

THE CRIME RAY

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I. CRIME FROM BELOW

THE cruising coupe was not the type of car to attract attention. It was a two-year-old model of an inexpensive make; its color was a dark-green, that passed for black as the car rolled along sparsely lighted side streets.

Even when it reached the avenue and followed it, the coupe was inconspicuous. So, for that matter, were the car's two occupants. They had a wary way of huddling low, that driver and the man beside him, whenever they passed a brightly lighted area.

Their faces, it happened, had been mugged too often. They didn't care to show them when police were about, for fear that some sharp-eyed officer might identify them as visages that he had seen among rogues' gallery portraits.

Tonight, police were on hand in this secluded section of Manhattan. Too many of them to suit the two men in the car. The driver emphasized that, as he swung into a side street:

"Take a gander through the back, Butch. See if that hackie is still tailing us."

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"O.K., Jerry," returned Butch. "Keep your own eye peeled for the bulls. Seems like there's twice as many as there was when we made our last round."

Jerry's grunt was one of agreement. As he piloted the car, he counted uniforms. It appeared that cops had been moving steadily into the area centered by the Midtown National Bank. At this rate of influx, there would be a police cordon fully formed by the time the coupe completed another trip.

That was bad enough, but Jerry knew what to do regarding the police. It was the trailing taxicab that really bothered him.

"Still taggin' us –"

As Butch gave that news, Jerry swung into another avenue. One hand on the wheel, the other on a revolver, he sped a quick look through the window at his left. He saw the cab, gave a pleased chuckle as it continued straight across the avenue.

"Guess you figured it wrong, Butch," announced Jerry. "With that bird gone, we don't have to worry."

"What if the bulls spot us, though?" objected Butch. "There's plenty of 'em know that we work for Shag Korman."

"They didn't lamp either of us on the jewelry job, did they?"

"No. But they were closer than they shoulda been. Besides –"

Butch cut off. Jerry had pulled the coupe to the curb, stopping beside a subway entrance. He gave a quick order to his companion:

"Hop down there, Butch, and slip the dope through to Shag. Tell him I'm heading up the line to tip off the troubleshooters. We're going to make suckers out of those bulls. That's why Shag put us on this trick."

With Butch sidling toward the subway entrance, Jerry scanned the street, saw what he expected – a man in plain clothes who looked like a headquarters dick. Shoving the coupe into gear, Jerry wheeled full about in the middle of the avenue and started a rapid spurt in the opposite direction.

The maneuver accomplished exactly what Jerry intended, though he didn't look back to view the result. The headquarters man sprang from his doorway, placed a whistle to his lips. Before blowing it, he waited, hoping to spy a patrol car.

A taxi wheeled in from a side street, took the same direction as the coupe. More traffic was coming up the avenue; pulling from a batch of trucks was the patrol car that the dick wanted. He flagged it, held a quick conversation with the men in the car. Then the patrolling officers were on their way, with the detective sauntering toward the subway entrance, to await the arrival of a squad.

DOWN in the almost-deserted local subway station, Butch was rapping at the change window to arouse the sleepy clerk. Traffic wasn't heavy at this late hour; the man behind the window scarcely noticed Butch's face. He was more interested in the quarter dollar that the crook had laid on the counter.

Taking it, the change-maker slid five nickels in return. He was idling again, half asleep, when Butch went through the turnstile

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The lights of a local were glimmering down the track. Butch was walking rapidly along the concrete platform, as if he wanted to be far enough ahead to enter the first car. But by the time the train arrived, it was plain that Butch did not intend to be a passenger.

He was seated on a handy bench, his head slumped on his shoulder. He looked like a drunken bum, who had chosen the subway as a better sleeping place than a park bench.

Doors closed; the local pulled out. Butch came to life again, made rapid paces toward the very front of the platform. It was not a dead end; at that point a passage cut right, marked by arrows pointing to an exit on another street. Taking the passage, Butch stopped by a barred door – an exit to an office building, which was used only in the daytime.

A gun muzzle poked through a crack of the door; an eye glistened above it. Butch was recognized. The door opened and he entered to meet the glare of flashlights. In a quick, hoarse whisper, Butch piped the news that bulls were closing in. The mall who had received him growled the word:

"Tell Shag."

A flashlight gleamed along a concrete wall. It showed a rounded opening flanked by the jagged ends of steel girders. The hole, five feet in diameter, appeared to have been made by some mighty boring machine.

Knee deep along the floor lay the remains of crumbled concrete; among the chunks was strewn a grayish powder that glittered with bright specks of metal. Looking inward, Butch saw a deeper hole, through which a sweatered man was crawling to carry the news to Shag Korman.

The second cavity was more interesting than the first. It was a jagged opening, but stretched across it were thin wires of bare copper which the crawling man lifted carefully with gloved hands as he passed through.

During the few minutes that followed, Butch and his pals heard another local rumble into the station and depart. Then the crawler was back bringing two men with him. Guns and flashlights in readiness, the crooks heard what they were to do.

Moving out from the passage, they approached the platform of the subway station. Butch was delegated to take a look toward the turnstiles. He poked his head out past the edge, returned it with a grin.

"Listen!"

Butch's fellow-thugs could hear the muffled approach of footsteps echoing from the vaulted depths. They heard a voice, subdued with a recognizable gruffness. It was Butch who whispered the identity of that tone.

"Joe Cardona," said the crook. "The wise guy that's always on the job! He's shoved his snoot into trouble one time too often! The police commissioner will be short one inspector, after we get through with this job!"

FROM a distance came the increasing rumble of another subway local. Butch took another look past the corner, to make sure which track the train was on. He gave a quick nod to the others; they sprang into sight, a few of them, and spurted shots along the platform.

That fire brought a rapid response from a swarthy, stockily built man who wore plain clothes and who was backed by a squad of police and detectives, a dozen strong. Inspector Joe Cardona believed in just one antidote for crooks when they began to shoot; his method was to answer them with a more powerful volley. The method seemed to work on this occasion.

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Butch and the rest were scurrying wildly through their passage when Cardona and the officers arrived. Ducking into the shelter of the basement doorway, they rallied with a barrage that told the police that strategy would be needed to complete the attack. The situation didn't phase Cardona.

"Keep low!" shouted the ace inspector above the roar of the arriving local. "We'll have those rats out of there _"

Before Cardona could complete the prophecy, new shots came. A batch of passengers had sprung from the doors of the local the instant that they opened. They were thugs with guns; the troubleshooters summoned by Butch's pal, Jerry.

Wheeling, the police returned the fire. They were quicker on the trigger than the thugs expected. Two crooks staggered back into the train; the rest were stranded on the platform, as guards slithered the doors shut.

The local was on its way, amid the crash of breaking windows, the screams of actual passengers, who were dropping to the shelter of the floors. The rattle of the train's departure was drowned by the bark of guns.

Again, the law had crooks on the run, but once more, rats showed purpose in their flight. Jerry and his tribe were making for the turnstiles. Gaining them, they were in the station proper, with the shelter of corners near the change booth, where the frightened occupant had ducked from sight.

Leading a rapid charge, Cardona had hopes of routing crime's new troops. He was taking his whole squad with him, not guessing the part that the first thugs intended to play.

More shots were blasting, but Cardona scarcely heard them amid the banging clatter of another subway train; an express, coming down a center track. It was the sight of men staggering beside him that made Cardona turn about.

Butch and the crew from the basement passage were loose again, starting an attack from the front of the platform. Trapped in the open stretch of concrete, Cardona and his squad were between two fires. Crouching, grabbing for benches, ducking behind slender posts, they were outnumbered, confronted by death from both directions.

Gunmen were sparing in their shots, content to snipe off police until they forced them to some mad endeavor. Joe Cardona saw the purpose and resolved not to wait.

Leaping into the open, he started toward the turnstiles, intending to blast his way through there, if possible. His squad went with him, totally vulnerable to the sharpshooters at the platform's front.

All that Butch awaited was the beginning of the fray up by the turnstiles, before launching his entire crew upon the police when the latter would be fully occupied. But something else was due before that moment.

A SHARP, blasting sound came from the speeding express train that was roaring along the center track through the station. As if blown out by a giant puff, every light on the train was extinguished. There was a terrific shriek of brakes; the catapulting express quivered and jounced, coming to a stop in the space of the platform's length.

It was one of those emergency stops for which New York subway trains are geared; a halt that threatened to hurl the cars from the track, by reason of its trip-hammer action. There were wild, trailing yells from passengers; then the rear lights of the last car were jerking, swaying, beyond the pillars, just past the passage where Butch and his crew stood.

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Despite themselves, the crooks forgot the police and turned in the direction of the halted train. Above the muffled shrieks from within the darkened cars, they heard a closer sound: a strident challenge that riveted them.

It was the mighty burst of a sinister laugh, a mockery that left no doubt as to its author or his location. In the glow of the train's red tail-lamps, they saw a black-cloaked figure leaning across the swaying chains that blocked the train's rear platform. Before they could aim, that black-clad figure vaulted the swinging barrier.

There was the momentary outline of a slouch-hatted head against a ruddy light; then, like the shoulders beneath it, the head was gone. The cloaked rider who had halted the express was dropping to the tracks behind the darkened car.

The instant that he struck the concrete roadbed, that singular arrival evidenced his presence again. He issued his strident mirth anew, but drowned it of his own volition, with another form of challenge. From among the pillars came the bursts of automatics, stabbing shots straight for Butch and the startled crew of thugs.

Crooks were due for battle of a sort that they had not sought. Murderous sharpshooters were confronted by crime's archfoe, The Shadow!

CHAPTER II. CRIME'S MYSTERY

BY the mere fact of his arrival, The Shadow had brought timely rescue to Cardona's squad. Started on their mad rush toward the turnstiles, the law's representatives drove back Jerry's crew and routed them.

Those mobbies couldn't understand why they weren't getting the co-operation that they expected. Staggering for the street, hard pressed by the police, they were muttering imprecations meant for Butch and his outfit.

Though they didn't realize it, the crooks who reached the street were better off than those who had remained below.

At the platform's front, ugly-faced gunners were staggering as they fired into blackness. They couldn't find The Shadow out there along the darkened track, but he was picking them off by the glow of the platform lights.

The only hits that thugs registered came when their bullets clanged pillars. Those clanks of lead against steel seemed to chime with The Shadow's laugh, the well-timed reports of his guns. He always had a post in front of him when he fired, and those were stout pillars.

Crouching low, Butch was urging his remaining men to spread. They'd get The Shadow if they used their noodles, according to the way Butch phrased it. Yes, they'd get The Shadow, somewhere out by the central tracks.

But The Shadow wasn't along those tracks when the thugs managed to play their flashlights beyond the pillars. Craning from the platform's edge, they were due to learn his new location from the new taste of bullets that he gave them.

A gun flame knifed suddenly from below the platform's edge. One thug staggered backward, losing gun and flashlight. Another saw the stabbing tongues, gave a triumphant shout as he leaned farther out, to aim. His cry brought a spurt in his direction.

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Crooks heard a shriek, saw the thwarted thug go sprawling to the local track. His clawing hand found a strip of metal, his body was lashed with a wild contortion.

That wounded mobster had plucked the third rail. He was one murderer who didn't have to wait his turn in the electric chair. He took his burning in the sight of others, and their urge for battle suddenly lessened.

Not so with The Shadow.

His laugh threw awe into the remaining few, as they dived for their passage. It seemed a knell for the crook who had found a proper fate, as though the incident had been deliberately managed – by The Shadow.

Taunted by ominous mirth, Butch and his pitiful pals were on the run, harried by shots that came from the edge of the platform. Flinging his guns ahead of him, The Shadow gave a swift, sideward hoist up from the track. Scooping his automatics, he supplied a kick to a revolver that a wounded thug was aiming. While the gun was still clattering away from the snarling hoodlum's reach, The Shadow headed after the few who had managed to flee.

He overtook them before they could barricade themselves behind the basement door. One thug took a bullet from a .45, while the others scrambled for the round hole in the wall. Before they reached there, The Shadow was upon them; he was slashing with his guns, knowing that he would need bullets later.

Staggered by that rear attack, Butch and a last companion sank gunless. The Shadow's way was clear.

COMING to the inner gap, the cloaked victor noticed the copper wires that stretched across the cavity. But he seemed to understand their purpose, for he issued a whispered laugh, then lifted the wires carefully with his thin-gloved hands.

Through the opening, The Shadow used a tiny flashlight, found a stairway that led upward. Sight of the marble steps gave a clue to his surroundings.

The Shadow was in the basement of the Midtown National Bank. Off in the dimness, he saw safe-deposit boxes that crooks had ignored. He knew where he would find the main body of raiders. They would be upstairs, at the vault.

Far greater than the surprise in the subway was the consternation that The Shadow produced when he reached the main floor of the bank. There, he saw three men in front of the vault, which showed a gaping hole like those in the walls downstairs.

One thug was holding a flashlight steadied on the stairway that led up from the basement, expecting pals to arrive from that direction. When The Shadow came into the glare, all that the crook could do was to give a guttural croak.

The others spun about, then dived. The flashlight was flung away, leaving darkness. They were pulling guns, shooting blindly. The flashes from their revolvers were give-aways that brought The Shadow's fire in return. Though the commotion was brief, it brought a startling result.

Someone pulled a light switch. The whole banking floor was flooded with brilliance. By an outer door which had a gaping wire-crossed hole, The Shadow saw a crook he recognized: Shag Korman.

Long known as a deader of thuggish squads that worked for racketeers, Shag was supposed to have left New York during a clean-up. Rumors had linked him with recent crimes, but The Shadow, scouring Manhattan in

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search of those responsible for robberies, had gained no proof of Shag's presence until this moment.

There was no mistaking Shag Korman. Broad-faced, with hard-set jaw, he had tiny ratlike eyes beneath a bulging forehead that was topped by an uncombed mop of reddish hair. The combination was a sort that made him recognizable on sight.

Shag's eyes were squinting at present. It wasn't the brilliant light that bothered them; it was blackness, in the form of The Shadow. Shag hadn't expected the cloaked fighter to pop up in the very center of the rifled bank. But Shag had the quick wit that his underlings lacked.

Two thugs were flanking him with drawn revolvers. Shag propelled his cronies in The Shadow's direction, poking their gun hands upward as he shoved them. With almost the same move, he dropped away toward the ruined outer door.

In one brief glimpse, The Shadow viewed a scene beyond. Crooks were pushing a peculiar mechanism out of the way; it was a squatly, compact device the size of a large radio cabinet. They were making room for others, who were passing boxes of loot through the cross wires of the gaping bank door.

Shag was yanking a gun; so were others by the door. There would be a mass attack if the two assassins failed. Recognizing that, The Shadow did not fire as the two killers charged. Instead, he wheeled away across the bank floor, fading shiftily in one direction, then the other, just as the pair opened fire.

They had wasted shots, before they saw The Shadow's objective. He was wheeling toward the jagged door of the rifled bank vault, picking a spot that could serve him as a stronghold when the later attack came.

There were spread wires at that opening also, but they did not matter. The Shadow did not intend to enter the vault. He merely wanted the protection of the alcove, where it was situated.

A LOUD yell came from Shag Korman; it carried a note of expected triumph. The two crooks who had blasted shots at The Shadow made a frenzied dive for the outer door, instead of offering further battle. Those sudden happenings, plus the snakish feel of a thick, insulated wire upon which The Shadow trod, were enough to make the black-cloaked fighter change his own intentions.

Whirling full about, The Shadow became a streak of living blackness, as he dived for the stairway that led down into the basement. He was in retreat, inspired by a sheer, instinctive guess that Shag was about to release a menace against which no human fighter could compete.

It came – an explosion that shook the whole floor, jarring The Shadow's dart into a headlong plunge down the marble steps. Shag had yanked a switch connected to the insulated wire. He had loosed a blast that blew the empty vault into fragments.

Finding himself at the bottom of the steps, The Shadow heard a clangor from above. The explosion had set off the alarm system connected with the bank vault. Curiously, those bells had not begun to ring when the vault was first entered, but they were making up for their tardiness, jounced into life by the explosion. The thing wasn't sensible.

In his present situation, shaken by the pitch down the stairs, The Shadow was temporarily bewildered by it. Then, his senses clearing, he groped along the steps, to regain his feet.

His hand clutched another thick cord, one that ran down to the bottom of the stairs.

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It meant another explosive charge ready to be released; one that would blow those lower wall gaps, where The Shadow had battled Butch's crew! It threatened doom, not to The Shadow but to others, whose shouts he could hear. Cardona and his squad were coming from the platform of the subway station!

In that moment, The Shadow was confronted with a real dilemma. He had two choices: one, to dash out through the lower route and hold back Cardona's men before it was too late; the other, to head up the stairs again and prevent Shag from setting off the charge. Though the first course seemed more reasonable, The Shadow staked his chances on the second.

He knew that if he reappeared, Shag might forget other matters long enough for Cardona's squad to come through. In that case, The Shadow would have reserves at his disposal. Without an instant's hesitation, he started up the stairs.

His choice proved better than he thought.

Before The Shadow had ascended half a dozen steps, the lower blast went off, quivering the building's foundations. The Shadow, had he sped out to warn Cardona, would have been in the midst of the explosion when it came.

As it happened, he was safe; distant enough, upon the steps, to escape the shock of thunderous upheaval – and his main mission, too, was fulfilled.

The police were still short of the passage leading to the shattered lower walls. They were blocked from joining The Shadow, but they remained unharmed.

NEW alarms were clanging when The Shadow launched himself across the deserted banking floor, intent upon overtaking Shag and the main mob. Crooks had made good use of the short period allotted them. Except for the few that The Shadow had felled with his first shots, all were gone, their swag and their precious machine with them.

They had not broken the wires that stretched across the gaping outer door. Beyond, The Shadow could hear the rumble of a truck, muffled in an alleyway. He didn't stop for the wires as he reached the door; he ripped right through them, starting the donging of new alarms directly overhead.

He saw the truck pulling out, men clambering aboard it. From behind it was an uncoiling wire, another of those thick insulated cords that had the writhe of a blacksnake.

That sight was The Shadow's cue not to halt where he was. Neglecting the safety that the doorway afforded against gunfire, he sprang out into the alley, shooting for the rear of the truck while on the run.

One mobster lost his grip and hit the cobbles; another sprawled down into the truck. The rest ducked. Among them was Shag Korman, and the leader of the horde tugged something as he went.

The explosion that came was the most violent of all. It wrecked the wall for a dozen feet on each side of the hewn door. It seemed to jounce the cobblestones from the alleyway, for they came up in a mass to meet The Shadow.

There was a blinding glare; then blackness. Yet, in the gloom, The Shadow raised himself from a sprawled position and fired two more shots, as a warning that he still had teeth for any crooks unwise enough to return.

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There was a rattle of fading gunfire from the direction of the avenue. The truck was running the thin cordon of police. Added shots told of convoying cars, helping the escape. Then came silence, broken only by the sad, occasional wails of police sirens, that seemed to give melancholy acknowledgment of defeat.

Like the law, The Shadow had been thwarted in his attempt to nullify crime. Nevertheless, there was significance to the low-toned laugh that came while he was groping from the vacated alley. That tone carried a prophecy of future trouble for the vanished crooks. The Shadow, in fighting his way to their very midst, had delved deeply into their long-hidden game.

When Joe Cardona arrived in the alleyway, after a long trip around through the subway station, he found no trace of The Shadow. The cloaked fighter had vanished, to take his own route through the night.

CHAPTER III. FACTS FOR THE LAW

RALPH WESTON, police commissioner, was in a baffled mood. That was why he had left his office to seek the comparative seclusion of the exclusive Cobalt Club. There, some moments glum, at others fuming, the commissioner bristled to the tips of his short-clipped mustache as he poured his problems upon his friend and confidant, Lamont Cranston.

Calm of manner, leisurely in action, Cranston made the very sort of listener that Weston wanted. The expression of his hawkish face was almost masklike, but he seemed to weigh all that the commissioner told him.

There was a good reason why Cranston liked to hear comments that Weston offered. Lamont Cranston was a guise of The Shadow, and was therefore interested in the law's version of mysterious crimes that had reached their peak with last night's robbery at the Midtown National Bank.

There was a real Lamont Cranston – a big-game hunter and world traveler, and, known to him, while he was away The Shadow would adopt his identity.

"We have had warnings," declared Weston, "if they could be called such. Warnings before every crime. Here, for example" – he spread some typewritten letters – "are communications received by wholesale jewelers, promising them protection against burglaries if they paid the sum of one hundred thousand dollars."

"And those warnings," supplied Cranston, in an even tone, "were ignored, of course?"

"Not entirely," returned the commissioner. "We were on the lookout. But that didn't stop the three robberies that followed, at the rate of one a night."

Cranston remembered those robberies. He had tried to forestall them, as The Shadow, but had gained his leads too late.

"Then came these threats against the banks," continued Weston, referring to another letter. "A demand of half a million dollars, to be paid through the New York Clearing House! We ignored it" – Weston spread his hands, helplessly – "and they cracked the Midtown National last night."

The Shadow reached for the letters. They bore the letterhead of the General Protective Association, Excalibur Building, New York. None had signatures; simply the title of the so-called association, typewritten.

"There is no Excalibur Building," declared Weston. "All that is just a blind. If these crooks were paid, they would still commit robberies, in my opinion. But the uncanny part of it is that we can't find a clue to them, or

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any of their stolen goods."

As Weston spoke, he noted a mild query in Cranston's eyes. The commissioner immediately modified his statement.

"We know who led the mob," said Weston. "We learned that last night. A crook named Shag Korman was in it. We know that from the identities of the mobsters who were killed. All of them were linked to Shag. But what's become of the rest? They're gone, the whole tribe of them. Completely vanished!"

"And you consider Shag Korman the big-shot?"

The commissioner smiled at Cranston's question. In reply, Weston tapped the letters.

"These show," he declared, "that a real brain is behind the game. Some racketeer, bigger than any in the past, has found a way to make crooks appear and vanish; to commit crimes in the twinkling of an eye. Shag is simply the subordinate, who leads the necessary mob.

"That robbery last night" – Weston was wagging his forefinger – "was highly mysterious. The crooks blew the bank vault, the basement wall, and finally the side door of the bank. The explosions came three in a row" – he snapped his thumb and finger in rapid succession – "like that! At the finish, where were the crooks? Gone! With more than the half million that they had demanded!"

CRANSTON'S face looked dubious, as though such events could not have happened. Weston became insistent.

"That's just what they did, Cranston! Of course, there was a lot of shooting before. But that was when they decoyed Inspector Cardona away from the main scene. They started trouble in a subway station, to hold him there."

"Rather unfortunate, commissioner."

