

THE SEVEN DROPS OF BLOOD

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I. DEALERS OF DEATH

SIRENS shrilled along Fifth Avenue. Their whine rose above the hubbub of the heavy traffic, where snorting taxicabs were poking their way past automobiles and shooting in front of lumbering busses. It was quarter past eight in the evening, a time when through traffic chose Fifth Avenue in preference to the jammed routes near Times Square.

The splitting sirens were answered by the whistles of traffic officers, who motioned cars toward the curbs. Gawkers atop the double-decked busses craned to watch a pair of motorcycles zigzag through the traffic. Behind came an armored truck, manned by uniformed policemen; another pair of motorcycle cops formed a rear guard.

The cavalcade roared southward; reached a cross street and swung left. Before the traffic officer could blow his whistle to start cars moving, a big limousine detached itself from the congestion and sped after the convoyed truck. The traffic cop started to blow his whistle, then grinned instead, deciding that the limousine had not violated the left turn rule.

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Half a block east of Fifth Avenue, the limousine stopped just in back of the halted armored truck. On the right was a pretentious doorway that bore a large sign:

KIRK PETTIGREW

Private Auctions

Two plain-clothes men were giving the nod to unload the armored truck. They hesitated when they saw the limousine; watched the big car while the chauffeur opened the rear door.

A lone passenger stepped to the curb. He was clad in evening clothes; his well-formed face carried a masklike expression. He was tall, leisurely in action. Apparently oblivious to the police, he produced a briefcase from the limousine and waved for the chauffeur to depart.

The car rolled away. The plain-clothes men nodded anew to the officers who guarded the truck. Meanwhile, the tall arrival strolled through a storelike room that formed the front of the auction house. He reached a heavy door that bore the sign:

AUCTION GALLERY

Another pair of plain-clothes men let him pass: for his appearance required no question. The tall visitor entered a long room where two dozen people were seated. At each side of the room were curtained doorways. Each of these was guarded by a detective. There were two more doorways at the far end of the gallery. They were also curtained, each guarded by a stolid detective. Between the end doors was a platform, where a wizened-faced auctioneer stood.

An attendant approached the calm-faced arrival and asked for the invitation card required as admittance ticket. The visitor supplied one that bore the name "Lamont Cranston." The attendant carried the card to the platform; the auctioneer read it and nodded. The attendant dropped the card in a square-shaped platinum box. While this was taking place, a stocky, swarthy-faced man approached the new arrival and spoke the greeting:

"Good evening, Mr. Cranston."

A SLIGHT smile showed upon the fixed lips of Lamont Cranston. Keen eyes displayed a momentary flash. The swarthy-faced man was Acting Inspector Joe Cardona, of the New York police. His presence indicated that he was in charge of the law's forces.

"Good evening, inspector," came the calm, even tone of Cranston. "Quite a surprise to meet you here. Do you actually expect trouble at this auction? Or are you following one of your hunches?"

Cardona grinned.

"You're a friend of Commissioner Weston," he said, "so you ought to know how little regard he has for any of my hunches. Since you know the commissioner, I guess I can tell you what this is all about."

Cranston's calm face showed mild interest. Cardona looked about, saw that no one was close by, then spoke in a low tone.

"It was a tip-off," he informed. "From The Shadow. I got one; so did the commissioner. They tallied. If you ask me, I'd say that The Shadow was acting on a hunch. But if you'd ever heard that voice of his over the telephone – an uncanny sort of whisper – you wouldn't argue matters."

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Cardona turned to watch the main doorway. It had opened; police from the armored truck were bringing in display cases, carrying them to the platform. The smile on the lips of Cranston showed a slight increase, and with good reason.

This personage whom both Commissioner Weston and Inspector Cardona knew as Lamont Cranston was actually The Shadow. A master sleuth, who aided the law in its battles against crime, The Shadow used the identity of Cranston to keep close to the activities of the police.

Neither Weston nor Cardona had ever guessed the double part that The Shadow played. Sometimes, though, one or the other gained inklings of The Shadow's plans and purposes. Joe Cardona, for one, had made a good guess tonight. Joe thought that The Shadow had sent a tip-off purely on a hunch. Cardona was right; that was why The Shadow smiled.

The magnitude of tonight's auction was something that the law had overlooked. The little, withered man on the platform was Kirk Pettigrew, whose size was no measurement of his importance in his chosen line. Pettigrew was the biggest auctioneer in New York. He specialized in the sale of jewels, thought nothing of auctioning off half a million dollars' worth at one time.

Police were always present at Pettigrew's auctions; but a few competent bluecoats and a pair of detectives had been considered sufficient in the past. In watching announcements of Pettigrew's scheduled auctions, The Shadow had observed that the present one was to involve more than two million dollars in gems. The Shadow knew that crooks could easily gain the same news.

Pettigrew, accustomed to the routine of auctions, had not realized the danger. The police, expecting the auctioneer to inform them if he needed extra guards, had not been aware of the situation. The Shadow's tip-off – whether founded on known menace, or merely given as a hunch – was so coldly logical that it had awakened the law to prompt action.

"TWO million in jewels," confided Cardona to The Shadow, while police were placing the showcases under Pettigrew's direction. "Yet Pettigrew was going through with it, just like any other auction. He intended to have the jewels here an hour beforehand, with only two men to watch them. I changed his plans for him."

Cardona paused, while the outside officers left the platform and departed by the main door. The four detectives at the curtained doorways retained their posts.

"We stowed the jewels in the bank vault," explained Cardona. "Pettigrew came in here alone, to greet the customers when they arrived. He told them all that the gems would arrive later. I showed up just after eight o'clock, bringing a squad of eight men with me. I posted four outside, four in here. Then I sent word for the armored truck to start from the bank."

The Shadow looked about, eyed Cardona's arrangement with approval. His eyes took on a far-away gaze, as though wondering what lay beyond the velvet-curtained doorways where detectives were on guard.

Cardona noted the questioning expression that showed itself on the features of Cranston. Anxious to gain the full approval of the commissioner's friend, Cardona produced a penciled diagram.

The chart showed the auction gallery – a long, rectangular room, with passages on three sides. Those at the left and right could be reached by the doorways at the sides. The third passage was beyond the far end of the auction gallery. The two doors past the platform opened into it.

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"This place used to be two buildings," stated Cardona, pointing to the diagram. "Pettigrew made one place out of them; but he couldn't alter the old hallways on account of permanent walls. As soon as I came here, earlier in the evening, I saw that those three passages would be good spots for crooks to hide in. So I inspected them.

"They're all walled up and empty. The only way to get directly into them is through an outer door off from the back passage. That door is plate steel; it has three automatic locks on it, with special keys. Not only that, but the only place it leads into is a courtyard that has all solid walls. Crooks couldn't come from there. If they tried to get away through the courtyard, they'd be bottled."

The Shadow nodded. People were crowding up to the platform to view the exhibit of gems. The Shadow strolled forward. Cardona kept at his elbow, adding in an undertone:

"Just to be sure of everything, I left a detective at the steel door, after we'd tried the keys and found the locks O.K. Pettigrew only has two sets of keys. He gave me one and kept the other. The man I left at the steel door was Lacey, one of the best I've got. He has stayed out of sight. After I stationed Lacey, I came here and told Pettigrew to get ready for the auction. He stayed in this room until I moved in with the squad. Lacey is at his post."

THEY reached the platform. The Shadow, though he seemed but casually interested in all that Cardona had said, had actually considered every detail. He was satisfied that the law had been thorough in its precautions. That settled, The Shadow turned his attention to the displayed gems.

Kirk Pettigrew, wizened even to the top of his bald head, was beaming as he pointed out the magnificent gems that he intended soon to auction. He was also eyeing the customers present, observing that they included some of the wealthiest persons in New York.

There were four large, glass-topped cases in the display. Each was divided into velvet-lined sections. One case displayed a resplendent array of diamonds set in pendants, necklaces and brooches. These were from various collections; some of the pieces were of huge value and they stood out conspicuously among the lesser items.

Two cases contained gems of other sorts. They, like the first, had prize pieces that were easily identified. The Shadow recognized a celebrated topaz that had once garnished a king's scepter. He saw clusters of amethysts and emeralds. It was the fourth display, however, that commanded chief attention.

Every item in that collection was a rarity. Pettigrew called attention to a solitaire ring with a fifteen-carat canary diamond. He indicated a platinum brooch that contained a clustered design of emeralds. He paused to announce the merits of a sapphire bracelet.

"Observe those blue stones," announced Pettigrew, in a wheezy tone. "There are twenty-four in all – every one a perfect match for the other. A marvelous item for a collector! I can assure all prospective purchasers that it would be impossible to duplicate this bracelet. This is from the De Leon collection; it was thirty years before the full two dozen sapphires could be matched."

No one was listening to Pettigrew. All eyes were upon the center of the showcase. There lay a sight beside which the bracelet and its small sapphires seemed trivial. The object was a six-pointed star of gold. Each point of the star was set with a massive ruby; a seventh ruddy stone adorned the center. Those jewels gleamed a blood-red crimson. Each showed a sparkling depth that captivated the eye.

Pettigrew saw where interest was centered. His wheezy tone became a dramatic one.

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"THE Seven Drops of Blood," declaimed the auctioneer. "Once the prized possession of the Maharajah of Bolopore. Each ruby, so the legend tells us, cost the life of a prince who owned it. Hence the stones were known as the Seven Drops of Blood. This unmatched star of Oriental workmanship adorned the royal turban of the maharajah.

"The assassination of the maharajah produced such political upheavals that British intervention was necessary to place the proper successor on the throne. Finding his treasury rifled, the new ruler of Bolopore was forced to sell the Seven Drops of Blood in order to pay the costs of intervention. The ruby star was finally purchased by Tobias Berkland. After years of ownership, he has placed it on sale."

As he finished speaking, Pettigrew waved a withered hand toward a tall, elderly man who was standing near the platform. The Shadow recognized Tobias Berkland, a retired oil magnate. With Berkland was his daughter, Lenore, a former debutante whose portraits had often appeared in the society columns of the New York newspapers.

Tobias Berkland was a man of dominating appearance. His profile was sharp, almost eaglelike. His high-bridged nose supported a pair of spectacles, through which, observers could see the glint of cold, gray eyes. Lenore bore a striking resemblance to her father; but the feminine softness of her face gave her a distinctive beauty. Her sharp profile actually added to her appearance.

Lenore was speaking, as attention turned in her direction. The Shadow was close by; as buzzing conversation ceased, he heard her words.

"Lawrence may be here at any moment," the girl was saying. "Since I have his card, he will not be admitted here –"

"Don't worry about Woolford," broke in Berkland. "Speak to your Uncle Glen when he arrives. He will see that Woolford is admitted."

The name of Lawrence Woolford was one that The Shadow recognized. Woolford was a young society man who was engaged to Lenore Berkland. The uncle to whom Berkland referred was a man named Glen Mogridge. He, too, had been in the news. As brother-in-law of Tobias Berkland, Mogridge had recently been made president of a subsidiary oil company of Berkland's.

Berkland's annoyance concerning Woolford was explained a moment later. As persons began to turn away from the platform, the sharp-faced oil magnate stepped up to speak to Pettigrew. Lenore remained beside the platform, looking toward the main doorway, hoping to see her uncle, Glen Mogridge.

As The Shadow and Cardona were starting to find seats, they paused at the sound of Pettigrew's gavel. With the others, they looked toward the platform.

"I have an announcement before the auction begins," wheezed Pettigrew. "Mr. Berkland informs me that today he accepted an offer for his rubies. Therefore, the Seven Drops of Blood will not be auctioned. For the benefit of those who are interested, I may mention that the rubies were purchased by the International Association of Jewelers, for display at their coming exposition. The price set for the seven rubies was three hundred and fifty thousand dollars."

AWED voices buzzed about the auction room. Amid the murmur, The Shadow and Cardona walked to the side of the gallery, toward the nearest empty seats. Their destination was not far from the curtained doorway at the left side of the room. They halted, however, before they reached the spot that they had chosen.

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Above the buzz came a sharp report; it was a gunshot. The Shadow and Cardona wheeled. Even as they spun about, a second gunburst followed the first. They saw the source of the fire; they viewed its murderous result.

Standing in the rear doorway to the left of the auctioneer's platform was a man dressed in baggy Hindu attire. His face was concealed by a heavy black beard; his head was topped by a brilliant turban. Because of the man's attire, it was almost impossible to gauge his height. It was certain only that he was of more than medium build.

A glove covered the bearded man's right hand. That glove was fingerless; but his fingers, themselves, were out of view. One was hooked to the trigger of the smoking revolver that the killer carried; the others were hidden beyond the handle of the weapon. Knuckles alone were visible. Their hue could not be determined in the dull light by the curtained doorway.

The bearded entrant had fired his first shot point-blank for Kirk Pettigrew. The withered auctioneer was slumping to the floor of the platform. The killer had sent his second bullet toward the attendant to whom The Shadow had given his invitation card. The attendant was beside the platform; he, too, had been an easy target. He was sagging when The Shadow saw him.

In less than two seconds, a killer had delivered double death. His gun was still pointed toward the platform; his eyes, peering through narrowed slits, were beadily viewing the wealth displayed there. The killer was faced by a score of witnesses, among them armed representatives of the law. He seemed contemptuous of their presence, and with good reason.

The bearded man had stepped in from the curtained doorway. Through the draperies behind him bulged the muzzle of a machine gun, trained on the throng that filled the auction room. From the other rear curtain, on the right side of the platform, loomed the barrel of a second machine gun.

One false move would mean death – not only for the individual who attempted it, but for every person in the room. Dealers of death had arrived to take command; and among those who stood helpless before their machine guns was The Shadow!

CHAPTER II. VANISHED WEALTH

WHATEVER the full purpose of the crooks who had entered, it was certain that they did not intend further slaughter, unless necessary. The Shadow recognized that fact the moment he viewed the killer. Unconsciously, the bearded murderer had lowered his revolver after its second recoil.

The death of Pettigrew and the attendant had left the way clear to the platform. Berkland still stood there; his daughter was near him below the platform, but they were on the side away from the jewels. Furthermore, the sudden fate of the auctioneer and his assistant had stunned the others present.

Hands were coming up instinctively, among them those of Joe Cardona and the four detectives. They, like the rest, had been caught completely off guard. In their vigil, they had posted themselves too far inward from the curtained doorways. They were covered by the machine guns.

The Shadow had passed the detective at the side door. Joe Cardona was between The Shadow and the platform. Nevertheless, The Shadow let his briefcase slide to the floor behind the detective. In the calm fashion of Cranston, he raised his hands. A machine gun was pointed in his direction. The Shadow did not care to be the person who might start a quick-triggered gunner on a campaign of slaughter.

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If no visible resistance should be offered, crooks would depart without using their machine guns. Their leader had chanced two revolver shots, believing that the sound would not carry through the thick door that formed the main entrance of the auction gallery. But once the machine guns began to rattle, matters would be different. A whole squad of outside police would hear. That was why The Shadow reasoned that the machine guns were intended chiefly as a threat.

Studying the bearded murderer, The Shadow was impressed by the effectiveness of the man's attire. It was impossible to tell whether or not the murderer was actually a Hindu or a masquerader. The Shadow decided, however, that the outfit was a disguise; The Shadow's reason was the bagginess of the attire. It looked like the sort of garb that could be put on or discarded without a moment of unnecessary delay.

Proof of The Shadow's opinion came as the murderer stepped toward the platform. It was then that the machine gunners edged into view, to make room for another pair behind them. Like their leader, the men with the machine guns were attired as Hindus; but their garb lacked the smoothness of their chief's. Their beards showed false in the light. Their ungloved hands were obviously stained with a hastily applied dye that glistened too conspicuously.

The bearded killer did not seem to worry over the fact that his men had revealed themselves as disguised ruffians. He had four machine guns backing him, instead of two. Of the submachine type, those guns could be easily handled by the individuals who held them. Moreover, another pair of faces showed in reserve; one at each door. There were six bearded followers behind the master crook.

THRUSTING his revolver beneath the girdle of his robe, the murderer stepped upon the platform. Pettigrew's body had stilled; the fake Hindu shoved one of the auctioneer's hands away from his path, using a shuffling foot motion for the deed. He stopped at the display cases, wrenched the first one open.

With a shoveling motion that kept his fingers from view, the crook scooped up masses of diamonds and brought them from the case. He looked about for a place to put them. He saw the platinum box that contained the special invitation cards delivered by those who had come to the auction. The crook poured the diamonds into the box; thrust his hand into the showcase and scooped out more gems.

