweep and caught the girl's cape. Instinctively the blonde flung the garment over the big man's head and squirmed from the tangle, emerging in her strapless gown like something bursting from a cocoon. Dirk came full about, half into the doorway of J-4 and thrust a swift hand under one of the girl's bare arms, across her throat, and to her other shoulder.

With that smacking impact, Dirk clutched hard and whirled the girl around in the fashion of a jive expert. His other hand went out and up at forty-five degrees to poise its knife for a drive to the victim's heart. Though the little gun was dropping from the girl's numbed hand, Dirk was merciless.

What the girl saw in those kaleidoscopic moments must have seemed the manufactured figments of a dream. Swirling blackness first, from the doorway which Dirk had left; now, Dirk himself, a thick, brutal-faced assassin gone completely berserk. Again, blackness, as the girl's head tilted away, the sort that came from a faint induced by sheer horror at the sight of certain death.

Except that the blackness was real. It did more than swirl as it issued from the very doorway that Dirk had used. It was living blackness, cloaked in the sable-hued garb that symbolized The Shadow!

Dirk's face, leering just above the girl's shoulder, was no good target for The Shadow's gun, but Dirk's knife hand was. Except that The Shadow didn't use his gun in the accepted manner. He was half turned, shouldering the door wide as he hauled a big automatic into play and from this position there was opportunity for something swifter than a gunshot.

The Shadow let go with a hard, sidearm throw, sending the loaded .45 ahead of him as he completed his whirl to produce another automatic from beneath his cloak. By then, The Shadow's fling had scored.

Dirk's wrist, coming downward with his fist, was met by a jarring missile that not only numbed his knife hand, but carried upward to snatch the blade right out of the assassin's grasp. As knife and gun jounced and clattered together, it was Dirk's turn to become vocal, which he did with an infuriated bellow.

If The Shadow preferred to toss unorthodox objects that happened to be at hand, so did Dirk. In this instance, Dirk preferred blondes, so he chucked the only one available. As the girl came flying headlong, The Shadow gave a sardonic laugh and with it seemed to dwindle, only to come upward from his stooping twist to pluck the girl almost as she struck the floor.

All with one sweeping swingabout, The Shadow was again in action, this time with a limp but uninjured girl draped over one arm, while his other hand was thrusting its automatic straight Dirk's way. Scrambling to regain his knife, big Dirk would have been an instantaneous target for The Shadow, if it hadn't been for Smiley.

Spurred on by Keene, Smiley jabbed quick shots from within his doorway. Crooks to the core, both recognized The Shadow by his laugh and Keene was as eager to demand the death sentence of this Nemesis as Smiley was to give it. It was bad business, though, to hurry matters with The Shadow; bad business for those who tried it.

Smiley's first shot, wide by nearly a dozen inches, sent The Shadow sidestepping toward the shelter of the wall. Smiley might as well have been using a pop-gun when he delivered his next blasts, for he couldn't get the angle without poking himself into destruction. The Shadow took a chance though, that Smiley would do just that, for The Shadow responded with a single shot that sizzled amid Smiley's gunfire.

Whistling past the doorway, that slug hit the wall just beyond and ricocheted to clip Dirk's shoulder as the big man came blundering up with his knife.

It was baiting the bull once more, that shot.

Howling, Dirk launched past the doorway, intent upon reaching The Shadow. Smiley swung out to follow, with Keene bringing up the rear. Letting the girl slide from his arm, The Shadow poured straight into the advancing trio, meeting them with an upward drive that piled Dirk back upon the men behind him.

It would have been victory right there, whether by slugging tactics or by gunfire, if The Shadow hadn't been interrupted by the very factor which he himself had introduced. Staggered, sprawling crooks heard shouts as the elevator door flung wide to disgorge a cluster of police with drawn guns.

Odd though it seemed, this arrival of the law was to bring a set-back to The Shadow's present cause.

CHAPTER V

OF the three crooks, Dirk alone rallied to give battle to The Shadow and received what he deserved. His knife just starting on another downswing, Dirk was met by a bullet that reeled him full about. Staggered, bellowing, Dirk flung himself upon the police who were grabbing his masked comrades and the officers took time out to riddle their big attacker with bullets.

That meant timeout for Smiley and Keene, the men whose masks still rendered them unrecognized. Smiley was trying to wrest his gun free from hands that gripped it; and on the chance that Smiley would somehow manage, Keene in his turn was trying to get the jewel casket from other claimants.

The best that Keene could do was yank the casket open, which meant he might snatch a glove-full of its precious contents. Before The Shadow could lunge in to prevent it, the lid came wide.

As the box opened, it puffed.

It came like a huge sigh, that curious explosion that literally bounced the box from gripping hands and sent men reeling back. Out of it came a monstrous, greenish form, like a spreading devil-fish of gaseous quality. From beneath the feet of twisting, diving men, The Shadow scooped something that he saw there.

Then, headlong, The Shadow was swooping away from the spreading flood of green that was punctuated by choking gasps and coughs. Reaching the girl, The Shadow flung the object that he carried, the girl's own cape, so that it covered her head. Then, his own cloak folded across his face, The Shadow was knifing through the cloud of green that reached him, bound for that fire tower door that offered free, fresh air.

One of The Shadow's neatly devised traps had sprung itself in strict reverse.

That casket, planted by The Shadow, had been loaded with concentrated tear gas. Its purpose had been to stifle the greedy thieves who found it and who would have normally opened it and promptly.

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There had been nothing wrong with The Shadow's timing. Keene and Smiley, or any other unknown burglars, should have been clawing around the Agnew living room when the police arrived. The unexpected girl had delayed their opening of the gemless casket which had now become a Pandora's box, with a load of mischief for all concerned.

Whatever the girl's part, The Shadow wanted to remove her as an unnecessary factor; now that the gas was loose, this was his opportunity, as well as the only course for himself. Down the steps of the fire tower, The Shadow reached the bottom; there, he used a flashlight to blink a quick signal through the darkness of the rear alley.

Time was still ample to double up and help the police complete a blind round-up of two equally helpless masked crooks. But things weren't working that way when The Shadow started his return trip up the fire tower.

Neither Keene nor Smiley had fared badly. In their first blind grope, they had found the door of the Agnew apartment; diving through, they had slammed it after them.

They owed their luck to the masks. Hauled over their eyes, with the bottom folds clenched in their teeth, the silken contrivances were serving Keene and Smiley against the greenish fumes. They were weeping, but not severely, as they found their way through a window opening on a side street.

Here the construction of the apartment building offered a series of one-story steps, down which the fugitives dropped. Conspicuous against the wall, they should have been flagged, but weren't. The few police who remained outdoors had been attracted to a new quarter, the alleyway behind the Landworth.

There, a very bewildered girl was finding herself conducted by guiding hands through the darkness. They were silent, these men who served The Shadow, but the girl's stumbles and the clatter of her high heels had become betraying sounds.

A voice called from one end of the alley:

"Who's there!"

The response was a brief trill of a police whistle from the other end of the alley, answered in kind from the direction of the first speaker. Uniformed figures began working into the alleyway, sending flashlight beams ahead of them.

Instantly, the girl found herself whisked across to a shallow doorway in a wall opposite the Landworth. Huddled in the folds of her mussed cape, she escaped the flashlight beam that licked past her, but it disclosed the face of one of her guides, a little man with a wise, wizened countenance.

The officer who was using the flashlight failed to glimpse that face and instantly, the wizened man turned from the glare. The girl heard him speak to a crouched man who was working at an antique lock in the little door.

"How are you doing, Tapper?"

"All right, Hawkeye," the crouched man responded. "Steady, half a minute more. Getting this turkey locked again after we go through, is going to be the trouble —"

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The interruption was the click of the lock itself. Under Tapper's twist, the door yielded, but its rusted hinges, long unused, shrieked a message both directions along the alley.

Flashlights fairly seemed to bound forward as hoarse voices called, "Who's there!" which was a fair indication that they didn't recognize the cause of the screeching sound. Tapper was half through the doorway, turning to help Hawkeye to guide the girl that same direction, but now the flashlight beams were interlocking from a scant twenty feet on either side.

In fact, the alley was practically aglare with light, which wavered first – and logically – toward the wall of the Landworth from which it would have cut promptly to the doorway where the girl and The Shadow's agents were, if something hadn't intervened.

That something was a shower of a brief but spectacular sort.

Something plopped the cement and bounded with a sparkle. Its scintillation was matched by the next drops that followed, drops of something that certainly was not rain.

More of that peculiar hail arrived, and a moment later the officers were not only snatching up the precious stuff, but turning their flashlights upward to learn where it came from.

Jewels!

The whole Agnew collection was being fed down from the stepped wall above; now that the police were ready for such gifts, more fragile items, brooches and necklaces, were cascading down into the glare. The officers didn't stop to question how or why; they just caught the stuff on the fly.

Meanwhile, that door across the way was closing behind the persons who had passed through it. Tapper remained to lock the door from within, while Hawkeye hurried the girl through the basement to an exit on a side street.

There, the still dazed girl found herself being helped into a cab by a rather handsome young man who was politely adjusting the evening cape that had wrapped itself around her shoulders. Feeling somehow that she had to explain herself, the girl began:

"I – I'm – well, my name is Bonnie Blye. I didn't mean – that is, I do mean – that if you understand –"

The young man bowed as though he did understand. Then:

"My name is Harry Vincent," he introduced. "I'm glad I just happened to arrive here in this cab. I hope we meet again, Miss Blye."

Before the girl could say anything more, she was in the cab and it was pulling away, the driver leaning over as though he expected his lone passenger to give him an address, which Bonnie finally did.

By then the shower had ended back in the alley. The cops who had received the Agnew gems were raking the building with their flashlights and shouting up to the ledges. They received similar responses from a window they couldn't see, up on the fourth floor. But their flashlights converged with those that cast out beams from that direction and they could hear the choking shouts of officers above.

It happened that nobody, either above or below, could explain where the jewelry had come from. Only one person knew and he wasn't inclined to tell.

That person was The Shadow.

On his return to the fourth floor, The Shadow had slipped past the recuperating police only to find the Agnew apartment devoid of the masked crooks. In choosing his own way out, The Shadow had taken the alley side of the building. Half way down the mammoth steps, he had spotted events in the alley.

Hence the shower of gems, The Shadow's impromptu method of drawing the attention of the police from where he didn't want it. Now instead of having focussed all attention on himself, The Shadow was letting it ride right by.

Flat on a ledge, lying along an inner angle where the ledge met the wall, The Shadow's cloaked figure had become a part of the blackness. The probing lights missed him, yet so closely, that they gave the impression of space at the spot where The Shadow actually was.

A whispered laugh stirred the darkness softly as the lights gave up and departed elsewhere. The police apparently were thinking in terms of some future trail. So was The Shadow.

Yet even The Shadow might be due for a surprise when he learned where that trail had led, for others already were experiencing that wonder.

Back at their favorite table in the Crystal Room, where they had slipped quite surreptitiously, Keene Marker and Smiley Grimm were preparing to stiffen their morale with a few stiff drinks before Planchini's final show, when Smiley gripped Keene's arm and lost sufficient sangfroid to gulp:

"Look!"

Keene thought that Smiley was concerned with the visiting magicians, Val Varno and Glanville Frost, who were joining each other at the same table where the crooks had viewed them before.

But Smiley was indicating a table nearer the floor, a choice table occupied by Sidney Maywick, the baldish man of wealth who sported the Van Dyke beard. Maywick had risen and was bowing profusely to a girl whose face Keene couldn't see, since she had just turned so that Maywick could introduce her to the persons at his table.

In fact all that Keene could see of the girl were her lovely shoulders and a sweep of an equally graceful back. It wasn't until she reached a chair and turned around again that Keene observed the blue gown that accompanied the remainder of her figure.

Then of course, Keene saw the girl's face too. Like Smiley, Keene stared at the unmistakable features consisting of sparkling eyes, saucy nose and straight lips that looked the same, even though less determined than they had been under more pressing circumstances.

These men who had, as masked crooks, eluded The Shadow, were staring at Bonnie Blye, the girl who had slipped their clutches, thanks to The Shadow!

CHAPTER VI

IT was morning for the Great Planchini.

That meant it was six o'clock in the afternoon. Planchini's usual hour for rising.

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Closing the door of his suite on the twelfth floor of the Chateau Parkview, Planchini saw a flicker of a red light from an elevator and hurried over to push the down button.

Planchini was just too late. The car went by before he could halt it. Another red light gleamed and a door slid open, admitting Planchini to an elevator managed by a girl operator of hoydenish appearance.

Finding that the car ahead was taking care of stops, this operator made a straight trip to the ground floor, at the same time trying to make small talk with her only passenger.

"H'yah, Planchini," the girl greeted. "Getting up at the crack of sunset, like as usual?"

"Sorry," returned Planchini, drily. "I always rise at dawn."

"It's six o'clock," observed the girl, "and that's six p.m., in case you don't know. Unless maybe you don't operate on New York time."

"You struck it exactly. My standard is Manila time. It is now seven o'clock in Manila, and that happens to be a.m., in case you don't know."

"You mean only seven o'clock this morning?"

"I mean seven o'clock tomorrow morning," emphasized Planchini. "Since I am able to regulate my mind accordingly, I am able within reasonable limitations to predict future events."

"And now, my thoughts being on the future" – Planchini fixed his eyes steadily, then relaxed them, paying no attention to the hoyden's astonishment – "I find that I have neglected the past. Because I unwisely set my watch by New York time, I forgot to bring it with me. Therefore I must return to my room."

Bowing out through the door that the staring operator opened, Planchini stepped into the car that had arrived ahead, just in time to join the passengers who were going up.

Something quite beautiful glared from behind a cigar counter and gave an angry toss of its brunette head. Coming from behind the counter, this girl picked up a newspaper and brought it along to the elevator where the hoyden stood in charge.

"Man in eight–eleven wants his newspaper," the counter girl told the elevator queen. "I can't find a bell–hop to take it up."

"Sorry, I can't leave the elevator," retorted the hoyden. "Against orders. Anything else bothering you?"

"There might be."

"If it's Planchini, all he was handing me was hoke. Anyway, I'm not his type."

"That's just it." The girl from the counter nudged her and toward the elevator. "Why did the Great Brain go back up again?"

"He said he forgot his watch," laughed the hoyden. "He had an alibi for it though, some stuff about his thoughts being in the future instead of the past."

"Did he really forget his watch?"

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"I guess so. I don't remember him looking at it. What do you figure it – an alibi for something else?"

The counter girl gave a grim nod and retreated to her own preserves. Elbows propped on the counter, she watched the dial of the elevator that had just gone up; seeing it stop at number twelve, the brunette's face remained grim, until it started again.

That elevator had stopped just about long enough to let off a passenger, which was just right.

EXCEPT that it hadn't let off a passenger. Up at the twelfth floor, the girl operating that particular car had closed the door again at a gesture from her one remaining passenger: Planchini.

She was a cute thing, the girl who operated this car. She had a roundish face beneath hair that wasn't really red, but just inclined that way, which was probably why she liked it when Planchini said:

"All right, Reds."

The girl smiled and was about to halt the elevator, when Planchini reminded:

"Not between floors, Reds. Those dials are too accurate. It would be just as bad as stopping too long on the twelfth."

The operator halted the elevator at the sixteenth but didn't open the door. She lifted her face so that she could snuggle her chin in the hand that Planchini obligingly raised. The girl's eyes were glowing soulfully when Planchini inquired:

"How's the code coming, Reds?"

The girl began to murmur words.

"Tall – dark – handsome –"

"Those aren't the code-words," laughed Planchini, "and if you mean me, save the dark until I put on my make-up. I'm really handsome then, too."

"You're really handsome right now."

"A kiss for that, beautiful." Leaning forward, Planchini let the girl supply one. "We'll skip the code lesson until later. Chin down now!" Planchini drew the girl's face gently downward. "Give me a few bits of gossip while you mosey up floor by floor."

"There wasn't much of account last night," declared Reds, frowning her forehead, while she made approximate stops at floors. "Old lady Miles is still waiting for word from her lost cousin whom you said she'd hear from within a fortnight."

