

CRIME'S STRONGHOLD

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I. ROAD TO CRIME

GABBY TARCOT swung his rattletrap car from the paved highway and nosed it cautiously along the sand road. He knew the difficulties of Florida sand roads, particularly at dusk, and he had good reason not to use his lights. But Gabby soon found that this road didn't offer trouble.

A clearing revealed a low but widespread building of Spanish architecture. Its grilled gates and walls of coquina rock gave it the appearance of a fortress. The structure, however, was no relic of the period when Spain had ruled Florida. It wasn't more than a dozen years old, and the fancy flowerbeds around it dispelled the illusion of anything ancient.

There was a bronze plate above the grilled front door, and Gabby paused long enough to try to read it; then gave a shrug and decided that he had found the right place. The sign said:

ANTHROPOLOGICAL LABORATORY

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The word "anthropological" had something to do with monkeys; that much, Gabby could guess, because Griff Perrick had mentioned it. Gabby remembered, too, that Griff had said to come in by the side door. So Gabby wheeled his junky car around to the side of the extensive building, and alighted.

He saw a bell beside the door, with a sign above it that said "Ring," a word within the limitations of Gabby's vocabulary. So Gabby pressed the button and waited, a grin upon his sallow, peak-nosed face.

When the door opened, Gabby's smile left him. Instead, his lips voiced a one-syllable ejaculation that wouldn't have looked nice on the bell sign. He'd expected to see Griff Perrick; instead, Gabby, was confronted, by something that wasn't human.

His ring had been answered by a five-foot chimpanzee, wearing an apron. At sight of a stranger, the ape shoved its big jaw forward in a fashion that Gabby mistook for challenge.

Gabby considered himself tough, but he wasn't going to parley with a chimpanzee. At least, so Gabby thought as he started for his car; but the chimp had a different idea. Before Gabby could drive away, the creature smacked a big hand on his arm and brought him through the door in a headlong fling.

Coming up against a wall, Gabby wheeled, groping frantically for a gun, as he heard the door slam and saw the aproned ape turn formidably in his direction.

Another hand stopped Gabby. Under its grip, he heard a raspy voice he recognized, and turned to see Griff Perrick, who had just stepped from an inner door. Cold of eye, blunt of nose, and with a jaw that matched the ape's in hardness though not in size, Griff gave Gabby reassurance.

"Cissie won't hurt you," said Griff. "She's our regular doortender. She'll get to know you, like the rest of them."

"You mean the rest of the guys?" queried Gabby anxiously. "Or the rest of the monks?"

"Both," returned Griff, opening the inner door and beckoning Gabby through. "Here. Take Loco for instance."

Gabby brought up short, facing a glary-eyed orangutan that was pouting with its big lips. The room was a library, and the ape was brandishing a heavy unabridged dictionary it had taken from the reading stand. Griff hooked Gabby's arm.

"Don't duck," warned Griff. "If you do, he'll throw it sure. I'll show you how to handle him. What he wants is to see pictures."

Taking the dictionary from Loco, Griff opened it to one of the colored plates. The orangutan ended its grimace and made cooing sounds as it stalked away, rubbing its fingers across the smooth color page. Griff moved Gabby along a hallway and halted him before another door. There, Griff queried:

"You brought the layout with you?"

Speechless, Gabby could only nod, as he pulled a folded sheet of paper from his pocket and handed it to Griff.

"What about Blink Halley?" continued Griff. "You said you could fix him. Did you?"

Another nod from Gabby; then, finding his voice:

"It took half a grand."

"Not too heavy," said Griff. "Only, I don't like dealing with a guy like Blink. Maybe he isn't a double-crosser, like I used to figure, but, anyway, he's a squealer, even if he is a pal of yours."

Gabby was about to argue the point, but Griff silenced him with a short rasp. Quite solemnly, Griff knocked at the door, and when a sharp voice called to enter, Griff did, drawing Gabby with him. As they went through the doorway Griff undertoned to Gabby:

"You're meeting Professor Morton Englemere. Show some class."

SO far, Gabby Tarcot had supposed that the roving apes, Cissie and Loco, were the most curious creatures that he could expect to meet in the Anthropological Laboratory. He dropped that notion when he saw Professor Englemere.

The head of the institution was a great-shouldered man who's large; black beard added to his bulk. He was taller than Griff and Gabby, but his stooped posture brought his eyes to a level of theirs. Those eyes, dark and boring, gave Gabby the same impression of sharpness as did Englemere's voice.

Despite his large size, Englemere was almost dwarfed by the creature that hovered beside him, an ape far more formidable than the two that Gabby had previously met. The bearded professor's companion was a great gorilla, that probably spent most of its time here in his study, for the creature seemed very much at home.

"Meet Mr. Tarcot," introduced Griff. "He's the new keeper I told you about, professor. We call him Gabby for short."

A long laugh emerged from Englemere's beard.

"Our new keeper, eh?" queried Englemere. "And you call him Gabby? Good! Gabby, meet Tongo."

The professor gestured to the big gorilla and Gabby gave a nod, which brought another chuckle from Englemere, who tilted his head for another look at the new keeper.

"Your nickname implies that you are talkative," said Englemere. "Well, Gabby, you will be after you get used to our friendly pets, like Tongo. It takes a little while." The professor suddenly shifted his eyes to Griff. "Take Mr. Tarcot to his quarters; then join me in my workshop."

When Gabby reached his quarters, in the far corner of the building, he was due for a more pleasant surprise. He found himself shaking hands with a dozen other "keepers," all men he recognized, and rather envied. Tough guys, all, but they knew how to carry it in a smooth way, like Griff.

Leaving Gabby in select company, Griff made his way to another corner of the building, where he found Professor Englemere unlocking a heavily padlocked door. They stepped into the room that the professor called his workshop; there, closing the door, Englemere turned to Griff with an inquiring gaze.

Griff promptly handed him the folded paper that Gabby had brought. Englemere spread it out; studied the diagrams that it displayed. His eyes gleamed.

"You know what this means to us, Griff?"

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"I have a general idea, professor."

"Of course," nodded Englemere: "I've shown you the effects of my medium Vapor Gun."

HE turned to a corner, where a squatty machine stood on a metal stand. The device was about three feet square, fitted with many tubes that connected to glass containers filled with liquids. Most conspicuous, however, was a chromium-plated nozzle that spread like a wide funnel from the center of the machine.

"Like many biologists," mused Englemere, "I was simply a disappointed chemist. I accepted my position here hoping that I would find spare time to devote to chemical experiments."

Griff nodded. He had heard the preamble before.

"I developed my Vapor Gun," continued Englemere. "Calcium compounds, vaporized with sulfuric or nitric acids, can produce astounding results. But I have thought in greater terms, Perrick. If I could only find an explosive of a milder acid content, I could add range to my Vapor Gun. I would have a weapon unheard of in modern warfare."

Griff didn't nod. It wasn't necessary. Englemere's eyes were glittering in a faraway stare.

"Such an explosive has been created," resumed Englemere. "It was discovered here in Florida. It is being manufactured from the pulp of citrus fruits. They call it Citrite, and its formula is closely guarded. Nor can we obtain a specimen of the stuff.

"But we know where plenty is to be had. In the Citrite factory, only fifty miles from here. So we shall go there to obtain it." Turning, Englemere clapped his hand on Griff's back. "This very night, Perrick, now that you have supplied the one thing we needed" – Englemere was waving the paper – "the complete chart of the Citrite factory."

"I've done more than that, professor," assured Griff. "I've fixed things so we can get right through to the storeroom where they keep the Citrite. What's more, I've picked the proper men to take along with us."

Englemere's enthusiasm increased. He strode to the door and opened it, waving to Griff to follow.

"Excellent!" exclaimed the professor. "We shall pack the machine and start at once. Success will be ours, and this night's venture" – he gave Griff a gleaming gaze – "will be but the first of our mutual endeavors, I assure you."

Griff grinned and nodded, but he warded off the shoulder clap that Englemere was about to give him. Griff had just seen Tongo coming from the professor's study.

"Lay off the friendly wallops," advised Griff, "whenever Tongo is around. He copies whatever you do, professor, and a love pat from a gorilla is enough to break a couple of ribs."

Englemere withheld his hand. He went one way and Griff the other. Griff's destination was the room where Gabby was renewing his acquaintance with companions of the days when mobs rode high, wide and handsome. As soon as Griff entered, chatter ceased. Looking about, Gabby realized that these men were expecting something that they had long waited to hear.

"It's jake," Griff told them. "I'd like to take you all along, but it won't do. First off, the prof might worry if I let too many guys in on the first job. Besides, there's the monkeys. He'd get the jitters if he started thinking

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about them, with nobody looking after them."

The mobbies agreed with Griff's logic. He wrote their names on slips of paper and dropped them into a hat, remarking that he was leaving Gabby's out because the professor wouldn't want a new man on the venture. Then, from the dozen wads of paper, Griff picked out four and read off the names. The chosen men went along with him.

It was pitch-dark outside the Anthropological Laboratory, or the Ape Lab, as the mobbies chose to call it, when two cars set out along the sand road to the highway. The first car was a coupe, containing Professor Englemere and his lieutenant, Griff Perrick. Scientist and racketeer were faring forth upon the road to crime, and in the back of their car they carried the contrivance which the professor termed a "Vapor Gun."

The second car was a sedan, its occupants the four mobbies chosen by lot. They were gleeful at this chance to cut loose in the good old fashion, and not at all perturbed by any worry over any future consequences. From their comments, they expected to baffle the local sheriffs, the State police, and even the Feds, should the latter be called in.

A final touch came when one of the four had the temerity to mention a name that all had so far avoided. A name that criminals would ordinarily have dreaded, because it had so often spelled disaster to men of crime.

"This is one job," the hoodlum gloated, "that is going to be a cinch, even if we meet up with The Shadow!"

For a moment, there was awed silence; then from the car came the combined glee of the four. Men of crime were giving the laugh to The Shadow!

CHAPTER II. PATHS IN THE DARK

THE SHADOW was seated in the office of the Citrite factory, listening to the talk of men about him. They were the officers of the Citrite Corp., and the chief among them was Hubert Alden, president of the concern. Of course, neither Alden nor his associates guessed that their silent companion was The Shadow.

They took him for Lamont Cranston, a wealthy New Yorker and a possible purchaser of stock in the newly-formed Citrite Corp. Most of their talk was high-pressure salesmanship, for Cranston's benefit. Hubert Alden was the principal spokesman for the group. A chubby man, with a high, wrinkled forehead, Alden was very earnest about the matter.

"I tell you, Cranston," he insisted, "whoever gets in on the ground floor of this proposition will be in on something big. This corporation is going to expand to ten times its present size!"

There were nods from the "yes men" who surrounded Alden. The nods didn't seem to stir Cranston greatly. He was a very calm person; his face, hawklike in profile, was practically immobile.

"The proposition would sound excellent," expressed Cranston, "if there were not so many explosives already on the market."

"But Citrite draws upon a surplus product," argued Alden. "We use the pulp of oranges and grapefruit in its manufacture. More of them are grown than are needed."

"Except in off years."

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"Those do not matter to us, Mr. Cranston. If a freeze spoils the fruit, we can use it just the same. In fact, a bad year for other consumers will be a good year for us. The more citrus fruit rejected, the more we can buy that much cheaper."

The shrewd point seemed to impress Cranston, so Alden quickly followed it with another.

"Of course, there are other compounds used with Citrite," explained Alden. "The fruit pulp is simply the base. The product itself depends upon a secret formula –"

"And how well do you guard that formula?"

Alden had an answer to Cranston's question. He brought out a large-scale chart that showed the whole plan of the factory. Though he didn't realize it, Alden was giving Cranston the very information that the visitor wanted. Cranston, it so happened, had a secret formula of his own.

He was The Shadow. His secret formula was his method of battling crime. He liked to get in on the ground floor of propositions where crime threatened; and meet it when it came. This case was no exception.

The Shadow didn't have to be convinced that Citrite had merit as a new form of explosive; he had already looked into the matter. He was here, as Cranston, simply to make sure that proper methods had been taken to guard a newly-invented substance that he considered far more valuable than the public, or even the government, yet realized.

Sponsors of Citrite, like Alden and the others present, did not recognize the vast trust that was theirs. They thought of Citrite as a money-maker. They said they were protecting it; but were they?

Such was the question that concerned The Shadow.

THE ground plan showed that the Citrite factory was well fenced, and consisted of several buildings. Only one building was vitally important: the one wherein The Shadow was at present. It held the offices where this conference was under way. They were on the second floor, and directly beneath was the storeroom which contained the manufactured Citrite.

Alden realized that it wasn't a comforting thought to be seated over a few tons of explosive that packed more wallop than dynamite, but he hastened to assure Cranston that danger was almost nil. Citrite would not explode in an atmosphere of low temperature, and the storage room was specially air-conditioned to keep it in a state of safety. That point settled, Alden went into other details.

He traced a pencil about the ground plan, indicating how each stage of Citrite manufacture was carefully handled by trusted men, in separately located buildings. By the time the stuff had gone through its entire process, no one individual would hold the key to the whole.

Very important data for an investor like Cranston, who would naturally want to make sure that no other manufacturer would be able to steal the secret and produce a rival explosive. But The Shadow was noting other features on the chart.

His concern was the main building. He observed that direct entrance to the storage room could be gained only through a formidable steel gate; thence through a passage to a strong steel door, that protected the storage room proper. He had seen the gate in question, when he came here with Alden.

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There was another way to reach the storage room. That was through the office where The Shadow was at present. This route was also protected by a steel door downstairs, and the office windows were barred. Across the office, The Shadow could see a connecting door to the inner stairway leading down to the storage room. Looking at it, The Shadow saw that it had no lock. Allen observed his visitor's glance.

"That door bars from the other side," said Allen. "The storage room is one hundred percent secure. It is just about time" – Allen was glancing at his watch – "for our chief watchman to report. I should like you to meet him, Mr. Cranston."

Allen had hardly folded the plan sheet before the chief watchman appeared. His name was Dorset, and he was stocky, broad-shouldered, with sharp eyes and bulldog chin. He had just made the rounds of the grounds, posting the six watchmen who formed the night squad.

His gruff, blunt tone indicated that Dorset knew his business, and while he spoke he kept one hand resting on a revolver he carried in a holster.

Having just come in from the darkness, Dorset was bothered by the strong lights in the office. He squinted a few times and rubbed his eyes while he talked to Allen, but the effect soon wore off.

There certainly was nothing wrong with Dorset's vision, as he proved when he led the way downstairs. The chief watchman had the eyes of a cat, for he picked out the dark stairs and warned the others when they reached the bottom.

Outside, while Dorset was locking the steel door to the office stairway, Allen and the rest shook hands with Cranston. They walked to their cars and Cranston entered a coupe of his own, for he was driving to Palm Beach, a trip of considerable distance.

Promising to communicate with Allen later, Cranston let the other cars start first, to guide him through the exit from the grounds.

With a last look back from his coupe, The Shadow saw Dorset starting on his rounds. Then, as the cars ahead began to pick up speed along the highway, The Shadow piloted his own toward a side road that cut off through the pine woods.

He was Cranston no longer; a whispered laugh told that a transformation was under way. The tone was the laugh of The Shadow.

To complete the change, The Shadow picked a flat space at the side of the road and eased the coupe in among the pine trees, extinguishing the lights as he did. In the darkness of the car, he drew garments from behind the seat; there was a slight swish as he slid a black cloak over his shoulders. Settling a slouch hat on his head, The Shadow emerged.

No longer could he have been mistaken for Cranston; indeed, he could have been mistaken for no one.

IN the shrouding night, The Shadow's figure was both silent and invisible. His course through the darkness was untraceable, as he strode back toward the Citrite factory to begin a first-hand inspection of the premises.

However capable and trustworthy Dorset might be, one thing was certain: Alden had imposed too great a task upon his chief watchman.

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This business of Dorset posting the other watchmen, and then making his rounds alone, did not make allowance for any weak links in the chain. One treacherous watchman would be able to do a lot of mischief between the times that Dorset checked on him. It was therefore The Shadow's intent to make the rounds himself, unseen by the posted men, and do a little checking on his own.

As yet, The Shadow suspected no definite thrust against the Citrite factory, which had been functioning for nearly a week without any signs of trouble. It was simply a freak of chance that this particular night should be the one when a crooked watchman named Blink Halley should have given the word to Gabby Tarcot, who, in turn, had carried it to Griff Perrick.

Ill luck, too, that Griff had found Professor Englemere eager to start on his first venture without delay, for though Griff himself was an expert at crime, he couldn't make the first move on his own. Griff was definitely taking orders from Englemere; and had merely paved the way for the professor's long-planned raid upon the Citrite factory.

Another factor entered. It happened that the marauders, thanks to their early start, had arrived while The Shadow was still in conference with Alden. Having seen the parked cars, they were waiting in concealment when the procession drove out.

Naturally, The Shadow hadn't been able to turn into the woods too soon; he was nearly a quarter of a mile from the factory when he left the road. But Englemere and the men with him were beginning their advance the moment the last taillight twinkled from sight. Unwittingly, they were putting to use the very minutes that The Shadow required to make his return!

Stealthily, in clustered fashion, the tribe crept toward the main building. Professor Englemere formed the central figure in the group of "keepers" that he had brought from his endowed home for apes. Only Griff Perrick was able to restrain the ardent professor, with low-voiced warnings. Griff was piloting the throng, for he knew the set-up that awaited.

They reached the heavy gate that afforded entry to the storeroom. Griff tried it, found it unlocked, and pressed the others through, voicing his satisfaction in an undertone.

"Blink did a quick job," Griff complimented. "I've got to hand that to him. I kind of expected he wouldn't have time to open the gate so soon."

Holding the others back, Griff turned to clamp the gate from the inside, remarking that it wouldn't do for some watchman to find it open while making his rounds. Then, pressing ahead, Griff found the inner passage and entered it, with Englemere.

The others had some difficulty squeezing through, and the reason for their clustering was explained. They were huddled together because they were lugging Englemere's curious Vapor Gun, mounted on its stand.

Hardly had the last crooks moved into the passage before The Shadow glided into the grounds. The first place he made for was the gate that Englemere's band had found unlocked. Trying the gate, The Shadow discovered it to be secure, as he expected. The clamp on the inside gave it the effect of being locked.

Skirting the building, The Shadow reached the door that led up to the office. It was tightly locked, as Dorset had left it. Looking upward, The Shadow could see the barred windows of the office, which could be reached by first scaling the door. Those bars had an inviting look, for they were crosswise and formed a ladder, offering access to the roof above.

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Deftly, The Shadow moved upward, the slight wavy motion of his cloak giving the effect of oily smoke rising in a slow cloud. So vague, that shape, against the gloom of the doorway and the window above, that the living smoke seemed to dispel itself as it reached the roof edge. There, The Shadow had flattened, and performed an inward roll that placed him upon the roof itself, away from any chance of observation.

There was a soft laugh from The Shadow's hidden lips as he saw exactly what he wanted: a trapdoor in the roof. It was fastened, of course, from the inside, as The Shadow learned when he tried it; but its slight yield was proof that he could pry it loose within a dozen minutes.

If nothing else made it profitable, a trip down into the office would at least serve as a lesson for Alden and the others, when they arrived in the morning to find that the place had been entered. So The Shadow began his work in smooth but silent style.

It seemed a race against time, nothing more. Actually, it was a race against crime. For, while The Shadow was forcing his entry from the roof, men of evil were at work below under the guidance of Professor Englemere.

They, too, were seeking a goal, with a purpose that only The Shadow could forestall, should he have the good fortune to encounter them!

CHAPTER III. DEADLY MEASURES

THROUGH the passage leading in from the gate, Professor Englemere and his companions had come squarely upon the steel door that barred the way to the storage room where the precious Citrite was kept.

Again, it was Griff Perrick who pressed forward to try the door, as he had done with the gate. This time, Griff turned with a disappointed shrug, to face the flashlights his men were cautiously using. With his left hand, Griff peeled away a handkerchief that he had wrapped about his right in the fashion of a bandage.

"Blink didn't get this far," declared Griff. "Maybe he was afraid he'd be spotted. Anyway, the door is locked, solid."

Professor Englemere stretched forward to try the door for himself. Savagely, Griff thrust Englemere's hand away before it could reach the knob. Quickly, and in apologetic tone, Griff explained his action.

"We can't afford to leave fingerprints, prof," said Griff. "That's why I used the handkerchief. But don't waste time wrapping your own hand for a try. The door is locked; and the only way to settle it is with that Vapor Gun of yours."

Englemere's eyes gleamed. He was pleased with Griff's foresight regarding fingerprints; even more joyful over his opportunity to put his brain child to a practical use. He had the men set up the device, with its wide nozzle directed against the steel door, at a distance of about six feet.

The thugs exchanged glances that ended when Griff scowled. They thought that the professor was crazy, but were willing to humor him, since Griff insisted. Had any of them guessed that while they were trying silly experiments with a steel door The Shadow was using very effective measures at entry from an opposite direction, Griff would have had a stampede on his hands.

They let grins play on their toughened faces as Englemere pressed a small lever beside the machine. When a cloud of white smoke issued forth and spread itself against the door, their grins increased.

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Then, as suddenly, the smirks vanished.

Something was happening amid that cloud of smoke, so incredible that it passed belief. Silent fireworks were under way, producing darting sparks that acted uncannily.

Professor Englemere was giving that steel door the heat, the works, and everything else in the catalogue!

Sparks were biting, flames gnawing, and the smoke itself was working through fissures that its silent allies produced. Literally, the door was melting under the power of the acid-bearing calcium compound.

Griff had told his followers something of this process, explaining simply by likening it to the formation of powerful acetylene gas from the admixture of water with calcium carbide. But that was child's play, compared to this.

Englemere's vaporizing system was devouring the steel with an acid bath, his calcium compound drilling, hammering, in soundless fashion, to give the acids an amazing punch. Like ghostly lights, green flames had taken over the scene, enveloping the entire door front. There was no more trace of smoke, except as a vague gray beyond, for it was all filtering through the door.

As Englemere drew the lever back the flames subsided, and the observers, all but Griff, stared in profound amazement.

The steel door was still there, but it had changed to a filigree. It hadn't any more substance than a wire screen. Holding one hand up in warning, Englemere held the crew in abeyance. He was waiting for the acids to evaporate, which required about two minutes.

It was a weird scene, that of the bearded professor standing like some alchemist of old before a throng of superstitious followers. But Englemere had outdone the alchemists. His power stood proven.

Englemere's signal that the way was clear came when he thrust his own bulk forward and drove the filigreed steel apart like tinsel. Others, following, saw the professor stumble and thought that he had tripped over the lower edge of the door, which was still a rim of solid steel. They realized their mistake as they paused.

A man's body lay beyond the door, and it had tripped Englemere when he shoved his way through.

RISING, the professor was staring at the dead man, when Griff came through to join him. In a low, hollow tone, Englemere inquired:

"How did he come here?"

Griff told the others to turn the body over. They did, and shrank back at the sight. Though hardened to death, and accustomed to delivering it, Griff's murderous companions did not like the look of what they saw.

The body on the floor was horribly disfigured. Its chest had sagged, its throat was gone, bringing a square-chinned face down to pitiful hands that were raised to clutch it. The flesh of those hands was eaten, and from one set of withered fingers hung a mass of misshapen metal that had once been a ring of keys.

Griff stared at the distorted face and shook his head, signifying that he didn't recognize it. Then an idea struck him.

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"No wonder the gate was open so soon!" exclaimed Griff. "This fellow must have come in here to inspect the storeroom. He left the gate unlocked, but he was fool enough to lock this door – or unlucky enough. We thought Blink opened the way for us. Instead, it was this guy."

There was a point to Griff's argument that he didn't know about. The man on the floor had good reason to be in the storage room. He was Dorset, the head watchman, whose business it was to inspect every part of the factory, inside and out.

Professor Englemere nodded solemnly.

"You are right," he told Griff. "Even to approach the door while the Vapor Gun was at work would mean death, once the compound began to penetrate." He gave his head a shake. "It is unfortunate that this man should have died."

The thugs made allowance for Englemere's qualms. They had been worried over such matters once. Crime was one thing; standing for a murder rap another. It wasn't until after a second kill that a murderer felt easy about it. But they could see that Griff looked pleased, and they knew why.