"It was. But Cardona can't be blamed. He guessed where the robbery was due, which is how he happened to be on hand. It was a marvelous guess, Cranston, and Cardona did nearly as well with the last jewel robbery."

The Shadow remembered the crime in question. The law had beaten him to the scene by several minutes; time enough to injure his own plans, but not soon enough to frustrate the crooks. History had, in a way, repeated itself last night at the Midtown National.

"Cardona is playing hunches," remarked Weston, "and while I do not ordinarily approve of such a policy, I cannot condemn it when it works. In fact, Cardona's promptness in being on the scene is the one factor that has saved me from more serious criticism from the newspapers."

His own mention of Cardona reminded the commissioner that he had not yet heard from his ace inspector, although the afternoon was late. Weston went to make a phone call, leaving his friend Cranston to consider mentally the facts that had been mentioned.

There was much for The Shadow to consider.

Recent crimes, as perpetrated by Shag Korman and his followers, were still mysterious to the law. Only The Shadow had learned one all-important fact: that crooks had some new and amazing way of entering jewelry stores and banks without setting off alarms. Those gaping holes, strung with wires as silent as unplucked harp

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strings, were proof of the method that existed.

Literally, criminals knew how to pulverize steel, without injuring copper. They had cut through doors of metal, through steel girders, which, in yielding, had caused concrete to crack and crumble with them. Yet the copper wires, attached to alarm bells, had failed to function when needed.

In the case of the Midtown National, the crooks had worked in from the subway, finished the vault and cut their way out to the alley, all with the aid of an intricate, roller-mounted mechanism which The Shadow had merely glimpsed.

The explosions, set off later, were simply the cover-up for the real method. Those blasts had left the police baffled by what they considered to be a rapid entry, robbery, and escape, completed in a very few minutes.

There was another mystery, however, that intrigued The Shadow, and in this case the law knew more than he did. Although his secret agents had been checking with The Shadow, looking for places where crime was due, the police had twice arrived in advance.

Commissioner Weston attributed it to Cardona's hunches, and really believed what he said. The one man who could tell the real truth was Inspector Joe Cardona.

The Shadow did not agree that Joe's hunches were good enough to work twice in succession. He was convinced that the stocky inspector had something up his sleeve beside a brawny arm.

While considering that problem, The Shadow saw Weston returning, accompanied by Joe Cardona, who had evidently just arrived at the Cobalt Club. There was a third man with them; reverting to his pose of Cranston, The Shadow studied the arrival and identified him. The man was Morton Delcott, a prominent financier and large real-estate owner.

WORRIMENT showed on Delcott's long, thin features. Seating himself, he adjusted his pince-nez spectacles and used a handkerchief to mop his baldish forehead. Finally smoothing his scant gray hair, Delcott turned to Weston and said:

"So I called headquarters and told Inspector Cardona about the letter. He suggested that I meet him here."

"A good suggestion," approved Weston. He passed a letter across the table. "Look at this, Cranston."

The letter was from the General Protective Association, announcing that Delcott's properties were threatened and that they would be protected against harm in return for monthly payments of five thousand dollars, to be continued until further notice.

"That would mean sixty thousand dollars a year," spoke Delcott, in a horrified tone. "Why, in five years it would total more than a quarter million!"

Though Delcott was reputedly a millionaire, the size of the demand apparently overwhelmed him. That was quite understandable. The letter called for cash; most of Delcott's wealth was tied up in the properties he owned.

Weston remarked that it was odd that the crooks did not ask for a lump sum. Cardona had a theory regarding that.

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"They probably figure that five thousand a month will cover their running expenses," said the inspector. "After last night, Shag Korman will have to pay guys plenty, to stick with his mob. Don't worry, Mr. Delcott" – Cardona was confident – "we'll handle this matter for you."

Momentarily, Delcott looked relieved; then he pointed out that the letter promised immediate trouble if he did not give his agreement to the payments. Cardona snorted.

"How are you going to answer them?" he demanded. "Did you ever hear of the Excalibur Building, where the offices of this protective association are supposed to be?"

Delcott shook his head.

"Neither did anyone else," added Cardona. "So just forget it. We'll look after your properties for you."

"I'll send you a list, inspector," promised Delcott, "naming all the properties which I own, or in which I have an interest."

"That won't be necessary!"

Cardona's words were so emphatic that both Weston and Delcott showed surprise. There was a flicker of keen interest from the eyes of Lamont Cranston, for The Shadow had an immediate idea that Cardona was about to lay his cards on the table.

Instead, Cardona was merely holding those cards closer to his chest. He wasn't going to give away the source of his so-called hunches. His next words were a bluff, though only The Shadow recognized it.

"I've got a line on the big-shot," asserted Cardona. "He knows it, and he won't make a move. I went up to see him this afternoon, but he wasn't around. He'll know that I was there, though. That guy is Philip Tormeon."

The Shadow had expected Cardona to end with that name. Philip Tormeon, a few years ago, had been classed as a racketeer, until the rackets had been broken. Then it had developed that Tormeon wasn't a racketeer at all.

Indicated with various others in a dozen crooked enterprises, Tormeon alone had met the charges and won out in court, despite the efforts of the district attorney's office to convict him. His relations with persons connected with the rackets had been legitimate business transactions, nothing else.

Since then, Tormeon had been a silent partner in many honest enterprises, a fact which Cardona promptly stressed.

"TORMEON sings a good song," stated Joe. "He says he can't tell us the names of the companies that he has backed, because it might hurt their business. When you slice that thin, it's baloney. The real answer is that Tormeon isn't in back of anybody who's honest.

"He's a prize racketeer, that guy! The only one big enough to be staging a game like this. There's plenty of mobbies who have worked for him, though he won't admit it; and – get this! – one of those crooks was Shag Korman!"

To prove his statement, Cardona brought a batch of papers from his pocket – signed statements, bearing the names of small-fry crooks who testified to Shag's former connection with Tormeon.

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"Others worked for Tormeon," added Cardona, "but only Shag is left. The rest are either dead or up the river. We've found out that Shag did the heavy work on those robberies. So that tells us that the big brain is Tormeon."

Commissioner Weston arose, clapping a congratulatory hand upon Cardona's shoulder. Turning from one person to another, the commissioner announced:

"We have found out what we need to know. The man that we must have to watch is Philip Tormeon."

One listener disagreed, although he nodded. Behind the calm pose that he adopted when passing as Lamont Cranston, The Shadow had a different theory.

The man that The Shadow intended to watch was Inspector Joe Cardona!

CHAPTER IV. THE CONTACT

UPON leaving the Cobalt Club. Joe Cardona noticed that the afternoon was cloudy, a fact that promised an early dusk. Lately, the ace inspector had preferred early darkness. He decided that by the time he had spent an hour at headquarters, he would be ready to set out upon a new mission.

The only person who entered Cardona's office after Joe arrived there was Fritz, the janitor – a pasty-faced, scrawny fellow who had a habit of muttering to his mop and bucket while he cleaned the place. But when Cardona strolled out at dusk, Fritz underwent an immediate transformation.

From the side corridor where he was mopping, Fritz moved down a stairway and left his mop and bucket beside a locker. From the locker itself, he scooped a black cloak and a slouch hat. Donning those garments, he reached the street and sidled into a waiting taxicab, while Cardona was entering another.

The Shadow had taken up Cardona's trail.

It wasn't an easy route to follow. Cardona left one cab and took another: later, he transferred to an East Side elevated. By that time, The Shadow had changed his make-up. He left his cab and took the same train as Cardona.

The cab tagged along the street, from station to station, arriving at one just in time for The Shadow to board it and point out the direction that Cardona had gone in another taxi.

The inspector didn't squander much money on his cab hops, as all of the trips were short. The Shadow finally trailed him on foot through a squalid neighborhood, where Cardona entered a little door behind a store and went up a stairway to the second floor.

There, he knocked at a door, was admitted into a darkened room. As soon as the door was closed, The Shadow appeared from the dimly lighted stairway and began to work on the lock. Muffled clicks told that his tiny picklike instruments were making rapid progress.

Meanwhile, Cardona had reached an unlocked inner room which was rather well furnished, considering the neighborhood. Among other things, the room had a telephone, and the man who had admitted Cardona sat very close to it.

He was a scrawny-looking chap and nervous in manner. Cardona met the flashes of beady eyes, the twitch of lips that were almost as white as the fellow's face. That didn't particularly surprise Cardona. Squeak Wembry

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was always nervous when he talked with anyone who represented the law.

"They'd croak me, Joe!" he was voicing earnestly. "Honest they would, if they even thought I was a stoolie! Maybe they're watching this joint right now!"

"Not a chance," assured Cardona, gruffly. "Just because they've got the phone tapped isn't any proof that they're covering outside here. I took a look. Everything's clear."

Squeak showed some relief. He probably figured that a tapped telephone wire meant that other precautions would be regarded as unnecessary. His lips formed a cunning grin.

"Guess you're right, Joe," he said. "Shag don't know I'm blabbing. It's lucky, though, that The Shadow was in on things last night. Shag figures The Shadow tipped you off."

"Let him," acknowledged Cardona. "What I want to know is, when's the next job coming? Once I get a real crack at Shag, you won't have to do any more worrying."

THE prospect pleased Squeak. In his eagerness to talk, he did not notice that the door from the outer room was easing inward, nor did Squeak spy the long stretch of blackness that appeared upon the floor, creeping almost to Cardona's back before it halted.

"They're going out again tonight," informed Squeak, "if Shag can get enough of a mob together. I looked over the lay and told Shag it would make a good quickie."

"How long ago did Shag call up?"

"About an hour ago, the last time. I guess he'll call again, to ask some questions. He usually does."

Cardona nodded; then quickly asked: "What's the job he's going after?"

"A warehouse," replied Squeak. "Here's the name of the place, and the layout. There's only one way he can get into it. That's to blow a hole through the wall at the end of the alley."

Cardona considered the rough diagram that Squeak showed him. An idea struck home to Joe.

"How are they going to clean out the place?" he demanded. "It takes time to do a job like that."

"I don't know," admitted Squeak. "They did a hurry job on the bank, though, after they blew the works."

Cardona grunted. He wasn't sure that the Midtown National robbery could be attributed entirely to dynamite. He had other questions, though, that were important.

"Who owns the warehouse?"

Squeak didn't know.

"Maybe it belongs to a fellow named Morton Delcott," persisted Cardona. "Ever hear of him?"

There was another headshake from Squeak.

THE CRIME RAY

"Let's get back to things we've talked about before," decided Cardona. "Where does the mob go to, with the swag, after they've staged a job?"

"I told you I don't know, Joe," whined Squeak. "Shag has me on the outside as a lookout. He wouldn't let me in on the rest of it."

"And what about Tormeon? Has Shag said anything more about him?"

"No," replied Squeak. "He just let the guy's name out once, while he was talking over the phone. But there's others that figure Tormeon is the big-shot. Guys that ought to know."

Cardona nodded. He knew the "guys" that Squeak mentioned. Their names were signed to the statements that Joe had shown up to the commissioner. But Cardona needed more than that to pin the goods on Philip Tormeon.

Tonight, he hoped to capture either Shag Korman or men close to the mob leader, fellows like Jerry or Butch. Unfortunately, those two had not been alive when Cardona caught up with them last night. Jerry had taken too many bullets near the turnstiles, while Butch had been crushed by the underground explosion in the foundations of the bank building.

WHILE Cardona pondered over matters, a patch of blackness receded from the floor. Squeak caught a fleeting glimpse of the sliding gloom as it trickled into the darkness of the outer room. In a pouncing fashion, the stoolie came to his feet. Cardona stopped him with a clamping hand.

"Where do you think you're going?"

"Outside!" hoarsed Squeak. "I seen somethin', Joe! Honest!"

Cardona snapped his Police Positive from his pocket. Followed by Squeak, he stalked into the outer room, flashing a light ahead of him. The room was empty. Joe looked at Squeak.

"Mebbe the guy went through," faltered the stoolie. "He could've snook out the door."

"You locked it, didn't you?"

Squeak answered the question with a nod. Cardona stepped to the door and tried it. As he turned the knob, his hand blocked off his own view of the key below, while his body hid the key from Squeak's sight. The key was moving, turned by thin pliers from the other side of the lock. Neither Joe nor Squeak heard the slight scrape it made.

"Locked tight," announced Cardona, referring to the door. "You'd better shake those jitters, Squeak. I'll stick around until Shag calls up, unless I have to wait too long."

The call came much sooner than Cardona expected it. Squeak answered it in competent fashion. After a brief conversation with Shag, the stoolie hung up and turned to give Cardona a quick nod.

"They're starting out," informed Squeak. "You've got plenty of time to box 'em, Joe. Only, don't let nobody spot you calling headquarters from around here. I don't want to get croaked."

With due regard for Squeak's welfare, Cardona walked a few blocks after leaving the hide-out. There, he called headquarters and ordered a flying squad to meet him.

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Confident that he had not been observed, Cardona was sure that no harm would come to Squeak. In his own turn, Cardona didn't want the stoolie croaked. Squeak Wembry was too valuable. He was the factor behind Cardona's hunches.

Chuckling as he rode by taxi, Joe Cardona decided that after tonight, Commissioner Weston would never again express doubt regarding hunches. Cardona had kept his meetings with Squeak an absolute secret; no one, so far as Joe knew, had ever guessed that such interviews had taken place.

Cardona was still considering Squeak's recent fright to be a case of jitters. It didn't occur to Joe that Squeak might have seen The Shadow.

Meeting the flying squad, Cardona held a huddle, then started for the warehouse, a huge windowless structure on the East Side. Dividing the squad into two groups, he posted one at each end of the street that had the blind alley in the center. Then, with one man from each group, Cardona started a personal foray.

His plan was that he and the two men with him should investigate the alley. If mobsters had arrived there, Joe and his companions could quickly summon the others. But if crime had not started, the game would be to lie in wait and surprise the crooked raiders when they came.

ALL was black and silent in the alley. Probing along the side walls, Cardona whispered for his companions to join him. He even decided that it would be safe to risk a flashlight, here in the gloom where blank walls practically surrounded them. But with the first blink of his light, Cardona stiffened.

He heard a whisper – a strange, ominous whisper that seemed to creep from nowhere.

The men beside Cardona gripped their guns. They, too, had caught that tone. Its words were indistinguishable, but its sibilance carried a note of warning. Cardona recognized its import, for he had heard that whisper before.

The voice of The Shadow!

Repressed to a subdued tone, the whisper seemed to come from beyond the inner wall of the alleyway, which Cardona and his companions had not yet reached. That made it all the more uncanny, for, in effect, it was coming from the depths of the warehouse, through a solid wall!

Cardona could not explain how any tone, even The Shadow's could pass through several feet of masonry supported by skeleton steel. He sensed that if he glared his flashlight in that direction, he might have the answer. But The Shadow's warning distinctly concerned the light that Cardona carried.

Death awaited here. The Shadow knew. That was enough for Joe Cardona.

Extinguishing the light, the inspector thrust back his men. He started them toward the mouth of the alley. The retreat was timely, for they hadn't gone a dozen steps when a roaring sound broke loose within those very depths from which The Shadow had spoken. It was the noise of a motor and hard upon its rumble came a brilliant glare of light that caught three men in its path.

Realizing that he and his companions were caught in that huge glow, Cardona spun about; staring into the illuminated alley, he saw the looming whiteness of the warehouse. Near the base was a jagged hole, large enough to accommodate a large truck, as the lights themselves proved.

They were the head-lamps of a truck deep in the warehouse headed for the gaping exit through the solid wall. Crime had struck earlier than Cardona anticipated. He had arrived in time to learn the secret that crooks had hitherto preserved from the law; the fact that they could hew their way through steel, without benefit of dynamite.

That truck was manned by thugs who evidenced themselves with gleeful howls, louder than the motor's roar. Ready for their getaway, they were happy at the chance to crush the puny victims who blocked the path.

While Cardona and his two companions stood riveted with amazement, the truck roared forward like a mighty juggernaut intent upon gaining human sacrifice!

CHAPTER V. THE VANISHED HORDE

AT the moment of the truck's forward lurch, it seemed that no human power could have stayed the murder that crooks intended. Though warned by The Shadow, Cardona and his men were still a few yards short of the street where safety lay. Turning, they started a mad dash from the alley, an effort as hopeless as it was frantic.

They didn't see what happened behind them, but they heard the strident laugh that came from the alley depths. It told them that aid was to be theirs.

The aid of The Shadow!

Into the path of the high-powered truck whirled a black-clad figure. The Shadow was just inside the gaping wall, a spot that he had reached when Cardona and the others had arrived. Wheeling straight for the truck, he was jabbing shots with an automatic, as if he expected those tiny pellets to halt the massive vehicle of destruction.

The truck was upon him. For an instant, The Shadow was lost beneath its lunging radiator. Then, as if lofted by a hidden spring, he was over the front. Feet on the bumper, he had caught the radiator cap with his free hand. He was toppled backward, jarred by the impact, but the truck's own momentum gave him balance.

Flattened along the hood, The Shadow opened fire point-blank at the face of the truck's driver – Shag Korman!

The windshield was bulletproof, but it cracked as the slugs hit it. With the glass blurring before his eyes, Shag dropped low behind the wheel, shoving the brake pedal as he went. He was shouting for his pals to dose The Shadow with bullets of their own. Half a dozen guns bristled from the truck's sides and began a converging fire.

With those revolver spurts, The Shadow had gone below the level of the radiator. Snarling, Shag realized what the black-cloaked fighter had accomplished. By mounting the truck before it attained full speed, he had diverted Shag from the original purpose of mowing down Cardona and two other helpless men.

Shag couldn't sight The Shadow. He thought that the cracked windshield was the reason. He figured that it was The Shadow's turn to be running from the alley. Lunging the truck forward, Shag roared it out to the street; his head skewed to one side, he was getting the clear vision that he wanted.

Still, he didn't see The Shadow, not until he gave the truck a hard veer. That was when a long, black shape flung itself across the glare of one headlight, to blend with the darkness of the opposite curb.

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Crouched low, The Shadow had ridden the front bumper during that roaring trip from the alley! Shag himself had personally escorted the cloaked fighter to safety!

GUNS were talking from the street. Shag's mobbies dropped below the steel sides of the semi-armed truck, to ignore that fire while they whizzed away. Cars were speeding in from the corner, and they weren't police cars.

They were thug-manned automobiles, meant to pick up crooks who had been assigned to blast the warehouse wall and make a getaway later. Dropping for the shelter of the alley that had so lately been a spot of death, Cardona and the two detectives started shooting at the arrivals.

Shots answered, not from the cars but from the warehouse. Attracted by the gunfire, the men who were to blow the wall had dropped that duty, to join the battle in the street. Forced to turn and meet them, the three officers were in the same unenviable situation that Cardona had been in the night before. Joe's only hope was to fight through to the warehouse, to avoid a murderous fire from the rear.

Mowing down the few who blocked the route through the alley, the officers once again were protected from enemies at their backs. Guns were spurting from all along the street opposite the warehouse alley; the shots were directed at the thugs who manned the cars, and they were fully occupied in giving reply.

The Shadow had posted his picked agents in doorways opposite, while he had made a lone trip into the warehouse. Competent marksmen all, the agents were making it hot for Shag's reserve crew. Almost with one accord, the cars sped along the street to escape the withering barrage.

Though pursued by one police car that came roaring after them, the crooks overtook the other while it was battling with the truck. Soon, cars were tangled in a jam that filled the narrow street, a few blocks from the warehouse.

Softened by their set-to with The Shadow's agents, the mobbies were no match for the police at close-range fire. They went staggering, sprawling along the street as they deserted their cars; but, like all of Shag's thugs, they fought it out to a finish.

Only one crook weakened, and flung his arms up to surrender. He received a shot from a dying thug who propped himself up from the curb. Again, crime's secrets were to be preserved, so far as this batch of thugs was concerned. They were sworn to accept death in preference to capture, and to make sure that others did the same.

BLOCKS away, the rumbling truck was traveling at breakneck speed, carrying Shag Korman and a crew of crooks who were still intent upon escape. If they managed to elude pursuers, they could count tonight's crime a victory, for their truck was loaded with spoils from the warehouse, and it carried the mysterious machine that enabled them to make silent entry through solid walls.

At intervals, cars wheeled in behind the truck, then sped ahead of it, signaling as they passed that no followers were on the trail. Those same cars would round the blocks ahead and come back to perform their previous duty.

All the while, the truck was zigzagging from side streets to new avenues, changing its course in a most confusing style. It seemed, actually, that no followers were on the trail, but thugs were wrong in that surmise.

Several blocks behind, a taxicab was tracing the truck's course. Its canny driver, Moe Shrevnitz, one of The Shadow's agents, was taking orders from his black-clad chief, who rode as passenger with drawn guns.

THE CRIME RAY

Spotting the tactics of the cover-up cars, The Shadow had matched them. He was trailing the reserve crews, not the truck!

Finally, the flocking cars crossed an avenue. The cab was following them, when The Shadow gave a quick order that brought an understanding nod from Moe, the taxi driver. Far up the avenue, The Shadow had spied the truck dodging among other traffic. This was where the reserve cars were supposed to drop off.

Moe jammed the brakes. With a quick reverse, he swung the taxi back into the avenue and dodged through traffic to resume the truck's trail. Within a dozen blocks, the cab was close enough for The Shadow to spy faces peering from the slitted section above the truck's high side. In low-toned command, he told Moe to drop farther back.

Rather than resume battle at this spot, The Shadow hoped to trail the truck to its ultimate destination, to learn where crooks had their mysterious lair. This wasn't the first time that they had gone on a vanishing expedition with a truckload of loot. Abandoned trucks had been found afterward, but the swag had never been traced. The Shadow intended to discover where it went.

Two blocks farther along, The Shadow's well-formed plan was disturbed by intervention that he did not want.

Shrieking in from a side street came a police car; in answer to its siren came another wail from up the avenue. The truck veered like a frightened hippopotamus, and went lunging blindly down a side street.

The Shadow knew the answer.

Members of Cardona's flying squad had spotted the truck's license number and had sent out a general order to halt it. They had probably described the truck, too, judging by the promptness with which the patrol car had grabbed the trail.

ROARING southward on another avenue, the truck was being overtaken by a pair of patrol cars, while The Shadow's taxi tactfully kept to the rear, its cloaked director hoping to again regain his former opportunity to trace the warehouse thieves to their ultimate goal.

Slats had dropped at the rear of the truck. Crouched low, crooks were announcing themselves with revolver shots and the police were giving answer. That fire was haphazard, producing no real damage to either faction, but it was accomplishing something of advantage to the crooks. They were preventing the police cars from flanking the truck.

