

DOUBLE Z

Maxwell Grant

Table of Contents

<u>DOUBLE Z</u>	1
Maxwell Grant.....	1
CHAPTER I. THE HUNTED MAN.....	1
CHAPTER II. OVER THE WIRE.....	4
CHAPTER III. DOUBLE Z STRIKES.....	8
CHAPTER IV. BURKE BRINGS ACTION.....	13
CHAPTER V. CARDONA ENCOUNTERS CRIME.....	18
CHAPTER VI. THE SHADOW PREPARES.....	23
CHAPTER VII. THE SHADOW AT WORK.....	29
CHAPTER VIII. MANN LEARNS FACTS.....	34
CHAPTER IX. GANGSTERS TALK BUSINESS.....	39
CHAPTER X. CARDONA PREPARES.....	44
CHAPTER XI. THE TIP-OFF.....	50
CHAPTER XII. THE HIDE-OUT.....	55
CHAPTER XIII. THE SHADOW'S FIGHT.....	61
CHAPTER XIV. DOUBLE Z PLOTS.....	66
CHAPTER XV. AT LOY ROOK'S.....	71
CHAPTER XVI. TWO MEN TRAPPED.....	74
CHAPTER XVII. THE THIRD SNARE.....	79
CHAPTER XVIII. THE PIT OF DEATH.....	82
CHAPTER XIX. CARDONA'S RUSE.....	86
CHAPTER XX. CARDONA'S TRIUMPH.....	90
CHAPTER XXI. THE SHADOW'S WORK.....	97

DOUBLE Z

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- [CHAPTER I. THE HUNTED MAN](#)
- [CHAPTER II. OVER THE WIRE](#)
- [CHAPTER III. DOUBLE Z STRIKES](#)
- [CHAPTER IV. BURKE BRINGS ACTION](#)
- [CHAPTER V. CARDONA ENCOUNTERS CRIME](#)
- [CHAPTER VI. THE SHADOW PREPARES](#)
- [CHAPTER VII. THE SHADOW AT WORK](#)
- [CHAPTER VIII. MANN LEARNS FACTS](#)
- [CHAPTER IX. GANGSTERS TALK BUSINESS](#)
- [CHAPTER X. CARDONA PREPARES](#)
- [CHAPTER XI. THE TIP-OFF](#)
- [CHAPTER XII. THE HIDE-OUT](#)
- [CHAPTER XIII. THE SHADOW'S FIGHT](#)
- [CHAPTER XIV. DOUBLE Z PLOTS](#)
- [CHAPTER XV. AT LOY ROOK'S](#)
- [CHAPTER XVI. TWO MEN TRAPPED](#)
- [CHAPTER XVII. THE THIRD SNARE](#)
- [CHAPTER XVIII. THE PIT OF DEATH](#)
- [CHAPTER XIX. CARDONA'S RUSE](#)
- [CHAPTER XX. CARDONA'S TRIUMPH](#)
- [CHAPTER XXI. THE SHADOW'S WORK](#)

CHAPTER I. THE HUNTED MAN

THE hand that held the key trembled. At last it found the lock. The key turned. A tall man stepped into the dim hallway, and closed the door behind him.

A slight sigh came from his lips lips thin and parched, that showed above the heavy muffler which covered the man's neck, even to his chin.

Slowly, the man moved along the hallway. He turned suspiciously as he reached the stairs, glancing back at the door. The glass transom above it worried him.

He thought of the dark vestibule, which obtained its only rays of light through that very transom. He remembered the nervousness that had gripped him while he had fumbled with the key. He listened, as though he expected some one else to unlock the door.

Now the man laughed nervously. He started up the stairs, his fears banished. His tall, stoop-shouldered figure seemed to stalk upward like a mechanical dummy.

DOUBLE Z

At the landing, halfway to the second floor, he stopped; then continued on his journey, with that same slow, methodical stride.

Another key grated in the lock of the vestibule door. The slight sound began just after the man on the landing had again moved toward the second floor.

The vestibule door opened. A short, broad-shouldered man slipped into the hallway.

He closed the door noiselessly. His eyes gleamed in the dim light as he stared toward the landing below the second floor. His firm face took on a pleased expression.

He followed the course that the first man had taken; but he ascended the stairs with amazing speed and remarkable silence. Two steps at a time he went, one hand on the banister taking part of the burden, he almost vaulted upward. But the strangely gangling figure of the first man was lost in the shadows.

The third floor of the building was darker. When the short, pursuing man arrived there, he stopped at the end of the stairway. His keen ears heard the click of metal. The first man was unlocking a door at the side of the hallway.

Swiftly, the pursuing man advanced through the darkness, keeping against the wall, and moving with his previous stealth. Within a few seconds, he stood only an arm's length from the tall man at the door. He heard the tall man's tense, hissing breaths, but the pursuer gave no sign of his own presence.

The door opened inward. The tall man remained motionless in the darkness. He was listening for sounds from downstairs, totally unknowing that a living person stood within a yard of him. Not satisfied, he tiptoed toward the stairway to listen, almost brushing against the hidden man as he went by. After a momentary pause, the tall man returned along the hall. He walked with reassurance. By this time, the short man who had followed him had gone in through the open door.

The tall man closed the door behind him and fumbled for a light switch. A click, and the room was flooded with light. He was in a small, but comfortable, sitting room of a third-story apartment. The tall man seemed confident in the security of his own abode.

He removed his hat, revealing a head covered with black, gray-streaked hair. He drew the muffler from his neck, disclosing the face of a man of fifty. He doffed his coat and placed it on a chair.

There was a mirror at the far side of the room. The tall man stood in front of it and studied his own features. They were well formed except for the chin, which was long and pointed.

The man rubbed his chin reflectively. Then he placed his hands upon his temples to hide the streaks of gray hair. He seemed pleased with his appearance while he held his hands in that position pleased, despite the worried, haggard expression which dominated his countenance.

OUTSIDE, a driving wind swept around the old house. In the room on the third floor, the windows, one on each side of the mirror, rattled dismally. But that sound did not disturb the man who was engrossed in his own reflection.

He evidently regarded this apartment of the old house on East Eightieth Street as a sanctuary, in which nothing could harm him.

He did not hear the slight click behind him as the wind shook the panes again; he did not see the door open

slowly at the other side of the room.

The man studying his reflection lowered his hands from his temples, and a ghostly smile played over his thin lips. They moved, as if muttering words of satisfaction.

A voice spoke behind him.

"Yes, judge," it said. "A little more black dye is necessary. The gray is showing through. Perhaps it is coming back. That would be unfortunate."

The man before the mirror stood petrified. He no longer studied his own reflection. His eyes had turned at an angle. They were focused on another figure that also showed in the looking-glass.

He was intently watching the man who had come up behind him, a short, stocky fellow clad in an old coat and soft brown hat. The stranger's face was not unfriendly, but it bore a look that was both sophisticated and challenging.

The tall man suddenly recovered himself. He swung quickly and faced his visitor. His hands went toward his coat pockets, but stopped on the way. He noticed that the other man's hands were hidden. Any intention he might have had to draw a gun faded instantly.

"Who are you?" he demanded in a hoarse voice. "How did you come in here?"

"My name is Caulkins," said the short man, in an affable tone. "I'm the fellow they call the 'Wise Owl'."

"The Wise Owl?"

"Yes. With the New York Classic. I'm the chap who gives the low-down on unsolved mysteries. That's why I'm here to-night."

"You you –" The man with the pointed chin began to splutter, but suddenly controlled himself. "Just what," he asked, with sudden dignity, "is the purpose of your visit? I never knew that newspaper reporters had the privilege of making forcible entry to a man's home."

"It wasn't exactly a forcible entry," declared Caulkins, with an agreeable smile. "I came in from the hallway when you left the door open."

THE middle-aged man was studying his visitor closely. He had betrayed signs of nervousness at first; now he felt sure that the speaker was telling the truth.

"Well," he said quietly, "we'll forget this intrusion. I might call the police" he waved his hand toward a telephone "but I hardly think it's necessary. If you are really a wise owl, Mr. Caulkins, you will leave here immediately."

"Not until I have interviewed you," came the firm reply.

"Interviewed me?" queried the tall man, with feigned surprise. "Why should you interview me? Perhaps you have mistaken me for some one else. My name is Joseph Dodd Joseph T. Dodd –"

"That's the name over the bell in the vestibule," interrupted Caulkins, "but it isn't your name. You've changed your appearance since I last saw you. That was more than a year ago, just before you disappeared Justice

Tolland!"

The older man did not reply. He stared at his visitor, wondering whether to order the reporter to leave or to engage in a discussion with him. Then anger gave way to an expression of cunning on the thin man's face.

"Why do you think I am Tolland?" the man asked suddenly.

"I know you are!" declared the reporter. "Judge Harvey Tolland disappeared fourteen months ago. Foul play was the story for a while, but I never figured you were dead. Now, why are you here?"

The positiveness in the reporter's voice was convincing. Had the other man been less anxious, he might have realized that the Wise Owl was bluffing. Caulkins watched him keenly, waiting expectantly for the reply.

It came. The older man pointed to a chair.

"Sit down," he said, in a hopeless tone. "There's no use in my trying to deceive you any longer. You are right. I am Judge Harvey Tolland."

Caulkins dropped into the chair with a broad, triumphant grin. His quest of fourteen months was ended. The greatest story of the year was in the bag. He had found the missing man, whose strange disappearance had remained unsolved!

He watched intently as the tall judge strode across the room and unlocked a table drawer. Tolland removed a paper from the drawer and thrust it into the reporter's hands.

"You have asked me a question," he said grimly. "You want to know why I disappeared. There is the answer!"

Caulkins hastily unfolded the paper. He scanned the written lines that appeared upon it. Suddenly, his hands began to tremble.

The older man, now calm, watched him grimly. The reporter's eyes were fascinated. They had completed the reading of the message; they were staring at the cryptic signature that appeared beneath it.

Then Caulkins uttered his startled exclamation in words that were gasped through trembling lips.

"A threat from Double Z!"

CHAPTER II. OVER THE WIRE

NEVER was a man more dumfounded than was Joel Caulkins of the Classic, after he had read the note shown to him by Judge Harvey Tolland. The fact that the older man was now calmly surveying him from an opposite chair did not ease his perturbed mind.

For the cryptic name of Double Z spelled fiendish horror. It was a title coined from the strange signature of a fanatic whose connection with a series of murders had terrorized New York and bewildered the police.

Caulkins, with his inside knowledge of detective investigations, knew of the menace that lay behind that strange signature. He had been shown other notes signed by Double Z, and not for an instant did he doubt the authenticity of this one.

DOUBLE Z

The two letters appeared side by side, one a half line lower than the other, so close together that they formed a mysterious symbol.

Slowly, mechanically, Caulkins folded the paper and laid it on the table beside him. He looked at Judge Tolland and noticed that the jurist's thin lips were twisted in a mirthless smile.

"Startled, eh?" asked Tolland.

"Yes," admitted Caulkins.

"I read your articles regarding my disappearance those that you wrote under the name of the Wise Owl. They were keenly done, Caulkins. Strangely enough, they were partly true. But they missed the important elements."

"This note from Double Z?"

"Yes. But you were not to blame for that."

Caulkins nodded thoughtfully.

"I never would have connected it," he said. "Double Z was not heard of until several months after your disappearance. Even now, I do not understand."

"The note simply says: 'You have one week to live' then comes the signature. Since Double Z was unknown at the time, I cannot understand why the threat frightened you. Judges often receive letters from fanatics."

"Caulkins," said Tolland slowly, "I am going to be confidential with you. With any other newspaperman, I would have bluffed this matter out. I have been on the verge of revealing myself during the past few weeks. I think you can help me and also aid the police to clear up this terrible mystery."

The reporter's eyes focused keenly on Tolland's. The statement freed his mind from the bewilderment that had gripped it. Here would be a real scoop!

"The theory of my disappearance," said Tolland slowly, "has followed one general trend, beginning with the day I left my home and did not return. That day was, incidentally, the day after I received that note from the man you call Double Z."

"It has been presumed that I had accepted bribes from criminals, and that I feared discovery. On the contrary, it was because I refused bribes that I found it necessary to disappear. There were certain cases due to come up before me."

"I received a visit from a man who offered me a very large sum to favor the defense of one case and the prosecution of another. I refused. After that I received the Double Z warning."

"You knew the man who tried to bribe you?"

"I knew the man."

"But you said nothing?"

"I could do nothing at the time. It would have been impossible. The standing of the man well, you will

DOUBLE Z

realize it later when I tell you who he is. The warning came from him."

"He is Double Z?"

"Yes. He knows that I am still alive. He wants to kill me. I have frustrated the man for months. I shaved my mustache and dyed my hair. Yet, despite my changed appearance, you recognized me, which is proof that my disguise is insufficient. So I am now ready to act; to bring this affair to a crisis; to meet my enemy and turn his own weapons upon him."

"His own weapons?"

"Yes. The letters he has been sending to the police. What do you think is their purpose?"

"I considered them the messages of a fanatic."

"The man is a fanatic," admitted Tolland, "but an amazingly clever one. I am the only person who knows the purpose of his messages. They are sent to frighten me."

"To frighten you?"

"Certainly! When I received mine the first of all the Double Z correspondence I took it seriously and went into hiding, in this house. The enemy suspected my game. He knew that I was protecting my own skin in order to deliver a counterattack.

"He felt that the effect of his threat would gradually wear off. So he launched his campaign of informing the police of his intended murders, believing that each one would weaken my morale when I heard of it."

CAULKINS sat upright in his chair. This amazing statement threw a new light on Double Z. It showed a method behind the criminal's strange notes to the police.

"For months," went on Tolland, "I have been giving my enemy a chance to betray himself. One slip one slight clew of his identity to the police and my reappearance would clinch the fight for justice. That clew has not been forthcoming. And I, alone, cannot give his name to the authorities. It must come from him from some act of his.

"Nevertheless, I have decided to act because of you."

"Why because of me?" asked Caulkins in surprise.

"There are two reasons," declared the judge calmly. "First, because you discovered me. That shows that my enemy may discover me, also. I am not immune."

"I saw you in a little barber shop," explained Caulkins, "having your hair dyed. Your chin looked familiar. I followed you here. I obtained a key that opened the vestibule door."

"The second reason," continued Tolland, passing over the reporter's explanation, "is because you credited that note when you saw it. I was afraid to put it to the test before. Now I am sure that I shall be believed when I speak."

"With your prestige –"

DOUBLE Z

"My prestige? Where is it now; I may have had some before I obeyed the impulse to flee to safety. Yet I was wise to go into hiding. I learned that my enemy had arranged a complete frame-up that would make my sudden death seem well-deserved. I believed that."

"What do you intend to do now?"

"I'm leaving that up to you. You are free to lift the lid with the most sensational true exposure of crime that has ever appeared. Meanwhile, I shall be traveling. You will hear from me when the time comes for my statements."

"When Double Z has been exposed?"

"Yes. If the exposure fails, I shall still be safe safer than I am here in New York."

Caulkins arose and paced the room. He swung toward Tolland with a question.

"When shall I start?"

"Right now!" declared Tolland, as if fearing to hesitate. "Every minute may be precious, now that some one has discovered me. Call your newspaper from here. Give them the story, while I am here to check on any questions. Then we shall both leave and that paper will remain in your possession."

Caulkins picked up the message from Double Z. He spread it and pointed to the signature.

"Who is Double Z?" he asked.

"I shall tell you, Caulkins," replied Tolland. "His name is an important one. There is method in everything he does even in that signature. What does it represent to you?"

"Double Z. Two initials. I can think of no one who would have such initials."

Judge Tolland seized the paper.

"Look now!" he declared, moving his finger across the signature. "Does that mean anything to you? Forget Double Z. Think of a big man a powerful, prominent man whose initials are –"

Caulkins suddenly stiffened. A startled look of incredulity came into his widening eyes. Before he could reply, Tolland picked up a pen and paper from the table and wrote a series of short lines, inscribing his signature beneath.

"There!" he exclaimed in a voice of indignation. "There is the name of the fiend the merciless murderer! I have written it, with my signature beneath. That is my statement to you. Tell your paper; tell the police. When it is safe, you can count on me to testify!"

Caulkins leaped to the telephone. He dialed a number. He stood, with both papers on the table before him, studying one and then the other, his eyes bulging, his breath coming in anxious gasps.

"Classic?"

His question came in a wildly eager whisper. Judge Tolland, eyes gleaming expectantly, stood close beside the reporter, tense and hopeful.

"City desk," ordered Caulkins.

A pause. Both men were strained. The time it took for the connection seemed interminable. It was a matter of seconds only, but to Tolland those seconds were hours.

A voice came over the wire. Tolland saw Caulkins clutch the phone more firmly. The reporter's lips began to move, and Tolland's hands gripped the edge of the table as he leaned close to catch the words from the other end of the line.

Vindication! His opportunity was here. After months of persecution, he had decided upon the vital step. Within the next few minutes the persecution which had threatened him would be ended.

For Caulkins was about to reveal the identity of the man called Double Z reveal it so all the world would know the secret of that man who gloried in crime.

CHAPTER III. DOUBLE Z STRIKES

THE reporter at the city desk in the Classic office placed his hand over the mouthpiece of the telephone and called to the city editor.

"Caulkins on the phone, Mr. Ward."

"Just a minute, Gaynor."

The reporter spoke into the telephone. Again he called to the city editor.

"Says it's urgent, Mr. Ward."

The city editor came grumbling to the desk.

"Time he called up," he said. "Expected him in an hour ago. We want that Wise Owl copy in a hurry."

He took the swivel chair as Gaynor slipped out of the way, and picked up the telephone.

"Yeah?" he growled.

Words came breathlessly from Caulkins.

"Biggest scoop ever, boss," was what Ward heard. "I've located Judge Tolland –"

"Where?"

"Right here with me now. In a hideout on East Eightieth Street. Listen: This Double Z business –"

"Wait, I'll put Gaynor on, if you can't get in with the story."

"No, no, boss!" came the protest. "Wait until I give you the dope. I'm afraid something may happen if I don't get it off my chest quick. Judge Tolland is alive. He's given me a statement. He knows who Double Z is. Don't think I'm crazy, boss! Double Z is –"

The voice broke off. Simultaneously, Ward heard the sound of a revolver shot over the wire. Three more

DOUBLE Z

followed in rapid succession. There was a clatter of a telephone falling.

"Hello! Hello!" called the city editor.

Vague sounds came through the receiver. Ward fancied that he heard a gasp. A sharp click ended the chaos. The phone was hung up at the other end.

"Gaynor!" shouted the city editor. "Try to locate where that call came from the phone number! Quick! I heard shooting."

He singled out another reporter.

"Up to Eightieth Street, Briggs," he said. "East Eightieth. Take Stewart along with you. Try to locate Caulkins. He was calling from somewhere up there. There was shooting in the place where he called from."

The alert city editor spotted another man.

"Get police headquarters, Perry. Tell them what you just heard. Shooting up on Eightieth Street. Caulkins is there."

Ward sagged back in his chair, his excitement passed. He became meditative, giving no thought to the scurrying men who were on their way to do his bidding. He leaned forward to the desk and wrote a concise memorandum of what he had just heard.

Then he pushed pencil and paper aside while he checked his recollections. He tilted back in his chair and looked across the room at the clock. He glanced toward the typewriter desks. Harwood, star rewrite man, was sitting idle.

"Say, Harwood," said the city editor in a matter-of-fact tone, "do a Wise Owl column. Anything you want. It's your job from now on. I don't think Caulkins will be with us any longer."

THE city editor of the Classic was correct in his prophecy. A few hours later, the lifeless body of Joel Caulkins was discovered in the third story of an old house on Eightieth Street. No shots had been heard in the vicinity.

Police had arrived at the place by a process of elimination. The owner of a little store had seen a car pull away from the building where no car had stopped for months. The place was supposed to be empty. The statement had warranted a search. The body of the ex-Wise Owl was found there.

Acting Inspector Fennimann was accustomed to reporters from the Classic. He considered most of them a nuisance. The tabloid newspaper was always after sensational stories, and the Wise Owl revelations, a page of presumably inside stuff, was not liked at headquarters.

But on this particular night, after he had received a report from Detective Sergeant Wentworth, the acting inspector was surprised to receive a visit from Dale Ward, city editor of the Classic.

The editor received a cordial welcome. In a few minutes he and Fennimann were in close conference, chewing fat cigars while they talked.

"I heard the shots that killed Caulkins," explained Ward. "But it was what happened before then that is most important. He was in a hurry when he called me. Before they bumped him off, he told me that Judge Tolland

DOUBLE Z

was there with him."

"Judge Tolland!" Fennimann raised his eyebrows incredulously. "That's impossible, Ward! If Tolland was anywhere around New York, we'd have located him before this. Say! You aren't going to run any stuff like that, are you?"

"That wasn't all that Caulkins said. He told me that Tolland knew all about Double Z. He was just going to let me know who Double Z was when –"

Ward stopped as the door opened. In stepped the familiar form of Joe Cardona, the dark-visaged detective whose reputation as a crime investigator was known throughout New York.

"I'm glad you're here, Joe!" exclaimed Fennimann. "This Caulkins killing has got me worried with Inspector Klein away and you off on an other job. This is Mr. Ward, city editor of the Classic. What about this Caulkins case, Joe have you seen Wentworth?"

"Yes," replied Cardona tersely, while he was solemnly shaking hands with Ward.

"I stopped at East Eightieth Street on my way home from the Bronx. I've seen the place the body and Wentworth's report. Happened to call here while you were out, and they told me about the murder."

Fennimann turned to Ward.

"Tell Joe what you told me," he said.

Cardona was expressionless while he heard the city editor's statement. Then he became thoughtful. He scratched his chin and turned toward the newspaperman.

"How many shots did you hear over the wire?" he questioned Ward.

"Four."

"Did the receiver click right after that?" continued the detective.

"Not for fifteen or twenty seconds perhaps half a minute."

"Four shots," said Cardona thoughtfully. "That's the number of bullets that were in the dead man's body."

"Which means –"

"That if anybody was with him when he called, it's a sure bet that's who killed him."

"He said that Judge Tolland was there," Ward asserted.

"So you told me. Was Caulkins reliable?"

"He was the Wise Owl," said Ward without a smile. "Apt to get fanciful at a typewriter but not on the telephone, when talking with me."

CARDONA closed his eyes. He was visualizing the scene in that room on East Eightieth Street, where he had observed the lone body of Joel Caulkins. He pictured the bullet-ridden form.

DOUBLE Z

"Wentworth thinks that some gangsters coaxed Caulkins up there," he said. "Wentworth may be wrong. Let's see that paper he brought you, Inspector."

Reluctantly Fennimann pulled a paper from the desk drawer. Cardona studied it and read it aloud:

"You have one week to live!"

He passed the note to Ward, who stared at the cryptic Double Z signature in amazement. Fennimann looked questioningly at Cardona, who signaled that all would be well.

"Where did you find this?" asked Ward.

"In the dead man's hand," said Fennimann.

"This ties up Double Z with the murder," was the city editor's comment. "But where does Judge Tolland come in?"

"That's the question," said Cardona.

"Is this a genuine Double Z note?"

"It looks like one. If there is such a person as Double Z, it is probably genuine."

"What do you mean if there is a Double Z –"

"It may simply be a ruse adopted by different criminals," explained Cardona. "But in this case it may be Double Z. He had told us of several murders before they occurred but they may not have been of his doing."

"I understand that," replied Ward. "Caulkins covered some of the Double Z cases and was working on them as the Wise Owl. Double Z, I understand, is presumably a fanatic, who has a remarkable knowledge of what is going on in the criminal world."

"Look here," declared Cardona. "I'm going to give you some theories. But lay off of any wild stuff. Work with us. This hits home. It's one of your own reporters. Get me?"

Dale Ward nodded.

"A number of people have received Double Z threats," said Cardona. "Now, the way I figure it is this. Caulkins may have received that note and kept mum about it. But that's hardly likely, eh?"

"Not unless he got it after he went out this afternoon," responded Ward.

"All right, then. Maybe he received it then. Sent to him by the bird that killed him. Now, why did Caulkins go to that house on East Eightieth Street?"

"Probably he got a tip to go there. He knew a lot of gangsters. Or perhaps he met some one –"

"Very well. I incline to the first theory. However, he went to the place alone, unarmed, apparently suspecting no danger. There was some one there with him. Maybe some one posing as Judge Tolland. Double Z, for instance."

DOUBLE Z

"Double Z!" exclaimed Ward.

"Yes. Because Caulkins was not killed by a gunman!"

"Why not?"

"Gunmen don't bump off reporters at least, not in New York. Besides that, it took four shots, and two of them were wide ones. Caulkins was at the telephone an easy mark. A gangster would have nailed him with one shot, or two at the most."

Ward nodded. He saw Cardona's point.

"Now get this," declared the detective. "Whoever was intending to murder Caulkins inside that house gave Caulkins the opportunity to spill a certain amount of information. From your description, that information came straight from Caulkins it was not under threat. Caulkins had confidence in the man who was with him."

"Now, Judge Tolland, if he is alive if he is in New York would certainly want to lay low. At any rate, he would have seen to it that Caulkins either said nothing or said everything. That's logical, isn't it?"

"It seems so."

"But let's figure Double Z on the job, pretending to be Judge Tolland. That wouldn't be difficult. You could double for Tolland, and so could Fennimann, here. Nobody's seen Tolland for more than a year. He'd be apt to be changed in appearance, anyway. So we'll consider Double Z a hound for leaving his mark or showing his hand."

"He gets a phony message to Caulkins. The reporter goes up there. He meets Double Z, who calls himself Tolland, and hands him a lot of bunk. Caulkins swallows the story. He calls you."

"First he tells you that Tolland is with him. That's part of the game. Then he brings in Double Z. That's great. Verbal statement as a new development on the note stuff. Then, when Caulkins begins to give away who Double Z is maybe the guy was crazy enough to actually tell him bang! Curtains for your reporter."

"And this note?"

"Left there to make it look like Caulkins was threatened previously by Double Z. That guy would never take back a note once he sent it. Looks like he just left it there, after Caulkins had brought it out to show him, thinking he was really Judge Tolland."

"A great story," declared Ward, his journalistic instinct coming to the fore.

"All right," agreed Cardona, "if you leave out the Judge Tolland part."

"Why?"

"Because we want to keep Double Z from thinking we've got everything. He doesn't know how much was really heard or understood at your end of the phone. He wants to bring in a lot of mystery about Judge Tolland. I think his game is to make people believe that Judge Tolland has gone berserk and is Double Z."

"That's possible!" exclaimed Ward.

DOUBLE Z

"Possible, yes," said Cardona. "But lay off it. Your story is good enough. Caulkins was lured to the old house, after receiving a threat from Double Z. He went there because some one had tipped him that he would give him the real low-down on who Double Z was and, naturally, Caulkins was anxious to find out, because of the threat.

"There he met Double Z in person, but didn't know it. He called up, started to say something about Double Z, then came the shots, and that's all! Double Z played it right up until the last minute."

THE city editor became reporter. He began to jot down the theory given by Cardona.

"This is a break for you," said Fennimann. "I wanted to hold back on the note. This Double Z stuff doesn't do us any good. Reference to Tolland would be worse."

"Right," agreed Ward. He was sold on the capabilities and methods of Joe Cardona.

"Now," said the detective, "I'll be glad to have one of your men come up and look for inside stuff. I've given you what appear to me to be the real facts. Let's stick to them. Keep an eye on what your man writes. I want to nail the guy that got Caulkins. That's my job."

The city editor of the Classic was thoughtful when he left detective headquarters. He admired the work of Joe Cardona. He saw the fallacy of attempting to revive the Judge Tolland case, even though it fitted in with tabloid ideas.

Joe Cardona was also pleased to have met Dale Ward. He was more pleased when he saw the next day's Classic. Along with photographs of the martyred reporter and the death house appeared the story that he had arranged. Double Z was in the news again; but now the strange criminal had overshot his mark. The police were obtaining clues. Detective Cardona expected results.