When Griff had told them that Englemere was going in for crime, he had expressed the worry that the professor might balk. The stronger the job, the better, Griff had put it, and this job was strong enough. A dead man, as a result, put Englemere in the same outlawed class as the men Griff had hired to act as keepers in the ape lab, with crime as the real issue.

Two of the thugs started to speak, to compliment the professor on his work, now that it was all over. They interrupted each other, and before they could resume Griff silenced them with a gesture. He turned to the professor.

"Just an accident," soothed Griff. "It couldn't be helped, prof. Charge it off to science, like the rest of your tests. You've wondered, all along, about the effect of the Vapor Gun on humans, particularly with steel protecting them."

Slowly, Englemere nodded.

"And besides," persisted Griff, "you had to get that Citrite. It's right here, professor, in this storage room."

Englemere lifted his head, his eyes glittering avidly. His eyes met those of his companions, and disturbed them, hardened as they were. To a man, they felt a chill come over them and thought that Englemere's eyes accounted for it.

Then, when Griff's teeth chattered and he clapped his arms across his chest, they realized that the chill was part of the room itself.

Looking about, Englemere saw the boxes that contained the precious Citrite. He gave a laugh as he felt the coldness of the room. He recognized what it meant: that this new explosive should be kept in a cool atmosphere.

He sprang to the nearest box, opened it and began to pick out short sticks of the explosive, which had the color of burnt sienna.

The others wanted to help him, but Englemere waved them back, muttering that he, alone, knew the quantity of Citrite that he would require. In his new interest, Englemere had evidently forgotten Dorset's fate. He was

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thinking only of his valuable find, the explosive that would step up his Vapor Gun to immense proportions.

Observing the professor's intensity, Griff turned to the others."

"He's forgotten what else we came for," said Griff, "so we'll handle it ourselves. Over this way."

Griff led them to a flight of stone stairs in a corner of the storage room.

"Up there," he said. "You'll find a door at the top. The bar is on this side. Through it, you'll reach the office. Take a look at the safe. If it's easy, smash it and take what's in it. If it's too tough, send word down to me and I'll fix it. This job ought to net us ten grand, anyway."

THREE men went to the top of the stairs, leaving one at the bottom. They unbolted the door and two went through, one staying to relay word down, if necessary. With their flashlights, the pair found the safe. One turned to the other and said:

"This box is tough. Tell Griff."

The other man turned. A crackling sound alarmed him, and brought his companion up beside him. The first man was calling to the door: "Tell Griff –" when he and the thug beside him located the crackle. It came from a corner of the room, up by the ceiling. A trapdoor had broken loose from its moorings.

Together, the pair dived for the door that led below. Outside that door, their pal was calling to the man at the bottom of the stairway: "Tell Griff the box is tough!" The call, though low, could be heard back in the office. It came as a warning to the figure that was dropping through from the roof.

A lucky warning; otherwise, the men diving for the stairway might have been the first to get their guns into play. But before they could make out the black-cloaked avenger who had dropped in from nowhere, he heard the echoing shout and was ready.

Ready with a laugh that proclaimed his identity. This time, three astonished crooks caught a chill that wasn't part of the normal atmosphere. They knew that sinister mirth, with its peal of challenge, its promise of doom to all of evil.

The laugh of The Shadow!

Bounding as he struck the floor, The Shadow went sideward. A gun tongued from his fist as if actuated by a spring. The opening shot zipped between the startled men at the stairway door; their own guns barked wide as they tugged triggers.

Blackness, nothing more, and somewhere amid it, The Shadow. It was too much for them. Headlong, they took to the stairs as another bullet smashed into the wall behind them. They were in mad flight, routed by The Shadow.

Had they gone singly, anyone of the trio would have tumbled down the stairs. Huddled together, each was fortunate enough to blunder against the other and so break his fall. Yet, all the way down, they could hear the shivery sound that denoted a living pursuer: that weird laugh of The Shadow!

It didn't occur to them that the cloaked avenger was not in immediate pursuit. Actually, The Shadow saw a better plan than putting himself in a trap. He knew that his foemen would rally, once they arrived below. If he didn't follow, they would flee by their only outlet: the way that they had come.

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By that time through the trapdoor, The Shadow could reach the roof, drop from its edge, and be ready to meet them when they made their exit.

With that plan in mind, The Shadow grabbed a desk and hauled it beneath the trapdoor. He was on the desk, reaching both hands upward, when he heard a sudden pound of footsteps from the inner stairway. Griff Perrick was at hand.

Griff had only half believed the wild yell about The Shadow. He believed in it full when he struck the threshold.

Looking to the corner where the big office safe stood, Griff saw the intervening desk and the cloaked form upon it. The light was very vague, but there was just enough trickle from the trapdoor for Griff to catch the outline that he knew must be The Shadow's.

The shape of blackness dropped suddenly, one hand sweeping from its cloak, bringing a gun. Griff didn't wait to exchange shots with The Shadow. Instead, he gave his hand a fling that sent an object scaling in the general direction of the desk. Over his shoulder, as he dived for the stairs ahead of The Shadow's first gun blast, Griff saw the cloaked figure fade.

Too bad for The Shadow that he had fired while on the move, to test Griff out. The Shadow had missed, and Griff had used something better than a gun. A drop to cover couldn't help The Shadow. The thing that Griff had tossed was a stick of Citrite.

The Shadow was gone from the desk when the missile struck, but the desk wasn't all that suffered. In this warmer atmosphere, the Citrite exploded with its advertised effect. It blew all the wooden furniture throughout the room to bits, and even brought down chunks of the ceiling.

Catching himself on the stairway, Griff heard the shattering echoes that told of utter chaos in the office. As he reached the bottom step, Griff looked upward and flung a rasping epitaph:

"Good-by, Shadow."

CHAPTER IV. THE SHORT CUT

IT might have been: "Good-by, Shadow!"

Certainly, Griff's choice of a weapon had proven phenomenal, more so than Griff had expected. But The Shadow, in competition with the Citrite, had chosen a refuge that also exceeded expectations.

Even in a battle of mere bullets, The Shadow preferred steel to woodwork as a shield. Hence his drop from the desk was toward the big safe in the corner. He'd seen the safe earlier and knew that one corner extended out from a space in the wall, so The Shadow had naturally chosen the niche behind the safe.

When the room rocked, the only furnishing that didn't go to pieces was the safe. It stood the concussion and diverted the battering deluge, of broken chairs, desks, typewriters, and shattered filing cabinets. When everything finally settled, The Shadow came from his refuge, the only secure spot in the room, to pick his way through the scattered debris.

No need, now, for exit by the roof. The best plan was to stalk the thugs below, for they believed him dead. So The Shadow found his way to the stairs and began the descent. He was halfway down when he felt the

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aftereffects of the explosion.

The stairs began to rock under an imaginary blast. His head swimming, The Shadow realized that the explosion had jolted him more than he supposed. He caught a new grip on himself, escaping a severe fall, but he couldn't avoid stumbles as he neared the bottom of the stairs.

There, The Shadow saw Griff Perrick against the glow of flashlights. Professor Englemere was beyond, out of sight, along with the men who carried the Vapor Gun. They and their burden were indicated only by flashlights, giving The Shadow the mere impression that Griff had companions.

As for Griff himself, his face didn't show. Hearing the Shadow's sudden arrival, Griff focused a flashlight toward the stair bottom.

Swinging into the shelter of the stairway, The Shadow fired at Griff. His shots missed, for his head was in a whirl. Griff didn't waste time with gunfire, but tossed another stick of Citrite from a supply that he had grabbed. It proved as useless as The Shadow's shots. Hitting the stone floor, the explosive bounded harmlessly in the chilled atmosphere of the storage room.

Thinking that The Shadow was merely baiting him with bullets, Griff turned tail and ran madly after the others. He reached them at the outer door of the passage, and flung his weight upon them as they were trying to get the Vapor Gun through. Everyone landed in a heap except Englemere, who caught his footing, as did Griff.

Crime would have ended then and there, if those two hadn't luckily avoided a fall. Both of them were loaded up with Citrite, and they were outdoors in the warm air of a Florida night. Griff didn't waste time in apologies. He started Englemere and the others toward the cars, and followed after them.

Lights were appearing everywhere. Watchmen had heard the gunfire and the explosion. A searchlight threw its beam, and Griff hurled a stick of Citrite at it. The searchlight vanished, along with several cubic yards of concrete.

Watchmen were coming up and Griff turned to throw some Citrite in their direction. A laugh halted him; it came from the storage-room exit. The Shadow deserved the Citrite more than did the watchmen, so Griff tossed it his way.

Hitting a doorway in a hurry was more difficult than landing a missile in the open. The explosive missed its mark by a dozen feet. Out of the echoes that followed the blast, Griff heard The Shadow's laugh again. By then, Griff was fully on the run. He threw another stick behind him and knocked the big steel gates from their hinges. Then Griff made a mad run for the coupe.

Mobbies had loaded the Vapor Gun in back. Grabbing the wheel, Griff found Englemere beside him. The coupe roared away, and the sedan followed, carrying its four-man quota. Passing the driveway, Griff flung a last bar of Citrite that produced a yawning hole in the paving. He figured that the gap would block pursuing cars, and it did.

Watchmen were scattered everywhere, and when they got to their cars, they encountered the crater that Griff had put in their path. All they could do was get to telephones and send out a general alarm to all high sheriffs in the several adjacent counties.

If Griff had hoped to eliminate The Shadow as a pursuer, he was hoping too much.

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Taking a short cut to the fence, The Shadow vaulted it. Though too late to fire after the departing cars, he still had his own, parked in the woods just off the side road. That side road, it so happened, was a short cut, one that might enable The Shadow to reach the very highway into which the fugitives would eventually turn.

Reaching his coupe, The Shadow set out to intercept the unknown crew. It meant a trip of fifteen miles, compared with twenty that the other cars would have to take. The fugitives had ignored the short cut because it was a "one-way" highway, one of those roads that consisted of a single strip of paving.

There were turnouts, of course, at frequent intervals, but they meant delays if cars happened to be coming the other way. Besides, they were sandy and a car might get stuck in them.

Certainly a route for fugitives to avoid, but one that suited a pursuer who had nothing to lose. The Shadow was taking that road full speed. Under the rhythmic wheels of his purring car, the grayish paving poured like a stream reaching the brink of a waterfall.

A flat road, with long, easy curves among the patchy pine woods, and this car could gobble up the mileage. The Shadow figured that he could make the fifteen miles in a dozen minutes, without straining his car.

Provided, of course, that he met only a few cars along the way; so far, he had encountered none. These roads weren't traveled much at night, and The Shadow's pace seemed sure. In fact, he would soon have an alternate route, if he needed it.

With ten miles to his credit, The Shadow neared an intersection where another one-way road cut into this one. Both led to the main highway that he sought, like the arms of a narrowed Y.

The Shadow took the bend just before the fork. He was doing seventy-five as he cleared the curve, and his foot sped suddenly from accelerator to brake.

Ahead, a car was jamming to a sudden stop; it was coming from the opposite direction and it was halting directly at the junction. Its driver had spotted the gleam of The Shadow's lights coming through the trees.

Only the stability of The Shadow's car prevented a smash. He brought his machine to a rapid stop, right in the glare of the other car's headlights: As he did, The Shadow saw huddly figures springing from the car ahead.

Instead of whipping out an automatic and giving them a defiant laugh, The Shadow flipped his hat back from his head and let his cloak drop from his shoulders. He was Cranston, again, when guns bristled through the open windows of his halted car.

Nothing to fear from those weapons. The Shadow had seen them in the hands of the men when they sprang from their car. The guns weren't pistols, the sort of weapons that mobsters would use. These were shotguns, clasped by deputy sheriffs.

The alarm from the Citrite factory had reached a hamlet near this obscure crossroad. Seeking to head off fleeing criminals, the hastily formed posse had stopped The Shadow instead.

Stepping out into the light from the other car, The Shadow introduced himself as Lamont Cranston, and expressed surprise at news of crime at the Citrite factory. He himself had left the place with Alden and the other executives, he said, and all had been quiet then.

The listeners did not doubt the calm Mr. Cranston; nevertheless, they wouldn't let him proceed along his way. Orders were to stop all cars and bring them back to the factory.

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It was a real dilemma for The Shadow.

He had two choices: one, to make a break for it and lead these deputies along a chase that might head off the crooks. The other, to return to the factory with them and lose all chance of intercepting the criminals.

Usually, The Shadow preferred that a chase should go on, but this time he decided otherwise. He had declared himself as Cranston, for one thing; for another, there was a chance that the crooks might not take the particular highway he expected.

WITH a deputy beside him, the calm-mannered Mr. Cranston paced the other car back to the Citrite factory, driving rather moderately, to give the impression that he had not been in much of a hurry when the deputies flagged him. On the way, he asked his companion about the trouble at the factory, but the shotgun bearer could supply few details.

The grounds were ablaze with many lights when they arrived there. Several cars had arrived, and more were pulling up.

Among the arrivals was Hubert Alden, and he was quite indignant when he learned that Lamont Cranston had been stopped by the deputies. Apologies were in order, but Cranston sided with the men who had stopped him, saying that they had performed their proper duty.

Garbled were the accounts of what had happened at the factory. Dorset, the chief watchman, had died while seeking to protect the storage room; that much was certain. But the other watchmen were very hazy in their accounts. They talked of gunfire; of a big blast that wrecked the office; finally, they told how unknown men had fled, tossing Citrite as a deterrent toward any followers.

Their reports did not include any mention of The Shadow. They hadn't seen him in the darkness. Yet they had the impression that someone must have been in pursuit of the criminals, considering the way the explosive had been thrown.

All the testifying watchmen came under The Shadow's scrutiny. They were a rather stolid lot, but their stories tallied. If the group contained a traitor, it was impossible to pick him out, for he was telling the same story as the rest.

Alden summed the situation when he turned to Cranston. Of one thing, Aden was convinced.

"Those criminals won't go far," he declared. "They raided the factory, grabbed some Citrite, and tried to get at the safe, but failed. But they're boxed in completely! Word has gone ahead of them, and they will never get clear of the Florida peninsula. Every main road will be blocked, and if they don't show up, we'll have them hunted down. But they'll show up within the next few hours. You'll see."

The Shadow didn't see. He had a firm idea that he wouldn't. During the passage of those next two hours, reports came in from many points, but all were negative. Sheriffs of every county were on the move, co-operating with the State police, but they hadn't yet traced the missing criminals.

Yet Alden still felt confident. He was falling back on his argument that crooks couldn't get out of the State. A convincing argument, considering that there were only a few main roads leading to the north. Still, The Shadow did not share Alden's surety.

The Shadow was strolling about in Cranston's leisurely fashion, when a soft, low laugh came from his immobile lips. A grim tone, that mirth, for it expressed The Shadow's own belief.

He was convinced of one thing, only: that he had, tonight, met up with a strange event, one that promised crimes to come, with a long, long hunt before the perpetrators could be brought to account.

CHAPTER V. CRIMINALS CONFER

GLIDING his coupe slowly along a winding course, Griff Perrick was listening to the philosophical remarks of Professor Englemere and giving grunts of agreement.

"Road making in Florida is a simple art," declared the professor. "You cut a path through the palmettos, drive a car through, and, Eureka! – you have a road!"

"A good road, too," accorded Griff, "if people don't try to use it. When they do, they make ruts and the road is no good."

"Excellently put," approved the professor. "Which reminds me. I must have our own road paved."

Griff gave Englemere a worried glance.

"What's the matter with it now, prof? We keep it dragged, don't we?"

"It's a matter of appropriations," said Englemere seriously. "You see, I asked for funds to provide the laboratory with a proper roadway. I received the money, and spent it on –"

"On your machine," interrupted Griff. "The same old story, isn't it, prof?"

"I guess so."

Griff laughed, sympathetically. He was about to speak, when he observed a slight rise in the rutted road. It meant that they were coming to a main highway. Griff extinguished the headlights, and the car behind them did the same.

After listening a few moments, Griff eased his car ahead, picked the highway by its feel and crossed it. The ruts of a sand road caught his wheels again, and he turned on the lights. Dim headlights appeared from the following car, and Griff took another look at Englemere, who was visible by the glow through the rear window.

"Don't worry about the driveway, prof," said Griff. "We'll pave it for you. We'll need some cash for the material, that's all."

The professor stroked his beard.

"Cash is low," he admitted. "Very low."

"The boys could raise some for you."

A headshake from Englemere.

"They have done enough," he asserted. "A loyal group of keepers, working for half pay; I could ask no more. No, I wouldn't think of it, any more than I would think of selling one of my anthropoid friends."

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Swinging the car along the shore of a little lake, Griff took another look at Englemere.

"I know how you feel, prof," he said. "I agree with you. I wouldn't sell one of those apes for a million dollars! We think the world of them, like you do."

Englemere gave a grateful sigh.

"Still," added Griff reflectively, "you could borrow on them –"

Sharp eyes burned Griff's way. To Englemere, borrowing was the next thing to selling; at least, until Griff explained the rest of it.

"I mean borrow from the boys," said Griff, "with the monks as security. Take Cissie and Loco, for instance. They're as good as ours, now, prof. Tongo is your own particular pet. You can't deny it."

Englemere gave a reluctant grunt of admission. To Griff, it meant an acceptance of the offer.

"Just leave it all to me," Griff told Englemere. "I'll talk with the bunch after we get back to the lab. Maybe there will be a few details to settle. I'll tell you later."

Another paved highway marked the final stretch. Here, Griff had to use his lights, but he employed speed with them. A run of a few miles, without an encounter, brought the cars to the sand road leading into the Ape Lab.

Griff rang the bell of the side door and Cissie admitted Englemere, who moved carefully ahead, carrying his precious burden of Citrite. Griff and the four mobbies followed, bringing the Vapor Gun.

REACHING their quarters, the participants in crime were immediately bombarded by questions from their friends. Griff silenced the discussion and asked if all the necessary work had been completed around the laboratory. He reminded his hearers that Englemere was very fussy over that matter.

They simply grinned and nodded. It was Gabby Tarcot who spoke.

"I'll say the work is done!" exclaimed Gabby. "You should have seen the way those monkeys went at it with brooms and mops. Say, Griff, did you train them?"

"Give the credit to Englemere," returned Griff. "He started it, but we did the rest. You see, Gabby, we're working on a half-pay basis. We couldn't afford it if the monkeys didn't do a lot of the heavy work. It's one thing, though, that we don't mention to the prof. He wouldn't want the apes to strain themselves."

There were chuckles from the other keepers. Having put them in a pleasant mood, Griff was ready to tell the worst.

"We picked up the Citrite," he announced, "but we didn't get the cash, worse luck! You see" – Griff was very calm – "The Shadow was around."

Consternation showed on thuggish faces. Griff turned to the men who had come back with him.

"I kept The Shadow off us," boasted Griff. "Didn't I?"

The four agreed that Griff had done it. Only Gabby showed alarm. Hoarsely he put a question:

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"What about Blink Halley? Why didn't you bring him back with you?"

"Blink is sitting pretty," Griff assured him. "We got into the place without him helping us. He was with the bunch that tried to stop us. I know, because I saw him."

Gabby settled back with a pleased grin. He had won his point regarding Blink. Obviously, Blink was no double-crosser, nor even a squealer; otherwise, Griff and his crew would not have returned.

"You were right about Blink," added Griff. "Anyway, he doesn't know where this hide-out is, so we won't have to worry. Now, let's get down to other facts. About the professor –"

Pausing, Griff waited until all were listening, which did not take long. Intently, the crooks were anxious to know more about Englemere's reactions.

"It kind of jarred the prof when we croaked that one guy," admitted Griff, "but he's gotten over it. He's willing to borrow dough from us, with the apes as security. If he'll go that far, the rest is easy. Leave it to me."

He beckoned a few of his men along and led them to Englemere's study, where he told them to wait outside. Griff was in conference with the professor for nearly a quarter of an hour. When he rejoined his companions, they saw satisfaction registered on his blunt features.

"It's a deal," Griff told them. "The prof is putting the Citrite on ice, and tomorrow he'll start building a Vapor Gun of the supertype. One that will work close up in a jiffy, and blast things a half mile away, if it has to."

One mobbie put a question:

"He's forgotten about the guy we croaked?"

"Never even mentioned him," replied Griff. "But here's the important part. As soon as the prof gets the new Vapor Gun under way, the old one is ours."

"You mean to keep?"

"To look after, like we do the apes," returned Griff, "and you know what that means. The prof is politely telling us to get dough, because he needs it. We'll get it and give him his cut, without bothering over foolish questions.

"I'm figuring we ought to do the next few jobs on our own. The prof will be busy with his experiments, and it isn't good to disturb him. What's more, we'd better tell him about the next guy we croak, instead of letting him see it happen."

TOUGHENED killers agreed. As they moved along with Griff, they threw eager glances at the door of the professor's workshop, where they had stowed the medium Vapor Gun.

Their work was of the close-range type, and the medium machine was all they needed. Having seen it in operation, the crooks had no doubt as to its merits. Griff, hearing their pleased mutters, summed up the story.

"With the prof backing us," he told them, "we'll go after more than Citrite. It will be dough, next time, and nothing else! I've got it all figured, right to the dot. Any night will do, and so we'll take the first one that comes after the prof hands us his old Vapor Gun. I like old machines" – Griff gave a chuckle – "because

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they're the kind you can hit the jackpot with most often!"

They rejoined the rest, and Griff spread the big news. He could tell that the mobbies had been talking about The Shadow during his absence; but, since Griff had slipped the cloaked avenger once, they felt sure he could do it again. Griff himself was careful to avoid mention of The Shadow.

"Nobody is going to stop us," he assured. "I'll tell you why. After tonight, they'll all figure that we've cleared out of Florida completely. You know how people are. They will say that crime is through. But we know that it is just getting ready to begin."

Neither Griff nor his companions recognized the full import of that last sentence. Unwittingly, Griff Perrick had voiced the exact opinion of The Shadow!

Crooks knew that crime was on the march.

So did The Shadow!

CHAPTER VI. ONE MOVE AHEAD

ON the map of Florida, the town of Center City formed a very small dot, signifying that the term "city" was one of courtesy, only. Actually, Center City had only half a dozen stores, a movie house, and a hotel. Squatty buildings, those, with one exception: the hotel. It really made Center City.

Twelve stories high, of comparatively modern construction, the hotel was the pride of Center City and the entire county, to boot. It was a relic of boom days, when self-deluded prophets had declared that Center City would in ten years become a metropolis rivaling even Miami.

Located near the center of the State, the town was to become the hub of Florida, so its founders had constructed the hub cap, first. The hub cap was the hotel, and its two hundred and fifty rooms seemed hardly enough to accommodate all the real-estate buyers expected to stake out lots. But the paint hadn't dried on the Center City hotel before the boom went bust.

Yet the hotel had managed to survive. This was good citrus country, and the orange groves soon blossomed on the sites of forgotten subdivisions. Sellers and buyers of the orange crop made their headquarters at the hotel, which was now the focal point of a wealthy area.

This was the orange-picking season, when people who wanted to buy groves came to Center City. One wealthy prospect was at present a guest at the hotel. His name was Lamont Cranston, and he occupied a room on the twelfth floor.

From his corner windows, Cranston could see the territory for miles around. It was late afternoon, and the sinking sun looked like a mammoth orange, appropriately reflected by thousands of tiny golden dots that glistened from the massed green of the orange groves, where the small fruit trees looked like regiments of sentinels stationed in regular rows.

The elevation enabled Cranston to see houses among those groves: some the homes of owners, others shacks inhabited by migratory orange pickers. There were trailers, too, by the hundreds, in locations allotted to them. Many tents were visible, with cars beside them. Some of those cars were of expensive makes, their owners preferring to spend their earnings toward comfortable travel, rather than better shelter.

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It was come and go with these folk, and when they went the trees would be green, like the linings of their pockets. For there was cash in picking oranges for those who could do a complete and rapid job. Thousands of orange pickers meant thousands of dollars going out to workers around Center City.

To go out, the cash would have to come in first, which was why Lamont Cranston, otherwise The Shadow, had deemed it wise to visit Center City.

This was Friday, and pay was due. It came into Center City by armored truck, for delivery at the huge packing house just past the outskirts of the very compact town. There, after dusk, the pickers would line up, and receive their pay. It was said that this week's pay roll would approach forty thousand dollars, including many salaries to others beside the orange pickers.