Satisfied that he had plucked the items that had large value, the killer wrenched open the second case and rifled it. He did the same with the third case, then turned to the fourth.

An awed gasp came from witnesses; the killer paused to glare savagely. Mumbles died. Men and women shrank back, fearful that the killer would give the order for the machine guns to start blasting.

With gloating air, the murderer picked out the contents of the last case. Viewers saw the solitaire with the canary diamond; they glimpsed the emerald brooch. A bluish flash followed as the murderer added the sapphire-studded De Leon bracelet to his collection. He paused to eye a final trophy, then thrust his hand into the case.

Up came the murderer's clenched fist. Gleaming from his fisted fingers was the ruby star. The killer clamped it to the front of his turban, then lowered his hand. From the turban gleamed the Seven Drops of Blood. With the proudness of a Hindu potentate, the killer faced the helpless crowd before him and grated an ugly laugh from the depths of his black beard.

Disguised henchmen leered from their doorways. As their leader turned his head, they could see the sparkle of the bloodlike trophy. Though they held their machine guns leveled, the supporting crooks let their eyes rest upon the Seven Drops of Blood, those hoodooed gems that had again changed hands through death.

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The Shadow had awaited this one moment, from the instant that he had known it would be due. It was his signal for action. It meant that attention would be briefly diverted from his inconspicuous figure. Standing at the very back of the onlooking throng, The Shadow had his opportunity.

Though an automatic rested within a special pocket of his full-dress coat, The Shadow did not reach for the gun. He knew how futile attack would be; if he should try to down one pair of machine gunners, the other two would break loose with rapid fire. The action that The Shadow planned was a silent shift. He made it in perfect fashion.

His tall form, slowly lessening, sank crouched from view behind Cardona and the detective. Huddled, The Shadow twisted to the left. With edging motion, he thrust one foot to the curtained doorway on his left. His body followed.

For the moment, he was fully in view. Men from the rear doors would have seen him, had they been watching keenly the spot where he moved. Eyes, however, were away. When one machine gunner chanced to glance toward Cardona and the detective, all that he saw was the faint rustle of the curtains.

For a moment, the gunner fidgeted with the trigger of the submachine gun. He nudged the bearded crook who stood beside him. Both henchmen eyed the curtains suspiciously. The rustle had ceased.

The fake Hindus dropped their suspicions. They concentrated on the massed throng. Neither saw the hand that crept from beneath the curtain, to move under the fringed edge of an Oriental rug. The Shadow clutched his briefcase, drew it back along the same path.

WITHIN the darkness of the side passage, The Shadow quickly prepared himself for the part of lone defender. From the briefcase, he whipped black cloak and slouch hat, donned the garments in the gloom. Close by the curtains, he could hear a sharp click from the auction room. The murderer had closed the lid of the large platinum box. He was ready for departure with the swag.

Moving along the passage, The Shadow neared the end. There he turned; he saw a shaft of light ahead. Thugs had spread open the nearer of the curtains at the rear doorway. Creeping forward in the darkness, The Shadow neared the light. Invisible in his approach, he was almost beside a guarding ruffian when he stopped.

A figure lay sprawled upon the floor; The Shadow knew that it was Lacey, the detective whom Cardona had assigned to guard the rear door. The Shadow saw Lacey's hand extended, its fingers wide apart. He immediately guessed a detail that Cardona had not mentioned.

Cardona had let Lacey keep the duplicate keys to the rear door. Someone – perhaps the master murderer – had entered the auction gallery before Cardona went on duty. That intruder had entered a passage without Pettigrew's notice and had slugged Lacey. He had taken the detective's keys. Crooks could only have come from the blind courtyard in the rear. That was the route by which they must intend to depart.

The Shadow planned to let them go until they were clear of the auction gallery. That was the only way in which he could insure the safety of the helpless persons who stood thronged before the machine guns. Though he could have delivered a flanking fire at this moment, The Shadow waited. He knew that he could not down all the crooks at once.

There was a shift along the corridor. Crooks were backing through the far door. The Shadow saw a closer stir that blocked the view beyond. Crooks were retiring from the nearer door as well. The Shadow moved forward as two of the three crooks hurried along the rear passage, away from him. The last of the nearer trio came through.

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As the man pulled his machine gun free of the curtains, he sidestepped. He tripped over Lacey's outstretched arm. Thrusting his hand toward the wall to stop his fall, he clamped The Shadow's shoulder in the darkness. Eyes glared from the bearded face. Covered lips started a snarl.

The cry finished abruptly as an automatic thudded downward. The Shadow's gun found the side of the fake Hindu's turban. Only the thickness of the thug's headgear saved him from complete oblivion. The machine gun tumbled heavily upon Lacey's body, as the crook sagged groggily to the wall.

HOARSE whispers echoed along the passage, their words indistinguishable. The Shadow gave a growled reply. It satisfied the thugs beyond. They thought that their pal was announcing that he would join them. The darkness aided The Shadow's ruse; fortunately, the curtains had dropped into place when the crook sagged.

Though a machine gun lay at his disposal, The Shadow did not seize it. He wanted to be sure that all was well in the auction room. Extending his automatic, he carefully pressed back an edge of the curtain and peered toward the platform. He saw everyone staring toward the rear door on the other side.

One machine gunner was still in the auction gallery, cagily covering every person in the room. He was the rear guard, stationed there until the others had gained a start. His task was to follow quickly, after a given interval. Meanwhile, he was keeping his machine gun slowly on the move, warning everyone to hold position. The Shadow saw a perfect opportunity to move along the passage and cut off the crook from his comrades.

Before The Shadow could drop the curtain, there came an unexpected break. The last crook edged forward, snarling as he viciously gestured with his machine gun. His purpose was to make people quail; then would come his retreat.

One man misunderstood the motive; that man was Tobias Berkland.

With a wild spring, Berkland leaped for the machine gun and grabbed the barrel of the weapon, to thrust it upward. The crook wrenched away, tripped Berkland with a sidethrust of his foot. The quick kick ended the oil magnate's attack.

Instinctively, Cardona and the detectives shot their hands for their guns. They were too late. The barrel of the machine gun was swinging downward, more rapidly than they could draw their revolvers. Men who thronged the auction gallery pushed shrieking women to the floor, to save them from the doom that seemed a certainty.

Only The Shadow could avert the slaughter that threatened. His plans of stealthy pursuit were ended. Shouldering through the curtain which hid him from view, he sprang into the auction room, aiming for the far machine gunner.

From The Shadow's lips, hidden by the collar of his cloak, came a laugh of challenge that quivered his defiance to men of crime.

CHAPTER III. THE CLOSED TRAIL

THE SHADOW'S challenge came at a timely instant. It was delivered just as the machine gunner's weapon reached firing level. It halted the finger that was about to pour a leaden hail into a clustered mass of hapless people.

No crook had ever ignored The Shadow's challenge. The bearded machine gunner was no exception. To his

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maddened brain flashed one vital thought: When he began his barrage, he would have to take out The Shadow ahead of all others.

The crook wheeled, aimed his machine gun straight across the platform, above the body of Kirk Pettigrew. As the muzzle of the "typewriter" swung, The Shadow fired. His bullet clipped the shoulder of the aiming thug.

Staggering backward, the fake Hindu let the machine gun hit the platform. He started to clutch his shoulder; then stumbled against Berkland, who was rising from the floor. The magnate made a grab for the wounded crook. Before the two could grapple, Lenore tried to intervene in her father's behalf.

The girl came between The Shadow and the bearded thug. Wildly, the crook seized the girl and wrested her toward the curtained doorway. Cardona and the detectives had their revolvers. They fired above the thug's head, hoping he would drop the girl and dash for cover. The gunman ignored their fire.

It was The Shadow who made him drop his prey. Aiming from the near edge of the platform, he dispatched a bullet that passed less than an inch above the girl's shoulder. The slug scorched the crook's temple and clipped the tip of his ear. That shot was sufficient. The thug hurled Lenore aside with his left arm, then made a lucky dive through the curtain.

Cardona and the detectives had ended their fire. They were caught in a stampede. The people in the auction room were swarming for the outer door. As someone yanked it open, the outside police and detectives surged inward. The meeting produced complete confusion.

Amid the panic, Cardona broke loose. He knew that the menace was greater than before; that crooks might return to loose the full hall of their machine guns. As Joe came free, he saw that The Shadow was ahead of him. Completely clear of the rush, The Shadow was across the platform. He had picked up the dropped machine gun. He was making for the far curtains.

As he neared that spot, The Shadow heard a scurry from the passage beyond. He ripped the curtains from their hangings; he sprang past the opening. Ahead, he saw two figures scramble toward the rear door.

One was the thug whom The Shadow had slugged with a glancing blow. The crook had fled without his machine gun. On the way, he had overtaken the other man – the machine gunner whom The Shadow had badly wounded.

The Shadow unleashed the machine gun as he took up the pursuit. The weapon drove a steady stream of protecting bullets, as advance warning to any who might try to block his path.

Reaching the door, The Shadow saw that it was open. Crooks had not waited to close it in their flight. Nor had others rallied to cover the fleeing pair. The rattle of The Shadow's machine gun had told them that they could expect a foe whose equipment was the equal of theirs.

BACK in the auction gallery, Cardona had rallied his detectives. Joe could guess what had happened to Lacey. He feared that, despite The Shadow, the door to the courtyard would be blocked.

Hurriedly, Cardona found keys on Pettigrew's body. He led a dash along the rear passage. One factor spurred Cardona to increased speed. The rattle of The Shadow's machine gun had ended.

When Cardona reached the rear door, he found the pathway open. He sprang out into the courtyard, stopped short to stare at a yawning gap in the center of the concrete space. It marked the route by which the crooks

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had come and gone. The glow of the city, reflected by the sky, shone down amid the courtyard walls to reveal this proof of crimedom's strategy.

Crooks had burrowed from a neighboring cellar. They had cut upward until only one large cement block remained to block their path. Cardona, himself, had walked across that shell earlier today. When the hour for attack had come, the disguised crooks had broken the last bar into the courtyard.

In their departure, the crooks had used a system. The leader of the band had started off with the swag. Others had followed, in pairs. The last duo, routed by The Shadow, had fled without their machine guns; but they had gained sufficient lead to reach their rat-hole before The Shadow could overtake them.

Quickly, Cardona reasoned that The Shadow must have kept up the chase; that he was somewhere in the subterranean depths. Cardona could foresee trouble for The Shadow at the other end of the tunnel. With a shout, Joe started forward, ordering his men to follow. His intention was to follow The Shadow's course.

Before Cardona was halfway to the hole in the center of the courtyard, a drilling rattle broke loose from the other side of the walled space. Bullets from a machine gun clipped the fringe of the tunnel with the steady tattoo of a riveter.

Cardona halted; the men behind him raised their revolvers to bark shots at the stabbing muzzle of the machine gun. They could not see the gunner who handled it. He was in the blackness of the lower wall.

Cardona wheeled about, grabbed the arm of the nearest detective. The lawman fired wild; the others halted their trigger fingers when they saw Cardona's startling move. Only by gesticulations could Cardona make them put away their revolvers. The clatter of the machine gun would have drowned commands.

Detectives stared dumbly, but Cardona understood. The machine gun's rattle ended. Cardona motioned his men back toward the passage to the auction room. Joe knew who had fired the machine gun bullets. The Shadow had loosed them as a warning.

Too late to trail the last escaping crooks down into their burrow, The Shadow had crossed the courtyard. Suspecting some added menace, he had used his machine gun as a sure warning that would halt the arriving forces of the law.

As Cardona stood motionless, his ears still deafened by the echoes of The Shadow's barrage, the proof of The Shadow's foresight came from below.

A muffled blast sounded deep beneath the ground. The courtyard quivered; even the closed walls seemed to shake. Portions of the cement crumbled, near the edge of the tunnel; as smoke issued forth, debris began to pour into the hole. A cloud of dust arose to join the smoke.

The criminals had dynamited the tunnel as soon as the last two fugitives had passed through it. Had The Shadow or any other followed them through that passage, doom would have come to the pursuers. The trail of crime was closed.

CARDONA snapped an order to the detectives. They turned about and headed out through the front way. In the auction room, they found a pair of policemen; the bluecoats had discovered Lacey. The detective was free of his bonds and gags. Cardona sent his squad ahead; he remained to hear what Lacey had to say.

The detective's story was brief. Shortly before eight o'clock, he had heard a sound in the rear passage. Coming to investigate, he had passed the first side corridor. He remembered a hard blow that had crackled the

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side of his skull; after that, nothing.

Police had taken charge of the bodies of Pettigrew and his attendant. A few of the customers were still about; they were ones who had been somewhat battered in the rush for the exit. Cardona found that none were badly injured.

As he turned away to go out front. Joe saw a figure that he had not noticed before. Cardona recognized Lamont Cranston, seated in a chair near one of the curtained doorways.

The Shadow had reentered, unobserved. He was again in evening attire, but his faultless garb had been badly rumpled. Cardona took it for granted that Cranston had been bowled over in the rush. He smiled with relief when he saw the police commissioner's friend rise dizzily. Cardona clamped The Shadow's shoulder.

"Come out to the open air," suggested Joe. "You'll feel better, Mr. Cranston."

The Shadow nodded; he looked about for his briefcase. It was perched against a chair. Cardona picked it up and carried it. The Shadow smiled as they started toward the door.

"I brought complete report lists," he told Cardona, in reference to the briefcase. "Records regarding all the gems that were on sale. I intended to bid for some of them tonight. Apparently, I shall not have the opportunity."

"You won't," returned Cardona, grimly. "Those crooks made a complete haul. Close to two million, in the best swag they could get!"

As they passed the outer door and came to the front of the auction house, Cardona added: "And here's the heaviest loser of the lot."

Cardona referred to Tobias Berkland. The oil magnate was standing by the front door of the auction house, his daughter beside him. Berkland looked glum. Lenore was trying to comfort him.

"Here is Uncle Glen," exclaimed the girl suddenly, as a taxicab pulled up in front. She pointed to a heavily built man who alighted. "Maybe he has just come from the house."

"What's the trouble, Miss Berkland?" inquired Cardona, "Can I help?"

"My father just called our residence," explained the girl. "He wanted to find out about the insurance on his rubies. Ungler, the secretary, is supposed to be there; but no one answered the telephone. Here is my uncle, Mr. Mogridge. Perhaps he has just come from the house."

MOGRIDGE came in through the doorway, staring in puzzled fashion. He was holding an admittance card to the auction rooms. Square-faced, keen of eye, he tugged at the tips of a black mustache as he surveyed the scene where confusion had reigned. Anxiously, Mogridge looked toward the closed door of the auction gallery.

"Has there been trouble here?" he inquired. "I heard the sirens of patrol cars, a few minutes ago. The police were starting to close off this block when my cab came through."

"Much trouble, Glen," informed Berkland, dourly. "Pettigrew was murdered by crooks who rifled the auction room."

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Mogridge's face showed alarm; then relief.

"But your rubies were not taken," he remarked. "It was fortunate that you sold them this afternoon, Tobias."

"I had not delivered them," groaned Berkland. "I knew that Pettigrew had them in a bank vault and that he intended to display them this evening. His contract called for a commission, once the gems had been entrusted to him for sale. The Seven Drops of Blood are gone!"

"They were insured –"

"I am doubtful about it. That is why I have tried to call the house. Have you come from there, Glen?"

Mogridge shook his head. He saw the auction house telephone, picked up the instrument and called the chief operator. While Mogridge was engaged in inquiry, a detective sergeant entered to report to Cardona.

"They made a clean get-away," declared the sergeant. "We just found out how they managed it. They entered a garage in the next block, bound the two attendants that were on duty and stowed them in a little room."

"What about their car?" inquired Cardona. "Did the garage men see it, Markham?"

"No," returned the sergeant. "They were grabbed first. But they heard two cars come in and go out, later."

"It would have taken two cars with seven of them," decided Cardona. "I'll go around to the garage and look things over. I want to see the other end of that tunnel."

Cardona turned toward the door; as he did, he saw Mogridge put down the telephone. The mustached man stroked his fingers through his heavy crop of black hair.

"That line must be dead," observed Mogridge. He turned to Berkland, to add: "Can't you have the inspector send some officers up to the house?"

The Shadow saw a sudden gleam flash from Cardona's dark eyes. The inspector had gained a sudden hunch. Just a short while ago, Cardona had mentioned that Berkland was the heaviest loser. The question about the insurance had supported Joe's opinion. News of a dead telephone line at Berkland's house looked like a possible link in the case.

"We'll all go up to the house," decided Cardona. He included The Shadow in his invitation. "If anything has happened to that secretary of yours, we'll want to know about it, Mr. Berkland. What did you say his name was?"