Their object was uncovered when other cars wheeled in from side streets. Those cars were the protectors that had left a while before. The truck had doubled back, to pick them up again. The emergency measure produced real results.

Cutting in at a spot where half the avenue was blocked for repairs, the reserve cars let the truck go through, then shoved into the narrow space and bottled it.

Guns were busy, warily. These crooks wanted to escape and knew they could, for they outnumbered the police. The patrol cars, in turn, were backing away. Halting the taxi, The Shadow opened a long-range fire that helped the officers to retreat. Moe, meanwhile, was crouched below the wheel, one eye cocked through his window to watch where the truck went.

THE CRIME RAY

He was informing The Shadow that it had stalled only two blocks ahead, under the shelter of an old elevated station that was being demolished. Evidently the truck's own route was cut off!

Before Moe had time to report more, the reserve crooks suddenly fled, shooting their sedans through the free half of the avenue. The patrol cars started after them, The Shadow's taxi followed.

At the first street, the sedans veered from the avenue, as if in a last effort to act as decoys. The police cars were not fooled. They kept straight ahead, for they saw the truck getting under way and thought they would overtake it.

The Shadow saw it, too. He spied men hoisting up the back that they had lowered, to cover the same machine that he had glimpsed during the bank robbery. In that instant, he understood why the truck had pretended to stall.

He spoke a grim word to Moe. The taxicab launched forward with whippet speed. It overtook the patrol cars, which were racing side by side toward the looming structure of the abandoned elevated, only a quarter block ahead.

Through the connecting window to the front seat came The Shadow's hand, to grip the wheel and jerk it hard to the right as Moe, for once, found his nerve falter. The driver, however, did the rest. He hoisted his foot from the accelerator, slamming it to the brake pedal as the cab took its sudden veer.

Their own brakes shrieking, the police cars also swerved, forced to the curb by the surprise action of the cab. Three cars jounced across the sidewalk under the very fringe of the elevated structure. The taxi smashed a plate-glass window; one patrol car ripped a broad doorway into splinters, while the other wrecked itself in a narrow alleyway.

But the sounds of those crashes, the jounces that shook the occupants of the three cars, were as nothing compared to the terrific din that followed, nor the destruction that they escaped, thanks to The Shadow's vigilance.

With a mighty din, the elevated station collapsed. Descending to the street along with tons of steel that supported it, the ancient structure shook the paving with the force of an earthquake shock. Criminals had used their pet machine to ruin those supports, hoping that the deluge would bury the pursuers who were on their trail.

The Shadow had seen the elevated structure totter. At the last instant, he had veered his own car and two others from its path, stopping them a dozen yards short of the collapsing tons of metal that would have flattened any vehicle unlucky enough to be beneath it.

Again a horde of crooks had vanished, to regain their mysterious hide-away, carrying their crime machine, and another enormous load of loot. But they had failed in their endeavor to crush their superfoe, The Shadow!

Amid the echoes of the clashing, tumbling steel came the tone of a strange, triumphant laugh from the wrecked cab that was thrust half through a store front.

The Shadow, too, could count tonight a victory, as crooks would later learn!

CHAPTER VI. THREADS TO CRIME

JOE CARDONA had guessed right about the warehouse. It belonged to Morton Delcott, as the police inspector learned at a morning conference in the commissioner's office.

Though his own loss had been small, confined only to the damage of the warehouse, Delcott was highly perturbed over the robbery. Silks, tapestries, and other merchandise to the value of some fifty thousand dollars had been stolen, and Delcott feared that merchants would remove their goods from several other warehouses that he owned.

The loss in storage rentals would in that case total quite a few thousand dollars a month, more than the crooks had demanded as tribute under the term, "protection."

Commissioner Weston gave reassurance that finally satisfied Delcott's qualms.

No public mention had been made of the letter that Delcott received. That fact, Weston explained, made crime's threat a general one, not something that involved a specific individual. There had been no loss of public confidence in jewelry stores and banks after the previous robberies; hence Delcott would have no reason to worry about his storage business.

Of course, the threat still existed; but the commissioner now had a complete list of Delcott's holdings and intended to guard the properties. Moreover, the law had acquired important evidence that made it unlikely that crooks would attempt another stroke.

In proof, Weston produced an envelope and poured out a quantity of grayish powder specked by tiny flakes that glistened like bits of mica.

"Samples from the warehouse wall," he explained. "We are having them analyzed. The experts have promised us an accurate opinion by late this afternoon. They agreed that the criminals have found some way of disintegrating steel."

Delcott offered the objection that the warehouse wall was constructed of concrete.

"Its core was structural steel," corrected Weston. "The steel was powdered by the action of some penetrating force, that caused the concrete to crumble. Suppose you meet me at the club, Mr. Delcott, some time after six o'clock. We may have full reports by that time."

With Delcott gone, Weston and Cardona discussed another phase of the robbery. Last night, the crooks had at least been up to usual form in two important respects. They had taken bulky goods along with lighter loot, and they had managed to complete disappearance following the crime.

"What gets me," admitted Cardona, "is the amount of stuff they lugged away. The truck must have been loaded to the roof. It was like that jewelry-store robbery, where they took about half a ton of tableware that most crooks would have figured was too heavy."

The phone bell rang as Cardona completed his statement. Answering the ring, Weston held a brief conversation. With a satisfied smile, he turned to Cardona.

"The man that we must question," decided the commissioner, "is Philip Tormeon. His former connection with various rackets makes him a most likely factor in these crimes."

THE CRIME RAY

"Tormeon has gone out of town," objected Cardona, glumly. "He's smart enough to have an alibi for everything he does. Wise enough to duck out, too, when the going gets hot."

"He hasn't ducked out," returned Weston. "He will be at his apartment at three this afternoon, and we are to call on him at that time."

Cardona showed surprise at the news.

"Cranston's doing," chuckled Weston. "Remember what you said about Tormeon – how he was putting up the bluff that he was in legitimate business? Well, Cranston decided to sound him out, and did. Tormeon was more than pleased to hear from a millionaire who wanted to talk over some new enterprise."

"Then Cranston made the appointment?"

"Yes. But we are going along" – Weston's smile was broad – "despite Cranston's protest. Meet me at the club, inspector, at half past two."

PROMPTLY at three o'clock, the visitors were admitted to Tormeon's apartment, which occupied the entire fourth floor of an old brownstone residence in the night-club district. Going up in the slow-moving automatic elevator, Cardona undertoned a few remarks.

"Tormeon owns this whole building," informed Joe. "He rents out the doctor's office on the ground floor and all the other apartments, except his own. At least, that's what Tormeon says; but my bet is that the whole works is a blind."

The commissioner showed quick interest.

"Could these apartments be hide-outs?" he questioned. "For crooks like Shag Korman? There must be a fake physician in the game, too, because they've carried away all their wounded."

Cardona shook his head.

"I've checked on the whole place," he said glumly. "Everybody has a clean bill of health. I still think they're in with Tormeon, but only to help his alibis. He's smart enough to keep his mobbies some place else."

"You're watched, though, the moment you show up here. We wouldn't have gotten past the street door, if Mr. Cranston hadn't walked up alone. We pulled a smart stunt of our own, arriving in a cab right when he was admitted. But Tormeon will know all about it. You'll see."

Cardona was right. The moment that they knocked at the door of the fourth-floor apartment, it opened and the visitors were greeted by Tormeon in person. The ex-racketeer was tall; his face as dark except for its glistening teeth, which shone like his sleek black hair when he tilted his head back to laugh.

Tormeon's mirth was silky. His hand clasp gave an impression of smoothness. His laugh changed to a purred tone, interspersed by chuckles, as he greeted:

"Good afternoon, commissioner, and you, inspector. I should have warned you, Mr. Cranston" – he clapped a friendly hand upon The Shadow's shoulder – "that these bloodhounds would trail you here. I knew they wanted to see me."

Commissioner Weston showed annoyance.

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"When I phoned here this morning," he declared, brusquely, "they said that you were going out of town."

"So I was," purred Tormeon. "I changed my mind. We all have that privilege, commissioner."

The jab was a neat one. If any man in New York had been changing his mind with the speed of a jumping jack, Weston could claim the honor. Recent crimes had kept the police commissioner busy giving orders and countermanding them.

"Come into the office," suggested Tormeon. "Through this way" – he was turning toward the rear of the apartment – "and take a look at my art collection as we go along."

The collection, which occupied two rooms, consisted of statuary, paintings, ship models, and a host of other curios that Tormeon had put about in hodgepodge fashion. Eyeing the medley, Cardona looked for silver plate, silken hangings and tapestries, the spoils of recent robberies. None were in sight.

Tormeon must have noticed Cardona's appraisal, for when they reached his mahogany-furnished office, he extended a box of cigars with one hand, a batch of papers with the other.

"Bills of sale," announced Tormeon, smoothly, "for all the stuff that you saw coming through. When I see something that I want for my collection" – his tone became emphatic – "I buy it!"

Having thus disposed of Cardona's suspicions, Tormeon concentrated upon Weston. He seemed to recognize the thought that was in the commissioner's mind.

"YOU'RE wondering where the money comes from," remarked Tormeon, suavely. "I'll show you, commissioner" – he tapped a bell as he spoke – "provided that you keep it confidential."

An attractive, red-haired girl answered the bell, bringing a folder from a filing cabinet. She came from a little side office, where the visitors could hear the click of typewriters, telling that other secretaries were busy with their work.

The girl stood by, smiling along with Tormeon, while he drew papers from the file and passed them to the visitors. Both Weston and Cardona were unable to control their amazement.

Here were signed documents that proved Tormeon's ownership of a dozen legitimate businesses that operated under other names. The ex-racketeer controlled a small chain of restaurants, owned two theaters outright, and held a large interest in a subsidiary motion-picture company.

Most intriguing was the fact that he owned two rival night clubs, both within sight of his apartment. Both places were doing good business, due chiefly to the fact that their supposed owners were at odds. Tormeon chuckled over that one.

"Everybody likes a feud," he remarked, as he sat back to puff his thin cigar. "Particularly on Broadway. So I let the Cafe de Paris fight it out with Club 33 and I take the profits from both. This young lady" – he gestured toward the smiling redhead – "can tell you all about it. She's Dixie Mayland, and she's worked in both places."

Only Lamont Cranston seemed unamazed by the details that Philip Tormeon had disclosed. Facing across the desk, he met Dixie's gaze. Smiling slightly, he remarked:

"I remember you, Miss Mayland. I thought that when you left Club 33, you were going on tour to the coast."

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"I was," replied the girl, "but Mr. Tormeon offered me an office job, instead."

"She knew the inside of the business," declared Tormeon, "and she has brains. The way I run things, I can't afford to have any dumbbells in the office."

He replaced the papers in the folder and handed it to the red-haired secretary. Ignoring Weston and Cardona, Tormeon turned to Cranston and asked suavely:

"Well, Mr. Cranston, what's your proposition?"

"None," replied The Shadow, in the calm tone of Cranston. "Any enterprise that I could suggest would be superfluous, considering those in which you are already engaged. My congratulations, Mr. Tormeon, upon your very clever and successful methods!"

AFTER dinner, that evening, Commissioner Weston was still talking about the visit to Tormeon's. Morton Delcott had come to the Cobalt Club and was waiting there, along with Lamont Cranston, for Cardona to arrive with technical reports that concerned the powdered steel.

"Tormeon is smarter than we thought," decided Weston. "Far smarter! Which simply convinces me" – he pounded the table as he spoke – "that he is the man behind this super crime! He denies, of course, that Shag Korman ever worked for him.

"But we have proof to the contrary, and let me add this: if certain other criminals of Shag's type were still at large instead of being in the penitentiary, where they belong, we would have a terrific battle on our hands.

"There are half a dozen who were associated with Tormeon. Indirectly, of course, which makes it impossible for us to supply the needed proof. But Shag's case is enough. We know that he hasn't the brain to think out the crimes that he has perpetrated. The man who has the brain is Tormeon!"

Before the commissioner could resume his tirade, Joe Cardona arrived. There was something triumphant in his air, enough to make him forget his usual poker-faced manner. Under his arm Cardona had a large envelope, which obviously contained the technical reports; but he didn't open it.

Instead, he produced a smaller envelope and shook some grayish powder on the table cloth, exactly as Commissioner Weston had done at his office earlier in the day.

"We've found the key to the thing, commissioner," stated Cardona, unable to control his enthusiasm. "It's right there, in the powder!"

Weston stared at the gray substance, with its minute sparkles, as if expecting the powder to come to life and spell Tormeon's name along the table cloth.

"Those little crystals," added Cardona, picking up some of the glistening particles with his fingertip – "what do you think they are?"

Weston decided that they were fragments of steel that hadn't disintegrated. Delcott thought that they were impurities from the shattered concrete. Cranston alone offered no theory, but behind his masklike face his brain was finding the real answer.

From Cardona's use of the term "crystals," plus the inspector's enthusiastic manner, The Shadow could have expressed the very words that three listeners were about to hear.

Holding his finger so that the dustlike particles glittered brilliantly in the light, Joe Cardona announced:

"They are diamonds!"

CHAPTER VII. THE RAY MACHINE

TO Commissioner Weston, Cardona's statement was one that called for new amazement; not because he believed it, but because he thought his ace inspector had gone crazy. His concern faded, however, when Cardona produced the reports that he had brought along.

The experts agreed that the shiny particles were diamonds, and from that they had drawn several conclusions, which were expressed in scientific terminology, illustrated with diagrams.

"I spent a couple of hours getting this dope straight," said Cardona. "Let me explain it, the way I finally got it. This diagram" – he picked one out – "is a honey! It shows just what happened."

The diagram illustrated dozens of short lines, interlocked. Some were black, others lighter, and they all occupied an oblong block which took up the top half of a sheet of paper.

"This is a cross section of a chunk of steel," explained Cardona. "Those lines represent iron crystals and carbon atoms. I forget which is which, but it doesn't matter. Anyway, they're keyed, the way they now stand.

"If you could unlock them, they'd fall apart – and that's just what happened when Shag and his mob got to work with their machine. Here, take a look at this second diagram" – Cardona turned up the bottom half of the page – "and you'll catch the whole idea."

The second diagram showed tiny black squares, which represented end-on views of iron fragments. The carbon atoms, still white lines, were lying at angles.

"Black's iron," recalled Cardona, "and white's carbon. I remember; that's it. The gray powder is what's left of the iron, and the carbon formed diamond crystals. Metal sand and diamond dust is what it all amounts to."

"But what caused it?" demanded Weston. "Some electrical process?"

"No." Cardona shook his head. "Theoretically, one expert said, enough heat would force the carbon atoms into new alignment, but it would have to be under a pressure heavier than anyone can produce. They've used such processes to make artificial diamonds, but they wouldn't work on steel.

"The only guess is that the crooks are using the concentrated action of some ray, that shakes up the carbon particles like a lot of sand settling in a jar. It's a matter of high frequency, not power. If there's only two ways of doing a thing, and when you know it can't be one, it's got to be the other."

Weston had to agree that Cardona was using good logic. The commissioner wasn't convinced, though, that there were two ways of doing it. He argued that if a heat process was considered to be practically impossible, the same would apply to the action of an unknown ray.

"It isn't an unknown ray, though," returned Cardona, bringing out a yellowed newspaper clipping. "Read this, commissioner. Here's a fellow named Simon Zurm who has been studying the actions of the cosmic ray. He said a couple of years ago that it was capable of producing reactions on certain metals."

"Where is this fellow Zurm?"

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"That's what we haven't found out yet," replied Cardona. "But the expert who had this clipping says we ought to be able to locate him. Zurm used to go up in some of those stratosphere balloons, just so he could study the cosmic ray."

MORTON DELCOTT was leaning forward eagerly, trying to get a word into the conversation. He found his chance when Cardona finished.

"I know where Zurm is!" exclaimed Delcott. "He has a special laboratory in the National Science Institute. I was one of the contributors to the institute when it was founded, ten years ago. Zurm has been mentioned in several of its reports."

"Has anything been said about a ray machine?" inquired Weston.

"Not that I remember," replied Delcott. "The reports simply said that he was designing a new apparatus to use on a stratosphere flight. His work was delayed by a fire in the institute, several months ago. Some of his equipment was destroyed, and his plans were burned."

"We ought to look into that," decided Weston. He turned to Cardona: "Call the institute, inspector."

"It wouldn't be open this late," objected Delcott. "But I think I can reach the director at his home. Suppose I ask him where we can find Zurm."

Delcott was back soon with the news that the director was out to dinner but was expected back within half an hour. During the interval, Weston began to go over the technical reports in detail. The only person who seemed disinterested was Lamont Cranston.

Remarking that he would be in the reading room, he strolled out through the foyer. Stopping at a telephone booth, he dropped his character of Cranston and became The Shadow, in voice, at least, as he talked by telephone to his contact man, Burbank. To Burbank, The Shadow gave specific instructions for certain agents, especially one named Clyde Burke.

Twenty minutes later, Cardona found Cranston in the reading room. In a voice too low to disturb the fussy old gentlemen who were reading the financial pages, Cardona announced:

"Delcott talked to the institute director. He says that Zurm works evenings in his lab. Delcott called there, but Zurm didn't answer. He's probably out eating, too. We're going to try again, and if Zurm doesn't answer, we'll go over. The commissioner thought you'd like to come along."

"What if Zurm doesn't like visitors?"

"He'll have to like them," returned Cardona. "Anyway, we can forget that worry until we get there."

THERE was a significance to Cranston's remark that Cardona did not catch. A visitor had already arrived at the National Science Institute, which stood a few miles north of the Cobalt Club.

The institute building was a squatly structure, which had never been completed beyond a few stories. It had been started in a day when funds were plentiful, but had suddenly run short of contributions.

Lights from barred basement windows showed that someone was in the place, which was why the visitor, Clyde Burke, kept buzzing at the slight bell.

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Clyde's summons was suddenly answered by a peak-faced, stoop-shouldered man who eyed him suspiciously. Clyde introduced himself as a newspaper reporter, which he actually was.

Wise-faced, and wiry of build, Clyde looked like a typical representative of the press, and when he showed his reporter's card, the man admitted him. On a hunch, Clyde asked:

"You're Simon Zurm?"

The peak-faced man nodded.

"You're the chap I want to talk to," said Clyde. "You gave an interview once, regarding the reaction of metals to the cosmic ray. We thought maybe it would make a timely story for the Classic."

"Timely?" questioned Zurm, in a thin, crackly voice. "Why do you say timely?"

"Because of the robberies."

"Robberies? What robberies?"

"Don't you read the newspapers?"

Zurm's reply to Clyde's question was a headshake. The inventor was leading the way to a flight of stairs that descended to the basement. As he shambled along, he kept muttering:

"Robberies – robberies –"

Halfway down the stairs Zurm stiffened, clutched Clyde's arm. In a high-pitched tone, the inventor exclaimed:

"That was it! A robbery – here!"

"When?" asked Clyde.

"At the time of the fire, some months ago," responded Zurm. "The smoke drove me out. When I returned to my laboratory, I found my equipment damaged; there were burned papers that I thought were my plans. But now I know the truth. My plans were stolen! Those burned papers were blanks!"

They were at the door of the laboratory; as soon as they had entered, Zurm bolted it behind him. There was a rear door, also bolted, and Clyde observed that the windows were barred. The room, itself, was rather bare. Although Zurm peered about suspiciously, he had little reason to do so, because there were no hiding places under shelves or workbenches.

Zurm led the way into an inner room, peering about as he entered. This room was smaller, and had no furniture of any consequence, except for an apparatus in the very center. It stood on an open-slatted crate that served as a table, and one look at the machine convinced Clyde that it was the type of device used in recent crime.

It answered the description of the machine which The Shadow had seen crooks use twice: once, at the Midtown National Bank; again, when the elevated station had collapsed. It was larger than the apparatus that had been employed for crime, judging from descriptions that Clyde had from The Shadow.

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OPENING the paneled sides of the machine, Zurm revealed an array of tubes set at a variety of angles. The tubes contained glowing wires, which lessened their flickers at steady intervals.

Clyde saw a storage battery set at the bottom of the apparatus, and noted also that the machine contained movable sheets of copper-colored metal, which Zurm tilted at different angles. Above, was a large pipe that looked like a projector.

"The tubes receive current from the battery," explained Zurm. "The flickers are the result of a discharge caused by the cosmic ray. By means of these deflectors" – he shifted the copper sheets – "the rays are concentrated, and therefore intensified."

He swung the cylindrical pipe upon its swivel, turning it toward a sheet of steel in the corner of the room.

"I call the machine an intensifier," stated Zurm. "An improved intensifier, far more effective than any I could have constructed from my original plans. By lowering the center of the projector" – he was turning a small knob – "I bring it into proper focus. Then –"

Zurm broke off. He tilted his head, his eyes showing alarm. He gestured toward the outer laboratory and asked in a hoarse whisper:

"Did – did you hear something – out there?"

Clyde shook his head. Zurm looked toward the doorway, then back at his precious machine. His eyes were turning suspiciously toward Clyde. To allay the inventor's qualms, Clyde made an obvious suggestion.

"Suppose I take a look," he told Zurm. "Meanwhile, you can get the machine focused."

Zurm gave a pleased nod. Clyde went out through the connecting doorway. He tried one bolted door, then the other, making plenty of noise in the process, so that Zurm would know exactly what he was doing. Turning about, Clyde called:

"It's all right –"

Further speech was interrupted by a gurgly screech from Zurm, somewhere in the inner room. There was no mistaking the sound; it came from a throat that was under the grip of a choking hand. Clyde made three quick steps toward the connecting doorway, pulling a gun from his hip pocket as he ran.

Before he could reach the door, or get the automatic fully drawn, every light in the place went out. Clyde grabbed for the side of the door frame, to get his location. He heard a choking sob from the darkness.

"Zurm!"

In yelling to the inventor, Clyde caught himself too late. His shout didn't help Zurm; instead, it gave Clyde's own location. To rectify the mistake, Clyde tried to make a quick shift in the darkness and took the wrong direction – through the connecting doorway.

A flinging form hit the reporter in the darkness. Hands took his throat in a driving grip. Light of weight, Clyde was hurled back into the outer room, swept so suddenly from his feet that he couldn't get the right direction with his gun. He heard a fierce snarl voiced in his ear, then he was sprawling, whirling toward the wall.

Clyde's finger tugged the gun trigger. The muzzle spouted a useless bullet into the surface of a workbench. Almost with the shot, Clyde's head thwacked the wall of the room. The whole place crackled with an imaginary light, more vivid than the gun flame.