Forty thousand dollars, in cash, would attract men of crime, if they were about, and The Shadow believed that they were still about, despite a consensus of opinion to the contrary. The excitement at the Citrite factory, nearly a week ago, had simmered down to the opinion that crooks, forced to flight, had somehow slipped the nets stretched for them and were far away from Florida's sunny clime.

Only The Shadow had laid his finger on the truth, that criminals had found a secure refuge within the State itself and intended to sally forth on further foray.

All week, calls had come to Cranston's room, to amplify his own tours through the terrain. The Shadow's own secret agents, competent men long in his service, were on the job as orange pickers. Filtering everywhere, they had phoned their chief to inform him of any suspicious moves by members of the migratory population. So far, there had been no ripples of coming crime.

This was pay day. It was the time when crime would strike, if at all. The negative reports from his agents convinced The Shadow that if mobsters appeared, they would come from without, not within. Therefore, the packing house itself was the place to be watched.

It was under guard already. The great, long shed that stretched along the near side of the railroad track, had half a dozen guards around its walls. They sauntered idly, forming a cordon as loose as it was thin, but they were experienced hands at stopping trouble when it came their way.

The Shadow could see them stop to chat with one another, and they had a habit of letting their gun hands slide to the holsters at their hips.

A habit of Dorset's, that one. It hadn't helped the head watchman at the Citrite factory when crime rolled his way and bowled him over.

There was still a great deal of speculation regarding the secret weapon with which crooks had done away with a steel door and the man who guarded it. Even The Shadow had no clue to the device used, but the fact that criminals possessed some powerful machine, was part of his argument that they would strike again.

Work was ending at the packing house. The last of many trucks had dumped their loads of fruit under surveillance of the guards, who were making sure that there were no human stowaways with the crop.

Ready for washing, drying, spraying, grading, waxing, polishing, coloring, and all the rest that went with it, the oranges would soon be shipped. Already, freight cars were being brought in line.

From his window, The Shadow saw a shifting engine shunt in from the main track, backing three empty gondolas behind it. Passing the packing house, it reached a switch, which was turned so the shifter could

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come forward on another siding. The engine eased up to another empty box car and shoved it up to the platform on the far side of the packing house.

The shed was so long that the engine and its four cars were lost from view, but soon the engineer and fireman appeared, strolling around the corner, waving to the guards as they went by. They were going out to supper and would finish the shifting later, so that the full quota of empty cars would be ready in the morning.

The Shadow's eyes moved back to a spot that they had watched before: a stretch of road that came across a hill a few miles away. This time, his gaze was rewarded.

Speeding over the slight summit was a vehicle that could only be the armored truck bringing the pay roll. The last rays of sunlight glittered on the armored car; it was showing speed in order to beat the dusk. It suited The Shadow almost to the dot.

These men who preferred daylight were delivering over their charge at the very time when The Shadow was equipped to take up vigil in their place: namely, when dark settled.

In Cranston's calm-mannered style, The Shadow took a last look at the scene below. The great shed of the shipping house was the symbol of security. The guards were covering the near side, the only route from which they feared marauders, for the officers, near the center of the shed, were cut off from the railroad platform by solid walls and barred doors.

Carrying a brief case with him, Cranston went down in the elevator. Outside the hotel, he strolled along the street that carried him from the actual town in less than a hundred yards. Then, taking a short route among some dilapidated sheds, he paused in the gathering darkness to bring out a black cloak and a slouch hat from the brief case, which he stowed between the cinder blocks that formed the wide-spaced foundations of a shed.

Putting on the cloak and hat, Cranston became The Shadow. He neared the shipping house, then took a skirting course, for large lights were aglow, illuminating the driveway on the near side of the great shed. The pacing guards offered a temporary obstacle that was eliminated when the armored truck rolled up, because guards promptly congregated to meet it.

While they were surrounding the truck, their drawn guns wangling in their hands, The Shadow made a glide for the corner of the shed. He moved slowly along, protected by the semigloom, while men from the truck, accompanied by a pair of guards, took the bags of pay-roll money into the office.

THE SHADOW was half way to the office when the guards came out with the truckmen, whose bags were dangling empty. Entering the armored car, the delivery crew drove away, and the guards began to deploy. They were taking their posts at the outskirts of the shed, and the one man who passed close to The Shadow failed to notice him.

It wasn't that the guard was careless. No human eye could have detected the black-cloaked figure that had merged with a patch of darkness so closely, that he seemed a part of it.

On the move again, The Shadow reached the office entry. It was lighted, but he kept to the fringe of the glow in a most uncanny fashion. Like a human ghost, he eased through to a passage, and saw the door of the main office, just ahead. Only The Shadow could have maneuvered to such a position; therefore, he was confident that all was well.

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He was anxious, though, to gain an inside position, in case the unusual should happen. So he stepped to the inner door, squeezed its knob and opened the barrier an inch, to study the scene beyond.

Should crime be due, The Shadow was one move ahead of it. So he thought, until he peered through the crack of the inner door. Instantly, The Shadow's lithe figure tightened, riveted by what he saw.

The pay roll had certainly been delivered. It was lying, in large stacks, all over a broad table in the center of the room, where four men, trusted clerks of the shipping house, were ready to count and sort the money.

At least, they had been ready to do so a few minutes ago. At present, they were staring, with upraised hands, toward a crew of invaders beyond them.

Those men had come from a door in the far side of the room. How they had entered was, so far, a mystery; for they had come by a route barred with big steel doors. What they intended was no mystery.

Eight in number, including their leader; they wore masks made from handkerchiefs. Four of them gripped guns, one for each of the clerks. The other four were advancing to the table, to pick up the currency that teemed there.

The Shadow's gloved hand went to his cloak and drew an automatic. Lone-handed, he would have to find a way to set this right. For a week, The Shadow had been planning to be one move ahead of crime. The crux had come, and crime was one move ahead of The Shadow!

Again, it was up to The Shadow to put himself one move ahead of crime!

CHAPTER VII. CRIME GOES RAMPANT

ONLY by finding a weakness in the opposition could The Shadow hope to forestall a crime that was practically completed.

At first sight, the problem offered no solution, for the marauders were under a competent leader, who happened to be Griff Perrick. He was moving his men like pawns, with a precision that would have been admirable had the motive been an honest one.

Four men with guns, holding as many victims helpless, meant that any average attempt at rescue would produce the sacrifice of human life. Four others, on their way to gather in the swag, promised that the job would be both speedy and efficient.

It was a situation that showed strength, not weakness, and the strongest figure in the picture was Griff, the masked leader of the criminal mob.

Strength, itself, could be weakness.

Such was The Shadow's quick decision as he eyed Griff's actions. Originally, Griff had held a leveled gun. It was lowered, at present, because Griff had detailed four men to hold the victims in abeyance. Thus, for the moment, Griff belonged to the four who were hustling forward to scoop up the cash; but he decided, on second thought, that he didn't belong with that group, either.

Three men could gather in the profits, easily enough. It was better that Griff should maintain his importance as the leader of this raid. With that intention, Griff paused a few paces ahead of the gunners and gruffed

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orders to the money takers.

His gun was up again; he was using it to gesture toward the cash, while he suggested, in a voice that he purposely disguised, the ways and means of carrying cash with greatest ease.

Griff's actions discommoded the gunners behind him. They shifted, to keep their victims covered without having Griff in the way. Noting the stir, Griff side-stepped. His shift carried him closer to The Shadow's door. With that, Griff made himself the weak member of his tribe.

Whatever concerned Griff would concern the others. Should he yield to an eccentric impulse, it would grip his followers as well. They looked to Griff for orders, for he had trained them to do so, and he wouldn't have to give those orders verbally. Griff's actions were as important as his words, and thereupon did The Shadow's strategy depend.

Pressing his gun muzzle through the crack of the door, The Shadow inched the barrier inward. His lips, close to the crack, began a whispered laugh, so low that Griff did not hear it at first. But the laugh, creeping upward in volume, was so designed that when it was heard, Griff's ears would catch it ahead of others.

Weird, sinister, the taunt came to Griff like an echo from the past. He forgot the crime in progress as he tried to locate the sound. His eyes, through the slits of the handkerchief mask, were darting as they scanned the door.

Purposely, The Shadow let Griff see the inching motion; then the crime leader's gaze centered on the muzzle of the automatic. It bored his way, that gun, and the sight of a leveled .45 was too much, even for Griff Perrick.

With a sharp gasp, Griff let his hands ease upward, though he didn't drop his own gun. His dilemma was real. In a sense, The Shadow was snatching crime's leader right from amid his followers. For the loom of the automatic, the burn of the eye that Griff could see above it, spelled coming death to Griff Perrick.

Like a bird hypnotized by a snake, Griff was rigid. Usually, the bird would wait while the snake approached it; but Griff, appropriately, found the snake's action assigned to himself. Slowly, he was moving toward the door, recognizing that if he did not go there, bullets would remind him that he should have.

It didn't occur to him that The Shadow could not well afford shots at this moment. Griff's death would only drive his comrades berserk, causing them to shoot down the victims whose lives The Shadow expressly wished to save.

Once in The Shadow's power, Griff would have to voice the orders that his cloaked captor commanded. Then, perhaps, Griff would recognize his own folly, too late. But The Shadow was taking a long chance in seeking such complete triumph. He didn't expect to win out against such odds. It was worth a try; that was all.

THE break came when one of the gunners looked toward Griff, wondering why the leader had stopped giving orders. Seeing The Shadow beyond Griff's shoulder, the crook gave a cry that brought the others full about. The spell was broken, particularly for Griff.

Imbued with the belief that The Shadow was operating on a hair-trigger basis, Griff expected immediate shots. Madly, Griff made a dive for safety.

The Shadow's gun did blast, but not at Griff. The cloaked marksman aimed for the four gunners; flinging the door open as he fired, The Shadow lunged straight for them.

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Instinctively, they dodged while their guns were spurting, and their hasty, self-jarred shots were wide. One man went sprawling, as an example to the others, but the crooks still insisted on firing at The Shadow.

Actually, they fired at where The Shadow had been. That lunge of his was tricky. It turned into a twist as rapid as Griff's dive, but not the sort whereby The Shadow could lose his footing.

One instant he was a target; the next, he was nowhere. Mobsters heard the resounding rise of his challenging laugh; wheeled to see him driving in again from a corner where they couldn't believe he had gone.

Again, The Shadow's gun preceded the blast of others. He was gone, with another crook falling under his fire. This time he was fading in Griff's direction, and he took a passing swing at the leader of the masked mob. Griff felt the glancing effects of the blow and came around, wondering where The Shadow was.

It was all very swift, and it would have proven very sure, had the packing-house clerks done as The Shadow wanted. It wouldn't have taken much bravery for them to grab the three startled thugs who were interested only in the money. Four to three, the clerks could have deprived those hoodlums of guns and aided The Shadow with a prompt fire.

All the clerks needed was a little bravery. It happened that they had a lot.

Instead of taking the money grabbers, they went after the gunners. Two of that tribe were gone, but Griff had made up for one. Thus two of the clerks each had a man, and the other two had Griff, who was the sort that really needed a pair to handle him. Springing to the attack, the clerks were quick enough to grab their foemen, but with such valor, they nullified The Shadow's aid.

The Shadow was left without the very targets he wanted. He had to swing to a new corner and take aim at the three thugs who were bundling the currency.

They weren't stooges, those fellows; they were gunners, too, and proved it. Clutching the piles of cash with one hand, they were bringing out guns with the other, aiming on the draw.

Three sharpshooters with a single target: The Shadow!

The dive The Shadow took was followed by the stabs of guns. A long dive, and a hard one, through the door that he had flung open less than a minute before. Crooks thought that they had clipped him and gave a triumphant shout that inspired Griff Perrick.

Shaking himself from the two clerks who gripped him, Griff dashed for the far door, roaring for the rest to come along. The other pair broke loose along with Griff.

Leaving two wounded men upon the floor, Griff and the rest fled, bundles of currency dropping behind them. No time to stop and gather up the lost cash.

Griff, at least, had sense enough to know that The Shadow could have dived ahead of the barrage that came his way. In addition, Griff could hear the shouts of guards from the front of the packing house. Armed men would be coming through in half a minute.

The Shadow needed less than half a minute.

Like a bolt of blackness, he was coming through the office before the amazed clerks could put their wits together. He was gone, on the trail of Griff and the masked mobbies, when guards poured into the office.

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Two wounded crooks, propped on their elbows, tried to stop the newcomers with shots. Instead, they received a deluge of bullets that felled them permanently. When The Shadow crippled crooks, he did it well enough to slow down their future fighting ability.

Through a steel door, The Shadow reached the loading platform beside the railway siding. A door that still was steel around the edges, though its center looked as though rats had gnawed it. Another evidence of Professor Englemere's Vapor Gun, but the secret weapon, itself, was not in sight. Crooks had put it into the box car in front of the shifting engine.

The whole game was plain. Griff and his crew had arrived in one of the empties brought in by the shifting engine. In flight, however, they were choosing the odd car that the shifter had pushed ahead of it when it came beside the loading platform.

Having waited until the engine crew left, the thugs had used their Vapor Gun to cut through the steel door leading to the office. Nor had they neglected the matter of a getaway.

Steam was up in the shifting engine, and two men were manning it. As The Shadow sprang for the cab, one crook lunged out to meet him, hoping that the other would back him with gunfire.

The Shadow prevented that assistance by wheeling his antagonist between himself and the engine cab. The man in the cab promptly neglected his pal and pulled the throttle wide.

Under the control of the amateur engineer, the shifter hopped ahead, shoving a crook-laden car ahead of it, dragging three empties behind. As the box cars clattered by, The Shadow struggled with a foeman gone mad.

Left to his fate, the odd member of Griff's band was desperate enough to hold off The Shadow until pursuit would fail. The fellow didn't realize that he was aiding the very men who had abandoned him.

The Shadow didn't intend to give up the chase. He settled his enemy neatly. Instead of grabbing for the thug's throat, he gripped the handkerchief mask and twisted it. Blinded as the solid cloth replaced the eye slits, the mobster couldn't avoid the swinging blow of The Shadow's gun.

As his opponent settled limply, The Shadow turned and dashed along the loading platform. Grabbing the ladder of the final box car, he clung to it and rode away.

The guards arrived too late to copy The Shadow's example. They heard a hoarse cry from the half-stunned thug, as he came to hands and knees and stupidly tried to aim at them. His mask was off, but he could hardly see to fire. Half a dozen guns spurted in his direction, withering him like the pair who had fallen on the office floor.

From his perch on the rear of the rapidly-moving freight car, The Shadow saw that sequel and knew that the guards had disposed of the last man who might give evidence against the crooks who were making their escape.

Grimly, The Shadow laughed.

Again, he was confronted with a task that he must handle single-handed: that of dealing with a thuggish band that he, alone, was in a position to handle. For mobsters, in their getaway on board the stolen freight train, were unwittingly carrying The Shadow as their passenger!

CHAPTER VIII. DOUBLE DEPARTURE

THE freight was out on the main track, thanks to a switch that was set the way crooks wanted it. They must have dropped an odd man beforehand, to attend to it. Whether he had sneaked away, or boarded the first car as it passed, The Shadow did not care.

His job was to stop this roaring juggernaut that was carrying men of crime to safety, and he set his mind upon that single task. Unless The Shadow stopped them, no one else would. With nothing but empties to carry, and few of them, at that, the shifting engine was showing some fancy speed, enough to thwart pursuers who might come along the highway.

The Shadow knew the route of this branch-line railway. He had crossed it often enough during his tours of the countryside. Ten miles from Center City, at a place called Marsh Transfer, the branch line crossed a river. The highway didn't do the same, for the simple reason that its new bridge hadn't been completed. If the freight reached the river first, pursuers in cars wouldn't have a chance to overtake it.

Climbing the ladder to the top of the box car, The Shadow started forward. The short train was snaking along in a most annoying fashion. It was like an alligator trying to shake off a captor, and The Shadow found it a slow process, getting from car to car.

For no good reason, the branch line had a lot of curves, and when it did take the straight way it dipped down into little depressions and over humps that nearly jounced the cars from the track.

It was a long trek reaching the tender, and one of the wildest rides The Shadow had ever experienced. Smoke pouring back from the straining locomotive added to the hazards of the forward journey. The train was acting as though it intended to cover ten miles before The Shadow could make his way along three cars, but he won the race by a considerable margin.

Out of the black smoke that wreathed the front end of a box car, The Shadow emerged like a solid chunk of inky cloud and landed with a leap upon the coal that filled the tender. From there, he began a crawling trip to the engine cab.

The Shadow could see the crook at the throttle. The fellow had tossed away his handkerchief mask, but his face was turned in the other direction. Half a minute more and The Shadow would be taking over the throttle himself.

Living blackness was stalking the thug in the cab. Blackness that seemed to grow as it emerged from the pile of coal. The engine was swaying crazily, with the crook at the throttle rolling, too. He'd roll right into The Shadow's clutch, if he wasn't careful.

The mobster wasn't careful; he was lucky. He happened to turn as The Shadow neared him, and the glow from the firebox revealed the Nemesis in black. Hurling himself about, the fellow jabbed a revolver in The Shadow's direction and tugged the trigger madly.

Above the clatter of the swaying locomotive, the frantic marksman heard the answer of a strident laugh. No one could hope to clip The Shadow against a background of black such as that provided by the coal tender. Each jerk of the cab gave away the direction of the crook's aim, and The Shadow was coolly dodging it.

Instead of responding with his own gun, he let his enemy exhaust his bullets; then, with a surprising lunge, timed to a bouncing roll of the engine, The Shadow landed squarely on his foe.

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It was another grapple, and The Shadow made it a brief one. Half through the window of the cab, with his opponent underneath, The Shadow could see the glisten of the river far ahead, with a black line indicating the bridge. His foe saw it, too, and made a frantic effort. He couldn't find the throttle; he gripped the brake lever, instead.

It was The Shadow who handled the throttle, chopping down the speed as the brakes were applied. He was seeing to it that the fugitives in the box car just ahead would never cross the river bridge.

They were going places, though, in their own way. As the shifting engine jarred along the track, shivering itself to a stop that threatened to derail it, the front car took a forward spurt. Crooks had loosed the coupling, giving themselves a shunt.

Odd, that they should have foreseen that the engine was about to stop. It gave The Shadow a new interpretation of his opponent's handling of the brake.

For some reason, the thug had deliberately tried to halt the locomotive. He wasn't groggy, as his action had previously indicated. There was fight in the fellow, plenty of it, as he demonstrated. He was grabbing for The Shadow's throat, and the motion of the engine sent both fighters reeling to the rear of the cab.

Then a sideward lurch was carrying them out through the space between the cab and the tender, the crook doing his utmost to drag The Shadow to disaster.

THE SHADOW didn't try to halt it. Flung from the train, two figures spun in air and landed hard beside the track, while freight cars grinded by. It was a headfirst spin, with The Shadow landing topmost.

He heard a crunch as they struck; it came from just beneath him. It wasn't a pleasant sound, that of a man's neck breaking under a telescoping jolt that pushed his head hard between his shoulders.

One more member of an outlaw crew had met with sudden death, and this fellow's end was of his own making. It was simply a sample of what the rest deserved, for they were murderers by trade.

Rising from beside the body of his late antagonist, The Shadow hurried along the track to reach the stalled engine, which was stopped a few hundred feet ahead.

Above the panting of the engine, The Shadow heard the clatter of the uncoupled box car that was rolling on ahead. The flooding light of the locomotive showed the car as it swung a curve toward the bridge. It had to pass a small station, on the near side, a freight stop that represented Marsh Transfer. After that, it would be on the bridge, with just about enough speed to carry it across.

Springing into the shifter's cab, The Shadow gave it the throttle. Wheels took a quick spin on the rails, and the sturdy little locomotive was on its way again, little burdened by the empties that trailed it. But The Shadow had hardly gotten up speed before a new surprise occurred ahead.

The box car wasn't going to cross the bridge!

Men were atop it, braking it, and with its slackening pace, the car jerked wildly to one side before it reached the dilapidated freight station. It was taking to a siding, and another crook, awaiting its arrival, was flinging the switch to keep the pursuing locomotive on the main track.

Moreover, mobsters knew that The Shadow was after them. The switchman didn't wait when his work was done. He dashed after the rolling box car, which was oddly disappearing from sight down a slope to the

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river's edge.

Two answers flashed to The Shadow.

He knew why this station was named Marsh Transfer. It had a siding where cars could be shunted down to the river bank so their freight might be transferred to little cargo steamers that plied the waterway.

As for guessing that The Shadow had taken over the shifting engine, the crooks didn't have to think long over that one. Their own man wouldn't have started the engine until receiving a signal that the track was clear.

Only one plan remained for The Shadow. He gave the shifter all it had. He was tearing past the station, and he saw the box car down on the lower level of the siding. It was jammed against a bumper, and half tilted from the rails. The crooks were out of it, putting something into a low-built speedboat. From the cab window, The Shadow opened fire; but it was useless.

The thugs heard the engine coming and ducked as their craft spurted out from shore. Still The Shadow kept up fire, for he had reached the bridge itself and was keeping parallel to the boat, which was trapped, temporarily.

It was between the railway pilings and the new bridge that would some day serve the highway. It couldn't get out of that groove until it reached the main channel, where each bridge had a draw. The boat was low enough, however, to skim beneath the wide space under a draw without the latter being opened.

His bullets ricocheting from the water like skimming pebbles, The Shadow was trying to find the gas tank of the speedboat. In their turn, crooks were shooting back, but they weren't poking into sight to take good aim. They had tasted too much of The Shadow's marksmanship, hence they were simply picking the locomotive as a target.

Bullets smashed harmlessly against the steel plates of the engine, none coming anywhere near the cab. Then, as the chase reached midstream, the speedboat swerved the other way and scooted beneath the draw of the highway bridge, while the locomotive necessarily kept to its steel path.

TAKING a last glance back, The Shadow saw the rakish craft whiz to safety around the river bend. In the same gaze, he saw cars pulling up at the Marsh Transfer end of the highway bridge.

Guards from the packing house were on the trail, though temporarily halted. It was hardly likely that they had spied the departing speedboat. Hence, they would suppose that crooks were still in control of the fleeing freight train.

They'd either get their cars across by the railway bridge, or phone ahead to intercept the runaway freight. To defeat the first step, The Shadow had to keep ahead; to frustrate the second, he would have to use good judgment about how far he went. Explaining his own part wouldn't be easy, should he be overtaken, or stopped.

Foreseeing those possibilities, The Shadow was quite sure that he could avoid them.

It was a case of double departure. Crooks had gone one way; The Shadow another. The unfortunate part was that The Shadow had to lead the law on the wrong trail. It wouldn't matter in the final run, however, since mobsters had definitely managed a getaway. Later, The Shadow could tip off the law regarding the real state of things.

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His real disappointment was the fact that his enemies had slipped him; but that could be rectified, too. Having partly succeeded in crime, despite The Shadow, they would try again. They'd lay their plans more carefully next time, to avoid another meeting with The Shadow.

Therein, they would fail. Tonight's encounter could not be ascribed to luck, no matter how much crooks might argue themselves into so believing. Having picked the spot where crime was due, The Shadow could do it again.

Anywhere that crooks might try new deeds of evil, their black-cloaked opponent would somehow find a way to be on hand, for he had thoroughly analyzed the opportunities that would appeal to criminal minds.

The greater crime's present success, the larger its future surprise. The Shadow knew!

CHAPTER IX. IN TWO CAMPS

FOR three days, Griff Perrick had been boasting about the success of his thirty-thousand-dollar pay-roll robbery, tactfully avoiding mention of the fact that it would have been closer to forty thousand if his men hadn't been forced to drop large batches of the stolen currency.

Griff was trying to keep his followers in good spirits, and he didn't find it easy. They were back on the old routine as keepers in a monkey house, but every time they started counting noses – their own, not those of the apes – they recalled that four were missing. It wasn't a pleasant thought; it brought up recollections of The Shadow.

At least, the crooks were still secure, their hide-out unsuspected. Griff brought back that news when he made lone trips to a neighboring town, where he was known as the chief keeper in the employ of eccentric old Professor Englemere.

Time and again, Griff assured his pals that they had nothing to worry about. They had lost four men in battle, but none were able to blab.

The only flaw in such comment was its tendency to make the monkey keepers apprehensive over their own futures; but matters changed when new recruits rolled into camp. Three arrived, all hand-picked men that Griff had summoned to replace the dead members of the band. The newcomers were highly enthusiastic when they saw the set-up.