"Ungler. James Ungler. He has been my secretary for the past three years."

"All right. We'll start right away."

DESPITE his promise, it took Cardona ten minutes before he could get away. There were details to discuss with Markham, who would remain in charge until Cardona returned. At last, Cardona was ready. The group moved out to the sidewalk. A policeman hurried away to bring taxicabs from the avenue.

While they were waiting, a coupe nosed its way from the corner. A patrolman was on the running board. As the car stopped, he jumped to the curb and beckoned to the driver. Turning to Cardona, the bluecoat reported.

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"This fellow bucked through," he stated. "When we stopped him, he argued that he had to get to Pettigrew's auction. So we brought him along."

The driver of the coupe was stepping to the sidewalk. He was a man in his early thirties; his face, though a well-formed one, showed signs of dissipation. The young man was attired in tuxedo; his coat collar was rumpled, his necktie twisted askew. He was hatless, his hair disheveled.

The Shadow knew who the man must be, even before Lenore Berkland blurted her recognition.

"Lawrence Woolford!"

Woolford grinned. He swayed unsteadily, tugged at his tie, then made a maudlin effort to restore a part to his unkempt hair.

"H'lo, Lenore," he greeted. "Shorry I'm late. Musta lost track of the time."

"And also lost count of the drinks you had."

Woolford's grin became sheepish. He blinked, looked at the sign above the door of the auction house.

"This is where I was coming." Woolford muttered to himself. "Pettigrew's auction – thass right. What've I got to do now? I remember! Show 'em a card so I can get in. Where's that card? What'd I do with it?"

He fished in his pockets with fumbling hands; then stared at Lenore. A pleased expression wreathed his face.

"You kept the card for me!" he exclaimed. "Sure. I remember. I told you I'd lose it. Show 'em the card."

Lenore's lips were tight. Her eyes flashed angrily as they viewed Woolford. The Shadow recognized that this was not the first time that Woolford had angered his fiancée by overindulgence in liquor.

"Shorry, Lenore," mumbled Woolford. "Awful shorry. Show 'em the card; let's go into the auction. I'll keep quiet. Guess I'll be feelin' better, soon. Show 'em the card –"

Lenore had produced the card. Cardona took it, and added it to the admittance card that Mogridge had presented on arrival. He motioned to a detective. The dick pushed Woolford back into the coupe. For a moment, Woolford sat stupidly; he saw the detective climb aboard the other side and take the wheel.

"Where we goin'?" demanded the young man, angrily. "Whass the idea?"

Lenore caught a nod from Cardona. The girl understood. She stepped to the side of the coupe.

"Father and I are going home," explained Lenore. "We want you to come there, too, Lawrence. But it's better that someone else should drive your car."

THE coupe rolled away, as Woolford subsided quietly beside the detective. A police car followed it. Taxis had arrived; Cardona boarded one with The Shadow, while Berkland took the other with Lenore and Mogridge. A second police car brought up the rear.

Cardona made only one comment to The Shadow.

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"We're heading straight for Berkland's," informed Joe, "but we're making no grand scramble to get there. If there's been trouble there, Mr. Cranston, it's better that we showed up without a lot of noise. Just like we were escorting Mr. Berkland back to his house."

The Shadow made no reply. He agreed with Cardona's decision; more than that, he coincided with an idea that Cardona had in mind but did not mention. The Shadow approved Cardona's hunch that the extinction of telephone service at Berkland's had a direct connection with the robbery at Pettigrew's auction gallery.

Just what that connection might be, was something that The Shadow could not fully decide until they reached Berkland's, and learned what had happened to the secretary, James Ungler.

CHAPTER IV. THE SHADOW CONCURS

TOBIAS BERKLAND's residence was an antique mansion in the upper Seventies, a house that stood conspicuous in its row. Though the building conformed somewhat to the others, it was plain that it had been constructed earlier; that the later houses had not only copied its style but had encroached upon its preserves.

Once, the old house must have had grounds of its own; at present, it was wedged tightly between other brownstone buildings. The only special features that it still possessed were narrow alleyways on each side. These were necessary, because the house had side windows and would have been rendered useless for occupancy if the walls of other buildings had abutted it.

The house was not entirely dark. A dim light glimmered through a transom above the front door. Cardona saw the glow when he arrived; he waited until Berkland's cab pulled up, then questioned:

"What about servants, Mr. Berkland? Don't you have any except your secretary?"

"I have a butler," replied Berkland. "His name is Perkins. His wife, Agnes, is the cook. They live elsewhere and always go home soon after the dinner hour."

"Were they here when you left this evening?"

"No. Lenore and I went out to dinner, so the servants were not needed at all this afternoon. Mr. Mogridge was downtown and did not intend to return for dinner."

"What about Ungler? Doesn't he eat?"

"Not a great amount. When the family is out for dinner, Ungler cooks a light meal for himself."

Cardona eyed the door with the light above it. He asked for the key. Berkland and Mogridge each produced one. Cardona took Berkland's; then questioned:

"What about the back door? Do you have a key to it?"

"No," replied Berkland. "There are two keys to the back door. The servants use one; Ungler has the other. There is a side door, though, on the left of the house. Lenore has the key to it."

"Good," decided Cardona. "I'll send a man to watch the back door. Another can enter by the side door. Let me have the key, Miss Berkland."

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Lenore looked in her bag. She could not find the key. Suddenly, she remembered what had become of it.

"Lawrence has the key!" exclaimed the girl. "I remember that I asked him to carry it for me, a week ago. I forgot to ask him to return it."

CARDONA looked along the street. The coupe had been the first car to arrive; it was parked just beyond the house. The detective was coming from the car, accompanied by Woolford, who had steadied, but seemed insistent upon walking slowly.

Cardona approached the pair and demanded the key. Woolford looked blank, then produced a half a dozen keys from his pocket.

"Guess it's one of these," he said. "I don't know which one, though. Maybe Lenore can pick it out."

The girl recognized a key. Cardona turned it over to a policeman and told the officer to enter by the side door. That arranged, Cardona ascended the front steps, cautiously unlocked the door and entered. Soon, he reappeared and beckoned the others to follow. Cardona had met the policeman in the downstairs hallway.

"Everything seems quiet," announced Cardona, when the rest had joined him. "All I'm worrying about is if anything has happened to Ungler. Where would we find him, Mr. Berkland?"

"In my study," replied the eagle-faced magnate. "He was supposed to be working there this evening. Come."

Berkland led the way to the second floor. He entered a front room. Coming in at the left, The Shadow saw that the room was a library and a large one. Huge bookcases lined the walls; there were reading nooks, and one front corner of the room was cut off to form what looked like a mammoth closet.

Berkland had turned on the lights. He paused to look at the closet door. Producing a key, the oil magnate approached and unlocked the door. He turned on a light. The closet proved to be a stack room, windowless and with its own bookshelves. No one was in the room.

"I keep my rare volumes here," explained Berkland. "Rarities and certain first editions. I wanted to be sure that no one had entered here."

He locked the door of the windowless room. Meanwhile, The Shadow had observed more features of the library. It had two large windows in the front wall. They formed breaks between the bookcases.

There were two doorways. The group had entered the door at the left corner, in the back of the room. There was a similar door in the right rear corner of the room. Berkland led the others to it, with the explanation:

"This leads into the study."

Opening the door, Berkland showed a short passage. He turned on a light, approached a door at the far end. Hand on the knob, Berkland hesitated, then motioned to Cardona.

"You had better enter, inspector," suggested Berkland. "I – well, in view of circumstances, I hardly know what we might expect to find."

Gripping the doorknob with his left hand, Cardona drew a revolver with his right. He turned the knob, shoved the door inward and bounded into the room. Those behind him saw emptiness; they saw Cardona turn about, then suddenly stop rigid.

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ONLY The Shadow guessed the reason. He had pressed forward with Cardona; he saw that Joe was staring to a spot behind the half-opened door. With a shove of his left shoulder, The Shadow sent the door fully open. He thrust his left arm after it, with a jabbing move.

The swing of the door instantly revealed a sallow, twitchy-faced man. The fellow was frail of build, attired in a drab suit of dark gray. In his nervous hand he clutched a .22 automatic; he was aiming the weapon straight for Cardona. One instant more, the frail man's straining finger would have begun to pump lead into Cardona's body. The Shadow's hand stopped the action.

Viselike, The Shadow's fingers clutched the fellow's wrist. The upward twist that followed brought a spontaneous cry from sallow lips. The man's knees sagged; his body plunked back against the wall. His hand lost its grip on the .22; the puny weapon clattered to the floor.

Others sprang into the room, as The Shadow subdued the sallow man. Cardona was already claiming the small automatic; as he picked up the weapon, Joe grunted his thanks to The Shadow.

"Good work, Mr. Cranston," approved Cardona. "This bird was all set to drill me before I could get a bead on him." Then, to Berkland: "Did you ever see this man before?"

"Certainly." Berkland was already smiling in relief when he heard Cardona's query. "He is the man we came to find. My secretary, James Ungler."

The Shadow released Ungler in leisurely fashion. The secretary looked bewildered; then became apologetic as he saw Berkland's eyes glaring through the high-rimmed spectacles.

"I meant no harm, Mr. Berkland," whined Ungler. "I thought – I didn't know that this man" – he indicated Cardona – "I didn't know that he had come with you. I heard whispers outside the door –"

"So you got ready with a gun, eh?" snapped Cardona. "Set yourself to plug any stranger who came in?"

"Ungler has a gun permit," remarked Berkland. "I arranged for one a year ago, so that Ungler could protect the house in case of danger."

Cardona stared; then sourly handed the .22 back to Ungler. The sallow man pocketed it with mumbled thanks. The Shadow indulged in a slight smile. Cardona had taken the most graceful way out of a situation that his overzeal had brought upon him.

Berkland, however, was not through with Ungler. The magnate was not only anxious to close the recent incident and thus cover Cardona's embarrassment; he also wanted to come to the point concerning his own affairs.

"Where were you, Ungler?" snapped Berkland, angrily. "Why didn't you answer the telephone, when I called?"

"I was right here, sir," insisted Ungler. "That is, except between half past six and seven, when I had dinner."

"A preposterous statement, Ungler. I called you just before the auction; and again, right after the robbery."

"The robbery?"

"Yes. Pettigrew and another man were murdered. My rubies were stolen."

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UNGLER gaped. Looking beyond the secretary, The Shadow saw Lawrence Woolford stare. The young man turned to the detective who had driven his car. The Shadow heard Woolford mumble thickly to the dick:

"No wonder you wouldn't answer my questions while we were driving up here. I didn't know there'd been a robbery. I was wondering what the fuss was about."

Both Ungler and Woolford had registered astonishment in their individual manners; but Ungler's was more impressive, by its absence of comment. Berkland eyed the gaping secretary, then snapped another question.

"What about the insurance? Did you tell the International Association of Jewelers to put their policy in force? They were supposed to call at seven o'clock."

"There – there were no telephone calls, sir," stammered Ungler. "I supposed that you must have taken care of the matter. Your own insurance terminated when you made the sale."

Joe Cardona had stepped to a desk in the corner. He was pulling the telephone cord that ran down beyond the desk. The lower end of the wire came into view. Cardona exhibited it.

The wire had been clipped. Its ends were connected by a short length of stout string, to keep the wire taut so that the cut would not be discovered.

"Is there another telephone in the house?" demanded Cardona. "A down stairs extension, perhaps?"

Berkland nodded.

"You'll find it cut, too," promised Cardona, grimly. "We know now why those telephone calls didn't come through."

Berkland stormed at Ungler.

"Why didn't you examine the wires?" demanded the magnate. "You should have known that something was wrong, when there were no calls. You should have tried to get the operator; failing that, you should have left the house and reported that the line was out of order. Why didn't you come to Pettigrew's to find me?"

"I was puzzled by the fact that no calls came," admitted Ungler, "but I thought that my place was here, sir. Besides, I could not have gained admittance to the auction."

"Why not," snapped Berkland. He yanked open a drawer of the desk, lifted some papers and found a card. "Here is the extra admittance card that Pettigrew gave me. You knew that it was here, Ungler."

"I had forgotten it," returned the secretary. His tone was steadier than before. "In fact, I thought that you intended to give the card to some friend, Mr. Berkland. It never occurred to me that you might have left it here. That was natural enough, because I had forgotten the card to begin with."

CARDONA took the card from Berkland. The Shadow was standing beside Joe; he noted that the card bore the words: "Admit Bearer." The usual cards given out by Pettigrew carried the names of individuals. Berkland explained that Pettigrew gave special bearer cards only to patrons whose jewels were on sale.

Though Cardona was perplexed about the cut telephone wires, he could see no purpose in remaining longer at Berkland's. His chief reason for coming to the oil magnate's residence had been the possibility that crime had struck there also; that Ungler might have met with foul play. The cutting of the telephone wires indicated that

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some person might have entered; but nothing else had been disturbed.

With the wires cut, Cardona could not receive reports from the men whom he had left near Pettigrew's. Duty called Cardona there. Moreover, the inspector had another hunch – one that he kept to himself until he entered the taxicab outside of Berkland's. It was then that Cardona confided in The Shadow, who had accompanied him.

"I'll tell you one thing, Mr. Cranston," stated Cardona, glancing back toward Berkland's as he spoke. "There's somebody in that bunch who knows more than he told us. Whoever cut those phone wires knew the inside of the house.

"That's why I decided not to stay around. The best way to reach the person is to say nothing; to keep him thinking that the matter is forgotten. Crime has been done; the haul was enough to satisfy the big-shot who's in back of it. The best game is to stick close on the case.

"There'll be a trail before we're finished and that trail will take us to Berkland's, to somebody who knows what goes on there. But until I've got some evidence on the murderer, I'm letting it ride. Sooner or later, he'll have a chance to show his hand."

Cardona said no more. Staring stolidly ahead, Joe did not see the smile that fixed itself upon the thin lips of Lamont Cranston. The Shadow had concurred with Cardona's opinion.

The Shadow, too, could see the finish of the trail. His policy was to be the same one that the law had chosen. When the time came for a showdown, The Shadow would have evidence that would leave no doubt concerning the identity of the murderer who had struck tonight.

CHAPTER V. THE THIRD NIGHT

IT was the third night following the murder of Kirk Pettigrew. Newspapers were still headlining the details of the police hunt for the killer who had stolen Tobias Berkland's rubies. The law was coming in for criticism. So far, no trail had been opened.

On this evening, Police Commissioner Ralph Weston was seated at the desk of a little office which connected with his apartment. Opposite him was Inspector Joe Cardona. There was a third person in the room. The visitor was The Shadow, here in the guise of Lamont Cranston. Weston had invited his friend to the conference.

Brusque, military of appearance, the commissioner was stormy as he pounded a pile of report sheets.

"You have accomplished nothing, Cardona," insisted Weston. "Those crooks closed their trail completely. We know that some of them must be wanted criminals; yet you have located none of them. As for the man who murdered Pettigrew and his assistant, he might be anybody. Even a Hindu, for all you know."

"I have one hunch," insisted Cardona, stolidly. "Someone at Berkland's must have known that crime was due. I don't say that such a person is the actual murderer. He might just have been an informant –"

"Bah!" Weston was angry with his interruption. "You can count Berkland out. He lost three hundred and fifty thousand dollars through the theft of his rubies. That eliminates him as the supercriminal. If he had collected insurance, we could consider him a suspect. He couldn't have been the master crook, because he was there in the auction room. What's more, a thug tried to kill him. That wasn't faked."

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"The same applies to Lenore Berkland," inserted The Shadow, with a slight smile. "You can count her out, too, Cardona."

Joe nodded his agreement. Weston thumbed his short-clipped mustache to hide a smile of his own. He regarded The Shadow's remark as a subtle jest at Cardona's expense: one that Joe had missed. Weston never suspected that his friend, Cranston, was simply leading him on to further assertions.

The Shadow wanted Weston to disagree with Cardona. He knew that if the commissioner should believe that the murderer could be reached through Berkland, Weston would immediately give orders for a general arrest. Such a step would ruin The Shadow's waiting game.

"Take Glen Mogridge," proceeded Weston. "He came to the auction house bearing his own admittance card. Your report, Cardona, states that he arrived less than ten minutes after the fleeing crooks had bombed their tunnel. During those ten minutes, those crooks were in wild flight, riding in a pair of automobiles.

"Patrol cars were spreading out in pursuit. The crooks, though away before they were spied, could not have halted within three miles. It would, therefore, have been impossible for Mogridge to have arrived as soon as he did. He could not have transferred from his car to a taxi."