After that, all was blackness for The Shadow's agent. Stunned by his collision with the wall, Clyde Burke hadn't a chance of helping Simon Zurm.

CHAPTER VIII. STRIFE IN THE DARK

THINGS were happening rapidly in the basement laboratory, events that Clyde Burke was unable to witness. A flashlight cut the gloom, concentrated on the rear door. A hand came into the light and pulled the bolt.

There was a whiff of air as the door opened, a hissed sound, then the quick approach of feet through an underground passage. Whispers were exchanged, while a flashlight swung toward the inner laboratory. A voice said:

"In there!"

The invaders numbered at least a half dozen, and they were moving rapidly. Using flashlights, they were crating Zurm's new machine, ready to take it with them. Meanwhile, another path of light was creeping along the wall of the larger room. It stopped on Clyde Burke.

A rough voice questioned: "What're you going to do with this guy, Shag?"

Into the light poked the hard-set face of Shag Korman. The mob leader's ratty eyes made a merciless study of the stunned reporter. Taking Clyde's chin, Shag lifted it, let the unconscious head thud back to the floor.

"He's not bluffing," decided Shag. "But he may know too much. If I was sure he didn't know too much, I'd leave him lay like he is."

"Want us to lug him along?"

"No. We've got enough to handle. Have they got that crate ready to go out?"

"Yeah."

"What about Zurm?"

"He's gone out already."

Shag heard the crate coming through the connecting doorway. With Zurm and the machine both on their way, he came to a decision regarding Clyde. Shag told the other crook to hold the light steady. Aiming his revolver straight for Clyde's heart, Shag sneered:

"Here's one less mug to bother us –"

The sudden smash of a window interrupted Shag's announcement, and forestalled the death bullet. Leaping back from the light, Shag saw a face at the broken window; below it, a hand with a gun. Shag fired; so did the man at the window.

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Neither shot scored a hit, but the marksman from the window was closer. He had Shag diving for the rear door, yelling for men to join him. The thug with the flashlight pulled a gun, but made the mistake of aiming his flashlight toward the window before he fired.

There were two sharpshooters there by that time, and they fired together. The sprawling thug became the first casualty in the conflict. From then on, shots were rapid, but wary. Shag and two gunners who had joined him were peppering the window from deep beyond their doorway. The men outside, flattened low, were beneath the line of fire as they supplied a return barrage.

They were other agents of The Shadow, who had come along with Clyde. Out front, they had heard the reporter's shot and it had brought them to the rescue.

Seeing Clyde's plight, their present purpose was to protect their fellow agent, by keeping Shag and his pals busy. At the same time, they were hoaxing Shag into further trouble that he didn't expect.

JUST as shots began to wane, there was a splintering crash of the laboratory's outer door. In from the stairway that Clyde had descended with Zurm came another pair of agents. One was Harry Vincent, long in The Shadow's service; the other Moe Shrevnitz, the cabby.

Shag's two comrades sprang out to meet them, thinking to take them by surprise. They met the glare of Harry's flashlight, which came with a timely swing. The thugs had either forgotten the two men at the window, or thought these were the same. They were reminded of their error when guns spurted final shots.

One gunner was Cliff Marsland, his companion a sharp-eyed agent named Hawkeye. Both had served The Shadow through many battles in the underworld, and they were cool with their triggers when it counted. One of Shag's thugs took a long pitch forward; the other reeled back and staggered after his leader.

Shag didn't wait. Forgetting Clyde as an intended victim, he sped out through the passage, followed by his staggering pal. Reaching the rear door of the laboratory, Harry and Moe fired a few shots to spur the flight, while waiting for Cliff and Hawkeye to come through the building and join them.

That delay was lucky for Shag Korman. When he reached the rear street, to which the passage led, he found his men ready to decamp. They had the improved ray machine aboard a light truck, under guard. The rest of the crew were in their cars.

"Where's Zurm?" demanded Shag, as he climbed into a car. "In the truck, along with the machine?"

Thugs gave an affirmative reply.

"All right," snapped Shag. "Let's go!... Wait!" He pointed back to the passage exit, where a reeling man had just come into sight. "There's Luke! Grab him and haul him along, before those hyenas catch up with him."

The truck was away and the cars were getting started, when The Shadow's agents reached the street. Lacking a car, they were unable to follow the mobsters, but they dispatched a few bullets after them. Paint was nicked from the rear of Shag's shiny sedan as it wheeled the corner, but the mob leader didn't mind.

"Just so they didn't get the gas tank," he growled, "or a tire. We should worry!"

Brakes shrieked from the corner ahead. There were yells from the mobbies in the car that had left ahead of Shag's. A big limousine took to one curb, the crook-manned car to the other. Neither vehicle was overturned, but as the limousine teetered on the curb, Shag recognized the official insignia on the door. From the back

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seat, Shag jogged his own driver.

"It's the commissioner's car! Ram it! We can't let that louse spoil our getaway! Give him the works! We'll hop to the other jallopy. Make it swift!"

THINGS were already happening swiftly; things that Shag didn't see. The door on the lower side of the limousine had jolted open, its handle yanked by the passenger who sat at that end of the rear seat.

Lamont Cranston was that passenger. There was a clear space in front of him, for the folding seat that Joe Cardona occupied was on the high side of the angled car, in front of Morton Delcott. Planted in the middle, Commissioner Weston did a lurch toward Cranston's side, for there was no longer anyone there.

Though he provided the impetus himself, The Shadow went out through the open door exactly as if he had been flung from the car by the near collision.

Another man was busy. Swinging to his window, Joe Cardona saw Shag's car roaring straight for the tottering limousine. Defiant of the wild shots that thugs began to loose, Joe yanked his own gun from his pocket.

He was too late. Never could he have halted that lunging vehicle that threatened to ram the limousine amidships and crush its passengers in the overturn.

The shots that did stop the motorized battering—ram came from the least expected spot. They were already ripping their message from underneath the limousine!

That was where Cranston had rolled, yanking a hidden gun with the quick action that had made him famous as The Shadow. From their location, those shots sounded like backfires of the limousine's motor, tearing at the big car's muffler. But the damage that they wreaked was concentrated upon Shag's car.

His elbow wedged beside the curb, The Shadow blasted a steady stream of bullets into a wide, approaching target that was looming larger every instant. Zimming a few inches above the street level, the leaden slugs tore into a front tire, to be answered by an explosion from the target itself.

Literally shredded by the well-aimed hail, the tire flattened like a pair of spreading wings. There was a clank as the rim jounced the paving. Veered by its flatness, the flapping tire yanked the steering wheel from the driver's hand. Before Shag could climb over the front seat and add his strength to the wheel, the rocketing car was off its course, hurtling toward a curb.

That crash was a real one. It missed Weston's limousine entirely. Ramming a house wall, Shag's sedan seemed to fling its doors open of its own accord. Shag and his mobbies were stumbling along the sidewalk, yelling to their pals to help them.

Swinging toward the lower door, Joe Cardona opened fire. Guns began to answer, but their shots seemed puny. Lone-handed, the police inspector was apparently crippling crooks with every bullet. Amazed at his own skill, Joe didn't realize that a fresh gun was talking along with his, from underneath the commissioner's car.

Knifing upward, The Shadow's shots were doing the heavy work. Mobsters didn't relish the sight of staggering pals who couldn't even begin to aim. Rolling aboard the car that had jumped the curb to avoid collision with the commissioner's limousine, they made their flight, abandoning Shag's emptied sedan.

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Loaded with a double quota of passengers, some of whom had lost interest in battle, the fleeing car swung a corner before Weston's chauffeur could stop his chattering teeth long enough to think of giving pursuit.

By then, a chase was useless. Concerned over Cranston's safety, the police commissioner shoved Cardona aside and sprang from the car to look for his friend. He found Cranston rising from the gutter, a bit bewildered. When Weston shook his shoulders, The Shadow came from his pretended daze, smiled in Cranston's fashion and began to brush his clothes.

INSTRUCTING Cardona to order a general man hunt, Weston started on foot for the institute building, beckoning Cranston and Delcott along with him. They found a shattered door, an open stairway down to Zurm's laboratory. There, past another broken barrier, they found Clyde Burke, half groggy on the floor.

The reporter was still trying to tell his story when Cardona arrived. Becoming coherent, Clyde related how he had called to see Zurm on the same lead that the law had followed.

It wasn't surprising that persons at the Classic office should have come across the facts of Zurm's interest in the actions of the cosmic ray, and connected them with recent crimes. Such research was part of the newspaper business.

Clyde's description of the machine that Zurm called an intensifier fitted with everything that the police suspected, as did Zurm's statements – repeated by Clyde – that Zurm believed the robbery of a few months ago to be a well-designed fake, wherein his plans had been stolen.

"That's how they acquired their machine!" exclaimed Weston. "They built it from Zurm's plans! They knew that he was working on an improved device, so they came here tonight to steal it. They abducted Zurm so he couldn't give us needed evidence that might help us place guilt where it belonged."

"Perhaps Zurm knew of weaknesses in the device," added Delcott. "He might have been able to counteract this fearful ray that is being used in crime. Poor Zurm! We must spare no effort in his rescue, commissioner. I, personally, shall insist that the institute offer a large reward for his safe return."

Leaving the matter of Zurm's present plight to Weston and Delcott, Cardona looked about the laboratory. He saw the broken windows, the shattered door from the front stairs. He noted that the window catches were still shut, the door bolted from the inside.

The rear door, however, was unbolted. That brought a wise nod from Cardona. He indicated the rear door, as he turned to Clyde.

"Was that how they sneaked in on you, Burke? While they were hammering at the front door and the windows? Or did they smash their way in first, and carry Zurm and the machine out by the back?"

"We were in there, Zurm and myself" – Clyde was pointing toward the inner laboratory – "when he thought he heard something, and I came out here to look."

"And what about the doors and windows?"

"They were bolted –"

Clyde hesitated. He realized that his fellow agents had smashed in through the front, to rescue him. He didn't want to say anything that would falsely implicate them. But he was sure that the rear door had been bolted, like the front.

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His eyes met those of Cranston. Under that penetrating gaze, Clyde felt that his very thoughts were understood; moreover, he was inspired with an answer to his own dilemma.

"I'm not sure." Clyde shook his head. "All that I remember is that the lights went out and somebody socked me."

Cardona was satisfied. Either of his theories would do. The Shadow, too, was satisfied. He held a theory entirely his own. From details surrounding the disappearance of Simon Zurm, plus his own earlier observations, The Shadow had formed definite conclusions regarding the origin of supercrime.

CHAPTER IX. CRIME'S NEW DEMAND

IN a blue-lighted room that served him as a hidden sanctum, in an old building in the heart of the city, The Shadow was studying stacks of evidence that related to recent crimes. Not only did he have the essential data gotten by the police, which he had obtained, as Cranston, from Commissioner Weston; he was also provided with extensive information gathered by his own agents.

There had been a real chase, that night when Shag Korman had tried to mash the commissioner's car without knowing who was in it, other than Weston. Shag had spied Cardona at the window, but not until the ramming drive had been on its way. Sight of Cardona had, of course, merely spurred Shag's desire to damage permanently the car's occupants along with the limousine itself.

Had Shag known that a certain passenger was in the commissioner's car, he wouldn't have made the attempt.

As it turned out, both passengers, Morton Delcott and Lamont Cranston, were still alive because one of them happened to be The Shadow. But even that fact wasn't known, thanks to The Shadow's mode of shooting from an unexpected spot. In the flight that followed, Shag had been too busy making a getaway to worry how The Shadow had mixed into matters.

The truck, with Simon Zurm and his precious machine, had gained a good head start. But Shag and his crippled crew were trailed in their overloaded car, not only by police but by The Shadow's agents, who had gotten back to Moe's cab.

Finally blocked, Shag and a few others had deserted their car on a side street and had fled on foot. Wounded crooks, shooting from the abandoned car, had succumbed to police gunfire, while The Shadow's agents were starting after Shag himself.

The capture of Shag had been unwittingly prevented by police, who had mistaken The Shadow's men for part of the mob.

Ducking first to cover, then back to Moe's cab, Harry, Cliff and Hawkeye had managed to get away unscathed, but so had Shag and the last few of his tribe.

Coupled to a full and significant report furnished by Clyde Burke, The Shadow was considering facts supplied by the other agents. It was obvious that Shag and his handful of thugs had found cover somewhere in a restricted area east of Sixth Avenue. But the police, scouring dozens of buildings in a space several blocks square, had found no trace of the vanished crooks.

They had searched about three dozen trucks that chanced to be in that area – some going through, others parked on streets or in parking lots, but none contained any thugs or a prisoner answering the description of Simon Zurm. Nor was there any cargo resembling the kidnapped inventor's strange ray machine.

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In his sanctum, The Shadow studied a large scale map showing the portion of Manhattan where the crooks had vanished. When the map failed to give a tangible clue, he turned to the subject of criminals themselves.

One fact was certified both by the police and The Shadow's agents, who had been conducting separate investigations: There had been no disappearance of known crooks other than those belonging to Shag Korman. Therefore, the mysterious mob could not have drafted new recruits to fill its thinned ranks.

Crime was stymied for the present. With only a skeleton crew, Shag could not risk the type of jobs that he had done before.

A tiny light, glowing like a whitened speck upon the sanctum wall, announced a call from Burbank. Answering it, The Shadow received a brief report through earphones. He extinguished the bluish light; in pitch darkness, a whispered laugh announced his departure from the sanctum.

AMONG The Shadow's reports was mention of a scheduled meeting between Inspector Joe Cardona and the ex-racketeer, Philip Tormeon. That meeting had begun, in Tormeon's fourth-floor office, at the moment when The Shadow left his sanctum.

Chewing the end of one of Tormeon's fifty-cent cigars, Cardona was watching the reformed racketeer in pokerfaced fashion. The policy didn't appear to bother Tormeon. With his usual pun Tormeon was discussing crime in a very impersonal fashion.

"I'm glad you came up here, Joe," said Tormeon. "It's a real compliment to know that you want me to help the law in an advisory capacity. I'm finding it worthwhile, living a straight life."

Cardona grunted between cigar puffs. He had his own opinion of what Tormeon regarded as "straight." On the desk, Cardona saw a corkscrew. Joe wanted to make the wisecrack to the effect that Tormeon probably used the corkscrew as a ruler when drawing his idea of a straight line. But Cardona finally decided that it would be better to let Tormeon keep on talking.

"It's too bad," remarked Tormeon, casually, "that you didn't have a tip-off to what happened the other night. If you'd known that Shag was out to snatch Zurm, you could have stopped it."

"Yeah?" queried Cardona, bluntly. "What do you mean, a tip-off?"

"Like the ones you had before," returned Tormeon. "Everybody knows you were on the job three times: at a jewelry store, the bank, and the warehouse."

Cardona shook his head.

"It was The Shadow got wise to those jobs," he said, in a confidential tone. "He started things, and we moved in to help him. He was on deck when they grabbed Zurm, too. Ahead of us, but not soon enough to stop the snatch."

Mention of The Shadow brought a worried look from Tormeon. Cardona complimented himself upon a clever speech. In emphasizing The Shadow, Cardona had definitely protected his own informant, Squeak Wembry. The one job that Squeak hadn't heard about in advance was the flurried abduction of Simon Zurm. Otherwise, Cardona would have had a tip-off.

"Well, so long, Tormeon," said Joe, helping himself to a fresh cigar by way of a friendly gesture. "One thing we know: Shag and his outfit aren't getting any new pals. We just had a roundup, and there isn't a thug in

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town who would risk joining up with Shag. The only guys who would take a chance on it are all in the Big House."

Cardona was looking around the room as he spoke, but he sidelonged a look at Tormeon. Joe's reference to the penitentiary was significant, because Shag's pals who were confined there were reputedly friends of Tormeon, also.

Tormeon simply let the remark ride.

"What are you looking around for, Joe?" he asked, as he rose to conduct the visitor to the door. "If you're wondering where the redhead is, she's gone to lunch. She's a swell kid, Dixie is, and she thinks I'm a great guy!"

That parting reference was Tormeon's indication that one person who would not reveal the inside of his business affairs was Dixie Mayland. Tormeon was actually a "great guy" in the girl's estimation, as she was demonstrating at that moment, though Tormeon did not know it.

AT the little cafe where she usually went to lunch, Dixie Mayland had chanced to meet Lamont Cranston.

They were chatting together in a little booth, and Dixie herself had worked the conversation to the subject of Philip Tormeon. Watching Cranston closely, Dixie affirmed:

"Phil Tormeon is on the level. Everything he does is legit, and if he wants to keep people guessing about what business he is in, that's his privilege. Anyway, everything he told the commissioner was straight stuff, and I'll tell you something else, Mr. Cranston. Tormeon doesn't deal with crooks, or doesn't even want to!"

The Shadow's reply was the slightest of Cranston's nods. Then, coolly, he replied:

"But there are crooks who want to deal with Tormeon."

For a moment, Dixie's eyes blazed. Suddenly, the subtlety of the remark struck her. She was particularly impressed by Cranston's calmness. Somewhat startled Dixie blurted:

"You mean they're trying to frame him?"

"Oh, very probably," replied The Shadow. "But it would not do to mention that to Tormeon."

"Why not?"

"He is the sort who would go after them, which is exactly what they want. Let us assume, for instance, that Tormeon managed to reach Shag Korman – something which the police have been unable to do. What reaction would that produce from my friend the police commissioner, if he heard of it?"

Dixie considered the question, then replied: "The commissioner would think that Tormeon was in it."

"Exactly!" Cranston's tone was confidential. "Therefore, you just watch for any indication that crooks are trying to bait Tormeon. Since he is on the level, as you term it, he should certainly be protected."

The logic impressed the girl, but it wasn't until after Cranston had politely departed that she realized the full significance of the suggestion. Since she couldn't talk to either Tormeon or Weston, if she learned anything, there was only one person qualified to receive her confidence.

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That person was Lamont Cranston.

Dixie thought that she had guessed that for herself; hence the idea struck her as a good one, particularly as she and Cranston had agreed to have lunch together the next day. That brought another question to mind.

What if Tormeon wasn't on the level?

It was possible that the ex-racketeer was still crooked. Dixie had to admit that much. Still inspired, more than she supposed, by Cranston's calm, fair-minded manner, the girl came to the conclusion that if Tormeon were really crooked, all his good behavior would be a mere pretense.

He wouldn't be a "swell guy" after all; therefore, he wouldn't deserve the consideration that she had given him. On her way back to the office, Dixie Mayland decided that it would be her part to put Tormeon's honesty to the test, and abide by the result.

MEANWHILE, the impassive Mr. Cranston had reached the Cobalt Club, where he received an urgent message from the police commissioner's office.

Going there, The Shadow found Weston in conference with former victims of recent crimes; among them, Morton Delcott. A new member had been added to the fold – a bulky, worried-faced man whom Weston introduced as Titus Longarth, president of the United Bridge Construction Corporation.

Longarth had received a letter from the General Protective Association, bearing the return address of the mythical Excalibur Building. It stated that unless all the bridge builders in the country pooled together for protection, every steel bridge now under construction would be destroyed.

Only the G.P.A could provide the needed protection, and the price asked for such service was one million dollars.

"They know our weakness," groaned Longarth. "My company alone has contracts involving millions of dollars in construction, and there are half a dozen others in the same situation."

The Shadow reached the last paragraph of the letter. It was more startling than any that preceded it. The paragraph stated that the G.P.A had done its utmost to postpone impending disaster, but that the criminals were determined to proceed. Unless the G.P.A received a large advance payment on the million it would be unable to operate against the crooks.

Important information had been obtained, however, and was being supplied to the law without charge. To test the power of their larger ray machine, criminals intended first to demolish the old Stuyvesant Bridge in Westchester County, which was already slated for removal.

If the law could prevent that operation, the letter smugly stated, the services of the General Protective Association would not be needed. The unknown directors of the G.P.A hoped sincerely that the law would not fail, and that all criminals would be apprehended. But if the law should fail, the G.P.A would gladly guard the future – for one million dollars.

"You have nothing to lose, commissioner," remarked The Shadow, in a calm tone that made others feel more confident, "if you try to capture the criminals when they demolish the old bridge. Through this protective association that serves them as a front, they have actually told you when they intend to do the job."

"At six o'clock tomorrow afternoon," nodded Weston. "You are right, Cranston; we can stop them!" He pounded the desk. "We will stop them!"

Then, in a manner as confident as if his task had already been accomplished, Weston swiveled to the telephone.

"Call long distance," he told the switchboard operation. "Have them connect me with the capitol at Albany. I want to talk to the Governor of New York!"

CHAPTER X. THE DEMONSTRATION

NEXT noon, a specially made chart lay on Police Commissioner Weston's desk. It showed the location of the old Stuyvesant Bridge and all highways leading to it. Over the same gorge that the old bridge crossed was a newer, higher span of concrete, which had been opened for traffic a few weeks before.

"The old bridge has been closed to traffic," stated Weston, to the group that surrounded him. "The new one is made of concrete, and therefore cannot be harmed. We have learned enough from Clyde Burke's testimony, and old notebooks belonging to Zurm, to know that the intensified ray harms only steel."

With that Weston began to mark out special details on the map. He had arranged everything with the governor, and the State police were to handle the situation. Weston, however, had been given special duties, and he was talking with the manner of a field marshal, as he showed how the forces would be placed.

The State police would not be too greatly in evidence. There would be just enough of them to keep away the curious, and handle whatever witnesses the law intended to allow. Reserves, however, were to be posted at strategic spots near the Stuyvesant Bridge.

"Somehow, the news has leaked out," declared Weston, planting his hand on a stack of morning newspapers that carried big black headlines. "Probably the crooks themselves arranged for it to get into print. They know nothing, however, regarding the fake organization that calls itself the General Protective Association.

"The public has learned only that criminals intend to demolish an old bridge that is no longer needed, and that we are presumably intending to let them go ahead with it. Which is exactly what we shall do until afterward. Then the criminals will find themselves in a trap!"

The telephone bell was ringing merrily. The commissioner answered it, spoke for a few moments in a disgruntled tone, then announced:

"All right, let them have a permit. We can't refuse any reasonable requests."

Hanging up, he turned to his visitors.

"That was a committee of bridge workers," said the commissioner. "They want to be there to see it happen. So I'm letting them have a permit, along with newspaper reporters, cameramen, and a lot of others.

"Inspector Cardona has a hunch that Shag Korman is counting on that. Your hunches have been good lately, inspector" – Weston turned with an approving smile – "and I hope this one proves right. You believe that Shag is counting on safety through numbers. Very well. Let him. We shall have him where we want him!"

"O.K., commissioner," grunted Cardona. "I've got another hunch, too."