They gazed admiringly at the rows of monkey cages, and even liked the looks of the occupants. Cissie, Loco, and a dozen other assorted apes were all very tame and helpful. Gabby Tarcot, now a veteran, grinned when he saw the amazement on the faces of the rookies. Griff and the "keepers" put the monks through their paces for the benefit of the newcomers.

Professor Englemere had trained the apes to answer the door, serve meals, and perform other useful stunts. Griff and the mobbies had carried it still further, showing their charges how to wash dishes, sweep up the place, and do all sorts of other work. The Ape Lab was on a self-operating basis. The main trouble was inducing the helpful monkeys to stay in their cages at inspection time.

Despite his interests in other matters, Professor Englemere was a stickler for regulations, where the monkeys were concerned. It was inspection time and Griff had just managed to get the apes where they belonged, when Englemere arrived.

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In very impersonal style, the professor studied the keepers, saw that their uniforms were tidy. He made the rounds of the cages, shaking hands with his friends, the apes, and finally turned to Griff.

"Very good," approved Englemere. Then, in a sterner tone: "Didn't you tell me that four of the keepers had quit?"

Griff nodded. Englemere grunted through his beard.

"Evidently they found the work too hard," he said. "I hope we have no more objections on that score."

He looked along the line of keepers, and they kept sober faces. They relished Englemere's humor, for the work of looking after the trained apes was certainly anything but taxing. At the same time, they saw a deeper meaning to the remark. Where other work was concerned, that of crime, the men in question had certainly found it hard. So hard, that they hadn't survived it.

"I've replaced three of the men, professor," reminded Griff. "I introduced them to you when they arrived, but you were busy working on your new Vapor Gun."

"Ah, yes," recalled Englemere.

"And the fourth?"

"He should arrive any time. His name is Kedly. We call him Dunk because he likes to soak doughnuts in his coffee."

"Have him avoid that habit. He might teach the apes bad manners."

With that sally, Englemere strode back to his workshop to resume labor on his oversized Vapor Gun. Griff used the professor's visit as a wedge to give his men new spirit.

"A great guy, the professor," Griff told them. "Has a swell sense of humor. Kids you sometimes when you don't know it. You've got to watch his eyes and catch their twinkle. You can't see when he grins, because his beard hides it.

"Anyway, he isn't worried. He's leaving it all up to me and you fellows. He's busy with that new Vapor Gun of his, so he's letting us use the old one. What more could you ask? I know" – Griff raised his hand before questions came – "you'd like to dodge The Shadow. Well, we'll manage that, next trip."

To emphasize the matter of security, Griff turned to the three new mobsmen.

"You fellows didn't have any trouble getting into Jacksonville?"

"Naw," replied one. "The coppers ain't checking on guys coming into Jax. They're watching the dopes who are trying to go north. We're telling you, Griff, this hide-away is perfect! The bulls won't get within fifty miles of it!"

WHAT the recruit told Griff was correct. Though the law now recognized that crooks were hiding out in Florida, the search was going to remote places, into the heart of hammock lands and cypress swamps among the myriad keys that formed tiny islets along the Gulf Coast.

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To The Shadow, registered as Lamont Cranston at a Jacksonville hotel, the law's hunt approximated folly. He had done his best to set the searchers straight. They'd gone wrong, first, after finding the train when The Shadow deserted it. He had run it to a crossover of another railroad, used an old switch to transfer it from one branch line to the other.

There were two main railroads in Florida, and finding a train from one on the tracks of another was something of a mystery. One that The Shadow cleared with a telephone tip-off, stating that crooks had really fled by water.

After that, the authorities should have laid out the most likely area where crooks might be found. Instead, they had insisted on a wild-goose hunt that would eventually lead them into the Everglades. It was up to The Shadow to map out the proper method of search, and he was doing it.

On his table lay a map of Florida, many of its highways studded with colored pins. He was picking the places where fugitives would have been cut off, had they come along after either of the crimes they perpetrated. Consensus was that the criminals had slipped the cordon on both occasions. The Shadow deemed otherwise.

Reaching for a telephone, he called another room in the hotel and spoke to one of his secret agents, a man named Harry Vincent. Briefly, The Shadow checked the area, which he wanted searched as the likely place where the hide-out would be. It was a rather large order, covering a rough circle some fifty miles across.

But it happened that The Shadow's circle included the Anthropological Laboratory. He, at least, was getting within fifty miles of the place where mobsmen actually were.

Finished with his phone call, The Shadow checked the local newspapers. They contained the names of the four men eliminated during the raid on the packing house. All those crooks had been identified as former mobbies, who would certainly have needed a hide-out. They came from different cities, had many friends.

So The Shadow opened a package, newly arrived, and spread out cards that bore large printed dots. Using a microscope, he enlarged the dots and they became pictures of men's faces. These belonged to The Shadow's private rogues' gallery, which he kept in microphotographic form for convenience sake.

The pictures had come from New York, the proper data with them. Soon, The Shadow was checking on friends of the dead crooks, and – quite as important – he was noting friends of their friends. Among these, The Shadow discovered the name and picture of Gabby Tarcot.

He'd heard of Gabby as a criminal who "got around." In checking on Gabby, The Shadow uncovered another name: Blink Halley. He found the fellow's photograph, enlarged it, and saw a face that looked familiar. What was more, The Shadow remembered where he had last seen Blink: at the Citrite factory.

Reaching for the telephone, The Shadow paused. No use to call the Citrite plant. That case was closed. They'd put in a new crew of watchmen, and the rest had scattered for parts unknown. At most, Blink couldn't have been any more than an inside man, who wouldn't know where the invading crooks came from.

Any questioning of others formerly employed at the Citrite factory would be useless. The real point was that Gabby might be among the criminals who operated from some unusual headquarters where was kept a remarkable secret weapon.

Gabby could therefore prove important, for The Shadow was of the opinion that depleted numbers would mean new hirelings, and Gabby was the sort who could provide them. Writing a brief note, The Shadow addressed it to Cliff Marsland, another of his agents, in New York.

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Cliff knew the badlands, and was reputed to be a very tough customer himself. The Shadow was instructing him to look up Gabby's closest associates and learn what they had heard from their talkative friend.

THE SHADOW'S own plans came next.

They involved the places where crime might strike. The Center City packing house had been an almost obvious choice, but there were no others that offered a similar target for robbery. It was more likely that crooks would try a bank job, in a locality where money was plentiful.

The Shadow promptly rejected such cities as Miami and Tampa. Those places were well policed, their banks heavily protected. One was on the Atlantic coast, the other on the Gulf, which limited the directions in which criminals might flee.

Moreover, those cities were remote from the area which The Shadow had picked as containing crime's headquarters. Working his pencil outward from the circle, The Shadow underscored towns of smaller size, that most persons would have rejected. But The Shadow knew the wealth that each small city represented.

Some were tourist towns; others were where the citrus growers banked their funds, plentifully at this season; while one represented a cattle center that often teemed with cash. Those were the cities where The Shadow intended to go and study the situation exactly as if he, instead of men of opposite ilk, were calculating upon performing crime.

Already, The Shadow knew the places in question. His survey would be rapid, straight to the point, based on data which would be the sort that his enemies, too, could obtain.

If all went well, crime in the making would come to an abrupt finish, with The Shadow's hand turning the balance against the cause of evil!

CHAPTER X. THE MONKEY BUSINESS

TWO days more, and Griff Perrick was the person who felt annoyed. The other human inhabitants of the Ape Lab had laid aside their qualms, but Griff had reasons for concern.

Dunk Kedly was overdue, and Griff couldn't move until he arrived. Even worse, Dunk knew how to get to the headquarters, and it wouldn't be good at all, should he be stopped en route as a suspicious character.

Gabby Tarcot knew what troubled Griff, and Gabby gloated. He found his chance to buttonhole Griff and talk to him alone. That was, they were alone except for the apes about them. The meeting took place in a courtyard where three monkeys were whitewashing the walls, thus saving the keepers the trouble.

"So you were worried about Blink," chuckled Gabby, opening the parley. "Afraid I couldn't get the right guys for you. Well, Blink went through with what you wanted, didn't he?"

Griff gave a curt nod.

"Then, when you wanted some new torpedoes," continued Gabby, "why didn't you come to me? I'll get them for you, Griff, and they won't be false alarms like this guy Dunk Kedly."

"I've got to change the system," returned Griff in a worried tone. "No more telling guys how to get here, until we know they're in Jacksonville, or even closer. Dunk is driving down from Chicago, but he ought to be here

by this time."

"And if he don't show up?"

"I don't know what then, Gabby. I'll tell you this, however. Next time I need replacements, I'll get them through you."

The monkeys were beginning to dab each other with whitewash. Griff gave an odd clucking sound that stopped them. Gabby had heard that cluck before, a signal which Professor Englemere had instituted. No matter what mischief the apes began, they ended it when they heard the sound.

"If those monks plaster each other," Griff growled, "it would take as long to clean them up as to whitewash the court ourselves. All right, boys" – he waved his hand – "get back to work."

The apes complied, pausing only when another of their kind came ambling across the courtyard, bound upon some mission. Griff gave a pleased exclamation.

"It's Cissie! She's heard the doorbell! Come on, Gabby. Maybe Dunk is here."

Griff started away eagerly. Gabby paused long enough to try a cluck on the apes. They immediately stopped their work with the whitewash brushes. Gabby waved; they began the task again. Smiling at the simplicity of the thing, Gabby hurried after Griff.

The arrival proved to be Dunk Kedly. He was a rangy chap, who didn't look too much the criminal type, though his eyes had an ugly glower when Griff demanded an explanation for his late arrival.

"So what?" snorted Dunk. "I came through Lake City, instead of Jax, that's all. Finding this dump was no cinch, coming from the other direction. I took the wrong road."

"But you didn't meet up with coppers?"

"I saw some," replied Dunk, "but they didn't stop me. Up the line, I pulled into the wrong place, thinking I'd gotten here. There was a guy there –"

"You didn't tell him who you were looking for?"

"Of course not!" Dunk was annoyed by Griff's interruption. "I said I was trying to find the monkey joint, so he steered me here.

"Say" – Dunk took a look at Cissie – "this monkey business is the real stuff, after all!"

Griff decided to show Dunk how real it was. He took the new man all over the premises, showing him the apes that were whitewashing; others, weeding flowerbeds; finally, a group that were digging a drainage ditch under supervision of keeper.

"The monks do the real work here," informed Griff. "Only, the real boss is the Prof. I'm taking you in to see him, Dunk, but don't mention what you've seen. He's playing ball one hundred percent. In the racket himself, and likes it! But he'd tear out half his whiskers if he knew his pets were doing all the heavy work. It's little points like those that bother Englemere."

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SOON after introducing Dunk to the professor, Griff summoned all the keepers. He had them bring in the apes and put them in their cages, though it wasn't inspection time.

Among the anthropoid arrivals was Tongo, which was quite unusual, since the huge gorilla was generally the professor's own companion. Tongo seemed glad, however, to be back with the other apes. He hopped into a cage at Griff's order.

A strange scene followed. Seated on stools and benches, twelve men who represented human scum listened to the words of Griff Perrick. All the while, from a row of barred cages, a gallery of anthropoids were drinking in the scene. A witness to that ceremony would soon have preferred the tender mercies of gorillas, orangutans, and chimpanzees to those of the human delegation.

Apes at their best, and men at their worst, made it seem as though the problem of the missing link had been solved. But neither Griff nor his associates – nor for that matter, the monkeys – were in any mood to speculate upon such questions.

"I'd counted on Englemere being with us," declared Griff, with as much regret as he could put into his raspy voice. "But he's busy; as usual, with that new machine of his. He couldn't even be bothered with Tongo, so you know how deep he's gone."

Crooks nodded. They'd discussed the Englemere question. Feeling that the professor had fully identified himself with crime during the Citrite raid, they were just as pleased to learn that he was busy, with his new invention. They preferred Griff as their active leader, despite the near failure at the citrus fruit packing house.

"You know how fussy the prof is," continued Griff. "He wants the place kept spick and span. It means a lot of work –"

"Easy enough," inserted Gabby, "with the monkeys doing the mean jobs for us."

Griff didn't like the interruption. He glared at Gabby, then eased his expression, remembering that he was counting upon the fellow to produce new keepers should they be needed.

"I'm coming to the point," assured Griff. "It's this. We're starting on another job, most of us, and we could leave the regular work to the monkeys. But this time, we've got to take a few of them along, too."

Crooks shrugged at first, until Griff amplified the problem. Some of the apes were more needed in the place than keepers.

"There's Cissie, for instance," Griff said. "If the prof saw another chimp answering the door, he'd wonder where Cissie was. His nibs is always asking me what funny things Loco has been doing, and since I won't be here to tell him, he may want to see Loco instead. We can't take old Gray Puss, either, because he always carries Englemere's meals into the study."

One by one, Griff narrowed down the matter of the monkeys, until he remembered Boola, the one misfit in the aggregation. Boola, happened to be a baboon, which type didn't belong to the simian classification the professor studied.

Englemere kept the baboon around to prove that the other types of apes were smarter. Every new trick that the others learned was eventually shown to Boola, who generally couldn't copy it.

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The crooked keepers had a slogan: "Try it on Dog-face." They used it to refer to any stunt too simple for the other apes to bother about. Boola, the baboon, had a distinctly canine profile; hence his nickname, Dog-face.

Griff decided that Boola could go along, but he needed some brighter monkeys, too. One of the keepers reminded him that a pair of gibbons had climbed into an oak tree and were building a house there. Englemere had said not to disturb them, but the gibbons were about finished with their job. They could certainly be taken along without the professor knowing it.

Agreeing, Griff had another idea.

"I'll tell him that Tongo went and climbed a tree, too," Griff decided. "That will please him, because he thinks that Tongo is getting too soft. Four monks! That's great! Roll out a couple of trailers while we're coaxing those gibbons down from their limb."

It wasn't difficult to coax the gibbons from the tree, but they didn't want to come farther. They were sizable apes, and threatened battle, until Tongo, an interested spectator, sided with the keepers. The huge gorilla took a gibbon under each arm and flung them into the rear of a trailer when Griff opened the door.

Of his own accord, Tongo entered the other trailer, and wasn't annoyed when Boola was shoved in with him. The gorilla simply regarded the baboon as dumb. In his turn, Boola did have sense enough to try no pranks with Tongo, so the two made good traveling companions.

The trailers were hitched to two old cars, and Griff took two men with him in one, telling Gabby to bring two in the other. Gabby promptly spoke a piece for the benefit of the other crooks.

"Say, Griff!" he exclaimed. "It's daylight – or don't you know? What if the coppers stop us?"

"If they do," chuckled Griff, "I'll talk to them."

"About what?"

"About those cages." Griff gestured to the trailers, which had open sides, with bars. "I'll let them see what's in them."

More than daylight dawned on Gabby.

"You mean you're using the apes as a front, Griff?"

"That's it," Griff replied. "We're in the monkey business. Get it? In it in a big way. So big, we'll make monkeys out of the coppers, before we're through with them!"

Griff started his car, and Gabby climbed behind the wheel of the other. The two-car caravan rolled out through the sand road, to the highway, in the full flood of the Florida noon. In the back of one car was the Vapor Gun, the light model that Englemere had turned over to Griff. Even if police saw it, they wouldn't know what it was.

Boldly, crooks were starting on a new expedition, ready to dare discovery by the law despite the daylight. If they so succeeded – as Griff was sure they would – no one, it seemed, would have a chance to detect their later actions, after dark.

No one, not even The Shadow!

CHAPTER XI. FROM THE SKY

FIFTEEN miles from the Ape Lab, the two cars encountered the very situation that Griff Perrick felt would imbue his followers with confidence, once the strain of it had passed. The road was blocked and officious State troopers, wearing Rough Rider hats, were questioning all cars that came along.

Griff doubted that this proximity to the Ape Lab meant that the State police had any clue to crime's headquarters. The cars were on a through highway, and there was heavy traffic from a crossroad. This was a likely place where police would stop all cars that came along, for a routine quiz.

It meant, in substance, that the law's quest was petering out. Cypress swamps and similar refuges hadn't yielded any discoveries. Evidently the police were hoping that criminals were still on the rove, dodging here and there throughout the State. They were looking for men who showed signs of sleepless nights and the ill-kept attire of roadside campers.

Griff's tribe didn't fit the description. They were well dressed and alert, even though they didn't climb out of their cars to chat with the troopers. They left that to Griff, and he explained their presence on the road by taking the troopers to the cage trailers and showing them the apes.

Some of the State cops did observe that Griff's hired hands were hard-faced gentry, but that didn't need explaining after the police saw Tongo. Griff remarked that one of his men was a trainer, the rest keepers. They'd have to be hard-boiled, those keepers, to control Tongo. One of the troopers suggested it, and Griff nodded, only to add:

"Tongo is gentle enough when you know him. I'll have the trainer show you."

The "trainer" was Gabby. He came from his car, and looked wise while Griff opened the door of Tongo's cage. Boola started to come out, but Tongo, knowing he was wanted, flung the baboon back to a corner. Then, catching a slight oration from Griff, Tongo reached out and lightly clapped his great hands on the shoulders of two State policemen.

Nearly collapsing under Tongo's idea of a light gesture, the troopers were brought to their feet again by Tongo's powerful clutch. Their comrades laughed, but then began to get worried, so Griff nodded to Gabby. The fake trainer gave the clucking sound that restrained the ape, and Tongo let go of his new friends so suddenly that they sprawled in the highway.

"Doesn't know his own strength," remarked Griff, referring to Tongo, "but he has the spirit of a little kitten. As for these two" – he pointed to the pair of gibbons – "they're liable to get quarrelsome."

Gabby was waving Tongo back into the cage, and Griff was getting ready to lock it. One of the troopers asked where the caravan was from, and Griff dodged the question by pretending to hear it wrongly.

"We're taking them to Sarasota," informed Griff. "I won't sell them to the circus, though, unless they give the boys some jobs. Ought to be plenty, there at winter quarters."

"And if you don't sell them?" came the query.

"We'll cut over to the East coast and try the jungle gardens. They have lots of monkeys around those places. Only, they'll have to pay plenty for these specimens, if they can't give us jobs, too. I've been in the menagerie business for years, and I always take as good care of my men as I do my animals."

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The troopers had nothing more to ask. Certainly no men concerned in crime would be burdening themselves with a tribe of monkeys. Tongo looked big enough and strong enough to be the secret weapon that had crashed through steel gates at the Citrite factory and the Center City packing house, but no one had seen a gorilla on those occasions.

More cars were coming along the highway, so the troopers waved the caravan on its way.

Among the arriving cars was a new coupe driven by a keen-eyed young man who had his license card ready the moment a State Policeman approached. The card told his name: Harry Vincent. He was the agent that The Shadow had appointed to cover this particular area.

One look at Harry convinced the State patrolman that no questions were necessary, so Harry asked one instead.

"Was I seeing things, or was that a gorilla hopping back into the trailer that just left?"

The trooper laughed.

"It was a gorilla," he laughed. "On its way to Sarasota, with some more monkeys, to join up with the circus."

Harry's own conclusion promptly coincided with that of the State police. Unfortunately, he had been too distant to identify the men with the gorilla. He would certainly have recognized Gabby, for Harry had a copy of the fellow's picture.

As it was, Harry did not regard the monkey trailers as important enough to mention in a special report to The Shadow. Animals on their way to the winter quarters of the circus were just about the same as oranges going North by truck.

LUCK had served Griff Perrick well. During the next few hours, he was chuckling how he had outsmarted the State police, and Gabby was echoing the same sentiments to the thugs in the other car.

Neither realized how close to discovery they had come. Had Harry arrived a few minutes sooner, word of crime's move would be flashing to The Shadow.

Mobsters were lucky, too, in that they were clearing from their own area and wouldn't run into Harry while he continued his search. Oddly, however, the only thing that gave them qualms was the fact that Griff was taking them so far afield.

The two cars covered more than a hundred miles, much of the distance in a southerly direction, before Griff finally revealed their actual destination. Taking a side road, he pointed to the hangar of an airport beyond a batch of pine trees.

"The Lakedale airport," said Griff. "A lot of student planes use it. There's a couple now."

Two tiny planes were circling low beyond the trees. Griff promptly forgot them.

"They need a new bank in Lakedale," continued Griff. "The old First National is doing plenty of business. But it ought to keep its dough in a stronger vault. Somebody's going to crack that joint some night and walk away with a coupla hundred grand."

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The listeners were instantly agog. They could guess who "somebody" would be. But Griff had another surprise for them; turning off from a paved road that led into Lakedale, he entered a narrow drive and stopped in front of a locked gate.

Leaving the car, Griff unlocked the gate; then, as an afterthought, he walked back to a rural free delivery mailbox at the corner of the driveway.

Gabby hopped from the other car to join him. Eying the name painted on the silver R. F. D. box, Gabby questioned –

"Who's L. K. Jamison?"

"I am," responded Griff blandly. "I own this orange grove." He pointed to the squatty, thick-leaved trees to the left of the driveway. "At present, I'm picking up my mail."

The mail consisted of a few weekly newspapers, that Griff poked under his arm. He took a look at Gabby, then noticed the trailer from which Tongo peered. The expressions of the man and gorilla were so alike in their curiosity, that Griff gave a laugh.

"Follow me in," he told Gabby, "and I'll give you the low-down."

The two cars curved left at the end of the drive and pulled up beside a little bungalow, with a garage beside it, both buildings deep in the orange grove. As Griff alighted to unlock the house, he quizzed his companions:

"You've seen a lot of orange groves. Notice anything different about this one?"

The listeners shook their heads.

"It's the most different grove in Florida," Griff declared. "The rest of them have their trees in rows. Not this one. When you set trees in rows, you can look right between, them from a lot of directions. So I planted these trees hit and miss. I don't want anybody to notice the house from the highway."

He ushered the others into the bungalow, which was plainly furnished and had several bedrooms opening into the living room. The place was a trifle musty; so Griff crumpled the newspapers he carried and started a fire in the fireplace. His lips formed a wise grin that his companions did not see.

Newspapers were taboo at the Ape Lab. The professor never read them; his only current literature consisted of scientific journals – in one of which he had first read about Citrite. Copying Englemere's example, Griff banned newspapers, too, attributing the order to the professor.

Lack of news kept Griff's helpers from learning things that might bother them. Hence, here at the bungalow, Griff was anxious to get rid of the journals from the mailbox before anyone had a chance to look at them.

"I lost a lot of dough during the real-estate boom," informed Griff. "Good dough, that I'd got from hard, honest work in the bootleg racket. All I had to show for it was this hunk of land. I figured I could use it to get back at the real-estate sharks who trimmed me. So ten years ago, I laid out the grove and built this house for a hide-out.

"I was living here when I heard about old Englemere. I figured I could get a job with him, and I did. That gave me two hide-outs; only, the Ape Lab was better than this one. It was a safer place for you fellows. I kept this joint for a hole card. Next thing I knew" – Griff gave a raspy chuckle – "I had the prof seeing things

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the way I did, so the Ape Lab was perfect.

"I come down here, every now and then, to look over the place. I'm Mr. Jamison to the crackers who pick the oranges for me, and do other odd jobs when needed. That's all there is to it. And if a couple of you lugs will go out and give the apes some exercise, Gabby and I will have some chow ready when you come back."

TEN minutes later, a pair of crooks came dashing into the kitchen to report that the apes were getting too much exercise. The gibbons had climbed a magnolia tree and wouldn't come down. In going after them, the keepers forgot Boola and Tongo, and now those two were missing.

"Find that baboon!" stormed Griff, turning over the cook's job to Gabby. "The gorilla has sense, and he'll come back. We'll get the gibbons down from the tree later, but that fool baboon will make plenty of trouble if we don't round him up!"

Baboons preferred the ground to trees, and their favorite diet was fruit, so it wasn't surprising that the crooks soon discovered Boola among the trees of the haphazard grove, eating oranges that were lying on the turf.

They hauled him back to the bungalow, and found that Tongo had returned. One-handed, the gorilla pushed the baboon into the proper trailer; then followed along to help collect the gibbons.

Tired of the magnolia tree, the pair came down, and made for their cage at Tongo's threat. He didn't grab them as he had before, and Griff suddenly noticed that the gorilla had only one hand available. Under Tongo's other, arm was a folded newspaper. He yielded it when Griff reached for it.

"Smart boy, Tongo," approved Griff. He gestured the ape into its cage. Then, to the men, Griff remarked: "Tongo saw me take newspapers out of the R. F. D. box. He must have gone along the road to find another box that had one. He picks up tricks quick."