WESTON thumbed the papers before him, then continued:

"As for Lawrence Woolford, he arrived at Pettigrew's after he had been drinking. Though he did not appear for nearly half an hour, he could not have acquired his intoxicated condition in that short period."

"Unless he had an edge on earlier," disputed Cardona, "or was faking –"

"Possibilities – yes," admitted Weston, "but not enough to consider Woolford as a serious possibility until matters clear further. As for James Ungler, his own actions show his innocence. You would have me believe that Ungler clipped those telephone wires himself?"

"Why not? If he ducked out of the house, the clipped wires were as good as an alibi. Since phone calls couldn't go through, there was no way of proving that Ungler wasn't at the house."

Weston shook his head at Cardona's opinion.

"A possibility again," declared the commissioner, "but not a likely one. I shall tell you why. If Ungler possesses sufficient cleverness to be the master crook, he is also crafty enough to know that he has placed suspicion upon himself. He would have preferred to travel along with his band. Those crooks have certainly demonstrated their ability to stay out of sight."

Cardona did not agree with Weston's opinions concerning Woolford and Ungler, particularly the latter. However, the commissioner did not give him time to raise objection. Weston had produced a new point; he intended to pursue it.

"Why have those rogues eluded us?" he demanded. "We made a round-up, but we gained no suspects. Yet the whole band cannot have left New York. Already, we have identified some of the stolen jewels as goods peddled in pawnshops."

"That's because the fences have reorganized their racket," asserted Cardona. "Those jewel snatchers certainly picked a ripe time to stage their job. I'll tell you why we haven't bagged any of the crowd, commissioner. Every man in that outfit was a picked one. Each has got his own hide-out. Six henchmen, sitting back and

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laughing at us. There's one, though, who won't laugh long."

"The man The Shadow wounded?"

"Yes. In the courtyard, on the floor of the garage, we found blobs of blood as red as those rubies of Berkland's. That fellow won't live long without medical attention, and there's no way for him to get it. We rounded up every phony doctor that works with the underworld.

"Yet you have not located the wounded man."

"No. Chances are he's dead by now. There's still a long chance that some stool pigeon will locate him. If he's alive, we may get a break. He's the only one of the crew that might be found."

THE telephone bell rang as Cardona finished speaking. Weston lifted the telephone, found that the call was for Cranston. He handed the instrument to The Shadow. The call was from the Cobalt Club, a reminder that Mr. Cranston had an appointment.

The Shadow took his departure, leaving Weston and Cardona still discussing the subject of the wounded crook. Outside the apartment house, The Shadow entered his limousine and rode to the nearest drug store. There he entered a telephone booth, dialed a number and waited until a quiet voice responded.

"Burbank speaking."

In whispered tone, The Shadow gave the word:

"Report."

The report came through. Burbank, The Shadow's contact man, had news upon which The Shadow had counted. Agents of The Shadow had been busy; following leads given them by their chief, they had finally learned the whereabouts of a man named Marlow Rund.

Police records listed Rund as a crook who had done a stretch in Atlanta. The government had implicated him in connection with a counterfeiting case. Since his sojourn in the Federal penitentiary, Rund had followed a respectable career as a salesman of dental equipment. The police files told little of his past.

Government records were also meager regarding Marlow Rund. That was because the former counterfeiter had glibly given an account of his past that tallied with facts that Federal agents gained.

The Shadow, in his intensive study of criminal records, had looked further into the case of Marlow Rund. The Shadow's records showed that Rund had been an honor student at the medical college of a large university, but had been expelled just prior to his graduation for selling examination papers that had been entrusted to his care.

Even at that, The Shadow would not have picked Rund as a member of the gang that had pilfered Berkland's rubies, except for a significant fact. A wounded crook was at large; Cardona could find no doctor who had treated him. This, despite the fact that the police had recently gained a line on nearly every fake medico in Manhattan.

The Shadow knew that he was hunting the members of a band that was equipped for every emergency. The leader of that crew had certainly foreseen the possibility of wounded henchmen. He must also have known of the tabs that the police had previously made on disbarred members of the medical profession. In choosing his

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picked henchmen it was likely that the master crook had looked for one who could serve both as thug and as surgeon. Marlow Rund was suited to the part.

BACK in his limousine, The Shadow gave a destination to the chauffeur. When the big car stopped on a darkened side street, a cloaked figure alighted. Picking his route between two buildings, The Shadow came to a blocking wall. He found a closed door; worked upon it with a pick – his lock-opening tool – and silently entered a gloomy hallway.

The Shadow was on the ground floor of a house that had been converted into a small apartment building. He moved forward, paused by a stairway. Satisfied that the place was unwatched, The Shadow ascended. He came to a side door on the second floor.

No light showed beneath the crack. The Shadow handled the lock in noiseless fashion, and entered a darkened room. Windows showed their dull outlines. The Shadow lowered the shades and turned on a light. He recognized immediately that Burbank's information was correct. This apartment was the lodging of Marlow Rund.

Torn envelopes lay on a table, addressed to the man in question. Beside the table was a large, square-cornered suitcase, the sort that a salesman would carry. The Shadow opened the suitcase, found that it contained a complete line of dental equipment. The Shadow's gloved fingers touched dust on the surface of the bag. Studying the envelopes on the table, he noted that the latest postmark was three days old.

Evidently, Rund had temporarily abandoned his job as salesman. He had certainly not been in the apartment for two nights. Perhaps he had stayed here overnight after the robbery. There might be evidence to tell that fact. The Shadow moved into a small bedroom that adjoined the living room.

A locked closet caught The Shadow's attention. His gloved hand used a pick to probe the lock. Opening the door, The Shadow found the closet empty. He used a tiny flashlight to study walls and floor. At the bottom of the closet, he discovered a board that gave slightly to his touch.

The Shadow loosened the board; the sparkle of gems reflected the glow of his flashlight.

The Shadow recognized jewels that he had seen at Pettigrew's; but none of the more valuable stones were among them. The Shadow came to the immediate conclusion that these were a portion of Rund's share from the robbery; that the fake salesman's absence indicated that he had taken others with him.

Rund was probably staying at some hotel under an assumed name, while he fenced the supply of gems in his possession. That job completed, he would come back here for the rest.

Carefully shifting the jewels, The Shadow saw a wad of paper in a lower corner of the cache. He opened it, read an address that was in the East Side tenement district. That could not be Rund's present location; nevertheless, the crook had considered the paper important enough to stow it with the jewels, so that he could refer to the address.

The answer was plain enough: the tenement must be the place where crooks had stowed their wounded pal. They had given Rund the address; he had looked after the crippled crook.

PROMPTLY, The Shadow replaced the jewels as he had found them and covered the swag with the loose board. He went out into the living room, extinguished the light and raised the shades. A minute later, he was cautiously descending the stairway, like a mammoth blot in the gloom.

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Reaching the rear street, The Shadow reentered his limousine. He did not lay aside his garb of black. Instead, he merely spoke through the speaking tube using the quiet tone of Cranston. The new destination that The Shadow gave was only a few blocks distant from the address that he had found among Rund's share of the stolen jewels.

The Shadow was on his way to interview the wounded crook whom Joe Cardona sought to find. Whatever The Shadow learned would reach the law soon afterward. The Shadow was simply blazing a path toward the goal of justice. A soft laugh, suppressed within the confines of the limousine, told that The Shadow expected prompt results in the task that lay ahead.

Chance alone could intervene to balk The Shadow's plans; and chance could always play a tricky hand. Even as The Shadow traveled to his immediate goal, events were shaping elsewhere to bring new factors into being.

Had The Shadow suspected those existing circumstances, he would have changed the plan of action that he had so quickly formed.

CHAPTER VI. THE DROP OF DEATH

TWENTY minutes after his departure from Rund's apartment, The Shadow stood in the shrouding darkness of a side street near the Bowery. He had passed two buildings in coming from the corner. The first was a two-story structure that had once been a pawnshop, but which was at present vacant. The next was a narrow-fronted garage, still used for the storage of cars.

The Shadow had found a convenient space after passing the grimy-walled garage. From his present vantage point, he was looking upward to the windows of a blocky old tenement house that reared itself five-stories high.

This was the building that was indicated by the address on the paper at Rund's. Somewhere in that teeming tenement lay a crippled crook, hiding out from the law. Viewing two sides of the building, The Shadow was endeavoring to locate the hide-out.

A clue was present; it stood out conspicuously. The glow from the Bowery showed a third-floor window that was fitted with a new green shade. Such was unusual. Most of the other windows had no shades at all; the few that boasted them had shades so old that stretches of gaslight showed plainly through them.

An elevated train rumbled above the Bowery. Its roar was terrific; its passage must have shaken the old, abandoned pawnshop, for The Shadow could feel a distinct quiver even from the more solid walls of the garage. By the time the drowning noise had ended, The Shadow was away from his post. When the elevated train had screeched into the distance, he was at the base of a rickety fire escape that adorned the rear of the tenement house.

When he had scaled to the third floor, The Shadow noted a rear window that matched the one on the side. It was heavily shaded; only the slightest strip at the edge showed a line of light. The back window could be reached from the fire escape, which was quite close to the corner of the building; but The Shadow chose another entrance. This was a window that led into a gaslit hallway.

Inside the hall, The Shadow observed the door to the corner room. Though the door was old, it was fitted with a new lock – another proof that the room could well be a hide-out. Studying the keyhole, The Shadow saw that it was empty. Light showed through the tiny opening.

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Inserting a clipperlike pick, The Shadow worked smoothly with the lock. His progress was slow, for he wanted no betraying sound to reach the room within. The clippers probed; The Shadow added a wedge-shaped key. The lock responded. Pocketing his instruments, The Shadow drew an automatic and slowly opened the door inward.

ACROSS the room, in a position where it could not have been seen from a view through the keyhole, was a cot. The improvised bed was close to the side window. A gas jet, flickering above it, showed the cot's occupant: a long-faced, hard-jawed man whose features were unnaturally pale.

A tight bandage bulged beneath the wounded man's pajama jacket. The crippled crook was on the road to recovery, for his wound did not bother him. He was holding a tabloid newspaper under the gaslight; as his beady eyes read the columns, his leathery lips pursed and contorted in a manner that seemed an unconscious habit.

The Shadow had seen that face in photographs. The twists of the crook's lips completed the identification. The wounded rogue was "Twitcher" Killick, a Chicago bad man who had gone to cover after a machine gun massacre near the shores of Lake Michigan.

Like Marlow Rund, Twitcher was a specialist in crime. This proved the theory – held by both The Shadow and Joe Cardona – that the band of jewel thieves were lone wolves, grouped under the leadership of a master criminal as individual in his methods as the crew that followed him.

Twitcher's twisty lips were grinning as his eyes read the newspaper. Suddenly, the beady eyes hardened. An encroaching stretch of blackness had glided across the page of the tabloid sheet; a silhouetted profile, hawklike and sinister, was blocking the glow of the gaslight.

Twitcher looked up, startled. He saw The Shadow.

Like a specter materialized from nowhere, the cloaked avenger loomed above the wounded crook. Eyes peered downward from beneath the brim of a slouch hat. Those eyes were merciless. Twitcher sank back against the propping pillows. His left hand fidgeted toward the side of the cot, then faltered. The sight of an automatic muzzle, bulging straight between his eyes, made Twitcher forget his effort to reach for a gun.

The Shadow's free hand stretched across the cot, plucked the hidden gun from beneath the blankets. Weaponless, Twitcher stared in helpless fashion. His last chance for resistance was gone. He knew the power of The Shadow.

NOT a word came from The Shadow's hidden lips. Fiery eyes alone burned their accusation. The Shadow's gaze was sufficient. In its glint, Twitcher saw doom. He responded as other helpless crooks had in the past. Twitcher wanted that merciless gaze to lessen its intensity. He thought that if he talked, and talked fast, he could induce The Shadow to lessen his relentless attitude.

"I was one of 'em," gulped Twitcher. "You – you're wise to that already. You was the guy who clipped me; you oughta know. But we – me an' the rest of us – we wasn't wise to what the big-shot was goin' to do. We didn't know he'd put the finger on Pettigrew an' his assistant. He didn't tell us that there was goin' to be a rub-out."

Twitcher's plea produced no visible effect. The wounded crook faltered. The Shadow's .45 moved forward, burning eyes above it holding Twitcher's gaze.

"I'll talk!" panted Twitcher, hoarsely. "The jinx is on me, like the big-shot said it might be! He told us –"

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The cause of Twitcher's broken sentence was not The Shadow's action. Twitcher's ears had caught a sound – one that came from beyond the hallway door. For a moment, he was ready to loose a cry, in hope that aid would come. Then he saw The Shadow draw away. Twitcher knew that the cloaked sleuth had heard the sound also.

It was plain that Twitcher expected Rund; that he hoped his fellow crook would be smart enough to outguess The Shadow. Twitcher's hope faded as The Shadow moved. Glumly, he watched the cloaked inquisitor move toward the back of the room. Every inch of the way, The Shadow's gun kept its relentless bead on Twitcher's eyes.

With his free hand, The Shadow raised the window shade, unclamped the fastening of the sash. He was deliberate, despite the fact that a key was clicking in the lock of the door.

Twitcher, craning his neck over his wounded shoulder, saw The Shadow blend with darkness beyond the window. Down came the shade; only the tiniest crack remained at the side. Through that space, however, Twitcher could still see the mouth of an automatic; above it, the burn of an everwatching eye.

Twitcher gradually managed to form a sickly smile. Perhaps Rund's entry would be a life-saver. If Twitcher played ball the way The Shadow wanted, his own hide might be spared. For a few seconds, Twitcher held his grin; then the expression faded.

THE door opened suddenly. With its quick swing came startlement for Twitcher. Following the motion of the door, a stocky man shouldered into the room, poking a stubby revolver ahead of him. Behind the first arrival came another: a shifty, smirking-faced fellow who looked like a thug. Twitcher recognized both.

The stocky man with the gun was Acting Inspector Joe Cardona. The ace sleuth's swarthy face was grim. His eyes showed keenly, as Twitcher unconsciously delivered a face contortion. Like The Shadow, Cardona recognized the wounded crook.

The man behind Cardona was "Squeak" Logrew, a man whom the underworld had marked as a stool pigeon. Squeak had accidentally learned that a wounded crook was quartered in this tenement house, and had guessed that the man might be Twitcher Killick. Squeak's grin was gleeful, as his sneaky eyes saw the man on the cot. He nudged forward beside Cardona; Joe pushed the stoolie aside and concentrated on Twitcher.

"Hello, Twitcher," growled Cardona. "So you were one of that jewel-snatching crew, eh? Lucky you were wearing a phony beard. Even a mask wouldn't have covered those chewy lips of yours. Who else was in the outfit?"

Twitcher's lips quit their contortion. Sullenly, the crook snarled:

"I'm not talkin', Joe! I've got nothin' to tell. I never saw the other guys, except when they was wearin' the whiskers."

"Listen, Twitcher," gruffed Cardona. "I've just come from the commissioner's office. I called headquarters right after I left there, found out that Squeak wanted me to meet him. I'll tell you something the commissioner said. He told me: 'Cardona, when you find that wounded man, give him a break if he'll tell who the others are.' So you've got your chance, Twitcher."

Twitcher remained silent. He figured Cardona's promise as a bluff. Joe, however, was quick to follow up his proposition. Eyeing Twitcher's bandaged shoulder, Cardona added:

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"The only guy who would have come here must have been a member of your outfit. Looks like he was something of a doctor, the way he fixed you up. He's one guy you know, Twitcher. Who is he?"

TWITCHER glanced at his shoulder and scowled. His expression changed to a twitch. Beyond his shoulder, the crook saw the back window; he realized that The Shadow was still there. Frantic nervousness gripped him. With effort, Twitcher came upright. He spoke to Cardona, but his words were for The Shadow's benefit.

"The croaker's a guy named Rund," blabbed Twitcher. "Studied to be a medico. Was in stir at Atlanta. I don't know where you'll locate him, though. Only the big-shot had that dope."

"The big-shot, eh? Who's he?"

Twitcher started to reply to Cardona's question: then wavered, pressing his left hand to his chest. Half slumping, he coughed:

"I'll – I'll try to tell you all I know, Joe. Only gimme some air. I've been cooped here 'til I can hardly breathe."

Cardona nodded to Squeak. The stoolie pulled up the shade at the side of Twitcher's cot, then opened the side window. The roar of an approaching elevated train came heavily from above the Bowery. Standing close to Twitcher, Cardona waited for the rumble to die away. Suddenly, he saw a rise of Twitcher's left arm; a contorted grin was on the crook's lips.