"I didn't say what fortnight," laughed Planchini. Then sourly, he added: "That debt collecting service is getting slow. I gave them a bill that I said the guy owed me. They ought to have located him by now."

"Somebody is going to ask you where Maria Leone, the movie actress, is taking her vacation. She always uses another name, so people won't find her."

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"And she always goes to some big city. There's an outfit calling itself Celebrity Service that covers characters like her. I'll check where she is by my list. Anything else?"

"Not that I remember." Reds shook her head as she stopped at the top floor and prepared to start down. "No, nothing else."

"Then let me off at the fourteenth, especially as your red light is showing," suggested Planchini. "But what about Sidney Maywick? Didn't you listen in on his chatter when you took him up last night?"

"He wasn't talking about bonds."

"About blondes, then?"

At Planchini's query, Reds brought the car to a slashing stop at the fourteenth floor and turned defiantly, to demand:

"How did you know?"

"Because he was all eyes for one that was perched at his table last night and I knew he'd be all talk about her afterward. What's her name?"

"Bonnie Blye."

"What else?"

"She's stopping here. On the eighteenth floor. I let her off there last night."

"And you're letting me off at the fourteenth right now, because there are customers waiting. See you later, Reds."

When he said "later" Planchini really meant much later, because after walking down to the twelfth floor and reclaiming his watch, he carefully avoided Reds' elevator just as ardently as he had tried to catch it earlier. It was from the hoyden's lift that Planchini stepped a short while later to receive the approving smile of the brunette who presided over the cigar dispensary, a smile that increased as Planchini approached the counter.

"Anything special in cigars?" inquired Planchini, in the bland tone of a customer. "Or don't you recommend any brands?"

"These Havana Specials," returned the girl, reaching beneath the counter in a rehearsed style. "They are exceptionally mild and the panatela size is a delightful after-dinner smoke" – the girl gave an apologetic smile – "or so the gentlemen say, sir."

"Save that sales talk for the right gentleman then," suggested Planchini with a wise smile. "Make sure he's going into the Crystal Room before my act starts and hold back the Specials unless he's changing a five dollar bill or something higher. Get it, Smokey?"

Smiling in acknowledgment of the nickname, Smokey nodded. She considered the term a compliment to her black hair.

"Only one customer to that box," added Planchini, "and give him the one buck bills that you've stashed in the side till of the cash drawer."

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"Except I don't have those bills," reminded Smokey. "You said you'd give them to me this afternoon. Remember?"

Fishing in a pocket, Planchini brought out some tens and twenties. The girl stepped to the cash register.

"I have some singles here –"

"Nix!" interrupted Planchini, leaning across the counter. "I can't list the numbers here. I'll get some in the drugstore when I eat breakfast."

The brunette's eyes became angry.

"I thought you weren't eating in that cheap joint any more," she asserted. "If you could hear what people say about you making fifteen hundred a week and still saving dimes –"

"What people?"

"The people who work here –"

"They aren't the people I entertain," interposed Planchini. "So don't let them worry you. I'll take one cigar" – he helped himself from the Havana Special box – "and I'll be seeing you later. Meanwhile, don't forget your code work. I'll be needing a partner soon."

Smokey smiled at that, knowing that Planchini couldn't mean much later in her case, since he'd have to return to plant the dollar bills he spoke about. Following Planchini with her own eyes, the girl didn't notice that she was the object of others.

Two pairs of them.

Across the lobby, Glanville Frost was giving some details to Val Varno.

"She was saying something about dollar bills," informed Frost. "I know, because I practiced lip reading, on the chance that it might help in a mind reading turn."

"Say, that's a good dodge!" complimented Varno. "One I'll bet that even Planchini missed."

Frost didn't like the term "even Planchini" since it denoted superiority in Varno's mind. But Frost erased his wince with an oily smile.

"Scout around here," Frost told Varno. "Make some contacts of your own. Bar tricks ought to help you get in with people who might have some fair ideas on Planchini's racket."

The suggestion pleased Varno and he headed for the bar while Frost sauntered in the direction of the drugstore. What Varno didn't see was the superior smile that Frost wore in departure.

In the opinion of Glanville Frost, he personally was getting closer to the inside of the Planchini business than Val Varno ever would or ever could.

CHAPTER VII

THERE was another and more important reason why the girl at the cigar counter didn't like it when Planchini breakfasted at eventide in the hotel drugstore.

That reason answered to the name of Babe and it worked behind the drugstore soda fountain, provided that lounging around in the willowy style befitting a tall peroxide blonde could be called working.

Certain customers, however, stirred Babe to rapid service and Planchini rated A-1 in that category. Babe had the orange juice and scrambled eggs coming up with coffee the moment that Planchini entered. With an appreciative nod, the Big Brain sat down and unfolded an afternoon newspaper that he had brought along with the cigar.

"Please give me scrambled eggs and hurry," recited Planchini, side-glancing at a five dollar bill that he held in his other hand. "Give me coffee and hurry now."

"Coffee up!" Babe planted the cup on the imitation marble. "Three, eight, four, three, four, seven. What about the other figures on that fiver, Brain Boy?"

"Tell them quickly."

"Two and a zero. Those code words click and proper. Want to try the name list?"

Planchini shook his head and gave the bill a quick shove across the counter.

"Better pay you now," he said. "Maybe I'd forget. Give me my change right away, because I might forget that too." Swinging on the revolving stool, Planchini stared across the newspaper and spoke suddenly: "Oh, hello, Frost. How's everything by you?"

Babe, being a smart babe, recognized that Frost must be a rival mentalist and therefore somebody who demanded Planchini's full attention and bluff. So she changed the five spot and put the result on the counter beside Planchini.

"Things are fine," said Frost. He nodded at the newspaper. "What are you doing? Reading your press notices?"

"On the front page?" Planchini raised his thin eyebrows in surprise. "My, my, you're giving me credit, Frost. Perhaps too much credit."

"Why too much?"

"Because I don't want my name to be there," confided Planchini. "I cater to a swank clientele, not to people who gorge on news of murder and robbery or who delight in scandal. Put that in your next exclusive manuscript on how to be a mentalist for five dollars."

The last shot told with Frost. He made a specialty of printing overpriced brochures on how to do anything and everything in magic. One of those publications covered the tricks of the mind-reading trade; in referring to the price, Planchini accented it as though five dollars was the fee that a mentalist could expect after imbibing the Frost system.

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His own mention of five dollars reminding him of something, Planchini shoved the newspaper to Frost to distract his attention. To cover his own chagrin, Frost glanced at the journal and found something that promptly interested him.

"You should have predicted this!" exclaimed Frost. "It more or less ties in with that clientele of yours. A robbery at the Landworth Apartments, frustrated by the police, thanks to a mysterious tip-off."

"A telepathic tip-off," observed Planchini, drily. "I sent it personally by mental radio."

Frost was turning pages to read the rest of the story. Planchini picked up his small change from the counter and dropped it in his right coat pocket, where his hand remained. Meanwhile, his left picked up the dollar bills and began to thumb them, much as Val Varno would have handled a pack of cards.

In spreading the newspaper, Frost caught a glimpse of Planchini's action. Doubling the paper, Frost slipped a long thumb-nail against the newsprint and neatly slashed a sizeable opening. Newspaper spread again, Frost began reading paragraphs aloud and slowly.

What Frost was doing, was spotting Planchini's pocket through the opening, watching a motion of Planchini's buried right hand. In pretending to read slowly, Frost was actually scanning sentences rapidly, then reciting them from quick memory, so Planchini would not suspect that he was under observation.

"The Agnew jewels," announced Frost. "All recovered including a diamond pendant belonging to Mrs. Louisa Jardine."

Momentarily Planchini's hand halted and at the same moment, Frost's voice paused. Then, oily-toned, Frost was reading again:

"Two masked crooks escaped, but the third, identified as Dirk Quingal, was shot resisting arrest and died in the hospital without a statement. The robbers used tear gas to escape but dropped the jewels in their hurry. The wall safe was found wide open but undamaged. Police are quizzing servants to know if any knew the combination."

Planchini's hand still was making occasional pauses. Recognizing why, Frost began to wonder if the newspaper item had jarred Planchini at all. The reason for Planchini's hand pauses was that he was using a tiny pencil to write notations in his pocket. Those notations were the serial numbers of the dollar bills that Planchini was thumbing with his left hand. Planchini had to shift his pocket pad after each row of figures.

"Funny business, this," commented Frost. "The police say it isn't the first robbery that looked like an inside job but wasn't. There have been a lot lately, but they can't trace how any originated."

"Another thing" – Frost was really concentrating on the news account now – "this Mrs. Agnew was a victim of a forgery about six months ago. It was the case where Hubert Lidden, the bank cashier, was sent to Sing Sing. He took Mrs. Agnew for about twenty thousand dollars."

Looking up, Frost found he was talking to the air. Planchini had finished his belated breakfast and had gone back into the lobby. Tossing the newspaper aside, Frost started that direction and was just in time to see Planchini leaving the cigar counter.

The dark-haired girl behind that counter was putting some money in a side till of the cash register and Planchini was continuing on toward the entrance to the Crystal Room, which was just opening for the dinner trade. So Frost went to the tap room instead and there found Varno doing some card tricks for two men at a

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table, both of whom looked mildly interested. Frost sat down and Varno introduced him between riffles of the pack, without naming the two customers because he didn't know their names.

Frost had missed out on something by not following Planchini. Instead of going to the Crystal Room, Planchini stopped to chat with a fluffy-haired hat check girl.

"I'm so mixed with numbers," the girl said with a winsome head-shake. "I just can't remember how that code goes. Besides, those lists I make for you keep me awfully busy."

"You're a great girl, Bubbles," approved Planchini. "You mustn't try to remember too much. Those lists, for instance."

"I don't, except when there's something very unusual. For instance, I don't remember numbers after I copy them."

"You won't have to copy numbers any more. Not unless you know exactly what they are, street addresses for instance."

Bubbles nodded, then asked:

"And telephone numbers?"

"Of course," returned Planchini. "You didn't get me many last night, did you?"

"Only a few. I didn't know what some numbers were, but I copied them anyway."

"That's just the kind you don't need to copy. By the way, you couldn't tell me whose numbers those were that you gave me last night, could you?"

Again, Bubbles shook her head.

"Then just forget all about them," suggested Planchini smoothly. "Street numbers and telephones – that's all the numbers you ever think about, the only kind you would even look for."

Bubbles smiled her agreement.

Returning to the elevators, Planchini looked toward the cigar counter just long enough to exchange a smile in that direction, which enabled him to miss the hoyden's elevator, as if by chance. Entering the car that Reds maneuvered, Planchini found himself alone with the girl before they reached the twelfth floor.

"Who did we have in the lost and found department last night?" asked Planchini absently. "Or was there anybody?"

"You ask me to remember?" returned Reds. "I'm not The Brain. You are."

"Sorry, Reds."

"There was some woman who lost something, but who she was, I've forgotten. A lot of people were trying to remember things they'd lost, just to test you. But don't bother about last night. I'll pick up plenty of scraps for this evening. I'll leave the envelope under your door when I go off duty."

Reaching his suite, Planchini found some envelopes already awaiting him, including a fat one from the clipping bureau that he patronized. But Planchini was too tired to go over this data so soon. He tossed the envelopes on one of his several filing cabinets and stretched himself on a couch.

The settling twilight that was dawn to Planchini put him in a placid mood. If he looked pale and gaunt in that dull light, it was only because he lacked the dark, full make-up that was part of the Planchini that the public knew.

For the laugh that Planchini gave was a healthy one indeed, a self-satisfied laugh at his own genius in choosing helpers who could find out much but remember very little.

CHAPTER VIII

AT about half-past eight, New York time, Lamont Cranston paused at the cigar counter in the Chateau Parkview and drew a ten dollar bill from his pocket as he looked over the display of cigars. One glance at Cranston spelled "Crystal Room" to the girl behind the counter. Anyone wearing evening clothes so immaculate could only be bound for that haven deluxe.

The girl came up with the box of Havana Specials and the sales talk that went with them. Always a fancier of panatelas, Cranston purchased a quota of the thin cigars. The girl promptly put the box beneath the counter, which roused Cranston's interest more.

What happened next did not escape Cranston's seemingly casual eye. He saw the girl bring four one dollar bills from a side till of the cash register. That was all Cranston needed to know.

Reaching the doorway of the Crystal Room, Cranston inquired for Mr. Maywick's table. He was ushered to a ringside seat where Maywick promptly introduced him to a crowd of prosperous visitors. Among them was a girl that Cranston expected to find, a certain Miss Blye.

Bonnie was wearing the same gown of the night before and she was really a rhapsody in blue. Enough so to violate the unwritten law of the Crystal Room, where the lady habitues never appeared in the same gown twice in succession.

Perhaps because Bonnie didn't yet rate as a regular, she was getting by; but for that matter, Bonnie could have gotten by in any company. Right now she was the most attractive sight in the Crystal Room not excluding the beautiful big cut-glass chandeliers.

To refer to Bonnie, all Cranston had to do was raise his eyebrows in Maywick's direction.

"Her father was a friend of mine," confided Maywick, leaning Cranston's way. "I hardly remember him, but of course I pretended I did. Who wouldn't?"

A nod came from Cranston.

"I sell a lot of solid securities to reliable customers," added Maywick. "I always warn them not to trade such gilt-edged purchases for doubtful stocks. But many of them do" – he shrugged unhappily – "like this chap Blye did. Henry J. Blye, his daughter says his full name was."

Dinner was being served, which pleased Maywick's guests, because they wanted to reach their desserts before Planchini's act went on. It was a standing rule of the house that no serving should take place while Planchini was officially on the floor.

CRIME OUT OF MIND

But Planchini acted in an unofficial capacity also, as became evident during dinner. The great mentalist appeared, smiling blandly through the dark, full-faced makeup that completely changed his gaunt and pallid visage, and nodded to regular customers as he proffered the large glass bowl in which he collected sealed messages.

Again, Glanville Frost and Val Varno were witnesses to this procedure from the undesirable table where they sat. Craning to look around a pillar, Frost gave an opinion to Varno.

"What a phoney!" commented Frost. "He won't give any of those messages back. It's fifteen minutes until show time and all he has to do is open them backstage and pick the stuff he knows he can answer."

"Yeah," agreed Varno, glancing at the coin he was rolling along his knuckles. "But that's still what gets us – the answers."

"I'd like to see what goes on back there," remarked Frost. "Or better, I'd like to have a peek into Planchini's room and see what sort of files he keeps."

"You wrote a book on how to crack handcuffs and pick locks," reminded Varno. "Why don't you load with the right gimmicks and check on what you want to know?"

"A good idea," nodded Frost, "except right now I'm getting interested in what I'm seeing here. That patch of blue, for instance."

The patch of blue proved to be Bonnie, and she must have captivated Varno's attention too, for Val's coin slipped and struck the table, the only time he'd missed on the coin roll in weeks. Planchini had stopped at Maywick's table and Bonnie was reaching a long, lovely arm across so that she could drop her sealed envelope into the bowl.

Even at this distance, Bonnie's soulful expression was evident and it was obvious that she believed in the reality of Planchini's powers.

"Dames," observed Varno. "That's what Planchini's act is built on. They all fall for that mental hoke."

"Or for the gentleman who dispenses it," modified Frost, thinking in terms of a soda fountain, a cigar counter, and their respective attendants. "I wonder if he'll really go through with a two person act."

"You mean where the guy codes the dope to some girl?" demanded Varno. "Not a chance! Planchini wouldn't be a good audience man; they have to be mousey like so many mice. The girl steals the act."

"Which would be all right with the right girl," decided Frost, watching Bonnie drape back to her chair. "It might steal some of Planchini's business too."

"Not from the dames that fall for him –"

"They fall for the hoke, too. You said that yourself, Val. What's more, around the better grade saloons such as this, the men pay the checks. Maybe" – Frost's eyes were more than speculative – "it's time that they fell for something too."

Others than Frost and Varno were decidedly interested in the trusting manner that Bonnie had displayed toward Planchini. Over at their favorite table were the two men who had shown some interest in Varno's barroom card tricks. That pair happened to be Keene Marker and Smiley Grimm.

CRIME OUT OF MIND

"That dame gets an answer," stated Keene. "I wonder if it's going to be the one that counts."