They went inside and Griff tossed the newspaper in the fire. Their lunch finished, Griff told two of the crooks to take the trailers, apes and all, back to Englemere's.

"If you meet up with any coppers," he told them, "say that the circus hired your buddies, but didn't want the monkeys, so you're going to try the jungle gardens. It's getting dark soon, and we won't need the apes as a front any longer."

The two thugs left with the trailers. Griff motioned to Gabby and the pair that remained. He led them to a door that connected with the garage. When Griff opened it, they saw a sleek four-passenger coupe. Griff told them to load the professor's Vapor Gun in the ample trunk compartment.

"We'll start in about twenty minutes," declared Griff. "It's only about eight miles to Lakedale, and we'll roll in right after dark. That bank job will be a cinch, and if the going is good, we ought to be back at Englemere's soon after the monkeys get there."

As Griff finished, he assumed a listening attitude. He heard the purr of a motor somewhere outside, and mistook it for a car stopping on the highway. Then, as the throbs suddenly returned, Griff relaxed.

"One of those student planes," he said. "They're always flying around here. That one is probably the last. They have to quit when it gets dark. They can't wise to anything, anyway."

There, Griff was wrong.

Overhead, the mosquito plane was banking, as it had been for half an hour, its pilot more interested in the ground than in maneuvering his tiny craft. Keen eyes observed an orange grove quite different from any that they had previously seen. In fact, the pilot of the tiny plane was ready to class that grove as unique.

He was studying Griff's grove. The disarrangement of the trees could pass unnoticed from the highway, but not from the sky, should anyone take pains to observe it. This flyer was taking such pains. He had come to Lakedale particularly to check on anything curious in the topography of the outlying terrain.

A low laugh came from the pilot's lips as he headed his plane toward the airfield.

The laugh of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XII. THE LAW'S TURN

ATTENDANTS at the airport were apprehensive when the last of the little planes came nosing to the ground. Its perfect landing convinced them, however, that the man who had hired it was something more than a student pilot. Getting out of the plane, he strolled to his car and drove away.

As he went, he obliterated his personality. He was no longer Lamont Cranston, as he had identified himself at the flying field. He was The Shadow, master of darkness. As such, he had found his proper element, for the dusk was deepening along the road that The Shadow drove.

As he placed his hat upon his head and drew his cloak up over his shoulders, The Shadow blended with the gloom that filled the interior of his car.

Reaching the crossroad, The Shadow swung left to reach the orange grove. As he did, a car from the other road took a sharp turn to avoid him. The Shadow didn't get a good look at the occupants of the other car. In their turn, they didn't see The Shadow at all.

It was Gabby who made comment as Griff spurted away.

"Say, that was funny." Gabby's tone was tense. "I looked right through that other buggy and didn't see nobody!"

"How were you going to see anybody?" Griff demanded. "It's turned dark."

"I guess that's right," Gabby muttered. "Still –"

"Take a hold on yourself," Griff interjected. "We've got other things to think about. Maybe the guy was just sitting low behind the wheel. Maybe he was a midget."

"What would a midget be doing around here?"

"Going to Sarasota, maybe. To sign up with the circus, like we said we were going to do when we had the monkeys with us."

Taking Griff somewhat seriously, Gabby silenced. Thinking in terms of midgets, he forgot his first qualm: namely, that The Shadow might have been the occupant of the passing car.

Meanwhile, The Shadow had found Griff's grove and was stowing his car among its trees, which hid the

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automobile as neatly as they did the bungalow. At least, the car was hidden from the road, but as he alighted The Shadow could see the sky up through the trees. He was quite sure that no cars could have been parked around the bungalow at the time he observed it, less than a half-hour ago.

A breeze was blowing along the driveway as The Shadow followed the fringing orange trees. He reached the bungalow, noticed its darkness, and peered through a window. There, he caught the faint glow of a few burning coals in the fireplace.

There had been no smoke coming from the chimney when The Shadow viewed the place from the air. Hence, the embers signified that people had been here earlier, but might have left a few hours ago.

The Shadow formed a new opinion when he reached the rear of the house. Under the whip of the wind, a garage door was flapping open. The doors had been tightly closed when The Shadow saw them from a bird's-eye vantage. It was possible, of course, that there hadn't been enough wind earlier to make the door flap open; but it was better logic to presume that a car had left the garage while The Shadow was making his round trip to and from the airport.

First, The Shadow had seen a likely car at the crossroad. Again, it was probable that the men in the bungalow had been waiting for darkness to settle. Without wasting further time, The Shadow returned to his car and drove it from the grove, pausing only to turn the headlights on the R. F. D. box that bore the name "Jamison."

Not having been in the air at the time when Griff's band arrived with the trailers, The Shadow had learned nothing about the monkey deception; in fact, he didn't know how long ago persons had come to the bungalow. His facts were somewhat meager, but they fitted with well-formed conclusions that Lakedale was the town where crime was due. Its bank was prosperous, particularly at this season, and an easy target for smart crooks.

Lakedale was rather distant from the area where Harry was hunting for crime's headquarters, but the temporary hide-out that the bungalow afforded was an offsetting factor.

Indeed, The Shadow was getting a broader angle on the whole matter. Whoever backed the crooked game knew Florida well, and had planned a long while in advance, for the haphazard orange grove was certainly a matter of prearrangement.

Nearing an isolated service station, The Shadow left his car and glided into the place while the proprietor was servicing a car out front. Using the telephone, The Shadow rang the Lakedale police headquarters and gave them a terse, but emphatic, tip-off.

Listeners believed The Shadow's tip-offs. They came in a weird whisper that burned into the hearer's mind. In this case, his information was specific.

Robbery was due at the First National Bank, planned by the perpetrators of two recent and sensational crimes. To balk the coming robbery, the police should not only close in on the bank. They would have to watch a clothing store next door to it, a shop separated from the bank by a thick building wall.

The service-station owner was returning as The Shadow glided from the doorway. The fellow blinked, wondering if his glasses needed changing. He'd seen black spots before, but never any quite so large as this one. But it disappeared amid his blinks, like an optical illusion.

Taking off his glasses, the man rubbed his eyes; then stared at a car that came suddenly into sight. He decided that his eyes were worse than he supposed. As the car passed the lights of the service station, the staring man

couldn't manage to even glimpse its driver.

FIVE miles away, matters were moving about as The Shadow expected. Crooks had easily forced an entry into the store adjacent to the bank. The door barred behind them, they were working on the wall between, using the secret weapon that The Shadow had never seen but could visualize from the results that it accomplished.

Englemere's Vapor Gun was eating a pathway through brick and mortar reinforced with steel. The results were pleasing to Griff Perrick. He'd estimated fifteen minutes for the job; the calcide spray was accomplishing it in ten.

As soon as the rift was sufficient, Griff moved his men through. Using flashlights, they found the vault. There, they set up their machine again and watched its smoky spray dig into the steel door.

The vault was strong, but old-fashioned; its time-lock wasn't any protection against the amazing weapon that Englemere had created. Another ten minutes and the vault would look like mosquito netting.

Those minutes were bringing a threat to men of crime. Outside the bank, the cream of the Lakedale police crop had assembled. The chief and five picked men were debating the merits of the mysterious tip-off they had received. Through the high windows of the banking room a plain-clothes man saw the faint reflection of a sparky light. He pointed it out to the chief.

"I guess that settles it," the chief decided. "We haven't been hoaxed. Unless those fellows are foxy and allowed we'd see them anyway. Say! I'll bet that fellow who called up was fixing to draw us off by telling us to go in through Drayman's Store! Suppose we do go in there? Where will we be when those fellows come out? In the wrong place, that's all!"

It didn't occur to the police chief that he could station men outside the bank while he investigated Drayman's. Pleased by his own masterful deduction, he decided to have an immediate showdown with the criminals.

Opportunity came his way in the person of the bank's cashier, who had been summoned from a restaurant across the street. The cashier had a key to the side door; the chief promptly used it and led his whole squad into the bank, the cashier with them.

Supposing that the robbers were making considerable noise, the chief didn't think that the blundering entry would be heard. But the Vapor Gun was silent in its operation, and Griff caught the clatter of footsteps on the tiled floor. The vault door was almost eaten away; he cut off the Vapor Gun and motioned to his pals to draw their revolvers.

Two tense minutes followed. Griff was allowing the proper time space, as recommended by Professor Englemere, before shoving his weight against the honeycombed vault door. The police were spread out, crouching among the tables of the banking floor, wondering why the crooks didn't move. The sudden cessation of colored sparks at the vault had warned the police that their arrival was discovered.

No flashlights were in evidence. The whole scene of darkness carried an uncanny stillness, as though awaiting a principal actor, who would stir the drama from its frozen state.

Such a figure was already making his approach outside the bank – a shape that glided from a parking lot close at hand. The Shadow had reached this spot where crime was deadlocked with the law.

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He saw the open bank door and recognized what had happened. He understood the full blunder, when he arrived at the rear door of the clothing store and found it unwatched by any police. The door seemed locked, but The Shadow knew it must be otherwise.

It was a double door, used as a delivery entrance, and when The Shadow urged his full weight against it, the sections yielded a full inch, enough for The Shadow to thrust a gun muzzle through and pry the bar that crooks had fixed within.

Hardly had he crossed the threshold before his ear caught a faint clatter. Picking a course with his flashlight, The Shadow started in the direction of the sound, knowing that it was but the prelude to a greater noise to come.

The sound The Shadow heard was Griff's sudden thrust against the remnants of the vault door. The gnawed steel gave way, precipitating Griff into the vault. Instantly, guns began blind spurts, to be answered by others. The police were opening fire, and crooks followed suit.

MEN were dodging right and left, bringing flashlights into play. Passing sweeps revealed the Vapor Gun, with the broken vault beyond it. From the vault came hoarse shouts, representing Griff's raspy voice raised to a commanding pitch.

His arms were bundled with all the currency that he could gather; he wanted his men to follow him through the outlet to the other building before the police discovered it. In following, they were to bring the precious Vapor Gun.

The idea wasn't so wild as it seemed. Spreading their gunfire, robbers had put the police at a disadvantage. In making for their chosen route, Griff and his men would give the impression that they were boxing themselves in. Before the police discovered the real situation, the crooks would be gone.

Lunging across the floor, Griff was already on his way. A flashlight outlined him, then turned away as Gabby and the gunners fired toward the telltale torch. Another light gleamed ahead of Griff. It revealed an irregular patch of gaping blackness: the outlet that the robbers hoped to reach.

Griff rasped an order for his men to down the cop with the light, but the command finished itself abruptly. It wasn't what Griff saw that stopped him, for he saw nothing. It was the thing he heard.

It couldn't be human, that mocking laugh, amplified by the space from which it came. Literally, the gap in the wall was delivering the taunt. It seemed transformed into a giant's mouth, ready to swallow the malefactors who had created it!

Perhaps the gape of blackness wouldn't have revealed its secret, had men of the law taken prompt advantage of the bewilderment that gripped Griff and his crew. That darkness was ready to disgorge stabs of deadly flame, once the police turned their flashlights on the criminal tribe.

But the police were as startled as the crooks. They couldn't understand the existence of the cavern, let alone its laugh.

Turning, Gabby and the thugs beside him aimed anew for the lights that represented the police they hated. Fortunately, the aiming gunners were visible in the fringe of the lights. The cavern laughed no longer; instead, it disgorged the maker of the mirth.

CRIME'S STRONGHOLD

As he came directly into the light, he pealed a taunt that made crooks turn his way. He was handling a brace of automatics with consummate ease. Though not yet aimed, the big guns spoke a reminder that foemen would first have to deal with this new adversary before resuming their quarrel with others.

His very appearance marked him as a superfighter, even to those who had never before witnessed his power in action. Cloaked in black, this challenger was indeed a being to be feared, as those who faced his wrath well knew. The Shadow had given the law its turn to capture men of crime and the strange contrivance that aided their evil deeds.

Police had missed their chance, so The Shadow was taking over. Again, the turn was his!

CHAPTER XIII. HALF AND HALF

SO suddenly did crooks go diving, that the police wondered if they had vanished in the same amazing style with which The Shadow appeared from nowhere. There wasn't even the bark of guns to answer The Shadow's fiery stabs, for Griff's followers did not dare reveal their positions.

The Shadow was baiting them, as he drove toward the vault, ready to risk the few shots that might come his way. He wanted to bring the police into action.

The Shadow succeeded, too well. What the Lakedale force lacked in efficiency, it possessed in courage. To a man, they were individualists. Sight of The Shadow, heading toward the vault where crooks had been a moment before, was enough to start the police in the same direction. Blindly, they reached their goal as soon as The Shadow.

Foemen surged to meet them. Only through a grapple could Griff's crew hope to protect themselves against The Shadow's fire. There was a tangle of struggling figures; then, The Shadow was whirling into the melee, slugging at his enemies. Crooks dodged and broke apart; yet, in their excitement, they didn't forget their duties.

Gabby sprang in Griff's direction to protect the leader who carried the spoils from the vault. The other thugs grabbed the Vapor Gun and tried to use it as a shield while dragging it toward the outlet that The Shadow had abandoned. The Shadow intoned orders that the police understood. The local constabulary surged for the two men who were burdened by the heavy machine.

Griff was spilling bundles of cash as Gabby dragged him in the opposite direction. Gabby wanted to scoop them up, but Griff shoved him ahead. Coming upright, Gabby saw The Shadow right in front of him and tried to aim. The Shadow took Gabby's gun hand and twisted it behind him. With his other fist, The Shadow aimed a .45 at Griff, who now was holding only half of the loot, bundled in one arm.

Griff was turned about, using his other hand to whip something from his hip, and in a flash The Shadow knew that Griff wasn't going for a gun.

Sending Gabby sprawling across the floor, The Shadow suddenly reversed his tactics. Instead of helping the police, he hindered them, and in a vehement fashion. Like a streak of living blackness, he overtook them, flinging them like scarecrows lashed by a gale.

The Shadow's drive began just as the police were grabbing the men who lugged the Vapor Gun. When it ended, the officers were rolling toward the wall and the crooks had regained their prize.

CRIME'S STRONGHOLD

For some reason, The Shadow had suddenly decided to let the thug's complete their getaway!

During those moments while The Shadow, like a black-clad thunderbolt, was sending men in uniform headlong, Griff Perrick stood waiting, his hand fully drawn from his pocket. Gabby saw what Griff held: a stick of Citrite.

After the affray at the packing house, Griff had decided to equip himself with some of the high explosive that he had used with such success the night when it was stolen.

Griff wanted to blast The Shadow, at any cost. At first, Griff was planning to toss the stuff at the police; then, seeing The Shadow lurch into the scene, he waited. At present, the police were gone and The Shadow was Griff's target. Wheeling with his automatic, the cloaked avenger was desperately trying to prevent the stick of Citrite from leaving Griff's hand.

The Shadow was too late.

Slithering from the fingers that clutched it, Griff's destructive messenger was on its way. True, two of his own men were present, and they had the much-prized Vapor Gun right in the path of Griff's toss. But Griff had quickly calculated those factors. He was willing to sacrifice two henchmen, if he could destroy The Shadow.

As for the Vapor Gun, Griff preferred to banish it into oblivion. The chances of carrying it away were slim; if it fell into the hands of the police, crime's secret weapon would be known. So Griff let the murderous explosive fly.

It didn't seem possible that The Shadow could avoid the missile. He was full about, swinging his gun straight toward Griff, and therefore the best of targets. What Griff did not reckon was the speed behind The Shadow's turnabout.

He wasn't halting, flat-footed; he was coming with a lunge, that he turned into a long reach for the floor. Blackness actually seemed to swallow The Shadow, as a dark pool of water would receive a diver. The chunk of Citrite merely brushed the cloak that flowed above his shoulders, and the contact wasn't sufficient to produce a blast.

The Shadow was striking the floor flat as the deadly stick completed its arc, a dozen feet past him. The Citrite struck the floor tiles right beside the Vapor Gun. Griff's two helpers tried to copy The Shadow's dive; too late. There was a blast, a concussion that rocked the banking floor.

Two thugs were gone; with them, the Vapor Gun.

Gone permanently, those two. As for Griff, he was making for the door which the police had entered. As he staggered for the exit, Griff encountered Gabby and dragged him along, shoving a few bundles of currency Gabby's way. Blundering, stumbling, the mobsters lost about half the swag they carried before they reached their car.

MEANWHILE The Shadow, up from the floor uninjured, was beginning a pursuit. Shaken somewhat by the explosion, forced to find his feet before he could start the chase, the cloaked pursuer naturally lost several seconds.

Those were enough to bring the police back in the game. Dazed by the blast, Lakedale's finest couldn't grasp the fact that The Shadow still was friend, instead of foe. So they grasped The Shadow and tried to hold him.

CRIME'S STRONGHOLD

The human thunderbolt behaved like living lightning. He zigzagged from the clutches of his would-be captors. Holding him was impossible; following him would have been the same, if he hadn't chosen to bring the police after him.

They'd muffed a perfectly good chance to spoil crime in the making; but, though the police had failed, The Shadow was disposed to help them retrieve the error.

Out through the door, The Shadow purposely cut into the swath of flashlights, to draw attention his way. He reached his car and sprang behind the wheel, waving back as he started away.

Some of the police took the gesture for derision; others thought it was a beckon. The former started to shoot, while the latter shouted for them to stop.

Despite their confusion, the Lakedale contingent was agreed on one thing. Whether the cloaked invader proved to be friend or foe, their job was to follow him.

Taking to cars themselves, they spotted The Shadow within a few blocks, because he was purposely waiting for them. His head start was necessary; otherwise, he couldn't have noted what direction Griff and Gabby took.

Those two were well ahead, but The Shadow saw their route. They were going back to the hide-away in the orange grove, not knowing that The Shadow had located it. As soon as police cars appeared, The Shadow took the proper road and showed the police what speed could be. He was hoping to corner the crooks as soon as they turned into the grove.

Success looked certain when The Shadow spied the twinkle of taillights near the crossroad that marked the last stretch to the road. He was far enough behind so the fugitives would not notice him, and the police were closing in. The Lakedale force was equipped with speedy cars, which was a help; but they had sirens, too, and used them when they saw The Shadow's car.

Those shrieks, piercing the night air, couldn't be mistaken. The sound carried to the crooks at the crossroad; they knew, on the instant, that their destination had been learned. Instead of turning toward the grove, they took another road. Grimly, The Shadow followed, hoping that the police would regain their wits. They didn't.

When the chase reached a fork, the crooks went to the left and The Shadow did the same, trusting the police would follow; or, at least, divide, if they weren't certain. Instead, the mirror showed that the police cars were heading to the right.

Only by slackening speed and firing a couple of gunshots, did The Shadow manage to attract them. Griff's car was out of range when The Shadow fired; hence the signal to the police merely spurred the crooks.

Twisty roads enabled Griff to press the advantage he had gained. Soon, The Shadow's choice of turns was merely guesswork, so he decided to drop from the chase and let the police continue it, while he studied whatever clues a road map might offer.

As he eased his speed, a police car sighted him, so his only plan was to travel hit or miss until he outdistanced the blundering pursuers.

The Shadow's road promptly veered to the south, which he realized must be the wrong direction, but there was nothing to be done about it except to display more speed, which he did.

CRIME'S STRONGHOLD

A FEW, miles away, Griff and Gabby heard the fading of the sirens. Griff eased at the wheel, but didn't slacken speed. Eyes fixed on the road, he said to Gabby:

"Tough about those two guys."

"Yeah," agreed Gabby bluntly. "Tough!"

"I was chucking that stick at The Shadow. I didn't think he could duck it."

Gabby didn't answer. Knowing his companion's talkative way, Griff sensed the reason for his silence.

"All right, Gabby," rasped Griff. "Out with it! You figure that even if I'd hit The Shadow, I'd have got those other guys, too. Suppose I figured it, too. What then?"

After short consideration, Gabby spoke: "I suppose it was all you could do, Griff."

"You're talking sense," rejoined Griff. "It was half and half. Two of us could get away, and two couldn't. The coppers would have croaked them, if I hadn't. Maybe The Shadow would have got us."

More silence, while Griff concentrated on his driving to swing a sharp curve. Then Griff reverted to his theme.

"Half and half on the dough, too," he grumped. "I had to get one mitt loose to chuck the Citrite. So I dropped half of the cash. I guess I must have scooped up about twenty grand. Maybe we still have ten."

Griff was going to add that there were two less men to share the money, but he decided that it wouldn't be discreet. Ruthless measures didn't suit criminals, when their own lives were at stake, and Gabby seemed to have taken the deaths of his pals very much to heart. So Griff soothed his tone to one of remorse.

"It was the prof's machine that worried me," he argued. "I had to get rid of it. The coppers might have traced it back to Englemere, and that would put all of us in a jam. I'd counted on the boys ducking when they saw me getting ready to throw the explosive stuff. You understand, Gabby?"

Gabby grunted acquiescence.

"We'll have to tell the other fellows," continued Griff, in the same rueful tone. "No need to worry them. We'll blame it on the coppers. Or on The Shadow. You know, Gabby" – Griff's tone became confiding – "a couple of smart guys could have gotten that machine away for us. I mean the kind of birds you said you could bring into the outfit. We'll need a couple of new torpedoes. Suppose you pick them for me."

With a sideward glance, Griff witnessed Gabby's reaction. Gabby was pleased; his animosity had vanished. By bringing in new men, Gabby would increase his importance, which, so far, had been very slight. He might even be picturing himself on the way to equality with Griff, should the men he supplied prove capable.

Such, indeed, were Gabby's notions. Today, Griff had given him special rating, and would logically report the fact to Englemere. If the professor decided that he needed two lieutenants, to offset difficulties of crime, Gabby would be the man in line. Griff would have to recommend him, considering that Gabby had witnessed Griff's sacrifice of two stout fighters, something that Griff didn't want mentioned.

The deal was made, and Gabby's first step in the matter would be to bring in new recruits. The prospect pleased him.

It pleased The Shadow, too.

Miles to the south, The Shadow had finally eluded the Lakedale police. Wending his own way, the black-cloaked fighter was thinking of the two crooks slain at the bank. Two crooks gone meant two more needed.

It would be excellent, if Gabby supplied them. Any of Gabby's friends that might be chosen would certainly recommend Cliff Marsland as the other recruit. For Cliff was on good terms with all of Gabby's New York pals, and shared none of the petty jealousies that they held toward each other.

The Shadow was also thinking in terms of half and half. Of the next two men who were chosen to join the horde of hidden crooks, only one would be serving crime.

The other would be serving The Shadow!

CHAPTER XIV. THE TWO RECRUITS

PASSENGERS alighting from the streamline limited were surveyed closely when they walked through the Jacksonville Union Terminal. Men were posted all about the depot for that particular purpose. Some of the arriving passengers were conscious that they were under scrutiny, and felt nervous. There were two who accepted the situation unperturbed.

One of the pair was portly, jovial of expression. He had a Panama hat tilted back over his forehead, and his eyes were half closed to conceal their sharpness. He looked about curiously, much like a salesman who had come to a new territory.

He was a salesman. Bullets were his merchandise, and he liked to deliver them in half dozen lots, through the barrel of a .38 revolver. His portly appearance was no sign of softness. Racketeers of the old school would have recognized this softy as Spud Kiefert, once the highest-priced gunman in New York.

The man with Spud was a firmer sort. His eye was steady, his face had a chiseled profile. He carried himself with the manner of a gentleman, the only passport that he needed. Such was Cliff Marsland, rated by crooks as a one-man mob, but never suspected as an agent of The Shadow.

Spud and Cliff took a taxicab to a hotel, where they registered under other names. They didn't say a word to each other until they reached their room. There, Spud opened a suitcase, took out a bottle and poured a couple of drinks. Finishing his with a single gulp, Spud looked at Cliff and queried:

"You saw them?"

Cliff gave a blunt nod.

"Feds," sneered Spud. "Casing the depot. Two-way stuff, watching guys coming into Jax, the same as those going out. Gabby said they might be around."

By "said," Spud meant that Gabby had mentioned it in a letter. Spud was the friend that Gabby picked to bolster the depleted quota of crooks. He'd been told to bring another "right guy" to Florida, and Cliff proved the logical choice.

"No chance of them spotting us, Cliff," assured Spud: "We were smart in the old days, not so many years ago."