"Double Z," muttered Joe Cardona as he stared at the newspaper spread upon the desk. "I've got the guy's number now. He'll boil up because that Tolland stuff didn't land. He'll show his hand again and when he does, it will be too bad for him!"

CHAPTER IV. BURKE BRINGS ACTION

"BURKE!"

Clyde Burke stepped up to the city desk. His eyes met those of Dale Ward. The two men had much in common. Both were journalists of long standing. Burke, formerly a reporter with the defunct Evening Clarion, was now handling special assignments for the tabloid Classic.

"You've been talking with Harwood about the Wise Owl job, eh?" questioned Ward.

"Yes," replied Burke. "He told me he had to jam some stuff through for it, but that he won't be able to handle it very long. It occurred to me that perhaps –"

"That you would be the man to handle it."

"Exactly."

The city editor laughed.

DOUBLE Z

"You win, Burke," he said. "I was thinking you were the man for the job. When Harwood spoke about it, I marked you down for the Wise Owl. You were pretty friendly with Caulkins, weren't you, old man?"

Clyde nodded.

"Well," continued Ward, "that's one reason why I figured on you. It's also the main reason why I'm going to tell you something that wasn't in to-day's story."

Ward half rose from his swivel chair to make sure that no one was near the city desk. Then he leaned forward and buzzed in Burke's ear. A look of surprise appeared on the reporter's face.

"Judge Tolland!" he exclaimed in a low voice. "You mean that he may be in this?"

"That's what Caulkins was saying when they got him," declared Ward. "I'm laying off it for the present. But keep your eye peeled. Listen, Burke: One of three things is sure. First" Ward tapped his left thumb with his right forefinger "Caulkins may have seen Tolland and have gotten some real dope from him. Second" the city editor tapped his left forefinger "Double Z bluffed Caulkins into thinking he was Tolland. Third" Ward indicated on another finger "Double Z is –"

Ward did not end the sentence. Clyde Burke finished it for him silently. The reporter's lips framed a single word.

"Tolland!"

"Right" said the city editor briskly.

"I'll be on the lookout," declared Clyde.

"Keep mum," warned Ward. "This detective, Cardona, has the right idea. Double Z is in the mix-up. Keep him guessing!"

"I'll run up to East Eightieth now," suggested Clyde.

"Good idea," agreed Ward. "Maybe you can trace back over the trail Caulkins followed. Then get in with the bunch that know. See how they're taking this story we ran to-day."

Clyde Burke sat down at an obscure desk in a corner of the news room. He drew a fountain pen from his pocket and wrote on a sheet of paper. Any one who might have observed him would have decided he was simply adding up his expense account. Clyde Burke looked the part of a police reporter.

But this firm-faced young man was engaged in a different task. He was inscribing a note of strange appearance. He was writing a series of coded letters, and the words which those letters formed told the vital facts which he had just heard from the lips of the city editor.

Clyde folded the sheet of paper and sealed it in an envelope. He sauntered from the newspaper office. He turned his steps toward Broadway, then to Twenty-third Street. There he reached a dilapidated old building. He entered.

Inside he ascended a flight of rickety stairs. He stopped in front of a glass-paneled door, upon which appeared the name:

B. JONAS

The reporter dropped the envelope in a mail chute cut in the door. He departed immediately. No one had seen his action. In fact, no one had ever seen a person enter through that door with the grimy, cobwebbed glass. Yet notes dropped there by Clyde Burke always reached their destination.

Clyde was thinking of that destination as he traveled uptown. He knew where his message was going. For the obscure office of B. Jonas was a receiving place used by that mysterious man of the night The Shadow!

Clyde Burke, to the world a newspaper reporter, was actually a trusted agent of this master of crime detection.

DURING the past few months, it had been Clyde's duty to watch for all startling developments in criminal activities. As a police reporter, especially with a tabloid newspaper that hungered for crime news, Clyde was in an excellent position to do this work.

Now, with the Wise Owl assignments in his hands, his contact with the underworld was reaching its zenith. He had already gained an insight into strange facts concerning the death of Joel Caulkins, and he had passed his findings on to his mysterious employer.

Despite numerous messages that he had delivered, Clyde had received no orders from The Shadow during these recent months. This was a singular state of affairs. Clyde could not recall any other period of inactivity on the part of The Shadow that was as long as this one. He wondered, sometimes, what had become of The Shadow.

Had the battler of crime withdrawn from the field? Had some shrewd gang leader pierced the unfathomable veil that obscured The Shadow and forced him to seek safety outside of New York? These were unpleasant thoughts, but Clyde, at times, had worse qualms. Perhaps something had happened to The Shadow!

For years gangsters had been trying to put him on the spot. Had they succeeded?

The only ray of comfort was The Shadow's broadcasts. Once a week this man of mystery spoke over the radio, and his uncanny laugh thrilled thousands of eager listeners. The broadcasts were going along on schedule; nevertheless, it was possible that some other man had taken The Shadow's place. No one had ever positively identified The Shadow, Crime Detector, with The Shadow, Radio Broadcaster.

Various tips on crime that Clyde had dropped in the Jonas office had been apparently ignored, although the reporter had felt sure that The Shadow would respond to them. To date, The Shadow had not, to Clyde's knowledge, taken the slightest interest in either the disappearance of Judge Harvey Tolland or in the peculiar correspondence that the police had received from a man called Double Z. But this was not disconcerting.

The sudden departure of a crooked jurist that was the general opinion of Tolland was not likely to interest The Shadow, who dealt with supercrooks. The strange notes from Double Z, hitherto regarded as the epistles of a madman, were also beneath The Shadow's notice.

Double Z had predicted certain deaths. Some had occurred; others had not. The few that had transpired had been minor gang killings. Never had the hand of Double Z appeared as that of the actual murderer.

But now the cry was out. Newspapers considered the death of Caulkins to be a gang killing, and at the same time suggested murderous work on the part of Double Z. Cardona's description of the case as the work of an inexperienced murderer had been played up in the Classic. Double Z had become a menace. Clyde Burke

DOUBLE Z

anticipated action from The Shadow. He felt sure that the Tolland connection would bring it.

WITH his mind occupied on these thoughts, Clyde arrived at the old house on East Eightieth Street. He studied the place from across the street. He noticed the heavily curtained front windows of the third floor. He sauntered across the street and ascended the steps. The door was locked.

A gruff voice spoke from the sidewalk.

"Hey, there!"

Clyde turned. He found himself staring at the squat, square-shouldered form of Detective Sergeant Wentworth.

"Oh, it's you, Burke," said the officer in an affable tone. "Didn't recognize you at first. Want to get in?"

"Sure thing."

Wentworth was explaining his presence as they entered the hallway and ascended the stairs.

"We're keeping watch on the place," he said. "If this nut Double Z is mixed up in the killing, there's no telling what may happen. He's just bugs enough to come back to the place. Might have left something here. So we're lying in wait."

Wentworth unlocked the door of the third-floor apartment. He and Burke entered the gloomy room, where Caulkins had died. The detective pointed out the telephone, and indicated the position in which the body had been found.

"Who lived here?" questioned Clyde.

"Wish we knew," said Wentworth. "Name downstairs says Joseph T. Dodd, but we haven't got any clew from it. We do know that some fellow did live here a while. We've found clothes and other articles. The only trouble is, he seems to have been careful to keep himself unknown. Nothing is here in the way of identification."

Clyde looked around the room, while the detective kept up a line of intermittent patter. The supposed actions that had taken place in the room were well established in Wentworth's mind.

"Caulkins came in," he explained. "He found the guy who had coaxed him here. They were talking about this Double Z stuff. Caulkins went to the phone right there; the other bird was standing here.

"Just as Caulkins began to spill the story, the other fellow outs with a gat and plugs him four times. Caulkins didn't have a chance, even though the guy that killed him was a bum shot. Right here is where we figure the murderer was standing. Nervy, eh, while Caulkins was phoning?"

Clyde nodded. Somehow, Wentworth's description, a duplicate of Cardona's findings, did not fully satisfy him; yet he could not explain what was wrong. He and the detective left the house. Clyde grunted a good-by, and started back to the newspaper office. On the way, he stopped at the building on Twenty-third Street. Standing in the dim hall, he scrawled a short coded message, describing his visit to Eightieth Street, and dropped the note in the door that bore the name Jonas.

BEFORE the desolate-looking house on East Eightieth Street, Detective Sergeant Wentworth continued his

DOUBLE Z

vigil. Dusk came. The door of the old house across the street was dim in the increasing darkness.

Watching it, Wentworth fancied that he saw a moving blur pass momentarily in front of it. He strolled across the street and tried the door. Locked. Wentworth went back to his post.

As his footsteps clicked down the stone steps to the sidewalk, a low laugh sounded in the vestibule. The soft mirth did not reach Wentworth's ears. A man was standing in the vestibule a man clad in black. He was totally invisible in the darkness. He had entered the front door in spite of the detective's vigil.

Now, a light appeared in the inclosure a tiny spot of light no larger than a half dollar. It shone directly upon the lock of the inner door. A queer-looking key appeared within that circle of illumination. A black-gloved hand used the key to probe the lock.

The door opened. It did not close immediately. The man in black was still working at the lock. The key moved in and out, as though being used to probe the metal depths.

At last, the door closed. Silence reigned with darkness. The light shone at intervals, moving upward on the stairway. It stopped on the third floor. Its rays swinging pryingly, stopped at the very spot where Joel Caulkins had stood in the hallway, unobserved by the man he was following. The tiny light, close to the floor, revealed slight dust marks.

Metal clicked against metal. The door of the apartment opened. The ray of the flashlight widened as it advanced uncannily, not a foot above the floor. It seemed to be following an invisible trail.

It paused; then, swerving, went to the door of the side room in which Caulkins had hidden himself.

Next, the light swung around the room, and aimed downward, to reveal the carpet. The floor covering was cheap and plain. It showed wear near the door and by the table. There was another spot where it was worn. The flashlight paused at that place, then moved upward. Its light glinted back from the silvered surface of the mirror that hung on the wall.

After a pause, the light went to the table. It moved busily about. It showed the telephone, off slightly to one side, and the chair, placed at an angle.

It examined the far side of the table, and the floor beside it. There, in the carpet, was a tiny stain. The light started toward the door, probing the carpet. It revealed another small dark splotch.

Then it went down the stairs, seeking, occasionally stopping to note some trifling sign. It reached the vestibule and made a thorough search. Here were no splotches only a broad smear, in the midst of a dust-streaked floor. The light was tiny now, as it ran up the side of the wall and stopped on the name of Joseph T. Dodd. Then the light went out.

The front door opened softly, and a thin figure slipped through, to merge with thickening night. Wentworth became suddenly alert across the street. He fancied that he had seen another motion at the door of the house; then he laughed at his imagination.

Why should he be concerned with every fleeting shadow that might appear before that door? He was posted to watch for a living being not a phantom!

And so, when Wentworth ended his vigil, being relieved by a plain-clothes man, he made out a simple report: namely, that no one had visited the house that day with the exception of Clyde Burke, reporter on the

Classic.

His report said nothing of a shadow in the dusk. If it had, it might have attracted the attention of the observant Joe Cardona. For the star detective knew more about shadows than did Wentworth.

Joe Cardona, alone of the New York detective force, might have suspected the truth: that The Shadow, living phantom of the night, had come and gone at the old house on East Eightieth Street. In answer to Clyde Burke's messages, the strange man of darkness had investigated the spot where Joel Caulkins had died.

Silently, invisibly, The Shadow had learned facts which had escaped the observation of Joe Cardona; and those facts pertained to other than Joel Caulkins namely, Judge Harvey Tolland, and to the man known only as Double Z.

CHAPTER V. CARDONA ENCOUNTERS CRIME

DETECTIVE JOE CARDONA was a man who played hunches. For months, he had been thinking off and on of Double Z. He had classed the man as an eccentric individual, who knew the inside of crookdom, and liked to display his knowledge by letters to the police.

He had harbored a hunch that Double Z might some day become dangerous, and he had been waiting for that time.

Now, the day had come. The murder of Joel Caulkins indicated action on the part of Double Z. It enabled Cardona to form his impression of what type of man Double Z might be.

He pictured him as one of those characters who fringe the borders of the underworld perhaps a "fence" who disposed of stolen goods. Through contact with crime, the man had gained knowledge. Now, possessed of more intelligence than the average criminal, the lure of crime had caused him to enter the field himself, while his eccentricity still made him follow his old practice of writing letters to the police.

Cardona recalled that two of Double Z's veiled tips of impending death had failed to materialize. Some months ago, he had said that a gangster was to be put on the spot, within a week. The killing had not occurred.

Then, he had hinted also the kidnapping of a prominent society woman. The police had become vigilant. The abduction had not taken place. These, therefore, were indications that Double Z had known of crime, but had not planned them. On the contrary, most of his statements had proven true.

Three unsolved murders had been predicted by Double Z. In one case, he had been of aid to the police. He had told of a plot to assassinate Signor Galvini, Italian plenipotentiary to the United States. His note had been turned over to the secret service. They had forestalled bomb throwing on the part of anti-Fascists, but had not discovered the men higher up. A few lesser criminals had gone to jail.

Joe Cardona was not a man to place too much faith in impressions. Doubts lurked in his brain, when he tried to identify Double Z as a definite personality. Some smart crook might be using this guise for some unknown purpose. But despite his suspicion of impressions, Cardona had a weakness for hunches. The first had materialized.

Double Z had committed crime and had shown himself to be shrewd, but bungling. He had lured Joel Caulkins, and had then required four shots to kill him, thus proving that Double Z was not so good when it came to gun play. Perhaps, Cardona speculated, Double Z might be an old man.

DOUBLE Z

While the detective still doubted his own impressions, he had experienced another hunch; and in that, he had no doubt. He felt positive that Double Z, once a killer, would now enter crime with boldness.

It was because of this hunch that Wentworth had been placed on watch. The house on Eightieth Street might be a hideout for Double Z, masquerading under the name of Joseph T. Dodd. If so, he might return there. Cardona was sure that the killer would soon be heard from, and awaited that time.

THAT was why the detective registered no surprise when he arrived at headquarters at noon to find Acting Inspector Fennimann anxiously awaiting him. This was on the day after The Shadow's secret visit to the old house two days after the murder of Joel Caulkins.

"What is it?" questioned Cardona, when he saw the inspector. "More on Double Z?"

"You guessed it, Joe. He's sent another note."

"Here?"

"No. To Philip Farmington, the big banker. A direct threat. Read this."

Cardona received a paper. Its words were poorly typewritten. The detective recognized the battered M and the weakly struck A. Double Z sometimes scrawled; on other occasions he typed. Always, he inscribed, at the foot of the note, those twin letters that served as his signature. The message read:

You are making a mistake. Stop at once or you will hear from me. Death will come to you!

The detective was contemplative for a few moments. Then he turned to Fennimann:

"When did Farmington get this?" was his question.

"This morning," replied the acting inspector. "Sent it down by messenger. Called up to make sure it came in. I told him you would come up to see him. He will be home at one o'clock."

Joe Cardona glanced at his watch.

"I know where Farmington lives," he said. "I'll go up there right away."

When the detective arrived at the banker's home, he was ushered into a room that served as an office. It adjoined a large living room.

Cardona took a chair near a huge mahogany desk, and awaited the return of Philip Farmington. The banker arrived within half an hour.

JOE CARDONA was keenly interested in the meeting. He had seen Philip Farmington, but had never spoken to him before. The man was a keen, hard-faced individual; one who possessed a powerful physique and a commanding personality. Cardona knew that he was reputed to be a multimillionaire, and was a strong figure in the activities of international bankers.

After shaking hands with the detective, Farmington seated himself by the desk and got down to business. He opened a box of cigars that was on the desk. Cardona accepted one. Farmington was already smoking.

"Well," asked Farmington, "what do you think of this Double Z matter?"

DOUBLE Z

"The man is crazy," declared Cardona. "Nevertheless, he is dangerous."

"Unquestionably," acknowledged the banker. "Not only dangerous, but methodical. I see a purpose in his threat."

"What is it?"

"He knows that I understand his message. I have already replied to it."

"What! You know where he is –"

"No," smiled Farmington. "I have replied by action, knowing what is in his mind."

Cardona appeared puzzled, but waited without asking questions.

"For some time," continued the millionaire, "a group with which I am associated has been considering a loan to the Fascist government. The matter awaited my decision to–day. The letter arrived while I was at breakfast. I took it with me to the office. It was obviously a threat if I gave my approval to the loan."

"Did you approve?"

"I did. The announcement of the loan appeared in the early editions of the evening newspapers. So Double Z if he is watching knows now that I have failed to heed his instructions."

"Hm–m–m," said Cardona. "Did you have any previous indication of this?"

"No," replied Farmington.

"When did you announce that your decision would be made to–day?"

The millionaire chewed the end of his half–finished cigar; then threw the perfecto into a tubular ash receiver. He arose and paced the floor, in thought. At last, he turned to face Detective Cardona.

"It has been known," he said, "that my decision regarding the loan might be made within a few weeks; but yesterday I made an announcement, indicating I would reach a definite decision to–day.

"A number of my friends were here last night. They had seen the announcement in the newspapers. I stated that it was correct, for I had definitely made up my mind."

"Did you speak to any one else about it?"

"Yes. To reporters who called up while my friends were here. They wanted to corroborate the announcement for the morning newspapers."

CARDONA puffed his cigar and became thoughtful. Philip Farmington noted that the detective was considering the matter minutely. He decided to assist him.

"Suppose," he said, "that I tell you everything that has happened since I gave the announcement to the evening newspapers, yesterday."

"Good idea!" replied the detective.

DOUBLE Z

"Well," said the millionaire, "they had been questioning me constantly. I made up my mind to act, without telling any one definitely. At noon yesterday, I received a call from the Evening Sphere. It was the usual call. Any decision planned on the Fascist loan? I said that it would probably be settled favorably to-day.

"I came home before three o'clock. I was in this room until nearly six. Then I dressed for dinner. About twelve persons arrived before seven thirty. We had dinner, and the guests departed between ten and eleven o'clock."

"When did the newspapers call you on the phone?"

"Before nine o'clock."

"When did you discuss the matter with your friends?"

"It was mentioned during dinner."

"Did anything unusual happen during the evening?"

"No. We were in the living room most of the time. A few of the gentlemen came in here, but after we had gone out, I locked the door. I don't usually keep this room open. It serves me as an office at home. I explained that to them. I never come in here in the morning. The room is kept locked until I return from downtown. Then, at dinner time, I lock up until the next day."

"The room was open when I came," said Cardona.

"Of course," replied the millionaire. "There is nothing of value here, and Ralph, the butler, has a duplicate key. I called from the office and told him to show you in here."

"I see. Now, regarding this note of Double Z. According to the postmark, it was mailed from the Bronx about midnight."

"Yes. I noticed that."

"All of the notes come from the Bronx." The detective hesitated. "That may mean something it may also be a blind. One thing is certain: it is a genuine Double Z note. It has been compared with the others that we have at headquarters."

"You have quite a collection?"

"Yes."

"All threats?"

"No. A few are tips. One in particular enabled us to forestall a plot against the Fascist delegate to America. That is why the note addressed to you is both right and wrong."

"How?"

"Because," said Cardona, "we have connected Double Z with Fascisti matters. That fits in. But previously, he seemed to favor the Italian government. Now, however, if your idea is correct, he opposes it."

DOUBLE Z

"Most peculiar!"

"Yes. But Double Z is eccentric, don't forget that. I'll tell you what I want to do, Mr. Farmington. I'm going to take notes of everything you have told me, just in case there may be a clew somewhere in it. This may be dangerous business."

"It doesn't worry me!" declared Farmington emphatically. "Nevertheless, we must capture this scoundrel. Make your notes, and I shall check them."

Farmington sat down at the desk and leaned back in the large chair. Cardona began to make notations, exactly following the statements which the millionaire gave him.

While Cardona was at work, Farmington unlocked a lower drawer of the desk and opened a cigar box. He brought out a cigar and cut off the cud. He flipped the bit of tobacco toward the ash receiver, and lighted his cigar in a methodical manner.

"I don't recall your telling me about this morning," remarked the detective. "You went directly to the office?"

"Yes. After an eight-o'clock breakfast."

"When did the conference begin?"

"At nine thirty."

"When did it end?"

"Ten fifteen."

"And the evening newspapers were notified –"

"Immediately."

"Did anything happen after that?"

Farmington chewed the end of his cigar as he reflected. He was leaning back in his chair, and Cardona noted the firmness of his profile.

"Nothing else," came Farmington's reply.

"All right," declared the detective. "I'll read all my notes. Afterward, we can see if we've missed anything."

He began in a monotonous tone. Occasionally he looked up to see if Philip Farmington was listening. The millionaire had turned away slightly, so his profile was no longer visible. His head was leaning back; his hand was resting on the desk, holding the cigar.

Cardona went on until he finished reading. He waited for Farmington to finish considering it. At last Cardona's patience ended.

"Anything else?" he questioned.

Philip Farmington did not reply.

"Satisfactory?" questioned Cardona.

No reply.

SURPRISED, Cardona frowned. He arose and stepped toward the seated millionaire. He advanced only three paces. He stopped stock–still, too amazed to move farther forward. He could now see the face of Philip Farmington, and it was his view of that countenance that astounded him.

Philip Farmington was staring at the wall with glazed, wide–open eyes. Upon his face had come a grayish pallor that matched the thin wisp of cigar smoke which curled upward from the hand upon the desk.

The firm features of the millionaire had taken a ghastly appearance that Cardona had never before observed upon the face of any man.

Startled, the detective stood motionless. Then, while a strange sensation brought incredible realization, Cardona reached forward and grasped the shoulders of the seated man.

The firm clutch brought results.

The millionaire's body gave way beneath the pressure. It slumped down into the chair. The arms dropped lifelessly, and the lighted cigar rolled upon the floor. The head with the staring eyes fell back, and the gruesome gaze turned unseeingly toward the ceiling.

A deep gasp came from Detective Joe Cardona.

Philip Farmington was dead!

CHAPTER VI. THE SHADOW PREPARES

THE strange death of Philip Farmington, millionaire international banker, was tremendous news. The circumstances under which it had occurred, in the presence of Detective Joe Cardona during a discussion of the mysterious Double Z, brought stern realization to both police and press. It was obvious that a man who had previously dealt only in eccentricities had now become a shrewd, insidious killer.

What was Double Z?

Was he a gangster, who had suddenly given up the usual undercover methods of crime?

Was he a tool of some one higher up a blind to mislead police investigators?

Was he a maniac, who knew the ways of the underworld who, after contenting himself with writing his eccentric letters, had now launched into a career of murder and thievery?

Was he a supermind a criminal who had been waiting for the right opportunity to begin murder and destruction?

Was he a man entirely unknown in gangdom, who had suddenly developed criminal tendencies?

Was he a foreign agent bent on a campaign of terrorism, with New York as, its center?

These questions remained unanswered.

DOUBLE Z

It was certain that Double Z, whoever he might be, must come under one or more of these classifications. His paradoxical actions and unexplainable purposes marked him either as a person who obeyed any criminal impulse, or as a man gifted with remarkable genius.

In either event, the police had but one course: To track down this slayer before he loosed his evil powers throughout a wider range.

Everywhere one went, the talk was of Double Z. This was particularly evident at the exclusive Cobalt Club, where Philip Farmington had been a prominent member. The death of the international banker had cast a pall over the spirits of his friends.

The Cobalt Club was a gloomy place at best. Now, for once, its members were loquacious; but their talk was morbid. The death of Philip Farmington presaged future threats, directed at other men of wealth.

A small, tense group was discussing the matter in the club lounge. Half a dozen men had gathered together. Barnaby Hotchkiss, the lumber magnate, was speaking.

"It looks like an international plot," he said emphatically. "The anti-Fascists are bad enough, but if the Bolsheviks are mixed in it –"

"That might be troublesome for you, eh?" quizzed Blaine Glover, the famous steamship man.

"Yes," admitted Hotchkiss. "I have been successful in prohibiting the importation of lumber from Russia. That cheap Bolshevik timber was a menace. We've stopped a lot of it now. They don't like it in Moscow."

"I don't think this can go far," said Blaine Glover optimistically. "There's nothing to be gained by attacking individuals."

"Look at it from Farmington's viewpoint," Hotchkiss put in sourly.

"Well, Farmington's dead."

"Yes. That's just the trouble. Who will be next?"

The words brought nods of understanding from other members of the group.

"No one is safe," observed Stephen Baum, the chain-store director. "If this crazy man sets out to kill, they cannot stop him. How was Farmington murdered?"

"Poisoned," declared Glover. "They discovered that right away. I read the report of the toxicologist in to-night's Sphere –"

"Yes, but who administered the poison? How? Where?"

Glover shrugged his shoulders.

"They haven't figured that out, yet," he said.

"I believe they have discovered the nature of the poison," declared Matthew Wade, the multimillionaire. "That, at least, is one step in the right direction."

"How does that help?" asked Hotchkiss.

"Certain poisons are peculiar to certain countries," said Wade. "This one, from the description I have read, resembles a very virulent, but little-used, poison found in India. I heard of such a poison during my last visit to Bombay, when I was cruising around the world on one of your ships, Glover."

"I think you are mistaken there, Wade," came a quiet voice. The speaker was Lamont Cranston, like Wade, a gentleman of leisure reputed to possess great wealth. "I have not only heard of poisons; I have studied them. Farmington's death indicates that he tasted a poison similar to the li-shun, a deadly product of Mongolia. It does not take effect immediately; when it does, it is extremely rapid."

Matthew Wade shrugged his shoulders. He was an indolent man, who had inherited much of his money, and who had spent long periods of time in foreign countries. He was not one to discuss technicalities, although he had a somewhat challenging disposition.

"I'll take your word for it, Cranston," he replied. "I guess you've traveled as much as I have. I spent most of my time on big-game hunts in India. But I was too busy to study the Oriental methods of artistic assassination."

THE group was breaking up. Some of the men started toward the billiard room; others toward the lobby.

Lamont Cranston remained in the lounge. He seated himself in a comfortable chair and turned to observe a man who was sitting near by. This individual had not been taking part in the discussion.

The man whom Cranston surveyed was a sober, quiet-faced chap in his thirties. He was dressed in evening clothes. He was smoking a panatella in a methodical manner, and seemed very much concerned with his own thoughts.

He, alone, seemed to reflect the usual atmosphere of the Cobalt Club. The only expression on his face was a look of glumness that seemed to be habitual. It disappeared suddenly when the man noticed that he was being observed. He cast a slow glance at Lamont Cranston, recognized the firm, chiseled face of the millionaire, and spoke words of greeting.

"Good evening, Mr. Cranston," was all he said.

"Good evening, er er—" Cranston seemed at loss.

"Mann," was the reply. "Rutledge Mann."

"Ah, yes!" exclaimed Cranston. "I remember, now. I've met you here several times before. Were you listening to the conversation of the worried plutocrats?"

"It hardly concerned me," replied Mann, with a wan smile.

"Why not?"

"I don't belong in the plutocrat class."

Lamont Cranston was studious. Despite his pretense, he had recognized Rutledge Mann. Moreover, he knew a great deal of his history.

Mann was of a family that had once been wealthy. He had conducted a small brokerage business, and had dealt with members of the Cobalt Club. Now, it was evident that he had fallen into hard times.

"Business not so good, eh?" questioned Cranston.

"There is no business at all," replied Mann quietly.

"Closed out?"

"Yes."

"That's too bad," observed Cranston. There was an understanding in his tone that impressed Rutledge Mann. "What are you going to do now?"

"I don't know," Mann replied. "I'd do anything to get started again. I owe a lot of debts. If it wasn't for that —"

He stopped abruptly. Although he never ended the sentence, Lamont Cranston inferred the rest. The peculiar flicker that appeared on Mann's face told him all.

Rutledge Mann was up against it badly. Only his sense of obligation prevented him from taking desperate measures. In fact, his thoughts were dwelling right now upon an automatic that reposed in the table drawer of his apartment.