"It might be," acknowledged Smiley, "unless Planchini is too smart to show his hand."

"He'd be smart if he did," gritted Keene. "He must know we want some service for being put on the spot."

"We got service," returned Smiley. "Didn't you ever hear of Dirk Quingal?"

Keene forced a nod.

"According to a note I received today," confided Smiley, "we're to pick up another big stupe named Hawser Thorgin, whenever we need him. Here" – he shoved the note Keene's way – "read it and don't weep."

Keene read it in the fair light that always persisted prior to Planchini's act.

The words weren't all that interested Keene.

"Same writing as the one I got," Keene undertoned. "Hang on to it, Smiley. We may want to match these some day."

"With Planchini's writing –"

"That's it. If we can't pick up some of those sheets he scribbles when he's answering questions, we may be able to swipe a few samples from his room."

Keene's notion pleased Smiley, particularly when he noted that his letter lacked any mention of his own name, as well as a signature. Therefore the people who had received the letters would not be implicated if the documents reached the police.

But it was equally evident that neither Keene nor Smiley intended to spoil what could prove a lucrative game, so long as no clues pointed their direction.

Meanwhile, Planchini, the subject of so much discussion, had retired beyond the screens that stood for off-stage at the Crystal Room. There, in a little dressing room, Planchini was lighting a half-smoked cigar as he began cutting open the envelopes that he had gathered in the bowl that lay beside him.

Laying aside those that suited, Planchini fished for the one he specially wanted and had little trouble finding it. This was Bonnie's envelope and Planchini had made an indentation in the corner of it with his thumb nail. Though he lacked the long nails that Frost wore, Planchini's were sufficient to accomplish enough in their small way.

Planchini's eyes glistened at sight of a smaller slip that Bonnie had enclosed with her question. His gaze then became speculative, very much so. Checking a card index that he had brought from his suite, Planchini found all the data he wanted – and more.

Drawing on his cigar, Planchini kept testing the aroma of the panatela as he stared into the thickening smoke. The room was becoming smoke-heavy, but Planchini seemed to like it that way, until suddenly he tossed the cigar aside and flung open the window.

When the call came for Planchini's floor show to begin, the mystic stepped from his dressing room, smoking a cigarette instead of a cigar. Closing his eyes, Planchini rubbed their lids gently, to make sure he had affixed

a pair of flat brilliants there.

Fully turbaned and carrying his crystal ball, the Great Planchini appeared amid a crescendo from the orchestra to begin what was to be one of his most startling performances.

CHAPTER IX

PLANCHINI'S act always opened with what he termed a warm-up, to whet the interest of the audience. Going around from table to table, Planchini gained occasional impressions, which filled time while a polite attendant was bringing on the table that held the fish bowl full of questions.

The warm-up had been somewhat lukewarm recently. Tonight, Planchini intended to make it red hot.

Gazing into the crystal, Planchini caught sight of reflected faces that he knew, since the whole room was lighted at present; in fact, the spotlight man was just starting from his office up to his booth. At one table, Planchini paused to state that someone there was thinking of the Ozark Mountains; at another, he gained the impression of a recent plane flight to Alaska.

These were stock stuff, worked on customers whose history Planchini knew by heart. Another of his favorite gags was that of getting an impression from someone whose birth month was September. Some woman would invariably claim that distinction and Planchini would dish out a brisk astrological reading as though that happened to be what was on the woman's mind.

Always, Planchini paused and swayed, taking deep breaths in accordance with yoga tradition. That was what had given him the idea for tonight's big punch.

They'd been saying lately that Planchini was either missing numbers or dodging them, so he was ready to ruin that impeachment. Planchini's long breathing exercises were with a given purpose. He was sniffing for a strong fragrance with which he had just educated himself, that of a very pungent Havana Special cigar.

Such an aroma reached Planchini now.

Among the cigars that were being flourished at the nearest tables, Planchini saw only one of the thin panatela variety. Stepping to its owner, identifying the pungency again, Planchini was more than pleased. The man who was smoking the planted cigar happened to be at Maywick's table, the same table where Bonnie Blye was seated.

The cigar smoker of course was Lamont Cranston, but Planchini didn't know his name, which made it all the better.

"You, sir," announced Planchini. "Have you ever met me before?"

Cranston shook his head.

"Never."

"Would you state on oath," inquired Planchini, "that there is positively no collusion between us?"

"I would."

CRIME OUT OF MIND

"Suppose then," suggested Planchini, "that you use your own money for the test I am about to perform. Take some bills and pass them to other persons at this table. Not big bills" – with a broad smile, Planchini added what passed as a touch of humor – "because I wouldn't want you to risk losing them.

"One dollar bills will do, but keep them with the green side toward me. I want only your friends to see the serial numbers on those bills, each friend who takes one. Then, as each person concentrates, I shall mentally read those numbers that they have in mind."

Naturally the dollar bills that Cranston produced were those from the cigar counter, since he'd had to change a higher bill there. As Cranston carefully distributed them, Planchini added just one amendment; namely, that the bills should be placed with persons well apart, so as to obtain a wider range of thought.

"One to the gentleman over there," said Planchini, "another to the lady over here – the lady in blue –"

The lady in blue was Bonnie, which made it perfect for Planchini. He was going to move this red-hot warm-up into a big bang that would start the evening right.

"I get the impression of the letter 'D,'" began Planchini, staring into the crystal ball, "followed by the figures three – nine – nine –"

"My bill," acknowledged Cranston, looking up from the one that he had retained. "You're giving it perfectly."

Planchini turned the crystal slightly, which was necessary because under it he had the paper that he had scribbled in his pocket earlier. The crystal was enlarging the figures like a magnifying glass. Planchini called the rest belonging to that bill and Cranston acknowledged that all numbers were correct.

At that, Planchini was glad to finish with Cranston. Over the crystal, he noted the man's face, calm, impassive, almost mask-like. Cranston's eyes, when they looked up, proclaimed insight which troubled the mystic.

"Another number comes to mind," continued Planchini. "The letter 'A' – then the figure seven – eight – three –"

"That's my number!"

The exclamation came from Bonnie.

"The number on your bill," emphasized Planchini, as though the dollar didn't belong to Cranston.

"Concentrate steadily and I shall give you the rest: Four – three –"

As he droned the figures that the crystal magnified, Planchini stole another glance at Bonnie and saw that she was quite agog. Getting what seemed a really mental answer was strictly a convincer where the girl was concerned. As she went through with the business of the dollar bill, Planchini could see the eagerness that registered on the girl's flushed face.

It meant that Bonnie was hoping for an answer to her written question and believed that she would get it. That was Planchini's cue.

The moment that he finished naming the number that Bonnie corroborated, Planchini shifted position, raised his free hand and snapped his fingers. Out went the crystal chandeliers, on came the spotlight as if by magic. Trained on Maywick's table, the glare caught both Planchini and the earnest girl.

And now Planchini was really Planchini.

Bonnie gasped as the mystic's eyes sparkled fire. Actually, Planchini's eyes were closed; the brilliants on his eyelids were reflecting the focussed light and therewith casting those vivid sparks. But Bonnie felt that it was very real and all for her.

"You have a question!" announced Planchini. "An important question, that you do not have to write, because it is so predominant in your mind. The question that you have waited long to ask –"

There, Planchini inserted one of his dramatic pauses that seemed to fill the hushed blackness away from the spotlight, until Bonnie's whisper broke it:

"Yes – yes –"

"I gain the impression quickly," continued Planchini, "because it is about money. You began by thinking of a dollar, now you are thinking of many dollars –"

A pause, while Bonnie swayed forward as she nodded.

"Dollars, but not in cash," declared Planchini. "You are thinking of a check to the amount of twenty–seven hundred and fifty dollars!"

Bonnie couldn't have spoken if she'd wanted. Her eyes were wide, fascinated by the glitter of Planchini's blazing orbs. If Planchini had seen the girl's face then, he would have realized that she was on the verge of a hypnotic state. But Planchini's own eyes were closed, as a help toward selling the medicine that he was delivering too strong.

"I see the name Gregg Zerber." Planchini was opening his eyes as he lowered them to the crystal. "It is the name with which the check is signed. You want to know who actually wrote that signature."

Bonnie's eyes were fixed, but her lips spoke.

"Yes."

"A check that you have never seen," specified Planchini, "but with a false signature which you know to be a forgery. You say you wish to know the forger's name."

All intensity, Bonnie was looking up, completely frozen. It was Maywick who recognized her semi–hypnotic state, for he was closest to her. If Cranston noted it, he gave no sign; he was seated calmly, with arms folded.

"Wait, Planchini!" began Maywick, reaching to grasp Bonnie. "The girl isn't well –"

It was too late. Eyes closed, Planchini heard another forcible, "Yes" from Bonnie and the tone must have knifed through Maywick's appeal, for Planchini imperiously gave answer.

"You will recognize the man from his initials," declared Planchini. "Acknowledge the facts when I give them. Those initials are –"

Clutching Bonnie with one hand, Maywick was rising to brandish an interrupting gesture toward Planchini, which the latter saw as his eyes came open. But at that very instant, Planchini was voicing the revelation that he promised:

"Those initials are 'H. L.!'"

Bonnie Blye acknowledged the initials dramatically enough. This time it was the girl's eyes that went shut, as with a sobbing sigh, Bonnie collapsed from Maywick's hasty grasp, jarred the man on the far side before he could give aid, and sprawled inert upon the floor beside the table!

CHAPTER X

A SHOWMAN to the core, Planchini blandly gestured the spotlight to where it would show what had happened to the young lady whose mind he had read too well. Into the glare came Maywick, Cranston, and others intent upon reviving Bonnie.

Then, Planchini's hand carried the spotlight with him as he stalked to the fish bowl and picked out an envelope at chance. In his most powerful voice, Planchini announced:

"For my second question, I shall describe an elephant, a white elephant. I mean a real white elephant imported from Siam. Who is thinking of such a white elephant?"

A voice responded and Planchini flagged the spotlight to the side of the floor away from Maywick's table to pick out an elderly man who was acknowledging the question. Over in their corner, Val Varno and Glanville Frost immediately commented upon the subject.

"Everybody knows that guy," declared Varno. "He's Pete Bouton, the big circus man. I read all about him in the Billboard, making that deal to bring in a lot of Royal Siamese elephants."

"The people here don't read the Billboard regularly," reminded Frost, "except for Planchini and the orchestra. You can see the way they're taking it."

The orchestra members were buzzing among themselves while the audience at large listened in amazement to Planchini's accurate description of King Yumba, lead elephant of the Siamese herd, while the circus man acknowledged all the specifications.

"What's more important," stated Frost, "is what happened to that girl. They must be helping her out of here in the dark."

"The dame overplayed it," was Varno's opinion. "I knew she was just another of Planchini's plants when she staged that faint."

"It wasn't a faint," argued Frost. "She was hypnotized."

"That's even fakier," returned Varno. "I did a phony hyp act once –"

"And Planchini staged a real one tonight," interrupted Frost, "even though he didn't mean it. You'd better read my manuscript on genuine hypnosis, Val. If I could see that girl right now, I believe I'd find her in a cataleptic state."

"Want to see her?"

Answering his own question, Varno flung his hand upward and a whiff of flame ascended, bringing gasps from surrounding tables, along with the brief light.

CRIME OUT OF MIND

"Give me that flash stuff," ordered Frost. "You'll have us chucked out of here next. You'd think you were some amateur magician, doing tricks while an act is on. They'll be asking you to show your U.W.A. card next."

Varno laughed at that, since the United Wizards Association, represented by the initials, answered to the nickname of "Usually We're Amateurs." Nevertheless, Varno handed over the bottle of flash capsules that he always carried.

"I'm going out to the lobby," stated Frost, "so I can learn what happened to the girl. Check on the rest of Planchini's act and we'll hold a post mortem when I get back."

Already out in the lobby, Bonnie was definitely exhibiting signs of a hypnotic state with her steady, vacant stare. Two ladies of the party volunteered to take her to a room where she could rest, while Maywick hurried to the drugstore, stating he'd phone his physician from there, since it would be a handy place in case the doctor ordered some immediate prescription.

As for Lamont Cranston, he was already making a phone call from the lobby booth that no one else used because it was marked "Out of Order." A wavery voice answered and Cranston immediately changed his tone to inquire in a blunt, even manner:

"Is Gregg Zerber there?"

"Sorry," came the quavery voice. "Mr. Zerber just went out."

"This is Kent Allard calling."

"Oh!" The quaver showed surprise. "I can tell you where Mr. Zerber went, Mr. Allard. He left for the Merrimac Club. He'll be at the Heliocar conference and I'm sure he'll be glad to see you."

The laugh that followed that phone call could have been styled a cross between Cranston's and Allard's. If Zerber had wanted Allard at the Heliocar conference, he would have asked him there. However, Zerber, whenever at home, was always at home to Allard.

These things were to be explained in due course. Just to simplify matters, the man who looked like Cranston but called himself Allard, underwent a quick change in the unused phone booth. In brief, he slid into the cloak and hat that formed the habit of The Shadow. Releasing a special panel in the depths of the phone booth, the cloaked figure filtered through.

Nobody witnessed that departure though one man seated in the lobby knew that it must have occurred. That man was Harry Vincent, the friendly chap who had turned over his cab to a lady in distress the night before. Ace among The Shadow's agents, Harry was stationed in this hotel lobby to observe what happened during his chief's absence. So Harry settled back to watch.

Oddly, The Shadow was at that moment riding in the same cab that had figured in last night's events. Or in a sense, it wasn't odd, since this happened to be The Shadow's own cab. Piloted by Moe "Shrevvy" Shrevnitz, the speediest hackie in Manhattan, this cab was always at The Shadow's beck. Last night it was Shrevvy who had disclosed that Bonnie Blye had gone to the Chateau Parkview, since Shrevvy had taken her there.

Now Harry Vincent was witnessing something so phenomenal that he wished his chief had remained to observe it. His attention attracted by a motion on a stairway to the mezzanine, Harry saw a blue-clad figure coming down those steps.

Bonnie Blye!

At first sight, Harry thought that the ravishing blonde had recuperated from her recent shock, but as she crossed the lobby, Harry noted her fixed stare and recognized its autohypnotic quality. Clutched to the bosom of her blue gown, Bonnie was holding the ornamental handbag that she had carried the night before, pressing it against the very center of the gown's clover-cut front.

Evidently Bonnie valued something that the bag contained, but no one other than Harry noted it. As for the girl's slow, dreamy stalk, it was customary for young ladies in evening attire to acquire such fantastic manners after imbibing too many of the fancy cocktails dispensed in the famous Crystal Room. Hence nobody but Harry gave Bonnie more than an admiring glance as she went by.

As for Harry, he knew that Bonnie hadn't taken a single drink while in the Crystal Room, because Harry had been there at another table. Harry simply supposed that Bonnie was going back to join Maywick's party and would probably snap out of it, particularly when she saw Planchini again.

But Bonnie didn't stop at the Crystal Room. The speed of her pace increased, she went right out the front door of the Chateau Parkview. That was when Harry came to his feet and followed, but too late.

Two cabs were standing outside the Chateau Parkview and Bonnie shouldered her way right into the first. This caused quite a stir along the sidewalk, since Bonnie looked like a fugitive from the Crystal Room, for it was hardly likely that otherwise she'd have hurried outside without stopping to put on her evening wrap.

As the cab pulled away, the doorman and passing pedestrians stared toward the hotel expecting some tuxedoed chap to come rushing out and call the girl back, but the only candidate at that moment was Glanville Frost, who had stepped outside the hotel to learn if fresh air could help him unravel more of the intricacies of Planchini's act.

In the style of a practiced magician, Frost performed an immediate disappearance into the second cab while eyes were fixed the other way. That cab was off along Bonnie's trail by the time Harry Vincent sauntered out to the sidewalk, affecting complete indifference where the Bonnie question was concerned.

Seeing that Harry wanted a cab, the doorman started to whistle one for him, while Harry went through the agony of repressed impatience at the lack of such a vehicle. The cab wouldn't be worth the twenty cent price of a minimum ride by the time it arrived, since it would then be too late to follow the others.

Making a wild guess as to where Bonnie could have gone, Harry remembered a name that Planchini had spoken, the sort of name that people usually dismissed from mind after a questioner acknowledged it as correct.