CRIME'S STRONGHOLD

We laid off when the Feds showed up in New York. None of them know us. What's more, they haven't got hep to guys like us.

"Smoothies, that's what we are! They're looking for tough mugs, the old gorilla type, the kind we used to boss around, and knock off if they belonged to some other mob. We've got to be careful, though. The Feds are so much in the dark, they might follow almost anybody."

In referring to "gorillas," Spud was using a term applied to mobsters. He didn't know that real gorillas, like Tongo, figured indirectly in the affairs of Gabby Tarcot. Nor did Cliff. So far, he hadn't learned anything from Spud beyond the fact that they were going to join up with a crowd of criminals that included Gabby.

Perhaps Spud didn't know much more. The bloated crook was pouring himself another drink, but it didn't encourage Cliff. He'd seen Spud polish off a bottle of Bourbon at a single sitting without getting talkative. The only way to learn anything from Spud was to wait until he wanted to tell it.

"Getting dark," observed Spud, looking from the window. "Guess I'll go down and buy a newspaper. These local blabbers may mention something we ought to know. Didn't want to pick one up while the Feds were giving us the look-see."

As soon as Spud was gone, Cliff listened at the door. Spud had a clever way of doubling back to places that he left. His bulky build didn't seem to qualify him as an eavesdropper, but Spud was such, par excellence.

Elephantine in appearance, he had the ways of a mouse. He might suspect that Cliff had friends in Jacksonville. If so, Spud would wait around to learn if Cliff used the telephone.

Satisfied that Spud was gone, Cliff put in a quick call to another hotel. Soon talking to the complacent Mr. Cranston, Cliff informed The Shadow of his arrival and named the hotel where he was stopping. So far, Cliff reported, he hadn't an idea as to how, where, or when, he and Spud were to contact Gabby Tarcot.

CLIFF had just settled in a chair and poured his drink down a handy washstand when Spud returned. He was carrying what looked like a bundle of newspapers, which he flung upon a table.

"Hit the jackpot," laughed Spud, referring to the newspaper. "Saturday night, so the Sunday paper is out. It's full of what's been going on. Maps and everything. Feds blew into Pahokee and about took it apart, looking for guys like Gabby."

Cliff knew of Pahokee, the vegetable center on the shore of Lake Okeechobee. Well south in Florida, it attracted hordes of migratory workers who picked the winter vegetable crops. Cliff had learned enough from The Shadow to know that crooks must have their headquarters much farther north. Nevertheless, it was good policy to appear apprehensive, so Cliff did.

"Don't worry," gruffed Spud. "We aren't going to Pahokee. The Feds followed a bum steer, and their next one is going to be worse. They haven't scoured the Everglades yet, so they're figuring on doing it in a big way. That will take them about a year, Gabby tells me.

"I'm sure of one thing, Cliff" – Spud was becoming confidential: "we haven't very far to go. Because, in his last letter, Gabby said that –"

The telephone bell interrupted. Spud answered it, put his hand over the mouthpiece and informed Cliff: "It's Gabby!" Then Spud was back at the phone again, and the rest of his conversation was mostly: "Yeah," and "I get it."

CRIME'S STRONGHOLD

Spud dropped one point of information, only. He repeated the name of a place that Gabby told him. The name was Yula Springs.

Cliff had been doing a lot of homework in between times, familiarizing himself with the map of Florida. He could mentally locate Yula Springs, a forgotten winter resort popular in the Gay Nineties. The place was about sixty miles from Jacksonville, on the fringe of a lake region. But it was outside the area that Harry Vincent was searching.

Very probably crooks planned a meeting at Yula Springs, in order that they could double back to their base. Should Cliff and Spud be apprehended on the way, police or Feds still wouldn't have a correct lead to the band that these two newcomers intended to join.

Culling through the newspaper, Spud tore out some pages that interested him and stuffed them in his pocket. He said that he and Cliff could leave their suitcases, which were nothing but dummies, and let the hotel worry about the bill.

They went downstairs, and in the lobby Spud paused to buy some cigarettes. While Spud was at the newsstand, Cliff paused idly at the desk, where he caught the clerk's friendly gaze.

"If anybody asks for me," remarked Cliff, "tell them I've gone up to Yula Springs."

The clerk looked surprised. He hadn't even heard of Yula Springs, and wondered where it was. Then his courtesy returned.

"Very well, sir," he said. "Your name, please, and the room number?"

Cliff gave the alias under which he was operating, for he had mentioned it to The Shadow over the telephone. Coming over, Spud gave a suspicious glare, directed more at the clerk than Cliff, who was starting to turn away. On the way out, Spud growled:

"What was that all about?"

"Some sort of phonus balonus," replied Cliff. "The clerk asked my name and room number. Said there was some mix-up on the hotel register."

"You gave him the moniker?"

"Of course. You saw how easy I passed it off. I don't think it meant much. The Feds have got the hotel guys worried, making them check on all guests. That's all."

Spud muttered something to himself, then told the doorman he wanted a cab. He had a chance for a few words to Cliff, and put them.

"I don't like it," said Spud. "There's a car in a garage here that I could pick up, but I'm going to use the other route instead."

THIS was Cliff's first inkling that Gabby had suggested two ways to reach Yula Springs. Spud crowded into the cab first, and said something to the driver that Cliff didn't hear. Then, as they were riding away, Spud pulled the newspaper pages from his pocket, rustled them, and gave Cliff a nudge with his elbow.

CRIME'S STRONGHOLD

"Terrible, terrible," spoke Spud, in a tone that was his idea of something aristocratic. "All this crime, I mean. What do you think of it, Pendexter?"

Cliff caught the cue. Spud had spoken loud enough for the cabby to overhear, so Cliff did the same.

"I hope they apprehend the rogues," Cliff rejoined. "I scarcely feel safe, even in this metropolis, Montague."

"We shall feel secure shortly," assured Spud, "when we have boarded the steamship for New York. I am so glad that our luggage is already installed in our staterooms. I trust that our voyage will prove a pleasant one."

"The vessel is an excellent one, I am informed. Ah, I see that we are approaching the steamship piers."

So they were, but Cliff knew well that they were not returning to New York. Spud's fancy talk was all for the cab driver's benefit; what it was hiding, Cliff hoped soon to learn, and did.

After the cab departed, Spud motioned Cliff to a small dock, where a trim speedboat was waiting. They boarded it, and under the darkness that overspread the water front, Spud glided the craft out to the channel of the Saint Johns River.

They were purring beneath a huge highway bridge, heading upstream, when Spud remarked:

"This is the way I like to travel, Cliff. Gabby knows it; that's why he had this speedboat planted for us, in case we didn't want to come by car."

"You mean Yula Springs is on the river?"

"Close to it. It has an old dock that hasn't been used for years. We'll park this baby under the old pier where nobody will find it. Gabby will be waiting for us."

Cliff wondered if The Shadow would be waiting, too. The boat was averaging about twenty miles an hour against the slow current of the broad Saint Johns, which meant about two hours to Yula Springs.

If The Shadow picked up Cliff's message within an hour, he could easily reach the destination by car before the speedboat arrived there.

Knowing the ways of The Shadow, Cliff finally decided that his chief would be on hand. He doubted, though, that The Shadow would declare himself. More logically, he would trail the crooks and locate their headquarters; later, The Shadow could contact Cliff, as inside man, and plan the undoing of the criminal band.

Cliff could picture a future replete with surprises, that might even begin to pop tonight. He was right: surprises were to happen, very soon. There was just one flaw in the picture.

Those surprises were coming in reverse. The persons who would experience them were Cliff Marsland and his chief, The Shadow!

CHAPTER XV. CRIME'S SNARE

GABBY was waiting at the forgotten dock. Spud introduced Cliff to him, and the three hid away the speedboat. Gabby led the way to a car, where another man was waiting.

CRIME'S STRONGHOLD

Taking the wheel, Gabby drove the car along a narrow road of red brick, sprouting with weeds that rivaled the Spanish moss that draped the boughs of encroaching trees.

"They don't use that landing any more," informed Gabby, "because it's half a mile from the town, which is pretty dead. You'll see when we get to it."

They saw, well enough. Yula Springs consisted of a sprawling old hotel made of wood which hadn't been painted for years. The place was closed, and Cliff could hear the wind banging the shutters.

Aside from the hotel, there were half a dozen smaller buildings, all dilapidated, and the breeze seemed to sway them in the moonlight, though it could have been an illusion caused by the trees that waved their mossy drapes.

The town had a traffic light, indicating the crossing of two side roads. It happened to be red when Gabby's car approached, and during the short wait, Cliff took another look at the hotel. He was almost sure that he saw a vague automobile lurking in the forgotten driveway.

That car could mean The Shadow!

Odd that Gabby should mention The Shadow the moment that the car started again, but Gabby did, and he addressed his remarks to Cliff. Gabby happened to remember something.

"I've heard of you, Marsland," he said. "They say you were out gunning for The Shadow, once."

"Yeah," returned Cliff. He'd started that rumor, a few years back, to impress some crooks that he was tough. "But I never did find The Shadow."

"He didn't find you, though," complimented Gabby. "Like he does most guys who look for him. Well, maybe you'll get your chance at The Shadow tonight."

Spud wangled into the conversation. His tone showed that he was nervous.

"You mean The Shadow has been around?"

"Sure he has," snapped Gabby. "You don't think the local tinstars have been queering things for us, do you? We've run them sheriffs ragged!"

"But what about the Feds?" queried Spud. "They're in Jax –"

"And we aren't," interrupted Gabby. "The Feds are new on this job. They haven't worried us. But this Shadow guy" – Gabby's tone was harsh – "he's met up with us every time! So, tonight, we're going to get him!"

Cliff weighed Gabby's boast. For one thing, Cliff recognized that they weren't bound for crime's headquarters just yet. They were outside the circle that Cliff knew about, and Gabby was heading farther away. There was something cocksure in Gabby's manner that didn't suit Cliff.

They'd gone at least a dozen miles, when Gabby revealed his hand a trifle more. He turned his head from the wheel and gave a nudging motion across his shoulder.

"Take a look out the back, Spud," Gabby ordered. "See if anybody is tailing us."

CRIME'S STRONGHOLD

Spud took a look, and a long one. His tone wasn't nervous, when he announced:

"It's all jake, Gabby. Nobody tailing us."

"There should be," Gabby chuckled. "I'll tell you how we figured it, Griff and me: We knew we couldn't spot The Shadow, if he spotted us. He's too smart; he knows how to hang back. So we planted a car just outside of Yula Springs. I told it to wait five minutes after I went past."

"Then it was to come, hell-bent, and catch up to us near here, unless" – Gabby stressed the word heavily – "unless another car came along in the meantime. In that case, the cover-up boys are supposed to tag it. That's what they're doing right now, and I can tell you who they're tagging: The Shadow!"

GABBY spoke with a conviction that Cliff was forced to share, knowing that The Shadow had probably picked up the message regarding Yula Springs.

Cliff was hoping, though, that The Shadow would spot the situation and recognize that he was between two crook-manned cars. The Shadow had solved such situation before, but this one, as Cliff soon learned, possessed unusual features.

"Don't think those guys in back are dumb," chuckled Gabby. "They aren't sticking close to The Shadow, so he can wise to what's what. They don't have to stick close. I'll show you why."

They were rounding a curve. Ahead were the lights of a small roadhouse; as they neared the place, Cliff heard the sound of raucous voices from within and caught the music of a tinny orchestra. There were quite a few cars parked all about, mostly rattletraps.

Gabby swerved toward the place, as though about to stop. Changing his mind, he blinked his lights from bright to dim, then back again, and kept on his way.

"We've got a guy named Dunk Kedly planted in that juke joint," said Gabby. "What I just did was flash him the signal. He'll put in a phone call to another juke joint, ten miles up the line, where Griff is waiting for it. The boys who are laying back will pick up Dunk and bring him along."

"Meanwhile, Griff will be getting ready, because he'll be expecting us. We're the decoy, get it? We'll pull The Shadow right to the spot where Griff is waiting. Griff thinks he can handle The Shadow all on his own, but if he don't" – Gabby spoke with eager anticipation – "it will be our job! You'll see."

That was just what Cliff was afraid of. Gabby was picking up speed to cover the next ten miles, but he wouldn't be able to outrun Dunk's phone call, which was meant to spell disaster for The Shadow.

The man beside Gabby was passing revolvers into the back seat, just in case Cliff and Spud hadn't brought guns of their own. Tense though the situation was, Cliff could only wait.

The lights of the next juke joint appeared, but Gabby sped straight past them. When he reached a curve, he slackened, on the assumption that The Shadow, close on the trail, would catch another glimpse of his taillights. Another mile, at a fairly moderate pace, and Gabby swerved into a sand road, blinking his lights as soon as he was among the trees.

"You won't see them," stated Gabby, "but they're here. Griff and his bunch, with sawed-off shotguns. On both sides of the road, ready to give The Shadow a blast he won't forget, if he lives through it!"

CRIME'S STRONGHOLD

Gabby's lights, cleaving through the trees and palmettos, swept briefly on the wave-chopped water of a lake. The road cut right, to follow the lake, and Gabby swung it still farther, to park in a turnout on the right side of the road. As he nosed into a low bank of palmettos, he blanked the lights entirely.

"Hop out," ordered Gabby, "and get back to the bend. If The Shadow pulls through, we'll settle what's left of him –"

Cliff didn't hear the rest. He was already hopping out. He'd formed his plan and was acting on it. He didn't care if those palmettos were full of rattlers, or the ground swampy enough to harbor water moccasins, too. Dangerous though such reptiles might be, they didn't carry half the sting of Cliff's present associates.

The farther Cliff could get away, the better. When The Shadow's car appeared at the beginning of the sand road, Cliff could fire away with his revolver and thus supply a warning to his chief. Cliff wasn't going to waste shots, either. When he fired them, they'd be in the general direction of the spot where Griff and other killers lay in ambush.

It chanced that Cliff wasn't familiar with palmettos. They weren't simply clumps of shrubs that stood straight up. They were things with long stems as large as tree trunks, that lay along the ground under the low, thick foliage of the plants themselves. Cliff hadn't gone a dozen feet before he tripped. His drive among the palmettos changed to a forceful plunge.

Cliff could hear a motor purring as he fell, and thought that the sound came from Gabby's car. He was wrong; another machine was wheeling in from the highway, slithering as it struck the sand. Cliff poked his head from the palmettos, to face the glare of headlights that didn't blink, as they would have if they belonged to Gabby's cover-up car.

It was The Shadow, driving straight into the ambush!

THINGS happened all at once, so swiftly that they seemed timed to the half-second that it took Cliff to find his gun trigger and pull it. The car from the highway took a terrific forward hurl; as it did, its lights blotted themselves entirely.

From the solid blackness came the rise of a challenging laugh, unmistakably The Shadow's. But the mirth was drowned, almost instantly, by the burst of guns that spouted from each side of the road, giving the effect of fireworks in the darkness.

Griff and three others had let go with the sawed-off weapons. The roar of the abbreviated shotguns drowned the warning bark of Cliff's revolver. Crooks had sprung their ambush in spite of Cliff's endeavor. How The Shadow had fared, was still a question.

If The Shadow had survived that fusillade, credit for the fact belonged to one person only: The Shadow, himself!

CHAPTER XVI. VANISHED PREY

THE SHADOW'S laugh was absent when the roar of shotguns faded. The only sound was a clatter accompanied by the crackle of palmettos, that ended in a sharp crash as a car brought up against a pine tree. The car was The Shadow's. Plunging through the ambushade, it had rocketed from the sand road, to finish with a smash.

CRIME'S STRONGHOLD

Facts were popping through Cliff Marsland's brain so rapidly, that he could hardly classify them.

The Shadow must have sensed a warning, and Cliff was realizing what it had been. Closing in on Gabby's car, The Shadow had seen it across the palmettos as it swerved to the turnout, for there the lights were trained toward the road. The sudden disappearance of the lights gave proof that the sand road was a trap.

By then, The Shadow was actually on the road. With no chance to retrace his course, he had done the only other thing. He'd watched for the first tremble of the banking palmettos; spying the waver, he'd doused his lights and given the accelerator a full shove. The car, at least, had lurched through so speedily that shotgun slugs couldn't wreck it.

But what of The Shadow?

Had the shotguns finished him, hence the crash? Or was the smash-up the natural result of a blind drive into pitch-blackness?

Cliff intended to be the first man to answer those questions. Tearing through the palmettos, he kept stepping high to avoid the loglike roots. He could hear other men making toward The Shadow's car. They were shouting, and blinking flashlights, as they neared the goal. The flashlights worried Cliff.

They meant that something had happened to The Shadow. Otherwise; the cloaked marksman would have begun to pick them off in customary style. Certainly, The Shadow needed help, if he wasn't completely beyond it.

More shouts told that Griff and his crew were coming from their place of ambush, but Marsland still intended to be the first man on the scene, and to fight the rest single-handed, if necessary.

The Shadow's car was off the road, but it was resting upright. Cliff saw the reason: one front wheel was bent beneath the car, but it was on the side that had left the road and hence was supported by the thick palmetto stumps. That side was toward Cliff and the door was open. A passing flashlight showed blackness only, but Cliff saw the blackness move.

The Shadow was still alive!

Alive, but dazed from the hard impact that the car had taken. Cliff was sure The Shadow hadn't received the blast from a sawed-off shotgun, for at close range those weapons were deadly. Moreover, The Shadow couldn't have rolled from a level car seat unless very much alive and active.

In fact, the door was slamming shut as the flashlight's gleam left it, proof that The Shadow must have given it a shove. The slam was drowned by shouts, which gave Cliff a chance to play the proper part.

Leaping in front of the wrecked car, he reached the door on the other side and yelled for crooks to join him. From the way Cliff brandished his revolver in the gleam of the flashlights, the other men were sure that he had found The Shadow.

Two arrived at once. One was Gabby; the other, cold of eye and hard of jaw, could only be Griff. He was carrying a shotgun, and was showing more authority than Gabby. Regretfully, Cliff saw that the shotgun was double-barreled.

Pushing Cliff, aside, Griff pushed his sawed-off weapon into the car window, while Gabby flicked on a flashlight. Then, turning, Griff inquired with a rasp:

CRIME'S STRONGHOLD

"Well, where is he?"

Griff was used to having men back down when he applied the pressure. This was his first test of Cliff's mettle, and Griff was due for a surprise.

"He was right in back of the wheel," said Cliff. "I saw him!"

"I don't see him," retorted Griff, gesturing toward the vacant car. "How can you?"

"I said I saw him!" Cliff's tone was as hard as Griff's. "If you don't see him now, it's because you hogged the show. You're dealing with The Shadow. Give him a half a second and he'll melt right out of your mitts. You gave him a full second."

"Yeah? I suppose he went through the other door."

Cliff shrugged as though he didn't know. Griff's response was an ugly snort.

"You'll be telling me The Shadow can vanish," said Griff. "I'll believe it when I see it. He couldn't have come out through this door, so he must have used the other one. Get busy, all of you" – Griff was addressing new arrivals – "and beat those palmettos until you find him!"

HENCHMEN were gingerly starting to the task, but they didn't find it necessary to beat the brush. Sounds reached them and they swung their flashlights, to see The Shadow stumbling through the palmettos toward the road beyond the bend.

Griff and the others of the ambush crew raised their shotguns and blazed away, but without result.

The range was long, for one thing. For another, The Shadow disappeared ahead of the first gun blast. He was at the edge of the palmettos; in shaking clear of their troublesome roots, he took a long fall to the road. While Griff and the others were staring to see if they had gotten any results, Gabby decided that they hadn't.

"The guy is groggy," insisted Gabby, "and that flop he took won't help him any. Come on. We'll nail him!"

Gabby started by the road to avoid the tripping roots, and Cliff followed, right at his elbow. So far, Cliff was free of any suspicion, thanks partly to luck, but he was ready to toss away discretion as soon as necessary.

Rounding the bend, Gabby saw The Shadow stagger into a palmetto clump toward the lake, and the killer raised his revolver. Cliff was just ready to make a sideward grab and spoil Gabby's aim, when The Shadow took another stumble and disappeared.

From then on, it was a slow-motion chase, the slowest that Cliff had ever experienced, and equally harrowing. The Shadow was rising, falling, visible, then gone. Gunmen were shooting from so many angles and distance that Cliff couldn't prevent them; but they were stumbling, too.

The bark of guns spurred The Shadow – not only to find shelter but to return the fire. His shots, however, were so wide that Cliff knew him to be badly dazed.

Having solved the problem of getting through the palmettos, Cliff was the closest pursuer when The Shadow neared the lake shore. By the sweep of a flashlight, he saw his cloaked chief take a desperate lunge that ended with a long spill across a gully. Head on, The Shadow smashed into a fair-sized tree, much as his car had struck a larger one.

CRIME'S STRONGHOLD

Cliff saw what followed: a sidelong roll that landed the dark-clad fighter back amid clumps of matted grass from which saplings rose. The Shadow was beyond the palmettos, lying on open turf, and definitely unconscious.

Cliff played a last, desperate stroke. He fired at an imaginary spot to the right of where The Shadow lay. Flashlights swung Cliff's way, and he beckoned. Gabby and others came along, to hunt the shore at the place where Cliff pointed. Since they wouldn't find The Shadow for a while, Cliff started back to give the others a wrong steer.

Running into Griff, Cliff found the fellow very doubtful regarding any information that his new recruit supplied.

"Over that way?" queried Griff. "That means the other way, to me. You can stay here and see who makes out best: Gabby or me."

At least, Griff was making a wide detour in the other direction, which meant that his hunt would be as slow as Gabby's. Unfortunately, Cliff no longer had a chance to move about, for Spud was with him, to see that he followed Griff's orders. Headlights appeared along the road, bringing Dunk Kedly and the reserves, which made matters even worse.

"You'd better hurry that hunt," said Dunk, when Spud informed him what had happened. "Some guys with deputy badges saw us pull out of the juke joint. They'll be coming along the highway, and if anybody heard the shooting, they'll head in here, sure!"

Spud suggested that Dunk and the rest work toward the shore, where Griff and Gabby were moving toward each other from two directions. Glumly, Cliff helped scour the brush, wondering what next. He could hear the wind sighing heavily among the pines, its whisper vaguely reminiscent of The Shadow's laugh.

The Shadow hadn't laughed when Cliff last saw him. He had been a sprawling, helpless figure, his cloak flayed wide by that same wind that now was mocking him. Cliff couldn't pick the exact spot where The Shadow had fallen, for he had lost its location while steering other men away.

These searchers, however, were sure to find The Shadow, and Cliff's only hope, a faint one, was that crooks might prefer to take The Shadow prisoner, instead of killing him, in his helpless state. At that, The Shadow's plight would be very bad.

Lights were converging upon the shore. Ten minutes of three-way hunting had narrowed the area considerably. Each succeeding minute weighed heavier on Cliff, until, to his amazement, he found that the group had joined. Yet the matted grass was barren; their prey, The Shadow, had vanished from their midst!

GRIFF swept a powerful flashlight out into the lake. The glare made something stir. From seemingly a floating log, it became a reptilian creature, an alligator. They saw the 'gator slide ashore and take to brushy shelter. Further out, Griff's flashlight revealed a small island amid the waves of the sizable lake.

"He couldn't have swum that far," assured Griff. "If he tried to, the 'gator would have gotten him. Maybe it did get him, unless he crawled back into the palmettos."

"Not a chance," returned Gabby. "It beats me, Griff. It's like it was up at the car. The guy just faded out on us!"

CRIME'S STRONGHOLD

Griff's eyes met Marsland's and stayed there. Griff hadn't forgotten what he said before, and when his gaze shifted, it showed his acknowledgment of the impossible. Griff couldn't deny what Marsland had previously intimated: that The Shadow had ways of vanishing when occasion so demanded.

It was Dunk's voice that shook off the amazement that gripped Griff.

"The cops are coming," reminded Dunk. "We ought to lam, Griff."

With a blunt nod, Griff ordered his men back to their cars. The caravan now numbered three, and they followed the sand road along the lake. Gabby's car was last, because the others passed it before he could pull from the turnout.

In the rear seat, Cliff looked back through the window to see new lights coming in from the highway.

Battle had been reported, and arriving deputy sheriffs were stopping to survey the evidence – The Shadow's car – wrecked beside the road.

Too late to witness the departure of Griff's band, the deputies would start their own search through the trampled palmettos. Whatever had happened to The Shadow, Cliff was sure that the deputies would not find him.