All the while, Cardona had been watching Twitcher's face. In that, he had an advantage on The Shadow, who was viewing the back of the crook's neck. Cardona should have known sooner that Twitcher was faking. By his error, Cardona had actually deceived The Shadow. With Twitcher's hand motion and its accompanying grin, Cardona realized that the crook had sent an emergency signal to someone on the roof of the low garage, between the tenement house and the Bowery.

Joe dived for the foot of the cot. Simultaneously, a rattle sounded with the power of a riveter, but its clatter was almost drowned by the crashing roar of the elevated train. Drilling bullets streamed through the window, to find two targets. The first was Squeak; as the stoolie fell clear, the machine gun bullets found Twitcher.

The crook rolled sidewise on his cot, still wearing his sickly grin. He had called for aid to offset the law. He had received it. The man who had responded with a submachine gun was the big-shot; from the garage roof, he had polished off Twitcher along with Squeak. But the hidden crook was not yet finished.

Again, the machine gun started its half-drowned clatter; bullets came sizzling at an angle. Shifting along the garage roof, the master crook was out to murder Cardona, whom he had glimpsed inside the room.

There came a counteracting move. From his station outside the rear window, The Shadow could not see past the corner of the tenement house. Nevertheless, he knew that the bombarding murderer must be almost on a line with that corner. The Shadow could see the level of the garage roof, by viewing the rear portion of it.

His right hand on the fire escape rail, The Shadow made a diving stretch along the wall. One foot gained a toehold that held him. His left hand thrust to full length and pushed an automatic muzzle just around the corner.

Steadily, The Shadow jabbed shots for an unseen target, pumping his bullets to cover the all-important area where the master crook would have to halt in order to aim his machine gun for Cardona.

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With each recoil of the .45, The Shadow's body turned, swinging in hingelike fashion from the wall. Amazingly, the black-clad marksman retained his hand clamp and his toehold.

The machine gun silenced amid The Shadow's fire. The fading rumble of the "el" train covered the last of The Shadow's shots. The Shadow's work was successful. His bullets had chipped the parapet of the garage roof, close to the approaching killer. The crook had given up his attempt to slaughter Joe Cardona.

SWINGING back to the rear window, The Shadow peered through; he saw Cardona staring from the side window, a revolver in his fist. When the typewriter rattle of the machine gun had stopped, Joe had leaped to the job, hoping to wing the departing crook. The Shadow could see that it was too late. Cardona had no target. The murderer was gone.

Looking toward the Bowery corner, The Shadow glimpsed the swift-moving top of an automobile as it shot away beneath the elevated. The glimpse gave him the impression that the car was a taxi that must have come up to the corner. The murderer had hopped to the roof of the vacant pawnshop, dashed down through the old building and grabbed the ready vehicle. It was too late to take up the trail.

The Shadow looked into the room again. He saw Cardona bending over Twitcher's body. Joe had guessed also that the big-shot had made a get-away. Not hearing The Shadow's deadened shots, Cardona did not know that there had been intervention from the fire escape.

Cardona, therefore, was concerned with Twitcher alone. One factor about the dead crook commanded immediate attention. Twitcher's right hand was clenched.

Cardona stared at the clenched fingers, then pocketed his revolver and gripped the dead fist. He pried at the stilled fingers; they gave, spreading outward. Twitcher's upraised palm-formed a tray, that held a rounded object. The Shadow saw the reflected glimmer of the gaslight transformed into a myriad of crimson sparkles.

Glowing from the dead crook's palm lay one of the Seven Drops of Blood. Like a fatal token, the prized ruby was a crystallized mark of doom. Alone, it looked the part that its name implied. It seemed to be a solidified blob of human blood.

Possession of that ruby had been followed by the death of its unrightful owner. One of the seven jewel robbers had received the trophy along with his share of the spoils. For Twitcher Killick, that glowing gem had become a drop of blood.

Silently, The Shadow drew away from the window. His unseen figure descended by the fire escape. Below, a grim laugh came as a suppressed whisper in the night.

Though a supercrook had silenced evidence by murdering one henchman, The Shadow was confident that he could regain the lost trail that ended with Cardona's discovery of a pilfered Drop of Blood.

CHAPTER VII. CROSSED TRAILS

IT was early the next evening. The end of a busy day had produced another conference between Commissioner Weston and Inspector Cardona. A pleased smile upon his lips, Weston was tapping a stack of newspapers that rested on his desk.

"We are arriving somewhere, Cardona," approved the commissioner. "Look at what the newspapers have to say. Through your efficiency, Tobias Berkland has regained one of his precious rubies. With it, a member of

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the criminal band has paid the penalty."

"That ruby gave the papers something to write about," admitted Cardona, with a grin. "They hardly mention the batch of other jewels that I found later, buried in Twitcher's mattress."

"The other gems were valuable," declared Weston, "but, singly, none of them was worth more than a trifle of the ruby's value. Nevertheless, despite the good results, there is still a great deal to worry us. Other members of the band are at large. They have fenced some more of the lesser gems."

"Worse than that, we are dealing with a master murderer. You were fortunate enough to escape his bullets last night, but the further you progress, the more dangerous the game may become. That is" – Weston's face showed a dissatisfied expression – "if you progress at all, Cardona."

"I get it, commissioner," returned Joe. "You think I was lucky; that the trail closed with Twitcher's death. You're wrong, commissioner. I picked up a lead from Twitcher. He told me about Rund; I've looked up the fellow's record. Marlow Rund is his full name. He sells dental equipment – and I've got a hunch he may have been a doctor, once."

"You told me about Rund, Cardona, but you admitted that you could find no one who knows where he can be located."

"I kept his name out of the papers, commissioner. What's more, I'm expecting word from the telephone company. Rund had a telephone once, at an old address. He may have one now, in some place that he took over from some other person. Like an apartment, with an unexpired lease."

"Rund used to make a lot of complaints about the telephone service; maybe he's still doing, it. So I sent a lot of his photographs to the telephone company. Told them that if any of their trouble-shooters recognized the man, to send a report down to headquarters."

Rising, Cardona glanced at his watch.

"I'm due down there now, commissioner," he informed. "I didn't post any one to give me a telephone call. I just told them to hold any messages that came for me."

Weston put a question, as Cardona was starting toward the door.

"Suppose you do locate Rund, Cardona?" he queried. "How will you approach him?"

"Like I did Killick," rejoined Cardona, grimly. "Only this time, I'll stay away from open windows."

Cardona took his leave. For the present, Joe was concerned with only one thing: the finding of Marlow Rund.

THERE was every reason to suppose that Rund was still in New York. Crooks were fencing jewels; Rund, in particular, had been needed in Manhattan, because Killick had been wounded. Yet Cardona had discreetly avoided a man hunt for Rund. He believed that the crook might be more easily captured if he did not suspect that Killick had betrayed him.

Cardona's belief was a good one. Its value was proven not long after Cardona had left Weston. The proof took place when a chunky, flat-faced individual walked from the lobby of a Lexington Avenue hotel. That man's widened countenance, his slitted eyes and heavy lips matched the photographs that Cardona had sent to the telephone company.

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Marlow Rund looked more important than a salesman. He had the appearance of a physician; he knew the fact and tried to keep up the part. Believing that he had bluffed the law, Rund was sure that a doctor's pose was the best that he could carry. He had read the newspapers, but they had contained no mention of the law's belief that Twitcher Killick had received competent medical treatment.

Rund was carrying a small satchel that served him doubly. It looked like a physician's bag; it also enabled him to lug around the jewels that he supplied to fences. The bag was light, as Rund handled it. That explained the destination that he gave when he entered a taxicab and spoke importantly to the driver.

Rund was returning to his old apartment, to pick up another supply of swag. As he rode along, he glanced impatiently at his watch. That gesture revealed another reason why Rund was going to his former abode. The crook apparently expected to hear from someone at a given hour.

When the cab reached Rund's street, the chunky man was alert. His slitted eyes stared, snakelike, from the windows, took in a quick survey of the entire block. The cab stopped a few doors above Rund's, as he had given the driver an address farther along the street.

Alighting, Rund paid the driver and stalked briskly to the proper house. He opened the front door with a key, went upstairs and used the same key to enter his apartment. As The Shadow had done the night before, Rund pulled down the shades and turned on the light afterward.

Everything in the living room was as Rund had left it. Swinging, he turned toward the bedroom. By the light from the living room, he could see the closed door of the empty closet that contained his surplus of jewels. He grinned in satisfaction as he entered the bedroom without turning on the light. He was carrying his physician's grip; he intended to load the bag with the aid of a flashlight that he produced from his pocket.

HALFWAY to the closet door, Rund paused as a muffled jingle came from beside a bed. It was the telephone; the suppressed ring pleased the crook. Rund had insisted that his telephone bell be adjusted so that it would not ring too loudly. He had given a good reason for the adjustment: the claim that he had been awakened at nights by persons calling the wrong number.

Since Rund asserted that he never received late calls for himself, he claimed that he was entitled to sleep through the night. A special bell had therefore been installed. As a matter of fact, Rund actually had received late calls, but did not want other occupants of the house to know it.

"Hello..." Rund's tone was a purry whisper as he spoke into the telephone. "Yes, I just arrived... No. Nothing wrong here. What's that? You think I had better leave town?... But I thought we were all supposed to remain here..."

"I see... Certainly, it would be wise, in view of circumstances... Yes, I arranged for a vacation. No one would suspect... All right. Give me the instructions. I'll repeat them..." Rund paused, listening to a voice across the wire. He repeated the instructions in staccato fashion:

"To Cleveland... Tonight... Take the goods with me... Caddey's Pawnshop. Tomorrow morning..."

Rund hung up. Then he used the telephone again, to make rail reservations to Cleveland, giving the fictitious name of Meeker.

Hanging up, Rund glanced at his watch. It was quarter past nine. The train departed at nine forty-five. The crook reached for his bag. His hand stopped on the handle. Outside, Rund could hear a click in the door from the hallway. The sound indicated a passkey; Rund knew that the janitor had one.

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Pulling the bag from view, Rund drew back behind the doorway.

The outer door came open. Footsteps sounded; Rund heard the prowler approach the door of the bedroom.

A figure shifted suddenly through the doorway, blocking the light. Rund huddled close to the corner, his face turned away. The ruse worked. The entrant had cut off his own light. He had failed to spy Rund in the darkness. Still huddled, Rund heard the light switch click.

As a glow filled the bedroom, Rund sprang around. His quick turn enabled him to catch the intruder flat-footed, even though the man heard Rund's surge and whisked about to meet him. On the other side of the doorway, Rund saw a man whom he had never met before, but whose identity he could guess.

The trapped intruder was Joe Cardona.

At headquarters, Joe had interviewed the "trouble-shooter" who had installed Rund's special telephone bell. Learning of Rund's apartment, Cardona had come here more wary than he had been at Berkland's, or at Twitcher's hideout.

Again, though, Joe was caught off guard, even though he was coming around with his gun. Rund had the bead; his finger was on the trigger of a gun he had pulled previously. Doom seemed sure for Joe Cardona at a three-foot range.

Instantly, a gunshot reverberated. So close was the report, that Cardona thought for the moment that Rund had fired. The crook's gun arm wavered, but Cardona did not notice it. Nor did he heed a warning hiss that urged him to withhold his fire. Instinctively, Cardona pulled the trigger as he completed his quick aim. His revolver barked just as Rund's arm sagged.

Joe's bullet found the crook's chest. Rund sprawled to the floor, kicked the carpeting in the agony of a mortal wound. His revolver clattered; its muzzle lacked a curl of smoke. Cardona looked to his left, suddenly remembering the hissed whisper that had come with the gunshot.

The closet door had swung wide. Stepping from the hiding place was The Shadow. He had been here, in wait for Rund, intending to accost the wanted crook. The Shadow had been forced to fire an intervening bullet in behalf of Cardona; he had chosen Rund's gun arm as a target. Cardona had followed with a blunder. Joe's quick shot had doomed Rund.

The Shadow reached Rund's body, stooped above the dying crook whom he had wanted as an informant. Rund's eyes were upward; they viewed The Shadow with a glassy stare. The Shadow hissed commanding words. Rund's tight lips opened as if to speak, then failed him. A last writhe shook the crook's frame; his left hand dipped to his vest pocket. His fingers went from view and tightened.

Cardona was beside The Shadow, stooping above Rund. In a subdued growl, Cardona acknowledged his error. Joe was staring at Rund's dead form as he spoke. Just as he was about to turn toward The Shadow, he stopped to watch a gloved hand reach for Rund's left wrist. The Shadow's fist tugged the dead hand from its pocket.

Cardona gave an exclamation, pointed to the hand which The Shadow held. Rund's thumb was pressed tightly against his first two fingers. Between the thumb and the digits was a glowing object that shone with the intensity of a living coal.

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The glow was red. The brilliant trophy that Rund gripped was a ruby, the mate of the one that Cardona had reclaimed from Twitcher Killick. The second Drop of Blood had been regained. It was a positive token that Marlow Rund had been a member of the heinous band that had stolen Tobias Berkland's gems.

THE SHADOW plucked the ruby from Rund's fingers, passed it to Cardona, who held it, staring awed, as he saw the stone's blood-red glitter.

Moments passed; Cardona arose and turned to face The Shadow. He wanted to mutter new apologies for his error; to thank The Shadow, in addition. Words, however, did not come from Joe Cardona's lips.

Instead, those lips opened as wide as Cardona's eyes. The ace sleuth stared at vacancy. While Cardona had been gazing at the ruby, oblivious to all else, The Shadow had staged a silent, rapid departure.

Though Rund was dead, The Shadow had gained another trait. The cloaked avenger had gone to seek enshrouding night. Acting upon a positive clue, The Shadow expected to meet new men of crime.

CHAPTER VIII. DEATH ON THE RAMP

WITHIN two blocks of Rund's apartment. The Shadow stepped into a parked taxicab. An alert driver, ready at the wheel, heard the slight slam of the door. He looked back into the rear of the cab, where The Shadow was completely blanketed in darkness. Expecting an order, the driver shifted the gear lever.

The Shadow spoke a whispered command to wait. Crouching forward, he gripped the base of the rear seat, slid it forward in the fashion of a drawer. From this space, The Shadow produced a flat box. He opened it; a tiny flashlight glimmered against a mirror.

This cab was The Shadow's; its driver, Moe Shrevnitz, was one of the speediest hackies in New York. Tonight, in anticipation of tangled events, The Shadow had chosen the taxi instead of his limousine. The box that The Shadow had drawn from concealment was a make-up kit. Choosing appliances that lay within, The Shadow began a transformation.

His gloves removed, he applied dabs of a putty substance to his cheeks, built up the contour of his hawklike face until it became unrecognizable. Swiftly, long fingers spread the mold. They added fills beside the nose. Working from memory, The Shadow completed the formation of a flattish countenance.

The Shadow spoke to the driver; the cab moved forward. With a final reference to the mirror, The Shadow added make-up to his lips; then closed his eyes in slittish fashion. He was satisfied with the face that peered at him from the illuminated mirror. To the last detail, that countenance was a duplicate of Marlow Rund's. For some reason, The Shadow had taken on the identity of the crook who had died but a dozen minutes before.

The Shadow had given the order for the cab to start; he had stated the direction; leaning forward, he added the actual destination:

"Grand Central Terminal."

A pause, while the cab moved onward. Again, The Shadow spoke to the driver:

"Follow emergency instructions when you receive the signal."

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Moe drove ahead. In back, The Shadow placed the make-up kit beneath his cloak. He did not replace the special drawer beneath the back seat; instead, he lifted the mat and clamped it to the floor board, where it fitted into grooves as if a part of the floor itself.

He pulled the driver's picture from the glass-fronted rack where it rested and passed it through the front window. He received another card that Moe gave him in return – one that bore a different picture and a mythical name.

The Shadow was prepared to dispose of the taxi that had served him on so many expeditions. For some time he had thought of junking it, to replace it with a newer, speedier vehicle. That opportunity had come; but the old cab was slated for a more deserving and heroic finish than The Shadow had originally intended.

THE cab neared Grand Central Terminal. It swung toward the entrance that loaded taxis used in entering the big depot – the drive that formed an entrance to the taxicab unloading platform. The Shadow's watch showed the time as nine thirty-seven, eight minutes before the scheduled departure of the train that Rund was to have boarded for Cleveland.

As he placed the watch beneath his cloak, The Shadow peered from the window of the cab. He whispered for Moe to slacken speed.

The cab slowed before it reached the entrance platform that formed the driveway. The Shadow's cloak was dropped from his shoulders; his head was hatless as he peered from the cab window. The features of Marlow Rund showed plainly in the light from the street.