Mann did not notice that Cranston was still watching him. Had he been alert enough to observe that fact, he would have been surprised. For Cranston's sharp eyes were focused keenly on the face of the ex-broker. He seemed to be reading the innermost thoughts of the man beside him.

Rutledge Mann arose from his chair. He glanced at the clock that showed through the door from the lobby. That action was significant to Lamont Cranston.

He knew that Mann must have pawned the expensive wrist watch which he had been wearing a few nights before. For Lamont Cranston had been secretly observing Rutledge Mann for a considerable period of time.

"Good night," said Mann abruptly. "It's rather late. I'm going to ride uptown to my apartment."

He left the lounge and obtained his coat in the lobby. He carried it over his arm until he had passed through the revolving door. For that coat was threadbare. The only respectable garb which Rutledge Mann still possessed was the full-dress suit which he donned for his evening visits to the Cobalt Club.

OUTSIDE, it was drizzling. Rutledge Mann faced the rain and strode along the Avenue. It was several blocks to the subway station, yet he ignored the taxicabs waiting at the door of the club. He did this for a good reason. He had only fifty cents in his pocket.

Mann chided himself as he strode along, particularly when a taxicab, swinging away from the entrance of the Cobalt Club, splattered past him. Accustomed to surroundings of wealth, the club had been his only haven during the past few months. He spent most of his time there, but felt strangely out of place.

With men like Lamont Cranston, for instance or Matthew Wade. To either of them, a thousand dollars was pin money. Yet, to-night, Rutledge Mann would have sacrificed anything for half that sum.

The drizzle had become a torrent when Mann emerged from the subway station near the apartment house

DOUBLE Z

where he lived. Two blocks through the deluge. He made it on the run. He entered his apartment, dripping wet. He threw his coat in the closet and surveyed the ruin of his evening clothes. He hung the coat up to dry, placed the vest over the back of a chair, and pulled away his tie and collar. He sat down in front of the table. Acting on sudden impulse, he pulled open the table drawer and picked up the gun.

It was the only item of any value which still belonged to him. Should he pawn it, or

The gun was in his left hand. Mann was staring, fascinated, into the gleaming muzzle. Instinctively, his finger sought the trigger. He seemed in a little world of his own, within the circled glare of the table lamp.

Even the rest of the room about him was a black, unknown realm. Mann's finger steadied. Then, from that outside world, came a black-clad hand that plucked the automatic from his grasp.

Mann stared upward to find himself facing a tall being, who seemed a fantastic specter come from nowhere.

The visitor was clad entirely in black. He wore a long black cloak, with a high collar that obscured his face. Over his forehead was the broad brim of a slouch hat. Two eyes were all that Mann could see eyes that glowed like sparkling coals.

The automatic disappeared beneath the folds of the black cloak. Mann, astounded and empty-handed, was unable even to gasp his surprise.

"Why do you seek death?"

The question came in a whispered voice. Its uncanny tones made Mann shudder; yet he felt no fear because of the stranger's presence.

"There's nothing to live for," he replied. "I'm broke. No friends. No future. No one depends on me. I've reached the end that's all. Why hold off?"

A black-gloved hand advanced. The gun was replaced in Mann's grasp. Mann felt that he was dreaming; that his harassed mind had fancied all this. The touch of the cold metal brought reality. But he held the gun loosely, his thoughts of suicide temporarily forgotten.

"If you have good reasons for death," came the whispered voice, "I shall not deny you the privilege. But if all you need is money and friendship to make life worth continuing, they are yours if you will do my bidding."

Mann laid the gun on the table. He stared straight at the man in black.

"What do you ask?" he inquired.

"Obedience. Full obedience. Without question. You will have life and honor. But my bidding shall be law."

Silence. Mann stared at that strange figure, seeking to observe the hidden lips that had spoken those all-important words. He was thinking of the future.

Which would it be his body, lifeless in this chair or Rutledge Mann, alive and active, freed from poverty. It all seemed unreal, but he treated it with seriousness.

"I accept your offer," was Mann's spoken decision, as he stared into those glowing eyes.

"You promise full obedience."

"I promise."

A black-gloved hand placed something upon the table, beside the automatic. Mann looked at the object. It was a check book. He opened it. The checks bore the imprint:

RUTLEDGE MANN

909 Badger Building

New York

"Be at your office to-morrow morning," came the whispered voice from beside him.

Projecting from the end of the check book was a deposit book. Mann drew it out and opened it. At the top of the first column was the statement of a deposit of \$2,500.

Mann wheeled in his chair to face the stranger. He saw no one. He leaped to the door and pressed the wall switch. He was alone. The man in black had gone!

He stepped swiftly back to the table. In one hand he held the pistol; in the other, the check book. One meant death. The other life a life worth living. He put the automatic into the table drawer. He sat staring at the check book as a man in a dream, while the minutes ticked by.

When morning arrived, Rutledge Mann saw the check book on his bureau, where he had placed it before retiring. It amazed him, even now, to find that it was real. The strange events of last night were dim recollections. Mann could not repress the suspicion that he had been hoaxed.

He dressed, left his apartment, and hurried downtown to the Badger Building, near Times Square. He went up to the ninth floor, and found Office 909. There he stood stupefied. On the door was the gilt lettering:

RUTLEDGE MANN

Investments

He tried the door. It was unlocked. Within, he found a small office, beyond it a door, and an inner office. On the desk of the private office lay two objects a key and an envelope.

Mann sat before the desk. He opened the envelope and extracted a folded paper. He began to read, and with reading came understanding.

WHILE Rutledge Mann was gaining his first insight into the methods of the mysterious man who had befriended him, another man who had business in New York was opening a letter at his breakfast table in his home in New Jersey. This was Cliff Marsland, a veteran of the World War, who had done his part in a recent campaign against the New York racketeers.

The letter which Cliff read was written in blue ink, and its words formed a private code which only he understood. Scarcely had he finished reading, when the writing began to disappear. The paper was blank when Cliff dropped it on the breakfast table.

DOUBLE Z

"Darling," he said to his wife, "I think it would be a good idea for you to take that Florida trip with your father. So plan to leave with him tonight. I have work to do that may take me away for a while."

Meanwhile, in the club car of the Eastern Limited, a young man known as Harry Vincent, was smoking a cigar and staring meditatively at the passing scenery. Harry had terminated his vacation early that morning. He had left his parents' home in the little town of Colon, and was riding east from Michigan, in response to an oddly worded telegram which he had received the night before—a message which he alone could understand.

And at precisely the same moment, Clyde Burke was hanging up the receiver of a telephone at the Classic office. He had just been listening to the words of a quiet voice which had spoken to him over the wire.

"Burbank!" Clyde Burke said in an undertone. "Burbank, the trusted agent of The Shadow! Burbank is on the job, and I have received instructions!"

Five men had received their orders. Simultaneously, The Shadow, the unknown master of mystery, had summoned his underlings, each to await his commands. While the police, with hundreds at their disposal, were blindly seeking to learn the identity of Double Z, The Shadow had prepared for battle with the newcomer in the world of crime.

CHAPTER VII. THE SHADOW AT WORK

AT three o'clock that afternoon, a man called at detective headquarters and inquired for Joe Cardona. He was taken into the detective's office. Cardona was out; but he arrived half an hour later, to find the visitor awaiting him.

He looked quizzically at the stranger, a tall, sallow-faced man, who wore a blue serge suit and brown slouch hat. Cardona had never seen the man before; but he was impressed by the fellow's appearance. The man's face was firm and expressionless; it seemed molded from a solid substance.

Before the detective could inquire the stranger's business, the man arose and drew back the left side of his coat to reveal a badge of the secret service. Cardona extended a hand in greeting.

"Blake's my name," said the visitor, in a quiet voice. "Terry Blake. You wouldn't suspect it from my name, but —"

He paused and broke into a smooth-flowing conversation of Italian. Cardona, surprised, answered in the same tongue. After a few more remarks, Blake resumed his conversation in English.

He had just explained to Cardona that he was of Italian ancestry on his mother's side of the family. Cardona, noting his features closely, observed certain prominent characteristics of that race.

"I suppose you want to see me about the Farmington case," remarked Cardona.

"You guessed it," replied the secret-service man. "I'm working on these anti-Fascist operations. It looks pretty much like this case fits in."

"No doubt about it," declared Cardona. "There's only one hitch —"

"The method?"

Cardona nodded.

"Bombs and stilettos are in their line," he said. "This poison business is a new wrinkle."

"Not exactly new," observed the secret-service man.

"No?" came the surprised reply.

"Italy," said Blake, "was famous for the Medicis. I've seen the survival of some of their subtle poisons. The art has faded, but it is not dead –"

"I can't see the connection," declared Cardona. "Any knowledge of poisons in Italy would belong to members of the aristocracy, some of whom still have criminal leanings. But the anti-Fascists are a Communistic group –"

"You think so?" interrupted the secret-service man, with a thin, slow smile. "You should pay a visit to Rome. You would find it different from New York. In Rome, the Fascisti are a middle group, hated by the Communists and secretly despised by the aristocracy. The activities against the Fascisti are not confined to the lower classes."

Cardona nodded thoughtfully.

"I get your drift," he said. "Here in New York, we have only the bomb-throwers and their type. But in this case with international affairs at stake it may be that a more elaborate plot has been arranged –"

"I regard it as possible," declared Blake.

"We haven't had much luck on the poison," lamented Cardona. "The toxicologist has found out its general nature, but he can't place it. He figures it works slowly at first; then suddenly. That gives us no help. It might have been given to Farmington at lunch in the morning, as early as breakfast –"

"Or the night before?"

"No. That would have been impossible. Not earlier than the morning – even then, not too early."

"What clues have you discovered?"

"None."

Cardona tossed a typewritten report to the secret-service man. It was a record of the detective's conversation with Philip Farmington.

"Have you discovered anything in Farmington's little office, that you mention here?"

Cardona shook his head in response to Blake's quiz.

"Any documents?"

"None of importance."

"Suppose we go up there," suggested the secret-service man.

"All right," agreed Cardona. "Here's something you'd like to look at before you go."

DOUBLE Z

He brought out the note which Philip Farmington had received from Double Z. The secret-service man examined it closely.

"You're sure it is bona fide?" was his question.

Cardona produced other letters. For fully ten minutes, Terry Blake studied and compared the letters. He laid all aside except the note which had been found in the hand of Joel Caulkins the note which warned the recipient he had but one week to live.

The secret-service man turned the note sideways, then upside down. He returned it to Cardona. The detective almost fancied that he saw a sudden gleam in Blake's eyes. Before he could ask a question, the secret-service man had arisen.

"Let's go," he said brusquely.

THEY reached Philip Farmington's home. Cardona had a key to the office where the banker had died. The men entered. Blake examined the chair in which Farmington had been seated. Cardona smiled.

"We went all over that," he said. "No poisoned needles. Not a clew here, old fellow. But I thought you'd like to look at these papers."

Terry Blake examined some documents that had belonged to Philip Farmington. Finally, he laid them aside and sat in the chair before the desk.

"Farmington was sitting here?" he asked.

"Yes." Cardona took the chair he had occupied on that other occasion. "I was over here, talking to him."

"What did he do?"

"Very little. Offered me a cigar, when he came in. From that box on the desk."

"Good. I'll be Farmington. Have one."

Cardona accepted the perfecto with a smile. Blake began to take one for himself.

"Wait!" said Cardona, entering into the game. "Farmington took one from the desk drawer. I remembered it at the time. I found out later he prefers a strong brand of pure Havana."

Blake opened the drawer indicated. It had been left unlocked. He found the box of cigars. One layer was gone. A single cigar was out of the second layer. Blake fished a cigar loose and bit off the tip.

"Farmington cut off the end," observed Cardona. "I remember he took a cutter from his pocket. Flipped the tip away."

"Never mind," replied the secret-service man. He lighted the cigar. The pungent odor caused Cardona to sniff.

"Strong, all right," said the detective. "Funny I didn't notice it yesterday. Guess I was too busy taking notes."

"So Farmington was sitting here when he died?"

"Right there."

"It beats me," admitted Blake. "You've got a tough crime to solve. Well, we'll be cooperating."

His hat was lying on the desk. He accidentally knocked it on the floor as he arose. Cardona saw him stoop to pick it up. They left the room and rode downtown in a cab. Blake dropped off before they reached headquarters.

In his office, Joe Cardona found a short, stocky man awaiting him. The stranger introduced himself as Tim Malloy, of the secret service.

"What!" exclaimed Cardona. "I just left one of your men."

"Who?"

"Terry Blake."

Malloy scratched his head speculatively.

"Terry Blake," he said. "I thought he was in Italy. What did he look like?"

Cardona described Blake.

"That sounds like Blake," declared Malloy. "Didn't know he was back. Funny he hasn't reported."

The subject was dropped. Malloy asked to see the Double Z correspondence. Cardona produced it. That was all Malloy required. After the government man was gone, Cardona wondered.

Funny thing, he thought, that Terry Blake should have come without being assigned on the case. That visit to Farmington's seemed odd. Malloy had suggested no such visit.

Suspicious began to enter Joe Cardona's mind. He was on the verge of another hunch. He stared from the window at the gathering dusk, and felt that he would like to meet Mr. Terry Blake once again.

HAD Cardona's gaze been able to pierce both blackness and solid walls, he might have viewed a distant scene which would have surprised him. It would also have explained, in part, the visit of the man who called himself Terry Blake.

A light was shining in the midst of a windowless room. Its rays, focused downward by an opaque lamp shade, cast a luminous circle in the center of a square-topped table.

Within that sphere of light, two hands were moving. Those hands were long, slender, and tapering; yet strong muscles were apparent beneath their smooth-textured skin. Upon a finger of the left hand, a strange gem glowed beneath the lamplight, its bluish depths changing in hue from purple to deep red.

The stone was a girasol a rare fire opal unmatched in all the world. It was the lone jewel of The Shadow.

Objects appeared as if from nowhere. A pencil and a piece of paper. A small goblet filled with water. A tiny box. A phial of dark-blue liquid, whose changing shades rivaled the matchless girasol. These appeared from the outer darkness, arriving within the circle of light as though conjured from space.

DOUBLE Z

Finally a curious book with flexible covers made its appearance. The hands opened the book and revealed a page of Chinese characters.

A pointed finger made its way up the page. It stopped and moved slowly from character to character. Eyes in the dark were reading from the book. The hand plucked the pencil from the table and made short notations upon the sheet of paper. The book remained open, but was pushed to one side, where it lay as reference.

The hands opened the tiny box and shook a quantity of yellow powder into the little goblet of water. The liquid took on a yellowish tinge, the powder dissolving immediately.

The hands produced an envelope; also a small pair of tweezers. The metal prongs were dipped into the envelope. They came out, carrying a small brown object between their tips. It was the end of a cigar, which had been clipped off with a cigar cutter.

The tweezers were dipped into the yellowish liquid. Half a minute went by; then the hand that held the tweezers removed them and let the soggy cigar end fall upon the envelope.

Now the phial was in use. Those living hands uncorked it and poured three drops into the glass. The bluish globules seemed to writhe and melt into the yellow liquid, until they had completely colored it a pale green. The goblet remained in view. The hands were motionless. The eyes outside the light were watching.

For a short while, nothing occurred. Then, with mysterious slowness, the color of the liquid again began to change. The green darkened. It took on a brownish tinge. When the metamorphosis was complete, the clear liquid had become a dark, muddy solution.

THE right hand picked up the pencil. Upon the paper it inscribed a Chinese character. Beneath, the hand wrote the word li-shun. Then it inscribed words of explanation:

This poison, in liquid form, dries and adheres to any object upon which it is applied. Moistened, it quickly comes away and leaves no trace.

Some one opened the cigar box in Philip Farmington's desk drawer. The box contained no loose cigars. The second layer was intact. Not wishing to leave traces, this person removed a cigar from the center of the row and inserted a similar cigar, which had been treated with li-shun. This cigar was slightly loose, so that it would be taken without effort by Farmington.

The hand rested. Then it added:

First proof: The remainder of the row was intact. Farmington would have disturbed it in taking a cigar from a tight row.

Second proof: Cardona did not notice the strong aroma of the cigar which Farmington smoked.

The person who placed it in the box had not obtained a cigar as strong as Farmington's own brand.

Another pause. Then:

No trace of the poison could remain on the cigar after Farmington had chewed the end. But the tip, cut off beforehand, lay on the floor where Farmington had thrown it. The analysis shows li-shun on that tobacco.

The paper lay with its strange information until the right hand seized it and crumpled it. Then the hand wrote:

Facts in the Caulkins death.

It crossed out the words and added the single remark:

Later

This sheet was crumpled. The hands, working swiftly, removed the various articles from the table. The light clicked out. A low, soft laugh echoed eerily from the walls of the room.

It was the laugh of The Shadow. The master mind that worked in darkness had discovered how Philip Farmington had died!

CHAPTER VIII. MANN LEARNS FACTS

IT was a different Rutledge Mann who appeared that night at the Cobalt Club. No longer did his face wear a harassed look. Instead of sitting solemnly in an obscure spot, Mann strolled about through lounge and lobby with the spirit of contentment that had been his former wont.

There was nothing in Mann's bearing that attracted attention, however. Mann was of a quiet, self-effacing type. Normally pleasant and courteous, he merely nodded to old acquaintances.

Mann had always believed that business would come to those who worked patiently and awaited it. His late misfortunes had somewhat riddled that theory; but his newly found opportunity had restored his self-confidence.

Mann was thinking as he lounged about the club. He was puzzling over business matters, and his thoughts were not of investments. Instead, he was dwelling on the activities of Double Z, the strange crime master who had baffled the police.

All that day, after reading instructions in the envelope upon his desk, Rutledge Mann had spent his time in reviewing copies of daily newspapers, with their varied reports of recent murders.

Who killed Joel Caulkins? What mystery surrounded the death of Philip Farmington?

Another question perplexed Rutledge Mann. That was the connection of Judge Harvey Tolland with the Caulkins murder. For within the envelope left him by The Shadow, Mann had found a complete report of the data supplied by Clyde Burke.

In brief, Mann was now fully acquainted with every angle of the Double Z business, And he was totally baffled!

These thoughts brought a frown to Mann's forehead. Then he laughed softly to himself. After all, he was no detective. Why had he been chosen to study this case? He had spent the entire day, considering the details in a methodical manner.

Hence he felt a clear conscience, so far as his duty to his mysterious employer was concerned. But he had added no constructive effort.

As on the preceding evening, clusters of club members were discussing the death of Philip Farmington. The first wave of interest had passed; but such a matter would not soon be forgotten at the Cobalt Club, where the dead banker had been so active.

DOUBLE Z

Mann unassumingly joined a group and listened to the conversation. He learned nothing that he did not already know.

Mann looked for Lamont Cranston among the men present. He did not see him. Somehow, Mann could not help but associate Cranston with the good fortune which had befallen him. For months, he had been brooding over his financial troubles, but had mentioned them to no one until he had encountered Cranston last night.

IT was shortly after that that the man in black had appeared to offer life instead of death. Mann, careful and analytical in reasoning, could see no definite connection between Cranston and the mysterious stranger; yet the association persisted in his mind.

It was eleven o'clock. Mann decided to return to his apartment. He went to the check room for his coat. He was leisurely to-night, for the old, worn coat had been replaced by a new one. Mann donned the garment and received his cane and hat with it. Like the coat, these articles were new.

He strolled across the lobby, said good night to the man stationed at the door, and stepped out to the sidewalk.

It was drizzling again. Mann looked for a cab. He heard a horn toot. A taxi man had spotted him beneath the lighted marquee in front of the club.

But before he could bring up his vehicle, another cab shot from across the street and stopped suddenly in front of Rutledge Mann. A businesslike driver opened the door, and Mann stepped in. The cab rolled away while Mann was giving his destination.

The disappointed taxi driver swung alongside with his cab and delivered a barrage of oaths at Mann's driver, but that was the end of it. Mann smiled. These fellows took their competition keenly.

"Now," said Mann aloud, as he sank back in the cushions of the cab, "let's think some more about Double Z."

"Have you formed any conclusions?" The words caused Mann to start. They had come from beside him, in a whispered voice that he recognized instantly. He turned in astonishment. Beside him sat the mysterious man who had visited him last night! At least, Mann was positive of his companion's identity, even though he could see nothing but a black form in the corner of the cab.

"YOU YOU are here –" stammered Mann.

"To receive your report," came the quiet reply. "I take it that you followed my instructions."

"I did," said Mann quietly. He had regained his composure after the first surprise. "But I must confess that I am completely in the dark."

"After reading all the reports?"

"Yes."

"You have formed no impression regarding Double Z?"

"None. Except that he must be eccentric to the extreme and possessed of the cunningness that often goes with eccentricity."

DOUBLE Z

"That may all be true," came the whispered voice. "But let us be specific. What are your opinions in regard to the Caulkins murder?"

"I think the police have it about right," declared Mann. "Double Z has gone in for crime. In person. He lured Caulkins to that house, after sending him a written threat. He killed him while he was telephoning. Cardona's theory, that Double Z is not an expert murderer, seems logical. Those four bullets –"

"And the mention of Judge Tolland?" came the interruption.

"Another proof of Double Z's eccentricity," declared Mann. "I think Cardona was wise to keep it quiet."

THERE was a short silence while the cab rolled on. Mann realized that the driver was not going directly to the apartment. They were entering Central Park, now. He realized that the man at the wheel must also be in the employ of this stranger in black.

"I have tested your impressions," came the voice from the corner, "by giving you the simple facts as the police see them. Now let me ask you this: Would Caulkins, as a newspaper reporter, go to that house on East Eightieth Street before he told his city editor that he had received a threat from Double Z?"

"No," replied Mann thoughtfully.

"Then what about the message?"

"I see!" exclaimed Mann. "It was planted on him!"

"Why?"

"Because well, because he had mentioned Double Z over the telephone."

"Now you are getting to the point." The whispered voice expressed approval. "But why did Double Z allow Caulkins to mention his name over the phone?"

"Probably another eccentricity."

"That is possible. But it is not in keeping with Double Z's policy. An interrupted statement. Why was Joel Caulkins not permitted to complete it?"

"Because he was revealing Double Z's identity."

"You believe Double Z told him that?"

"Hm–m–m," said Mann. He was staring straight ahead at the back of the driver, almost oblivious to the man beside him. "That doesn't sound logical, does it? I should think Double Z would have given Caulkins wrong information, and then let him go through with it –"

"Why did Caulkins mention Judge Harvey Tolland before he spoke of Double Z?" came the questioning whisper.

"I don't know," admitted Mann.

"Could he have considered Tolland of greater importance at the moment?"

DOUBLE Z

A gasp of sudden understanding came from Mann. His methodical mind was beginning to grasp the situation. He saw a new light, but even yet he was still confused.

"Let us presume," came the voice, "that Double Z knew nothing whatever of Joel Caulkins."

"Then why did Caulkins go there?"

"To find out something regarding Judge Tolland."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mann. "But why was Double Z there?"

"For the same reason as Caulkins. Judge Tolland is the missing connection between the two."

Rutledge Mann was nodding, but his brain was in a turmoil. He could not figure the connection; but he realized that new depths of the mystery were being probed.

He heard a soft laugh from the darkness. It was a mirthless laugh that brought a shudder, even though Mann knew that his weird companion was his friend.

"You have not seen the scene of the crime," came the whispered comment, "but I have. I went there, assuming that Caulkins had been killed on the spur of the moment, and not through premeditation on the part of his murderer. I found evidence to prove that point."

"Double Z did not go there to kill?"

"Double Z did go there to kill," contradicted the voice, "but his intended victim was not Joel Caulkins. He was after Judge Harvey Tolland. Let us picture the situation.

"Judge Tolland was living in that old house under the name of Joseph T. Dodd. The name card in the vestibule is warped and grimy. It shows traces of having been there many months.

"The thin carpet in the upstairs room is worn in spots. One place is before the mirror. A man must have stood there often, studying his own reflection, considering his disguise, and trying to practice new facial expressions.

"Caulkins went there and discovered Tolland. It is obvious that the judge decided to tell the reporter his story. So Caulkins called his city editor. First, he mentioned Tolland, but quickly turned to the important information—the identity of Double Z. He could have learned it from only one source from Judge Tolland. Therefore, it is safe to suppose that Tolland had given Caulkins proof for instance, a threat from Double Z."

"The paper in the reporter's hand!" exclaimed Mann.

"Exactly," confirmed the soft whisper. "Tolland was expecting danger from Double Z. While Caulkins was phoning, Tolland was beside him. The position of the chair and the telephone at one side of the table—indicates that. Picture the situation. Then realize that at the crucial moment, Double Z entered the room!"

"I see it now!" exclaimed Mann.

"Four shots," went on the voice. "Four well-aimed shots, that accomplished two purposes: First, the death of Caulkins, before he could complete his statement. Second, the death of Judge Tolland, which Double Z had sought."

DOUBLE Z

"But there were four bullets in the body of Caulkins –"

"Certainly. Two were fired after the telephone was hung up by the murderer. Two shots to make it look as if a bungler had done the work. There is one of Cardona's fallacies. Two shots were perfectly placed; two were wide. A man may be a good shot or a bad one he is never both. Double Z would not have attempted murder himself without being sure of his own ability."

"But only one body was found in the room," objected Mann.

"The body of Judge Tolland was removed. The evidence of his death and his removal were both obvious. A tiny bloodstain on the carpet away from the spot where Caulkins lay. Then, more spots on the stairway. Places where shoulders had rubbed against the wall. It took two men to remove the body."

"There was some one besides Double Z?"

"Yes. Double Z entered by picking the locks. There were tiny marks to prove it. He left his companion in the vestibule. The man was smoking. There are cigarette butts in the corner, and traces of ashes.

"Double Z went upstairs, opened the door of Tolland's room, and committed the double murder. He went down and summoned his man. They carried out Tolland's body, as the stair and wall marks show.

"To confuse the police, Double Z fired two shots; then he took his own message which Tolland had received, and left it with Caulkins. I have seen that message. Both the paper and the ink show that it was written some time ago.

"As I said before, Caulkins would not have kept it under cover. Cardona has simply added it to the other correspondence received from Double Z, without questioning its age."

RUTLEDGE MANN was silent as the cab rolled on. Then, again came the voice beside him.

"We know now," were its words, "that Double Z has been active for more than one year. He is a shrewd schemer. His activities are designed to create terror. They must have kept Tolland in constant fear.

"Double Z is not simply an eccentric individual. He is a bold murderer; a good shot with an automatic; a man who has accomplices. He is also a man of strength, who, with one other, can quickly remove a body. He knows what is going on in the underworld, and he's a master of subtle murder, as the death of Philip Farmington shows.

"Yet so far, I have no exact clew to his identity. My plan is to search at every possible angle. You will play a passive part, directing the movements of my agents at my order. I have talked with you to-night, to learn your reactions to my findings. Are they clear?"

"They are," declared Mann.

"In this envelope" a packet was thrust in Mann's hands "you will find instructions regarding my agents, and also facts pertaining to the death of Philip Farmington. Follow all the details and make complete reports. You will receive new orders from me. But do not expect to meet me again for a long while.

"Remember. I am The Shadow!"

The revelation of the stranger's identity brought weird thoughts to Mann's mind. He had heard of The

Shadow, the mysterious man of the night. He had half suspected his employer's identity; but the actual statement brought a sense of realism that he had not experienced before.

The cab had come out of the park; it was whirling along a side street. The lights of an avenue were ahead. Mann heard a shrill hiss from the dark figure beside him. Before he could look toward The Shadow, the cab swerved suddenly and one wheel climbed the curb.

Mann clutched the strap that hung beside the window. The cab had stopped, and the driver was expostulating with a man at the wheel of a car alongside. A policeman arrived at that moment.

"All right," Mann heard the officer say to the driver of his cab. "Pull along. Wait. You've got a passenger? Better see if he's all right."

The door was swung open; the inside of the cab showed clear beneath the glare of a street lamp. Mann, in answer to the policeman's question, said he was unhurt. And then, before the door closed, gasped in astonishment. Dazed, eyes bulging from their sockets, he sat still as the cab rolled on toward his apartment.