Harry's lips spoke it:

"Gregg Zerber!"

Maybe Harry was becoming really telepathic, for somehow his recollection of that name seemed to date, not with Planchini's revelation, but from the moment that Harry had seen Bonnie coming down the mezzanine steps as though drawn by her own hypnotic stare.

Quickly Harry swung back into the hotel to find a phone book and look up the number of Gregg Zerber before the doorman finally hailed a cab.

CRIME OUT OF MIND

That name, Gregg Zerber, was in other minds as well. Back in the Crystal Room, Keene Marker and Smiley Grimm were going over their usual list as the lights came on.

"I'm betting on Question One," Keene was saying. "It was the knockout of the evening."

"A safe bet," agreed Smiley. "Less odds than usual, too. Planchini only clicked off five tonight."

"Smart, cutting his act short," declared Keene. "All the punch was at the start, but he held the people as long as they expected something just as strong. He clipped that last five minutes before they could go wise on him."

Smiley nodded, indicating that he'd timed Planchini's act, too. His hand was strumming the table as he glanced impatiently toward the door of the projection man's office.

"Maybe Planchini won't be using us," spoke Smiley. "The dance act is over and the guy from the booth will be down here any time now. Planchini has been up in his room at least five minutes. He ought to know that time is short."

"Too short," specified Keene. "Here comes Mr. Projector now –"

"And there goes the signal!"

Smiley's ear had caught a single ring from the telephone in the office. Keene was alert too, half rising as though he didn't expect more. Smiley came to his feet too and a moment later, both men were sidling through the handy exit.

One ring only, meaning the name that these two guessers had picked: Gregg Zerber.

Much was on the move tonight.

CHAPTER XI

BY the time The Shadow's cab had reached the Merrimac Club, the face of Lamont Cranston had undergone a complete transformation. In the dark, The Shadow, master of disguise, had switched his features to those of a person called Kent Allard.

It had taken little of The Shadow's genius to accomplish this remarkable result. In actuality, he had simply wiped Cranston's visage away, taking care to remove a waxlike base that was responsible for the perfection of the Cranston mold.

Still The Shadow in attire, the cloaked passenger made a quick survey of the street as the cab swung in front of the Merrimac Club. Ready for almost anything along this trail, The Shadow was prepared to handle lurkers in his own inimitable style, before Zerber arrived. Only there were no lurkers, which was why The Shadow let his cloak and hat slide to the cab seat.

Out of that cab stepped Kent Allard.

This was one of those exceptional cases when The Shadow disclosed his real identity, but under circumstances when nobody would begin to guess it. Greatest of The Shadow's secrets was the fact that the very character which had become a part of him, that of Lamont Cranston, was in itself a disguise.

CRIME OUT OF MIND

The Shadow had learned to live the role of Cranston, to the point where becoming Allard seemed strange indeed. His agents and a few trusted others, believed that he was Cranston; though they knew that on occasion he might turn out to be almost anyone.

Even in his archives, The Shadow referred to himself as Lamont Cranston, if only for convenience. (Ed: Having full access to The Shadow's archives for a period of fifteen years, I can vouch for the fact that there was not even the slightest reference to Kent Allard prior to the time when a chance emergency caused The Shadow to resume his real identity. See "The Shadow Unmasks," Vol. XXII, No. 5, Aug. 1, 1937. Maxwell Grant.) Of course this gave him the advantage of holding the Allard identity in complete reserve should future policy demand it. Perhaps that was The Shadow's real reason for reverting to his own self so seldom.

There was a reason where Gregg Zerber was concerned. Zerber had known Allard from some years back, but had never met Cranston. It was Allard who had flown the mail for Zerber when the latter had been threatened with the loss of his contract with a Central American government that expected planes to ride the highest mountains in the worst weather.

Always thereafter, Zerber had been going to do great things for Allard, but had been too busy accomplishing great things for Zerber. The door of Zerber's apartment was always wide open, but never that of his office. Right now, Zerber wasn't going to be happy when Allard crashed the gate of the Heliocar conference.

Smiling slightly at that thought, Allard didn't forget his limp when he entered the foyer of the Merrimac Club. The limp belonged to Allard permanently, because it was part of his story about being lost amid a tribe of Xinka Indians in the Yucatan Peninsula at the very time when an amazing personage known as The Shadow had first begun to harass America's unwanted gangland.

Announcing himself at the door of the conference room, Allard listened for comments from within. He still had reason to smile when he thought how welcome Lamont Cranston would have been, as a potential investor with access to millions, in contrast to a forgotten skybird like Kent Allard. But instead of excuses, Allard was favored with apologies of a sort.

One of the committee men arrived to explain matters with sincere regret.

"Sorry, Mr. Allard," the man said, "but Mr. Zerber won't be with us this evening. He called from his apartment to tell us so."

"But I found his apartment," returned Allard. "His servant told me he had already left for this conference."

"You must have misunderstood old Jeffers," declared the committee man, referring to Zerber's servant. "He probably meant to say that Mr. Zerber was about to leave."

It was the proper time for Allard to play dumb.

"But if Zerber didn't leave –"

"Something detained him," came the explanation. "An unexpected appointment, so he said. Frankly, we thought it must be you, Mr. Allard. Always, Mr. Zerber has spoken of you so highly that we know he would give you first consideration in any important matter."

Having had enough of that complimentary double-talk, Allard bowed his departure. Limp notwithstanding, he made a quick return to Shrevvy's cab and was giving an order as he settled in the back seat, sliding into his black garb the moment he arrived.

"Zerber's apartment. No loitering."

That last phrase was the sort that made Shrevvy see green in the way of traffic signals. Red lights could be something that Shrevvy sometimes couldn't see and this was one of those times. Twenty minutes was a proper estimate of the time lost by detouring to Zerber's apartment by way of the Merrimac Club. Shrevvy intended to chop that margin down to something like fifteen.

While Shrevvy was doing anything but dawdle, Bonnie's cab rolled up to the apartment house where Zerber lived and disgorged its charming passenger. Over the sill of the front window, the cab driver met the wide stare of fixed blue eyes and watched curved shoulders respond to the action of graceful arms and hands that paid the fare from a chic blue beaded bag.

Shoulders erect, face solemn, Bonnie walked into the small apartment house, finding the door unlatched because the buzzer device was out of order. As if in a trance, the blonde approached an automatic elevator, pressed the button and waited while the car made a slow, laborious trip down from the fifth floor.

As was common with hypnotized subjects, Bonnie was focussed on one thing only, the elevator. She wouldn't have heard the outer door slam even if it had. When the elevator arrived, the girl entered it, closed the door mechanically and pressed a button that bore the number two.

This proved that Bonnie was in a hypnotic trance. Any normal person of reasonable agility would have used the stairs to reach the second floor, rather than wait for the wheezy elevator to come all the way down from the fifth. In starting later from the Chateau Parkview, Bonnie had already lost seven or eight of those minutes that Shrevvy was trying to make up. She dropped from two to three more, by bothering with the elevator.

On the second floor, Bonnie's stare absorbed the name of Gregg Zerber, which appeared on a door. Opening the door, Bonnie entered. A feeble groan greeted her, as though from a resisting door hinge, but Bonnie was immune to such sounds tonight.

Walking through an ample but dimly-lighted living room, Bonnie came to the open door of a study and entered. A creak preceded her, but it could have come from the other end of a loose floor board, for this apartment house, though exclusive, was old.

The study was lighted but its glow was curiously concentrated. The light came from a desk lamp that was tilted so its glare would meet the eyes of anyone who entered. Bonnie met that glare without a blink and advanced slowly, with pausing footsteps toward the desk.

Behind the desk sat a dumpy man who wore a smoking jacket. His big face was mostly chin, settled deep against his chest, the forward tilt of his head enabling his half closed eyes to avoid the light, yet scrutinize his visitor. On the desk lay a slight strew of papers that looked like canceled checks; the spread was not untidy, but appeared to be a batch that had been rather hastily sorted.

Without a word, Bonnie reached into her handbag, brought out her tight fist and leveled it straight at the big-jawed man who could only be Gregg Zerber.

In an icy monotone, the girl announced:

"I am Bonnie Blye. I want the check that you mentioned in the letter. You know the letter I mean, the one that you wrote to my uncle, Hubert Lidden. Unless you give me that check instantly, I –"

CRIME OUT OF MIND

Bonnie pressed her lithe body forward to the desk edge, to accompany the forward thrust of her tight fist. Her tone rose as the words came fiercely:

"I will kill you!"

Viewed from the door, the scene looked real. Bonnie's taut fist, hidden by her body, must certainly have gripped a gun to account for the piston action of her elbow. Added to that was Zerber's pose, that of a man so frozen by the threat of sudden death that he could neither budge nor speak.

That was why a man came surging through the door, giving a quick call to make the girl turn about. He was drawing his own gun, a sizeable automatic, this man who was subbing for The Shadow: namely, Harry Vincent. If Bonnie turned, she'd have to meet a threat superior to that of her own gun and besides, Zerber was a factor; he couldn't be counted on to show mercy under this stress. If he had a gun in a desk drawer, he'd be apt to grab it and cut loose.

Only Bonnie didn't turn and therefore Zerber didn't move. What Harry did therefore was complete his drive and hook Bonnie's right arm with a cross-reach of his left. With a backward whip, Harry spun the girl around like a top, Bonnie making three revolutions before she landed back against the wall.

By then, Harry was gripping the side of the desk to halt his own recoil. Zerber making no move, Harry stared at Bonnie, much amazed by what he saw.

Fixed eyes and empty fist!

The girl had been threatening Zerber without a gun in hand; hence there was no mystery as to why he had ignored the menace. For the moment, Harry Vincent felt as foolish as he was befuddled, until he heard the floor creak. It came from near the door, that sound, and Harry wheeled anew. He was in time to spot a man who was starting a sneak from the corner of the room, but Harry's whirl carried him too far to cover the fellow with his gun. Though Harry couldn't see the man's face in the light, he gained the impression of a tuxedo shirt-front.

Discovered, this intruder was lunging Harry's way, hands ahead, hoping to snatch Harry's gun. Harry took one quick side-step past the desk, then came forward, parrying his gun so as to swing his fist and let the gun-weight add power to the punch.

It was neat, the way Harry caught the man off-guard, or it would have been neat if the fellow hadn't flung one hand upward. From that hand came a sweeping flash of living flame that half-blinded Harry as he hit the desk and sent it askew, taking a long sprawl to the floor.

Rolling over, Harry came up with the gun, prepared to shoot blind, when he heard the door slam and caught the muffled fade of speeding feet beyond. Lowering the gun, Harry came to his feet, rubbed his eyes and gazed inquiringly to the desk, realizing that, after all, Zerber could explain and with it accept apologies.

But Gregg Zerber wasn't capable of either.

As Harry stared, his blinking eyes unbelieving, Zerber slid slowly from the desk that had been wrenched out of place and landed with a deadweight thud that made the very floorboards creak the message:

"Murder!"

CHAPTER XII

GREGG ZERBER, dead, slain by an imaginary gun with a bullet that didn't exist!

Such was the impossible trail of thought that ran through Harry Vincent's mind as he stared at the slumped figure on the floor.

If ever there could be murder by magic, this seemed it.

Of course Harry's eyes still saw big floating blocks of black as a reflex from the sudden, blinding flash that somebody had tossed his way. He remembered having seen a few such flashes around the Chateau Parkview and he identified them with Val Varno. However, that wasn't the main issue of the moment.

Harry looked toward the wall where Bonnie stood. The girl's fist was still clenched, but lowered, while from her other wrist dangled the blue bag. It had come open, that bag, and in it Harry almost expected to see a gun. But when he steadied his eyes, he noted that the bag was empty, except for a change purse, a compact, and a few minor items.

Bonnie's eyes still held the vacant stare which her own intensity, plus the glitter of Planchini's brilliant-studded eyelids, had hypnotically induced. This convinced Harry that Bonnie couldn't have fired the shot that killed Zerber.

Which produced the possibility that Zerber might have been slain by something other than a gunshot!

On that assumption, Harry turned to survey the body closely. Hardly had he stooped above Zerber's form, before the door clattered and Harry had just time to swing himself above the desk, gun in hand, when he saw a pair of men enter. Spotting Harry, they immediately deployed, producing revolvers of their own.

It was stupid to be taken so off-guard, but Harry wasn't in a condition to avoid it. His vision was still blurred, to the degree where these invaders looked like floating figures, chopped by blackness. He'd seen both men, Harry had, around the Chateau Parkview, for the pair consisted of Keene Marker and Smiley Grimm. But Harry couldn't begin to recognize them under present circumstances.

Whether Keene or Smiley recognized Harry was another question; it might be that they thought he was Zerber, whose body was now out of sight behind the desk. Whether the slick crooks knew why they'd been sent here did not matter, for they had a general idea, now that they were on the actual premises.

That idea involved the checks that were strewn on Zerber's desk. Maybe they looked like canceled checks but there might be some negotiable items among them. Keene and Smiley could see well enough, because the lamp's glare was on the desk proper; besides, a stray breeze, wafting through an open window behind the desk, was stirring the messed papers, giving them a conspicuous flutter.

Around behind the desk and crouching low, Harry felt the wind against his neck and bristled. Perhaps that was the nearest Harry could come to giving a shiver, after years in The Shadow's service. Being in a spot like this wasn't a new experience to Harry Vincent, but those persistent blurs of black before his eyes were disconcerting, at the least.

One thing: the two invaders didn't seem to want to start shooting any more than did Harry. However, that fact, in its way, rendered the situation all the more insidious. They were scheming something, these men that Harry could scarcely see, judging from the way they kept flanking further, drawing more and more apart.

CRIME OUT OF MIND

It couldn't be that they were going to do the rush act. All Harry would have to do would be wheel in one direction, settle the first man who tried to jump the gun, and be clear around the desk, ready to turn and devastate the other.

Easy enough, if Harry's eyes had been right. On the chance that they soon would be, he started a shift to the right, imperceptibly at first, all the while wangling his gun from one side to the other, in a lazy but disconcerting style that his chief, The Shadow, had taught him.

Floating in with the breeze came the chimes of a neighborhood clock, striking the hour.

Harry didn't need to count the strokes. He knew what time it was: nine o'clock. Those big dongs that stirred the tense silence had a better use. They provided just enough relief for Harry to move faster, as though he had become a trifle nervous. He would make it seem that the clock strokes had excited him.

One detail was overlooked by Harry.

That detail was Zerber's body. Completely forgetting it, Harry stumbled across the sprawled form and had to grab for the desk to save himself from a fall. From their viewpoint, Keene and Smiley probably thought that Harry's misstep was faked.

Nevertheless, it served them, because there was something else that Harry had forgotten: Bonnie.

The crooks sprang their ruse with splendid teamwork.

From his left, Harry heard a sharp challenge, and turned in Keene's direction, only to get a blackish glimpse of the fellow dropping to the shelter of the desk. Harsher, more forceful was the next voice from the right. As Harry spun that way, knowing that his second adversary couldn't find shelter on this side of the desk, he learned how the man had profited by the brief time allotment.

Smiley had grabbed Bonnie and was whirling the transfixed girl in Harry's direction, using the slim blonde as a spinning human shield!

Neither sight nor foresight could have saved Harry then, since Keene was ready to deliver a flank attack along with Smiley's protected drive. But Harry had wits in plenty and was trained to use them.

Hurling himself straight for Bonnie, Harry met the whirling girl, took a half turn with her in a change-your-partner style and came slugging blindly at Smiley, who made a mad dive for Keene's shelter. Not only that, Harry diverted Bonnie's spin and the girl, ricocheting from the desk, knocked over the lamp with her wildly spinning arms. As Bonnie did a half topple across his path, Harry didn't grab her as a shield, for he doubted that his enemies would care what happened to her.

Too much of Bonnie was too white and conspicuous even in the half-light that now filtered from the hall, so Harry simply brushed her toward a front corner of the room as he sliced to a sharp frontward angle of his own, from which he could charge at the huddled men who weren't ready to receive him.

This slighter light was helpful to Harry's eyes, until something bulked suddenly to block it. Instinctively, Harry gave a reverse twist, to reach the front of the desk as a shelter from the men upon the left, and at the same time greet a new invader who was hulking through the doorway.