That face was spied instantly by the occupants of a cab that was waiting near the platform. The cab shot forward; lights blinked a signal. As the cab cut into the platform ahead of The Shadow's taxi, a second cab closed suddenly from the rear.

The Shadow huddled to the rear seat, whipped up the collar of his cloak. With the same action, he clamped his slouch hat on his head. Snapping forth an automatic with his right hand, he gripped the door to his left. Hidden lips phrased a single word – a command to the man at the wheel:

"Go!"

Moe pulled the hand accelerator lever as The Shadow shoved the rear door open. Kicking his own loosened door, the driver made a dive from the car. He looked back as he did, for the order was to follow The Shadow. The cloaked fighter led the way, springing clear of the running board, with the taxi driver following him.

The spot that The Shadow had chosen was between two big pillars. He gained it, on his feet. Moe sprawled beside him. The Shadow shoved the hackie out of danger. The jump was timely.

The Shadow's cab was between two others; from both of those, machine guns sprouted, trained directly on the abandoned taxi. The "typewriters" ripped loose; their bullets riddled the cab completely. If Rund had been in that taxi, he would not have come out alive; nor would the unfortunate driver who might have been at the wheel.

The Grand Central taxi platform had become a death trap, designed for the doom of Marlow Rund.

CROOKS did not know that their intended victim had already died; nor did they guess that the actual occupants of the cab had done a dive between the pillars.

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There were two in the front cab. Their jolt came when The Shadow's cab lurched onward, spurred by the opened throttle. It cracked the cab ahead, sent it bouncing half across the loading platform. The bumpers locked; fenders crashed. The Shadow's cab climbed halfway over the one ahead, bashing the entire back of the manned vehicle.

All that saved the crooks from a complete wreck was the sidewise topple of the abandoned cab. Thudding a pillar, the old hack broke free; it pounded head-on against another stony barrier.

The crook at the wheel of the attacking cab ahead saw chance for flight. The platform was clear in front of him. Jabbing the accelerator, he started a getaway, with a stunned machine gunner flat on the floor in back of him.

The second of the attacking cabs had stopped, just inside the platform. Its driver had counted upon a halt of other cabs outside. He was ready to reverse, when he heard a hoarse cry from the man in the rear seat. The passenger who gripped the machine gun had spotted the blackened figure of The Shadow against the grimy granite of the nearest pillar.

Knowing that The Shadow would make for the running board, or intended to roll beneath the stalled taxi, the man with the machine gun dipped the weapon. His full weight on the doorsill, he shoved his shoulders outward, peering over to take quick aim.

At that instant, The Shadow was by the step. His hand had found the doorknob. Kneeling on the concrete of the platform, The Shadow yanked the door outward.

The machine gunner sprawled headlong, but held on to his machine gun. The thug at the wheel jabbed down the gas pedal; the cab whipped away in reverse, out to the street and was away, just as The Shadow came up to aim.

The felled killer was hoisting his machine gun, determined, this time, to get the weapon into play.

The Shadow's gloved finger tugged its trigger. The .45 tongued its dart of flame. The thug took the bullet in the shoulder. Losing his grip on the machine gun, the ruffian staggered forward; then, rallying, he dropped the weapon and flung himself upon The Shadow.

Clutching the attacker, The Shadow shoved the ugly face backward. In the light above the platform, he recognized the ruffian. The thug was a local crook, "Ping" Locus, well known in the underworld for his ability with a machine gun. He had been a suitable running mate for Twitcher Killick.

Supposedly on the lam, Ping had actually stayed in some Manhattan hideout, to elude the police round-up. That policy had gained him little. He was captured by The Shadow. Ping, like Twitcher and Rund, was a rogue who could talk. The Shadow intended to make him blab. Ping knew it, as soon as he caught the burn of The Shadow's eyes.

With a harsh oath, Ping jabbed his left fist for The Shadow's throat. The Shadow's head bobbed away; his shoulders heaved. Ping was lifted off his feet; headlong, he pitched to the platform and rolled there. The Shadow swung to pounce upon his sprawled adversary. He stopped, to twist about as he heard the screech of brakes.

A taxicab had swung into the ramp, coming at terrific speed. Its driver saw Ping and jammed the brakes too late. The front wheels hit the outstretched machine gunner. One wheel thumped over Ping's neck. As the driver twisted the steering wheel, a rear tire bounced across the middle of Ping's back.

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STANDING against the pillar, The Shadow saw a man leap from the cab. It was Joe Cardona; the inspector sprang to Ping's side and lifted the prostrate thug. Joe's taxi driver joined him. At that moment, Moe came up beside The Shadow.

"I've got a cab waiting," whispered Moe, quickly. "Told the hackie I was in a jam – that I wanted to get away. He's waiting for me; we can cut through between the pillars, when you're ready to go –"

The Shadow motioned for silence as he gave Moe a nod. Watching Cardona, The Shadow saw that Joe had revived Ping Locus. There was still a chance that the crook could speak before death claimed him.

"I know about Rund," The Shadow heard Cardona say. "They called back from Grand Central, thinking his name was Meeker, to tell him they had the reservation he wanted on the train to Cleveland. That's why I headed here. I know the whole dope, Ping. Better spill what you know about the big-shot –"

Ping interrupted with a grimace. Though his eyes were glazed with the approaching, touch of death, the crook knew that Cardona was bluffing. With an effort, Ping raised one hand to his mouth, thrust something between his lips and tried to gulp it with one swallow.

He failed. An exclamation came from the taxi driver who stood beside Cardona.

"Poison!" The hackie's tone was awed. "He's trying to croak himself, so he won't have to talk!"

Cardona gave a twist at Ping's chin. The crook's neck went back, then toppled forward. Ping was dead; his muscles had relaxed their spasmodic tension. Thick lips opened; jaws spread apart. From between Ping's big teeth dropped a rounded object that looked like a large bead.

Cardona grabbed it, the trophy that Ping had tried to swallow.

The light above the ramp imparted a bloodlike brilliance to the object that Cardona had gained. Once again, the police inspector held a ruby that matched the two that he had already reclaimed. Ping Locus, third of the bearded marauders who had made the jewel grab, had delivered another of the stolen Drops of Blood!

From beside the near-by pillar, the whispered laugh of The Shadow came as a solemn knell. When that sound faded, the black-clad battler was gone.

CHAPTER IX. CARDONA'S VISIT

THE next day was a triumphant one for Joe Cardona. The press credited the ace sleuth with a double stroke. Joe had regained one ruby that night at Twitcher's; he had topped it by bringing in two in a single evening.

During the day that followed the double success, Cardona attended a conference of the International Association of Jewelers in company with Commissioner Weston. They watched experts test the three Drops of Blood; they saw an application of the heat test which gems other than rubies could not stand. Under the blasts of furnace temperature, the rubies glowed more vigorously than ever. They did not lose the smallest fraction of their lustre.

Microscopic examinations were also made. The experts declared emphatically that these were the genuine rubies that had once adorned a maharajah's starred turban. Broken from their settings, the stones had obviously been divided among the crooks, of whom there were seven.

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During the day, Tobias Berkland visited the office of the International Association of Jewelers. He was given a check for one hundred and fifty thousand dollars as payment for the three rubies. The stones were placed in the super vault at the Association office. Announcement was made that they would be displayed at next week's exposition.

In addition to the rubies, the law had recovered new quantities of lesser gems. Search had uncovered the cache at Rund's. Papers in the pocket of Ping Locus had contained clues to the location of the machine gunner's hide-out. There, Ping's share of the swag had been found. Ping had apparently failed to fence any of his portion.

Unfortunately, further trails had not been forthcoming. The newspapers did not mention that fact, for police reporters were of the opinion that Cardona had learned more facts but was keeping mum.

Weston alone was informed that Cardona's future hunt would have to be a blind one; but the commissioner voiced no disapproval. On the contrary, he was so enthusiastic over Cardona's work that he talked himself into the belief that the ace would make new progress.

WHEN early evening came, Cardona was in the subway, riding to headquarters. Summarizing the events of a busy day, the swarthy inspector began to puzzle over one particular point. That was the policy of the master crook. Obviously, the murderer had seen to the death of two men who had worked for him.

First, the murderer had slain Twitcher Killick, in person. He had done that to prevent Twitcher's squeal. To dispose of Rund, he had called in the rest of the subordinates, turning the job over to them. Though Cardona knew nothing about The Shadow's disguise, it was plain that waiting crooks had mistaken The Shadow's cab for Rund's.

Cardona came to the logical conclusion that the henchmen had knocked off Rund because the fake doctor was taking to flight.

Cardona might have altered that opinion, had he known of the telephone call that Rund had received. That call had come from the master crook, ordering Rund to leave New York. Only The Shadow had overheard that call. The Shadow had formed opinions of his own.

Ping Locus had been slain in straight combat, plus an accident.

Events were shaping themselves without Cardona's knowledge. The swarthy sleuth had proof of it when he reached his office. There was a message waiting for him – one that should have borne an inkling of the future; but Cardona failed to regard the message as an important one. It seemed more a matter of routine.

The message was from Berkland. It requested that Cardona make a prompt visit to his home, to discuss an important matter. Purely as a convenience, in case reporters were about, Berkland suggested that Cardona come in by the back door. The message added that he would find Berkland in the second floor library. With a slight touch of humor, Berkland guaranteed that Ungler would not be carrying a gun.

Cardona noted that the message had arrived an hour ago; therefore, he decided to go at once to the oil magnate's home. Remembering Weston's admonition regarding frequent reports, Cardona stopped off at the Cobalt Club, which was on his way. He inquired for Commissioner Weston, only to learn that his superior had taken a trip to Long Island and would not return until midnight.

As he started from the club lobby, Cardona saw a tall figure move languidly from the door of the reading room. He stopped to give a greeting.

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"Good evening, Mr. Cranston," spoke Cardona. "I expected to see you earlier today, when they tested the rubies."

"Such experiments bore me," replied The Shadow, in the easy tone of Cranston. "It appeared obvious that the gems were genuine, since they were found on criminals who possessed other stolen jewels. I was willing to take Commissioner Weston's word for it."

The Shadow paused: he eyed Cardona keenly, but his half-closed eyes did not betray their burning glint. The Shadow could tell that Cardona was impatient to go somewhere; that he had stopped at the club only in hope of finding Weston.

"By the way, Cardona," remarked The Shadow, "Commissioner Weston commended you quite highly this evening. He said that he intended to place his official car at your disposal. He forgot that statement, when he was suddenly called to Long Island. Perhaps I could rectify his forgetfulness."

Cardona looked puzzled. The Shadow added an explanation.

"My limousine is waiting out front," he said. "You can use it, if you are in a hurry."

Cardona could see no way to decline the offer. Moreover, it was one that pleased him. He wanted to make up for lost time, and the big car certainly offered the way to reach Berkland's rapidly.

Joe expressed his thanks. The Shadow accompanied him to the front door; the limousine came over to the entrance.

"I won't be gone long," explained Cardona. "I'm only running up to Berkland's for a few minutes. But I shouldn't be depriving you of your car, Mr. Cranston. If you happen to want it while I am gone —"

"That's easily settled," interposed The Shadow. He urged Cardona into the limousine, then stepped in himself. "I shall ride along with you. I would like to say hello to Berkland. I imagine the old chap will be in an enthusiastic mood tonight."

Through the speaking tube, The Shadow gave Stanley, the chauffeur instructions to drive to Berkland's. Cardona added an amendment. He explained that he was going to enter the house by the back door. The Shadow relayed the information to Stanley, telling the chauffeur to stop on the rear street.

When they neared the back of Berkland's house, The Shadow drew a briefcase from the cushions.

"You may wish to confer alone with Berkland," he told Cardona. "So I shall take along my briefcase. While you are busy, I can go over papers that I brought with me to the club."

They alighted at the passage to Berkland's back door. Cardona was pleased when The Shadow ordered the chauffeur to drive back to the club and await his call. They went through to Berkland's house, found the back door open, with a light burning in the kitchen. Going through to the front hall, the visitors went upstairs.

BERKLAND greeted them outside the library. His face showed annoyance when he saw The Shadow; then Berkland covered the expression.

Cardona noticed it; he explained that Mr. Cranston could wait in another room during the conference. The Shadow added that he intended to go over papers in his briefcase.

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"I have a better suggestion," put in Berkland warmly. "Suppose you look over some of my rare books." He indicated the little room in the front corner of the library. "Go right in, Mr. Cranston. Make yourself at home. I shall close the door, so that you will not be disturbed."

The Shadow seemed pleased at the suggestion. He entered the unlocked room. Berkland watched him lay his briefcase aside and begin to look over the books. The oil magnate closed the door, beckoned to Cardona and pointed toward the passage to the study. They went through to the little room.

Another man awaited them. Glen Mogridge was seated near Berkland's desk, puffing at a cigar. Berkland's brother-in-law nodded to Cardona, but his face showed anxiety. One look at the dark-haired man told Cardona that something important was due.

Glancing toward Berkland, Cardona saw that he, too, expressed concern. Berkland had covered that fact while in the library. Once in his study, he looked solemn and troubled as he locked the door through which they had come.

"Sit down, inspector," invited Berkland. "Have a little cigar. There will not be time for a longer smoke. We are to have a visitor – one whom you must meet."

"Who is he?"

"I do not know his identity; but I can assure you that both Mogridge and myself are relieved because you have arrived. We were becoming fearful. You will understand why, when I tell you the one fact that I do know about our expected visitor."

Berkland paused. His hand was a trifle shaky as he stretched forth a match to Cardona's cigar, then applied a flame to his own.

"You recovered three of the stolen rubies," asserted Berkland. "Thereby, you learned the identities of three men who held them: Killick, Rund and Locus. Tell me positively, inspector" – Berkland eyed Cardona steadily – "have you gained the names of any others?"

Cardona hesitated, then made the frank reply:

"Not one of them, Mr. Berkland. The trail is blind. If I could only get hold of one more member of that crew – if I could only get a peek at him –"

"You will have that opportunity soon, inspector." It was Mogridge who supplied the remark. "The man in question is due here in ten minutes."

Astonished, Cardona stared at Berkland. He saw the sharp-featured oil magnate nod his head solemnly.

"What Mogridge says is true," pronounced Berkland. "Our expected visitor will be the man who holds the fourth Drop of Blood."

Intently, Cardona awaited further facts. Berkland's tone had convinced him. Joe Cardona was eager to learn the details of this surprising visit. All the while, he was tense, for an important thought had struck him.

The break that Cardona wanted had arrived; but this coming meeting bore a dangerous aspect. It promised to be one interview that would take place without The Shadow's knowledge.

CHAPTER X. CROOKS COMPROMISE

"AT half past seven this evening," expressed Tobias Berkland, "I received a telephone call from some unknown party. The man who spoke used a voice that was obviously disguised. He wanted to arrange an appointment with me at nine o'clock tonight, the meeting place to be this study."

"He knew the layout of this house?" queried Cardona, sharply.

"No," replied Berkland. "He had but an imperfect knowledge of it, such as one might have gained from newspaper reports and by studying the house from the outside. He knew that there was a side door; he said that it was the only entrance he would be willing to use. He specified that the door must be open, with a free path here."

"And he said that he had one of the rubies?"

"Yes. He decided that he would bring it, as proof that his claim was genuine. He told me that he could promise information that would lead to the recovery of all the missing Drops of Blood. He specified, though, that he must see me alone; that if the house happened to be watched, the visit would be called off.

"But I believed that if you came here alone, inspector, the crook would suspect nothing; and that we could depend upon you to handle the matter as capably as a squad of officers."

Cardona looked pleased at the compliment; but his face also showed concern. He put a question:

"Does Ungler know about this?"

"No," replied Berkland. "He answered the telephone when the call came, but he left the study before I held the conversation. Ungler seemed ill today. I suggested that he retire early. He is in his room on the third floor."

"What about young Woolford? Was he here when the call came?"

"Yes," acknowledged Berkland. "He was downstairs, with my daughter. I called Lenore here later and explained matters to her. She suggested to Woolford that they go out together. Lenore understands that she is to breathe no word of the matter."

Cardona noted a clock on Berkland's desk. It showed five minutes of nine. Joe shook his head dubiously.

"We're in something of a spot, Mr. Berkland," he said. "I'd like to go through with this proposition; but this study isn't a good place for it. You've got to be here alone. Where are you going to stow Mr. Mogridge and myself?"

Berkland smiled before replying. The eagle-faced man arose and stepped to the center of the room. He waved one hand toward the door that led to the library.