"What is it?"

"That I ought to go along with you," expressed Joe, "instead of being detailed to sit around with Philip Tormeon all afternoon. What good will it do to have me up at his place holding his hand? Tormeon is too smart to give himself away."

"Something may slip," returned Weston. "Shag might call Tormeon, in the emergency. My order still stands, inspector."

TURNING to the others present, Weston stated that they were to join him at three o'clock, to ride in his car. There were to be three guests, all of whom were at present in the office.

The first, of course, was Titus Longarth, the bridge builder who had received crime's latest threat. The second was Morton Delcott, whose properties, though guarded by police, were marked for targets by Shag's henchmen. The third was Lamont Cranston.

The Shadow was studying the desk map, while Weston passed each man a special identification card to carry on the expedition. As Cranston glanced at his card, Weston saw him give an approving nod.

"Thank you, commissioner," said The Shadow, in a quiet tone. "I have a luncheon engagement and may not be able to reach the club before three. With this card, I can follow you in my own car."

Though Weston would have preferred to have Cranston with him, he finally decided to let the matter stand, as it seemed highly likely that Cranston would arrive in time. But when The Shadow strolled from the commissioner's office, he had no intention whatever of joining Weston's party.

His luncheon engagement was at one o'clock. At that hour, The Shadow met Dixie Mayland and introduced her to a young man whose handsomeness intrigued her. He, in turn, showed a definite admiration for the red-haired girl which made them friends immediately. The young man was Harry Vincent.

Classing his agent as a private investigator, The Shadow announced, in Cranston's fashion:

"Mr. Vincent handles all matters confidentially. Since he is not a personal friend of the police commissioner, it would be preferable for you to discuss matters with him, rather than with me. He understands the situation and you may rely upon his advice. Good afternoon, Miss Mayland."

It didn't take Dixie longer than ten minutes to become fully convinced that Harry Vincent was a "square-shooter," as she herself expressed it. A lapse of twenty-four hours had more and more convinced the girl that Lamont Cranston was acting in the interest of everyone concerned.

Meeting him again, she had fully trusted him; and to find that Cranston had friends like Harry Vincent was proof to Dixie that her opinion was justified.

She and Harry held a long and earnest conference, which ended only when Dixie realized that she had overstayed her lunch hour. She called Tormeon to tell him she would be late; and from that call, she gained news that she thought would interest Harry.

"Who do you think is up there?" questioned Dixie, breathlessly. "That gumshoe Joe Cardona! Tormeon says it looks like he's going to stick there all afternoon."

"No wonder," smiled Harry. "Cardona thinks that Tormeon is in back of that bridge proposition."

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For a moment, Dixie showed a flicker of expression that Harry had waited to see. Without knowing it, she registered doubt in Tormeon. Then, tightening her lips, the girl smiled.

"We'll see what happens," she promised. "Whatever I find out, you'll know it. I'll call you later."

WHILE all Manhattan waited during that balmy, lingering afternoon, events were shaping themselves beside the old Stuyvesant Bridge, miles north of the city.

Commissioner Weston had posted his car upon a roadway leading from a hill brow down to the level of the old bridge, which spanned the gorge at an altitude of about one hundred feet. Beyond was the higher concrete arch, lined with spectators, most of whom wore light topcoats.

Beneath those coats, as Weston had told Delcott and Longarth, were State-police uniforms. They were reserves, sufficiently disguised, and they had cars waiting at each end of the concrete span.

There were other cars about; some were driven by State police; others, with tops lowered, stood parked at good lookout spots. In them were radio announcers, their microphones connected by long wires to telephone lines. The public was due to get a first-hand description of whatever happened at the old bridge.

There were press cars, too, but their occupants were absent. Some of the reporters were on the higher bridge, others in the gorge. Photographers were scattered everywhere, but most important were the newsreel cars, equipped with their devices for recording sound effects.

They had wheeled to most strategic spots, where they could take advantage of the sunlight as long as it lasted. Sunset wasn't due above the gorge top until past six, by which time, if crooks went through with it, the bridge scene would be over.

One camera car had swung down to the gorge road to take advantage of the upward view. Newspaper photographers were also down there, along with picked reporters. Police, stationed on connecting roadways, were not permitting less privileged spectators into the gorge, even with passes.

There was a battered car on the road below the bridge. How it had arrived there, the State police didn't know, for it had been there when they came. Though they had searched that car and found it empty, they were keeping a close watch on it.

On the roads above, certain cars were also under surveillance. There was one, however, that produced no suspicion. It was a high-powered roadster of expensive make, obviously owned by someone of importance. Though it was parked on a knoll that commanded a complete view of the whole scene below, the elaborate roadster was too far from the steel bridge to possibly figure in anything that might happen there.

At the wheel of that roadster sat Lamont Cranston, otherwise The Shadow. With him, he had a pair of small but powerful field glasses. Through the lenses he could make out Weston's face; he watched the commissioner's moving lips and read the words that Weston was saying to Delcott and Longarth.

"Watch everywhere," advised Weston. "Zurm's ray may be invisible, but the criminals who are using it cannot hide themselves. I can safely predict that they will be spotted the moment that their work is under way."

IT was six o'clock. Announcers were becoming hysterical through their mikes. Photographers were snapping last shots of the old steel bridge, just before the zero hour. In the camera cars, the motion-picture men had forgotten other phases of the scene and were also concentrating their lenses on the bridge. Their hands were

waiting at the cranks.

Yet there was no token of crime's action; no sign of the evil workers who were to demonstrate their skill at destruction. With passing minutes, the silence seemed to carry the prediction that the whole occasion would prove a mighty hoax.

Then, from a hundred feet above the gorge came a sharp, loud crackle. Its echoes ripped along the gully and were repeated from the depths of the gloomy gorge. Again came the sound, sharper, terrific in its outburst.

Those sharp notes were scarcely traceable, until a gigantic moan ground through the valley. It was like the groan of a mammoth beast in dying agony. That hideous grating was uttered by the ancient bridge itself!

Eyes saw what followed, though they had to blink before they believed it. The great steel bridge was swaying, its whole vast weight threatening an immediate collapse. The crackles, coming like a rifle volley, were the bursting of steel supports.

The groans, increased to a titanic volume, formed a continuous obligation as great girders ground together, fighting like living things intent upon overthrowing one another.

Without a change in the existing scene, the massive Stuyvesant Bridge was going to its promised ruin, gripped, seemingly, by a power that made human strength pitiful.

A power that seemed beyond the vaunted ability of the intensified cosmic ray with which picked crooks had managed all their earlier crimes!

CHAPTER XI. DARK TAKES THE SHADOW

AMONG the observers watching the destruction of the old Stuyvesant Bridge, one alone was lacking in amazement. That witness was The Shadow. Like the others, he had first been attracted by the crackles and groans that came from the higher portion of the failing bridge; but his attention was rapidly drawn elsewhere

Those snapping struts and yielding girders represented the effect produced by another cause. The reason for the bridge's impending collapse lay elsewhere. Training his powerful glasses toward the gorge, The Shadow spied the actual answer.

The great steel arch was supported upon two huge bases of stone. At one base only, on the near side of the gorge, great posts of steel were melting. The fact was scarcely discernible, even through the glasses, for the gully was gloomy and the sinking of unmelted steel filled the space left by the disappearing metal. Nevertheless, the process betrayed itself by another feature.

Unable to stand the grind of sinking steel that replaced the withered portion, the stone support was cracking. Bits of masonry were bounding into the gorge, unnoticed because their thuds were trivial compared to the shrieks and rumbles from the metal.

Though other spectators occasionally glanced toward the gorge, they saw nothing that afforded explanation of the crumbling base. Again, it was The Shadow who found a hidden answer.

Among the half dozen cars that were taking newsreel photographs, only one was stationed deep in the gorge. An odd spot for it to be, for although there was plenty of light higher up, the gorge itself was hazy.

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Apparently, the newsreel photographer had come to his senses, for the camera car was swinging away from its position near the sinking end of the arch. It wasn't just a case of getting out from the danger zone; the camera car was heading for a small stone bridge that crossed the creek in the gorge depths.

A State trooper was challenging the car. The camera man gesticulated, shouted something and pointed upward. The officer waved him through. Obviously, the photographer had argued that the light was getting bad; but he wanted to get to the top of the gorge and take further shots from there.

That merely made half sense.

Once posted in the gorge, the camera car should have remained there, for the crash of the steel bridge was imminent. Down in the gorge, the photographer had at least a chance of getting shots that others would not have. He was giving up that opportunity at the moment when it was best.

More than that, because of the long road circling up to the trees, the camera car couldn't possibly reach a higher outlook before the bridge went. The camera car was acting either very crazily, or very cleverly. The Shadow knew instantly that the latter case was true.

The camera car was a camouflaged truck that carried Zurm's improved ray machine!

Thanks to their bluff, Shag and a few other crooks had placed themselves right at the bottom of the bridge. While one man had been cranking a dummy camera, the others, hidden inside, had been directing the concentrated ray from their concealed machine.

Having reduced steel supports to powder, they were letting the doomed bridge complete its own destruction, while they made a bold getaway!

Thanks to the tiny bridge across the creek, the mobsters were bound for some highway on the far side of the gorge. There was only one chance of overtaking them. The Shadow took it.

WHILE hundreds of awed eyes watched the steel bridge buckle, saw it swing with a pendulum sway that increased with every alternating motion, they were treated to a sight that made the fate of the bridge seem trifling.

Down from an old approaching road swooped a high-speed car, a shiny, glistening roadster that looked like a gleaming arrow against the brilliance of the lowering sun. Piloted by a daredevil driver that car was streaking straight for the sagging bridge, where a gap of a dozen feet had opened at the nearer end.

The Shadow, as Cranston, cleared that space as if it hadn't existed. He roared his car across the buckling bridge, the purr of the motor completely drowned by the cannonade of smashing steel. The high-powered car reeled drunkenly, zigzagging from one rail to the other.

Not only did the sway produce that course. The Shadow was dodging openings where the surface of the bridge's roadway had dropped through with the girders that supported it. Halfway across, the car was flinging chunky steel strips high and wide, as if they had been loose boards.

It was across the hump. Awed spectators began a grateful sigh. The sound ended in a human moan, audible for one brief moment before the thing that everyone feared came into stark reality.

With a few hundred feet still separating the car from the safety toward which it sped, the Stuyvesant Bridge collapsed. As the vast mass of steel began its monstrous plunge, it seemed that only death awaited the driver

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of the roadster.

But The Shadow still had a chance for life.

He knew what had happened. Ahead of him, he saw the bridge begin to form a hill. One end of the arch had gone, but it was the end that he had already crossed. Seconds, perhaps, remained before the ruined end of the bridge would pull the other with it. The Shadow did not calculate those seconds.

His foot pressing the accelerator to the floor board, he counted upon the powerful car completing its surge up the increasing grade before the angle became impossible.

The roadster made it. Just as the bridge slashed sharply downward to a pitch of forty-five degrees, the car shot over the brow of the steel hill onto solid ground. Never halting the speed, The Shadow was taking a curve along the gorge edge, when he managed a quick glimpse through the trees.

Writhing like a tortured giant, the Stuyvesant Bridge was settling into the gorge, its broken girders clanging into a mass of junk that was swallowed by the gloom below. Fronting the great concrete arch that reared beyond was a great gap, with nothing but stone buttresses against the fringes of the gorge to indicate the level that The Shadow's car had crossed.

Speeding around another bend, The Shadow lost all sight of the gorge. Echoes of the great collapse were muffled, to fade altogether. A new urge guided The Shadow in his speeding drive. Ahead, he saw the fake camera car, racing along a narrow paved road that led to a through highway.

Taking the first short-cut, The Shadow wheeled in toward the trail. He knew why crooks had set six o'clock as their zero hour. They were counting upon dusk to help them shake pursuit. Their course, for a while, would be twisty, but when darkness came they would head back to their base.

STRIKING the highway, the crook-manned car swung left and suddenly doubled back along another side road. That method was not mere madness. It told exactly what they had in mind.

They had found out just where the State police were posted. They knew that the highway was blocked in both directions. They were weaving a serpentine course through the guarded area. But The Shadow needed no markers to trail them.

Etched in his mind were the details of the well-planned chart that had been in the commissioner's office. There was only one route through this area. The crooks were taking it; so was The Shadow.

Though Shag's fleeing tribe knew their way about, their route was not all velvet. They had to cross roads that were picketed by State police patrol cars. Two of those happened to be close enough to cut in ahead of The Shadow and take up the pursuit.

Shag's speedy truck was out of sight when the patrol cars reached a fork. Each took a separate road. The Shadow followed the one that he knew was on the correct route. The patrol car must have sighted the truck, for the officers made good choices after that. Gaining on the patrol car, The Shadow was only a hundred yards behind when it swung into a narrow but well-paved highway.

Despite the gathering dusk, The Shadow saw the truck only a few hundred yards ahead. The patrol car made a quick spurt on it, and guns began to talk back and forth. There were only a few marksmen shooting from the truck, and The Shadow was ready to concede victory to the patrol car, when something went wrong with it.

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Veering from the road, the cops were lucky enough to pick an open space. Their car was half overturned, but they were poking their heads from it when The Shadow's roadster zipped past. Tailing the truck, The Shadow thrust his left hand from the roadster and aimed an automatic.

Guns were spurting back at him, but he ignored them. He wanted close range, a sure chance to clip a tire or the gas tank. He fired one shot, then another, saw them kick up little puffs on the road. He was getting the range he wanted.

A true aim was hard, however, for the roadster motor was spitting: either bad gasoline, or the ignition system.

His third shot was mere inches short. At that moment, The Shadow didn't think it mattered. He was wrong. As he tugged the trigger a fourth time, the .45 failed to speak. He couldn't understand it for a moment; then, as he squeezed again, he felt the gun give like putty.

The ray machine!

The crooks were employing the intensifier while on the run! Their bullets hadn't crippled the police car; the ray had done that trick. Fearing The Shadow's gunfire, they had sought first to stop his shots, rather than his car. That accomplished, they were ready with a different dose.

It came before The Shadow had time to prevent it. The truck was wheeling a sharp bend to the right, the roadster just behind it. All the strain was on the left front wheel when it gave. Bashing a wooden guard rail, The Shadow's car went through.

Steel yielded like wood. Weakened by the deadly ray, the whole car front crumpled. The deluxe roadster was partly junk before it somersaulted down a stony embankment, where huge rocks waited to ruin what was left of it.

Skirting a horseshoe-shaped bend, Shag's truck rounded the stone-strewn ravine where the roadster had crashed. Dusk had closed in; the truck's lights came on. Accompanying them was a glaring spotlight, with which the crooks probed the valley. They saw the remains of The Shadow's crumpled car, bashed into a big rock that had the semblance of a tombstone.

What they didn't see was the black-clad shape that was clinging to the ruins of the guard rail, up by the road itself. The Shadow had gone with the car in its plunge. Still wearing the cloak and hat he had slipped on early in the chase, he escaped the searchlight's probe and saw the crook-manned truck swerve off between the hills.

Dark had taken The Shadow back into its folds. From such gloom, the intrepid fighter would emerge again. Men of crime would soon learn that their archfoe was still alive, prepared to deliver vengeance upon those who had sentenced him to doom!

CHAPTER XII. THE DOUBLE DILEMMA

NEXT day, the public began to get educated on the subject of the cosmic ray. No longer could the law keep all of crime's details quiet. The story had cracked wide open, with the crash of the Stuyvesant Bridge.

Newspapers, radio broadcasters, went into elaborate explanations, which boiled down into simple but rather meager facts.

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The cosmic ray was one of nature's mysteries. Traveling with the speed of light, having a wave length shorter than any other known, those rays were bombarding the earth with a remarkable penetrative power.

Some scientists regarded them as the cause of the mysterious northern lights, otherwise known as the aurora borealis. Cosmic rays, it was known, produced a certain amount of radio interference. Their effect could be measured by vacuum tubes containing electrified platinum wire. But when it came to harnessing those rays, one man alone had managed to do the trick.

He was the missing inventor, Simon Zurm.

Cosmic rays could best be studied in the stratosphere, because the earth's atmosphere acted as a blanket against them. The rays were a potential source of power, but not at the earth's surface. Certain scientists believed that the total energy of all the cosmic rays at sea level would not exceed one hundred horse-power. But the peculiar action of those rays were definitely a different story.

They had a marked effect on weather conditions, and that, plus their penetrative ability that enabled them to pass through several feet of lead, was the basis upon which Simon Zurm had worked.

Deflected rays, intensified. That was the story in a nutshell. The concentrated force had shown its effect on steel, a man-made alloy. It could probably ruin duralumin and other alloys. But it had no effect on copper, lead, aluminum or zinc, which indicated that many other metals, and such alloys as brass, would be immune.

Human beings, too, were safe against the ray. The Shadow, for one, could have testified personally to that fact. He actually owed his luck of last night to the ray's effects. In an ordinary type of crash, The Shadow would have rolled to destruction, trapped in his wrecked car. The ray, however, had served him.

Literally, the intensified force from the machine had crumbled the roadster's front. Powdered bolts had yielded; the car had fallen apart as its plunge began. The Shadow had struck ground just over the edge of the road. Holding tight, he had let the cracking vehicle bound over and beyond him.

Recalling his escape, The Shadow could testify to another effect of the concentrated ray. Judiciously applied, it had no effect upon electrical apparatus. The lack of alarms during certain robberies proved that fact. But when the converged rays were poured with furious intensity, as they had been at The Shadow's car, they created a disturbance. The Shadow remembered that the roadster's ignition had gone balky just before the crash.

The police supposed that crooks had been using the improved supermachine that they had taken from Zurm's laboratory. The Shadow was positive upon that particular point.

DURING the day that followed the bridge collapse, The Shadow spent a considerable time in his own laboratory, a black-walled room that adjoined his sanctum. There, he experimented with tube-type cosmic ray detectors. Packing the best samples in a box, he called Burbank, his contact man, and told him to collect the tubes later.

Burbank, himself an electrical genius, was to place detectors in various parts of the city, where other agents could keep them under observation. If crooks cut loose with new crime, and overdid their use of the ray, it wouldn't take long to trace them. The detectors would pick up indications at long range, and by having several in use, they would act like radio finders.

There were flaws, however, to that process.

THE CRIME RAY

In their crimes, the mobsters had not needed an overintensified ray. They had used one in the bridge demonstration to hurry up the process. The only other time that The Shadow recalled as similar was when they had ruined the supports of the old elevated.

Until another such incident occurred, the detectors would be useless. Besides, Burbank wouldn't have them placed for twenty-four hours at least. Therefore, to handle the present, The Shadow had but one course: to go back to his original way of getting information, by trailing Joe Cardona when the police inspector visited Squeak Wembry.

With the afternoon only half gone, The Shadow had no need to hurry. As Cranston, he visited an old antique shop, where he became intrigued by a type of curio that had always interested him. Before he left the shop, he purchased some obsolete weapons, including widemouthed blunderbusses and Swiss culverins that looked like small cannons.

The Shadow took his purchases to the Cobalt Club and left the heavy packages there. Commissioner Weston wasn't about, but that pleased his friend Cranston. The Shadow had a more important appointment, with Joe Cardona, though the latter didn't know it.

With dusk, Cardona arrived on the street outside Squeak's hide-out. Looking about, Joe failed to notice the shrouded, motionless shape that watched him from a doorway opposite.

As soon as Cardona had gone inside, The Shadow followed. Soon, he had handled the locked door and was listening in on the conference.

"I'm giving you the straight dope, Joe," Squeak was saying. "Shag is up against it. Sure, he and the mob are back in their hide-out, wherever that is, but how's that helping 'em? There ain't enough guys left in the outfit to break up a Sunday-school picnic!

"Yeah, they got away with that bridge job, but what did they get out of it? They showed what they could do, but that was all. Shag's got to get a new mob together, and the only guys that would sign up with him are in the Big House.

"What's more, he needs dough. He's got to pay plenty, even to the pals that would work with him. They're afraid of that mazuma he grabbed at the Midtown National. The banks were wise that something was coming, and they had the numbers listed of all the big bills. Shag's blown the small dough, and everything that's left is too hot to freeze in a hurry."

THERE was logic as well as sincerity in Squeak's tone. The Shadow wasn't surprised to learn that crooks were in a double dilemma. They needed money, and they wanted men.

"Tormeon has plenty of cash," gruffed Cardona. "I was up at his joint all yesterday afternoon, and he was showing me his books. If I had ten per cent of what he took in last year, I'd retire for life!"

Squeak nodded, wisely.

"I asked Shag why Tormeon didn't come through with dough," said the stoolie. "You oughta heard Shag laugh."

"What was funny about it?"

THE CRIME RAY

"The idea of Tormeon handing over dough. Shag says this is a racket where the big noise is supposed to take in the gravy, not ladle it out. Besides, he said the same thing you did, Joe."

"What do you mean?"

"About Tormeon being in business," explained Squeak. "The way Shag put it, the big-shot has to keep himself covered. The only way he can do it is to keep his own accounts on the up and up. You oughta know that, after Tormeon showing you his books."

The logic dawned on Joe Cardona. Still, the ace detective was wondering how Shag was going to get the money needed to buy men. Squeak grinned, then spoke in a confiding tone.

"Ever hear of the Antipodes Export Co.?"

Cardona nodded.

"They got a pile of dough in their safe," assured Squeak. "Close to a hundred grand, Shag says. Money that ain't listed. It's come into their office in return for exports. Nobody's supposed to know it, so they ain't been bothering to bank the cash."

"How did Shag find that out?"

"Tormeon must know somebody in the export company," decided Squeak. "Maybe a loud mouth talked too much at one of the night clubs. Anyway, Shag is going after it tonight, about an hour after the joint closes. He says he can stage the job with only a couple of guys to help him."

That was all Cardona needed to know. He left the hide-out, and The Shadow went ahead of him. The Shadow was still ahead, when Cardona found Commissioner Weston at the Cobalt Club. With the commissioner was his friend, Lamont Cranston. Together, they listened to Cardona's latest hunch.

"If you are right, inspector," declared Weston, "it means that the criminals will have to use the ray machine again. Necessarily limited in number, they should be easily trapped. Arrange your campaign accordingly."

It was after Cardona had left that Weston became dubious. The Shadow prompted that mood by remarking, in Cranston's fashion, that he hoped the law would be in time tonight.

"That's just the trouble!" exclaimed Weston. "Gad, Cranston, I'd like to use real strategy in a case like this! Inspector Cardona is doing his best, but he is limited. It would be an excellent idea for him to visit the exporting company first, and see how matters stand there."