The invader greeted Harry first.

Not with a gun, nor a knife, but with the strangest weapon that it had ever been Harry's ill-luck to encounter. A thing like a billiard ball came whizzing through the air, not straight, but with a long wide curve. As it scaled around his shoulder, Harry thought that it had missed him, and jabbed his gun forward, intending to skim his enemy considerably closer with a bullet.

Then, before he could tug the trigger, Harry was hooked forcibly from his feet, choking and goggle-eyed as he tried to rip away something that had lashed around his neck with tightening coils that would have flattered a python.

That ball was on the end of a long, thin rope and the man who flung it had retained the other end, which was made in a small loop. He'd swung the thing like a hammer-throw, neck high, purposely giving enough length so the ball would go beyond Harry and let him receive the rope instead.

Three times the thing had coiled before the ball thwacked Harry's Adam's apple. This little business was a specialty with Hawser Thorgin, the new husky who had been assigned as handy man to the team of Grimm and Marker.

Big teeth glittered from a pockmarked face in the dim light as Hawser started to haul in his sagging captive like some gasping fish. Hooked between the coils of the rope, the ball was causing those coils to tighten, cutting off what little breath Harry had left.

Murderous treatment, this, which Harry could not have survived, had it continued much longer. But Hawser's gloating was destined to be brief. Even before the haul was finished, Hawser was challenged by a fierce, defiant laugh that came through the window, bringing a shrouded shape amid its own echoes. The shape of a real avenger: The Shadow!

CHAPTER XIII

ONE deft whip of the rope and Hawser Thorgin sent Harry Vincent twirling like a top spun from a string. With another whip of the ball-tipped leash, the burly strangler tried to loop The Shadow by the same device. He was gauging by the laugh, was Hawser, slapping the rope low, because he was confident The Shadow had gone into a crouch.

Hawser guessed right, but missed the reason. The reason didn't miss him. That reason happened to be Zerber's desk, which The Shadow was flinging forward with a mighty flip. The desk took Hawser much as the loop had taken Harry, flinging the strangler backward. Hawser's rope hooked a chandelier and stayed there.

On his feet, Harry found himself beside Bonnie and almost as dazed as the girl. He was able, though, to shout a warning that wasn't needed. The Shadow had already picked out two huddled men who were scrambling to regain the shelter of the overturned desk.

Keene and Smiley thought they were fast with their guns, but they were slow, painfully slow, in comparison to The Shadow. He could have nicked them with two quick shots before they learned their guns had triggers, if Hawser hadn't come to their aid again.

Abandoning the glorified yo-yo that had tangled with the chandelier, Hawser lurched upon The Shadow with a bellow quite as sincere as Dirk's, the night before. Like Dirk, Hawser received quick treatment. The Shadow met the husky with a grapple that turned him half-around, a blockade against Keene and Smiley, even though he was their shield as well.

CRIME OUT OF MIND

Amid this, The Shadow gave a swift command that cut through Harry's daze. He was telling Harry to get started and to take Bonnie along. In grappling with Hawser, The Shadow was circling the big strangler toward the door, keeping Keene and Smiley completely immobilized.

Harry left suddenly, hauling Bonnie with him. It was an unwritten rule with The Shadow's agents never to argue with their chief. How aptly this rule applied, was proved the moment that Harry and Bonnie were really in the clear.

Hoisting Hawser with an expert heave, The Shadow flung that struggling chunk of bulk upon the two lurkers who were back beside the desk. As they flattened, Keene and Smiley began shooting; their target by that time was the ceiling.

It took more than one fling to settle Hawser. He came to his feet, but as he did, he took the gunshots to be The Shadow's. With that, Hawser became The Shadow's ally, for he gripped Keene and Smiley by their respective necks and tried to crack their heads together, evidently thinking that one was The Shadow, the other Harry Vincent.

Guns were the only answer to such treatment and the two crooks gave with theirs. Taking the bullets, Hawser reared and gave a half stagger. Lunging slantwise toward the desk, he blundered into The Shadow as the latter was springing forward to get at Keene and Smiley.

From then on, Hawser was quite a handful, exhibiting all the fury of a dying man who wouldn't cave. Keene and Smiley didn't appreciate what power Hawser had gained, nor did they care to answer to him, any more than to The Shadow. They took off through the window, to a fire escape just outside it.

All during the fading clatter from the fire escape and the dwindling footbeats from the cement of the rear courtyard, The Shadow lashed about the room with Hawser, artfully, forcing the strangler to waste his convulsive fury. More bullets would only have roused Hawser to greater frenzy, so The Shadow didn't use them.

After a few minutes of borrowed time, Hawser succumbed, suddenly and thoroughly. Letting the dead man's clutch slide away, The Shadow intoned a mirthless knell then faded out through the doorway.

Police whistles were shrilling through the neighborhood, but there was no sign of The Shadow by the time the police reached the house where the shooting had occurred.

Events were shifting rapidly to the Chateau Parkview. There, something of a stir swept the lobby when Harry Vincent entered, bringing Bonnie Blye. They had made a swift trip here in Shrevvy's cab, which had been waiting outside Zerber's, but Harry avoided mention of that detail.

Sidney Maywick dominated the lobby and with him was a solemn man with a physician's satchel. At sight of Bonnie, Maywick helped the girl to a chair, then turned accusingly to Harry.

"For half an hour I've been hunting this girl!" stormed Maywick. "I brought Dr. Herkimer here" – he gestured to the man beside him – "and returned to find her missing. Can't a man go to bring a specialist without having the patient disappear?"

Harry glanced at the clock above the hotel desk. It registered twenty minutes after nine.

"It took me about half an hour to find her," explained Harry. "I don't even know who she is. I saw her walk out the door with her eyes dead-set for Central Park, so I thought I ought to go after her."

Maywick gradually became mollified and muttered his thanks to Harry. By then, Dr. Herkimer had studied Bonnie's eyes and had come to an interesting conclusion.

"This girl's been hypnotized," declared the physician. "She seems to be the victim of some strange fixation, temporary of course, but possibly serious."

"Why serious?" inquired Maywick.

"Because we do not know the extent of the hypnotic condition," explained Herkimer. "I could awaken her quite easily, but it might not be wise. She would not recognize me for one thing; furthermore, we would not know if she were under a post-hypnotic suggestion."

Maywick looked puzzled, so the doctor explained further.

"Post-hypnosis," he stated, "is a condition wherein the subject has been given some mission to fulfill. It is always unwise to awaken such a patient without knowing what that later impression is to be. If the subject is unable to fulfill the post-hypnotic mission, it becomes a terrible burden. Therefore you should find the person who hypnotized this girl."

People were gathering at a respectful distance, but one man had already stepped closer: Planchini. Still wearing his mystic regalia, the mentalist had just come downstairs from his suite.

"I hypnotized the girl," admitted Planchini, blandly. "It was accidental, because she simply became too intense while I was giving her a reading. But she is under no post-hypnotic suggestion. Shall I awaken her?"

The doctor nodded solemnly and Planchini stepped forward. Finding that the lobby represented an audience, Planchini did the natural thing; he played to it. This, if anything, would add to the Planchini fame.

Among others who recognized that and rather resented it were Val Varno and Glanville Frost.

"Look at that phony!" grumbled Varno. "What he gets away with!"

"It's a better act than you did in the bar," returned Frost, suavely. "Too many card tricks are like too many rabbits from a hat."

"How do you know?" demanded Varno. "You weren't there to see me work. You only showed up five or ten minutes ago –"

"Never mind the argument," interrupted Frost. "Let's watch Planchini. By the way, here are those capsules of yours." He handed the bottle of flash pills to Varno. "But don't start playing with them now."

Varno was toying with the bottle as the two magicians moved closer and Harry noticed it. Harry's look was brief, because he didn't want Varno to observe it. Besides, Harry was interested in what was happening with Bonnie.

Lifting the girl's chin with his hand, Planchini turned her face into the light. His own face moved closer until he remembered that this wasn't Reds, the elevator girl, and also that he and Bonnie weren't alone.

Closing his eyes, Planchini let the brilliants furnish their usual glitter as he snapped his fingers, repeatedly and emphatically. Bonnie's fixed expression changed; she started to gasp as she saw those sparkling optics just above her. Taking the gasp as a cue, Planchini actually opened his eyes and gave Bonnie a smile which

she returned.

"I – I can't remember the question that I wanted to ask," began Bonnie. "It – it was something –"

"Something already answered," interposed Planchini. "No need to remember what it was. Think of another and ask it the next time you see my act."

Two men coming from the Crystal Room halted abruptly at sight of what was happening in the lobby. They turned abruptly to the head waiter who was standing near.

"Guess we'd better get back to our table," said Keene Marker. "We've been sitting there all evening, waiting to see Planchini's act again."

"That's right," added Smiley Grimm. "If he's going on soon, we don't want to lose that table."

It was something of an alibi for Keene and Smiley, considering that the same head waiter had seen them go to that table originally. Of course they didn't mention the proximity of the exit by which they could arrive as well as leave. That was something Keene and Marker didn't talk about, except to themselves.

One other person was entering the lobby, but he remained entirely unnoticed. Kent Allard, a gaunt man with a limp, was a stranger at the Chateau Parkview. He was wearing evening clothes, but they looked rumpled. Nobody would ever have classed them with the immaculate attire of Lamont Cranston, a regular patron of the Crystal Room.

Entering a phone booth, Kent Allard dialed the same number as before; that of Gregg Zerber. Phoning a dead man would have seemed a strange procedure, except that Allard wasn't supposed to know that anything had happened to Zerber. Even Lamont Cranston wasn't supposed to know.

Of the three personalities combined in the single individual, only one could afford to know:

The Shadow.

CHAPTER XIV

POLICE COMMISSIONER RALPH WESTON stared at the bodies on the floor of Zerber's study, then at the chandelier with its hanging trophy that wasn't a lamp cord. With that, the commissioner declared:

"It's as plain as day, inspector."

The remark was addressed to Inspector Joe Cardona, a swarthy, stocky stalwart, who usually was prepared to argue the point, even with the police commissioner. This time, Cardona's nod showed that for once he agreed.

The fact annoyed Weston. He looked toward another man who had just joined them and was again treated to a steady gaze of the strong, silent variety. The man who received Weston's glance was Kent Allard.

"Cranston ought to be here," decided Weston. "He has ideas. Not constructive ideas, but novel ones. I'd like to give him my analysis of this case, just for his reaction."

Stepping past the overturned desk, Weston gestured to Zerber's body.

CRIME OUT OF MIND

"It puzzled us at first," the commissioner said. "We thought that Zerber had been shot, or even knifed. It wasn't until we lifted his head that we saw –"

To complete the statement, Weston stooped and raised Zerber's chin. Under the man's long jaw, tight around his neck, was a rope like the one that hung from the chandelier. This rope too had a ball on one end, a loop on the other. The ball had been pushed through the loop enough times to tighten three coils around Zerber's neck, with appropriate results.

"Hawser's work," declared Weston, "Somebody must have come upon him immediately afterward. He tried to noose them too. I say 'them' because the evidence points to more than one. They shot Hawser instead."

The ordinarily silent Mr. Allard had a query:

"Have you been able to determine the time of Zerber's death?"

"A few minutes before nine o'clock," announced Weston in a final tone. "Hawser was slain a few minutes after the hour. Perhaps when we find the persons who killed him, we shall have to extend congratulations. After all, Hawser had branded himself a killer."

Allard was studying the rope that hung from the chandelier. It was fairly short, about the same length as the one that twined around Zerber's neck.

"About your phone call, Mr. Allard," put in Cardona. "You say Jeffers here told you that Zerber had gone out?"

Cardona gestured to a withery servant who was seated, quite wilted, in a corner of the study.

"That's right," Allard acknowledged, "and I think Jeffers told the truth."

"I did," quavered Jeffers. "I did indeed. It was nearly half past eight and I didn't know that Mr. Zerber had only gone to the drugstore and intended to return before leaving for the club. If he hadn't come back, he wouldn't have been here for the other phone call."

Cardona's eyes fixed steadily on Jeffers.

"Who was that call from?"

"I don't know," replied Jeffers. "But Mr. Zerber thought it was important. He didn't go to the club at all. He phoned the conference and stated that he had an appointment here."

It was Allard who put the next question.

"When did Zerber receive the call?"

"Only a few minutes after yours, Mr. Allard," testified Jeffers. "He came in just after I talked to you. If I'd only known where to reach you –"

"You couldn't have," interposed Allard, bluntly. "I was looking for a cab to go to the Merrimac Club."

Cardona was an intent listener to this and Allard knew what went on behind the star inspector's dead-pan. Every story, Allard's included, would be checked by Cardona. However, when Joe discovered that Allard had

actually been to the Merrimac Club, he wouldn't care where he had been before that.

One thing Cardona would definitely learn: there hadn't been time for Allard possibly to reach Zerber's before nine o'clock, the time established as the moment of murder. In fact, allowing for the time of a normal cab trip, Cranston couldn't have arrived at Zerber's before quarter past.

By then the police had taken control, so Cardona would deduce that Allard hadn't come here at all, but had simply phoned later, to show real surprise at the news of Zerber's death.

In fact, Cardona was already so inclined in Allard's favor that he made no objection when Zerber's friend took a close look at the thick, closely woven strangle cord responsible for the nine o'clock death. Allard noted particularly that the rope was thrice around the victim's neck and he studied the way in which the ball had been worked through the loop and the adjacent coils to form an interlaced pattern.

Meanwhile, Cardona was trying to gather further time factors from Jeffers, but with no result. All Jeffers remembered was a sudden burst of light; when he'd awakened he was lying in the front closet with the door locked. His thoughts were a blank as to what had happened immediately before that, whether in terms of seconds or minutes.

Jeffers didn't remember whether Zerber's visitor had arrived, nor how long Zerber had been waiting for him. Which resolved to the fact that Jeffers had been overpowered some time between eight-thirty and nine o'clock. Since Zerber's death was established at the latter time, Cardona sagaciously marked off Jeffers' experience at approximately that hour, leaving only the question of whether the murderer had put the quietus on the servant before or after killing the master.

Inspector Cardona was still checking this point when Kent Allard left, bound to a singular destination.

Somewhere in Manhattan, a bluish gleam appeared within the black-draped walls of a windowless room. This was The Shadow's sanctum, the hidden headquarters wherein he mapped his campaigns against crime.

Into that light came a pair of hands that seemed like separate entities, for the black sleeves above them faded into the darkness that rimmed the sphere of light. These were the hands of The Shadow, a fact betokened by a strange, glowing gem that scintillated from one finger, reflecting the light with ever-changing hue.

This rare stone was a fire-opal or girasol, a trophy of Allard's actual trip to Yucatan. He had gained it as a symbol of authority over the Xinca tribe that he had ruled while absent and over which he still held supremacy so long as he owned this flaming amulet.

A map of Manhattan came into the light, drawn there by the long, thin hands. From this, The Shadow traced the running time between such places as the Chateau Parkview and Zerber's apartment, which he calculated at approximately ten minutes.

Next came a floor plan of the Chateau Parkview showing the various exits from the hotel, including those through shops that adjoined it. On this plan, The Shadow had marked the secret exit through the tricked telephone booth, a device which he had uncovered while tracking down a previous crime and now used for his own convenience.

A time chart followed, The Shadow inscribing its details in writing that resembled printed script:

8:30 Girl taken to lobby.

CRIME OUT OF MIND

Maywick went to call doctor.

Allard phoned Zerber.

8:35 Allard on way to Merrimac.

8:40 Planchini ended act.

8:45 Girl started to Zerber's.

Frost followed in next cab.

Vincent took up trail.

8:50 Allard at Merrimac Club.

Others on way to Zerber's.

8:55 First three arrivals at Zerber's.

Frost departs from Zerber's.

9:00 Established time of death.

Others arrive with Hawser.

Maywick back at hotel with doctor.

9:05 Shadow reaches Zerber's.

9:10 Matters concluded at Zerber's.

Frost back at hotel.

9:20 Vincent and girl reach hotel.

9:30 Planchini wakens girl.

All parties back at hotel.