For the light that had entered the cab had shown no other occupant. Rutledge Mann was alone!

Somehow, in the space of a few short seconds, the mysterious figure beside him had left the cab. Invisibly, The Shadow had vanished into the night!

CHAPTER IX. GANGSTERS TALK BUSINESS

BLACK PETE'S PLACE was a notorious hangout for denizens of the underworld. Ostensibly a night club, it was in reality the spot where sinister plots were hatched and blood money was paid. Enough coin to equal an emperor's ransom passed from hand to hand every month in the back room at Black Pete's.

The place was tolerated by the police for various reasons. First, "Black Pete" paid tribute to the politicians. That in itself was ample excuse for the existence of his dive.

But he played the game safe in addition. No "wanted" men were allowed within Black Pete's portals. Only those gangsters who were temporarily free from surveillance were permitted to enter.

Strangers were allowed in the place, but they were carefully watched. Black Pete and his associates had keen eyes when it came to detecting plain-clothes men or Federal agents.

Gangdom, in turn, respected Black Pete's laws. No killings were ever perpetrated in his domain. Guns might be carried in, but they were never unholstered.

The premises consisted chiefly of a cabaret. It was located on the second floor of the building. There was apparently but one entrance to the second floor, and that led directly to the cabaret. However, it was said that there were other means of entry, known to Black Pete's chosen friends.

The most interesting portion of the place was the labyrinth of passages that ran back from the cabaret floor. The main room had two side doors. These led to darkened corridors that divided and turned in all directions. Along these passages were rooms where gangsters met. Perhaps their purpose was to drink bootleg liquor in privacy; more likely their intention was to scheme new killings and to make cash settlement for old ones.

However, when any one walked through a door to the passages, no one could tell either his destination or his intention. The room to which he was bound was known only to himself and to Black Pete, from whom he

DOUBLE Z

obtained a key. Black Pete treated all customers alike; and whatever he knew of their business he kept to himself.

It was several days since the murder of Philip Farmington. The affair had created much excitement in the bad lands as well as in the social world. For killing was the province of gangsters and criminals. The name of Double Z was already tangled with previous murders.

The death of Joel Caulkins had also caused a stir. The reporter had known many gangsters. His death, by gunfire, savored more of the gorilla killing than did the demise of Philip Farmington.

Double Z was a constant subject of whispered speculation in the underworld, and his strange soubriquet had been mentioned often at Black Pete's.

NIGHT had fallen, and the cabaret was doing its usual business. Little attention was paid to those who sat at obscure tables in the background. Occasionally a hard-faced individual arose and strolled through the portal to the nearest passage. Others, more indifferent, made directly for the side doors upon entering the place.

Among the latter type was a short, stocky man who wore a dark sweater beneath his coat. His cap, tilted over his eyes, obscured his features. He cast a brief glance at the cabaret floor as he entered; then stalked through the doorway and was lost in darkness.

He felt his way along the passage and stopped before a door. He stooped down an instant to knock at the bottom of the barrier.

From the other side came the sound of a key turning in the lock, then the door opened. The man entered.

A moment later the stocky man was seated at a small table, staring stolidly at a man facing him. The newcomer, Jake, had a cold, hard face, with an ugly, pudgy nose; but the man who had awaited him possessed a still harsher appearance.

Seated at the table, he appeared tall. Actually, he was of medium height. His thinness gave him the semblance of stature. His face, like his body, was thin. His cheeks were hollow and pasty. From either side of his hooked nose peered two beady eyes.

His lips were parted to reveal pointed, fanglike teeth. His entire physiognomy betokened an inborn cruelty and ugliness. The man was hatless. His head was covered with a crop of short-clipped black hair.

"Well, Jake," quizzed the fang-toothed mobster, "is it fixed?"

"All set," growled the newcomer. "Here's the grand for the info that I'm supposed to get from you, Sneaks."

"Keep it," grinned "Sneaks." "That makes it even. Let's hear the story."

"Well," said Jake, "Dave Markan's made up his mind. He wants Arnold Bodine bumped off on Wednesday night. He's payin' you one grand for wisin' him up to the lay. There's two grand more if you can fix the bump-off."

"Tell him three grand, the cheap skate," responded Sneaks. "This has got to look like it was on the level. It'll cost two grand for the rods. I oughta get a cut."

"He'll fork over the other grand, all right," commented Jake. "But you're sure this'll go through O.K.? I'm

gettin' leery, Sneaks."

The pasty-faced gangster laughed contemptuously.

"Everything went right before this, didn't it, Jake?"

"Yeah. But this bird Double Z is gettin' kinda chesty. It gives me the bumps, the way he works."

"That's his game, Jake. He was right when he picked you. The guy's always right. He don't take no chances on a double cross. The first thing to keep a guy from double-crossin' is to make him scared of you."

"You ain't scared of him!"

"Yeah?" Sneaks showed his ugly teeth in a sour grin. "Lookit: You think I'm on the inside. Well, I'll put you wise. Double Z ain't told nothin' to Sneaks Rubin that Jake Dermott doesn't know. Whatta you think of that?"

Jake stared at the pasty-faced speaker. He knew that the man was telling the truth.

SNEAKS RUBIN was an odd figure in the underworld. He was one of those strange characters that knew every one and sided with no one. It was not until several months before that he had appeared in a definite guise; then, his new condition was revealed to very few, Jake Dermott among them. Sneaks was a man who played it safe.

"You know the lay," said Jake in an objecting tone. "I don't. So you know more than I know."

"I don't know more than you, Jake," retorted Sneaks. "I figure more, that's all."

"Tell me what you figure about Double Z, then."

"All right," agreed Sneaks. "First of all, he's a smart guy. He's got 'em all talkin' ain't he? He knows plenty that's goin' on. When some of these guys that call themselves big shots get ready to pull a job, they find out the dicks have been tipped off by Double Z.

"That makes 'em wonder about him. Then he comes along himself and knocks off a couple of gazebos. That makes 'em wonder more, don't it?"

"He knocked off three," said Jake.

"That's right," agreed Sneaks. "You and I are the only guys that know it. What's more, you're the only one that ever worked with Double Z when you helped him lug that corpse outa the old house. You've seen him. What does he look like?"

"Blamed if I know!" exclaimed Jake. "I showed up that night like I was told. Left that old stolen car around the corner. I walks in the vestibule. Like a shot I hears a voice tellin' me to stay where I was."

"Then what?" Sneaks leaned forward eagerly.

"The guy goes upstairs an' I wait. Pretty soon he's back again. 'Hear anything?' he says in the dark.

"No," says I. He tells me to come along.

DOUBLE Z

"We go in the dark all the way. Up on the third floor he grabs me by the arm an' pushes me down toward the floor.

"Take hold!" he tells me. Next thing I knows we've lugged a dead body down to the vestibule.

"Get the car," he says.

"I get it an' come in. Between us we walk that corpse across the sidewalk and prop it in the front seat.

"Get rid of it!" he tells me.

"I go around an' climb in at the wheel. Off I starts. Thought he was with me in the back seat. But he wasn't! Whatta guy!"

"You got rid of the body O.K., didn't you?" Sneaks asked.

"Sure enough. I know where to bury my dead. But listen, Sneaks," Jake went on. "There I was, workin' with the guy, without seein' him. Cartin' off a body of some bird I'd never run into before. No wonder I've got the creeps."

"He works smart," declared Sneaks admiringly.

"There's only one other guy works like him," replied Jake in a low voice.

"Who?"

"The Shadow!"

Sneaks was silent. Then he leaned across the table and whispered to his companion.

"Say, Jake. Sometimes I wonder about this guy. Maybe he is The Shadow!"

"The Shadow don't work with crooks," said Jake.

"You're right there," acknowledged Sneaks. "But he may have changed. No one knows what that guy sets out to do. But I hope Double Z is The Shadow."

"Why?" Jake was interested.

SNEAKS flipped a cigarette into his gashlike mouth and scratched a match on his thumb nail. He inhaled deeply before answering.

"Because I'd rather be with The Shadow than against him. You know, I met this Double Z once. That's when I began workin' for him. At Loy Rook's hop joint. In the dark. Pitch dark. That's why I said I'd never seen him."

"Well, he's smart," declared Jake. "But he ain't goin' to tip off the cops on this Bodine job, is he?"

"He always does," returned Sneaks.

"How'll he get away with it, then?"

DOUBLE Z

"Simple enough, when I give you the dope you paid Dave Markan's grand for."

Jake Dermott laughed. He shook his head in perplexity.

"It beats me!" he said. "This guy must know what he's up to. Where does he get all his ideas?"

Sneaks Rubin grinned and waved his hand as he dropped back in his chair.

"That's my end of the racket, Jake. I get paid to hear what's goin' on."

"But this guy does things one way then the other –"

"Yeah? That's because you ain't got his brains. Lookit, Jake. Arnold Bodine is supposed to be a big shot, ain't he?"

"Yeah."

"But he's layin' low now. Tryin' to live soft. Payin' big money to a couple of bodyguards. Gettin' his rake-off from the two guys under him Dave Markan an' Mike Lombrosi each with a mob."

"Yeah."

"All right. Why does Markan want to bump off Bodine? I'll tell you why. You know it already. Markan's tired of seein' Bodine take the gravy."

"Sure."

"So Markan's out to get Bodine. Lombrosi has got the same idea. Each guy wants to handle his own mob independent. They don't like the idea of a big shot that's sittin' pretty."

"I know that."

"Well, suppose there was a big shot that they couldn't get at? They'd play ball, wouldn't they?"

"They'd have to."

"Well, that's Double Z's game. He's goin' to be the real big shot!"

"Not with Markan an' Lombrosi. They're out for their own –"

"But when Markan an' Lombrosi are gone, it's goin' to be Jake Dermott an' Tony Marano."

"An' Double Z –"

"Will be the big shot. You're Markan's chief guy. Markan is next to Lombrosi in that mob. They picked you guys because you're tough but don't know enough to get along without a boss over you. Well, you're goin' to have your chance. First Bodine goes the voyage; then Markan an' Lombrosi."

"Who's goin' to bump 'em?" quizzed Jake.

"You'll see," grinned Sneaks Rubin. "When Bodine's laid out, there'll be somebody to square things with

DOUBLE Z

Markan. As for Lombrosi well, he's slippin' now. Double Z queered his game when he let the Feds in on those bomb jobs. Then he made Lombrosi look like a sucker when he knocked off Farmington, who was too big a guy for Lombrosi to tackle.

"Don't forget, Lombrosi has got a side line besides the rackets. He's in on this Italian Red business. His flops don't go so well there!"

A glimmer of reason was dawning on Jake Dermott. He studied Sneaks Rubin's ugly countenance with hungry eyes.

"You're sure about Wednesday night?"

"Get that three grand," declared Sneaks. "I'd rather handle this than let Markan try it. He'll get the credit for it an' a funeral will go with it."

"But if Double Z tips off the dicks, with all this mess still stewing, they'll be watchin' the hotel –"

"Let them watch Bodine won't be there!"

"Where'll he be?"

"In his hide-out. The hotel is a blind. That's the dope you're to give Markan for his grand. I know where the hideout is. No bodyguards. Bodine ain't trustin' them right now."

"Whew!" exclaimed Jake Dermott.

"That's the lay," Sneaks talked on. "I've got the guts to do the job. I picked him for Double Z. He's a one-man mob in himself, but I ain't trustin' him alone on this trip. He'd go through with it, but it's too risky. He's been lookin' for a pal, an' he's got one."

"Who?"

"Leave that to me. Spill the news to Markan. Back here to-morrow night with the three grand. Get me?"

"I got you."

Sneaks reached up and turned out the light in the center of the little room. The door opened softly, and Jake Dermott stepped out. The sound of breathing was audible for several minutes after he had gone. Then the door closed and a key turned in the lock.

Jake Dermott was no longer in Black Pete's cabaret when Sneaks Rubin strolled through a side doorway and glanced around the floor in search of a likely-looking moll.

CHAPTER X. CARDONA PREPARES

WEDNESDAY morning. Detective Joe Cardona strolled into headquarters, whistling. Acting Inspector Fennimann had not yet arrived.

"Letter there, Joe," said a man in the office. "May be another one of those Double Z gags. Left it lay for you or the inspector –"

DOUBLE Z

Cardona was ripping open the envelope before the man had finished speaking. Out came a folded sheet of paper. The detective scanned the lines that had been atrociously typed. A gasp followed.

"What's the matter, Joe?"

"Matter? When will the inspector be here? I want him to see this. It looks real, too –"

Before Cardona could explain further, Fennimann walked in the door. He stopped short when he observed the expression on the face of the star detective.

"What's up?" he inquired.

"Double Z again!" declared Cardona.

"No! Let me see it."

"Wait," replied Cardona. "I'll read it."

Holding the paper with both hands, he repeated the message aloud:

"To–day is the last for Arnold Bodine. He will be killed before midnight, unless you prevent. Warn him!"

"Signed by Double Z?" questioned Fennimann.

"Signed," replied Cardona, handing the inspector the message.

Fennimann scanned the typed words. He became thoughtful as he turned to the detective.

"Looks like he's gone back to his owl stunt," he said. "Tipping us off like he did before. I can't understand it, Joe."

"It's kind of puzzling," admitted Cardona, "but it just shows how the man's mind turns. He's gotten wind of something, like he did before. Once in a while he's wrong. But this time he seems sure of himself."

"What's the best way to handle it?"

"Put a bunch of plain–clothes men on the job," declared Cardona. "Bodine hangs out in the Goliath Hotel. Along with a bunch of friends – so–called friends. Actually his bodyguards. Remember that Bernstein murder? Well, this will duplicate it if it goes through. But it won't!"

"What about the newspapers?"

Cardona shook his head emphatically.

"Keep it away from them," he said. "Wait until after to–night. This is either a big hoax or it is our chance to get on the trail of Double Z!"

BUT while Detective Cardona was planning to maintain silence with the press, one reporter was aiming to get information on the very subject which the detective wished to avoid.

Clyde Burke was answering a telephone call at the Classic office. A pleasant voice was speaking over the

telephone.

"Mr. Burke?"

"Yes."

"This is the National Photo Service. Have you seen our man to-day?"

"No."

"He is anxious to see you before ten o'clock."

Burke hung up the phone.

"I'm going over to National Photo," he said. "I want to look over some pictures."

The man at the city desk nodded. Burke left the office. He went uptown instead of down. For that telephone call had contained certain words which were emphasized by the speaker.

The real import of the message was: "Our man ten o'clock."

The message was obvious. But "our man" did not signify a representative of the photo service. It was the name "R. Mann" therefore Burke's destination was the office of Rutledge Mann in the Badger Building.

Arriving at Suite 909 in the midtown office building, Burke found the stenographer in the outer office. He was ushered into the inner sanctum, where Rutledge Mann sat quietly at his desk.

This was Burke's first meeting with The Shadow's new contact man. Burke had received word in code to expect a call from him.

"Mr. Burke?" asked Mann.

Clyde nodded.

Mann handed him an envelope.

"Look over these securities," he said.

Clyde found a coded message within. He read it.

The job is set for to-night. One thousand dollars. A big one. Details not yet known. Meeting at nine. Club DeLuxe.

M.

The writing vanished. Clyde turned to Mann. He knew that he could now talk freely with the quiet-faced investment broker who had The Shadow's confidence.

"This is a copy?" he questioned, referring to the blank sheet of paper.

"It was," declared Mann calmly.

DOUBLE Z

"He's uncovered something, then."

"Yes. Before he proceeds we must find out if the police have received any word."

Burke nodded.

"They'd be keeping it quiet," was his comment, "but I ought to be able to get it out of them."

"Do that. Then report."

CLYDE left the office and went directly to headquarters. There he found Joe Cardona. The detective eyed him rather doubtfully. Cardona's manner was evidence to Clyde that the detective had received some message.

"Listen, Joe," said Clyde confidentially, "you got another Double Z letter to-day, didn't you?"

"I can't recall it," said Cardona coldly.

"That's strange!" said Clyde. "I thought maybe you did. Well, I was on a bum steer, that's all. What I've heard doesn't count."

"Wait a minute!" Cardona stopped Clyde as he was starting toward the door. "What do you mean? What have you heard?"

"I've heard a lot, doing this Wise Owl stuff for the Classic."

"What have you heard that would interest me?"

"Nothing unless you've received another note from Double Z."

"Suppose I have?" questioned Cardona.

"Let me in on it," answered Clyde, "and I'll see if it checks up."

"We don't want anything in the Classic," declared Cardona. "So why should I talk to you?"

"We didn't spill what Caulkins said about Judge Tolland, did we?"

"No," admitted Cardona. "Well, if you'll play straight on this I'll give it to you. You deserve a scoop, anyhow. This will be one for to-morrow."

"Shoot!" said Clyde.

"Well," Cardona said, "Double Z has tipped us off that some one is going to bump off Arnold Bodine to-night. Now what do you know? Does that fit in?"

"It does," said Clyde.

"How?"

"Well," Clyde spoke thoughtfully, "you know I've been handling this Wise Owl column since Caulkins died."

DOUBLE Z

I get around a bit, and when some of these inside boys find out who I am they spill a lot of chatter, most of which is hokum. But I'm always listening, and every now and then I overhear something that's worth following."

"And you heard –"

"Some mention of a big job coming off to–night. A thousand dollars being paid."

"To whom?"

Clyde shrugged his shoulders.

"You don't know who's in back of it?" quizzed Cardona.

"No idea," declared Clyde. "That's all I can tell you. One grand for one job. Where and how I don't know."

"Well," said Cardona, "that's enough. Here's Double Z's note and you've promised to keep it out of the news until I give the word."

Clyde read the message. He was apparently studying the signature. Actually he was committing the words to memory.

"It looks genuine," said Cardona.

"Before midnight," remarked Clyde. "That means –"

"You get the story as soon as it breaks. If it's a hoax, you can let it ride at one minute after twelve. I think it's going to miss."

"Why?"

"Because my men will be there."

"Are you warning Bodine?"

"Yes and no. We'll let him know something's up, but he won't know just what."

Clyde went back to the Badger Building after he left headquarters. He sent a long envelope in to Rutledge Mann by the stenographer. The girl returned to tell Clyde that Mr. Mann would call him later.

Back at the Classic office, Clyde busied himself with the Wise Owl column. He had gathered numerous rumors of doubtful authenticity, and now prepared them in the form of a story which promised much and told little. It was five o'clock when he received a telephone call.

"This is Jack," said a noncommittal voice. "It doesn't seem as though you're ever in the office. I called before nine this morning. What are you doing to–night, Did you get my message? I left word for you to call immediately."

"Must have been a slip–up," replied Clyde. "Sorry, I'm busy to–night. Give me a buzz to–morrow."

He pondered on the message. "Seem" that meant "See M." Thus the complete message of emphasized words

was: "See M before 9 to–night. Get message. Call immediately."

Clyde understood. The Club DeLuxe an uptown cabaret where gangsters sometimes gathered. An ideal meeting spot, provided little was to be discussed. In that place there would be no risk, and a possible opportunity to communicate with M, whose identity Clyde knew well.

SHORTLY before seven o'clock Detective Joe Cardona appeared in the lobby of the Goliath Hotel. A man stepped forward to speak to him.

"Nothing doing yet," he said.

"Bodine come in?"

"No. He's expected."

"I'm going up to see."

Cardona arrived at the door of Arnold Bodine's apartment on the eighteenth floor. It was opened in answer to his rap. Joe shouldered his way in past the man who stood there. He encountered an individual whose face bore a long, twisting scar.

"Hello, Crayton," said Cardona. "Bodine come in yet?"

"No," was the response. The man was one of Bodine's bodyguards. "But he's liable to drop in any minute. What's the idea of you coming up? You've had a couple of gawky–looking dicks on the floor all afternoon."

"I'll talk to Bodine when he comes in," declared Cardona.

"All right," was the response. "Make yourself at home."

The words were spoken with assurance. Crayton knew well that Cardona was not after Bodine. The big shot had been inactive for months, living on tribute and reputation.

"You don't know where Bodine is?" questioned Cardona.

Crayton appeared puzzled at first; then decided to be frank with Cardona.

"Listen," he said. "If you're worrying about him, forget it. He's out and when he's out, nobody knows where he is. I don't need to tell you that he's O.K. the minute he walks into the lobby of this hotel. Sometimes he stays out all night, but to–night he's coming back sure."

"When?"

"Before midnight. By eleven at the latest."

"All right. I'll come back when he gets in."

Joe Cardona strolled to the door. He noticed one of his men in the hallway, and stopped long enough to have a hurried word with him. The plain–clothes man told him that others were posted on the floor. The star detective went down into the lobby. At eight fifteen he came back.

Arnold Bodine had not been heard from, Crayton informed him. This time Cardona decided to wait. He seated himself in a comfortable chair and refused a highball that was offered him.

It was at that particular moment that Clyde Burke rolled past the Goliath Hotel in a taxicab, bound for the Club DeLuxe. He glanced at the lighted building as he went by and saw a man slouched by the entrance.

One of Cardona's detectives, Clyde decided.

But there was something he did not see something that also escaped the vigilant gaze of the man posted there. It was a shadowy form that lurked beside the lighted entrance, scarcely ten feet from where the detective stood.

The Shadow, like Cardona, was awaiting the return of Arnold Bodine!

CHAPTER XI. THE TIP-OFF

Two men sat at a table in a corner of the spacious Club DeLuxe. The popular night club was rarely crowded at nine o'clock on a Wednesday evening. Hence the spot which the men had chosen was well away from observation. No one was within thirty feet of them.

Both men were well dressed. They bore a similarity of appearance. There was one noticeable difference their expressions. One had a firm face, a steady gaze, and well-chiseled features that gave him a distinctive profile. The other possessed a brutal countenance, sullen and merciless. Facially, there was no resemblance between Cliff Marsland and "Clipper" Tobin.

Cliff replaced his coffee cup on the table. He glanced about him to make sure that no one was near. Clipper duplicated the action. The closest person was a young man who had taken a table well beyond earshot. Cliff turned toward his companion and put a direct question to the tough-faced gangster.

"Out with it, Clipper," he said in a low voice. "It's time I knew the layout for to-night."

"You're gettin' your grand, ain't you?" came the sullen reply.

"Sure," said Cliff. "That's why I want the low-down. If you expect the help you want, you've got to shoot straight with me. That's all."

"I'm shootin' straight, Cliff!" retorted Clipper. "We ain't likely to run into no trouble to-night. I'm goin' to do the job; you'll be there in case we run into a second guy. We've only got to get one gazebo. It don't take two of us to do that."

"All right!" said Cliff quietly. "Suppose you go it alone then. I'll give you back your money."

Clipper's eyes sparkled angrily. His vicious glance was met by Cliff Marsland's firm stare. The tough gangster had met his equal. He realized that he could no longer play pretenses with Cliff Marsland.

"Listen, Cliff," he said in an appeasing tone, "I've told you before that I ain't the boss. I'm gettin' paid, like you. The fellow that slipped me the dough figured that only one guy needed to know the lay. I've done jobs for him before. This is your first crack. You can't blame him for bein' careful."

"He told you to get a man to work with you," was the retort. "That much was left up to you. I can't see why you're holding out."

DOUBLE Z

"I ain't doubtin' you, Cliff," appealed Clipper. "I picked you as soon as I heard you was on the loose. I heard about you from guys that knew you up in the big house when you was doin' a stretch a few years back. You did some good bumpin' off after that, too, they told me."

Cliff smiled to himself. He knew that his reputation in gangdom was intact. What Clipper Tobin had said was true. Cliff had served a term in Sing Sing for a crime which he did not commit. After that he had fought among racketeers, but he had been on the side of gangland's most feared avenger The Shadow.

This was unknown to Clipper.

Cliff remained silent while his mind flashed back through the past. Out of the corner of his eye he was noting the man at the other table. Clipper observed his companion's silence, but misconstrued it. He decided that Cliff was becoming lukewarm.

"Listen, Cliff," he said, "the guy that hired us doesn't know you. You're right when you said he left it up to me. I didn't tell him your name any more than I told you his. I just said that I had found a killer to leave the rest to me. He took my word for it; but he said for me to use my noodle, and to do the job without much chatter.

"At the same time, you're goin' to wise up pretty quick to what we're doin'. We ain't goin' to lose no time after we get outa this joint. So I'll play the game an' tip you off right now. That is, if you're satisfied with what you're gettin'. I am. Is that enough for you?"

Cliff laughed.

"Say, Clipper," was his response, "I'd have gone along with you for half of what I'm getting. I've got dough. One grand isn't a lot of cash. But what's a killing? I've seen plenty of times when I'd handle one for the fun of it."

A sordid grin came over Clipper Tobin's ugly face. This was the sort of talk he liked to hear.

"I told you we're safe on this," he declared.

"I took your word for it, Clipper."

"You're goin' through with the job O.K.?"

"Just as I've intended from the start."

Clipper saw no double meaning in Cliff's last remark. He leaned over the table and fairly hissed his next words.

"All right, Cliff," he said. "I'm wisin' you up. The mug we're goin' to bump is Arnold Bodine!"

CLIFF MARSLAND evidenced no surprise other than a steady stare that caused the grin to spread on Clipper's face. They formed an odd pair; Cliff, unmoved by Clipper's startling statement; Clipper with the triumphant look of a man who has delivered a bombshell.

"Is that all?" asked Cliff.

Clipper stared back in surprise.

"You ain't kiddin' are you?" he questioned.

"Certainly not!" was the retort. "Bodine's a has-been."

"He's still gettin' his."

"Well, he'll get it in a different way to-night."

Again Clipper Tobin was pleased by his companion's attitude. Still, he could not help but think that Cliff was minimizing the danger.

"You know where Bodine hangs out, don't you?" asked Clipper.

"Sure," was Cliff's reply. "At the Goliath Hotel."

"You know how many bodyguards he's got, don't you?"

"I've heard he has five."

"You heard right. I guess that makes you wonder, don't it?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I figured right away that you've got some way of sliding around them. Otherwise it would take more than two of us to do the job."

"You've got a head on you, Cliff," said Clipper admiringly. "Well, you've got the right lay although I'll surprise you when I give you the inside. What d'you think is Bodine's weakness?"

"Too many bodyguards!"

"Why?"

"He isn't paying them enough, probably," Cliff explained. "He'd be better off with two giving them as much as he's handing five."

"That's it." Clipper nodded. "Well, here's the low-down. One of the five has squealed. He's let out somethin' that nobody knew."

"Which is –"

"That Bodine's layout up at the Goliath Hotel is a blind. He's got his real hide-out somewhere else. Those five bodyguards are all baloney. He don't need any. Those guys get paid for doin' nothin' but keeping mum. They're not supposed to know where his hide-out is but one of them found out and spilled the dope."

"How?" Cliff was taking advantage of Clipper's sudden volubility. Now that the man had begun to talk, he was going through with it.

"He was offered some dough to tell what he knew about Bodine."

"Where's Bodine's hide-out?"

Clipper threw a hasty glance to make sure that no one had approached. His eyes sought the clock above a distant counter.

"In the Maurice Apartments," he said. "Eight blocks from the Goliath. We're goin' there now. He calls himself Andrew Davis."

Cliff slipped his right hand into his coat pocket. He was leaning against the wall. His arm appeared motionless; but his hand was busy. He was scrawling quick items of information on a small pad in his pocket, using the stub of a pencil.

"Ready?" questioned Clipper.

The gangster's eyes were directly on Cliff, but he did not detect the secret action. Cliff nodded and arose. His fingers were twisting the sheet of paper into a small ball. His hand came from his pocket, and the pellet dropped into his hat as he reached to get it.

The two men walked across the cafe; as they passed the table where the lone man was seated, Clipper scrutinized him suspiciously. The man was busy eating, and apparently did not notice Clipper's action. It was Clyde Burke, of the Classic, but Clipper did not recognize the reporter.

Cliff Marsland, following close behind Clipper, did not even glance in Clyde's direction. As he passed the table his hat brushed against it, and the pellet of paper rolled on the tablecloth. Clyde set his napkin on the table at that particular instant and trapped the little wad with its precious information.