"But that would be a give-away. The people in the place would be worried. So Cardona will do as he did before. He will close in from the outside. But if those crooks know the inside, they may be able to stage a getaway. Even if we trap them."

As he concluded, Weston saw Cranston smile. The commissioner asked the reason.

"If the Antipodes Export Co. is still open," he remarked, "how easy it would be for someone to stroll in there on business and learn all that you need to know."

It was the word "stroll" that made Weston think in terms of Cranston.

"You could do it!" exclaimed the commissioner. "Call that office, Cranston, and find out if it is still open!"

The Shadow made the call. The office was open, would not be closed until nine o'clock. With that information gained, The Shadow and the Commissioner sat down to dinner – planning their own move as they ate.

During the meal, faint traces of a smile showed on the impassive lips of Lamont Cranston. Tonight's events were shaping exactly as he wanted them. Whether or not the law managed to spring its trap, one thing was certain:

Crooks would meet with a real surprise if they invaded the offices of the export company. This was one occasion when they would find that The Shadow was there ahead of them!

CHAPTER XIII. THE MASTER CROOK

BY eight o'clock. Commissioner Weston was itching for Cranston to get started; so The Shadow obligingly left the Cobalt Club and headed for the export company offices. Left alone, Weston began to think of other things to do.

He called Delcott and Longarth, told them to come to the club at once. He also phoned Cardona at headquarters and ordered the ace inspector to report for a final conference.

At eight-thirty all were gathered. Cardona was again announcing his hunch, and basing it on the fact that Shag Korman needed money in order to obtain men. This time, however, Weston began to analyze what Cardona told him.

"This is more than a hunch inspector," insisted the commissioner. "Out with it – where have you been getting information? I demand that you inform me!"

Cardona had expected the present situation. In fact he had wondered why the commissioner had not seen the light on former occasions. Joe had long ago resolved to meet the issue by declaring the truth. So he came out with it.

Casually Cardona described his dealings with Squeak Wembry. He knew that it ended Weston's belief in hunches, but Joe expected another commendation and received it.

For long it had been the privilege of various officers to handle special stool pigeons in the way that they thought best. Weston complimented Cardona upon his use of that policy.

"Very good, inspector," nodded the commissioner. "By dealing with Wembry alone you prevented any leak. Too bad that he is only their outside man. If he could only learn more! The location of their stronghold for instance."

"Squeak would give himself away if he did," asserted Cardona. "But so far Shag hasn't gotten wise to him. Which shows that Tormeon hasn't either."

"What about Tormeon?" put in Delcott. "Did you learn anything while you were with him yesterday?"

"Not a thing," returned Joe glumly. "I said I'd give him a buzz this evening maybe, but I haven't yet on account of this other business."

THE CRIME RAY

There was silence for a few moments, then Delcott asked: "Wouldn't it be best to call Tormeon, inspector?"

Cardona started to shake his head but Weston intervened.

"Of course it would!" exclaimed the commissioner. "If Tormeon doesn't hear from you, he will suspect that you know something about the crime that he has planned tonight. Delcott is right."

Longarth nodded agreement with Weston and Delcott. Stubbornly, Cardona held out alone.

"You've got to figure everything two ways with Tormeon," he argued. "When I said I'd call him, he figured I wouldn't do it. I decided I would call him, just to worry him. Right now, I don't want to worry him."

The point didn't impress Weston or the others. Rather than cause trouble, Cardona went out and put in a call to Tormeon. While Joe was disposing of that formality, Weston received a call of his own. He had something to tell when Cardona returned.

"Cranston is at the export company office," said the commissioner. "He says that everything is quiet there; but that they will be open until nine. He gave me a brief description of the place. Here is a diagram, inspector."

WHILE Weston was tracing the details as Cranston had told them, Delcott excused himself to keep another appointment. He promised to return later, to learn how tonight's campaign had gone. Longarth was also on the point of leaving, but finally decided to remain.

Thus there were three persons to learn the startling news that came soon after nine o'clock, just as Joe Cardona was about to leave for the building where the export company was located. The ace had figured that mobsters would start their job within the hour that Squeak had allowed. There was always a chance that Shag might spring the unexpected. In this case, Shag had.

Going through the foyer with Weston and Longarth, Cardona was stopped by an attendant who said that he was wanted on the telephone.

Leaving the booth door open, Cardona let Weston and Longarth overhear his end of the conversation. From Joe's excited remarks, they recognized that he was hearing from Squeak Wembry.

"What's that?" demanded Joe. "You say that the big-shot is going down there himself? Did Shag mention Tormeon by name?"

Over the wire, Squeak's reply came in a frenzied whine, that the other listeners could catch from the receiver.

"Shag's got wise to me, Joe! From something I musta said. I gotta lam, before he gets here –"

The stoolie's voice faltered; then caught itself.

"I'm a goner if I don't, Joe! Listen, you gotta get down to that joint quick. If Shag stops off here, you'll have time to nab the big-shot –"

That was all Squeak said. A sharp sound split the telephone receiver. Cardona recognized it as a gunshot. He heard a gargly moan: Squeak's. Then the sound of a telephone thumping the floor.

Dropping his own receiver, Cardona forgot himself to bark sharp words at Weston:

THE CRIME RAY

"They got Squeak! That's what came from the crack-pot idea of having me call Tormeon! He wisied that Squeak had blabbed. But Tormeon's down there, and I'm going to get him. I can beat Shag to it. The squads all posted, ready to close in when I give the word."

Leaving Weston open-mouthed, Cardona turned about and headed outdoors before his superior could decide whether he deserved a rebuke or an apology.

WITHIN the offices of the Antipodes Export Co., all was quiet and dark. The place had closed a few minutes before nine, and the manager, the last person to leave, was sure that the offices were empty.

The manager remembered a very distinguished visitor, Lamont Cranston, who had talked of export matters in large figures, and who had made a telephone call which the manager had not overheard. He supposed, of course, that Cranston had gone before the office closed.

That surmise was wrong. On a chair near the door, Cranston had left what appeared to be a folded coat, underneath a package that almost concealed it. He had gathered those belongings before leaving the anteroom, and had undergone a rapid transformation. The coat had become a black cloak, a slouch hat had emerged from its folds. Donning them, Cranston had become The Shadow.

With the package safely hidden beneath the cloak, The Shadow turned into a gliding, elusive figure. Shifting from one spot to another, he had remained unnoticed while the lights were going out. With the offices dark, he was unwrapping the package, to disclose its contents as a brace of automatics.

The ray would be used judiciously tonight, and The Shadow intended to keep out of its path. By striking crooks unexpectedly, he planned to have them helpless when the law arrived. But The Shadow intended to accomplish something that the law had not yet managed, even in victory.

No matter how fierce the combat, he counted upon taking at least one intruder alive and making the thug talk. Through that procedure, The Shadow expected to find crime's hidden stronghold, where tons of unpeddled loot were kept, along with Simon Zurm and the inventor's supermachine.

They would be using a portable machine tonight, the crooks. It wouldn't take a strong concentration of the ray to finish the steel bars that protected the doorway of the export company. Similarly, a simple application would cleave the front of the big safe that stood in a deep corner of an inner office.

The safe in question hadn't been opened while The Shadow was present. It was obviously one devoted to some special use, such as the storage of the reserve funds that Squeak had mentioned. Though strong, it was old-fashioned, and The Shadow was confident that he could open it without the ray apparatus.

Busy with the dial, he probed the combination. Ungloved fingers, sensitive in their touch, were finding the task easy. All that interrupted was the buzz of a telephone close beside The Shadow's elbow. He had connected that particular line with the outside switchboard, and had muffled the bell with his discarded glove.

The call was from Burbank, reporting that Philip Tormeon had heard from Joe Cardona and had later gone out, ostensibly to visit one of the night clubs under his control. The news had come through Harry Vincent, supplied to him by Dixie Mayland. On the chance that Burbank might receive later reports, The Shadow left the wire open.

The safe front swung wide. A tiny flashlight licked the steel interior, stopped. The safe was empty, but that was not what riveted The Shadow's attention. At the back of the safe was a yawning cavity, two feet in diameter; a hole that penetrated the steel-butressed wall beyond!

THE CRIME RAY

Crooks had staged their robbery hours ago, working through from an empty office! They had duped The Shadow, along with the law, by informing Squeak Wembry of a crime already accomplished, not one that was merely contemplated!

There was something behind the game; more than a mere mistrust of Squeak. A big brain had ordered Shag Korman to this task in order to obtain an important result. They were pitting one foe against another. Figuring that their plans would leak out, crooks had fixed it for the police to trap The Shadow!

HOARSE, cautious whispers were drifting through the gaping back of the rifled safe. The Shadow saw the blinks of flashlights. Simultaneously, he heard creaking sounds from the door of the outer office. Those weren't crooks, closing in. Cardona's squad was on the job.

The Shadow had no desire to shoot it out with the law. Though his cause was a right one, this was a trap he could not escape without damaging those who might oppose him. But he couldn't let himself be captured as The Shadow.

Turning to the telephone, The Shadow cut off a report that Burbank was about to give. He spoke quick words to the contact man, then hooked the receiver.

Wheeling from the inner office, The Shadow clattered chairs as he went. The noise brought results. There were shouts from the empty office on the other side of the safe; crashing sounds from the front of the export company's suite.

The Shadow reached a window, ripped it open. There were bars outside; he didn't have time to wrench them loose. But the space between those bars was all he needed. Whipping his cloak over his shoulders, The Shadow carried his slouch hat with it. Twisting his automatics inside the compact bundle, he pushed the black cloth out between the bars.

As the weighted cloak dropped, the front door crashed. From the inner office, there was a clatter as a man sprawled through the back of the safe and rolled to the floor. Thumping the window shut, The Shadow grabbed up a chair and began to swing it as he charged into the glare of flashlights.

Police guns were talking, but their shots went high. The Shadow was almost at floor level, his arms swinging the chair considerably above his head. He made a wide sweep toward a detective who was aiming from the doorway of the inner office. As that fellow ducked away, The Shadow whipped toward an opponent from the front.

He could easily have downed the second man with the chair; instead, he merely thumped the dick's gun arm and made him fire wide. Then, losing the chair as he wheeled about, The Shadow stumbled clumsily into the hands of two other detectives, keeping his arms above his head as a protection against their swinging guns.

Purposely collapsing, The Shadow was surrounded by half a dozen captors who were racing to put handcuffs on him. Someone pressed a light switch, flooding the office with a bright glow just as one of the captors yelled:

"We got him! We got the big-shot!"

In from the shattered doorway strode Inspector Joe Cardona. He saw a tuxedo coat lapel in the midst of the detectives and grabbed it.

"Wearing your glad rags, huh?" snorted Cardona. "I guess you headed down here from a night club, didn't you, Tormeon?"

The prisoner didn't answer. Yanking him into the light, Cardona saw his face. Joe's eyes went goggly; his hands lost their grip. If he'd found his own face looking at him, Cardona would not have been more amazed.

Lamont Cranston, friend of the police commissioner, the big-shot of the crime ring! The thing was absolutely incredible! To take him into custody was a duty that left Cardona numb.

Joe Cardona was almost as astonished as if he had been forced to arrest The Shadow!

CHAPTER XIV. UP THE RIVER

THE trial of Lamont Cranston was the fastest, hottest, wildest display of crisscrossed legal activity that had ever been enacted in the New York courts. There were enough Latin phrases in it to fill a newspaper paragraph, and radio commentators found themselves talking in terms of habeas corpus and non compos mentis.

The police had captured a master crook, but couldn't produce the goods to prove he was one. The D.A. couldn't figure what charges to bring against the prisoner. Murder, robbery, blackmail, all were in the air – and stayed there.

It seemed that Cranston had an alibi for everything, except one important count. He had been trapped in the offices of the Antipodes Export Co., with the safe wide open and empty. His fingerprints were on the safe dial and the telephone.

But there wasn't a witness to prove that Cranston had opened the safe. His own statement was that he had found it empty. The hole in the back proved that someone else could have walked off with the cash. The tangible charge against Cranston simmered down to attempted robbery.

That didn't satisfy the district attorney's office. This was a case that had to show results. When men of high esteem went crooked, examples had to be made of them. Otherwise, less fortunate culprits would howl that lack of money was the only reason that they had been jailed.

The police didn't find the cloak and guns in the courtyard below the office window. The Shadow had told Burbank about those, and agents came to get them. Harry Vincent paid a prompt visit to the Cobalt Club and picked up the packages of antique weapons. But, somehow, the police heard that there was a revolver in Cranston's locker at the club, and they found it.

With surprising speed, Lamont Cranston was indicted under the Sullivan Act, tried by a court that overruled many of his lawyer's objections, and convicted by a jury that thought him guilty of so many things that it was a foregone conclusion he would go to prison. The judge supplied an immediate sentence to speed him on his way.

THE day Lamont Cranston started for Graykill Prison, Inspector Joe Cardona walked into the commissioner's office and handed in his resignation. Purple in the face, Ralph Weston indulged in indignant splutters, which Cardona finally interrupted.

"You know that Cranston isn't guilty!" asserted the resigning inspector. "You sent him down to that office yourself. You said so to me. Why didn't you show up at the trial and speak your piece, then?"

THE CRIME RAY

"I didn't tell Cranston to stay there –"

"What if he did?" interposed Cardona. "You didn't tell him to come back, either. I'm through, commissioner!"

"But you haven't sufficient reason –"

"I've got another reason, and a good one! Somebody planted that gun in Cranston's locker, and I've got a hunch who did it!"

"I don't like your hunches, inspector!"

"You wouldn't like this one, commissioner, because you're the person I've got in mind!"

Joe Cardona had spoken his piece in full. He was glad that no witnesses were present, for he expected Weston to rage. Instead, the commissioner behaved in a most surprising fashion. He calmly tore up Joe's resignation, brought out a box of his best cigars, and told the inspector to sit down and smoke one.

"You're right," said Weston, coolly. "I put the revolver in the locker."

The cigar fell from Cardona's mouth as he gaped at the admission.

"I talked to Cranston after you arrested him," related Weston. "He told me to forget that I had sent him to the export company. He asked me to place the gun in the locker. Later on, you see, I can come out with a statement that Cranston was engaged in duty to which I had assigned him. As for the revolver, we can prove that it was registered in another name, without stating who planted it on Cranston."

By that time, Cardona could find words. "You mean that Cranston wanted to go to prison?"

"Certainly! So that the real master crook will think himself safe as long as he refrains from further crime. That will enable us to trace him without jeopardizing lives or property."

The logic was good, but it brought up a point that Cardona saw fit to express.

"Cranston may have a long wait coming," said Joe, glumly. "If the real brain doesn't show his hand, how are we going to nail him?"

"That, inspector," smiled Weston, "is your problem. It is one reason why I do not want your resignation."

Leaving the commissioner's office, Cardona went up to see Tormeon. He found the former racketeer in a very jovial mood, and quite as generous with his cigars as Weston.

"A nervy chap, that Cranston," purred Tormeon. "I'd never have picked him as the man in back of it, that day he dropped in here with you. Well, all you've got to do, Joe, is make him tell you where to find Shag and his bunch. Cranston will crack, while he's in the cooler. Those stuffed shirts always cave in."

Cardona retained his poker-faced pose, his eyes meeting Tormeon's steadily. Neither saw the expression registered by a red-haired girl who was on her way to the inner office. Her eyes flashed anger as she heard Tormeon's references to Cranston, but Dixie Mayland managed to compress her lips and walk away unnoticed.

THE CRIME RAY

Cardona learned nothing from his chat with Tormeon, but he intended to visit the fellow often. Sooner or later, Cardona hoped, Tormeon would make a slip, and Joe wanted to be around when it happened. The sooner, the better, because Cardona wasn't at all pleased with the fact that Cranston was being forced to spend a while in Graykill Prison.

THOUGH noted for its many modern improvements, the Big House up the river was badly overcrowded. New prisoners were therefore confined in the old cell block, a hideous monstrosity of the past that should long ago have been demolished. Those cells had walls so narrow that an occupant could scarcely squeeze into the space beside his cot.

The bottom tier was the worst in the entire block. It was practically at basement level, and the passage outside the cells had the musty, gloomy appearance of a dungeon keep. Fortunately, that tier was seldom used for prisoners; and it had at last been put to another purpose: the storage of old prison records.

During the period of Cranston's trial, a solemn, set-faced man had been classifying those records. His name was Slade Farrow, and he was a noted criminologist. Intent upon his work, Farrow did not mind browsing through the ancient cells, provided the doors remained open.

On this particular day, two prison workers were beginning to clear the first cell in the abandoned tier, to store its records elsewhere. Farrow inquired what they were about, and they told him.

"This cell is for the high-hat guy who came in today," said one. "That fellow Cranston. He likes to be exclusive, so he's going to be!"

Farrow was quite horrified.

"You can't mean that he's being put in this tier!" exclaimed the criminologist. "Why, these cells are the worst in the entire prison! It's impossible! A man like Cranston, used to luxury and comfortable surroundings –"

"That's just it," interrupted the second worker. "When the guy got here, he was told that he could expect no favors. He'd be treated like the rest of us; that was final. So he got sarcastic about it. He said he didn't want favors but he had a right to make a reasonable request.

"He'd heard about these punk cells and wanted one. He asked for it, so he's getting it. I hope he likes it when he sees it. But that guy won't ever be a stir-bug. He's goofy already!"

Farrow was back at work when Cranston was brought to his cell and locked in there. The cell had a special lock, separate from those in the rest of the tier, because their doors were frequently open. But there wasn't a chance that Cranston could work his way out through the steel door, unless he carried a portable ray machine of the type which crooks, supposedly under his control, had been using in their crimes.

Having been thoroughly searched when admitted to Graykill, Lamont Cranston obviously lacked such a device.

Afternoon was waning when Slade Farrow finished his work. Coming from an open cell, the criminologist paused to mop his forehead. He happened to stop in front of the closed cell that contained the sarcastic Mr. Cranston.

"We managed it," undertoned Farrow, without looking toward the cell. "I smuggled Tapper in with a box of books, and he worked on the wall while I was busy with the records. Shipping him out was harder, but they didn't suspect anything coming from here. So Tapper has gone, and I leave today. Good luck!"

On occasions in the past, Slade Farrow had served The Shadow capably. Once again, he had proven his ability.

AS soon as all was silent in that lower tier, Lamont Cranston rolled from sight beneath his low cot.

Probing along the darkened wall, he found the opening where Tapper, a reformed convict loyal to Farrow, had worked at a long–forgotten task of hewing his way through prison walls. In this case, Tapper had been provided with first–class tools, smuggled in with him.

He had carved a hole of just sufficient size for Cranston to work through. From the other side, behind a high stack of bound prison records, the new resident of Graykill replaced the neat–fitting blocks that Tapper had provided.

Probing hands found a bundle. Farrow, himself, had brought it – the same cloth package that The Shadow's agents had reclaimed from the courtyard outside the export company's window. Unwrapping it, Cranston placed two automatics under his belt, slid the cloak over his shoulders, and pulled the slouch hat down upon his head.

Dusk had come. The corridor outside the ancient cell block was filled with preternatural darkness that seemed tinged with memories of many prisoners who had stared hopelessly from their cells. It was a place for ghosts – and a living one appeared, coming from the empty unlocked cell that contained the life records of the very men who had dwelt within these confines.

A creature of blackness; a being so elusive that he might credibly have passed through solid bars, The Shadow was at large in Graykill Prison. With gliding stride, ready to fade from sight at any moment, he was following gloomy corridors and obscure stairways, to investigate the situation that had brought him within prison walls.

There was a reason, other than the one expressed to Weston, why The Shadow had chosen to reside in Graykill. Here lay his next opportunity to forestall impending crime.

Only The Shadow had divined that fact.

CHAPTER XV. WESTON DECIDES

NEW history was in the making at Graykill Prison. There were five days of it, and five nights. A period when nerves were taut and rumors were rife among the prison population. Yet, inklings of what was really to come did not reach the authorities in charge.

The restless feeling among the convicts began soon after the arrival of Lamont Cranston, but there was no way of linking the new prisoner with it. If ever Graykill had received an inmate who accepted his surroundings with absolute calm, Cranston deserved the title.

At meals, hundreds of eyes kept glancing at the masklike face of the new prisoner. Not once did any pair or those many eyes detect a change in Cranston's impassive expression. In the prison library, to which Cranston had been assigned, studious convicts forgot their books to watch for any alteration in that inflexible countenance. They, too were invariably disappointed.

Though he had become a number, instead of a name, Lamont Cranston was leaving an indelible impression of individuality, not through any effort to attract attention, but by his passive way alone. Confined to his solitary cell, his self–chosen residence seemed a perfect setting for one of his singular demeanor.

THE CRIME RAY

Cranston's impenetrable calm would have given the other prisoners much to talk about, if another, and more startling, phenomenon had not been present at Graykill. By day, eyes watched Cranston; at night, those same eyes looked for something that seemed intangible but failed to see it.

There was something that stalked by night through the silent corridors of Graykill; a creature neither ghost nor human, that stopped by the barred doors of cells, to whisper things that brought jittery convicts shrieking from their sleep.

Awakened men had been heard to mutter later. What they said, their fellows never knew. In the daytime, convicts who had undergone that strange experience remembered nothing but bad dreams, too fantastic to be sensible. They didn't recall the mumbles that they had given.

Common opinion had it that the victims of those nightmares were going stir-crazy. Epidemics of the sort were not unknown in prisons. Screams in the night had a way of shaking nervous men who heard them. It was only natural that others would have nightmares of their own. But the thing was on the increase.

Prisoners were being transferred to other cell blocks; a few, whose fears were unabated, were sent to the hospital. Still, the hard-boiled convicts were jesting at the weakness of their goofy comrades.

All except two, who found a chance to meet in the prison library. They were a pair who had once held much in common: Red Garey and Prex Albus. Both were convicted mobleaders, whose past exploits had been similar to those of Shag Korman.

"LIMMER CRAYLE got the bug last night," side-mouthed Red. "I heard him howl. That's bad! Limmer is in the know."

"I talked to him," undertoned Prex. "He don't remember nothing, except that he didn't say nothing."

"How does he know, if he don't remember?"

"The screws ain't been bothering him. That shows they ain't wise to nothing. Everything's jake, Red."

The two went back to their reading as one of the library workers went past. Red glanced up to see the masklike face of Lamont Cranston. The new prisoner was arranging a file of magazines. When Red was sure that Cranston was out of earshot, he leaned toward Prex.

"It was the dead-pan guy," said Red. "Keep lamping him, in case he comes this way. Listen, Prex; my aunt was in to see me yesterday."

Prex grinned at Red's reference to his "aunt;" the woman in question was a fake relative, upon whose visit the crooks had counted heavily.