It was approximate, this listing, with allowance for minutes between those specified. This latter point was covered by the order of the various listings; for instance, the three arrivals at 8:55 had reached Zerber's separately. It was quite possible that Frost could have passed Bonnie, but Harry's arrival so soon after wouldn't have allowed Frost any great leeway. Frost had certainly shown speed in departure, according to a report that The Shadow moved into the blue glow.

That report had been relayed from Harry Vincent to The Shadow's sanctum, through Burbank, a contact agent whose life was a perpetual swing shift.

Not only were Harry's reports usually accurate; where this one was concerned, The Shadow was able to check it by his own data. Nevertheless, something was definitely wrong with it.

CRIME OUT OF MIND

According to a police surgeon's finding, Gregg Zerber had died at nine o'clock, the very time when other events were at their climax!

As Allard, The Shadow had checked the neighborhood clock that had chimed the hour and its time was correct. Yet Harry's report stated that Zerber was already dead, or practically so, strangled in an expert style. Even the practiced hand of a strangler like Hawser Thorgin could not have accomplished that job in under five minutes.

This would indicate that the police estimate was at least five minutes late and that the murderer must have started operations soon after a quarter of nine in order to be gone before the first arrivals that The Shadow had listed. The police didn't know that intruders had been on the ground before swift death had reputedly struck down Zerber.

Something was wrong and badly so. To charge the error to the police surgeon was the easiest course, but The Shadow did not write it off in that fashion. In the vast majority of instances wherein a surgeon's examination was held so promptly, the time estimate proved accurate.

Perhaps the trouble was the time chart itself, or certain factors which it did not include. To tally on those was The Shadow's next objective.

The bluish light clicked off and a parting laugh dwindled amid the shrouded walls of the mysterious sanctum. The deep hush that followed told its own story.

The Shadow had gone to probe into the hidden facts of murder.

CHAPTER XV

EMERGING into the lobby of the Chateau Parkview as Lamont Cranston, The Shadow immediately saw some persons from whom he might learn a few missing details that belonged on the time chart.

Val Varno was doing some slick card tricks in the corner for a small but enthusiastic group that included Sidney Maywick and his physician, Doctor Herkimer.

Maywick saw Cranston approach, gave him a nod, and commented:

"Watch this chap, Cranston. He is very deft."

The most puzzling feature of Varno's tricks was why he was doing them at all. Providing free entertainment around a hotel where Planchini was getting fifteen hundred a week, less taxes and stooge fees, was hardly helpful toward establishing Varno's commercial status.

Looking for reason, Cranston detected one by its absence. Glanville Frost wasn't around.

It followed that Varno was helping Frost accomplish something special by keeping other persons temporarily immobilized and this rule could apply to Maywick and Herkimer. Proof of this came when the physician turned to leave, just as Varno finished a trick with the four aces.

"Just a moment, gentlemen," began Varno, glibly. "I am about to show you the Monte trick, the real Varno version of Find the Lady –"

CRIME OUT OF MIND

"You must wait for this, Herkimer," said Maywick to the doctor. With a smile, he added: "You can find the other lady later."

"You mean Miss Blye?" inquired the physician. "I know exactly where to find her. She is resting quietly in her room."

"I know," nodded Maywick, "so you can watch the Monte trick and go see her afterward."

"That won't be necessary," the physician explained. "You can see how she is and phone me."

"Suppose we go up to see her now," began Maywick. "Then I can drive you home –"

"Find the Lady!" interrupted Varno, brandishing two spot cards and a red queen. "You think you can't miss, but you do. The hand is not just quicker than the eye; it is quicker than the mind! Find the Lady and then learn how!"

"Good advice for you, Maywick," chuckled Herkimer, slapping his hand on the bearded man's shoulder. "Learn how to find the lady and you won't have to hunt a half an hour the next time she disappears."

That brought a Van Dyke smile from Maywick.

"That lady found herself, Herkimer."

"Lucky for you she did," nodded the physician. "You didn't tell me the patient was missing when you stopped at my place to bring me here."

"I supposed she would be found by that time," rejoined Maywick, "and she was."

"Yes," admitted the physician, "she was back when we arrived here. If you'd phoned me earlier, though, I might have helped you hunt for her. Well, good-night, Maywick."

"Let me drive you home, doctor –"

"Nonsense. It's only a few blocks. You like magic, so stay and watch Varno's tricks. Maybe you should tell Varno that you dabble in the mystic art yourself."

"I do a few tricks," admitted Maywick. "Just as a hobby, you know." He drew back his coat and showed a small badge with a peculiarly cryptic emblem. "I belong to the S.O.S."

"Society of Sorcerers," identified Varno. Then, under his breath, he added the nickname that applied to that amateur aggregation and their performances: "Same Old Stuff."

Maywick didn't catch the derogatory statement and Varno followed it with the glib announcement:

"You'll like my Monte routine, mister. All the magi say it's the best. First, you mark the queen –"

By then, Cranston had left, like Herkimer. The intricacies of the Monte trick would hold Maywick a long time, since he was interested in such deceptions. Meanwhile, Val Varno would be fully occupied in demonstrating it, which allowed good opportunity to check on the activities of a more polished deceiver, Glanville Frost.

CRIME OUT OF MIND

Quite recuperated from her ordeal of the evening, Bonnie Blye was seated in the living room of her suite on the eighteenth floor of the Chateau Parkview. The fact that Bonnie could afford a suite at such a fancy-priced hotel, added substantially to the aura of mystery that this glamour blonde had already woven about herself.

Particularly it intrigued Bonnie's lone caller, a suave gentleman who answered to the name of Glanville Frost. It hadn't been difficult for Frost to introduce himself; he had simply phoned Bonnie's room and announced that he was coming up in behalf of the management.

Now Frost was carrying through with that pretext and handling it adroitly. He'd mentioned that he was a magician, because that was part of his scheme. Also, it promised well for Bonnie.

"It's about Planchini," Frost was saying. "He's finishing his engagement here at the Chateau Parkview as soon as he winds up the current week."

Bonnie's eyes lighted with surprise, then became troubled.

"On my account?" she inquired. "But I'm sure he didn't intend to hypnotize me at all."

"You really were hypnotized, weren't you?"

"Completely," Bonnie admitted. "It was just like a blank. When I woke up, I couldn't remember a thing. That is, nothing except –"

"Except what?"

Frost put the question coolly but firmly and Bonnie, perhaps mistrusting her ability to resist direct questioning, let her eyes stray away.

That was how the girl's gaze happened to fix on the door and stay there, so strained that Frost began to wonder if another hypnotic trance was coming over her. Wheeling in his chair, Frost demanded:

"Who's there?"

At that, Bonnie laughed lightly.

"Just my imagination," she explained, gesturing toward the door. "I thought for the moment that I saw the door close, but my eyes are jumpy, that's all."

On his feet, Frost took a few steps toward the door, then returned. The door was closed, hence if anyone had opened it, that person must have retired outside. Certainly no one would have the temerity to remain within the door, expecting to stay unobserved in a restricted triangle of gloom that slanted from the doorway to the adjacent wall.

Frost's self-importance restrained him from going over and prowling the spot in question. Moreover, the hand that Frost had slipped into the pocket of his tuxedo jacket failed to find a little bottle there. Remembering that he had returned those capsules to Varno, Frost was struck by another thought.

It wouldn't do to stage the flash trick in Bonnie's presence. Perhaps her memory would prove as long as Frost's was short. A man who specialized in tricks, Frost was beginning to suspect that Bonnie was trying one on him. Turning to the girl, Frost asked smoothly:

"What was it you said you remembered?"

"Nothing, really," replied the girl, pursing her eyebrows. "It was like one of those odd dreams, the kind that puzzle you afterwards. There was someone I intended to go and see, that was all."

"And did you?"

"Of course not," laughed Bonnie. "I just wandered around outside the hotel until somebody steered me back in again. Only now I'm not worrying about seeing that person."

"Why not?"

"Because I feel it would be useless," sighed Bonnie. "I'm afraid it was foolish for me to come to New York at all." She shook her head sadly. "I'm sure there's nothing I can do here now."

Bonnie didn't specify anything further, so Frost took over from that point.

"About Planchini," he resumed, casually. "It's not your fault he's through. He's just been working his act too strong."

"Too strong?"

"Overdoing it," interposed Frost. "He's been predicting the future. That's telling fortunes. There's a police ruling against fortune tellers working nightclubs in New York."

"There is?"

"Absolutely. If Planchini was really smart, he'd taper off with a hypnotic act and then switch to magic. But he'll have to try that out of town first. Now my way would be to work it the other way around."

Noting Bonnie's interested, yet puzzled expression, Frost came right to the particulars.

"I'd start with magic," he explained, "then swing into hypnotism, and finally throw in some mentalism, a two person act, if you know what I mean."

Bonnie shook her head to indicate she didn't.

"You'll find out soon enough," declared Frost blandly. "We'll open with the bullet catching act, which will be a real sensation. After a few weeks, we'll introduce some hypnotism, because you're a natural subject –"

"I'm to be working with you?" interrupted Bonnie. "But I don't know a thing about show business!"

"You don't need to know anything at the start," insisted Frost. "By the time we get around to the mental act, six weeks from now, you'll be fully rehearsed."

Bonnie began to laugh, happily, but with a dash of hysteria.

"And I thought I could stay in New York," expressed the girl. "I was beginning to think I'd have to give up what I came for" – she caught herself quickly – "that is, I was beginning to think I'd have to save my money. But now you're telling me I can make money –"

CRIME OUT OF MIND

"And plenty," put in Frost. "You can stay right here in this suite. Only I'll handle all the interviews and manage the show. Wait until you see the publicity break that will put us across. I'll tell them –"

By "them" Frost meant reporters and he swung as though to address an imaginary gallery of such, only to halt as abruptly as Bonnie had before. This time it was Frost who thought his eyes were getting jumpy. He could have sworn he saw the door close, slicing off a portion of that triangular darkness.

Two strides, then Frost halted. Nonchalantly, he turned and bowed to Bonnie, then sauntered toward the door. Reaching it, he was turning the knob casually, when a knock came from the other side. Whipping the door open, Frost was confronted by a red-haired elevator girl.

"I came for that extra phone book," Reds announced. "The one somebody dragged up from the cigar counter, when all the excitement was on. They're yelling for it downstairs."

Letting Reds pass, Frost strode to the elevator expecting to find someone there. The elevator was empty, so Frost looked toward a distant door marked "Fire Tower" and thought he saw it closing. Hurrying to that door, Frost stared down a flight of dimly-lighted steps, listening for sounds from below.

There were no sounds; nothing but a streak of noiseless blackness that Frost didn't see as it glided from the steps to reach a door on the floor below. There, a door opened so quietly that its sound did not carry.

A tall, cloaked figure appeared in the seventeenth corridor, to catch the brief red flicker of a light that denoted a passing elevator. A whispered laugh came from beneath the slouch hat worn by this shrouded personage.

That mirth symbolized the secret, unseen visitor who had listened in on Frost's chat with Bonnie:

The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVI

AT the Chateau Parkview they followed the practice of parking surplus elevators at various levels rather than the ground floor; this, because of changeable express schedules and similar factors.

When elevator operators took over duty, they entered those cars by opening the doors with a hooked implement misnamed a key. Such "keys" were not too difficult to get, at least The Shadow hadn't found it so.

That was why, shortly after the episode in Bonnie's suite, the ground floor dial above an elevator door showed that a car was coming down dead-head, but no one noticed it, not even the usually alert cigar counter girl who answered to the name of Smokey.

The term "Smokey" would have applied better to the shape that issued from the elevator. The door began to open, imperceptibly at first, then with a sliding part-way motion that reversed itself all in one sweep, during which the yawning blackness of the elevator briefly precipitated itself outward.

One witness alone traced something of what followed. That witness was Glanville Frost who had come downstairs meanwhile and was standing quietly with the group that was watching Val Varno baffle Sidney Maywick with the climax of the Monte trick.

Maybe Frost's imagination was at its peak, but he could have sworn he saw something blackish glide across the lobby and fade through an obscure doorway beyond. Watching, Frost remained taut until he was startled by a sharp nudge at his elbow.

CRIME OUT OF MIND

It was Varno who nudged. The group was breaking up and Varno was sidemouthing a query:

"How'd I do? Or rather, how'd you do?"

"I'll tell you later," gritted Frost, under his breath. "Meanwhile, slip me that bottle of flash pills. I'm carrying those from now on, just in case I meet a certain somebody who needs to be shown up."

All traces of anything resembling The Shadow were gone by the time Frost received the bottle. Frost was preparing solely for a future meeting with something that still might be a product of his imagination, but which he feared could be real.

The men who should have thought about The Shadow in present terms were Keene Marker and Smiley Grimm. Their mistake was simply that they were considering the past.

At their favorite table in the Crystal Room, the two slick crooks were methodically taking notes of Planchini's late show, which was proceeding at its smoothest. Nothing sensational had developed yet, but Planchini was smoothly convincing his audience of his psychic powers.

"Throwing their questions right back at them," said Keene. "He's seeing palm trees in the crystal, but he gets the impression of snow flakes fading from the picture. Now he's talking about Christmas –"

"And the lady is nodding all amazed," added Smiley, looking across to a table where a woman was nodding to everything Planchini said. "Chances are she wrote a question: 'Will I get my train reservation to Florida in December?' so Planchini is playing it as though she hadn't written anything."

Planchini's voice came authoritatively across the floor:

"Concentrate, please! I see the name that is solely in your mind! The word 'Florida' is in the crystal –"

Keene gave a grunt and checked his list, while Smiley did the same.

"That's the last," decided Smiley. "I don't think any of them count, this show."

"Why should they?" queried Smiley. "That one assignment we took tonight was plenty."

Recollection of events at Zerber's demanded increased caution. The cronies in crime put their heads closer together and the mere action blocked off what little light reached the table. In so doing, Keene and Smiley cut off something else, the trace of a deep gray silhouette that had begun to creep between them.

It was the shadow of The Shadow, cast before. Lost in the gloom just behind Keene and Smiley was a cloaked form standing so close that he could have placed his hands upon the shoulders of the two men at the table.

"A bad job tonight," undertoned Keene. "I didn't like it."

"Neither did I," low-voiced Smiley. "We missed out again and The Shadow was the reason."

"It wasn't just that." Keene's tone was nervous. "The Agnew job was only robbery. What happened at Zerber's was murder."

"So what?" Smiley's words came through his teeth. "Dirk Quingal took one rap; Hawser Thorgin the other."

CRIME OUT OF MIND

"Except we know they weren't to blame. Suppose the police find out the same?"

"It would be worse if they found out about Dirk, because we really staged a robbery at Agnew's. In the case of Hawser, it wouldn't matter. We didn't do anything at Zerber's."

"Except bring Hawser there –"

"And Hawser wasn't the murderer." Smiley's tone had emphasis. "We can vouch for that, because he came along with us."

"Which is something we don't want anybody to know," reminded Keene, sourly. "The police would mark us down as accomplices."

"Except that Zerber was already dead –"

"On whose word? Nobody's but ours, unless the Shadow wants to give us a clean bill."

That very suggestion relieved the tension. Smiley laughed at what Keene said and in his turn, Keene couldn't help but see the humor. The pair were still chuckling when the lights came on, marking the end of Planchini's act.

Fortunately, Keene and Smiley watched the great mystic bow off, otherwise they might have noticed the blackness that receded from their very elbows, like foam retiring from a spent surf.

Even more ironical was the fact that though both Keene and Smiley were interested in where The Shadow went, they didn't look that way. The Shadow had withdrawn to the door of the projection man's office, toward which the two crooks tilted their ears, but were too smart to stare.

Their voices reached The Shadow, though, for they were very close and thought themselves alone.

"Better allow Planchini a good five minutes," stated Keene. "It would take him that long to get up to his room."

"He was slow on the phone signal after the last show," reminded Smiley. "He just managed to slip that one ring through before the projection man got here."

"Lucky it wasn't a latter question," remarked Keene, "or the fellow would have heard the ringing. If Planchini had been faster with it" – Keene's tone became an annoyed growl – "we'd have gotten to Zerber's sooner."

"Maybe he didn't want us there sooner," suggested Smiley. "He could have slated us for a rap along with Hawser."