NO observant eye could have detected what had happened. Clyde Burke acted as though he were being watched. He had captured the ball of paper unseen; now he drew it to his lap with the napkin. With one hand beneath the table, he unrolled the wad. The message lay upon his lap. The penciled scrawl was plainly visible by a light that came from a pillar behind the reporter.

Out to get Bodine. Hide-out Maurice Apartments. Fake name Andrew Davis.

Clyde made no motion. He sat at the table for a full minute without even glancing toward the door where the two men had gone. He was allowing sufficient time for them to leave the Club DeLuxe. His first action was to call for the waiter and pay the check.

Leisurely he strolled to the entrance. There was a telephone booth there, but he ignored it. Better to make his call outside.

The Club DeLuxe was located on the second floor. As Clyde was striding down the stairs he encountered one of those chance interruptions that so often play an important part in the best-laid schemes. Three men were coming up the steps. Clyde, swinging downward, accidentally stumbled against one and threw the man toward the wall. An angry response was the result.

"Sorry," remarked Clyde.

"Yeah?" came the vicious retort.

Clyde found himself staring into the eyes of a tough-looking individual, evidently a gangster-habitue of the Club DeLuxe. The man had been drinking, but he was by no means incapable. He had apparently reached that

early stage of drunkenness that produces pugnacity. The man reached forward and clutched Clyde by the shoulder.

"You know who I am?"

Clyde was intent on his errand. He sought to mollify the man, but as he began to speak the fellow became more violent. Despite a warning cry from one of his companions, he swung a quick blow at the reporter's chin.

Clyde warded it aside. He thought quickly. A fight now would be unwise. The other men might side with their friend. At the same time, it was necessary to get away. As he parried the blow he made no effort to punch back. Instead he stepped back a pace, avoided a second swing, and started down the steps.

It was then that his opponent, angered at Clyde's agility, threw himself forward.

Clyde could not avoid that plunge. He raised his hands in protection and lost his footing as he stepped backward. The weight of the man's body landed upon him, and Clyde Burke was thrown head-foremost down the steps. He felt a strange dizziness as he was hurtling downward; then his head struck against something and all was black.

He opened his eyes to see a group of faces peering at him. He recognized the features of the rowdy who had attacked him. This fellow, despite his tough appearance, seemed the most apprehensive member of the crowd.

"All right, buddy?" he asked.

Clyde nodded. Two other men propped him against the side of the wall. He noted that the cafe manager was present. That partly explained the change in his attacker's attitude. Another reason was immediately put forward.

"You're from the Classic, ain't you?"

Clyde nodded again.

"Didn't mean to hurt you. It was my fault, startin' things," came the apology. "You must 'a' tripped when I grabbed you. Wasn't that what happened, boys?"

The fellow's companions chimed their agreement. The manager of the Club DeLuxe spoke to Clyde.

"All right now?" he asked.

"All right," said Clyde, rubbing a bump on the side of his head. "Say how long have I been out?"

"Pretty near ten minutes."

Clyde suppressed a gasp of alarm. Cliff Marsland and Clipper Tobin were on their way to Bodine's place. It was not at the Goliath Hotel, where he knew The Shadow would be on watch! Ten precious minutes had been lost. He must let The Shadow know!

Rising clumsily to his feet, he shook hands with the man who had battled with him and grinned as though the matter was of no account. Every one seemed relieved.

"I'm supposed to be down at the Classic office," he explained groggily. "I'm not hurt let's forget it."

"Have a drink?" questioned his late opponent.

Clyde shook his head.

"Want a cab?" inquired the solicitous manager.

"No," was the reporter's response. "I'll take the subway."

He steadied himself against the rail and fought off a spell of dizziness. He was anxious to avoid further delay. He waved his hand in a friendly manner and went down the steps, trying to appear at his best. His head was swimming when he reached the sidewalk.

THE bright lights of the avenue confused him. He walked toward the corner, spied a drug store, and entered. As luck would have it, all the phone booths were occupied. Clyde decided to go elsewhere, but his legs seemed too weak. He sat on a stool at the soda fountain and rested, his head throbbing, all about him confusion.

Some one left a booth and Clyde staggered into the compartment. He dropped his nickel and tried to dial. There were black spots before his eyes. His finger slipped. He began again.

With great effort he managed to dial the number. He waited patiently, the ringing over the wire conflicting with the throbbing of his head. At last he heard a quiet voice, seemingly far away.

"B," he said in response.

"Report," came the word.

Clyde's lips were to the mouthpiece of the phone. There was no opportunity for artfully worded phrases. His grogginess was coming on again in this stuffy booth.

"Bodine," he said in a low voice. "Not at Goliath. At Maurice Apartments. Phony name Andrew Davis. On their way to get him. Hurry."

A word of understanding came over the wire. Clyde hung up the phone and sat with his head in his hands. There was a rapping on the door of the booth. Some one else wanted to make a call.

Clyde came out, made his way to the street, and leaned against a wall while the fresh air began to revive his sickened senses. It must have been fully twenty minutes after the men left the Club DeLuxe before he sent his message through. But now all was well.

He had reported to Burbank, The Shadow's confidential aid. The message in turn would be relayed to The Shadow. Before Arnold Bodine's enemies had arrived, The Shadow would be there unless Clyde's call had been too late!

CHAPTER XII. THE HIDE-OUT

WHEN Clipper Tobin and Cliff Marsland left the Club DeLuxe, the toughened gangster who headed the two-man expedition led his companion to a taxi. They rode rapidly down the avenue and alighted at the corner of a side street. Here Clipper conducted Cliff along the street, away from the brilliant lights.

Hardly had they moved into obscurity before another man followed the same path. He stepped from a doorway near the corner and moved swiftly in pursuit. Only for a brief moment did his face show beneath a corner light. It was Sneaks Rubin, secret director of the crime that was about to transpire.

Neither Clipper nor Cliff knew any thing of his presence. Clipper was simply following a carefully laid-out plan, in which the time element had been taken into account. Cliff, in turn, was following Clipper's instructions.

As a precaution, Cliff, always wary, glanced behind him as he moved along. Clipper did not consider the action strange. It was to be expected. But Cliff saw nothing, for Sneaks Rubin knew where the other men were going, and kept well out of sight.

"We're goin' to cut in the back way," said Clipper in a low voice. "There's a fire tower that's easy to get into. Nobody sees us comin' nobody sees us leavin'. This will be a soft get-away."

The course taken by Clipper led across another avenue; then through an alley in back of a garage. Clipper had discharged the cab sufficiently far from the apartment house where Arnold Bodine lived to ward off possible suspicion of the driver.

Now, ahead of the two men, showed the lighted windows of the building for which they were bound.

"You can't see Bodine's apartment from here," whispered Clipper in the darkness. "The garage runs right up against the apartment house. Bodine's apartment is one story above the top of the garage on the fourth floor."

Cliff understood this as they turned a corner of the alley. The old garage building fronted on the next avenue. So did the apartment house. The garage had an L-shaped front, the projection being an extension which abutted against the lower stories of the apartment building.

The alley ran down to this, ending in a cul-de-sac. Clipper stopped at the beginning of the short blind alley. They had reached the entrance to the fire tower.

Clipper pointed almost straight upward, toward the front of the apartment. He designated lighted windows on the fourth floor.

"See?" came his whisper. "That's the place. Take it easy until we get into the fire tower. There ain't nobody around here, but we gotta play it safe. This is our way out don't forget that!"

Cliff gazed into the black space that ended with the garage wall and realized that there could be no escape by that direction. The path which they had followed was their one means of leaving. He smiled grimly to himself. Clipper Tobin expected an easy escape. He did not know what he was about to encounter.

For Cliff was positive that by this time The Shadow had arrived. It was nearly twenty minutes since they had left the Club DeLuxe. Burke had received the all-important information. He had surely relayed it to The Shadow promptly. The Hotel Goliath was only eight blocks away. Perhaps The Shadow had entered the apartment house by this very method – the fire tower! Perhaps he had come by the front way! At any rate, Cliff was confident that the mysterious man in black would be on hand with one of his amazing surprises.

A few minutes' stall would not hurt. Cliff nudged Clipper and whispered in his ear.

"Lay low a minute, Clipper," was his warning. "Maybe somebody's followed us."

DOUBLE Z

He knew that even if The Shadow were lurking in the darkness, vigilant observation would be of no avail. The Shadow had a strange ability for remaining unseen, even when persons were looking at the very spot where he might chance to be.

Clipper Tobin heeded the warning. Crouched by the black side of the apartment house, he listened, while his shrewd eyes sought to pierce the shroud of night that hung throughout the narrow alley.

"Nobody around," he whispered. "Come on!"

They moved cautiously to the fire tower. Up the steps they went, silently and slowly. They reached the fourth floor. Clipper opened a steel door gently and peered into a lighted corridor. He waved Cliff along. The corridor turned; Clipper pointed along the branch that led to the front of the building.

There was only one door visible at the end of the passage. Cliff knew that it must be Bodine's apartment. The number was plain as they approached 458.

A KEY appeared in Clipper's hand. Cliff decided that it must have been provided by the informant who had discovered Bodine's hide-out the traitor who had revealed the name under which the celebrated big shot lived in this abode.

With expert touch, Clipper inserted the key in the lock. He opened the door softly. The men stood in a little hallway, with a door on each side.

Clipper closed the door through which they had come. He hesitated a moment, undecided which door to open next. He shrugged his shoulders.

Evidently either one would do. Bodine could be in only one room. If they saw no one in the first, they could try the second.

"Ready," whispered Clipper. "I'm goin' in; you stick here to cover."

It was quite dark in the little hallway, the only light coming from a transom that let dull rays flicker in from the corridor outside. Still, the light was sufficient to show the automatic which Clipper had unlimbered. Cliff had his own pistol in his hand. His brain was working fast, but his nerves were steady.

Nevertheless, Cliff Marsland was tense as Clipper placed his left hand upon the knob of the door at the right. What would that opened door reveal?

Cliff knew that he was on the verge of an exciting adventure. Until now he felt that he was playing a passive part. But somehow he had a hunch that he now had work to do.

His instructions were based upon a very simple formula. Unknown to Clipper Tobin, Cliff was working with The Shadow. It was The Shadow's purpose to frustrate the crime that brewed to-night not because The Shadow had anything in common with Arnold Bodine, but because the killing foretold by Double Z must be frustrated.

Cliff was simply The Shadow's informant. The course of events had decreed that he must accompany Clipper Tobin on this expedition, but with The Shadow now here, there was no need for Cliff to act.

Whatever The Shadow might do, Cliff's status would remain the same. He, like Cliff, would appear as an intercepted killer.

Still, it was Cliff's duty to aid The Shadow in any way within his power. He could do this if necessary, even though it might reveal his true capacity. One point pleased Cliff. His identity was unknown to any man except Clipper Tobin.

He knew that Clipper worked for some other man, but Clipper had agreed to deal with Cliff alone, and to keep his name a secret. When Clipper agreed on something, he kept his word. That was why he had so long remained a free agent in gangdom, unmolested by warring gunmen.

Cliff ceased all contemplation suddenly as the door which Clipper controlled began to open inward under the gangster's pressure. Light entered the little hallway. Cliff's body moved forward his gun hand raised.

The gangster stepped swiftly into the room, and Cliff slid to his place at the open door. The entire scene was revealed to Cliff.

A man was sitting in a chair at the far corner of the room. Cliff recognized him as Arnold Bodine, although his appearance was a trifle different from the usual pictures of the big shot.

Bodine's hands were sprawled upon the chair arms. A startled, hunted expression was upon his face. He was staring at the muzzle of Clipper's automatic. The gangster was threatening him from the center of the room. Cliff, from an angle, saw Clipper's ugly, menacing profile.

Peering quickly around the edge of the door, Cliff was surprised to note that the room was otherwise empty. Where was The Shadow? Could it be possible that he had not arrived?

For an instant Cliff thought that Bodine might be The Shadow in disguise; but one more view of the startled man in the corner altered that opinion. Bodine, answering a grunted command from Clipper, was elevating his hands above his head. The man was helpless.

"Big Shot Bodine," sneered Clipper sarcastically. "All ready to be bumped off! Don't like it, neither, eh?"

The threatened man licked his lips painfully. He made a reply in a forced voice a feeble effort to mislead his enemy.

"My name is Davis," he said slowly. "Andrew Davis. I can't understand why you have come here."

"Andrew Davis, eh?" came Clipper's contemptuous retort. "You've got Bodine's mug. That's enough to spell curtains for you, wise guy."

Bodine quivered, and his eyes rolled from side to side, like some hunted beast at bay. He saw Cliff's dim form in the doorway, but knew that he was viewing another enemy. His expression became more fearful.

Funny, thought Cliff, how the biggest men among gangsters hated to die. Those who ordered death for scores of enemies, underworld czars like Bodine, were the ones who loved life the most!

The helpless man stared at Clipper Tobin and sought to parley as a last resort.

"How much dough do you want?" he questioned hoarsely. "Name it. I've got it!"

"You have?" ridiculed Clipper. "Well, you can keep it but it won't be yours long. Lay offa that money squawk. I've heard it before, and it don't go. I've got my dough for this job, and I go through with it. Savvy?"

BODINE did not reply. Cliff could see the satisfied look upon Clipper's face. The killer instinct was coming to the fore. Clipper had deliberately waited in order to taunt his helpless victim; now, his gloating finished, he was ready to fire the fatal bullets.

"Ready, Cliff," came his voice. "Get set for the get-away. I'm goin' to plug him."

"Wait!" came Cliff's quiet response. "Don't shoot yet! It won't be good for you, Clipper."

The gunman did not turn. His finger was still on the trigger, but he noted something in Cliff's tone that made him hold back. Still facing Bodine, he listened for Cliff's next words.

They were not long delayed. Cliff Marsland had seen that action was imperative. Something had delayed The Shadow. Perhaps he had never received the message!

The duty that was now Cliff's stood obvious. The Shadow had planned to prevent this killing. It was Cliff's job to do that work in the absence of The Shadow.

"I've got you covered, Clipper," said Cliff in the same steady voice. "One move and out you go!"

Clipper did not move.

"Put up your gat!"

Clipper obeyed sullenly.

"You, Bodine," added Cliff, speaking to the man in the corner, "keep away from any foolishness. I've got a bead on you, too!"

Encouraged by this remark, Clipper Tobin swung in the direction of his former pal. He stepped back as he saw the leveled automatic.

"Up with the mitts," ordered Cliff.

Clipper obeyed. Cliff was master of the situation. Hunter and hunted, both were now at his mercy. The scowling face of Clipper Tobin was equaled in expression by the puzzled countenance of Arnold Bodine.

"What're you tryin' to do?" demanded Clipper sullenly. "Sell out to this guy?"

"That's none of your business," responded Cliff. "I've got my own game."

He was in a quandary. This was not an enviable spot. Cliff had saved Bodine, but neither did he desire to kill Clipper Tobin. Yet now that he had betrayed his hand, there would be certain danger if Clipper remained alive.

It was impractical to await the coming of The Shadow. This tableau of two men with hands poised in front of a revolver might lead to unexpected consequences. Cliff decided upon immediate action.

Even though he was now an enemy of Clipper's, he could keep the gangster from discovering his true associations. Clipper's last remark gave him a cue.

"I've got my own game," declared Cliff. "Bodine's not going to be bumped off by you. I'm going to let you

slide out. That's more than you deserve."

"Double-crossin' me, eh?" derided Clipper, defiant even in the face of death. "I get you now! Bodine fixed it with you before this. You tipped him off. He wanted to see the guy that was out to get him. You're both yellow you've got me here, but you're scared to bump me!"

"Let him have it, Bud," interposed Bodine, seeking to work with his rescuer. "I'll slip you five grand for the job. He won't squawk when he's dead and you won't run any chances. They'll think I got him."

"That's not in my game," returned Cliff. "I don't want your money, Bodine."

"Baloney!" sneered the defiant Clipper.

"You're leaving here, Clipper," said Cliff. "Leaving without your rod. Come over here, and don't lower your hands."

Clipper obeyed. Cliff stopped him before he was too close. With a quick, decisive action, he caught the butt of Clipper's revolver and dropped the weapon on the floor. He stepped back and waved the man toward the center of the room.

Clipper retired sullenly. Bodine had made no motion. It was easy to see that Cliff's businesslike methods had impressed him.

CLIFF made no motion to pick up the revolver that lay on the floor. That could come later. Instead, he motioned to Bodine, and pointed toward the telephone with his left hand.

"You're going to call your mob, Bodine," he said. "Tell them to hop over from the Goliath Hotel. As soon as I know they're on the way, you're going to travel, Clipper and I'll follow. So keep going, plenty fast!"

Bodine, seeing salvation, kept his hands well away from his body as he reached for the telephone. He gave a number, and when the hotel responded, asked for his suite on the eighteenth floor. Without stopping to inquire who was at the other end, he gave his hasty information.

"I'm over at my hide-out," he said. "Suite 458, the Maurice Apartments. There's a guy here who's trying to croak me. Get some gorillas over here quick!"

There was a response; then Bodine asked quickly:

"Who's this Gus?"

Another reply came over the wire. Bodine dropped the receiver on the hook. His expression changed. Cliff detected it. Bodine observed his quizzing look. He hastened to explain.

"It wasn't Gus," he said. "It was Joe Cardona, from headquarters!"

This was unexpected news to Cliff Marsland. He was on the point of commanding Clipper to flee. Now his idea changed. Clipper, in the hands of the police, would be no menace! Should he leave him here for Cardona?

Then came another thought: Bodine's surprise seemed genuine enough, but it might be feigned. Perhaps he was thinking the same as Cliff. Maybe he wanted Clipper to be left, to learn the merciless methods of Arnold

Bodine's mob.

Cliff's hesitation came to a sudden end. As Cliff stood with his back in the hallway, something struck him from behind. A man had entered silently from the corridor.

The tap of a revolver butt had settled the question. Cliff Marsland collapsed in a helpless heap.

Some one had struck from behind. In his moment of certain victory, with the killing of Arnold Bodine thwarted, Cliff Marsland was stunned and at the mercy of his unexpected foeman!

CHAPTER XIII. THE SHADOW'S FIGHT

"GET him, Clipper! Get Bodine!"

The hissed command came from the little hallway just behind the prostrate body of Cliff Marsland. There, from the darkness, Sneaks Rubin was speaking. The pasty-faced gangster had arrived at a crucial moment. Leaving nothing to chance, he had followed his two gunmen to make sure that they did the job. And by working from the background, he had ended the plans of Cliff Marsland!

Sneaks fired no shot. This was not his job. He had hesitated long before he had followed his hirelings to the door of Bodine's apartment. He had come only because they had not returned to the alley. He had been close enough to Bodine's door to hear the gang chief's last words.

Clipper Tobin picked up his automatic, which lay in the center of the room. Sneaks turned. The police were coming, and Sneaks had reasons for wanting to be outside that building.

He had delivered his blow and his order in less than two seconds. Now he was scurrying down the corridor, the door closed behind him, anxious to be in the fire tower before Arnold Bodine died.

The dull report of Clipper's automatic reached the ears of Sneaks Rubin just as the shrewd little crook was crawling into the entrance of the fire tower. He grinned gleefully as he thought of Bodine lying dead. Clipper could not have missed his mark.

But Sneaks Rubin thought wrong.

Clipper had aimed while picking his gun from the floor. Bodine, who chanced to be unarmed, in the security of his hide-out, had dropped when the shot was fired. Before Clipper could shoot again a footstool hurtled across the room. It missed Clipper's head by a close margin.

It struck his gun hand instead. The automatic fell from the gangster's numbed fingers. As he scrambled for it, Arnold Bodine leaped toward the same objective.

Clipper gained the automatic, but before he could bring it into play, Bodine was struggling with him. Clipper was the stronger; Bodine fought with the desperation of a man who knows that minutes gained will mean rescue.

They whirled about the room, Bodine hoping that he could knock the telephone from its table and shout for help. People might arrive from downstairs before Cardona and his squad. But Bodine did not succeed. Gradually Clipper brought the muzzle of the automatic toward his opponent's body.

Shots cracked. They missed. Clipper, enraged, tried to free himself. He fired again taking hurried aim, and a

DOUBLE Z

bullet shattered the glass front of a small bookcase. Then Bodine, grappling, forced the muzzle of the automatic underneath his own arm.

Clipper pressed the weapon upward as he discharged two shots in quick succession. One reached its mark. Bodine, crippled, lost his hold. Clipper flung him to the floor. He fired his last two bullets into Bodine's heart. Then he stood panting like a fierce beast that had killed its prey.

The struggle had carried him to the corner of the room. With a snarl, Clipper jerked open the large window and drank great drafts of fresh air. Turning, he spied Cliff Marsland's helpless form. He aimed his automatic and pressed the trigger.

Then he remembered that the gun was empty. He leaped across the room like a wild animal and snatched up the automatic that lay beside Cliff. A sudden leer appeared upon Clipper's evil face. He might need every bullet in this gun. Help was coming every bullet might be useful. But that could wait. He pocketed the pistol.

With a display of prodigious strength, Clipper picked up Cliff's body and carried it to the window. He looked out as he prepared to thrust the body through. The roof of the garage was a trifle to the left. Directly beneath was the blackness of the blind alley. That was where Cliff Marsland would die!

Clipper was thrusting the body headforemost. Cliff's head and shoulders were hanging over space. Clipper gripped the victim's waist for the final effort. As his hands lifted upward, a revolver shot sounded from the doorway. Clipper staggered back, his left shoulder limp. The body of Cliff Marsland slumped downward against the wall, the head resting on the window sill. The timely shot had saved him from a horrible death!

A MAN clad in black was standing in the doorway, a smoking automatic in his gloved hand. His expert shot had picked the one spot on Clipper's body that could have been struck without danger to Cliff Marsland. Clipper dropped to the floor, his automatic dangling in his right hand. He managed to turn his head.

"The Shadow!" he whispered.

He had recognized the avenger of the underworld. The tall man with the turned-up cloak and the wide-brimmed slouch hat concealing his face was indeed the strange being of whom Clipper Tobin had often heard. And now he had met The Shadow!

Clipper's bulging eyes noted the body of Arnold Bodine. The form of Cliff Marsland was beside him. He had killed one. He was not to be cheated of the other!

With a snarl, he seized Cliff's body and twisted himself behind it. He pulled Cliff's loaded automatic from his pocket and pointed it toward the door and fired.

His first shot, a hasty one, was wild. The second was well aimed, but the bullet never left the muzzle. Once again The Shadow's marksmanship prevailed.

He had chosen the automatic in Clipper's hand as his target, and his shot proved true. The gun fell from Clipper's stunned claw. The killer was helpless.

Even then Clipper Tobin would not yield. The shrill sound of a police whistle came to his ears. He was defeated in conflict, and captors were approaching. Still, he was determined at least to elude The Shadow.

He raised himself and carried Cliff's body up before him as a shield. Wounded as he was, his effort cost the killer energy.

DOUBLE Z

The two forms stood before the window. Now The Shadow advanced, his gun ready for the first vulnerable spot that Clipper might offer.

Clipper cursed. If he had realized what was about to happen, he would have shot Cliff before he lost his gun. At least one more enemy would have died with him. But that was too late. Here, however, was another scheme for safety.

As the black-clad Shadow came closer, Clipper suddenly flung Cliff's body forward, almost into the arms of the man in black. With a leap he was through the window; with a wide swing, Clipper projected himself toward the roof of the garage, ten feet below.

The Shadow caught Cliff Marsland's body with one arm and let it slide gently to the floor. He reached the window and stood there like a gigantic silhouette, staring into the darkness. Reflected lights from the avenue revealed a tragic scene.

Clipper's drop had carried him at an angle over the intervening space to the garage roof. He landed there, on the very edge. He was a target for The Shadow, but the man at the window did not fire.

Instead, he calmly watched Clipper Tobin struggle against the hand of Fate. For Clipper was slipping from his precarious post of safety. His body had toppled over the edge; he was fighting to draw himself to the roof.

But his crippled arms were unequal to the task. Clipper had signed his own death warrant when he had made that desperate plunge. The force of the ten-foot swing had jarred him; now his clutching hands were losing their hold.

Numbed fingers slipped. With a fearful cry, Clipper Tobin lost his battle and pitched downward into the Stygian depths of the concrete-floored alley!

The crash of his body awoke a frightful echo. His death scream floated upward. A deep, sighing groan sounded from the blackness. All was still. The Shadow waited.

He heard the sound of footsteps echoing beneath. They did not follow to the spot where Clipper had fallen. They were pounding toward the fire tower.

Swiftly, The Shadow whirled across the room and locked the door of the little hallway. The action was none too soon. Already men were entering the outside corridor. Joe Cardona's squad, dispatched to prevent the murder of Arnold Bodine, was already at the doorway of the apartment!

The strong door, which Bodine had purposely placed at the entrance, withstood the pounding of the detectives' shoulders. The gruff voice of Joe Cardona was shouting in the corridor.

Muffled commands could be heard. Cardona was planning to prevent the escape of the man who had closed that door. In the meantime, The Shadow, a strange form in black, was quietly bending over Cliff Marsland, reviving the unconscious man.

Cliff opened his eyes. The Shadow stepped away. Although his head throbbed, Cliff's confusion cleared away rapidly.

He did not know who had struck him down. He did know that The Shadow had come to his rescue. Too late to save Arnold Bodine, however. The body of the big shot lay but a few feet away.

DOUBLE Z

There was a lull outside. The attackers were waiting to hear if any sound came from within. A voice called up from the alleyway below.

"We're down here, Cardona! There's a dead man here!"

The silence indicated to the crier that Cardona had not yet forced his way into Bodine's apartment. The beam of a powerful flashlight shone outside the window. The men who had found the body were centering its glare upon the roof of the garage. That means of escape was cut off. Police would soon be there.

THE words from the alley echoed in Cliff's mind. He realized instantly that the dead man must be Clipper. He wondered what The Shadow intended to do. He saw the black-clad form studying the body of Bodine. Was The Shadow about to don a disguise to deceive Cardona and his men into thinking that he was Arnold Bodine?

No. That would be hopeless. Too many explanations would be necessary. Cliff groaned as he realized that he was a burden on The Shadow. He knew that fact as he tried to climb to his feet, and sank back weakly.

The Shadow could escape, even if he had to fight his way through the minions of the law. But he would not desert his associate.

Leaning against the wall, Cliff watched The Shadow. The mysterious man seemed purposeless, as he strolled about the room. At last, he stopped by the wall in a front corner of the room, and tapped softly. Cliff could hear a laugh from the man in black.

There was terrific pounding from outside. The blows of a sledge hammer resounded against the corridor door. Wood was splintered. Triumphant shouts followed. The police were breaking in!

The Shadow opened the door of a closet near the corner where he had tapped. He entered. Cliff could see his arm moving up and down.

Now the man in black was across the room again, his hands upon the body of Arnold Bodine. Cliff saw the flash of metal as The Shadow brought forth a key ring from the dead man's pocket. Once more The Shadow was back in the closet. He emerged and swept toward Cliff. Clutching the black arm that was offered him, Cliff gained his feet.

Crash! Cliff heard the thud as the splintered door gave way. The Shadow was in the closet, drawing him along. He could hear the shouts of orders from the men who were entering the room.

The closet door closed. The powerful clutch of The Shadow was beneath Cliff's arms. He was thrust toward the side of the closet. He felt himself descending through the floor.

Clutching, he caught the rungs of an iron ladder; he gained a foothold, and let himself down a step. Something clicked above. The Shadow had closed the secret entrance.

Weak though he was, Cliff managed to keep moving downward. He felt a hand supporting him from above. His feet touched a solid floor. He leaned against the wall and waited.

He knew that The Shadow was beside him. They were at the bottom of a short shaft, some fifteen feet in depth.

Cliff understood it all while he leaned there in the darkness. The Shadow, ever alert, had divined that Arnold

DOUBLE Z

Bodine would not dwell in a hide-out that had but a single exit. The roof of the adjoining garage had been the clew.