"I have locked that door," he declared. "In addition, there are two more doors between us and the little room where I left Cranston. We shall have no disturbance from that direction. This other door" – he pointed across the room – "is the one by which the crook will enter. He will surely find it after he enters, for I have blocked off all other pathways on the ground floor."

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"Over here" – Berkland stepped to a spot opposite his desk – "we have a bookcase. It covers an alcove where I once kept a bulky safe. That space is empty at present; moreover, it is quite accessible."

Berkland gripped the bookcase, drew it like a door. The bookcase swung wide to disclose a square alcove that measured four feet across. It was just high enough to admit a person of average stature.

"Though not intended as a hiding place," said Berkland, "it can be used as such. It is admirably suited to our purpose, inspector. Mogridge and I tested it, while waiting for you. Persons behind the bookcase can remain unseen, yet be able to peer out between the rows of books. Moreover, they can hear all that is said in the room, but their own whispers cannot be detected. If you and Mogridge go behind the bookcase –"

BERKLAND paused. From somewhere downstairs came a sharp click. It could have been the bolting of the side door. The clock showed nine.

Berkland stepped hastily to his desk. He produced a .32 revolver gestured for Mogridge to take it. Cardona drew his own revolver; he and Mogridge hastily moved beyond the bookcase. Berkland swung it shut and strode back to his desk.

The door, leading from below, opened. A man stepped in from the threshold. He was tall, well-dressed, although his attire was a trifle garish. Brown shoes, brown suit and green necktie were topped by a shrewd, beakish face. The visitor was a man of about forty-five; his eyes, though pleasant, were shifty and added to the man's crafty appearance.

As the arrival stared about the room, Cardona gave a suppressed grunt of recognition. Mogridge caught it; he whispered:

"You know who he is?"

"Gaspard Marotte," identified Cardona, in an undertone. "He claims to be an Englishman; but he has a French name. Travels the steamships. Been held a couple of times on smuggling charges."

"A jewel smuggler?"

"Yes. Last we heard, he was in Europe. Just the sort of bird to be in on a jewel snatch."

Marotte had centered upon Berkland. The oil magnate had arisen to greet his visitor.

With a friendly nod, the shrewd-faced smuggler took a chair at Berkland's gesture. Cardona and Mogridge could eye the man's profile.

"I shall be brief, Mr. Berkland," announced Marotte, suavely, helping himself to one of the oil magnate's cigars. "Who I am, does not matter. What I can tell you, does. Do you agree to hold this interview in confidence?"

Berkland nodded. Marotte smiled and proceeded:

"Seven men robbed Pettigrew's auction rooms. One man dominated that group. He engineered the whole affair, aided, of course, by his six subordinates. The leader murdered Pettigrew and his assistant; but those crimes were his own idea entirely.

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"Afterward, he claimed the deaths were necessary. But then Twitcher Killick was bumped off; then Marlow Rund. The master crook didn't know of Rund's death, for he had henchmen at Grand Central to murder him. One was Ping Locus – and he was killed in a fray there with a person known as The Shadow.

"Today, two of the three remaining subordinates met and decided that the crook leader might feel that his future safety depended on the silence of the men who served him. A murderer already, that master crook would certainly consider death to be the best of all silencers."

Berkland caught the full meaning of Marotte's statement. The supercrook – whoever he might be – was killing off his henchmen, one by one. He had finished Killick; Rund had been polished off before he got to him. Luck had added Locus to the fatal list. More than that, Berkland understood that Marotte was one of the henchman; that he, too, feared death from the supercrook.

"What about the fourth ruby?" questioned Berkland, suddenly. "You promised to bring it as a credential."

MAROTTE slyly eyed the room. Satisfied that he was unwatched he opened his mouth and thrust thumb and fore-finger far back to an upper tooth. He plucked out a molar. The tooth was a false one of an overlarge size.

When he brought the fake tooth to the light, Marotte revealed that it was nothing but a thin metal shell, coated with a white enamel paint. The top of the tooth was open. Inverting it, Marotte tapped. A ruby plopped from the cuplike container and rolled across the table to Berkland.

"A smuggler's device," smiled Marotte. "I needed a special size to get that ruby in it. You see, Mr. Berkland, the two men whom I mentioned have decided to deal with you before they settle with the master crook who intends to betray them."

"Quite interesting," remarked Berkland. He, too, had put on a canny smile. "One of them gave you his ruby. What about the other? I would rather talk about two than one."

Marotte made answer by reaching to the other side of his upper jaw. Out came another large-sized tooth. The crook shook another-ruby to the table.

Berkland picked up the two gems, held one in each hand, comparing them. Coolly, he asked:

"What is your proposition?"

"Forty grand for the pair," replied Marotte. "Cash down."

"Twenty thousand dollars apiece?" returned Berkland, in an incredulous tone. He shook his head. "That is far too much!"

"It may only be ten grand apiece," insisted Marotte, wisely, "if you follow this up, Mr. Berkland."

"How so?"

"As part of the proposition, I shall give you two names. One, that of the fool who still thinks the big-shot is on the level; the other, the name of the master crook himself. Each has a ruby in his possession. Neither will suspect that his identity is known. You have merely to tell the police who they are. The law will capture them, red-handed."

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"And you and your pal? I mean the two men you represent?"

"They will make their get-away. You, of course, will forget them. That is part of the deal. You can say that two rubies were delivered to you anonymously, with information regarding the other two."

Berkland was silent. He had reached a point where he did not know what to say. Marotte thought that the oil magnate was still dissatisfied with the price.

"You can spare forty grand," reminded Marotte, suavely. "You just received a hundred and fifty thousand dollars today, from the International Association of Jewelers."

Berkland nodded.

"I did," he admitted; "and I deposited the check in the bank. But I have no cash here tonight."

"Produce it tomorrow evening," proposed Marotte, reaching to take the rubies. "You went through with this meeting according to agreement. I can count on you to do the same tomorrow."

"Very well. Bring the rubies again tomorrow."

AS Berkland returned the gems to Marotte, Cardona nudged forward, intending to push the bookcase open. Mogridge gripped Joe's arm. With quick whisper, the mustached man restrained his companion.

"Better allow Marotte to leave," advised Mogridge. "He thinks Berkland is on the level. He will be back tomorrow."

"But we can bag him now," returned Cardona, in the same low tone. "With a pair of rubies on him."

"Tomorrow night he will name the crook behind the whole game. That will enable you to find the other rubies."

"I'll make him talk tonight. He'll have to, if he wants to save his hide. Leave it to me, Mr. Mogridge."

Cardona's whisper was determined, so emphatic that it brought a whispered agreement from Mogridge. Leveling his revolver, Cardona nudged the bookcase with his shoulder, just as Marotte was bending forward to replace the rubies in their false-tooth containers.

Marotte heard the grind of burdened hinges. He dropped the rubies, sprang to his feet and whipped around, his right hand thrust toward his coat pocket. Halting, the crook gave a sickly, leering grin that showed the gaps between his upper teeth.

Gaspard Marotte was staring straight into the muzzles of a pair of revolvers. Joe Cardona's gun was the closer; Mogridge's .32 was more distant, but as steadily aimed as Joe's.

Completely bluffed by Berkland's willingness to deal with him, the fourth crook had let himself be trapped. Joe Cardona, this time, had gained a capture without The Shadow's aid.

CHAPTER XI. DOOM REPEATS

MAROTTE'S glossy manner vanished when his eyes spied the steady guns. A ratlike snarl came from the

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crook's opened lips. His fingers clenched as he backed toward the corner of the desk. Turning, Marotte spied Berkland; viciously, he spat oaths at the oil magnate.

"Cut it, Marotte," snapped Cardona. He approached, frisked the crook's gun from its pocket. "You talked a lot tonight. Let's hear some more."

Marotte stared toward the opened door, saw that his path was blocked by Mogridge. Cardona was squarely in front of the crook; Marotte looked across the room, seeking another possible avenue of escape. All that he saw was the locked door that led to the library, its key straight upward.

"What if I did talk?" snarled Marotte. "I didn't incriminate myself."

"Maybe not by what you said," rejoined Cardona, pocketing the crook's gun, "but by what you did. Having those rubies on you is enough, Marotte."

The crook chewed his lips. Cardona kept up the pressure.

"You know what the charge will be," he reminded. "Murder! You were with that bunch at Pettigrew's. That makes you as badly off as the actual killer. It will be the chair for you, Marotte!"

Marotte trembled. His ugly leer was gone. He moved one of his upstretched hands to wipe cold sweat from his wide forehead. His lips moved, as though ready to talk.

"One thing might save you," added Cardona. "If you and that pal you mentioned turn State's evidence, maybe there won't be a murder charge. Your only way out is to admit that you were in on the robbery, and tell us your pal's name. How about it, Marotte?"

"I don't like to squeal on a pal," pleaded Marotte, his voice rising to a quavering whine. "If I thought it would help him, though –"

"It will," assured Cardona. "You can count on that, Marotte."

"Then this isn't a squeal." Marotte put the statement vigorously. "I'm telling you his name to help him out. So he can help me out. That's why I'm telling you who he is. You've heard of him. He's Jake Doxol, the con man."

"That's a hot one," grunted Cardona. "Another smart guy, working out of his line. I thought Jake was in Florida."

"He was, until he heard of this proposition. He's not very far away now," asserted Marotte. His voice had steadied, his lips had lost their quiver. "It won't take you long to find him. Not long at all. You'll see Jake very soon –"

AN ugly chuckle interrupted Marotte's words. It came from the open door. Cardona turned his head, then stiffened. So did Mogridge. Berkland, behind the desk, sank backward.

There was a moment's pause; after it, two revolvers thudded the floor. Cardona and Mogridge raised their arms; Berkland shakily copied the move.

In the doorway stood a long-limbed man whose rounded face and bald head showed everything but friendliness. Lying in the crook of the arrival's arm was a submachine gun. The man's position indicated that

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he knew how to handle the weapon. Marotte, the fourth crook, had introduced the fifth.

The man in the doorway was Jake Doxol.

"Good work, Jake," chuckled Marotte, pulling a handkerchief from his hip pocket. He mopped his brow, then added: "I knew you'd come upstairs when I overstayed my time. But it was tough, keeping up the bluff."

"I heard you," gruffed Doxol. "You were talking louder than you needed. I didn't want to barge in in a big hurry. The more they got interested in what you were saying, the better."

"That was smart. Keep them covered, Jake, while I settle this proposition. Don't worry about that other door. It's locked on this side."

Jake looked across the room, saw the key turned crosswise in the door that led to the library. He edged in from his own door, gesturing Cardona and Mogridge to the far corner. Marotte concentrated upon Berkland.

"The deal is still on," announced Marotte, "only it will cost you sixty grand, instead of forty. We'll take your check for it, Berkland. You'll make it out, right now. It's going to cause you some inconvenience, though, knowing who we are.

"We'll tie you up along with Cardona and stow the pair of you behind the bookcase. We'll take this brother-in-law of yours along with us. He may be useful tomorrow, if there's any questions when we go to cash your check.

"Don't worry about Mogridge, though. He'll come back. We'll ship him in to you. We'll have him bring a letter with him, telling you who the big-shot is, and giving the name of the stooge who still thinks the big-shot is a right guy. You'll get the last two rubies as a bargain for your sixty grand."

There was a check book on the table. Berkland reached for it weakly. Marotte watched him; then he turned to Doxol, starting a question as he swung about:

"How about it, Jake? Does the deal suit —"

MAROTTE cut himself short, as he saw the doorway through which he and Doxol had entered. Sighting a figure in the hallway, Marotte found himself helpless, for he had not reclaimed his revolver from Cardona's pocket. All that Marotte could do was shout a warning to Doxol:

"Look out, Jake!"

Doxol performed a side step. As he did, a frail man lunged wildly into the room. It was Ungler. The secretary was gripping the same .22 that he had carried on the night of the robbery. He was aiming for Doxol as he came, but the crook's side move was too quick for him.

Ungler stopped, turned to take new aim. He would have gained it before Doxol could swing the machine gun, but Marotte prevented it.

With a long leap, the smuggler pounced on Ungler; he dashed the man back toward the open door and made a grab for the small automatic. As he shoved the .22 upward, Marotte bellowed to Doxol:

"Give it, Jake! To all of them! I'll handle this guy!"

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By "all," Marotte meant Cardona, Mogridge and Berkland. Doxol swung about to get the first pair; his move was timely, for Cardona and Mogridge were already pouncing toward him. Doxol's finger was ready on the trigger; he was about to start the machine gun spraying while it was on the aim. Neither Cardona nor Mogridge could have stopped him; but there was another who could and did.

The closed door across the room was swinging open. Its key – first upright and later crosswise – might have told that it had been engaged by clippers on the other side. No one had detected the fact, however. No one had guessed that the door had been silently unlocked during the tense events within the study.

Even while the door was swinging inward, a big gun thundered. A gloved fist gripped that automatic. Keen eyes burned as a cloaked marksman gave perfect aim. The Shadow had arrived to deal with a new pair of assassins. He had chosen Doxol as his first target.

With two crooks on hand The Shadow could afford to dispose of one. A sure shot was necessary with Doxol. If merely wounded, the machine gunner might have loosed his fire. That was why The Shadow aimed straight for Doxol's heart. He found the mark with a single bullet.

As the echoes of the automatic sounded through the room, Jake Doxol pitched his machine gun sidewise and crumpled to the floor.

Marotte heard the shot, knew that it was not from Doxol's machine gun. Marotte's hand had gripped the barrel of Ungler's pistol. The thug drove the butt of the weapon hard against the secretary's head. As Ungler sagged, Marotte came around. He saw The Shadow aiming for him, while Cardona and Mogridge were busy snatching up their revolvers.

For the instant, Marotte thought his game was up. He saw the purpose behind The Shadow's burning gaze. Those eyes spelled no mercy. If Marotte yielded to The Shadow, he would talk – and do it without coaxing.

Frantically, and hopelessly, Marotte looked for an opportunity to elude The Shadow. His chance came by sheer luck.

TOBIAS BERKLAND was out from behind the desk. Seeking to do his share in battle, the oil magnate was stooping to pick up Doxol's machine gun. With a dive, Marotte hit the floor; shielded by Berkland's body, he tried to snatch the machine gun from the other's weaker clutch.

Marotte needed seconds only to gain the needed weapon. No one could reach him with a bullet, for Berkland blocked the path. Again, The Shadow acted; this time, in different fashion.

Dropping his automatic, he drove across the room with the speed of a black arrow. His gloved hands clamped Berkland's shoulders; his arms wrested the oil magnate clear of Marotte's grip. As Berkland rolled to the wall, The Shadow seized the machine gun and flung it beyond the desk.

Grappling, The Shadow had Marotte helpless.

Either Joe or Mogridge could have fired; but they preferred to await the finish of The Shadow's conflict. Cardona voiced the reason to Mogridge.

"Hold it," ordered Joe. "We'll have Marotte inside a minute. He's got more to tell us –"

A shot rang out from another quarter.

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A new factor had entered. Lawrence Woolford had arrived suddenly from the door of the library passage. Seeing the fray across the room, he had snatched up a handy gun – The Shadow's automatic. Woolford, steady in aim, blazed his shot for Marotte.

The bullet staggered the crook. Slowly, Marotte slumped. He would have fallen but for the grip of the Shadow's hands, which had gained a hold upon the rogue's throat. Holding Marotte upright, The Shadow drew him toward the desk.

Woolford, standing with the smoking automatic in his hand, saw The Shadow relax his pressure on Marotte's neck.

"I'm through," croaked the jewel thief, his eyes closing before The Shadow's gaze. "I'm cashing in – but I'm talking – telling what I know – about the big-shot!"

Cardona and Mogridge strained forward; they saw Marotte's lips move, heard him mumble:

"He's a double-crosser. Get him while you've got the chance. His name is –"

Marotte's effort ended in a spasm. A cough racked his frame. Blood trickled from the crook's lips as Marotte slumped forward, dead.

THE SHADOW moved away; his figure seemed to vanish as he stooped beyond the desk. Marotte's body slipped from the front of the desk where The Shadow had propped it. As the corpse thudded the floor, The Shadow came upward into view. Resting on his arm was the machine gun.

Burning eyes carried a command. The Shadow slowly swung the machine gun to cover everyone in the room. Revolvers dropped from the hands of those who held them.

The Shadow paused; then he swung the machine gun from him and let it strike beside the wall. Stooping as he performed the action, he reclaimed his automatic in the same move. Leveling the weapon, wagging it slowly, he stepped into the library passage and closed the door behind him.