"If I thought that Planchini was trying a double-cross –"

"Take it easy, Keene. We're not sure yet, and the only way to find out is to play along. We're in this too deep to do different."

Minutes passed until the dance act ended and the projection man came down from his booth. By then The Shadow had shifted to another angle and he saw the telephone in the little office. Keene and Smiley had their backs turned so the projection man wouldn't notice them and The Shadow took advantage of that situation to glide out through the convenient exit that the crooks themselves so frequently used.

Soon afterward, Lamont Cranston reappeared in the lobby, there to find Sidney Maywick talking to Harry Vincent, the young man who had brought Bonnie Blye back to the Chateau Parkview. According to Harry, Bonnie had simply been wandering in a bewildered state asking people where the hotel was, so he'd shown her the way there.

This brought an approving nod from Cranston when Maywick introduced him to Vincent. Maywick took the nod as something that accompanied the introduction, but Harry understood.

It was better to keep Bonnie's visit to Zerber's a strict secret, rather than clutter the situation with too many clues.

The Shadow knew!

CHAPTER XVII

A FEW days had changed matters immensely at the Chateau Parkview.

Most notable was the fact that two signs now appeared outside the Crystal Room, one announcing the merits of Planchini, the Famous Mentalist; the other advertising Glanville Frost, Master of Mystery, assisted by Bonnie Blye.

These two claims were rather speculative in themselves. As a "mentalist," Planchini didn't state that he was a fortune teller, nor did the term "master of mystery" specify that Frost was a magician.

As a matter of record, Frost seemed to have the edge as a fortune teller, except that he made his predictions privately instead of publicly. He'd told Bonnie that Planchini wouldn't stay long at the Crystal Room and it looked as though the prophecy would come true. Rumor was stirring, though, that Frost knew how to shape the future.

Somebody had phoned a complaint to the police regarding Planchini and that complaint could very well have come from Frost. Otherwise it was a very remarkable coincidence that he should have tried to book his act at the Crystal Room just at the time when the management had been officially informed that Planchini would have to go.

Only Planchini hadn't gone.

Smartly, Planchini was extending his time limit on the ground that fortune telling wasn't part of his act. Sheer entertainment was all that Planchini offered; no fortunes. The police were welcome to attend and learn for themselves. But the hotel management, doubtful that Planchini's act could stand up in such diluted form, had booked in Frost to share the bill, just in case Planchini's popularity faded.

There were other changes at the hotel.

The girl behind the cigar counter had gone on a vacation and a quiet-mannered brunette had taken her place. Planchini had nicknamed her Smokey, like her predecessor, but her real name was Myra Reldon and she was working for The Shadow.

So was a new doorman named Jericho Druke, a powerful African who was very gentle with doors of pre-war taxicabs, because his powerful grip, if normally exerted, might have ripped those doors from their hinges.

CRIME OUT OF MIND

Being short-handed, the hotel had hired two other men who belonged in The Shadow's service: Hawkeye and Tapper. Anywhere that Hawkeye couldn't pry, because of locked doors and such, Tapper provided the method. The Chateau Parkview was literally providing open house, thanks to this capable pair, but only for The Shadow.

The natural rivalry between Planchini and Frost was something with potential news value, particularly as Frost calmly claimed that he had purposely let his assistant be hypnotized by Planchini as a test. So Clyde Burke, a star reporter with the New York Classic, was on hand to cover the first show in which both wonder workers were to appear. It happened that Clyde was another of The Shadow's agents.

Harry Vincent was around as usual, but Lamont Cranston hadn't been seen at all. Hence on this particular evening, Sidney Maywick was both pleased and surprised when he saw his calm-mannered acquaintance stroll into the lobby.

"Hello, Cranston!" greeted Maywick. "Here to see the big duel in the Crystal Room?"

"Duel?" queried Cranston. "You mean some fencers are going to perform?"

"No, no," laughed Maywick. He gestured to the display boards outside the Crystal Room. "I mean Frost versus Planchini. One deceives the eye, the other baffles the mind. I think I can make room for you at my table. How about it?"

Cranston considered; then nodded.

"I think I can make it," he said. "I just dropped in to see a friend who is stopping here. His name is Slade Farrow. Do you know him?"

Maywick shook his head.

"It's just a casual visit," added Cranston. "So I probably won't be long. If anything delays me, I'll phone your room, Maywick."

Casual described Cranston's meeting with Farrow, so far as the manner of the two men was concerned, but the subject they discussed was anything but trivial. Farrow was a stoop-shouldered man who greeted Cranston with an apologetic bow, then took a quick look out into the corridor before closing the door of the hotel room.

When Cranston was seated, Farrow took another chair, then tilted his head in a listening attitude. He was a curious type, this man who was well along in middle-age. He looked tired, yet alert; his face was hard, but ready to relax; his deep-set eyes cold, yet somehow sympathetic.

People who noted these conflicting traits would not have been surprised to learn that Farrow had spent some of his best years as the inmate of a dozen penitentiaries; he had the mark. What would have surprised them was the fact that Farrow had never been anything but a voluntary convict. By profession, Slade Farrow was a criminologist who preferred laboratory work and his idea of a laboratory was a prison cell.

There, Farrow learned what really made convicts tick. Most of all, he could detect the mechanical flaws of a certain type of human clockwork. Convicts who constantly reiterated the same old story, the claim that they were innocent, were the sort that intrigued Farrow most. Given a few weeks with such a man, Farrow could find out the lie that the fellow sought so ardently to hide.

Except when there was no lie.

That was Farrow's great purpose, to prove the innocence of men whose punishment was undeserved. When he struck upon one of those very rare cases, he counted upon The Shadow to help him gain vindication for the man in question. To Farrow, Lamont Cranston was the Shadow's spokesman on such occasions.

A case was now on the board; that of Hubert Lidden.

Silently, Farrow handed over his full report, including a photograph of Lidden, a wan, haggard man whose features looked as though they had been beaten from within. But Farrow didn't judge from mere appearances.

"Lidden was doing too well with his brokerage job," asserted Farrow. "Too well to go in for forgery. He handled checks for clients as a matter of convenience, but the orders came from the firm. It would have been very easy for him to put through duplicate checks, the way the prosecution claimed. I would say too easy."

Cranston's eyebrows raised slightly.

"Too easy?"

"Yes," affirmed Farrow, "because he would either have worked some system, like a clever criminal; or he would have overworked it, like a greedy one. Instead, he played it hit or miss."

To prove his point, Farrow indicated a paragraph of his report.

"The Agnew instance is an example," said Farrow. "Lidden knew that J. Allison Agnew was due in town; that he always went over his wife's records as a matter of course. If Lidden had waited only a week, he could have slipped that check through safely. Instead, he played it right into Agnew's hands."

Standing where he could look across Cranston's shoulder, Farrow pointed out other incidents that followed the same theory. He finally came to the best of all.

"Those checks of Zerber's," declared Farrow. "There were two of them, each for twenty-seven hundred and fifty dollars; one genuine, the other forged. Zerber thought he'd made out both of them through some oversight. So he wrote Lidden a note about it."

To save time, Farrow took the report and thumbed through to another page while he continued:

"All Lidden had to do was look through his own records and discover the mistake; that is, if he was crooked. It would have been smart for him to pay Zerber back, because" – here Farrow paused to tap the new paragraph he wanted – "because a forged check had just gone through on Homer Wingate, the importer, for thirty thousand dollars.

"Now Wingate was a friend of Zerber's and the very man to whom Zerber would have mentioned the matter if Lidden didn't settle it. If Lidden had been crooked, he would have covered up. Instead, he wrote Zerber a very testy letter, accusing him of trying something shady."

Going back to his chair, Farrow let Cranston finish the report. Then:

"Zerber never appeared in court at all," recalled Cranston. "What was Lidden's theory on that?"

"He thinks Zerber believed him," replied Farrow. "But the case was so strong against Lidden that if Zerber had produced the forged check, the prosecution would have used it as a clincher and ruled out the letter."

"So Zerber retained both –"

"Yes," interposed Farrow, "and Lidden's niece has the memo that Zerber originally sent to Lidden. He was hoping, Lidden was, that she would go and talk to Zerber, but he wanted her to see Mrs. Agnew first. If Agatha Agnew would try to reopen the case in Lidden's behalf, the other evidence would have some value."

Cranston nodded slowly; then he inquired:

"What is the name of Lidden's niece?"

"She lives in the Middle West," began Farrow, "and she's probably somebody you never even heard of –"

"Her name?"

Cranston's smile was slight, but it carried the opinion that Farrow had overlooked something when he arrived at this hotel, namely the big new sign outside the door of the Crystal Room.

That Cranston was right was proven when Farrow made reply:

"Bonnie Blye."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE Great Planchini was putting on his face.

Not that Planchini used a mask; he didn't quite. But his real face, that of a gaunt ascetic, didn't go across with the management of the Chateau Parkview which felt that everyone should look well-fed in a place that taxed the customers a five-dollar minimum charge. So Planchini's face needed building and considerable, every night.

Planchini used a darkish substance resembling putty that filled the hollows of his cheeks. He sleeked his hair with a special but temporary dye that gave it a distinctive gloss. Of course there were the brilliants for the eyelids; Planchini had quite a selection of them, and he affixed them with spirit gum.

What made the make-up perfect was the life-size, hand-colored picture that hung in a frame beside Planchini's mirror. It showed Planchini exactly as he ought to appear and enabled him to fix his face to the last detail. Thus there were three Planchini's in the strong light concentrated to include them: the original, its reflection, and the picture.

Meanwhile Planchini was listening to a conversation between Glanville Frost and Bonnie Blye.

Those two parties were not here in person; they couldn't be, since the door of this hotel room was triple-locked. Planchini was listening to their voices, which came from a small radio which served as amplifier for a reproduction of a wire recording.

Beside the radio lay an open telephone book. Its interior was cut out and the open cover revealed two spools of wire, a tiny motor and a pair of small dry cell batteries. This was how Planchini had been picking up all conversations between Frost and Bonnie.

CRIME OUT OF MIND

Small wonder that Planchini had played his cards well and kept himself a rival headliner in the Crystal Room. He'd learned about the new mystery act soon after it had been decided upon; now he was getting details of a final conference that had taken place this very evening.

"Don't worry about this bullet," Frost's voice was saying. "It looks like lead, but it's only wax. Painted silver, of course, but I dig my finger into it to make sure it's wax before I load it."

"But even a wax bullet might be dangerous," was Bonnie's reply. "Have you tested it?"

"I'll test one now," returned Frost. "See that target? It's about fifteen feet away. Watch!"

There was the report of a gun, an odd echoing ping, then Bonnie's voice:

"Why, it just flattened away to nothing!"

"Of course," rejoined Frost's tone. "It hit that thick wood, that's why. Wax can't hold up; the mere heat from the friction of the air is enough to melt it."

"And I'm to be behind the target," came Bonnie's voice. "That seems safe enough, but be sure you hit the bull's eye, Mr. Frost!"

Hearing a muffled knock from the door of his room, Planchini turned off the radio. He closed the telephone book and turned from the dressing table. All was very dark away from the glare that Planchini's eyes had been absorbing so long. A few long blinks, and Planchini saw the blackness draw away as it always did. Putting the phone book under his arm, he turned out the strong light and picked his way through the dim room to the door.

Outside was Reds, the elevator girl. Planchini gave her the phone book.

"Keep it handy," Planchini told the girl. "Smokey the Second, down at the cigar counter, will tell you where to plant it when I want it."

There being no feud between Reds and Smokey the Second, otherwise the new counter girl, Myra Reldon, Planchini was quite sure that all would work out right.

So was The Shadow.

As soon as Planchini had stepped outside the room and closed the door to throw its triple lock, the darkness laughed, softly and serenely. What Planchini had mistaken for blackness without substance had been the solid shape of The Shadow, watching the details of Planchini's make-up and listening in on his special recording.

Now, with a tiny flashlight, The Shadow started through Planchini's well-indexed files. Soon he found the very thing he wanted: an envelope containing clippings and other data. The clippings referred to Hubert Lidden, convicted forger and the topmost contained a statement by Lidden's niece, Bonnie Blye, insisting upon her uncle's innocence. From a Mid-West newspaper, this was the only clip that mentioned Bonnie.

The other data included the memo signed by Gregg Zerber. It wasn't addressed to Lidden; that was, it bore no mention of his name, but it referred to the doubtful check that Farrow had mentioned. Also attached were some notes in Planchini's own particular scrawl, plus a written question from Bonnie, asking for information regarding the check that the memo mentioned.

CRIME OUT OF MIND

To read all this, The Shadow had turned on the strong light above Planchini's mirror. Now, fully revealed in the glare, The Shadow looked at his own reflection alongside Planchini's picture.

Again came The Shadow's whispery laugh, with a note of prophecy that would have worried even Planchini.

Meanwhile, Planchini had gone down in the elevator with Reds. Stalking through the Crystal Room, he bowed in his usual style to the customers congregated there. Going backstage, he encountered Glanville Frost and gave him as friendly a smile as was possible with the putty make-up. Frost turned away to chat with Val Varno, who was a backstage visitor.

Planchini took advantage of this to knock at the half-open door of Bonnie's dressing room. The girl drew a dressing gown from the chairback, threw it over her shoulders and turned to say, "Come in." Seeing Planchini, Bonnie rose somewhat nervously, but the mystic's genial smile reassured her.

"The best of luck," said Planchini. "I'll go on first to put the audience in a friendly mood. You'll be the big feature."

"I only hope so," began Bonnie. "On account of Mr. Frost –"

"You're the act," interposed Planchini, drawing closer. "Not Frost. He is no showman. I doubt that he has really rehearsed you."

"Why, yes –"

"Very well, then." Planchini's tone was a soft purr, for he had reached the chair beside which Bonnie stood. "Then let me tell you just this –"

The rest was scarcely audible to Bonnie. She sensed Planchini's words rather than heard them. For Bonnie was staring wide-eyed into the sparkle which she thought was Planchini's gaze.

As on another night, Bonnie was fascinated by the glint, never realizing that it came from the brilliants attached to Planchini's eyelids. Those sparklers, however, were more hypnotic than Planchini's own gaze. As inducers of hypnosis, bright objects are the strongest and Bonnie was focussing her sight upon a vivid pair of such. Breathless, she was answering the words that came from Planchini's almost motionless lips.

In another dressing room, Frost was showing Varno a bowl of envelopes, a duplicate of the type that Planchini used.

"Dummies," informed Frost. "Switch them for Planchini's, bowl and all."

"Neat," supplied Varno. "Copping originals by ringing in dummies is an old gag. This is putting it in reverse. It ought to louse up Planchini's act and proper."

"And that," assured Frost, "is the precise purpose of this original subterfuge."

They stepped from the dressing room just as Planchini appeared from Bonnie's door. Curt nods were exchanged as before and the three went their separate ways. It was then that blackness moved in from a dim corner and entered the room where Frost and Varno had held their chat.

Seeing the bowl, the blackness approached it and in the light became the shrouded figure of The Shadow. A thin-gloved hand plucked a few envelopes from the bowl and opened them, to find blank slips within. Taking

a chair, The Shadow began to write questions on those slips.

What was going to happen with Planchini's act was something that would puzzle Frost and Varno, quite as much as it would Planchini himself!

CHAPTER XIX

SPOTLIGHTS and the Great Planchini.

Bowing, the turbaned mystic drew an envelope from his bowl and held it to his forehead as he gazed into the crystal ball. There, Planchini saw and announced the name "Cairo" which was promptly identified by a stooge.

Slinking in from the screen that cut off the backstage rooms, Val Varno slipped into a chair and stifled a chuckle. Varno had been quite sure the first question would be faked. Planchini hadn't been able to open his own batch of envelopes tonight, not with Frost backstage.

Therefore Planchini, master of unlimited nerve, was using the only system at his disposal, the old "one ahead" gag long favored by fake parlor mediums. Having faked a question and answered it, Planchini was now opening the envelope to check the question and assure the audience that he was right.

Of course it would be another question, not the one just answered. Planchini would read that question to himself and answer it when he drew out the next envelope. Which in turn would give him another question and so on, with every envelope that he opened.