The space between the closet and the wall served a definite purpose. It was a means whereby Bodine could leave his rooms unseen. The Shadow had discovered the lock of the secret door, formed by the wall of the closet. He had obtained the key from Bodine's body. They were on their way to safety!

Cliff wondered why The Shadow was waiting. He did not believe that his rescuer could be at a loss. Then he realized that the delay was made to give him time to recuperate his strength.

"I'm all right!" he whispered. "Let's go!"

A click and the wall ahead moved outward. A firm hand gripped Cliff's arm. With The Shadow, he stepped forward. They were inside the garage, on a narrow stairway. The tiny gleam of a flashlight appeared, and Cliff made out the stone flight of steps ahead.

Evidently, this was a seldom-used side stairway. They descended, while the flashlight showed the way. There were no windows nothing but stone walls on either side. And a locked door blocked farther passage at the bottom!

A BLACK-GLOVED hand appeared in the light, holding the key ring. The lock was opened. The door moved outward and showed a dim corner of a garage floor. An expensive coupe was standing ten feet away.

"Get in the car," came a whisper.

Cliff was steady now. He walked across to the car, opened the door, and entered it. Resting on the comfortable cushions, he looked back toward the door through which he had come. It was closed now, and it bore the placard, "Air Shaft," in large white letters.

Before Cliff realized it, the starter was buzzing. He was surprised to see a man in the driver's seat. The Shadow had silently taken his place there. He was no longer a man in black. Cliff could not distinguish his features in the darkness, but noticed that the cloak was gone, and only the slouch hat remained.

The car moved toward the door of the garage. There a burly policeman stopped it. The man beside Cliff leaned from the window and pulled back the side of his coat.

"From headquarters," Cliff heard a gruff voice say. "This is Bodine's car. Cardona told me to bring it around."

"All right," came the policeman's response.

The car rolled out, on the side street. The driver did not speak another word. They traveled on through darkness; even when they crossed the avenue, Cliff could not glimpse the other man's face in the light, for his head was turned away.

The car pulled up in darkness on another side street. Fifty feet ahead, Cliff saw the electric sign of the Hotel Metrolite. He understood that this was his destination. He waited a moment. The man beside him made no comment.

Cliff opened the door and stepped to the sidewalk. He walked steadily now. When he reached the door of the hotel, he glanced toward the street to see the tail light of Arnold Bodine's coupe flashing toward the next avenue.

Once again, The Shadow's daring had overcome all obstacles. A timely rescuer, he had carried Cliff Marsland from the midst of danger; and the escape had been so cleverly contrived that Cardona and his plain-clothes men would never know what had occurred!

CHAPTER XIV. DOUBLE Z PLOTS

CLYDE BURKE'S story in the next day's Classic was read by New Yorkers with avid interest. Arnold Bodine, the big shot who had cloaked himself with respectability, had been murdered in his own apartment!

Even the security of a secret hideout had not protected him. That, in itself, was sensational. The fact that the police had received a tip-off from Double Z was amazing. Once again, the name of the archmurderer was on every tongue.

Joe Cardona, calm in the face of criticism, reiterated the fact that Double Z was not responsible for the killing. The police had evidence that pointed to the real slayer. Clyde Burke, as the Wise Owl, suggested the name of Dave Markan.

It was the underworld's general opinion that Markan had engineered the slaying; and the underworld had a peculiar habit of being right.

Popular opinion produced strange results. Cardona's truthful statement that Double Z had merely furnished information, and had not been the actual murderer, was ridiculed.

A few months ago, it would have been accepted. But with Double Z classed as the slayer of Joel Caulkins and Philip Farmington, anything which carried his name indicated his action.

Editorials condemned Joe Cardona for his honest opinion. Even Inspector Timothy Klein, now back on the job, came in for criticism, although he had been absent when Double Z had killed.

The exciting events at the apartment of Arnold Bodine had made it hot for Dave Markan. He had ordered the death of the big shot. He had an alibi. Ordinarily it would have held. But now it was subject to fire.

It was obvious that the police would have to round up any one who might be connected with the affair, purely because the trail might lead to Double Z. That, in itself, was trouble enough for Markan.

But he was in wrong elsewhere. The underworld was seeing red. Markan's mob was growling at their chief's slip. It was rumored that Arnold Bodine's bodyguards would not let the death go unavenged. There was talk of a fund established secretly by Bodine.

In the event that the big shot was murdered, so the tale went, a certain lawyer would pay a large sum to the man who killed the murderer.

When the underworld said that gunners were out to get Markan, the underworld meant that very thing. Under all this pressure, Dave Markan showed a yellow streak.

He fled from the city. He had planned too boldly. He feared his own mob, Bodine's killers, and the police.

Jake Dermott assumed control of the leaderless mob. His apprehension had been changed to realization. Jake was on top of the world. He prided himself upon his secret allegiance to Double Z.

Before the print had dried on the final editions of the evening newspapers, another killing took place. Gun

DOUBLE Z

shots flashed in a gloomy room where Mike Lombrosi made his headquarters, and Tony Marano became the new leader of that mob.

Lombrosi had long been tottering on his throne. He had paid tribute to the dead Arnold Bodine, and rumor had it that he might have supported Dave Markan in the enterprise. So Tony stepped in with a big gat and ended the discussion.

The killing took place when several of the mob were present, so Tony did not have to wait long for congratulations.

Like Jake Dermott, Tony Marano was pleased with his new connection. Double Z, through Sneaks Rubin, was to be the recipient of the tribute that had once been paid to Arnold Bodine. But that was a matter that Tony intended to keep to himself.

Thus, in less than twenty-four hours, two of the most proficient criminal groups in New York had come beneath the sway of the great unknown Double Z and not a word of the change had reached the ever-ready ears of gangland!

Bodine's death was something of a mystery. The first indication had been the note from Double Z. Detective Joe Cardona had put men on guard at the Goliath Hotel. Cardona, himself, had camped in Bodine's rooms.

He had answered a telephone call. It had been Bodine's cry for help. A slayer was in the big shot's hide-out!

The shooting had commenced before Cardona had arrived. The detectives found the door barred. They were sure some one was in the apartment.

In the alley outside, men sent to guard the flank had discovered the body of Clipper Tobin a lone wolf in gangdom. Crashing into Bodine's room, the detective found the body of the big shot, but the slayer was gone.

What part had Clipper Tobin played? Cardona doubted that he was one of the murderers. It was more likely that Bodine had hired him as a special bodyguard.

If so, two men had doubtless entered for the killing. They must have escaped by the window, swinging to the roof of the garage, for it had been some time before the police had blocked that exit.

Logically, these men would be considered as hirelings of Dave Markan. That was Cardona's claim, and it gathered force when Markan made his sudden departure. But the newspapers could not forget Double Z. His name was undeniably linked with the killing. Perhaps he was the actual murderer!

JOE CARDONA was glum when he conferred with Inspector Timothy Klein. The detective was a man who had his ups and downs. Klein was always the same gruff and doubtful. He was not pleased with what had happened. He lost no time in saying so.

"Rather bungled," was his comment, and the words were no salve to Joe Cardona.

"It's this Double Z business," protested the detective. "If they'd lay off and give us a chance! Burke, with the Classic, is shooting straight. But the others –"

"Can you blame them?" questioned Klein. "You admitted you got the tipoff; but the killing went through just the same. Who is the guy? Have you any idea?"

DOUBLE Z

"Never hit anybody like him. He's a mystery."

"How about The Shadow?"

Klein's question was startling, but it brought a growl of disapproval from Cardona.

"The Shadow isn't a killer," he declared.

"He's given tip-offs," retorted Klein.

"Yes," said Cardona, "but they've been clean ones. I'll tell you what, Inspector. I wish The Shadow was in this!"

"Why?"

"Because we'd be getting some results."

"You think he'd help out?"

"He did in the past."

"Well," drawled Klein, "maybe The Shadow is in it. Maybe he's changed tactics. Maybe he's Double Z."

Cardona shook his head. He had met The Shadow in the past. He had never gained an inkling of the mysterious man's identity, but he felt that he understood The Shadow's methods.

"Where is The Shadow?" questioned Klein. "This is the kind of mess he would get into. We haven't heard a word of him. Doesn't that make it look like he might be Double Z?"

"You don't know The Shadow, Inspector. If he happened to be in back of this playing the part of Double Z he'd be in the game as himself, just to make it more bewildering. No, The Shadow isn't Double Z. I'll stake my reputation on that!"

"You won't be staking much," asserted Klein grimly. "Not if this keeps on, you won't!"

"Listen," replied the detective. "I'll make a prediction: We'll hear from Double Z again. Soon. And his next job will be a flop!"

"I hope so."

HAD Joe Cardona paid a visit to Room 909 in the Badger Building, he would have been surprised to observe the actions of an investment specialist named Rutledge Mann. For that quiet-faced individual was dealing in other papers than stocks and bonds.

He was clipping accounts of the Bodine killing and the rumors which had followed it. He was missing nothing. Among his tabulated statistics were the facts that Mike Lombrosi and Dave Markan were no longer important figures in the realms of gangdom.

His notations came from other sources than the actual newspapers. On his desk was an envelope delivered by Clyde Burke when the reporter had stopped by on his way to the Classic office. The Wise Owl had been getting material. He had been hearing more than rumors from the lips of mobsters.

DOUBLE Z

Finishing his work, Rutledge Mann pasted up some clippings and stuffed them in an envelope. He dropped them in the office marked B. Jonas, while en route to the Cobalt Club. After a heavy dinner, Mann lighted a cigar and strolled about. Once again, the plutocrats were discussing Double Z.

"The man's a maniac!" he heard Barnaby Hotchkiss say. "He's dangerous! It is outrageous, the way the police continue to fail! Why, we're all in danger! First Farmington was killed; now Bodine."

"No analogy there," declared Blaine Glover. "One was a banker the other a crook."

"Both had money."

"But this man called Double Z did not profit thereby," Glover persisted.

"How can you tell? I assert that no one is safe! He will strike again, and one of us may be the victim!"

"That would be interesting," commented Matthew Wade. "I hope it isn't worrying you, Hotchkiss?"

"Just as much cause for you to worry, Wade," came the reply. "You are no safer than any of the rest of us. I tell you again, the man is out to make trouble. He has a mania that causes him to attack those who have wealth no matter how they may have acquired it."

A murmur of agreement followed. Even Glover admitted that Hotchkiss might be correct in theory. Wade seemed noncommittal. Rutledge Mann noted that Lamont Cranston was in the group, but silent. He went along to the library. When he returned, Cranston was gone.

A few hours later Mann stopped back at his new office. He found a letter on the floor. He opened it and read it quickly. The writing faded away, but Mann had perused the entire coded message. He sat by his desk and softly repeated the words that he had read.

"Jake Dermott," he said. "Jake Dermott and Tony Marano. That's right. Burke said they were only gunmen, not typical gang leaders. Marsland must be cautious; but if he can follow Dermott, he may gain information. Burke must be posted, too. Vincent on the usual job no results as yet –"

None of these thoughts had occurred to Mann when he had forwarded his data to The Shadow. But since then, the Double Z problem had been studied by The Shadow. Mann knew that the master mind had been at work, for he had just become acquainted with the findings. Facts that Cardona had never suspected were seen by The Shadow's keen vision.

"Cliff Marsland's report," murmured Mann. Here he was on a trail which Cardona had not even seen. "Who sent Clipper Tobin on the job? Does that man know Marsland? Well Marsland can trace back Tobin's actions. Perhaps he may discover their source –"

SOMEWHERE in New York a man sat in a small, darkened room, a pair of earphones clamped to his head, a mouthpiece before him. He was at one end of a conversation. At the other end, in the back room of a secluded dive, sat Sneaks Rubin. The pale-faced gangster with the fanglike teeth was talking with his master Double Z!

To Sneaks, Double Z was no more than a voice but he dreaded that voice to the depths of his evil heart. In this conversation, Sneaks was pouring out all he knew and his words told of a looming danger. For Sneaks Rubin had not been inactive during the exciting moments that had followed his departure from Arnold Bodine's apartment.

DOUBLE Z

"Clipper was double-crossed," he was saying. "The guy that went with him on the job was a phony."

"What was his name?"

The question came in a deliberate, monotonous voice. It was that same singleness of tone that had constantly perplexed Sneaks Rubin.

"I don't know who he was," admitted the gangster. "Clipper figured he was O.K. –"

"You did not follow my instructions," said the accusing voice. "I told you to obtain a reliable man."

"Clipper said he was reliable –"

"That is not sufficient," came the interruption to the protest. "You should have been positive, from your own observation."

"I played it safe, Chief," said Sneaks. "I tagged along to see that the job was done. When I got to Bodine's, I found this guy had covered Clipper. I stepped in back of him an' cracked him. That gave Clipper the chance to plug Bodine."

"Then what happened?"

"I don't know. I scrambled. I heard Clipper shoot. I run down the fire tower. I waited at the bottom. Then Clipper falls out the window!"

"What about the man you struck? Was he unconscious?"

"I knocked him cold. It was some other guy that heaved Clipper out. That's why I'm worried, Chief. This other guy musta come in after I was gone, an' I know who he was. The Shadow!"

SNEAKS blurted the fearsome name in a hoarse whisper. He listened intently, wondering what the response would be. But the voice of Double Z betrayed no emotion.

"How do you know he was The Shadow?"

"When I see Clipper flop in the alley, I slides up to him. He was pretty near gone, Chief, but he knew who I was when I spoke. He says: 'The Shadow got me. The Shadow. Get him, Sneaks –' Then he passes out."

"I didn't wait no longer. I got away just a few minutes before the cops showed up."

"What do you know about The Shadow?"

"Nothin', Chief! That's the worst of it. I figure he had this guy fixed the guy that was with Clipper."

There was silence. Then Double Z spoke slowly.

"You must find The Shadow."

"I don't know how to find him, Chief –"

"There is one sure way. Look for the man who went with Clipper Tobin."

"But if I don't find him –"

"You do not need to find him. He will find you!"

The suggestion brought a shudder to Sneaks.

"When he finds you," resumed Double Z, "lead him to Loy Rook's."

"I can get Jake Dermott to bump him off –"

"I need no suggestions," reprimanded Double Z. "I order. You obey. Lead him to Loy Rook's. He will be captured there. We do not want him dead."

"But he double-crossed Clipper."

"He shall die for that," announced the voice. "His death will come later. When he has been captured at Loy Rook's, have Dermott and Marano in preparation. For you may be sure of this: The Shadow came to his rescue once before. The Shadow will come again."

There was a click. The earphones and mouthpiece were laid aside in the darkened room. Sneaks Rubin, his mouth gaping as he understood the scheme, sat at the end of a dead wire. His orders had been received; he would hear no more from his master to-night.

"I'll find the guy," muttered Sneaks, with a malicious grin. "Find him by lettin' him find me. Then it's curtains for him an' The Shadow!"

The scrawny gangster was confident as he sauntered from the dive to keep an appointment with Tony Marano. The Shadow, scourge of the underworld, was to meet his match. Double Z had plotted and Double Z would win!

CHAPTER XV. AT LOY ROOK'S

THE office of Loy Rook was located in one of the newer buildings of Chinatown. There was nothing Oriental about it. It might have been the office of any American business man. For Loy Rook handled his affairs in Occidental fashion.

He was a powerful figure among the Chinese. He stood well with all the tong leaders, and pursued his business unmolested. He affected American attire and mannerisms.

Loy Rook was the owner of several Chinese restaurants and shops. His office was on the second floor of the building, beneath which was a tea shop. There were living quarters on the second floor, where certain trusted employees roomed in comfortable surroundings.

Loy Rook's own suite was on the third floor. It was furnished in Chinese style. Thus Loy Rook stepped downstairs from a home that might have been in Peiping, and entered an office that was obviously in New York.

Loy Rook was in his office to-day the day after gangdom had undergone its shake-up. He was going over certain important affairs, and he paused from consideration of a pile of papers to call his secretary.

"Can you come here a moment, Vincent?" he said.

Harry Vincent arose from a desk in the corner. He approached Loy Rook and helped him sort the papers. The old Chinaman looked on admiringly. This man was the first good secretary he had ever had.

The gods had been wise when they had prompted Ching Foo, Loy Rook's very good friend, to recommend this secretary. Loy Rook was always ready to hire a new man. He wanted one who liked to work; whose salary demands were low; and who was willing to live on the second floor of this building. Harry Vincent had answered all those demands.

"Wait a minute," said Loy Rook, in his queerly enunciated English. "Do not go back to work just yet. Let us talk."

Harry resumed his seat and looked at the old, bespectacled Mongolian.

"You like it here?" questioned Loy Rook.

"I find it very pleasant."

"That is good. You would like to travel to China, perhaps?"

"I prefer New York, but –" Harry paused.

"Not now," said Loy Rook hastily, "not for a long time yet, perhaps. But I have much to do with China. You know that, from the work you have done for me. I will need, some day, a man like yourself to go there."

"I'll be ready."

"China is a wonderful country," declared Loy Rook. "A very wonderful place. When I, Loy Rook, say that, it is because I understand. These Chinese in New York they do not know their native land! When they wish to find out how things are done in China, where do they come? To Loy Rook!"

Harry nodded.

"That is why I tell you about my Chinese friends. They may ask me many things, but that I do not tell them. I have my own reasons for that. But when I speak to you of them, and tell you what they ask, it is because I wish you to understand how the Chinese think. You see?"

Harry nodded again.

"There is none so wise as Loy Rook," said the Chinaman solemnly. "That is what the others say! Perhaps Ching Foo has said that also?"

"He said words to that effect."

"Yet Loy Rook is not wise. He has simply remembered what he has seen. And he has seen much."

This impersonal manner of talking was a familiar trait of Loy Rook's. He always adopted it when speaking of himself.

"There is much that is known in China," declared Loy Rook. "Much that is not known in New York" he laughed "but there are people here who think they know much. When there is something to be learned that is known not here, those who are wise come to Loy Rook."

With this cryptic remark, the old Chinaman busied himself with the papers that Harry had arranged. Harry went back to his work. He was thoughtful. At last, he was making progress, even though it was not much.

He was here at The Shadow's bidding. For The Shadow was certain that through Loy Rook the key to Philip Farmington's murder could be discovered. The poison li-shun was known only in Mongolia, of which Loy Rook was a native.

Loy Rook, ostensibly a prosperous merchant, loved money too well not to take part in shady dealings. So Harry had been posted here, through some mysterious arrangement between The Shadow and Ching Foo, the man who was a friend of Loy Rook's. Harry's present job was to keep a watchful eye.

Ching Foo had suavely told him of Loy Rook's peculiarities. One was that every visitor, no matter what his purpose might be, entered Loy Rook's office to meet him. The old Mongolian was too canny to overdo his crooked work.

He made every one meet him in what appeared to be an aboveboard transaction. At least, that was supposed to be the case, so Harry had been informed. To date, he had seen nothing to the contrary.

So far, results were a blank. Loy Rook usually talked in English; occasionally he indulged in Chinese conversation with visitors. On those occasions, Harry was at a disadvantage; nevertheless, he was always alert in case something suspicious might take place.

IT was nearly noon when a young Chinaman entered the office and demanded to see Loy Rook. Harry's employer was out. The visitor said that he would wait. There was something about the stranger's manner that impressed Harry. This young Chinese almost American in appearance was restless. An unusual trait among his race, Harry decided.

Half an hour later, Loy Rook came in. He greeted his visitor, and Harry heard the name he called him Luke Froy. They chatted in English. Loy Rook and Luke Froy then they broke into a verbal display of Chinese.

In the midst of it, Harry's alert ears caught a word that sounded very much like li-shun. Loy Rook wound up his conversation in English.

"To-night," he said. "You come back. See me then."

"When?"

"Eleven o'clock. Not to office. You know where."

Luke Froy nodded and departed. Loy Rook beckoned to Harry.

"Come with me," he said.

He led the way to the back of the second floor, where Harry's room was located. He stopped in front of a tall, double-sectional bookcase, which Harry had often noticed.

"Eleven o'clock, to-night," said Loy Rook. "You do this."

He pressed the bottom of the bookcase between the two sections. Each portion swung outward like a door, revealing separate flights of narrow steps one leading up, the other down.

DOUBLE Z

"This opens a hidden door below," explained Loy Rook. "Then my friend Luke Froy may come in. Remember you say nothing only watch!"

Harry nodded. He accompanied Loy Rook back to the office. As chance would have it, Loy Rook invited him to a Chinese lunch, so Harry had no opportunity at that time to send his information to Rutledge Mann.

When they returned to the office, Loy Rook remained there. The afternoon wore along. At last, Harry's chance came. Loy Rook announced that he was going upstairs to his apartment.

The Chinaman might return at any time. It would be bad policy to leave the office. He picked up the telephone and dialed the number of Mann's office. He heard Mann's voice answer.

"Hello," said Harry. "Did you mail that package that I left at the hotel?... Oh, I see. You gave it to the night clerk... Yes... Eleven dollars was the price... For the watch; the Chinaware cost fifteen. The man said he would take it back at the store on Fourteenth Street... What's that? I can't hear you... Oh, I see... Good-by."

The spaces in the conversation had been timed for imaginary replies. Actually, Rutledge Mann did not speak a word while Harry was talking. In the course of his sentences, Harry had sent a definite message: "To-night. Eleven. Watch Chinaman. Back street. Here."

Loy Rook walked into the office shortly after Harry had hung up the telephone. That meant nothing. Harry made occasional personal calls from the office. He was quite positive that his disconnected conversation could have aroused no suspicion in Loy Rook.

EVENING arrived. Loy Rook invited Harry to dinner in the third-floor apartment. They dined in a room filled with beautiful Oriental hangings, waited upon by Loy Rook's Chinese servants. Harry went downstairs at ten o'clock.

He waited patiently until eleven. Then he stepped into the hallway and pushed the bottom of the bookcase. The sections opened. Harry retired to his room.

His work was finished. Loy Rook had said nothing about closing the bookcase. Harry listened in darkness. Fifteen minutes later, he heard stealthy footsteps descending stairs. Luke Froy was leaving.

Harry stared from the dark window. He fancied he saw a dim form in the back street. He followed its course, and distinctly observed a man of Luke Froy's height appear at the corner. Harry still watched.

He thought he saw a patch of darkness flit along the sidewalk. That was all. It was enough. Harry Vincent knew that The Shadow was on the trail of Luke Froy!

CHAPTER XVI. TWO MEN TRAPPED

SNEAKS RUBIN was obeying his master's instructions. He had become conspicuous in the underworld. Sneaks was a well-known character, but he usually kept to himself. Now he was traveling the rounds.

He cronied with gangsters whom he had known and chatted with them in places where he might be overheard. His conversation dwelt on a particular subject. Who had last seen Clipper Tobin before he was bumped off?

Sneaks was keenly observant. All the time that he was apparently concerned in talk, he was watching. This was the third night that he had been thus engaged, for he had started on his campaign immediately after his

DOUBLE Z

orders were received from Double Z.

It was in a dilapidated dive called the Green Mouse that Sneaks gained his hoped for results. While he was talking to a second-rate gunman, he noted a motion on the part of a man near by. Sneaks watched from the corner of his eye. Instead of turning toward him, the man turned away.

That might have been disarming, but for one fact. Sneaks Rubin had only seen the back of the man whom he had stunned in Bodine's apartment. Now Sneaks recognized the same back at the near-by table! He had found his quarry!

Sneaks immediately became confidential in his tone, but he talked loud enough to his companion, so that the listening man might hear.

"Listen, Bud," he said. "I'd like to find a torpedo as good as Clipper was. He was my well, Clipper was a one-man mob in himself. I'm the guy that called him that –"

Cliff Marsland, listening, was elated. Sneaks had used the very term that he had heard Clipper use. The dead gangster had prided himself on being a "one-man mob." Without doubt, Sneaks Rubin was the man who had arranged for Clipper Tobin to kill Arnold Bodine.

Sneaks was known to Cliff, although it was doubtful that the crafty little gangster knew Cliff by sight. The reason was plain. Sneaks was a character in the bad lands. Cliff was just a name.

Due to his long absence, Cliff was seldom recognized. Nevertheless, he decided to take no chances. He remained in his position, head turned away, until he saw Sneaks shamble from the place.

Cliff followed. He was cautious in his actions. He wanted to find out all he could by watching Sneaks. Afterward, he could inquire regarding the pasty-faced crook whose name was so appropriate.

Now, Sneaks was bound for a definite destination, hopeful that Cliff would follow. He was going to confer with Double Z. Why not? In the back room of the dive he would be safe from observation. The action would mystify Cliff Marsland, and make him all the more willing to follow.

By a strange coincidence, it was the very time that Sneaks might expect a call from his mysterious chief. Instructions, furthermore, would be valuable.

Sneaks had another purpose. When he shambled into his favorite hangout, he made a sign to a man who was lounging there. This sign was a familiar one at that place. It meant, "I'm being trailed. Watch who comes in!"

Then Sneaks entered the little back room, barred the door, and waited.

His call came, promptly at the appointed minute. One ring if not answered, the phone would be hung up at the other end. Sneaks snatched up the receiver. He spoke hastily as he recognized the voice.

"The guy's on my trail," he said.

"Do you know who he is?" asked Double Z's voice.

"No. I can find out –"

"Take him down to Loy Rook's. Right away. That is most important."

DOUBLE Z

SNEAKS left the room. He saw a man sitting in the corner. The tip-off made a sign. Sneaks threw a sidelong glance and recognized Cliff's appearance. He began to act furtively. He slipped out into the night.

His part was well played. Within two minutes, Cliff Marsland had left the dive and was scanning the sidewalks for the little gangster. He saw the stooping form of Sneaks Rubin in the distance.

Sneaks wandered cunningly. He gave no sign that he was being followed. He strode along through side streets, with the air of a man who has a definite objective. Cliff kept up the pursuit. It was not long before they reached the vicinity of the building where Loy Rook lived.

But on his journey, Sneaks had passed a look-out post where one of Jake Dermott's vigilant men was always on watch. There, Sneaks had paused.

Standing in the light, the man had recognized him. So while Sneaks, slowly lessening his pace, reached Loy Rook's neighborhood, the word had already reached Jake Dermott.

Sneaks turned into a back street. Here, on the fringe of Chinatown, Cliff Marsland was wondering. He knew that Harry Vincent was stationed at Loy Rook's. Could that be where they were going?

The Shadow's agents were kept well posted through the medium of Rutledge Mann. It was unlikely that Harry would expect Cliff; but Harry was always alert. Much might be gained tonight.

Cliff hoped that Sneaks would linger along the way, so that Cliff would have a chance to notify Burbank, The Shadow's night sentinel. But had Cliff known where the trail might lead, he would have sent word before he had followed Sneaks into the second dive. It was too late now.

Sneaks stopped in a dark, narrow street. Cliff waited out of sight, behind a stack of barrels. He saw the little gangster make a motion beside a door. Then Sneaks disappeared.

Cliff advanced cautiously. He came to an open door, with a flight of steps ahead. He noted that the door was cleverly built so as to seem almost part of the wall.

Cliff hesitated. Should he leave temporary and call Burbank? He decided to go in. It was well that he did so, for unbeknown to him, the ends of the little street were already watched by Jake Dermott's sentinels, ready to cut off his retreat!

CLIFF ascended the steps, automatic in his hand. He came to a hallway on the second floor. He stood there, in semidarkness. The only light came from a window at the end of the hall.

Cliff noted that he stood between two objects that looked like doors. A quick inspection proved that they were hinged bookcases. Cliff stepped forward in the dim light. He started quickly as he heard a low whisper.

"Cliff!"

His own name!

"Yes!" he whispered tensely.

"This is Harry Harry Vincent."

"Good. Is this Loy Rook's?"

"Yes."

"I'm trailing Sneaks Rubin."

"A man just went upstairs."

"I'm following, then!"

Cliff Marsland moved cautiously toward the third floor. Harry, in turn, slipped down the hallway. Silently, in the dark, he reached the office and dialed the telephone. Burbank responded. Harry quickly told him what was taking place.

During his residence with Loy Rook, Harry had made as many observations as possible. He knew that The Shadow was familiar with the situation here. Harry could see no danger to himself. He felt that he should forestall any possible trouble for Cliff Marsland.