"It's all set for tonight," added Red. "Like Shag sent word it was going to be. He only wanted to make sure that the movies weren't called off."

"Fat chance they would be," chuckled Prex. "With so many guys going haywire, the warden probably figures that the flickers will get their minds off it."

"Yeah. Anyway, get busy. Pipe the word to the right guys. I'll take care of my bunch."

"O.K., Red!"

THE CRIME RAY

Separately, the pair left the library. Not glancing back, they failed to see something that would have amazed them. The slightest trace of a smile had appeared upon the thin lips of Lamont Cranston. The new prisoner had studied the acoustics of the library ever since he had been working there.

In that room, voices carried farther than either Red or Prex supposed. By picking the precise limit of the range, The Shadow had overheard every word without attracting suspicion. The statements that had reached the ears of Lamont Cranston fitted with words that Limmer had muttered in his cell last night in response to the weird, whispered query of The Shadow!

THOUGH five days had made Lamont Cranston something of a fixture in Graykill Prison, there were persons far outside those walls who regarded him as quite the opposite. In New York, Commissioner Weston and Inspector Cardona were discussing Cranston's plight from a new and hopeful angle.

On Weston's desk lay a new letter from the General Protective Association; one which promised an important change in the existing situation.

The letter was addressed to the commissioner personally, and it threatened new calamity. It classed the imprisonment of Cranston as an outrage, and promised retaliation.

Unless Cranston should be released before tonight, the letter stated, the country would be shocked by a disaster as great as the bridge crash, with an added toll of human lives. This time, mobsters were going to destroy valuable property with their disintegrating ray.

"The point of this letter is plain," summed up Weston. "Your friend Philip Tormeon is trying to establish that my friend Lamont Cranston is actually the master mind."

"Don't call Tormeon a friend of mine," objected Cardona. "It was your idea, commissioner, to have me drop in and chin with him like we were a couple of buddies."

Weston smiled acknowledgment. Then, his face becoming serious, he stated:

"There is only one thing that we can do. We must release Cranston."

"But that's what Tormeon wants –"

"I understand," interrupted Weston, "but we shall not do it according to the terms of this letter. Our game is to call Tormeon's bluff, then spring our own surprise."

Cardona didn't quite understand.

"I have talked with Delcott about this letter," explained Weston. "None of his properties are the sort where human lives would be at stake. Therefore, the underworld is not directing a new thrust against him."

"I called up Longarth, also. He assured me that all bridges under construction by his company and others are being guarded. That stunt with the camera car can't work again. So we know that Tormeon isn't after Longarth."

Cardona pondered over that, then questioned: "Who is Tormeon after?"

"No one," returned Weston. "How can he be, when Shag Korman, his only lieutenant, has so few men left? That is why I say this letter is a bluff, inspector. Therefore, I shall have photostatic copies made of it, and

give them to the evening newspapers."

"But how will that help Cranston?"

"When crime fails to strike," answered the commissioner, "public confidence will be restored. I can then reveal the details of Cranston's co-operation. He will receive a pardon from the governor; but not until tomorrow, after we have proven our case."

With that, the commissioner proceeded to put his plan into action. He sent the letter to be photostated; he called the newspapers and told them to send reporters to his office. While he waited for the news hawks to arrive, Weston called Albany and talked with the governor.

Cardona heard the commissioner state the true facts of Cranston's case. Hanging up, Weston displayed a broad smile.

"The pardon will go to Graykill tonight," he announced, "with instructions to the warden to hold it until tomorrow. It will be a real surprise for Cranston" – Weston was chuckling at the thought – "because he expects to hear from me first. But after all, that is entirely unnecessary. What good would it do to inform Cranston of all this? He can do nothing, there in Graykill."

One of Cardona's hunches must have been stirring when the ace inspector left the commissioner's office. Cardona felt uneasy, but didn't know why. He didn't connect it with the fact that Weston had decided not to notify Cranston in advance that his term of imprisonment would soon be over.

At last Cardona blamed his worry on the letter. Whenever crooks had bared their fangs before, they had bitten hard. True, in this case, their threat, though large, was vague. But that, in a sense, made it the more dangerous.

Cardona was finally lulled by the thought that since Weston was making the letter public, The Shadow would promptly learn of it and be ready with any needed measures. If real purpose lay behind the letter, The Shadow was one person who could ferret it out.

Joe's fresh confidence would have faded, had he known that facts which failed to reach Lamont Cranston invariably remained unknown to The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVI. THE PRISON BREAK

EIGHT o'clock was the hour set for the prison movie show, but Lamont Cranston was not among the privileged convicts who were gathering in the auditorium. Attendance was optional, and Cranston still preferred the seclusion of his lone cell.

That choice, properly interpreted, meant that with darkness, the time had come for him to roam as The Shadow.

On this night, of all that he had spent in Graykill, The Shadow needed his garb of black. Picking a shrouded course among the great buildings of the penal institution, he was planning rapid moves to halt crime's scheduled stroke.

Though The Shadow wasn't the big brain of the crime ring, he knew the exact purpose of the master mind who managed it. The law should have recognized it, too, for Squeak Wembry had practically told it to Joe Cardona.

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Money and a mob.

Those were the things needed to replenish the thinned ranks commanded by Shag Korman. The money had been acquired by the robbery of the export company's safe. With that cash, a mob could be bought. Manhattan mobsters were chary about signing up with Shag Korman. There were others, though, who would welcome any offer.

They were residents of Graykill.

If freed by Shag Korman, crooks would not only serve in his mob, but in others. For Red Garey and Prex Albus would become lieutenants of equal rank with Shag. They, too, would have ray machines to aid them in future crimes.

Those prospects could be thwarted only by The Shadow. His course through the prison grounds had brought him to the administration building. Picking a short passage to a stairway, he ascended and reached the warden's office.

This was the strategic spot that The Shadow needed. From one window, it offered a view of the prison yard; from another, it gave outlook to the world beyond the walls. There, The Shadow could see the huge steel gate that formed the main entrance to the prison.

Numerous cars were parked along the approaching drive. There were trucks among them, and none of the vehicles were under close surveillance from the steel watch towers that topped the concrete walls. The Shadow intended to watch for the arrival of thug-manned cars. Should he spot them, shots from the window would end their foray.

Like other outer windows in the administration building, those of the warden's office had bars over it. The warden wasn't anxious to be disturbed by occasional convicts dashing through his office because it offered a route to freedom.

In fact, few persons but The Shadow had ever reached the warden's office unchallenged, for there were several guards stationed below.

In this present visit, The Shadow had been detained because the warden had not left the office until a few minutes before eight. The delay, however, did not seem important, for The Shadow did not expect the break to begin until a while after the movies had started.

At the moment of his arrival in the office, The Shadow particularly wanted to learn how soon the warden intended to return. Hoping to find some clue, he stepped to the desk to examine the memo pad that lay there. The pad was blank, but beside it was an opened envelope from the governor's office

Taking a folded paper from the envelope The Shadow opened it. There was silence, then the whisper of a low, strange laugh. The paper was a pardon made out for Lamont Cranston!

FROM that chance discovery, The Shadow divined an immediate fact. Something must have happened in New York – something that concerned Commissioner Weston. Hoping for further luck, The Shadow stepped to a radio set in the corner and tuned in on station WNX.

The eight-o'clock news broadcast was under way. A rapid-fire commentator was spreading the same information that Weston had given to the evening newspapers for their final editions.

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"Crime threatens anew!" came the announcement. "New York's police commissioner places the blame for the recent ray robberies and destruction of the Stuyvesant Bridge upon a syndicate of criminals calling themselves the General Protective Association. Operating the biggest racket in the history of modern crime, these crooks are covering their game by claiming to have offices in the Excalibur Building. Though no such building exists, the criminals are real as they have proven. They demand –"

The radio was interrupted by a sudden crackle of static. Turning about, The Shadow made for the window, barred outside. As he yanked it open, he saw a change in the prison's great steel gate.

A wide circle had appeared against its solid surface. A powdery substance was falling from it, like metal shavings from a lathe!

Shag's slim crew was already on the job. Their truck was parked behind a larger one, in a space where gunfire couldn't reach it from the windows of the administration building. The crooks were working their ray at full blast, to cleave a path through the prison gate!

The truck was visible from the nearest watch tower. A guard's rifle cracked. It was answered by spurts from revolvers. Those shots were puny in comparison. The guard was getting the range with follow-up shots. A few more bullets from that vantage spot would put the attackers to rout.

But the needed fire didn't come.

Something had gone wrong with the guard's rifle. Another guard had joined him, but his gun quit after one shot. The tower, itself was indicating what had happened. It was canting to one side, with a crazy lopsided twist.

Crooks had brought along a second ray machine. Its concentrated force was disintegrating the watch tower just as the larger machine was pulverizing the gate. The guards were diving down the tower stairway to escape the crash, carrying rifles that had been rendered useless.

There was only one way for The Shadow to enter the conflict. That was to blast away the bars on the office window with slugs from his automatics, and thereby get outside. He began the process just as great sirens wailed.

The bars were loose, The Shadow was jolting them free, when he heard another sound. It was continuous, but he caught it only between the brief lulls of the shrieking sirens. It was like the roar of stormy surf, but it lacked pause between its beats. The sound was voiced by a thousand human throats raised in raucous unison.

INSTEAD of springing outward, The Shadow sped to the inner window. The prison yard was bathed in the glare of floodlights. The space was alive with men, hundreds of them, who had surged from the exits of the auditorium.

Red and Prex had planned well. They and dozen of others had planted themselves throughout the convict audience. They had stirred the whole group with timely yells the moment that the sirens had begun their earsplitting whine. Under cover of a general break, they expected to insure their own escape.

The nearest guards were forced to flight. Their rifles were wrenched from them as they ran. The men who grabbed those guns were working for Red and Prex, in keeping with last-minute plans. They were opening fire on the guard towers.

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Smuggled revolvers, too, were talking from the ranks. Squads of guards were taking to shelter, hoping to quell the riot from safe spots. Berserk convicts were driving upon them, caring nothing when the men beside them sprawled. Armed with chairs and other improvised weapons brought from the auditorium, they intended to massacre the guards through sheer strength of numbers.

Nothing, it seemed, could halt mass murder and general escape. Nothing, except the challenge that came, strident above that roar of human voices. Inserted between the halting screaming of sirens, the horde heard it.

The fierce laugh of The Shadow!

Dropping from the warden's window, the cloaked fighter was atop a low projecting roof. In the glare of the floodlights, the ghost of Graykill had revealed himself. Not only by his laugh, but with the thrusts of his big automatics was The Shadow offering battle to a thousand foemen.

The stabs from his guns were finding sharpshooters before they could fire with their captured rifles. As weapons clattered in the yard, other marksmen grabbed them up, only to be sprawled by sure shots from The Shadow's deadly pistols.

Charging crowds had halted, to stare at the figure on the roof. Cornered guards came driving out upon them, scattering them across the yard. In the midst of that milling mass, Red and Prex shouted orders that their followers heard.

The gate had crumbled. A mad throng made for it. Tower guards were sniping them as they ran, but some of them were getting through, Red and Prex among the lucky. The Shadow, a fresh brace of automatics in his fists, was still concentrating upon the yard, to quell outbursts there.

His shots dropped ringleaders among the other groups who still battled with the guards. Prisoners were losing their desire for fight, and the guards were taking over. Except for the score or more who had reached the ruined gate, there would be no other convicts leaving Graykill.

The surge for freedom was broken, by The Shadow!

DROVES of subdued convicts were staring toward that low roof, wondering what the amazing battler would do next. They saw The Shadow cloak his guns, fling his hands high above his head, to clutch a window sill. With an acrobatic skill, he whisked himself in through the office window.

Ears heard The Shadow's parting laugh, but no eyes witnessed his departure. When guards reached the warden's office, they found it empty. The bars were gone from the outer window, and so was The Shadow.

Shag's truck was speeding away from Graykill prison, followed by a dozen cars that outside crooks had cunningly planted, earlier in the day. Those cars were filled with escaping mobbies, who had been fellow convicts along with Red and Prex.

All cars except the last one. It started off too late. A gloved hand swung through the window, thudding a gun against the driver's head. Yanking open, the door released the stunned thug. He rolled to the ground beside the car.

There was a second thug in that car, but he didn't wait. Taunted by a mocking laugh, startled by a yawning gun muzzle thrust squarely toward his face, the fellow hurled open the door on his side and made an earnest dive for safety.

Doors slammed. The car whipped forward. It was on its way, in pursuit of the few dozen who had managed to complete their break for freedom.

Away from the walls of Graykill, those new members of the criminal mob had not yet eluded the power of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVII. CURBED CRIME

DAUNTLESS in his pursuit of the fleeing caravan, The Shadow garnered results within the first few miles. Overtaking a straggling car, he cut across its path and drove it from the road before its occupants realized that he was a foeman.

The fate of that car must have been noticed from the one ahead, for shots greeted The Shadow as he drew close to his next quarry. Low behind the wheel, he ignored the hurried gunfire and fired bullets of his own, with a tire as a target.

When the tire burst, the crooks slued from the road. Roaring past, The Shadow went after another unit of the caravan.

He was playing a bold bluff, counting upon mobsters to believe that his appearance signified a general pursuit. The game worked. The cars ahead were spreading out, all desirous of individual escape. That made them separate targets for The Shadow.

His one regret was that he hadn't time to stop and deal with the cars that he crippled. He was strewing the countryside with wrecked automobiles, but the crooks themselves were able to get clear. In slowing their escape, however, The Shadow was laying them open to capture. Moreover, he was putting an added crimp in crime's game.

As yet, none of the new mob knew where they were supposed to go. They had been following Shag's speed truck, counting upon it to lead them to their destination. When Shag arrived at his goal, if he reached it, he would be due for a surprise, when he found he no longer had his followers.

But The Shadow did not intend to let Shag reach his goal. He had linked certain facts: the Cranston pardon in the warden's office; the radio broadcast regarding the threat note; the fact that fleeing cars were following a cross-country route – all those points informed The Shadow that criminals intended to stage some further crime before returning to Manhattan.

With four cars settled, The Shadow was tailing a fifth, when he saw it suddenly change course, taking a side road that denoted a reversal of the route. The car was still following the caravan, for The Shadow could see taillights up ahead. Overtaking the straggling car, he settled it and sped on to the chase, confident that the scene of coming crime was very near.

Then, rounding a bend, The Shadow suddenly cut off his lights and put the car into a coast. Cars had halted at a crossroad a short distance ahead, and the speed truck was with them. Men were on the ground; the glow of dimmed headlights showed them looking back, wondering where the other cars were.

In the darkness, The Shadow could have coasted almost to the crooks, if it hadn't been for the creaks of the old car that he drove. Braking it, he alighted and approached on foot, stopping just short of the dim group of lights.

Shag Korman was talking to the throng.

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"Those boobs have lost their way," decided Shag, "or some of the jallopies quit on 'em. Red's going to stick along with me in his buggy, while Prex goes back and rounds up the crew. Take the rest of the cars with you, Prex, and guide 'em all into town. I've told you where to head when you get there."

Prex responded with a knowing grunt.

"The place where we're going, Red," announced Shag, "is called Riverdale Crossing. We've just got time to get there and spend ten minutes before the World's Fair Limited comes through. Only, that rattler won't be going through, when we've finished our job."

THERE was only one interpretation to Shag's statement. Crooks intended to ruin the trackage with Zurm's ray. This was the supercrime that had been promised Weston. In a few moments, they would be on their way. Shag was ordering thugs into the truck; others were moving toward Red's car.

Quickly, The Shadow made his own decision. He would be in for battle anyway, as soon as Prex's outfit saw the car that he had left on the highway. It might be suicide, the course that he intended, but if it proved so it would at least use up the time limit that Shag would need when he reached the crossing.

From darkness, almost at the elbows of the throng, The Shadow delivered a taunting laugh. The moment that the challenge had left his lips, he made a quick fade toward the other side of the road, to be where crooks least expected him.

Flashlights blazed. Alone, they wouldn't have mattered. But there were crooks in the parked cars, and they turned on the head lamps. The glare that swept the crossroad was as bright as the floodlights back at Graykill.

Then guns were blazing. Crooks had spied The Shadow and were answering his opening fire. They were ducking for the cover of their cars, leaving The Shadow without shelter. One instant's hesitation would have meant The Shadow's doom, but the cloaked fighter did not falter.

He flung himself squarely upon a pair of mobbies who were diving away, close together. Slugging one before the thug could fire, The Shadow thrust the sagging foeman into the path of the other's gun. As bullets riddled the first human shield, The Shadow grabbed another.

A cross slash rendered the thing helpless. Shooting for head lamps, The Shadow was blanketing the scene. Wildly, the massed mob surged. They'd give him slugging tactics, if he preferred them. At moments, the glints of flashlights showed swinging guns glancing from The Shadow's head; but the superfighter did not wither.

His foemen thought they had him, when he reeled away in darkness amid the blasts of hastily aimed revolvers; but when flashlights sprayed along the highway, they showed no sign of The Shadow.

Shag was bellowing orders. Stunned thugs were to be loaded on the truck, along with the more seriously wounded. Prex and his crew were to find The Shadow, whatever was left of him; then go about their business with any cars that still had lights.

Shag and Red had another job to do, and they were in a hurry. Like the truck, Red's car still had lights, for those two vehicles were pointed straight ahead.

Suddenly, a wild yell sounded. A gunman had spotted The Shadow's car, with the cloaked fighter in it. As guns began to talk, the car shot forward. With crooks diving from the path, The Shadow wheeled the car through the circle of halted automobiles and sped it straight along the road to the railway crossing!

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Shag and Red went after him. For a quarter mile, they were roaring side by side; then Red's car forged ahead of Shag's truck. Gaining on The Shadow, Red thought at first that his own car must be a faster one. Then he had another answer.

"Look at the guy zigzag!" exclaimed Red, to a gunner beside him. "He's groggy! Say, maybe he's due to crack up before we catch him!"

WHERE the road curved to cross a gully, the crash came. The Shadow didn't even see the bridge. His hurtling car took away one rail, cleared the gully, and telescoped upon the opposite bank. Thrown against a door, he felt it open. He heard the car go clanking to the rocky bed below.

A medley of recollections jarred into The Shadow's impressions of the present. He remembered instinctively the measures that he had taken that night in the export office. He slid his cloak from his shoulders, his slouch hat with it. Clumsily poking his guns into the cloak fold, he let the loose bundle go bouncing down the bank. Slowly, painfully, The Shadow began an upward climb.

Red's crew were playing their flashlights on the wreckage of The Shadow's car when Shag's truck halted after crossing the half-wrecked bridge. A few mobbies clustered with him, Shag joined Red and held a short conference.

"Take a gander," suggested Shag, "and if you find the guy, croak him! That is, if you need to. Then head into town. I'll be seeing you" – Shag chuckled – "at the office in the Excalibur Building!"

Remembering that he wanted to reach the railway crossing, Shag hurried his crew back to the truck. From then on, their race was a mad one, to reach the crossing ahead of the World's Fair Limited, the crack flyer due from Chicago.

Scheduled to reach New York at night, the limited was a popular train, for it gave visitors a chance to reach the fair grounds at the peak of the evening's activities. But the passengers aboard tonight's train weren't going to see the fair at all, according to Shag's calculations.

Reaching the crossing with a few minutes to spare, Shag planted the truck across the inbound tracks and turned the ray machine along the rails. Turning a dial to its full extent, he poured out the steel-destroying ray in its full intensity.

"We're supposed to shoot it slow," snarled Shag, to a thug beside him. "That's what I would be doing, if The Shadow hadn't tried to queer things. But it won't matter, letting it ride full power just for a couple of minutes.

"It makes a lot of static and other disturbance, when you go the limit; but it gets results, too. Look at those rails! See 'em melt? Listen, you at the wheel – as soon as you see that engine swing the bend, get started!"

"We're going to be on our way when that rattler goes to pot. See this curve we're on? You know what that means. Coming through at seventy, the limited is going to wind up in the river!"

A stretch of rails had disappeared while Shag was talking. Neither he nor his pals had noticed a slight crackle overhead, nor the way that lights along the right of way were blinking. They spied a mammoth glare, as the giant searchlight of the locomotive swung from the bend that Shag had mentioned.

Suddenly, the glare was gone. But the roar of the train could still be heard. Shag jabbed the driver with his fist, brought the gaping man to action.

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"Get going, lug! Just because the engineer cut off that glim, is no reason why we want to stay here. Hop to it, before the whole works plow right through us!"

The truck jolted from the crossing, started up a slope. Staring from the high slats, Shag was watching for the Limited's arrival at the broken stretch of track. It came, but the train was not traveling at seventy. The locomotive was almost stopped when it jounced across the trackless ties and canted to an angle, at which it remained motionless.

Steel cars were clanking, but they did not overturn; in fact, the rear of the train did not leave the solid rails. The wreck had come, but not as crooks wanted it. Snarling because the great disaster had fizzed, Shag noticed the electric locomotive.

That stretch of track was electrified. By operating the ray at full intensity, Shag had created the disturbance he had talked about. The machine had done more than disintegrate the rails; it had interfered with the power line. The current cut off, the locomotive had lost its driving force at the time the searchlight failed.

Naturally, the engineer had braked the train. But he wasn't the person who forestalled the tragedy. The Shadow had averted the catastrophe, by his delaying battle at the crossroads. Whether The Shadow still lived was a question; but there wasn't a doubt regarding his most recent accomplishment.

By engaging in a fray that offered death as its reward, The Shadow had taken the sting from crime's most potent thrust.

CHAPTER XVIII. TORMEON SUSPECTS

PHILIP TORMEON was seated in his fourth-floor office, a newspaper spread upon his desk. As he studied the facsimile reproduction of the letter that Weston had received, Tormeon gave a wise smile and stroked his chin.

He reached for a radio dial, tuned in on a news broadcast. Big events were flashing over the air. There had been a prison break at Graykill; a horde of dangerous convicts were at large, among them two notorious mob leaders: Red Garey and Prex Algus.

The break had been managed, the announcer stated, through use of the dreaded cosmic ray intensifier that criminals had stolen from Simon Zurm. Then, almost in the same breath, he added a later news flash.

The World's Fair Limited had been wrecked, and reports had it that the ray machine was again responsible. Details would be forthcoming within the next ten minutes. Tormeon didn't wait for them. He switched off the dial and settled back in his chair.

Dixie Mayland appeared from the inner office.

"Did you hear all that?" purred Tormeon, smoothly. "I suppose that pest Cardona will be around tomorrow, asking me what I know about Red Garey and Prex Algus.