Naturally Varno chuckled. In drawing blanks, Planchini would have no next question to read. He would have to go on faking until everybody present would know that there was something wrong.

Only that wasn't what Planchini did.

Looking at the paper he drew from the first envelope, Planchini nodded, tossed it aside and drew another envelope.

"Yes," said Planchini, "that first question involved the name of Cairo. I now have another query, signed with the initials 'H. W.' which asks if this person, 'H. W.,' should sell the jewels. I would say yes, if the price is right."

Nobody identified the questions, but Varno was a little puzzled by the way Planchini had handled the blank slip without a show of surprise. Now Planchini was going right on with the next.

"Unsigned, this question," stated Planchini, "and wisely so. I shall not divulge the name, because the person who asks it admits that he has a considerable sum of money with him. He wants to know if he should proceed with his transaction. Again, my answer is yes."

Another question followed and now Varno was becoming very woozy.

"Someone is really trying to test my telepathic faculties," declared Planchini. "This questioner must have been in the lobby when a new guest just checked into the hotel. He wants to know what room was assigned to a person named 'Wingate.' I get the number" – Planchini paused dramatically – "one – six – one – two."

CRIME OUT OF MIND

It went on, this amazing act that was too smooth to be merely a matter of ad-libbing with blank slips, much to the bafflement of Varno. One question involved an important package; whether or not it should be put in the hotel safe. Another asked if an old friend could be trusted. A few more seemed to revolve curiously about the others if anyone wanted to interpret them that way.

Since people weren't calling out their identities, Planchini didn't waste time sending the spotlight to look for them. He was working a different act tonight, a fast one, because his time was limited, and he concluded by bowing off to the usual applause.

Also as usual, much applause came from the table where Sidney Maywick was entertaining a group of friends. There was just one empty chair at that table, the one reserved for Lamont Cranston. After looking for Cranston to arrive, Maywick decided he must have been detained with Farrow.

Now the great sensation of the evening was at hand. Spotlights were busy showing the polished performer, Glanville Frost, as he bowed and introduced Bonnie Blye, the hypnotic young lady who was immune to bullets.

Bonnie indeed looked like a true hypnotic subject. She was attired in a white fluffy gown that would have suited Trilby, the historic lady who was susceptible to the mesmeric skill of Svengali.

In keeping with the act, Bonnie walked steadily forward, eyes fixed straight ahead. Frost stopped her, then proceeded to show a muzzle-loading pistol to the audience along with a batch of bullets that clanked the plate on which he dropped them.

Over in their corner, Keene Marker and Smiley Grimm were watching these preparations with interest.

"I hope it works," said Keene. "It will be something worth knowing if it does."

"You mean you hope it won't work," corrected Smiley, "but it's one and the same thing."

"If bullets can't hurt people," explained Keene, "I want to find out why. If I do, there's one person I won't mind meeting up with."

"If you mean The Shadow," argued Smiley, "don't forget he packs a different type of gun."

Now Frost was taking the gun from someone who had examined it. He poured powder down the muzzle, poked in some wadding, then displayed a bullet and dropped it in next. Finally, he rammed home another batch of wadding.

Varno came into the spotlight holding the wooden target at arm's length. The target was a large affair, about a yard square. Varno took his position midway between Frost and Bonnie, who were about thirty feet apart.

All set to shoot, Frost beckoned Varno a trifle closer. The spotlight moved accordingly, but kept on. Following it, Varno was getting nearer and nearer to the gun, which annoyed Frost. Looking up to the projection balcony, Frost gave wigwags, but the light still moved.

Staring elsewhere, Frost learned why. Over by the screen that led backstage, Planchini was gesturing to the projection man. Used to taking his cues from Planchini, the fellow was following orders. It was Planchini's turn to play hob and he was doing his best to ruin Frost's act.

CRIME OUT OF MIND

Except that nothing could faze the smooth Mr. Frost. As the target loomed right in front of him, he nodded approvingly and beckoned Varno even closer. It was good comedy, this, easing the strain that the audience felt. Varno was bringing the target right to the muzzle of Frost's gun, so close that Frost couldn't help but score a bull's-eye.

The nervous laughter from the audience was a tribute to Frost. The muzzle a mere foot from the target, Frost furnished everyone, Planchini included, with a big, broadly humorous grin. Then, suddenly serious, Frost raised his free hand.

"When I fire this shot," announced Frost, "the bullet will pass through both the target and the girl without leaving a trace! Neither target nor girl will be harmed in the slightest. Are you ready, Bonnie!"

Bonnie's tone came clear and steady.

"I am ready."

Nervous people were leaving the Crystal Room. Among them were two members of Maywick's party and he was solicitously seeing them out through the door. Planchini, apparently disgruntled, had retired from the scene. Frost was holding the gun, its muzzle almost up against the target, while he raised his other hand to still the audience.

The only sound that broke the silence was heard by two persons who were just close enough to catch it. That sound was the ringing of the phone in the little office over by the exit. The two men counted the rings.

"Four," whispered Keene. "That means the question about Wingate."

"His room number is sixteen twelve," undertoned Smiley. "We'll duck out and get up there as soon as that gun goes off."

At that moment, the gun went off.

Terrific was the blast from the old muzzle loader. A tongue of flame gave the target a brief, scorching jab. Varno jolted slightly as the target jounced, but no eyes were watching him. All were fixed on Bonnie.

With a shrill cry, the girl threw back her head and crumpled to the floor, clasping her hands to the bosom of her dress with a wild, despairing clutch that slipped away, for as she struck the floor, Bonnie's arms went wide.

Half-staggered by the gun's recoil, Frost stood gaping at something that gaped right back at him. If anybody needed proof that a real bullet had carried all the way to Bonnie's heart, there was that proof and graphically.

Punched straight through the bull's-eye was the evidence that really staggered Glanville Frost, a flame-scorched hole that marked the bullet's course!

CHAPTER XX

IT didn't take a thought-wave for Frost to guess the name of the mighty mind behind this murder. Frost's maddened brain thrummed it all in one word:

Planchini.

CRIME OUT OF MIND

Flinging the one-shot pistol aside, Frost brushed past Varno and dashed for the screen behind which he was sure Planchini must be. As he went, Frost whipped an article from his pocket in the shape of one of those handy flash capsules that he had borrowed permanently from Varno.

Then, rounding the screen, Frost pulled up with a half-jolt. Instead of Planchini, he was confronted by a figure cloaked in black. He'd met the very person that he wanted, that ominous foe known as The Shadow!

One of The Shadow's hands was ungloved. It was extended in a half-beckoning gesture, that seemed to call for Frost to calm himself. In retaliation, Frost supplied the same treatment that he had doled out to Harry Vincent.

Frost's hand came up, flinging the capsule, which ignited fully in The Shadow's face. That glare would have proven blinding, had The Shadow waited to receive it. But The Shadow's lowered arm was on the up as quickly as Frost's hand.

The rising arm brought a sweep of cloak with it, completely covering The Shadow's face against the spurt of fire. Then The Shadow's ungloved hand made a swing in Frost's direction and a thumb and finger snapped.

Right then, Frost learned of a potency that made the flame-gushing capsules seem trivial. The Shadow's thumb and forefinger each had a tiny dab of complementary substances that did terrific work. The snap exploded them with a blast as sharp and startling as Frost's gun. The concussion literally jarred Frost; he sprawled back on the floor and sat there stupefied while people overtook him and dragged him to his feet.

The Shadow was gone by then, bound somewhere and swiftly.

Others had already left. Keene and Smiley hadn't even waited for the confusion to begin. They were in the elevator piloted by a red-haired girl, who had delayed the trip just long enough to get something from the cigar counter.

As the two passengers stepped off at the sixteenth floor, the girl handed the object to them. It was a telephone book.

"I can't leave the elevator," the girl stated, deciding it wasn't wise to disobey rules with passengers present. "The man in sixteen twelve needs a phone book. Leave this with him, will you?"

Smiley hesitated, but Keene promptly took the book. Then, as they swung the corner, Keene explained.

"The girl saw us come up here, didn't she?" Keene queried. "All right, she might remember us later. Now we have an alibi. She asked us to leave something in sixteen twelve, That's how we happened to meet Wingate. Get it?"

Getting it, Smiley agreed. He knocked on the door of room 1612 and had the words ready when the door opened:

"Mr. Wingate?"

Only it wasn't Mr. Wingate. The man on the threshold was Sidney Maywick and his recognition was mutual. With a nod to the arrivals, Maywick invited:

"Step right in. I'm expecting Mr. Wingate very shortly."

CRIME OUT OF MIND

They entered and Keene planted the phone book on the table where it belonged. Maywick closed the door and studied the visitors quite blandly.

"Sit down, gentlemen. I'm sure my friend Wingate will be glad to see you." Pausing, Maywick waited for comment that didn't come, then asked: "Is there any special purpose in this visit?"

Shrugs were the only answer, but at the same time, Keene and Smiley did some glancing about. They remembered questions involving jewels and money, a mysterious package and a trusted friend. They were trying to link some of those factors with Wingate.

A key, turned in the lock, was the thing that broke the silence. As all eyes turned, Maywick's alone could have recognized Wingate; but Maywick's gaze froze like the others.

The man who stepped into the room was Planchini, attired in his full regalia!

"Pleasant to find you here," announced the mystic, blandly. "While we wait for Wingate, suppose I show you a clever trick I do. Better than those that Varno does, Mr. Maywick."

Planchini drew a coil of rope from under his Hindu jacket and drew the ends to show that it was about a yard in length. Then, running his hands along the rope, he began to stretch it.

Keene and Smiley gaped as they saw the rope extend itself to double the original length.

"Fooled you?" queried Planchini, smoothly. "It shouldn't. You can buy a yard of it in any magic shop. It's all in the weave; it's made to stretch."

He was showing the rope to Keene and Smiley, but keeping his eyes fixed on Maywick.

"It costs a lot, but it's worth it," assured Planchini. "Because this rope naturally contracts to its original length, so you can do the trick again."

More than ever intrigued, Keene and Smiley suddenly found themselves really startled, when Planchini added in his wise style:

"One good trick often explains another. This stretching rope which is really a contracting rope, tells why Gregg Zerber died at ten o'clock."

A sharp hiss came from Maywick's lips, but he suddenly repressed it.

"Zerber wasn't strangled," explained Planchini. "He was garroted. In case you aren't familiar with the difference, garroting may be likened to slow strangulation. The victim's breath is cut off to the point where he is helpless, but still alive."

A sharp interruption came from Maywick.

"We're not here to see tricks, Planchini –"

"You're here to listen about murder," interrupted Planchini. "A rope of this type did it. Slowly, steadily," – Planchini was twirling the rope by the ends as he spoke – "it contracted and what had begun as a garroting ended in what the police mistook for an actual strangulation."

CRIME OUT OF MIND

"It's the only explanation, Maywick, considering the time element. Somebody must have left this hotel at half past eight to reach Zerber's before quarter of nine, the latest time that the garrote could have been put on Zerber. Ten minutes from here to Zerber's" – Planchini paused to let the calculation sink home – "and that elects you, Maywick!"

It did elect Maywick, since both Keene and Smiley could testify that Planchini had been working in the Crystal Room until nearly quarter of nine the night of Zerber's death!

"Why be a fool?" snapped Maywick. "You phoned a ring signal to these two men yourself –"

"I phoned it?" queried Planchini, as Maywick halted. "You mean you phoned the projector's office from Zerber's. You were trying to plant everything on me. You just proved it, by admitting you knew about the signal system. Your system, Maywick, not mine."

A long, hard laugh came from Maywick. His Van Dyke beard wagged with it.

"See all, know nothing," scoffed Maywick. "That ought to be your slogan, Planchini. All right, I'm The Brain. I was using these two men for their own benefit. I wanted them to get their share of the Agnew jewels."

"Fair enough," agreed Planchini. "You knew right where those jewels were. Laura Jardine happened to have the combination and when it slipped out during my act, you recognized what it was."

Maywick nodded, beard and all, very proudly too.

"Jewel robbing is a tougher job than forgery, though," remarked Planchini. "That was what you worked on Mrs. Agnew before."

That statement brought a glare from Maywick.

"All you wanted from Zerber was a canceled check and a letter," continued Planchini. "Zerber had no gems."

"All right," snapped Maywick. "So I was covering up. Hubert Lidden took the rap for my forgeries and he'll stay right where he is. If that niece of his hadn't believed your press notices, she wouldn't have come here to consult you. But that doesn't really matter.

"I pulled a forgery on Wingate, too." Maywick looked from Keene to Smiley, nodding for their approval. "I'm after his gems right now and the cash that somebody is bringing to buy them. I'm cutting my friends in on it."

"Now that they are here," returned Planchini, "you say you're cutting them in. But it wasn't your idea. I planted those questions and I phoned the tip-off tonight. I wanted your friends, as you call them, to meet their double-crossing chief!"

It all seemed out of character for Planchini, this business of being so strongly on the side of integrity. But it was explained the moment that Maywick's hand went for his gun.

From Planchini's half-fixed lips came the unmistakable laugh of The Shadow!

Equally startling was the looping whip that The Shadow gave the rope. It licked over Maywick's wrist, formed a knot there, and hauled the bearded man clear around, as The Shadow wheeled and snapped one end. Maywick's gun went flying from his hand and he took a smacking, face-first dive right after it.

CRIME OUT OF MIND

Out of their respective stupors, Keene and Smiley remembered suddenly that they were Maywick's accomplices, even though he had deceived them. They reached for revolvers, but they were too late. It didn't even require The Shadow's draw to stop them. In from the hallway stepped two men: Harry Vincent and Clyde Burke, each with a handy gun to plant in a crook's back.

On the way out, The Shadow, still masquerading as Planchini, met Slade Farrow and gestured to the telephone book that lay on the table. Farrow opened it and found the final item needed, Planchini's wire recorder, running smoothly, steadily.

That device had picked up every word of Maywick's boastful confession. It was the evidence that would free Hubert Lidden.

All that remained was to tell Bonnie Blye.

It didn't take The Shadow long to rid himself of the putty overlay and other items that would have enabled any good make-up artist to duplicate the face that Planchini showed the public. The Hindu regalia was baggy and fitted over Cranston's own attire, so he disposed of it as rapidly, this extra costume that Planchini had used before he lost weight.

Arriving in the lobby as Cranston, The Shadow was in time to see two wild men come breaking from the Crystal Room, with a third behind them. The fugitives were Frost and Varno, their pursuer was the real Planchini, shouting for them to stop.

Big Jericho stopped them. The new doorman took Frost and Varno each by the back of the neck and carried them into the Crystal Room, with Planchini wheezing alongside. They thought they were going to answer a murder charge, those prisoners, but they were wrong.

Cranston was already snapping his fingers before Bonnie's eyes, and the girl, resting stiffly in the arms of men who held her upright, suddenly responded by coming to life with a puzzled gaze.

"A dangerous trick, Planchini," reproved Cranston. "You hypnotized this girl just before the show and gave her a post-hypnotic suggestion. She was to fall and play dead, the moment she heard the gun go off."

Planchini nodded, somewhat guiltily.

"I wanted to spoil Frost's act," he admitted. "After all, he was out to ruin mine."

Frost and Varno, unable to believe their luck, were staring at the wooden target as though that still disproved it.

"Another trick Planchini knew," Cranston told Frost and Varno, "but one that neither of you ever heard of. At very close range, a wax bullet will pierce a board easier than a lead bullet will. That was why Planchini coaxed the target right up to the gun muzzle. He knew Bonnie wouldn't be hurt; she was far enough away for the wax to melt itself before it reached her. But it did a real bullet's job at the start of its trip."

Much was dawning on Bonnie Blye, but she hadn't begun to realize the surprise that still awaited. Lamont Cranston provided for the sequel quite artfully, when he spoke to two attendants who were standing by.

"Show Miss Blye to her room," ordered Cranston. Then in an undertone that Bonnie didn't hear, he added: "The number is sixteen twelve."

CRIME OUT OF MIND

Cranston himself followed to the door of the Crystal Room. He was alone there, when Bonnie, nearing the elevator, thought she imagined that she heard a strange, parting message that somehow boded success as the climax of her troubles.

It wasn't imagination. Bonnie really heard it, the whispered laugh of The Shadow!

THE END