For Cliff, himself, was inclined to accept the impossible in a situation which offered nothing else. Though helpless and unconscious, hounded by foemen who sought his doom, The Shadow had vanished without a trace!

CHAPTER XVII. CLIFF MEETS THE BRAIN

BY the time the caravan reached the Anthropological Laboratory, Cliff Marsland had completely lost all sense of direction. Griff Perrick, leading the procession, had traced a course through dozens of forgotten roads that crossed paved highways like the strands of a spider's web.

The Spanish architecture of the Ape Lab was another puzzle to Cliff, and when Cissie, the trained chimpanzee, politely admitted the returning crowd, Cliff thought he was in the middle of a nightmare. Spud's impression was the same, but it wasn't long before the newcomers became acquainted with their surroundings.

Griff took them along with the rest, to the room where the cages were. There, he told them what the place was, but did not mention its exact location, so Cliff was still somewhat in the dark.

Though he knew Florida quite well, he had never heard of the Anthropological Laboratory. Privately endowed, and conducted for scientific purposes only, the institution was not listed in any guide books.

Explaining that the new men were to serve as keepers in the employ of Professor Englemere, Griff decided to give them an idea of the usual routine. He began by inspecting the row of cages, where most of the apes were quartered for the night.

Griff stopped at a cage specially reserved for Tongo, and noted that the prize simian was absent. Swinging to two men who had been on duty during his absence, Griff demanded:

"Where's Tongo?"

CRIME'S STRONGHOLD

Both keepers started to talk at once. From their remarks, Griff grasped that matters had been hectic while he was away. The monkeys had been put to work, as usual, on their various tasks, but some of them had gotten out of hand. In the confusion, Tongo had gone out for a stroll. The two men hadn't seen him since.

"He'll be back," decided Griff, at last. "Tongo knows how to ring the bell."

"Somebody was ringing it before," said one of the keepers. "Cissie answered it."

"Who was it?" Griff queried.

"We don't know," replied the other keeper, uneasily. "We got to the door too late. We thought maybe it was Tongo – or you."

Griff overlooked the comparison of himself and the gorilla. He was more worried about the bell. An idea struck him.

"It could have been Tongo," said Griff. "He might have gone in to see Englemere." He turned to Cliff and Spud. "Come on, you two. I'll introduce you to the big shot, and we'll see if Tongo did come back."

They went to Englemere's study and found Tongo there, exactly as Griff hoped. The great gorilla was looming behind the desk where Englemere sat, and Cliff thought that the professor was a dwarf, until he arose. Then, shaking hands with the bearded man, Cliff found himself looking up at him and realized that the professor had merely looked small in comparison with Tongo.

While Cliff was shaking hands with Professor Englemere, Griff happened to observe the newspapers poking out from Spud's pocket. With a swoop, Griff took them and thrust them beneath his arm. Turning around, Cliff heard Griff say:

"I'll take care of these, Spud. The boys waste too much time reading newspapers. We don't allow them here. Step up. I want you to meet Professor Englemere."

Cliff saw a smile appear amid Englemere's beard and took it as the professor's approval of Griff's confiscatory methods. Tongo moved forward as though interested, too, but Englemere noted the gorilla's approach and gestured him back.

Introductions finished, Griff was starting from the study with his companions, when Englemere called to him:

"I should like to confer with you, Perrick, after you have shown the new men to their quarters."

From Englemere's tone, Cliff sensed that the conference might prove important. He eyed Griff as they walked along, and wondered how soon the fellow would be going back.

By the time they reached the bunk rooms, in another corner of the building, Cliff was determined to listen in on the chat between Professor Englemere and Griff Perrick.

In all his experience, Cliff had never before encountered a set-up so tight as this one. It was like a game within a game, more formidable the deeper it went.

ORIGINALLY, Cliff had expected to meet just Gabby Tarcot and a band of roving mobsters who were thriving in the Florida climate and managing to stay safe in their hide-away largely because the law's hunt had gone the other direction. If Gabby Co. had simply been hopping from juke joint to juke joint, it wouldn't

have surprised Cliff.

Then Griff Perrick had loomed into the picture. Griff made a decided difference. He'd left New York some years ago; gone out West, so people thought. Rated highly in crimedom during the days of the racket rings, Griff had never let the law get too much on him.

Tonight, Griff's attempt to ambush The Shadow was typical of the ex-racketeer's nerve, and when he led his band back to a pretentious headquarters of Spanish stucco, it was simply new evidence that Griff did things in a lavish way.

Then Griff and his importance had suddenly dwindled in Cliff's mind. Griff's talk of a big shot had merely been the prelude to a meeting with a real colossus, in the person of Professor Englemere. Anyone that Griff would concede to be bigger than himself would have to be very big, indeed.

Englemere filled the specifications. In mental stature, he towered above Griff, just as Tongo bulked physically above the professor, himself.

More than curiosity impelled Cliff's decision to look in on the conference between Englemere and Griff. It might be that the brain would have some ideas when his lieutenant reported the strange disappearance of The Shadow. So Cliff, still worried about his chief, began to look for an opportunity to leave the bunk room and follow after Griff, who had already gone.

The opportunity arrived. Gabby was the man who made it possible, along with a couple of uniforms that he handed to Cliff and Spud.

"Get into these," ordered Gabby. "Half an hour until inspection. We must all be spick and span. That's what the prof calls it."

Spud didn't like the idea of a uniform. He wanted to know why he had to wear one.

"It's so we can tell you from the monkeys," bantered Gabby. "If you think I'm kidding, keep your eyes open. Some of them apes can outsmart you twice in a row! Wait'll you meet Loco, the orangutan. He's just learned to shoot craps, and the way he handles the bones, the boys wish they hadn't taught him!"

Despite the banter, Spud was still growling when Gabby went. He glared at the uniform and decided that half an hour would be time to "look around the joint" before he put on the suit that would distinguish him from a monkey.

So Spud stalked from the bunk room, and as soon as his footsteps faded, Cliff hurried out and went the other way. He felt he could use Spud as an alibi, if the present quest brought trouble.

At the passage to Englemere's study, Cliff saw Griff up ahead. He waited until the lieutenant entered the professor's room; then Cliff slid forward and tried the door himself. The doorway was deep on the inside, much like a short alcove. Finding the door unlocked, Cliff easily maneuvered into the listening post.

He was employing The Shadow's tactics, but he doubted that he could emulate his chief. Rather, Cliff was thinking in terms of Spud; remembering how easily the clumsy-looking man could move about, Cliff was sure he could do the same.

Sounds of voices drowned Cliff's entry. Englemere was talking, and his tone had a sharp, sarcastic bite that Cliff had not noticed during the interview. Its emphasis was stronger than the raspy voice with which Griff

replied.

Cliff risked a look around the corner of the doorway. He saw Englemere holding a newspaper, a thick one, the same edition that Spud had bought in Jacksonville.

"You've read this, Perrick?"

"Where did that come from, prof?" countered Griff. "I didn't bring it."

"I know you didn't," mouthed Englemere, "because you were out when it arrived. Tongo brought it."

"Tongo!" Momentarily, Griff was taken aback. He looked from Englemere to the gorilla, standing beside the desk. "Say, Tongo, you were supposed to be up a tree!"

"Don't dodge the issue," inserted Englemere. "You've taken Tongo with you, somewhere. Otherwise, he couldn't have learned this trick of taking newspapers from rural mailboxes!"

On his feet as he finished, Englemere was giving Griff an eye-to-eye glare. Cliff saw possibilities in the situation: an open break between the brain and his lieutenant. Indeed, Englemere's next words showed signs of rage.

"I have given you leeway, Perrick! But always with one proviso: the apes are never to be taken from their present habitat. Had I so chosen, I could have used Tongo and others to assist me in the venture that I managed personally. If you won't take orders –"

"I'll take over!" interrupted Griff. His hand whipped from his pocket and clamped a revolver against the professor's ribs, so swiftly that the gun might have sprouted from Englemere's chest, instead of Griff's hand.

"I've been waiting, just in case this happened, prof! You've forgotten that while you've been busy with your Vapor Gun; I've been giving the orders to a dozen men. One word from me and they'll pile in here! They'll listen to me, not to you!"

Though Englemere's arms were lifting, a great laugh came from his black beard. He was tilting back his head when he uttered:

"So you can depend upon a dozen followers, Perrick! What are they compared to one, when that one is – Tongo!"

The pause preceded a louder tone. Englemere's use of the gorilla's name was like a summons. Before Griff could realize it, Tongo responded. The ape came across the desk like a living tidal wave.

Evidently, Englemere had trained him to grab for guns, for he took Griff's, and its owner with it. His revolver thumping the desk, Griff spun in air, to come into Tongo's full embrace. Astounded, Cliff could only think of Griff as a walnut in the jaws of a nutcracker.

Englemere intervened as he scooped up Griff's gun. He clucked from his black beard; and made a gesture. Tongo's great grip relaxed into a toss that landed Griff, limp and disheveled, in a chair. From across the desk, Englemere laughed as he declared:

"I think we can now discuss matters on an equitable basis, Perrick! But, first, there are some facts I wish to know."

Facts that Cliff Marsland wanted, too, for he knew they could prove useful to The Shadow, if his chief still lived!

CHAPTER XVIII. THE NEW SCHEME

STEADILY, Professor Englemere eyed Griff Perrick, who, in turn, was looking askance at Tongo. Quite obviously, Griff wasn't willing to risk a move, nor even an argument, while the gorilla stood in readiness. The fact pleased Englemere.

"Let us review a few points," suggested the professor. "I feel that we have made a mistake in operating independently. We shall start with the night we raided the Citrite factory."

Griff nodded, since there was nothing else to do. Englemere proceeded with his theme.

"In back of that raid," declared Englemere, "I had, let us say, a scientific purpose. I needed Citrite to improve my Vapor Gun, and there was only one way to obtain it."

Griff gave another stiff nod. Englemere suggested that he relax, which Griff did, by degrees. Tongo relaxed, too, so Griff became fully at ease.

"To put it bluntly," resumed Englemere, "I made my debut in crime. Whatever my justification, the fact remains: I am a criminal like yourself, Perrick."

"I guess that's about it, prof."

"Of course, I might have vindicated myself," said Englemere, stroking his beard, "if we had not slain the watchman, Dorset. I learned his name from this newspaper." The professor tapped the journal that Tongo had brought. "It contains a complete review of the recent crime wave. But we did kill Dorset – and that marked me, Perrick!"

Griff's eyes gleamed. He found his voice, in voluble style.

"Say, prof!" he exclaimed. "You mean this build-up I've been giving the boys is really on the level?"

"What build-up, Perrick?"

"Telling them that you're the real brain, the guy behind this stuff that we've been doing. I had to hand them that line, or they wouldn't have played along, at first."

Teeth glistened white from Englemere's beard. A full grin from the professor was rare. Its ugliness convinced Griff that Englemere had greater possibilities than anyone would normally suppose.

"Once committed to a course," declared Englemere, "I follow it to the full. Recognizing myself as an outlaw, I planned to conduct myself as such. Why do you suppose I have been working so intensively on the supermodel of my Vapor Gun?"

"You said once that you would give it to the government," reminded Griff, "so it could be used toward the protection of humanity."

Englemere scoffed a laugh.

CRIME'S STRONGHOLD

"Why should I protect humanity?" he queried. "I have wantonly destroyed it, in the case of Dorset."

Griff gave an acknowledging nod.

"And now," added Englemere, relaxing into his chair and folding his arms upon the desk, "I want every detail of your recent activities, Perrick. Remember: there are points that I can check. I have read the newspaper thoroughly."

IN his turn, Cliff eased. It was better to keep out of sight, and merely listen, while Griff made his revelations.

During the next quarter hour, Cliff heard the complete story of every recent crime, all from the inside viewpoint. There were occasional grunts from Englemere, all denoting high approval. The only times the professor remained silent were when Griff mentioned the trailer trip with the monkeys and the fate of the original Vapor Gun.

Brief silence followed Griff's account. Then came the rolling tone of Professor Englemere, announcing reactions that had some surprising angles.

"Inasmuch as you did not use the apes in actual crime," asserted Englemere, "I can overlook your indiscretion, Perrick. Only human beings are privileged to indulge in crime, for they have the ability to calculate the consequences. Good or evil! Bah! What are they, other than individual viewpoints?"

"Ethics must prevail, however, in all forms of human endeavor, crime included. Men far worse than criminals adhere stoutly to ethics. Lawyers, for instance, when they defend known criminals. Doctors who engage in vivisection upon poor creatures like my friendly apes. The worse a practice in which a man indulges, the more important his ethical standards become."

"I guess you've hit it, prof," agreed Griff. "What we need is ethics!"

"You shall have them!" Cliff heard Englemere pound the desk. "As regards the Vapor Gun, the old one, you did right in destroying it. I would have done the same, in your case."

"And croaked the two guys with it?"

"Of course! They understood the hazard. As for inducing Gabby to support your story that the police were responsible, I commend it heartily. I should say that you already have an excellent comprehension of criminal ethics, Perrick."

Much pleased, Griff switched the subject to the new Vapor Gun, only to learn that the superdevice was not yet finished. Next, Griff learned, along with Cliff, the hidden listener, that Englemere did not consider the Vapor Gun an asset for the present.

"You have overworked it," Englemere told Griff. "I could put together a small one, of the old type, but the newspapers are filled with talk of crime's hidden weapon. Besides, any new raids on our part would bring searchers back from the Everglades. I prefer to let them stay there."

"Maybe so," conceded Griff. "But what are we going to do, meanwhile?"

The professor supplied a long and ardent laugh.

"When this institution needs more funds," queried Englemere, "how do you suppose I raise them?"

CRIME'S STRONGHOLD

"I guess you invite the stuffed shirts in," replied Griff, "and show them how smart the apes are. A guy that's got a couple of grand to spare ought to cough it up, if he likes monkeys."

"They do," assured Englemere. "But the next man I invite will be worth one hundred thousand dollars! A hundred grand, in your parlance, Perrick."

Cliff heard Griff whistle. Then:

"You're going into the snatch racket, prof?"

"If you mean kidnaping," chuckled Englemere, "I am. Or, rather, we are entering the game together. I have already chosen the victim. His name is Lamont Cranston."

Cliff nearly gave himself away, when he started at the name. Steadying himself in the deep doorway, he heard why Englemere was making the choice. From the newspaper, the professor had learned that Cranston was a prospective investor in Citrite; had been present at the factory the night when it was raided.

He had also read Cranston's name in scientific journals and learned that the versatile man of wealth likewise dallied with jungle explorations. Furthermore, Cranston was in Florida at present.

"A man with a mind like my own," decided Englemere. "I shall write him a well-worded invitation to visit us, alone. I am sure that he will tell no one of his excursion here, since any indiscretion would end his chances of receiving further invitations.

"You may go, Perrick, and tell the men of our new scheme. If any have questions, bring them here. You can prove to them that I am the brain you represented me to be."

Griff rose to leave, and Cliff desperately sought to move ahead. The interview was over so abruptly that Cliff would have been spotted had not Englemere called Griff back. Out through the door, Cliff was just easing it shut when he heard Englemere say:

"Your revolver, Perrick. You won't need it, but neither shall I. Ethics compel me to return it, since we have reached a complete accord."

HALFWAY back to the bunk rooms, Cliff halted. He was thinking of The Shadow, whose name had been mentioned throughout Griff's report to Englemere. Always as The Shadow; never as Lamont Cranston.

Invariably, Griff had described crime's archfoe as a cloaked fighter up to the finish, when The Shadow, alive or dead, had made his amazing disappearance. Griff had an idea that the Shadow question was settled permanently; but did Englemere?

Each mention of The Shadow had brought a meditative "Hm-m-m" from the professor, as though he were analyzing Griff's story. To top it, Englemere had produced the name of Cranston like something out of a hat. Odd, that Englemere should pick a kidnap victim who happened to be The Shadow.

Or was it odd?

Reading about the Citrite factory, Englemere might have divined something that Griff didn't: namely, that the one stranger present at that time must have been The Shadow. The fact that he hadn't mentioned the thought to Griff was real proof of Englemere's superior cunning. He intended to trap The Shadow first, and let the mobsters know their prisoner's identity later.

CRIME'S STRONGHOLD

Provided that Cranston answered Englemere's letter. If he didn't, the professor would know that The Shadow had permanently disappeared. Therefore, this was the time to balk Englemere.

Turning, Cliff hurried back to the study, boldly opened the door and thrust himself into the room. Having witnessed Griff's misadventure, Cliff was properly prepared.

He stopped just within the doorway, his gun drawn. He saw Englemere staring up from the desk, gunless, since the professor had returned Griff's revolver. But Cliff didn't aim at Englemere. He took a larger target: Tongo. Far across the room, the big gorilla was too distant to pounce.

"One move, professor," announced Cliff, "and you'll be minus a prize ape! Maybe one bullet won't stop the big fellow, but six will! Don't forget the ethics you talked about. Tongo won't know what he's up against, if you start him this way."

Professor Englemere shrugged.

"Your name?" he inquired absentmindedly. "Ah, yes. You're Marsland, aren't you? Well, Marsland, what do you want?"

"That letter, to begin with," returned Cliff, noting that Englemere held a pen above a half-inked sheet of paper. "After that, we can talk other terms."

Just what those terms would be, Cliff hadn't an idea. He was in a difficult position, but he hoped to worm his way out by keeping Englemere under control.

However, Cliff was to be spared the trouble of such problems. Before Englemere could reach for the letter to hand it over, the door of the study opened.

Cliff wheeled about, since he couldn't venture further into the room because of Tongo. He was facing Griff, who was bringing two others: Gabby and Dunk. None had guns in readiness; they could only raise their hands when Cliff made his threat.

Then Cliff's own hand gave an instinctive jolt as something jabbed it sharply. Three crooks lunged as one, hurling Cliff's hand farther upward as he attempted to press his trigger finger.

The thing that jabbed Cliff's hand was Englemere's penholder. It was a heavy holder, of the quill variety, and the professor had thrown it like a feathered dart. Though trifling in itself, the improvised weapon furnished enough jab to halt Cliff momentarily.

Crooks were doing the rest; under their slugging fists, Cliff lost his gun and sagged to the floor. Feet were kicking him, but they stopped before Cliff lay insensible.

Tongo was responsible. Bounding into the melee, the gorilla lifted Cliff from the floor and held him in the nutcracker clutch, that relaxed when Englemere gave the clucking sound.

As soon as Tongo dropped Cliff, the thugs surrounded their prey with drawn guns; but Englemere ordered them to hold their fire. Griff couldn't understand it. He began:

"This guy's a double-crosser —"

CRIME'S STRONGHOLD

"From our viewpoint, yes," inserted Englemere. "But not from that of The Shadow, the person who probably sent him."

"Say, that's why The Shadow slipped us!" exclaimed Griff. "Marsland here was helping him! I thought it was funny, the way he kept spotting The Shadow, then losing him. But it's all the more reason why we ought to croak him, prof."

"All the less," corrected Englemere. "We can keep Marsland as a hostage until we have captured Cranston. Take him, and keep him in one of the extra cages. He is an interesting specimen. Any human who serves a master blindly, as he does The Shadow, belongs in the same category as the anthropoid apes."

Professor Englemere followed to the door while the crooks were carrying Cliff out. Vaguely, Cliff heard voices and distinguished Griff's among them.

"You say to keep him," remarked Griff, "until after we get hold of that guy Cranston. What then, prof?"

"When we have trapped Cranston," replied Englemere dryly, "I am sure that we shall have no further trouble from The Shadow."

Crooks didn't understand the cryptic laugh that was cut short by the closing of the door. Cliff did, while his captor's were lugging him to his cage. Even to Cliff's whirling brain, it was a certainty that Professor Englemere, new master mind of crime, had actually learned the dual identity of The Shadow.

CHAPTER XIX. THE DOUBLE TRAIL

IT was daylight and the birds were chirping noisily from their nests. So noisily, that they stirred The Shadow from the lethargy in which he had lain for hours. Propping himself up on one elbow, The Shadow looked about and saw the rippling water of a lake that stretched away into the morning haze.

Trying to reach his feet, The Shadow nearly slumped, but managed to grasp the trunk of a maple tree beside him. He expected to see more trees, but except for the twenty-five-foot maple, the others were merely saplings. The ground was grassy, with clumps of varied vegetation, and the birds were all about.

All were water fowl. The Shadow saw herons, egrets, the ibis, and even the rare anhinga. They seemed very much at home upon this shore, but The Shadow did not share their enjoyment. He felt himself wavering, as though the ground, itself, had become unsteady. Shakily, he turned about and started back in the direction where he thought he would find a road.

After several paces, The Shadow discovered that he was on an island, and a very small one. The thing was baffling, until he spied other islets, off in the haze; they, too, were teeming with birds. It was difficult to gauge the spaces between those little islands, because the distance seemed to alter with every survey.

By then, The Shadow put his facts together. His low laugh, gathered by the increasing breeze, disturbed the nesting birds. A silence lulled above. The Shadow's island, the strangest shore upon which a human could have been marooned.

Last night, The Shadow hadn't bothered to identify the lake where crooks had laid their ambush. He recognized, today, that it must be Orange Lake, famous for its floating islands. Solid though this island looked, it was actually drifting on the water.

CRIME'S STRONGHOLD

Remarkable phenomena, these islands. They formed themselves from decayed vegetation that lined the lake bottom, and teemed with aquatic plants. Growing large, those plants drew the soil to the lake's surface, where other plants could grow from seeds scattered by the birds.

Enlarging, many of these islands had reached a size of several acres, and were covered with many trees; elder and myrtle, as well as maple. Drifting at a mile or more an hour, the floating jungles traveled from one shore to the other, according to the wind.

Last night, The Shadow had stumbled upon this tiny island when it was clamped against the lake shore. His fall had jarred it, and the wrenching wind had done the rest. The island had drifted a hundred yards offshore by the time crooks found the spot where Cliff had seen The Shadow sprawl.

No wonder The Shadow's vanish had amazed them. Floating away with a piece of lake front property, The Shadow had accomplished the utterly impossible. Except that it wasn't impossible on Orange Lake – something which the crooks, quite fortunately, had never heard about.

During the night, the island had sailed several miles and was now approaching the opposite shore. Taking off his cloak and hat, The Shadow wrapped them in a bundle and waited, quite calmly, for his floating refuge to complete its journey.

EARLY in the afternoon, Lamont Cranston arrived at his hotel in Jacksonville, to find Harry Vincent waiting. He told his agent of his adventures, and they discussed Cliff's probable reactions. Those being indefinable, The Shadow came back to the question of Harry's search.

Posing as a salesman for an agricultural journal, Harry had narrowed his territory down to one quarter of the original size, but without result. During his report, Harry was interrupted by a knock at the door. Cranston answered it, and received a letter, which he read and put into his pocket.

"Suppose I go along with you, Vincent," suggested The Shadow, when Harry had finished his report. "There is a certain place I want to visit. You can drop me off."

It was nearly sunset when Harry dropped Cranston at the entrance to a sand road in the very area where Harry still had ground to cover. Noting that it was late, The Shadow made another suggestion.

"Suppose you go back to Jacksonville," he said, "and come out here tomorrow. If you don't find me waiting, drive into the place. It's the Anthropological Laboratory directed by Professor Morton Englemere. He has invited me to stay overnight and discuss the ways and means of increasing his endowment."

Harry noticed that Cranston was carrying a suitcase when he walked in through the sand road. But the term "anthropological" did not register its full significance. So Harry drove away, thinking it a mere coincidence that his chief had decided to visit someone in this area.

It struck him, as he went, that he might stop at a few houses and peddle some farm journals before heading back to Jacksonville.

Less than a mile from the sand road, Harry saw a man working at some beehives. He stopped the car and strolled in the man's direction. The man turned; said testily:

"No, I haven't any monkeys!"

"Monkeys?" Harry laughed. "Why should I be looking for monkeys?"

CRIME'S STRONGHOLD

The man nudged toward a sign on a tree beside his farmhouse. The sign bore one word:

APIARY

"Do you know what that means?" asked the bee man.

"I sell farm journals," replied Harry. "I ought to know that an apiary is a bee house."

"Shake hands, friend!" The bee man extended his. "I'll buy your farm journal. I've been hoping to meet someone like you. Most of the people who stop here think that an apiary is a place where apes live."

Harry began to write out a subscription blank. The bee man kept on talking.