The game was important. Still, it was Harry's part to be cautious. He knew that Cliff could not possibly have notified Burbank of his whereabouts, so he had attended to that matter himself.

The hallway was empty when Harry reached his room. The bookcases were still open. That was a good sign.

With door ajar, Harry remained watchful within his room. His pocketed automatic was ready to be unlimbered at an instant's notice.

At that particular moment, Cliff Marsland was also watchful.

He had reached the head of the stairs. He stood on the threshold of a dimly lighted room. It was an antechamber, furnished in Chinese style. A grinning joss rested beside the entrance. A paneled door showed between two curtains. That was evidently where Sneaks had gone!

What was happening behind that door?

The room seemed to have an alluring power. Try as he would, Cliff could not repress the urge to slip closer. This was increased by the sound of mumbled voices. The door was evidently a thin one, or the crack beneath it was by no means soundproof.

Cliff moved forward. He reached the door and crouched there. Even then, he could not make out words from the low conversation on the other side.

The room was a narrow one. It was also low-ceilinged. Cliff had walked forward about seven steps to reach the mysterious door. By spreading his arms, he could touch the wall on either side. After he had listened for several minutes, he chanced to move backward a trifle.

He bumped suddenly against something solid. He swung quickly, with his gun in hand.

Behind him was another door a duplicate of the one in front. Silently, unnoticed, it had descended from the ceiling. He was in a boxlike trap, scarcely five feet square, not much over six feet in height!

Cliff clutched a curtain in front of him. His head was beginning to swim. That was odd! He tried to rise to his feet, but found it impossible. Dizziness swept over him. His throat was becoming numbed. Gasping, he sought to cry out, but an inarticulate gurgle was his only response.

Cliff sank to the floor, moaning. Some powerful gas was overwhelming him. If he could only signal to Harry! It was too late, now.

Cliff's automatic slid from his nerveless fingers. He crumpled upon the floor. He fancied that he heard his name being whispered.

"Cliff! Cliff!"

He could not respond. He managed to give one last choking gasp. His final thought was the thought of death. Was this to be the end?

THE words that Cliff Marsland had heard had not been formed by his imagination. Harry Vincent, waiting below, had decided it was time to act. He knew that Cliff would return shortly, if only to post him regarding matters upstairs. So Harry, in turn, had ascended the narrow flight.

Like Cliff, he had encountered an antechamber with a curtained doorway at the end. But the space between Harry and the door that barred his path was only fifteen feet!

With Cliff Marsland, it had been twenty!

Harry, listening, also heard a sound beyond that doorway. It was a human utterance, but not in the form of words. Some one seemed to be gasping. Like a shot, Harry realized that Cliff had encountered trouble. He crept forward and stooped before the door, calling Cliff's name in a low, tense whisper.

There was a faint response; but it could not be called an actual reply. Harry repeated his words. Silence was the only answer. What to do?

Perhaps it would be well to go downstairs; to enter the third floor by tapping at the entrance to Loy Rook's door at the foot of the regular stairway. Harry would tell the old Chinaman that he had heard some one enter that he had thought it best to inform his employer.

He turned as he raised himself to his feet. Like Cliff, he was startled. He was facing a blank door, within arm's reach. He, too, was in a boxlike trap. He realized what had happened to Cliff Marsland. His friend was helpless; so was he!

Harry became unsteady. He felt a sickening sensation. It was doubly bad, for when he began to emit gasping cries, he knew that he was meeting the same power that had overcome Cliff. Was this a poison gas? Did every breath he drew spell doom?

He tried to hold his breath, but in vain. The odor of the gas was scarcely noticeable, but its effects were numbing. Harry sank to the floor and tried to seek fresh air at the bottom of the door; but the barrier was tightly closed.

There was no hope. His senses were going. Despite the dim light that pervaded this weird prison, blackness was closing over Harry's eyes. He gasped once, and lay inert.

Minutes went by minutes that were unknown to the two victims, each in his own gas-filled prison. A figure appeared at the top of the stairway a black-clad form that had arrived there in total silence.

A man, almost invisible in the darkness of the stairway, stood surveying the scene before him with eyes that were shaded beneath the broad brim of a slouch hat. About the newcomer's shoulders lay the folds of a black

cloak, as he stood close by the squat, hideous idol at the entrance.

The same antechamber lay in front of this man the antechamber that ended with a curtained door. But the distance to the barrier was now but ten feet not fifteen. The man in black stood silently, as though fascinated as though about to move forward.

Two victims had fallen in Loy Rook's toils each in his separate trap. The third snare was in readiness for The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVII. THE THIRD SNARE

"KEEP watching," said Loy Rook.

Sneaks Rubin, his pasty face gleaming, stared at the little taboret which the old Chinaman indicated. The carved piece of furniture was open, like a box. Within glowed tiny lights.

Loy Rook's long-nailed forefinger ran along a row in which a single bulb was extinguished the one at the end. He pointed to the last lighted bulb.

"He is here," declared Loy Rook.

"In the doorway?"

"Yes. Here" Loy Rook pointed to the first light in the row "he was at the door on the street. Here, at the second floor. Here, at the entrance. The next light will show. When it comes on, the man will be in the trap."

"He's been waiting a long while," was Sneaks Rubin's comment.

"They always wait," declared Loy Rook solemnly. "Perhaps he is looking at my joss."

"You mean that brass statue?"

"It is made of bronze," corrected Loy Rook. "It is very valuable. The solid metal in it weighs nearly two hundred pounds."

An exclamation came from Sneaks. The final light had turned on! Loy Rook smiled benignly.

"He is in the trap," he declared. "Watch!"

He pointed to three larger bulbs, each marked by a Chinese character. They were figures, symbolizing the numbers one, two, and three. Two were lighted. The third came on while Loy Rook spoke.

"The trap has closed," asserted the bespectacled Mongolian.

"You are sure he's in there?" questioned Sneaks.

In reply, Loy Rook pointed significantly to the last light in the lower row.

"It works from the floor of the trap," he explained. "Once a person has stepped upon it, the light goes on. Should that person step away, it would go out. It worked for the first trap; then I put out the light and arranged it for the second. Now, it is set for the third."

"How about the other lights?" questioned Sneaks. "I mean the ones that tell when he's down below, coming up the stairs. They're still on."

"They are arranged to stay on," replied Loy Rook. "They show when a man comes up. They were working when you came. You remember that I put them out after you arrived?"

Sneaks nodded.

"But look here, Loy Rook," he said. "Suppose a man should start back again –"

"They do not go back," replied Loy Rook contentedly. "You have seen that, Sneaks. But I shall show you."

He pressed a switch. All the lights in the row went out save the last.

"You see? He is in the trap. Should any one else come in, the lights would turn on, one by one. Should any one go down the stairs instead of up, the lights would turn on the other way backward."

He pressed another switch.

"Now," he announced, "the door is closed below. The bookcases are closed. No one else can enter. The three traps are filled. Each has taken its one man."

"You're smart, Loy Rook," declared Sneaks. "I didn't figure there'd be three of them. I didn't know –"

"Loy Rook is very wise," returned the old Mongolian. "He does not watch with closed eyes. He has known that his house contained an enemy. A young man so good a secretary would not work here at a cheap price. So the trap was made ready for him. To-night, he has fallen!"

Sneaks glanced toward the door at the end of the room. Behind that barrier were the three snares with their helpless victims. Two men and their would-be rescuer had fallen into the toils!

"Let's haul them out now," suggested Sneaks. "They're groggy, aren't they?"

"Two are asleep," declared Loy Rook. "The one who came last is not asleep."

"What!" exclaimed Sneaks. "That's The Shadow, Loy Rook! The man we want to get! Not asleep –"

"He is dead!" was Loy Rook's slow reply.

It was clear to Sneaks now. Loy Rook's instructions had come from some source unknown to Sneaks. The crafty little gangster had been merely the decoy to lead the victims to their snares.

The first two rooms were arranged so that each prisoner would be overcome by some sleep-producing gas. But no chances were being taken with the final victim. The lethal gas pervading the last room had been planned to complete his doom.

Sneaks grinned in ugly fashion. He admired Loy Rook's methods. The wise old Chinaman relied upon automatic mechanism, overpowering or murdering his enemies as he might prefer.

"The Shadow is dead!" mumbled Sneaks. "The Shadow is dead!"

DOUBLE Z

It seemed too good to be true. The scourge of the underworld enmeshed at last! And Sneaks was eager to see the body of the victim. Like every hardened crook, he feared and hated the very name of The Shadow.

For years, now, gangsters had been seeking to kill the mysterious man who had created havoc in the bad lands. Now The Shadow's time had come and Sneaks Rubin had played his part in the affair!

Sneaks feared The Shadow any way but dead, and with reason. He had heard of criminals who had captured The Shadow, but who had failed to kill him. They had seen their quarry melt away, and they had not lived to give the details. To-night, however, it was different. Loy Rook's brain had outwitted the master mind!

"Let's see him," suggested Sneaks. "Let's look at The Shadow –"

"In time," smiled Loy Rook. "Let each have his turn. The living first; then the dead."

He walked to the door at the opposite end of the room, and pressed a button that was on the wall the top one of four.

Slowly, the door moved upward, like a heavy theater curtain. It disappeared in the ceiling, its draperies vanishing with it. The body of Cliff Marsland lay huddled on the floor. With a cry of glee, Sneaks leaped forward and looked at the man's face.

"This is the guy I knocked cold at Bodine's!" he said gleefully. "The guy that double-crossed Clipper –"

"Bind him," ordered Loy Rook, handing the gangster a length of cord.

Sneaks followed orders. Then Loy Rook assisted the gangster in carrying Cliff to the side of the large room. There was a low, narrow platform at that spot. Cliff's form was deposited on one side, leaving room for another body.

Loy Rook pressed the second button. The next door went up. Harry Vincent lay in view. It was Loy Rook who uttered the words of recognition.

"This man was my secretary," he said. "I have been watching him. He was not wise enough for Loy Rook."

Harry was bound and deposited beside Cliff Marsland. Sneaks waited expectantly for Loy Rook to press the third button; but the Chinaman desisted.

"Wait," he said. "Wait until they can see. Let them look when we find their dead master."

LOY ROOK had scarcely ended his sentence before Cliff opened his eyes and stared about him. He tried to speak, but his jaws were helpless. He turned his head wearily and saw the form of Harry Vincent beside him. A minute later, Harry also regained consciousness. Loy Rook spoke, but neither of the bound men answered.

"They can understand," explained the Chinaman to Sneaks. "But they cannot talk. It is the effect of the gas."

The owl-faced Mongolian strode over to the wall. Sneaks saw Cliff and Harry turn their heads to watch him. The next door was plainly within their range of vision. Loy Rook placed his hand upon the third button. He spoke to the captured men.

"Now," he said, "you will see the man you call The Shadow!"

He pressed the button. The door moved upward. Sneaks Rubin was staring at the barrier.

Then a cry of rage came from him. Loy Rook leaned forward to see. Like Sneaks, he realized how they had been tricked.

A seated form rested beyond the lifted barrier but it was not the shape of a human being, either alive or dead. Leering with its shining eyes of metal, the figure of Loy Rook's bronze joss seemed to mock the men who stared. The Shadow had eluded the trap of Loy Rook!

Suspecting its presence, he had placed the image near the barrier in front of him. Its weight had caused the dropping door to fall. The Shadow had remained behind the farther barrier. Loy Rook's lethal gas had been wasted on a thing of metal!

CHAPTER XVIII. THE PIT OF DEATH

SILENCE reigned in Loy Rook's sanctum. Sneaks Rubin was stupefied. Harry Vincent and Cliff Marsland were wondering. Loy Rook was contemplating the scene before him.

The trap which had lured two victims had failed with the third. The Shadow had scented the pitfall. The cunning of the wily old Mongolian was no match for the intuition of the mysterious man in black.

Where was The Shadow?

That question predominated in Loy Rook's mind. The Chinaman glanced at the row of telltale lights in the top of the taboret. The last one still shone. The others were not illuminated. Obviously, The Shadow could not have traveled down the stairs within the wall.

It was on this point that Loy Rook's memory was at fault. He forgot the lapse of time that had followed the appearance of the last light. He had the impression that he had extinguished the row of signals immediately after the final one had appeared.

The single light still shone, because the weight of the joss was upon the floor plate that controlled it, acting as an electric switch.

One solution occurred to Loy Rook: The Shadow must be just beyond that final barrier behind the grinning idol. He must be waiting there, hesitating to descend for fear that there might be a trap behind. The bookcase at the bottom was closed. It could not be opened from within.

The Shadow was actually trapped, Loy Rook argued, but he was alive, and while he lived he was dangerous.

The Chinaman expressed this belief to Sneaks Rubin. The frail gangster grinned hideously.

"Jake Dermott and his rods are on the back street," he informed Loy Rook. "They can pump him full of lead. They're waitin' there a gang."

Loy Rook nodded. He wanted to play the game safe. He saw how it could be done.

"Are they watching the street door?" he questioned.

"You bet they are," responded Sneaks. "They'll bump off any guy that tries to come out. It wouldn't be safe even for me to try it."

"Where is Jake Dermott?"

"Up in the next street, at the Shanghai Restaurant," answered Sneaks. "Waitin' to hear from me. His gorillas are on the job."

"Call him," ordered Loy Rook, bringing a telephone from within a taboret.

While Sneaks was getting the number, Loy Rook informed him what to say.

"The street door will open," explained the old Chinaman. "He and his men can come up to the second floor. Then each bookcase will open in turn. First they will be on the second floor; then the next stairway will be before them. They can come straight up. On the way, they will meet our enemy. He will be trapped between them and the barrier."

Sneaks nodded. Jake was on the wire, now. The little gangster told him what to do. He did not mention that The Shadow was the enemy. He did not want Jake to have qualms. He knew that the new mob leader had a yellow streak.

"It's easy, Jake," insisted Sneaks. "We let the guy come in that was all arranged –"

"The boys didn't see any one go in," answered Jake's voice; "that is, any one but the guy that followed you."

"It's the same guy," lied Sneaks, realizing that The Shadow must have passed invisibly through the cordon of gangsters posted by Jake Dermott. "It'll be easy to get him, but you'll have to work fast."

"O.K.," came the reply.

Sneaks hung up the telephone and looked at Loy Rook. The wily old Chinaman grinned. He had a game to play one that would amuse himself and Sneaks Rubin.

"We are safe, here," he declared. "That door is of metal. Downstairs" he waved his hand toward the front of the house "my door is double-locked, so we can have no disturbance from there. While we wait for The Shadow to die, we can see what these men have to say."

He turned toward Cliff Marsland and Harry Vincent. He laughed at the first; he scowled at the second.

"You tried to deceive me," he said. "It did not work. Now I shall hear you speak. Tell me, who is this man you call The Shadow? The one who sent you here?"

Harry had regained his tongue, but he could scarcely speak coherently. He answered Loy Rook, announcing that he had nothing to say. Loy Rook looked at Cliff and gained a similar mumbled response.

"You will not talk?"

THE old Mongolian leered at the helpless men. He walked to the side of the room and pulled a cord that hung from a tapestry. An opening appeared in front of the dais upon which Harry and Cliff were resting. The prisoners were on the brink of a bottomless pit.

"Look down," said Loy Rook to Sneaks.

The little gangster peered into the hole and grinned. Far below he could see the glint of sharp-pointed metal

spikes. A three-story drop to a terrible death! A fitting end for these double-crossers!

"Shoot 'em down!" urged Sneaks.

"Let them talk first," declared Loy Rook.

He gazed gleefully, expectantly, through his round-rimmed spectacles, but both his intended victims remained calm. They knew that a horrible end awaited them. They realized that The Shadow must be unable to help them. But both Cliff and Harry had faced death before. They were not afraid to die.

"Will you speak?" demanded Loy Rook.

There was no reply.

The old Chinaman clutched a cord that hung above the platform.

"When this is drawn," he said, "your resting place will tilt down. You will see the death that awaits you when you are on your way below."

He paused to smile wanly as he spoke to Sneaks.

"This was once used for an elevator," said the Chinaman dryly. "It now has a better use."

Sneaks Rubin was gloating. He loved death for others, when he himself was well out of danger. He pointed to the cord and made a motion, indicating to Loy Rook to go ahead. The Chinaman waited a few seconds longer, surveying his victims with his hand upon the cord. Neither Cliff nor Harry spoke.

Loy Rook's fingers closed upon the death rope. Harry shut his eyes instinctively; then opened them boldly. He would not give this monster the pleasure of seeing him show fear. He stared deliberately at Loy Rook.

As he did so, his eyes detected a motion of the hanging draperies that covered the front doorway of the sanctum. Loy Rook's fist was clenched about the rope. His arm was about to pull

A sharp report came from the doorway. A flash of flame burst through the curtains. Loy Rook's arm fell. The cord slipped from his useless fingers.

Harry saw the rope swinging as the Chinaman's hand brushed away. His clutch had failed when the bullet had crashed into his wrist!

With a scream of anger, the old Chinaman wheeled and his other arm shot toward the rope. Loy Rook was intent upon reaching that cord before another shot could intervene. But the gun behind the curtain was too sure. It roared again. The bullet struck Loy Rook's shoulder. The Chinaman, off balance, was staggered by the terrific force of the leaden missile. He sought to save himself, but all in vain. His foot slipped on the edge of the yawning pit. Head-foremost, his arms and legs sprawling wildly, Loy Rook plunged screaming downward, headed for the death he had designed for his victims!

It was then that Harry shut his eyes. The dull fall from below was sickening. Loy Rook, pierced by the upright spikes, was crying out his agony. Two long screams that was all. But even the thought of the monster's doom brought anguish to Harry's fevered mind.

Sneaks Rubin had stood petrified. Now he sprang to action. He was well away from the curtains, toward the

narrow passageway that led to the steel barrier. With quickly clawing hand he sought to escape. He pressed the button on the wall and dived for the rear exit.

The Shadow's gun spoke from the curtains. This shot failed, for Sneaks had scurried past the edge of the protecting opening.

But that gun shot brought a wild reply from beyond the lifting barrier. Jake Dermott and his gun-toters were crouching there. They did not recognize Sneaks Rubin as he shot toward them. The little gangster went down with a dozen bullets in his heart.

Jake Dermott, keen of vision, saw a curl of smoke in the room beyond the passage. Without waiting to see whom his men had killed, he led a sudden charge.

As he dashed into the sanctum, he saw the smoke at the curtain. He raised his gun and fired, but even as his finger pressed the trigger, a bullet from The Shadow's automatic rolled him on the floor, and his shot reached the wall above the curtain.

The men who followed him three in all had seen the direction of their leader's aim. Two trained their guns upon the curtain; the other, spying the bound men, sprang forward to shoot them where they lay. But The Shadow was too quick.

With him, impressions came in fractions of a second. He had swung through the doorway. His left hand pressed the wall switch. As the room was plunged in darkness, the two gunmen fired at that fleet black form. Even as their automatics spoke, a flash of flame burst from the other side of the room.

The man who was about to slay Harry and Cliff had hesitated a moment too long. He tumbled forward, wounded; as he writhed upon the floor, he rolled into the pit where Loy Rook had fallen. His last scream of terror and agony resounded above the roaring shots.

JAKE DERMOTT'S gorillas were firing low. They knew the ways of gangsters, who crouched in darkness. But there The Shadow had outguessed them. Instantly after firing the shots that had crippled the man destined for the pit, the black-hatted figure had leaped upon a heavy table in the corner of the room.

The bullets that swept the floor missed him entirely. His return fire was unerring, despite the darkness. Silence replaced the sound of shots. The light came on, to reveal The Shadow by the curtained doorway.

Jake Dermott's two remaining men lay wounded, with emptied guns beside them. The gang leader was dead. His own men, seeking to kill The Shadow, had riddled their chief with bullets.

Paying no attention to the crippled gunmen, The Shadow found the cord that had opened the trapdoor in the floor. He loosened it, and the trapdoor closed. In a few seconds Harry and Cliff were freed by the black-clad man who leaned over them.

Groping their way, they followed The Shadow to safety down the secret stairway. They stopped as they neared the street. Black-clad arms shot out through the darkness and seized the form of a gangster stationed by the door. The man fell heavily to the sidewalk, stunned by the force of his fall.

The Shadow pushed Cliff and Harry to the street. Following his urge, they hurried toward the corner. They were alone now, running easily in order to leave the vicinity before either police or gangsters might arrive. As they jogged along side by side they heard a weird, uncanny sound that echoed between the walls of the narrow byway.

It was a mocking laugh a sardonic laugh the triumph laugh of The Shadow!

The Shadow had played the winning game. After suspecting Loy Rook's trap, he had worked the trick of the joss and had made a quick exit to the second floor before the Chinaman had closed the camouflaged doorways. He who laughed at locks had entered the third-floor sanctum by the double-barred front stairway. With his advent had passed the fiendish schemes of Loy Rook and Sneaks Rubin!

CHAPTER XIX. CARDONA'S RUSE

THE second morning after the battle at Loy Rook's, Detective Joe Cardona held a conference with Inspector Timothy Klein. The two police officers discussed the new upheaval that had startled gangland; the death of Jake Dermott, the chieftain who had replaced Dave Markan.

The gun play at Loy Rook's had been a welcome relief. It made good copy for reporters, and it was a change from the insidious methods of Double Z.

It brought gang war into the picture, and the public was accustomed to such affrays in New York. Double Z was temporarily shelved by the press. Hence Joe Cardona and his superior had experienced a breathing spell.

In his investigation of the Chinatown quarrel, Joe Cardona could find no trace of Double Z. Jake Dermott was not a gigantic figure in the underworld, and Sneaks Rubin was of trifling importance.

Nevertheless, Double Z would probably have sent one of his predicting messages if he had known that killings were on the way. Perhaps Double Z was becoming cautious. Joe hardly knew whether to be glad or sorry.

"I'd give my right eye to get the guy!" he told Inspector Klein. "If he'd only try something once again I think I could get him!"

"You think so?" quizzed Klein. "Well, Joe, you'd better get him if he shows his nose again."

The remark was not encouraging to the star detective. He had a troubled look on his face when he left.

Little did Joe Cardona suspect that Double Z had been closely concerned with that fight at Loy Rook's that three of the mad murderer's most trusted and important agents, Dermott, Rubin, and the Chinaman, had met their doom because they had meddled with The Shadow!

A mighty conflict of unseen forces had taken place, and New York's best detective had not stumbled upon a single clew!

"Double Z," thought Joe Cardona. He muttered the name as he sat by his desk. "Double Z! Will he bob up again?"

The telephone rang. Cardona answered it. He heard a strange, anxious voice at the other end asking for him.

"This is Cardona," said Joe. "Who's calling?"

"Matthew Wade," came the reply.

The detective jumped at the name. Matthew Wade! One of the biggest multimillionaires in the East! A man of great influence, and tremendous holdings which he had inherited and had afterward increased. What could

Matthew Wade want?

"What can I do for you?" asked Cardona.

"Come up to see me," replied Wade. "At my home on Fifth Avenue."

Cardona knew the place. The man of wealth still lived in a costly mansion that had belonged to his family. The detective wasted no time in further parley. He heard Wade's final instructions to make the visit confidentially. That was enough. Joe Cardona was on his way.

THE detective was ushered into a luxurious smoking room when he called at Wade's mansion. There he met the millionaire. He eyed Matthew Wade with respect. The man was not much over forty. He was tall and broad-shouldered, a typical sportsman.

Matthew Wade had hunted tigers and elephants in India. He had patrolled the South African veldt. He was a man of many parts and boundless wealth. Despite his indolence of manner and his ease of living, he showed signs of latent power and dynamic personality.

What impressed Cardona most was the expression upon Matthew Wade's face. The man was trying to seem indifferent. Actually he was ill at ease. He seemed to be repressing a dread.

"Have you spoken to any one about this visit?" inquired Wade in a tone of apprehension.

"To no one," said Cardona.

"Good," responded Wade. "Then we can talk."

He strode up and down the room several times. He finally stopped and faced Cardona. He spoke abruptly.

"It looks like trouble for me," he declared. "It's meant trouble for others before. What do you think of this?"

He pulled a crumpled paper from his pocket and thrust it into Cardona's hands. The detective's heart jumped. He recognized that crude typewriting, with the cryptic signature beneath. The message read:

You will be next! Unless you pay one million dollars, you may count on death. Instructions will come later. Tell no one!

"Is that from Double Z?" questioned Wade.

"It is," replied Cardona grimly.

The millionaire sat down suddenly. He rubbed his beaded forehead. He looked at Joe Cardona rather sheepishly.

"I'm worried," he admitted. "I don't mind dying. I can lose a million. But to be threatened and blackmailed by a crazy man! Killed, perhaps –"

Cardona was solemn. He wanted to promise Matthew Wade protection; but he knew too well the power of Double Z. Only on rare occasions months ago had Double Z failed in his predictions. Now that the unknown man had become a killer Cardona thought of Caulkins and Farmington and was silent.

DOUBLE Z

"We've got to beat him," declared Wade emphatically. "It's worth money to me if you can help me, Cardona."

"It's my duty to help you," replied the detective.

"This man must be shrewd," said Wade. "Shrewd, even though he is a maniac. He's a killer. He murdered Farmington a good friend of mine. You know, Cardona" Wade's voice became thoughtful "I wouldn't be surprised if he had hounded Judge Tolland!"

The statement brought a gasp from Cardona. His mind went back to what Joel Caulkins had told his city editor over the telephone just before the reporter met his strange death.

Until now Cardona had considered it a hoax. But with the statement coming from Matthew Wade, the case was different.

"Judge Tolland was a friend of mine," added Wade. "I know that he was honest. There were cases of gangsters coming up before him. Perhaps one of them might have concerned Double Z. I have never been able to understand Tolland's disappearance until now. But with this threat hovering over me, I can see why any man would wish to flee."

Cardona suddenly recollected that Judge Tolland had been pressing investigations at the time of his disappearance. One of them had involved members of Dave Markan's gang. Rumors had said that Tolland was bought off. Certain it was that the investigations had ceased when the justice had disappeared.

"I'd like to rely on you, Cardona," said Wade. "But you know too well that the police have been unable to cope with this murderous man."

"We'll keep the threat out of the papers," began Cardona.

"That won't do," argued Wade. "Publicity might help us rather than hinder. Think of my viewpoint. I want to be beyond the reach of Double Z. If I –"

"How about leaving town," suggested Cardona. "Start on one of your trips to –"

"I might be followed. We've got to do more than that. We must deceive the man completely. If he thought that I was dead –"

CARDONA pondered. He was anxious to be of aid to Matthew Wade. The last suggestion was a happy one.

"If you were dead," said Cardona, taking up the uncompleted sentence, "there would be no fear from Double Z. For the time at least. Your death is what he wants provided that he cannot get his million. You have given us a tip to-day. At last we have learned that he is after money. But as I said, if you were dead if he thought you were dead –"

Matthew Wade brightened suddenly.

"You've got it, Cardona!" he exclaimed. "Fake my death! Make him think I'm dead!"

"That would be difficult," mused Cardona.

"I can do it," said Wade eagerly. "I can do it. Perfectly. But you've got to be with me because I'm coming back later."

DOUBLE Z

"How can you work it?" asked Cardona.

"Listen," said Wade. "I've got a great plane a Lockwood Aryan that travels two hundred and fifty miles an hour. Suppose I set out for Florida with my pilot. Followed the shore line and disappeared –"

"I get you," said Cardona, "but where –"

"Where would I land?" Wade laughed. "I've got a thousand-acre place in North Carolina. A landing field there that the natives don't even know about. My pilot I can trust. We'll put in there; and I'll lay low until something breaks that will give you a line on Double Z."

"It ought to work," declared Cardona. "It ought to work. Your affairs here, though –"

"That's easy!" exclaimed Wade. "I'm always set to travel somewhere. I leave for Florida unexpectedly. No one knows about it until after I'm gone. I may be off on a long trip. My plane is presumably lost at sea. What happens here?"