"I'll tell him what I said about Shag Korman. Sure, I've met the guys! But does that prove anything?" Tormeon's eyes were steady, as he spoke. "Not a thing! Everybody that knows me will say I'm on the level. You for one, Dixie."

The girl nodded, making an effort to show enthusiasm. Tormeon noticed it.

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"You've been working too late," he said. "There's no need for you to stay around the office evenings. You'd better go home and get some sleep."

"A good idea," agreed Dixie. "That's just what I'll do."

Going out to the elevator, Dixie doubled her trail and crept back toward Tormeon's office, keeping to the shelter of the statuary in the room that held the curio collection. She had an idea that Tormeon wanted her out of the place, and the hunch proved correct. She heard him pick up the telephone and call the manager of the Cafe de Paris.

"Listen, Frank," said Tormeon. "Remember that goofy architect that wanted me to build the streamlined night spot?... Yeah – Fortner, that's the fellow. He's around there, isn't he?... Good! Tell him to get that book of plans he has, and bring it over here..."

"Before he starts, tell him to keep his trap shut. He's not to talk to anybody. Tell him this: If he says anything about the Excalibur Building, he's likely to get croaked. But if he brings the plans over here, I'll hand him a couple of grand..."

"By the way, Frank," Tormeon was speaking in afterthought. "When Kay Kerry finishes her turn on the floor, tell her to run up and find out how Dixie Mayland is... No, Dixie isn't feeling good. She went home a while ago. Said she was going to bed."

SNEAKING out to the elevator, Dixie made a rapid trip to the apartment that she shared with Kay. Arriving there, she called Harry Vincent, gave him a breathless report of all that she had heard.

"You'd better get over to Tormeon's, use that duplicate key I gave you," concluded Dixie. "He suspects me, all right; that's why he's sending Kay here. She's all right, except she's too snoopy – and she's trying to make a hit with Tormeon..."

"Don't worry, I can bluff Kay. But I've got to be undressed and in bed by the time she gets here. She's due in a couple of minutes, because the club's only next door. I'll make it, though."

If Dixie hadn't been skilled in changing costumes rapidly, she wouldn't have made it. She was barely out of her clothes when she heard Kay's footsteps on the stairs outside the door.

Snatching a nightie from the closet, Dixie swept it over her head and shoulders during the dive that carried her into bed. Extinguishing the bed lamp, she dropped her head to the pillow just as Kay entered.

When Kay turned on the room light, Dixie sat up in bed and blinked. Kay was a tall blue-eyed blonde, who had a lovely way of showing sympathy, even when she didn't mean it. In fact, her real delight was making people feel that she had something on them.

In this case, she was actually disappointed. The best she could do was stall around awhile and pretend to be sorry because Dixie wasn't feeling well.

From a cab parked opposite Tormeon's, Harry Vincent kept a close watch on the place. It wasn't Moe's cab; like all the other agents, except Harry, Moe Shrevnitz was on special duty, checking one of the sensitive detectors that Burbank had installed in the zone where Shag's mob had last disappeared.

Harry's cabby was all right, though. He couldn't possibly be allied with Tormeon, and he probably supposed that Harry was watching some of the night clubs along the street. Tormeon's front door didn't attract much

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attention.

All that Harry was worrying about was the doorman. The man on the night shift was somewhat lax in duty. Though Tormeon hadn't found it out, Dixie had. In fact, Harry had a hunch that the redhead had probably told the doorman he could leave his post without Tormeon knowing it.

Dixie was putting Tormeon to the test, exactly as The Shadow had predicted that she would before introducing Harry to the girl. But tonight had been the first time that Dixie had managed to learn anything that smacked of secret business dealings on the part of Philip Tormeon.

While Harry watched the doorway, Tormeon's doorman suddenly appeared from a parked cab where he had been chatting with the driver. The reason became immediately apparent. A lean man carrying a briefcase had stopped near Tormeon's house, to look at the numbers.

Harry knew that the man must be Fortner. The doorman spoke with him, then ushered him into the ground-level door that served as entrance to the converted apartment building.

After that, the doorman stayed at his post. Harry was chafing over the situation, when someone came out. It was Tormeon; he spoke to the doorman, then walked along the street toward the Cafe de Paris. The doorman immediately returned to chat with the cab driver, indicating that Tormeon would be gone awhile.

Handing his own driver a five-dollar bill, Harry told him that he wouldn't have to wait longer. As soon as the cab had left the street, Harry slid over and sneaked into Tormeon's place. Using the silent elevator, he reached the fourth floor and worked his way through the statuary to the office.

FORTNER was looking at plans that were spread over Tormeon's desk. The architect gave a very funny bleat when Harry covered him with an automatic.

The top sheet showed the finished plans of a tall, magnificent building, that rose like a giant monument to a height of some sixty stories. Harry didn't try to count the exact number of the floors. He was busy keeping intermittent watch on Fortner.

Plain on the plan, however, was the name "Excalibur Building," but above it was the word "Proposed." The riddle began to unfold itself. The building was just another of those architectural dreams that had vanished with the boom days of the '20s. Harry took a look at the trembling Fortner, and demanded:

"Did you design this building?"

Dumbly, Fortner shook his head. He didn't want to talk; for that matter, he didn't have to. There was other lettering on the plan sheet; Harry leaned forward to read it. He noted the proposed location of the unbuilt Excalibur Building.

The address was in the zone where Shag's mob had disappeared. But there wasn't any building on the premises in question. Nothing but an open parking lot, as Harry remembered it.

With that recollection, Harry's thoughts were jolted. Fortner had lunged from his chair, was making a frantic grab for Harry's automatic. The fellow was fighting viciously, showing power despite his frailty. It was a tough struggle, for Harry didn't want to shoot the fellow.

They reeled out toward the gloomy curio room; there, Fortner suddenly went rigid, after flinging his hands upward with a gasp. Stepping back, Harry saw a revolver prodding Fortner's ribs. The gun's owner emerged

from behind an ornamental screen. As she stepped in sight, Dixie Mayland threw a smile to Harry.

They marched Fortner into the office; there, Harry noted Dixie's attire. She was wearing a fur coat, though the night was warm. Noting a pink border below the coat, Harry understood why the girl had put on the winter garment. Dixie was wearing only a nightgown and a pair of slippers.

"That snoop Kay stuck around too long," said Dixie. "When she finally found an excuse to call Tormeon, he didn't answer. She left, and so did I, without wasting time getting dressed. I figured that with Tormeon out of here, we might uncover something."

Harry pointed to the plans. He kept Fortner covered in his chair, while Dixie studied the picture of the Excalibur Building.

"This spills the works!" exclaimed the girl. "It's what they've all been after! It tells where Shag's mob is! Why, if we called headquarters —"

"I wouldn't!"

It wasn't Harry who interrupted, nor Fortner. The words came in Tormeon's silky tone. They were spoken from the doorway of the office. Dixie nearly lost her fur coat as she spun about, trying to get her revolver from the pocket where she had dropped it. Harry was prompt with his automatic, but it didn't help.

Tormeon already had him covered. In through the gloomy curio room stepped two other men, hard-faced fellows who were also armed. Obliging, Harry let his automatic fall. Tormeon smiled, as it bounced across the floor.

"That's better," he said, smoothly. Then, looking from Harry to Dixie, he asked the girl: "So you and this friend of yours were trying to put one over on me?"

"We weren't!" snapped Dixie, defiantly. "We just wanted to find out if you were on the level, like you always said you were. If it turned out that you were, our idea was to help you. If not —"

Tormeon stepped forward and patted the girl's shoulder. Turning to Harry, he held out his hand. Having no other choice, Harry accepted the grip.

"Thanks a lot, both of you," purred Tormeon, in the smooth tone that might mean anything. "Sit down, both of you, and listen while I make some telephone calls. You won't mind, of course, if the boys keep you covered. It's good training for them."

With a glitter in his eye, a suave smile on his darkish lips, Philip Tormeon picked up the telephone. Grimly, Harry and Dixie listened, knowing that their captor was going to show his hand at last!

CHAPTER XIX. THE UNDERGROUND REALM

A TRUCK pulled into a large Manhattan parking lot and backed to a corner stacked with empty oil drums. Soon afterward, a rather battered sedan arrived, and was given a space near it. Meanwhile, the rear of the truck had opened. Two men, sliding from the interior, pushed back the oil drums.

Their work was concealed by two blank, converging walls. The truck, too, was scarcely noticeable as it moved back farther. Soon, a portion of the truck floor was descending through a trapdoor that had opened in the ground.

THE CRIME RAY

The trap was made of boards covered with gravel, that matched the surface of the parking lot. Men from the sedan had joined the truck crew; after some curious machines had been lowered by the elevator, both crews descended. With them they carried others, who had lain silent in the truck.

In a lighted room below, Shag Korman grinned as he introduced Red Garey to the underground domain. He led the way to a room furnished with lounging chairs; to the men who were carrying the wounded, Shag pointed out the passage that took them to the hospital ward.

"Prex will like this when he gets here," affirmed Red, looking about the place. "What's the rest of it like?"

"Better," returned Shag. "We've had everything we needed, except guys to fill the joint. But we've got them now. We'll get back to that later. Tell me: did you find The Shadow?"

Red tossed a folded cloak upon a table. It clanked from the weight of guns, and a slouch hat rolled from the bundle.

"We found those. That's all."

"The guy must have crawled away somewhere," decided Shag. "Well, we've got other things to think about. Let's go in and see what the sawbones has to say about those boobs that let The Shadow cripple 'em."

On cots in the underground hospital ward, the two lieutenants surveyed a row of faces. It was Red who stared, quite amazed, at a pale, hawk-faced victim who appeared to be quite unconscious.

"Cripes!" gulped Red. "How did that mug get with us?"

"Who is he?" asked Shag.

"Lamont Cranston!" exclaimed Red. "The stuffed shirt that they pinned the goods on! He wasn't in the know. He must've been smart enough to beat it along with the rest of us. I guess he got slugged by The Shadow, too, back there by the crossroad."

Shag began to rub his blocky jaw. The thing had him puzzled, as the squint of his eyes indicated. While he was pondering, a thug appeared at the doorway with a message:

"The big-shot's on the wire, Shag."

"Come along, Red," said Shag. "I'll tell the chief about Cranston, along with the rest of it."

Shag's telephone conversation was a fairly long one. By the time he had nearly finished, Prex and the rest of the escaped convicts were coming in. Shag reported that fact, then concluded the call. After telling Prex where to take his men, Shag drew Red aside.

"We're going to keep Cranston here," he said. "Only to make it worthwhile, somebody from outside ought to see him. Get the idea?"

Red nodded.

"The best bird for us to pluck," continued Shag, "is a fellow named Morton Delcott. He owes us some monthly payments, for protection. We've never gotten them."

THE CRIME RAY

Another nod from Red.

"Delcott is at the Cobalt Club," concluded Shag, "with the police commissioner. Get over there and grab him when he leaves. Don't hurt the guy, because we want him to see Cranston when he gets here. Shove a blindfold on him, though, so he won't know where he's going."

"O.K. What does Delcott look like?"

Shag had a good description of Delcott, and gave it. Red set out with a pair of husky pals. While they were getting into their car, they saw the last of Prex's crowd descending through the trapdoor.

TWENTY minutes later, Morton Delcott was snatched from the doorstep of the Cobalt Club almost under the eyes of Police Commissioner Weston and Titus Longarth. Delcott had stepped ahead while they were leaving the club, and it all happened very rapidly.

Two men seemed to spring out of the sidewalk, brandishing guns that they poked against Delcott's ribs. They quick-timed him into a sedan that pulled up to the curb, its rear door swinging wide.

The car, the kidnapers and their prisoners were gone by the time Weston was on the sidewalk. Hearing the testimony of the doorman and other witnesses, the commissioner rushed back into the club and gave the alarm. He knew, though, that by that time the car must be blocks away.

While the sirens of police cars were wailing from the street, Weston called headquarters to talk to Joe Cardona, who had been due back at the office. He learned that Cardona had arrived there ten minutes before, but had gone out after receiving a telephone call.

From then on, Weston was busy dispatching patrol cars and doing everything else to find Delcott. None of his measures helped. The missing man had already reached the underground destination.

His blindfold off, Delcott was seated in a comfortable lounge chair, viewing the leering face of Shag Korman.

"A friend of yours, Delcott –"

Shag waved; a door opened. In stepped stoop-shouldered Simon Zurm. Delcott rose, to give glad greeting to the inventor. Shag grinned at Red and Prex, who were standing by.

"Let 'em talk," suggested Shag. "We'll go and fix the next surprise."

A few minutes later, Shag arrived with Cranston, who was walking very slowly. Delcott sprang up with another greeting; then introduced Cranston to Zurm.

"The commissioner tells me that you have been exonerated," began Delcott. "My congratulations, Cranston –"

Cutting himself short, Delcott began to mop his baldish brow, fearing he had said something that the listening crooks were not supposed to know. None of them, however, seemed to recognize what the word "exonerated" meant.

"Can the chatter," growled Shag. "We're going to show you through the joint. We're going to let you see what there is of the Excalibur Building, four floors underground, waiting for sixty more to pile on top of it."

THE CRIME RAY

FROM then on, the prisoners were treated to a most remarkable trip. The four basement floors of the Excalibur Building were by no means barren. Instead, they were furnished in a lavish style. At last it was known why crooks had gone in for silks, tapestries, silver plate, and even furniture.

The costliest of hangings adorned the walls they passed; the rooms were well, though thinly, furnished. Shag apologized for them, however.

"Give us time," he promised. "We'll have the whole joint the way the big-shot wants it! He says he's going to be king of the underworld – a real underworld!"

"Did you ever see anything like it?" Delcott asked Cranston. "I mean for lavishness, with lack of taste?"

"Only in one place," replied The Shadow, in his calmest tone. "The apartment where Philip Tormeon lives."

Ascending to the top floor of the four, they passed a room to which Zurm pointed and gave his first utterance: a groan. Beyond the open doorway, they saw Zurm's largest ray machine. Shag gave a chuckle.

"We took the others up to the truck," he said. "Maybe we'll be using them again – soon, when the chief gives the word. Right here" – he thrust open a door at the end of the passage – "is where this trip ends."

He conducted the three into a small but comfortably furnished room, which was evidently to be their temporary prison. As he motioned them to chairs, Shag reached to a table and picked up a black cloak that he spread with a smirk. He then displayed a slouch hat and a pair of automatics.

"These belonged to a guy that got too smart!" announced Shag. "He called himself The Shadow! One of those heaters is loaded" – Shag tapped the gun in question – "so don't get careless with it. The Shadow didn't have a chance to use it; and so you guys won't. We're too many for you – like we were for him."

Shag went out, closing the door behind him. The three men looked about.

"It looks all right to me, Cranston –"

Delcott finished with a gasp; Zurm, hearing it, added one of his own. Instead of Cranston, they saw a being cloaked in black, a slouch-hat on his head. In one fist, their transformed companion held the one loaded automatic. There was something in his pose that proved the garb was his own, not borrowed property.

"Cranston!" cried Delcott in a tone of joyous hope. "You are The Shadow!"

From hidden lips came the whispered answer:

"I am The Shadow!"

CHAPTER XX. SHATTERED CRIME

EXUBERANCE swept Delcott and Zurm, they danced like happy children, as they expressed their hope of deliverance from this underground lair.

The Shadow curbed that enthusiasm with a sibilant statement that made them halt, rigid.

"Save your sham for your friends!" he told them. "For Shag Korman, Red Garey, Prex Algus. They are your lieutenants, Delcott; they and Zurm, who deserves to be included on the list!"

THE CRIME RAY

Keeping the pair covered with the loaded gun, The Shadow picked up his empty automatic and thrust it beneath his cloak. He spoke again.

"Clever of you, Delcott," said The Shadow, "to pose as victim, and hide the fact that you ruled crime! But it meant no more than your attempt to thrust the blame on Tormeon. In a way, Tormeon was too obvious a choice. He had a past too questionable for him to risk the things that you did."

Burning eyes roved from one culprit to the other. The Shadow's laugh was sinister. He was glad to have this pair together. The link between them had been the major clue.

"You arranged your own abduction, Zurm," The Shadow told the inventor. "Burke's testimony proved it. There was only one way that Shag could have entered your locked laboratory; that was for you to unbolt the door.

"You faked that gargly choke you gave. You switched the lights off and attacked Burke yourself. Then you let the mob in, to help you get the big machine away in a hurry, at Delcott's order. He had arranged that once your device was known to exist, it would be best for you to join the criminal band."

Zurm's own expression showed the truth of The Shadow's words. The inventor gave a snarl, then subsided as The Shadow turned to Delcott.

"You actually called Zurm and tipped him off," declared the black-cloaked accuser. "That night, Shag nearly crashed the commissioner's car while you were in it, but that was merely Shag's mistake. You gave yourself away again, Delcott, when you ordered the murder of Squeak Wembry, after learning that he was a stool pigeon.

"You suspected him, but you weren't sure. You learned it from Cardona, when he talked to Weston. I heard about that conference, from the commissioner himself, before I went to prison. You had a chance to call Shag, and you did; again, you tried to blame it on Tormeon. But by that time, Delcott, you were labeled!"

Delcott's face had turned as ugly as Zurm's. Yet behind their anger, The Shadow detected a confidence which he expected. Stepping to the door, he stopped there.

"I tricked your crew tonight," taunted The Shadow, "when I crawled into the truck and lay among the injured! You suspected the truth, Delcott, when you heard from Shag. That was why you decided to stage this little drama: to learn if Cranston could be The Shadow.

"Yes, I am The Shadow! No longer do I need to crawl from danger. You obligingly gave me time to recuperate. I am going out of here – alone – through the mob of crooks who serve you!"

WHEN The Shadow yanked the door open, Delcott yelled. Outside, waiting mobsters dropped back, expecting the cloaked fighter to pull a gun trigger. Instead, The Shadow whisked out his second automatic and drove among them, slugging with both guns.

He was halfway along the passage before he flung away his automatics, to snatch up revolvers that crooks had dropped. Wrestling from the flaying mob, The Shadow opened fire as he wheeled.

Amid the roar of gunfire came the explanation why The Shadow had flung away his one loaded automatic. A half-groggy thug picked up that .45 by mistake and aimed it. The moment he tugged the trigger, the gun burst into fragments, blasting the man who used it. By Delcott's order, the automatic had been loaded with dynamite cartridges.

THE CRIME RAY

Before increasing shots could clip him, The Shadow had the goal he wanted. Wheeling into the room where the big ray machine stood, he jabbed a few shots, then disappeared from sight. It was Delcott who yelled a warning to the mobsters.

"He's starting the machine!" shouted the big-shot. "Don't get too close – he'll ruin your guns! Keep baiting him; make him use up his cartridges!"

At last, the cartridges were all accounted for. A good percentage of them had scored minor hits, but those didn't matter. Delcott and his lieutenants were used to taking care of crippled thugs. They wanted The Shadow at any cost.

Delcott gave the word: "Now!"

They surged for the ray room. Beyond the machine, The Shadow was diving for a far corner. He was trapped at last, The Shadow. With a united cry, crooks bellowed their triumph.

That was when the roof came through.

The Shadow had not directed the ray machine toward the mob. It wasn't necessary. He knew that all of them, Delcott included, would figure the device was turned upon them. So The Shadow had tilted it toward the steel girders that supported the roof, taking care, of course, to choose an angle that would protect the corner where he took final refuge.

Disintegrated by the ray, a huge mass fell, bringing cars from the parking lot with it. Delcott's fighting lieutenant, and a dozen thugs besides, were buried under a pile of powdered steel, cracked masonry and damaged automobiles.

THROUGH the enormous cavity came the shrill blast of a police whistle blown by Inspector Joe Cardona. He had received a call from Philip Tormeon and had gone to see what it was all about.

Tormeon had shown Cardona the plans of the Excalibur Building and had offered to help find the place, with two private detectives who were on his pay roll.

It happened that Tormeon knew Fortner, who in turn had known the architect who planned the unbuilt Excalibur Building for Morton Delcott. But until tonight, when he saw the letter that Weston gave the newspapers, Tormeon hadn't known that the Excalibur Building even figured in the case.

Cardona had politely decided to let the law handle the matter alone. He had thanked Tormeon, though, and had left the smiling night-club owner receiving congratulations and apologies from Harry Vincent and Dixie Mayland.

While Cardona and his raiders were staring into the dust-cluttered hole, a truck started from a corner of the parking lot. Delcott and Zurm had reached the trapdoor, four mobsters along with them.

The truck zigzagged across the parking lot, its ray machines in full action. Zurm's intensifiers were withering the guns that aimed in the truck's direction.

What could stop them with the ray in action?

They found out when they reached the parking lot's one outlet. New opponents rose to meet them; they were The Shadow's agents, who had located crime's scene through Burbank's recording ray detectors. To a man,

THE CRIME RAY

The Shadow's squad was armed with ancient culverins and antique blunderbusses.

Those firearms of a former day remained intact despite the approaching ray. The Shadow had supplied his agents with guns that were made of brass, not steel. The slugs that served as ammunition were lead, a metal which did not melt when the ray struck it. The volley that the truck received had all the power of a cannonade.

Tires, wheels and motor, even the truck's thick walls, were ripped by that mass of flying lead. As the truck crashed, thugs came tumbling to the ground, to be overwhelmed by police.

Zurm, his ray machines broken, became a howling madman who fired wildly with a revolver until they had to drop him.

But no one needed to bother with Morton Delcott. The master crook was mangled behind the truck's steering wheel. He had met the spreading fire from a blunderbuss, head on.

CLIMBING atop a twisted pile of automobiles that had dropped ten feet into the space that he had opened beneath them, The Shadow witnessed crime's finish. A strident laugh, a peal of weird mirth, echoed long from walls surrounding the parking lot.

From the spot where Morton Delcott had once planned to rear a tower of commerce. The Shadow had sounded the knell to the master crook's fallen castle of crime!

There was later evidence of The Shadow elsewhere, though no one recognized the fact.

At Graykill Prison. where order had been completely restored, the guards who watched the shattered gateway heard the throb of an airplane motor, that cut off very suddenly. Then from the darkness beyond the illuminated prison yard, they heard the motor roar again.

Big searchlights trained upon the spot, picked out an autogiro rising from the ground. The strange craft had evidently made a landing, only to follow it with an immediate take-off. The lights followed the ship with the spinning blades until it disappeared. No eyes detected the cloaked passenger who had dropped off during the brief landing.

Tomorrow, Lamont Cranston, the almost-forgotten man of Graykill Prison, would be present to receive the governor's pardon for crimes which The Shadow, tonight, had placed where they belonged!

THE END