"The last fellow who stopped," he said, "was as tough-looking as an ape, himself. He wanted to argue about it. He said I was trying to cover something up, until I finally told him about old Englemere's place."

"Englemere's place?"

"Yes. That's where the monkeys are. It's probably why people get mixed when they see my sign. They're looking for apes, and the sign says apiary, so it satisfies them."

Harry questioned the man further, and began to gain more facts. The informant didn't realize that he was supplying bits of data that pieced together to form something important. In his estimate, the Anthropological Laboratory was something of a madhouse, ruled by the maddest of all men, a bearded professor who relied on gorillas to do his bidding.

"I know people who have been there," said the bee man. "Trades people, mostly. They say one monkey answers the door and another waits on the table, where the professor sits with the biggest monkey of the lot."

"Do the monkeys ever get loose?"

"Once in a while. But I guess the keepers manage to control them. They say the professor has a dozen keepers in the place, but we hardly ever see them. I think the fellow that stopped here last was a new keeper."

The statement was correct. The bee man was referring to Dunk Kedly, the crook who had arrived at the Ape Lab later than Griff expected. While Harry was taking the subscription money, the beekeeper remembered something else.

"They took some of the monkeys out the other day," he said. "They went by in a couple of trailers that looked like cages. Maybe they've got more monkeys than they know what to do with. I didn't see them come back."

HOWEVER much Cliff Marsland had worried about The Shadow's fate, he couldn't have outmatched Harry. Driving away into the dusk, Harry was gripped with the mad desire to storm the Ape Lab lone-handed, in order to aid his chief. For there wasn't a doubt in Harry's mind that Professor Englemere was head of the notorious outlaw band that the law had been seeking far and wide.

Harry, himself, had seen the trailers that contained the apes, but hadn't realized that they belonged in this vicinity. They were on the road the very day when crime had struck in Lakedale. The bee man's talk of new keepers, particularly the tough one who stopped at the apiary by mistake, was direct evidence that the horde of crooks was being replenished.

CRIME'S STRONGHOLD

The strongest fact, however, was Englemere's invitation to Cranston, bringing him to the Ape Lab. It showed the full craft of a scheming mind. Englemere had not only identified Cranston as The Shadow; he had lured his archfoe right into the trap.

Clever of Englemere, to work such an open game. If only Harry had mentioned those apes and their trailers to his chief! Only through such a clue could Harry have recognized the deception; and The Shadow lacked the needed clue!

Stopping his car by the darkened sand road, Harry debated the matter. Then, seeing lights through the trees, he drove away. Another car swung out into the highway, but Harry merely sped faster. Rescuing The Shadow was beyond his own ability. He would have to leave it to the Feds.

Nearing a little settlement, Harry parked his car and went into a service station, which was also a grocery store. He found a telephone in a rear corner and put in a call to Jacksonville. Soon, he was asking for a man named Vic Marquette, only to learn that he was out. The hotel clerk asked if there was any message.

"Tell him Vincent called," said Harry. "He's to meet me at the Anthropological Laboratory."

"The which?"

Harry repeated the name, but still the clerk didn't get it clearly. Harry decided that he'd have to talk to Marquette personally, and when he learned that his friend, the Fed, would be back in fifteen minutes, he said that he would call again.

During those fifteen minutes, Harry strolled around outside, staying rather close to the service station. No one was in the store when he entered it again. Using the telephone, Harry called the Jacksonville hotel and again asked for Vic Marquette. His mention of the name produced results, but not from the other end.

From a door near Harry's corner, two men surged upon him and bowled him hard against a shelf of groceries. Harry's head and shoulders deadened the fall of the canned goods that poured down to the floor. Crooks didn't have to slug him; the merchandise did it for them.

As the pair lifted their half-stunned victim, a third man hung the telephone receiver back on its hook.

"Good work," said Griff to Gabby and Dunk. "You handled this guy as well as you did Marsland. I thought there was something phony when I spotted his car while I was coming out. I saw him come in here; that's why I went back to get you."

"Think he put the call through?" queried Gabby.

"Not a chance!" replied Griff. "He was waiting around because he couldn't get the guy he wanted."

"Who was that?" asked Dunk. "The Shadow?"

"No," decided Griff. "This bird is working with the Feds. He was calling Vic Marquette. Well, take good care of him. You know the prof's motto: 'Bring 'em back alive.' Good stuff, hanging on to guys like this. They're never worth anything after they're dead."

The mobsters carried Harry out through the door and dumped him into their car. With Griff at the wheel, they were taking Harry along the same trail The Shadow had voluntarily followed a little while before.

A trail from which men of crime believed there could be no return – not even for The Shadow!

CHAPTER XX. RIVALS IN STRATEGY

WHEN Griff Perrick rang the bell at the Ape Lab, it was answered instantly, but not by Cissie. The chimpanzee was caged, at present, and Spud Kiefert was acting as doorman. Griff motioned for silence, then undertoned:

"Where's the prof?"

"Still in the study," informed Spud. "Talking with Cranston. Old Tongo is standing right by."

"I kind of wish Cranston was The Shadow," said Griff. "Even The Shadow couldn't try his funny stuff, with Tongo close."

"He's close to Cranston, all right. The prof was showing pictures of the apes, and Tongo was handing them to Cranston, the last time I was in there."

Griff turned and beckoned to men outside. Gabby and Dunk entered, carrying Harry. Griff pointed them to the cage room, then locked the door and left Dunk in charge.

Harry's senses were back again when he reached the cage room. He saw a line of apes staring through the bars, until he neared the end of the row. There, Harry blinked. Peering from another cage was his fellow agent, Cliff Marsland.

No recognition passed between them. Harry's surprise was natural enough, since a human caged with a line of monkeys was an oddity in itself. A man dressed as a keeper unlocked the cage past Cliff's, and Harry's captors shoved him in through the door.

A clang, the turning of a big key, and Harry was another member of the monkey family.

Griff gave the prisoners a final glance and left the cage room. He stopped at Englemere's study, knocked and entered, to find the very situation that Dunk had pictured.

Professor Englemere was facing the complacent Mr. Cranston across a desk strewn with photographs, while Tongo sat close enough to embrace Cranston at an instant's notice.

"I was expecting you, Perrick," said Englemere in a pleased tone. "How soon can we visit the cage room?"

"Inspection will be in half an hour, professor."

"We still have time, then," said Englemere to Cranston. "Come. I shall show you my workshop."

Tongo arose with the men and picked up Cranston's suitcase, as he always did with luggage that visitors brought. When they reached the door, Englemere pointed straight along the hall. Cranston hesitated, and Tongo promptly laid a huge arm over his shoulders to draw him along.

"Tongo will show you the way," chuckled Englemere. "I think he likes you, Mr. Cranston. I shall join you after I talk with Perrick."

CRIME'S STRONGHOLD

Cranston and Tongo were scarcely out of earshot, before Griff spoke hastily:

"If you take Cranston to the workshop, he'll see the new Vapor Gun, professor!"

"No, no!" Englemere smiled. "I've put it away. I'm going to show him some of my other inventions."

"How long will that take?"

"As long as you let it, Perrick. I want you to bring all the keepers and station them outside the workshop. When you are ready, knock. I shall come out first, and then –"

He smiled anew, and Griff understood the rest. Englemere's exit would clear the path for action. The workshop was a perfect place to trap a man like Cranston; much better than the study. With Tongo in the room, Cranston's chance of putting up a fight would be absolutely nil. The gorilla would grab him when the crooks gave the cue.

"Give me a few minutes;" added Englemere. "I want Cranston to think that I have been captured, too. Then I can discuss the matter of ransom with him as friend to friend."

"I get it," nodded Griff. "Mutiny stuff, on our part."

"Exactly! Lose no time about it. I am getting tired of the byplay. Bah! I won Cranston's confidence in five minutes. You should have come sooner, Perrick."

Griff explained the reason for the delay. Englemere's eyes gleamed when he learned of Harry's capture, particularly when Griff added that the prisoner might be a Fed. Griff showed the professor some cards that bore Harry's name, which crooks had taken from the prisoner's pocket.

"I shall go to the cage room," decided Englemere, "and talk to both prisoners. But not until after I have left Cranston. Remember, Perrick, have every man available. The more men, the easier it will be to overpower Cranston without injuring him. Anything worth one hundred thousand dollars is too valuable to hurt."

ENGLEMERE moved along to the workshop, while Griff went to the cage room and called the keepers together. He told them to scout up the rest and join him in the passage.

A few of the keepers paused to toss a few remarks at Cliff and Harry. The last man to go was Gabby.

Always talkative, Gabby was naturally the last man. He'd been baiting Cliff, and getting sharp replies. Gabby couldn't forego the opportunity of another wisecrack.

"We're going to pair you guys off," remarked Gabby. "Not together, though. We've got the right cage for you, Cliff. In with Boola, the baboon. We've been trying to find him a bunkmate dumber than he is!"

Cliff shoved his face close to the bars, gave a quick look at the departing keepers, and undertoned.

"You should have brought in Blink Halley, while you had a chance. He's the dumbest guy I ever heard of – except maybe you, Gabby."

Hearing what Cliff was saying, Harry became interested immediately, and moved over to the corner of his cage, to add arguments if he could. Gabby was still eying Cliff.

CRIME'S STRONGHOLD

"No cracks about Blink," snapped Gabby. "He ain't dumb!"

"You mean he wasn't dumb," returned Cliff. "Only, that's your opinion, not mine. Any guy that would let himself get knocked off, the way he did –"

"What do you mean?"

Cliff dug deep in his pocket and brought out some newspaper clippings. He folded one that bore a small photograph, keeping the fold covered so that Gabby couldn't read the name. Cliff queried:

"That's Blink, isn't it?"

Gabby nodded.

"Look at the name under the picture," suggested Cliff, "and tell me what you think."

Gabby unfolded the paper. His eyes popped, his mouth opened in fishlike fashion, as he exclaimed:

"Dorset, the watchman at the Citrite plant!"

Cliff nodded, slowly.

"That's all I wanted you to know, Gabby," he said. "Now, who's the double-crosser? Am I – or is Griff Perrick?"

"Griff is," gritted Gabby. "He didn't tell me he knocked off Blink. I didn't even know what moniker Blink was using at the Citrite plant. He said he'd open the way, and be waiting for Griff –"

"Which he was," inserted Cliff, "behind a door that wasn't locked. All Griff had to do was knock. Instead, he cut loose with that machine of his and finished Dorset, along with the door."

Cliff didn't add that these facts came from The Shadow, who had recognized Dorset's photograph in his rogues' gallery under the name of Blink Halley. In fact, it was largely through Blink's connection with Gabby that The Shadow had worked the scheme of getting Cliff into the crime ring. There was more, too, that Cliff could have told, but he let Gabby voice it for himself.

"Griff was the only guy who knew Blink," muttered Gabby, "and he didn't put the others wise. No wonder he didn't allow newspapers in this joint! But there's something else!" Gabby's voice rose, but it didn't matter. All the other crooks were gone. "Griff double-crossed the outfit! He made me keep mum about what happened down in Lakedale! You know what happened there?"

Cliff knew, and produced another clipping to prove it. The clipping told how the leader of a bank-robbing crew had blasted two of his own men into oblivion, along with their secret weapon.

"That's why I went in to see the prof," said Cliff, while Gabby was reading the clipping. "I wanted to put the heat on him and find out if he knew that Griff was playing the rat. Let me out of this cage and I'll take it up with Griff where I left off."

Hustling across the room, Gabby found the keys and brought them. As soon as Cliff was out, he took the keys from Gabby and started to unlock Harry's cage. Gabby began an objection:

"That guy's a Fed –"

"All the better," put in Cliff. "If he is, he can handle a rod. Get us a couple, Gabby. Some of the dopes may stay on Griff's side."

WHILE Cliff was playing his piece of strategy, another was in progress. Outside Englemere's workshop, Griff and ten keepers were in readiness.

Griff hadn't bothered to count noses, hence didn't notice that Gabby was absent. His men were armed, but their guns were in their pockets. Ten against one, they could take Cranston barehanded.

The door of the workshop opened. Englemere stepped out, speaking over his shoulder.

"I am going to arrange the inspection, Mr. Cranston," said the professor. "As soon as we are ready, Perrick will call you."

As though Griff and the crooks weren't there, Englemere walked blandly past. Griff stepped toward the workshop door and gestured for his men to wait.

But before Englemere could open the door to the cage room, it swung his way and three men sprang in sight. All had guns: Cliff, Harry and Gabby.

Frantically, Englemere flung himself upon them to drive them back. They sent the professor spinning across the passage. Griff yanked a gun and at the same time pulled the door of the workshop wide. It was steel-faced and gave him a pill box in the corner behind it.

He yelled for men to stop the invaders, and they surged to the task, drawing guns. But Griff wasn't forgetting Cranston.

"Into the workshop, some of you!" he roared. "Shove Cranston into a corner, and Tongo will do the rest!"

Crooks nearest the workshop preferred its shelter while they were pulling their guns. Three of them followed Griff's injunction and went that way, in headlong fashion. The door was open, but they brought up as suddenly as if they had hit a barrier of steel.

Reeling back, their guns half lifted, they recoiled from the sound of a weird laugh that reverberated along the passage.

Lamont Cranston was gone, and in his place stood The Shadow. He was wearing his black cloak and his slouch hat; behind him stood the helpful valet who had taken those garments from the suitcase and helped him put them on. The Shadow's valet was Tongo, the mighty ape.

Others had shown their ways of strategy. Now, it was to be The Shadow's turn!

CHAPTER XXI. STROKES OF JUSTICE

ONLY the arrival of The Shadow could have saved his two agents, who had started matters on their own. Neither Cliff nor Harry realized that they were due to meet Griff and the entire batch of keepers, all with handy guns.

CRIME'S STRONGHOLD

They'd heard Griff mention an inspection, but had supposed it mere routine, for Griff hadn't given the later details until his men were gathered in the passage.

Englemere's action of thrusting them back would have proven helpful, had Cliff and Harry accepted it. Instead, they were flat-footed in the passage, two men against ten, their only advantage their ability to fire the first few shots.

They had come as three, but now they were only two, for Gabby showed himself a rat in the face of odds. Diving past The Shadow's agents, Gabby was yelling: "I'm with you, Griff –" when The Shadow's laugh intervened.

Cliff and Harry fired with their borrowed guns. Griff was shooting from behind the door, aiming for The Shadow's agents. Other crooks were turning as they heard the laugh, only to dive at the first bursts from The Shadow's automatics.

Caught between two fires, matters looked bad for the phony keepers. Only Griff's sudden change of action saved them.

Hurling the door hard shut, Griff sent it right at The Shadow, who was flung back into the workshop before he could damage the opposition seriously. Seeing what happened, Harry and Cliff made a quick dive for the shelter of the cage room. They would not have reached it but for Professor Englemere.

The bearded man had drawn a gun, too, and was firing point-blank at the surging crew of thugs who were driving forward, not only to overtake Cliff and Harry, but to get away from The Shadow before he could open the door again.

Englemere's surprise shots slowed the surge; then, as The Shadow's agents reached the cage room, the bearded man took a long leap after them.

Guns were roaring from the passage, all too late to damage The Shadow's agents or their new ally. Then, again, came the laugh of The Shadow. Once more, he was flinging the door wide, and this time Griff was no longer behind it.

Wildly, Englemere was shoving Cliff and Harry beyond the cages. They needed shelter, for gunmen were coming from the passage. The thunder of The Shadow's guns had taken over; thugs were staggering as they reached the cage room. But most of them came through, with Griff in their midst. Pointing some across the room, Griff himself took charge of the door.

The battle became a sniping one. Two of Griff's men had fallen under The Shadow's fire and were lying in the hall. From the edge of the door, Griff and another crook were taking jabs at The Shadow, who zipped shots back. The rest of the thuggish tribe, five in all, were nicking the far end of the cage row, behind which The Shadow's agents crouched with Englemere.

In such a fray it was possible to reload, and both sides were at it. Griff stepped in from the door, to let his fellow-marksman take a stab at The Shadow. The man leaned out too far; the report from a .45 was accompanied by the marksman's stagger. Filling the breach, Griff rasped for another sharpshooter to join him.

From the passage, The Shadow laughed. His tone was one of confidence, assuring his followers that they could win if they held their own. It worried the crooks, that laugh, and they would have lost their caution if Griff hadn't ordered them to be careful.

CRIME'S STRONGHOLD

Englemere saw Gabby sliding up to Griff to speak with him, and the professor gave an anxious look at his companions.

"If you'd only waited," said Englemere. "I was coming to release you. I was pleased when I learned that there were two of you. So was The Shadow when I told him."

Cliff stared, puzzled. Englemere reached out and blasted a shot at Gabby, who dived for shelter, clutching his left ear. Then Englemere resumed:

"I was bluffing when I talked to Griff. The letter I sent to Cranston was a ruse to bring him in here. I was sure that he must be The Shadow; that he would help me —"

THE SHADOW was helping himself at that particular moment. The sudden blast of his guns made Griff drop back, shouting for more men to join him.

Again, The Shadow laughed his contempt of all foemen, and with it, Englemere caught something in his tone. He pointed in Gabby's direction, said to Harry and Cliff:

"Get that man!"

Before they could stop him, Englemere was bounding in the open and Gabby was aiming for him. The Shadow must have heard Gabby's shots, for his laugh suddenly faded. He was retreating to the workshop, where he had left Tongo, and Griff's men were pouring out into the passage, thinking they had their cloaked adversary trapped.

Cliff clipped Gabby before the fellow's shots could find Englemere. For the moment, the professor had the cage room to himself. Pulling a master key from his pocket, he bounded along the row of cages, unlocking them. Cliff and Harry were coming out to join him, when Englemere came bounding back.

All heard a distant slam of the workshop door. The Shadow had taken refuge. Griff and four crooks came hurrying back into the cage room. Griff saw Gabby crawling on the floor, pointing weakly at the cages. Before Gabby could talk, Griff shouted him down.

"All right, so they clipped you!" Griff turned to the corner. "Well, here's where we get them, now that The Shadow isn't bothering us. I'll show you how it's done!"

Crouched low, Griff started along the front of the cages, his companions following in Indian file. They intended to reach the corner and make a quick surge upon men whose guns were almost empty. But Professor Englemere had a better plan: a little idea that he had discussed with The Shadow.

Englemere throated a peculiar cry. Every cage door popped open. Gibbons, orangutans and chimpanzees sprang from their cages, to take strangle holds upon the crooks below them.

Frantically, Griff and his men gave the clucking sounds that should have made the apes desist, but Englemere kept repeating his high-pitched call.

The apes tightened their grips on the captive crooks.

Guns were falling on the floor. Englemere scooped them up and passed one to Harry, another to Cliff, reserving one for himself. He led the way to the passage, and started a savage fire at two men down the passage.

CRIME'S STRONGHOLD

Cliff and Harry were about to join him, when they heard sounds behind them. Englemere had neglected to make the call the apes obeyed. Griff and the half-strangled thugs were clucking their way to freedom.

The Shadow must have timed his stay in the workshop just long enough for Englemere to spring his scheme. The Shadow was needed again, and he came at the required moment.

Englemere and the agents were springing back to help the apes recapture the crooks, when the door of the workshop hurled wide again. The two men stationed there were turning to fire point-blank, but they had two fighters to deal with, not one. The Shadow beat the first thug to the shot, and Tongo handled the other.

As fast as the gun stab that darted from The Shadow's gun, Tongo's great hands flew forward. One crook was dropping his gun and clamping his hands to his chest, where the bullet had struck him; the other was trying to fight off a pair of mammoth hands that completely circled his neck.

As The Shadow sprang across the sagging crook, Tongo flung the other along the passage, clear beyond the door to the cage room. Then The Shadow and his mighty ally were at the door of the cage room itself, witnessing events there.

Matters were going well, for, among the crooks, only Griff had a gun. Harry and Cliff were locked with him, while the apes were handling the other mobsters. But the situation didn't quite suit Tongo.

HOPPING forward, Tongo took three men in his embrace. He literally weeded them, one by one. He handled Harry gently, for he considered him a stranger. He gave Cliff a shove, for he remembered the scene where Cliff had threatened Englemere from a distance.

But Griff, the man who had actually planted a gun against his master, was a different case entirely. Tongo intended to take away his gun again and fling Griff right through the wall.

Englemere sprang in to intervene. At his cluck, Tongo halted. Wrenching loose, Griff showed the way he appreciated favors. Twisting past Englemere, he came in from the other side, putting the professor between himself and Tongo. Griff still had his gun, and he shoved it for Englemere's heart.

Griff thought he was safe from The Shadow, too, but the cloaked battler was swooping in from the door. From the midst of a sideward fling, The Shadow fired, picking the proper angle without an instant's hesitation. Griff's body jolted; his hands sprang apart and the gun went flying from his fingers, unfired. But Griff did not fall.

Two great arms had come around Englemere's shoulders. Their paws caught Griff's throat and shook it. As Englemere dodged away, Tongo gave Griff's form a whirl and hurled it toward a cage, where it drove halfway between the bars before it stopped, too wedged to travel farther. If The Shadow's bullet hadn't found Griff's heart, Tongo's fling had made up the deficiency.

The Shadow's keen ear detected distant sounds. He stepped out to the passage and turned in the direction of Englemere's study. Harry and Cliff were wondering where he had gone, when they heard the dash of footsteps.

Raising their guns, they were facing the passage, when they recognized the men who entered. Vic Marquette had arrived with a squad of Feds.

When Englemere announced that he had barred trailers that could carry the prisoners back to town, Marquette was pleased.

CRIME'S STRONGHOLD

"I received your message, Vincent," he said. "We came out here, and heard the shooting. We managed to get in through that big hole in the back room."

Harry was puzzled, but Englemere understood.

"The Shadow must have used the new Vapor Gun," he said. "I suppose it opened the wall entirely."

"Just about," nodded Marsland. "I saw the machine when we came through. It must have done quick work."

"It does quick work," nodded Englemere, "and I am giving myself up with it."

Marquette couldn't understand, until Englemere explained the matter of the Citrite. He admitted that he had stolen it; knowing of no other way to acquire it. He had felt that when he used the explosive to create an antitank machine, his action would be vindicated.

"Dorset's death made a difference," concluded Englemere. "Still, it did not change my purpose. The Vapor Gun is yours, Mr. Marquette. I am ready to stand trial for murder. Of course, The Shadow did mention something about Dorset that might change the complexion of the case –"

Both Harry and Cliff were interrupting, to tell Marquette who Dorset was. They dragged Gabby over to give his testimony, and Marquette listened with a smile.

In Vic's opinion – and he could cite similar cases – Dorset's death was definitely the premeditated work of Griff Perrick only. Since Dorset was actually Blink Halley, Gabby's testimony marked him as Griff's accomplice.

"I think your gift will nullify your error, professor," said Marquette. "The government may consider you too useful to be put behind bars, even for a few years. Though you wouldn't mind it, professor" – Vic was looking at the windows, whimsically – "because you're living behind bars here. Maybe they're to keep the monkeys in, but they certainly kept us out!"

THE apes were moving to their accustomed tasks. Some were getting brooms and mops, others bringing pails of water, to clean up after the fray. They were demonstrating the training to which Griff had put them without Englemere's knowledge, so the fake keepers would find time for crime.

In their way, the anthropoids were adding evidence that would stand in the professor's favor.

Cissie, the chimpanzee, was laying aside a broom. Her keen ears had heard the tingle of the doorbell; she was putting on an apron, to answer it.

Harry looked at Cliff, who nodded. Cliff waved to Englemere; Harry to Marquette. Together, they went out through the passage. When they reached the front door, Cissie had opened it and was staring out into the darkness.

The Shadow's agents heard the purr of a motor; they saw the signal blinks of a tiny flashlight. The Shadow was summoning his agents to join him in departure.

Harry and Cliff walked off through the darkness; while Cissie, remaining at the door, was joined by Loco, the orangutan.

CRIME'S STRONGHOLD

The car was moving toward the sand road, when a third face loomed between the other two. Tongo had joined his simian companions. The three apes heard the strange laugh that quivered from the darkness, trailing off into night. Not one of the three creatures stirred. Cissie, Tongo and Loco formed a tableau where they stood.

They were three wise monkeys. They saw no evil, heard no evil, spoke no evil. But they had done their part in curbing evil, under the guidance of a strange master cloaked in black, who had visited them, and departed.

Like Professor Englemere, they were grateful to The Shadow for freeing them from the control of crime.

THE END