"They settle your estate," said Cardona shortly.

"Not right away," replied Wade. "They haven't found the body. There's no proof that I'm dead. They've got to wait.

"Meanwhile, you may have this Double Z mess under control. If it comes to a pinch and I have to get back, you can notify me. I'll be living in comfort, and Double Z will think that death cheated him of a victim."

The big man began to chuckle. His whole manner had changed. Cardona began to admire the merits of the scheme, particularly because he had been its sponsor.

"That's a go?" asked Wade, proffering his hand.

"Yes," said Cardona, shaking.

"Keep the letter," said Wade. "Hold it for evidence. Not a word to any one my life depends on it!"

"You can count on me," said Cardona, and Wade could tell that the detective meant it. Joe Cardona was a man of his word.

"You're the only person I'm trusting," said Wade solemnly. "The only one except my pilot, and he'll be with me."

"Right," said Cardona.

On his way back to headquarters, the detective's ears still rang with the congratulations which Wade had showered upon him for bringing the thought that had led to this magnificent scheme. They had made the final arrangements. Cardona was to keep his knowledge to himself and to wait for word from Wade. The millionaire, his confidence restored, had shown a return of bravery.

"I might decide to come back," he had said in parting. "Incognito, you know. If I do, the one place I'll pop up will be in your office. I like danger, Cardona, if I have a chance to study it. I can do that better in North Carolina than there."

DOUBLE Z

Long after midnight a small coupe slipped away from a side entrance of Matthew Wade's home. It traveled to a Long Island airport. There Matthew Wade boarded his plane. The motor whirred; the ship rose and pointed down along the Jersey coast.

Only a few persons present knew who was in the plane. The news spread. There was an item for the newspapers. Matthew Wade had suddenly left New York.

Joe Cardona was among the persons who saw the plane leave. He breathed a sigh of relief when he saw it safely off. He thought that he alone saw significance in the departure. But he was wrong. Another observer had seen the plane leave a man in a long, dark coat with upturned collar and broad-brimmed slouch hat.

This man was standing in the background as the plane left the ground. He laughed as the speedy airplane ascended, and his laugh was a strange one. It was weird but mirthless, that laugh. It was a laugh that would have startled Joe Cardona had he heard it, for the eerie sound was the laugh of The Shadow!

How had the mysterious man of the dark arrived at that spot? Only he knew. His presence there proved that he was ever alert; that through his own observation, or through that of his agents, The Shadow had learned of Joe Cardona's visit to the home of Matthew Wade.

But the detective did not know of The Shadow's presence. The dark-clad man was scarcely visible upon the gloomy field, over which the faint gray of dawn was just appearing. His laugh, too, was unnoticed. It was lost in the roar of the departing plane.

CHAPTER XX. CARDONA'S TRIUMPH

A WIZENED old man sat in a little room, staring over the curving banks of the Harlem River. He was in a veritable watchtower the third story of an old building on the border of the Bronx. On the desk before him lay a pile of newspapers.

The old man laughed and showed his toothless gums. He was gloating happily. He picked up a newspaper and read its screaming headlines. He laid his head upon the desk and chuckled convulsively.

The headlines which so pleased the old man dealt with the death of Matthew Wade. The famous millionaire sportsman had been lost at sea in his airplane. But it was the wording of that heading that caused the wizened man's greatest glee. It flashed its message for all the world to see:

WADE A VICTIM OF DOUBLE Z PLOT

While the old man still chuckled wildly, a buzzer sounded. The hideous creature pressed a button at the side of his desk. He held it with his thumb while a portion of the opposite wall moved aside.

A short man stepped through the opening. The old man raised his thumb from the button. The wall closed. The man who had entered turned. It was Luke Froy, the Chinese-American.

The newcomer sat down beside the desk. He waited for the old man's wild chuckling to end. The last spasm ceased, and the wizened creature stared at his visitor.

"I have followed your instructions, sir," he said.

"You mailed just one letter?"

DOUBLE Z

"Yes, Mr. Shellmann."

The old man became solemn. He picked up an envelope that lay upon the desk. It bore the name of Zachary Shellmann, typed in neat letters. Shellmann tore the envelope to bits and carefully burned the pieces.

"Is everything safe, Luke?" he inquired seriously.

"Yes, sir. Of course, that trouble at Loy Rook's is still a slight source of worry to me –"

Luke Froy noted an expression of annoyance on Zachary Shellmann's face. He hastened to reassure the old man.

"It is too bad, that's all," he said. "The police have no idea of my connection there."

"That is good," exclaimed the old man with satisfaction. "That is good. Look at this, Luke" he passed the newspaper to the Chinaman "read it to me. I long to hear it –"

Luke Froy read:

"Matthew Wade was killed by Double Z. Again the police have bungled. Detective Joe Cardona now admits receiving a message from Double Z. He stated that he had intended to keep secret, to protect Wade. This letter was received at headquarters on Monday morning.

"Exactly twenty–four hours later, while Wade and his pilot were winging southward, every newspaper office in New York city received a duplicate of the message which had been sent to Cardona. In view of this, it is safe to say that the disappearance of the plane was engineered by Double Z –"

While the old man leaned back and chuckled in delight, like some child pleased with a new toy, Luke Froy continued reading:

"– unless Joe Cardona can trace the source of the Double Z messages before to–morrow midnight, a new detective will be assigned to the case. It is well known that Cardona's failure has jeopardized his job. Those in the know state emphatically that the colorful sleuth's career has reached its end."

A new outburst of merriment came from old Zachary Shellmann. He made his attendant read and reread the passage that had pleased him so much. At last the wizened madman gained control of himself.

Luke Froy turned his head aside to keep the old man from seeing the look of pathos that had come over his features.

"There is one bad thing," said Shellmann. "Somewhere in the paper I read that the secret service is investigating. They did that before. I do not like them, Luke."

"They can do nothing," said the Chinaman.

"I suppose not." The old man stared from the window. "You mail each letter from a different post box, Luke?"

"Yes, sir."

"That one package you received some time ago. The poison from Loy Rook. You did not mail that, did you?"

DOUBLE Z

"No, sir. I told you all about it at the time. I left the box of li-shun on the doorstep of the empty house on Ninety-eighth Street and came back here immediately, as you instructed me."

"I recall it now, Luke," said the old man. His tone suddenly changed. "So poor Loy Rook is dead. He was a good friend to me, Luke. I knew him in Shanghai thirty years ago. At the time I adopted you, Luke."

"Yes, sir."

"He helped me, Luke, when times were hard two years ago. Then that day you came back from his place ah! That was the beginning of this wonderful life!"

"Yes, sir."

"When I say 'Kill!' men die! Ha-ha-ha-ha—" The voice of the old man trailed away, and once again he gave way to a spasm of convulsive, mad laughter. At last he regained control of himself. He became solemn again.

"That last letter, Luke. You mailed it to police headquarters."

"I did, sir."

"What will this absurd detective say when he reads it?"

Luke Froy shrugged his shoulders.

"He will be afraid to show it to any one! He will be afraid to keep it hidden! Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha—"

WHEN the old man's outburst had ended, he became very serious. He went to a corner of the room, where a pair of earphones and a mouthpiece rested. He donned the earphones and held the mouthpiece before him. He glanced at the clock and waited. Luke Froy was speaking. The old man saw his lips move and removed the earphones.

"What is it, Luke?" he demanded querulously. "Do not interrupt—"

"You expect no message to-day, sir. Don't you recall—"

"Ah, yes. You remember everything, Luke. By the way" the old man became suddenly apprehensive "are you sure that all is well? You are careful when you come and go? You are sure no—"

"I use the utmost caution, sir. I went to Loy Rook's that one night, as you ordered. I am watchful when I mail the letters."

"Very good," said the old man. "You are faithful, Luke. You have always been faithful."

"You have been very good to me, sir."

"Ah, yes. Perhaps. But you are faithful. You have helped me in my great work. You have helped me wonderfully. You bring every letter that comes to me. You mail all that I give you. Every envelope is destroyed.

"That one I just burned had you noticed it, it would not have been on my desk. I am forgetful, Luke. I am getting old. I was young once. I saw much. In China, when you were a little boy."

DOUBLE Z

"You saw my father die."

"Yes. I looked on without moving while he was beheaded with twenty others. Then I took you, Luke. Everywhere with me. I have been a father to you, Luke."

"You have, sir."

"Luke" a serious expression came over the old man's face "Luke, you must not stay here. Go back and see that all is well. The steel door in your room. It must be barred. Keep it that way always."

The Chinaman bowed and walked to the wall. The old man pressed the button while his attendant walked through the opening. The wall closed. The old man stared from the window.

Dusk was gathering. Lights were glimmering on the Harlem. Shellmann crept across the room and drew the shade of the single window. He turned on a small wall light. He drew a loaded revolver from the desk drawer. He sat with the gun poised.

"To-night," he muttered happily. "To-night two more! They die like those heads dropped off in Shanghai! But I must watch. Danger comes after dark. I can depend on Luke –"

His voice trailed away. His head began to nod. The hand that held the revolver was lowered to the desk. The gray head rested on the arm. The old man slept.

AT headquarters, Joe Cardona paced back and forth, smiting each fist alternately against the opposite palm.

"Double Z!" he growled. "If they'd only give me a chance! This business to-night well, I'm guarding the place. Men inside the house. No one suspects this last letter it's only natural that I might have men up at Wade's!

"They think Wade's dead! If I told them different, it would save my skin. But what if I do tell? Then he's prey for Double Z. I've got one chance to get the man himself. To die by my own hand."

Cardona was repeating words that he could not forget. He brought his fist against his palm and cried aloud:

"If I could only pull something now! Only how" he walked back and forth a full minute, then repeated "if I could only find out where those letters come from –"

He paused to stare at a man who had entered the office. It was the man who had come there one time before Terry Blake, of the secret-service.

"Perhaps I can help you," said the new arrival.

"To find the source of the Double Z letters?" quizzed Cardona.

"Yes."

"Where is it?"

"I can take you there."

"When?"

"Now."

"How many men will I need?"

"Bring two."

Cardona reached grimly for his hat.

"One moment," said Blake. "Has anything new developed?"

Cardona thought quickly. He remembered that Tim Malloy had wondered that Terry Blake was in town. Joe's face was turned away. He assumed a calm expression, so that his face would not betray the fact that he did know something which might be of interest to Terry Blake.

"Nothing has come up," he said quietly as he faced the secret-service man. "Why?"

"I thought some business might be more pressing than this which I suggest."

"Nothing could be more important than that."

Joe Cardona seized the phone and called for two detectives. They arrived promptly. The four men hurried into a police car.

"Where to?" asked Cardona.

Blake gave a destination in the Bronx.

As the car sped northward, Joe Cardona began to wonder about Terry Blake. The man's manner reminded him of some one. Here, in the dark, the resemblance was most pronounced. Who was it, thought Cardona a man whom he had met at night a man whom

Before Cardona's mind had caught the resemblance, Blake spoke. In another second Cardona might have realized that Blake reminded him of The Shadow. But the interruption turned his thoughts.

"My men have been watching this place," explained the speaker without adding who his men were. "I have been in there myself. I have fixed it for our entrance. But it isn't my job. I'm working independently. The pinch belongs to you, Cardona."

"Thanks," said the detective. "I'll need it. My job's hanging by a hair right now."

The police car was crossing the Harlem River. It stopped at a spot indicated by Terry Blake. The four men left and crept forward toward an old house. Cardona began to wonder again. The ease with which Blake moved was amazing. They came to a side door. Blake produced a key. The door opened.

"Leave the men here," instructed Blake, "until we call them."

Cardona followed upstairs. At a nudge from Blake, he unlimbered his automatic. They stopped before a solid door.

Cardona watched the tiny ray of a little flashlight which Blake had produced. A thin, flat piece of metal glowed in the secret-service man's hand. Delicately Blake wedged it in the crack of the door.

DOUBLE Z

Cardona repressed a gasp. A portion of the door had been cut away evidently some time before so neatly that the eye could not have noticed it. This was Blake's preparation!

Cardona noted the slender white hand that handled the thin piece of metal so smoothly. Now he saw muscles quiver; the metal moved noiselessly. In miraculous fashion Blake was lifting up a latched bar on the other side of the door yet not a sound could be heard!

THE door moved now. The flashlight went out. Beams of light came through the crack. Blake slid through. Cardona followed, but Blake had moved so rapidly that Cardona was left well behind.

Within the room the detective discovered the secret-service man, gun in hand, covering a startled Chinaman who had been sitting in a chair.

The captive was garbed in American clothes. He had risen when Blake had surprised him, and now stood half out of the chair, his hands above his head.

"Get your men," whispered Blake.

Cardona summoned his detectives. At Blake's order they pressed the muzzles of their guns against the Chinaman's body.

"If he says one word," ordered Blake, "shoot him. Not a sound or we kill!"

The secret-service man went to the opposite wall. He ran his hands up and down from side to side. At last he found a spot that suited him. He looked at the Chinaman.

"Is it three taps or four?" he questioned.

Luke Froy did not reply.

"Come," said Blake. "I heard you once when I was outside. It sounded like three taps" the Chinaman's lips curled almost imperceptibly, but Blake detected the motion as a suppressed smile "but I'll try four!"

He beckoned to Cardona. With the detective at his side, Blake tapped four times against the wall. There was no response. He tapped harder. Cardona was astounded as the wall slid away; then, coming to his senses, he rushed into the next room.

An old man was raising his head from a desk. As his wild eyes saw the attackers, he seized a revolver that lay before him. Blake made a headlong dive as the old man rose. His quick hand caught the wrist that held the revolver and turned it aside just as the maniac pressed the trigger.

Blake was trying to capture the man alive, but Cardona spoiled the plan. Seeing the threat, the detective fired instinctively, and his bullets crashed into Zachary Shellmann's brain.

The old man dropped dead, his wizened body sprawled in a pitiful heap.

"Double Z!" shouted Cardona. "Double Z! We've got him! We've got him!"

The detective's eager eyes were taking in the scene the earphones and the mouthpiece, the pile of clippings. He forgot the body and shoved a sheet of paper into a rickety typewriter in the corner. He struck off a line of letters and studied them.

DOUBLE Z

"This looks like it!" he cried.

The keen eyes of Terry Blake were noting the typed characters. A frown appeared upon his forehead; then a gleam of understanding. The letters were identical to those of the Double Z notes.

Blake swung into the other room.

"Go in there and help Cardona," he said to the detectives. "I'll watch this man."

As soon as the plain-clothes men had gone, Blake spoke to Luke Froy. Curiously, the secret-service man's words were in the Chinese native dialect that Luke Froy used. A puzzled look appeared upon his face. Then he began to plead in his native tongue. He was looking squarely into the eyes of his inquisitor, and in those eyes Luke Froy saw understanding. He made a short statement and Blake stopped him.

"What!" the secret-service man exclaimed in English. "Another letter?"

Luke Froy nodded.

"Cardona!" called Blake.

A REPLY came from the other room. Cardona's face appeared. He saw the secret-service man covering the Chinaman with a gun.

"Did you get a Double Z letter today?"

"Yes," admitted Cardona. This was the statement he had held back at headquarters. "Here it is. But it doesn't mean anything now. We've got Double Z."

Blake seized the paper. He read the message aloud:

"Barnaby Hotchkiss. Blaine Glover. To-night. They are to die by my own hand."

"See?" said Cardona. "Signed by Double Z and we've got him! Just found out his name, Zachary Shellmann. There's the Z for you –"

"Where are Hotchkiss and Glover?" asked Blake.

"At Matthew Wade's. They've gone there to take care of some affairs for him. He wrote them to be there tonight. My men are watching the place, but it's safe now. Double Z is dead."

For an instant the detective was off his guard. In that moment Luke Froy leaped forward and seized Cardona's gun. Blake never moved. As Cardona made a clutch forward, the Chinaman turned the automatic to his own breast and fired. Luke Froy fell, dying, to the floor.

"Too bad," murmured Blake as Cardona stood stupefied by Luke Froy's unexpected action. Blake leaned forward and spoke to the Chinaman. His words were low, and in Luke Froy's native tongue.

"You did well to tell me," was his statement.

"He is dead my master –" gasped Luke Froy. "He is gone so I can speak! I could not before! Now he is dead so I die, too!"

DOUBLE Z

The death rattle was in the Chinaman's throat. Blake arose and faced Cardona.

"I'm leaving," he said. "You've got the old man and his accomplice. The rest is up to you."

He caught Cardona's hand, which the detective proffered in thanks. Then Blake wheeled and strode from the room. He hurried down the stairs and out into the night, where he was swallowed in the blackness. Terry Blake was Terry Blake no longer he had become The Shadow!

But upstairs in the old house, Joe Cardona knew nothing of that. He ordered his men to carry out the bodies, while he continued his search among Zachary Shellmann's papers. For this was Joe Cardona's hour of triumph. He had slain Double Z!

CHAPTER XXI. THE SHADOW'S WORK

BEFORE the great house of Matthew Wade, detectives were still on watch. Within were other plain-clothes men. Joe Cardona, working in the Bronx, had not yet sent word for them to leave.

Only two men had been allowed to enter the building that night. They were Barnaby Hotchkiss and Blaine Glover men of great wealth, and old friends of Matthew Wade, who was supposedly dead. They had come there in answer to letters mailed by Wade before he had departed on his ill-fated flight.

They were in the smoking room, going over papers that he had instructed them to examine.

"You think there's danger here tonight?" questioned Hotchkiss.

"Perhaps so," said Glover warily. "That detective Cardona told us that he was worried for our safety. But with all these men on duty –"

"A good precaution," was the other's comment. "Perhaps he has some inkling that this criminal is after us, too. But this is probably the best place for us to be. We are amply protected, I feel positive!"

OUTSIDE the mansion a plain-clothes man was guarding the side door – the very door where Matthew Wade had left in his coupe when he had started for the flying field.

The driveway was narrow and dark. The detective looked toward the street. He fancied that he had seen something move. He pulled his flashlight from his pocket and stepped to the center of the drive. The torch gleamed.

Only a flickering shadow showed momentarily. The sleuth thought nothing of it. He still watched down the driveway. He did not hear a slight sound by the door in back of him.

A man had entered the hallway of Matthew Wade's home. He stood in a narrow passageway, each side a paneled wall. There was no light there. A door blocked his path in front; he had closed the door behind him. He knew that a detective was on the opposite side of the barrier ahead. One patrolled the driveway outside the door in back.

Only one man could have entered so silently, and that man was The Shadow!

It was he who stood alone in the silent passageway. The smoking room was beyond the inner door and to the right. But The Shadow did not advance. Instead, he felt along the panels at his right. They were exquisite, highly finished oak panels. That was not visible in the dark; but visitors to Wade's home had often noticed

them when the passage was illuminated.

Lamont Cranston had visited Wade's home on several occasions. He, too, had noted those panels. He had often wanted to run his hands along them, but had desisted when in the guise of Lamont Cranston.

But as The Shadow, in solid darkness, the man who now stood in the passageway was free to investigate. He was working quickly and skillfully, searching with greatest pains, but losing no time in his efforts.

Slender, tapering fingers found a spot which yielded. They pressed slowly, cautiously. One of the lower panels slid aside, without the slightest noise. A body slipped through. The panel closed.

A LONG, narrow room, low and windowless a pitch-black den.

Silence reigned in the place. Then came a low muttering. The rays of a tiny flashlight suddenly appeared and glowed upon the wall. A hand pressed a button. A dim illumination filled the room.

It revealed a man seated by a table upon which rested a pair of earphones and a mouthpiece. In front of the man was a peculiar instrument a little box with a tiny dial on the top.

The man's face was hidden as he looked downward. He stretched his hand forward. His fingers rested on the knob, about to turn it. Then his hands spread and he looked up suddenly as he fancied he heard a noise near by.

The man was Matthew Wade. A strange, evil look was on his full face. He stared down the corridorlike room in momentary alarm. Then he became transfixed. From the other end of the room a figure stepped forward. A man was approaching, clad in black. His face was hidden in the folds of a black cloak. A slouch hat covered his eyes. An automatic showed in his outstretched hand a hand that wore a silken glove of black.

"The Shadow!"

The dread name was gasped by Matthew Wade.

"Yes!" came a hissing voice. "The Shadow! Come to end the fiendish schemes of a murderer!"

"I am in my home," growled Wade without moving his hands.

"The home of a monster," came The Shadow's whisper.

"You can prove nothing!" exclaimed Wade.

A low, whispered laugh was the reply. It struck terror into Wade's evil heart. The laugh seemed more fearful than the man who uttered it!

"Listen," came the Shadow's accusation. "I shall tell the story of your crimes the crimes which I have discovered and have pieced together.

"Matthew Wade a man who loved to kill! A big-game hunter who looked for bigger game human game! A man of wealth jealous of the power wielded by lords of the underworld. Inspired by an evil desire to gain such power for himself!

"I have not only learned your crimes. I have fought against them. One by one I have met your underlings.

DOUBLE Z

Tonight the last of them are gone all but Tony Marano and evidence will soon reach the police to put him where he belongs in prison, as a murderer.

"Your first victim was your friend, Judge Harvey Tolland. You tried to bribe him to spare Tony Marano, against whom he had evidence. Why? Because you believed Marano would be useful to you. Tolland refused. You drove him away with a threatening message the first of the so-called Double Z letters. He hid and was safe for many months.

"That began your reign of terror. Cautious, first, you used Sneaks Rubin, a man who brought you information. You obtained him through Loy Rook. You had learned of Loy Rook in Shanghai. You knew he was as evil as yourself a man who loved crime. You felt that you could trust him.

"Through Rubin's information you tipped the police on crime for three reasons: to frighten Tolland, who was in hiding; to make your name feared; to bring confusion to important figures in the underworld.

"You thwarted Lombrosi. You performed a job that he feared to do the killing of Philip Farmington. That was my first clue the subtle poison, li-shun. Only Loy Rook could know of it. You, as a guest in Farmington's home, put the poisoned cigar in his desk the night before he died.

"You had the killer desire even before that. Necessity had forced it on you when you had discovered Judge Tolland's hiding place.

"You entered there to kill. You were just in time. Tolland was giving away your secret. To a newspaper reporter Caulkins. You killed them both. You removed Tolland's body. It was carried away by one of your underlings probably by Jake Dermott!"

Matthew Wade's gasp showed that The Shadow's impeachment was true. The murderer could only stare at this strange being from nowhere who had come to make him listen to his crimes.

"The death of Arnold Bodine represented a temporary drawback from the joy of killing," continued The Shadow. "One of my agents sought to thwart it but failed. With Bodine's death and the elimination of Markan and Lombrosi, you ruled supreme. The biggest of all big shots. A man who needed no hide-out because your identity was unknown.

"But there you encountered The Shadow. You sought to combat this unknown enemy who you knew was more powerful than the police, so far as you were concerned. You failed. Your hirelings were slain. Worst of all for you your great ally, Loy Rook, perished.

"For once you knew fright. But you were clever. You conspired to kill yourself! Double Z threatened Matthew Wade!"

THE SHADOW'S mirthless laugh expressed the ironic humor of this situation.

"But I knew you by then, Matthew Wade," went on the man in black. "Your strength your knowledge your intelligence all pointed to a man above the gangster type. Your ruse did not fool me, as it did Cardona. I waited for your next move.

"I come now to the most fiendish part of all your schemes. The notes from Double Z. They appeared to be the work of a maniac. You wanted a perfect alibi. You found one through Loy Rook.

"Old Zachary Shellmann had known Loy Rook in China. There, Shellmann had adopted a Chinese boy, Luke

DOUBLE Z

Froy, who loved him as he would love a father. In New York, in an old house in the Bronx, Shellmann became afflicted with a mad desire to kill. Luke Froy nursed him. They were short on funds. He went to Loy Rook.

"They suddenly had money. Everything that the old man wished was his. Luke Froy encouraged the killer desire because it was the only thing that made the old man happy.

"Letters came to him your letters the Double Z notes. He copied them. He used your cryptic signature. He sent them to their destinations. Luke Froy mailed them. The young Chinaman knew that it was wrong; but he feared to oppose Loy Rook, and he kept on to please his foster-father.

"Luke Froy knew nothing except that letters came, and that Zachary Shellmann received phone calls from an unknown source. Those calls came from this very room. The old man gloated over your crimes. He felt that he had played a part in them.

"Twice Luke Froy went to Loy Rook's: once for the li-shun; again to deliver a note which the old man had written to Loy Rook at your order. That was the instruction for my capture. A plot that failed.

"Now, even though you fear me, The Shadow, and your power has waned, you have attempted crime again. Supposedly dead, actually in hiding, you have not been able to repress your desire to kill. You are here to murder your two friends, Hotchkiss and Glover!

"I can recognize your method. An infernal machine planted in your smoking room, where these men have come because they were your friends. A twist of that dial which you are now afraid to touch the machine will be exploded by remote control. But that plot shall never succeed!"

The Shadow paused and studied the man at the table. Matthew Wade became frenzied.

"The proof!" he screamed. "the proof of what you say!"

"Shellmann died to-night," said The Shadow quietly. "Luke Froy, stricken by the old man's death, told me his story with his own lips before he committed suicide. It was he who revealed that a final letter had been sent a letter which Detective Cardona had kept to himself."

"You think that I am Double Z?" demanded Wade.

"I know that you are Double Z!" said The Shadow.

"Prove it!" cried Wade. "Prove it!"

THE SHADOW advanced. His left hand reached to the table. It seized a paper and pencil that lay there. With two quick motions, The Shadow's left hand made the mark of Double Z one letter half a line above the other. He turned the paper sideways. He made the signature again, but this time he formed the strokes at an angle and drew the lines in different order.

"Double Z," declared The Shadow in a low voice. "Double Z to some M. W. to others!"

Matthew Wade stared at the sheet of paper with its telltale marks.

"One man recognized your symbol," said The Shadow. "Judge Tolland understood after he received your message. He had heard from you before it came he knew your handiwork. You left that note with Caulkins

DOUBLE Z

—"

Wade's hands shot forward. One went by The Shadow's left arm and seized the wrist that held the gun. The other reached for the knob upon the box that controlled the infernal machine. But the dial was not turned. The Shadow's left hand struck Wade's hand away. The two grappled and staggered down the long room.

It was a grim fight in that strange compartment. Matthew Wade was struggling with the one man whom he feared; and as he realized that The Shadow was only human, he fought with added frenzy.

He was making a desperate attempt to defeat the man in the black cloak when fortune favored him. The Shadow tripped and staggered backward. Wade's heavy body bore him to the floor.

With one hand the murderous millionaire pressed The Shadow's head against the boards; with the other he gripped the muzzle of the automatic and wrested it from The Shadow's grasp.

Only The Shadow's forefinger still clutched the pistol, hooked firmly in the trigger guard. Wade, with a wild cry of success, wrenched the gun directly toward himself. The Shadow's slipping finger was drawn violently against the trigger. A loud report echoed through the soundproof room. Matthew Wade collapsed slowly to the soft carpet.

The muzzle had been against his chest, the bullet passing through his heart. Matthew Wade lay dead.

JOE CARDONA'S sentinels did not see the figure in black step through a panel in the passageway that led to the side door of Matthew Wade's home. The panel closed. The door opened to the driveway. The Shadow stepped forth unsteadily. He paused a moment to drink in deep breaths of fresh air. Then he merged with the night and moved through darkness, phantomlike, a being unseen.

Behind him, hidden in the secret room, lay the body of Matthew Wade, the man who had posed as Double Z, the multimillionaire who had not been satisfied with wealth alone.

That man had sought the power which only crime could bring. He had dealt death; but his career was finished now. Matthew Wade lay buried in an unknown tomb. The reign of the arch-criminal had been ended by The Shadow!

Outside, all unwitting of the epic struggle that had just ended within, Cardona's watchers were startled by the sound of a low, throbbing laugh that seemed to taunt their vigilant inactivity. The weird sound persisted softly for a few minutes, then died away.

The Shadow had gone his way victorious, to resume his perpetual fight against the underworld in some other quarter. What horrible plot against the public safety would next attract his attention?

Only The Shadow knew!

THE END