At the last instant, Joe Cardona caught a flash from The Shadow's eyes; he saw a motion of the slouch hat that he took for a nod. In a twinkling, Cardona understood. Before the door had closed, Cardona reached forward and grabbed up his revolver.

"Sit down, all of you," ordered Joe. "I guess we're jittery, the lot of us. I'll take charge of things. I'm used to this sort of business."

Cardona indicated the bodies of Marotte and Doxol as he spoke. The other men nodded, as though relieved by Cardona's offer to take charge. Mogridge shoved a chair to Ungler, who looked groggy; then took one of his own. Woolford settled shakily into a chair by the door. Berkland went to the chair behind his desk, plucked up the restored rubies and stared solemnly at the fatal Drops of Blood.

Kicking loose guns across the floor, Cardona took his stand in the corner where the machine gun lay. His shoulder was toward the door by which The Shadow had departed. Cardona felt sure that The Shadow had lingered, waiting for Joe to take control.

For Joe Cardona had realized why The Shadow had made so guarded a departure. The Shadow's nod had sent Cardona's thoughts reverting to a former theory, one which the ace had at last accepted as a fact.

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One of the living men who occupied this very room was the master murderer whose name had frozen upon the lips of Gaspard Marotte. That killer had been ready to go berserk the instant that his identity was known. Though Marotte had died, the murderer was still a menace; like any other crook, he would have hazarded all to slay The Shadow.

Knowing it, The Shadow had threatened all. A clever ruse; for it served a double purpose. It held the murderer helpless while The Shadow retired, and it covered the fact that The Shadow knew the truth. Perhaps the murderer believed that The Shadow suspected someone; but if The Shadow knew the actual murderer, the man had not guessed it.

The Shadow had left the field to Joe Cardona. He was giving the law another chance to gain the goods it wanted. The law was closer to its goal. Five crooks were dead, their rubies claimed. Only two remained alive, and one was the master criminal.

Rather than let the supercrook betray himself tonight, The Shadow had restored events to normal sequence. The ways and devices of the master murderer were many. The Shadow wanted all to be uncovered.

The Shadow had again blazed the trail, and left it in the hands of the law.

CHAPTER XII. EYES IN THE DARK

FROM his corner, Cardona cast a commending gaze upon the men who sat before him. It was his part to congratulate all who had served in battle against Marotte and Doxol; after that, Joe intended to bring up some questions. Those details could best be handled bluntly. Cardona addressed Berkland for a starter.

"Lucky you weren't killed, Mr. Berkland," observed Joe. "You made a bad move, when you jumped for that machine gun. I thought you intended to drill Marotte with it."

Berkland tilted his head and looked toward the machine gun. His smile broadened.

"I could never have handled the weapon," he remarked. "I am quite unfamiliar with machine guns. No – I merely wanted to put it out of action."

Cardona turned to Mogridge. The mustached man was seated with folded arms. Cardona asked him an unnecessary question:

"Why didn't you take a shot at Marotte? You could have clipped him without killing him."

"I realized that, inspector," smiled Mogridge, "but I knew that you had the same opportunity. I felt that you would be more proficient."

Mogridge's reply was about what Cardona expected. Cardona had argued the point merely to seem impartial when he went on with other quizzes. The time had arrived for an important question. Cardona turned to Ungler.

"You did your bit," he told the secretary. "The breaks were against you, that was all. You couldn't handle both those crooks at one time. Tell me one thing, though, Ungler. How did you know they were down here?"

"I heard them from the third floor," began the secretary. "You see, I was feeling out of sorts tonight. I had retired early. I was aroused by a loud voice."

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"You heard Marotte talking?" put in Berkland, suddenly entering the conversation. "That seems impossible, Ungler. The door of your room must have been closed."

"The door happened to be open, sir," protested the secretary. "You see, I had not exactly retired. I still had my clothes on. I was reading in my room, with the door open. When I heard the loud voices, I brought my automatic and came down as fast as I could."

His plea finished, Ungler looked toward Cardona and added in a wheedling, apologetic tone:

"I intended to be more careful with the gun tonight, sir. Perhaps I was too careful. I had the opportunity to shoot both of those men, but I failed. I was tricked by Doxol; and Marotte was too quick for me."

"You did one thing in a hurry," observed Cardona. "You learned the names of both of them without being in here."

Ungler never blinked. He did not seem to catch the import of Cardona's suggestion that he might have known the crooks beforehand.

"I heard the conversation," explained the secretary, "while I was creeping down the stairs. Their names happened to be mentioned. You see, I was on the stairs at the time Doxol arrived to aid Marotte."

CARDONA eyed the secretary for a few short moments, then turned suddenly toward Woolford. That young man was huddled in his chair, staring gloomily toward Marotte's body.

"You were quick enough, Woolford," observed Cardona. "It's lucky you showed up when you did. How long did you wait before you breezed in here?"

"I'm – I'm sorry about all this," stammered Woolford. "From the way it looks, I suppose you'd have preferred to take that man alive." He pointed toward Marotte as he spoke. "I didn't want to kill him. I never shot anybody before; I never want to again. But he was fighting The Shadow."

"You've heard of The Shadow, eh?"

"Yes. Some friends of mine mentioned him as a person who made trouble for crooks. I arrived just as The Shadow dashed across the room. I could see that he was fighting for you. That is why I grabbed up the gun he dropped."

"And you figured yourself a good enough shot to pick off Marotte without clipping The Shadow?"

"Yes. The two were side by side. I am a good shot when I'm sober. I've been sober, too, ever since the night I made such a fool of myself down at the auction house."

Berkland inserted a testy remark.

"Soberness seems to endow you with second sight," declared the oil magnate. "It is quite remarkable that you should have arrived here at so crucial a moment. Whose thought waves did you receive to tell you that you might be needed?"

"I talked to Lenore, Mr. Berkland," explained Woolford, seriously. "Or, rather, Lenore talked to me. When we went out tonight she told me that there might be trouble here. I asked her why, and she told me that you had an appointment with one of the men who had stolen your rubies. She said that you intended to keep it

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alone."

"I did say that to Lenore," admitted Berkland. "but I also told her to keep the matter confidential. What did she do – send you back here to look out for me?"

Woolford nodded. He watched Berkland closely and saw that the gem owner accepted the explanation. Woolford's face showed prompt relief. He, like the others, was one who had given good reason for his actions.

THE whole situation stumped Joe Cardona. Joe realized that it would be wise to avoid further questions. Briskly, he stepped to the telephone and put in a call to headquarters. He summoned detectives and a police surgeon. Watching the others while he spoke, Cardona noticed that Woolford shifted uneasily.

"Are you going to hold me, inspector?" queried Woolford, when Cardona completed the call. "Because I shot that fellow Doxol?"

"Marotte was the one you shot," corrected Cardona. "I'll detain you here, Woolford, along with everyone else. Technically, you can be regarded as a member of this household. Since Mr. Berkland and Mr. Mogridge were acting under my official orders, the same applies to you.

"That covers you too, Ungler." Cardona looked toward the secretary as he spoke. "You have a permit for your gun and had a right to use it against known criminals."

Swinging back to Woolford. Cardona added: "It might have been different if you had come in here with a gun of your own. Picking up a loose one in a pinch, was all right."

Cardona made his statement with a purpose. He wanted to show confidence in all present to offset any belief that he still suspected that one man might be the master crook. Cardona's doubts regarding The Shadow's opinion had faded. Past experience had invariably shown The Shadow to be correct. The Shadow also figured in Cardona's decision not to arrest Woolford. If Cardona took Woolford into custody for bagging Marotte, he would have to start a hunt for The Shadow because the latter had dropped Doxol.

It was not long before Detective Sergeant Markham arrived with other headquarters men; and a police surgeon came soon afterward. Cardona took the others into the library while the bodies were being examined. There, he had them make complete statements: Berkland first, then Mogridge and Ungler, in turn.

Woolford was ready when Cardona turned to him; but before he could begin, a detective arrived from downstairs. With the detective was Lenore Berkland.

Anxiously, the girl asked what had happened. She was told. As Woolford began his statement, Lenore nodded her corroboration to every early detail. Woolford showed a pleased smile, when he had finished with the account of his later actions.

"Just one point," added Cardona. "When you came in here, Mr. Woolford, you used the front door of the house. How did you happen to have a key for it?"

"Lawrence needed no key," put in Lenore, promptly. "I saw to it that the front door was unlatched, when we went out. Father had told me that his visitor was coming in by the side door. That's why I wanted Lawrence to enter by the front one."

Cardona turned to Berkland, to ask: "You told Miss Berkland about the side door?"

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"Of course," returned Berkland. "I can not criticize Lenore for what she told Woolford. She naturally supposed that I would be alone, because I spoke to her before I conferred with Mogridge. But there is someone else whom we must think about, inspector. What has become of your friend Cranston?"

CARDONA swung instantly to the closed door of the little stack room. He yanked the door open, entered hurriedly when he saw a tall figure stretched in a chair near the front of the room. Cardona shook The Shadow's shoulder; he saw Cranston's eyes open and blink. Lips formed a smile.

"Hello, Cardona," remarked The Shadow, in the casual tone of Cranston. "I must have dropped asleep. No wonder. The air in here is stuffy and this old volume is very slow reading."

He picked up one of Berkland's rare books that lay open on the table, replaced it on the shelf and walked from the stack room with Cardona. The Shadow's eyes showed feigned surprise, when they observed the assembled group. The Shadow looked to Cardona for an explanation. Cardona gave the details of the fray in the study.

"Most amazing!" expressed The Shadow. "Odd that I should have dozed all through the excitement. I did not hear a disturbing sound all the time that I was in that little room."

"No wonder," observed Berkland, offering an explanation. "The stack room is practically soundproof, when the door is closed. In addition, there are other doors between the library and the study."

Cardona completed arrangements. Markham was to remain in charge, with another man inside the house. Since the two were armed, Cardona ordered the removal of the machine gun and the confiscation of Berkland's revolver and Ungler's automatic. Other detectives were detailed outside; their instructions were to allow no one to leave the residence after Cardona had gone.

Downstairs, The Shadow called the Cobalt Club, ordered Stanley to bring the limousine. Outside, he and Cardona entered the car when it arrived. Cardona did not express his belief that the actual master crook was among the persons remaining in Berkland's house. Cardona was satisfied that the man would make no move tonight, not even if he could find a chance to take a shot at The Shadow.

That was The Shadow's own opinion, as he boarded the limousine. He knew that the master villain felt secure; that the criminal's policy would be to make no false move, now that matters had quieted and the law was in charge. The crook's identity had been suppressed by the double deaths of Marotte and Doxol.

Joe Cardona might have been jittery had he guessed that The Shadow and Lamont Cranston were one; but Joe failed to grasp that fact. Even the briefcase that The Shadow calmly laid upon the seat of the limousine did not give Cardona an inkling of the truth. Cardona believed that it actually contained papers. He would have been amazed had he learned that the real contents were The Shadow's garb and guns.

But there was one man who had guessed the truth; and The Shadow knew it. That was why he looked back toward Berkland's house as the limousine rolled away. The occupants had left the library; the lights on the second floor were out. Yet The Shadow was confident that one person in that house was watching the limousine's departure; that the watcher was the master criminal himself. The Shadow's lips showed a smile when the limousine rounded the corner.

THE SHADOW'S surmise was right. There was a watcher peering from the house – a person who had remained in the darkness of the library, to stare from the blackened windows. Lips were phrasing an ugly, muttered oath. Evil eyes were glaring their malice when the limousine disappeared.

The master crook had chosen the only possible policy. He was wise enough to know that a move tonight would be his own betrayal. But the glare of his malicious eyes told that soon the murderer would seek a way to settle with The Shadow.

CHAPTER XIII. THE SHADOW CONFERS

THREE days had passed since the affray at Berkland's. During those days a lull had followed action. The law had gained no further leads. Public criticism was lacking, however; for the recovery of two more jewels had been sensational proof that the police could gain results.

Details of the fray at Berkland's had been carefully suppressed. The testimony of the witnesses, when published, included a general agreement that there had been confusion. Woolford was admittedly the man who had shot Marotte with a gun that he had picked up from the floor. No one, however, took the credit for picking off Doxol.

Witnesses concurred in the statement that the first deadly shot had come from the doorway where Woolford had later appeared. The bullet that had finished Doxol was from the same gun that had been used to get Marotte. By mentioning nothing of The Shadow's struggle, the question had been left open. Either someone had fired from the doorway, dropped his gun and gone; or Woolford, in his excitement, had shot down two crooks instead of one.

The newspapers jumped for the latter story. It made good news copy. Woolford, the indolent society man had shown his mettle. In their willingness to get such a story, reporters had so bombarded Cardona with leading questions that it had been easy for him to let them have it their own way.

Joe smoothed that, in clever fashion, by handling all interviews in person. He abridged the statements made by Berkland, Mogridge, Ungler and Woolford; told all four to stick to the shorter stories. They agreed willingly; through their cooperation, Cardona omitted The Shadow's presence.

Other news was heralded in print.

The rubies recovered from Marotte and Doxol were in the custody of the International Association of Jewelers. They had been tested in like manner as the previous gems. They were pronounced genuine. Five of the Seven Drops of Blood had been regained. Tobias Berkland, incidentally, had received a new check for one hundred thousand dollars.

The police had found a hotel suite where Marotte and Doxol had been living; there, they uncovered another supply of unfenced gems. As before, none of these were items of great individual value.

There was one important item of news that the newspapers printed, but did not connect with the story of Berkland's rubies. In fact, the item was no more than a paragraph that appeared in the society columns. It mentioned that Lamont Cranston had left New York for a short trip. The millionaire's destination was not mentioned.

DESPITE the statement regarding his departure, The Shadow had not left New York. On this particular evening, he was seated in a hotel room high above the city, reading a newspaper.

The Shadow was attired in ordinary street clothes; but no one would have identified him as Lamont Cranston. He had changed his features; they were rounded and heavier than those that he employed as Cranston. Only a trace of his hawkish appearance remained.

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The Shadow had donned a mythical identity that he used on certain occasions. At this hotel, he was registered in the name of Henry Arnaud.

A ring of the telephone bell interrupted The Shadow's reading. Answering in a tone that differed from Cranston's, The Shadow learned that a Mr. Clark Copley had arrived to see him. He said for the visitor to come up.

A few minutes later, there was a knock at the door. The Shadow admitted a smiling, red-faced man, whose manner was brisk.

"I would have been here sooner, Mr. Arnaud," informed Copley, "only I was late getting back to Cincinnati. Got my line with me." He planked a sample case on a trunk rack. This time it's imitation jewels instead of pearls. That's what your wire said for me to bring."

The Shadow nodded. Copley opened the sample case. The sparkle of imitation gems was plain in the light.

"Some of these are beauts," began Copley. "Only an expert can tell the paste stuff from the real, without a close examination. If you want replica of famous gems, I've got them."

"Sit down, Mr. Copley," interposed The Shadow, as he studied the false gems. "There is something I want to ask you about."

The Shadow produced an envelope from the writing desk, tucked it handily in a pocket then began to speak.

"Your arrival" he said, "was prompt enough to indicate that you have probably guessed the reason why I called you to New York. My business is that of a special investigator. I handle robbery cases."

Copley nodded. He had formed the conclusion that the mysterious Mr. Arnaud was an insurance investigator.

"At present," continued The Shadow, "I am concerned with certain rubies known as the Seven Drops of Blood."

Copley's look became intent. He had read the newspapers thoroughly and knew all the details that had reached the public concerning Berkland's gems.

"Five of those rubies have been reclaimed," declared The Shadow. "Unfortunately, the law has made no progress in finding the other two. In a few days, an exposition opens. At that time, the International Association of Jewelers would like to display the Seven Drops of Blood, which are their property. However, they need two more rubies."

Copley shook his head.

"It wouldn't do, Mr. Arnaud," he asserted. "You couldn't get a pair of phony rubies that would stand up alongside the real ones. They'd look like glass."

"Perhaps a display of seven imitations –"

"Nope. That wouldn't do, either. The real rubies are too large to be properly copied. Some other gems might be copied – particularly small ones, you understand – but not those babies. Any one who ever saw the real Drops of Blood would know that it was a fake proposition."

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THE SHADOW smiled.

"Suppose, Mr. Copley," he proposed, "that we talk of synthetic stones, instead of imitations. We know that it is possible, by chemical processes and application of tremendous heat, to produce gems that have the exact composition of those which have been mined from the earth."

"You're right, Mr. Arnaud," returned Copley. "You're talking right down my alley. There isn't a trick in the artificial gem business that I have missed. There's been some real discoveries in that line, and rubies have, somehow, been the biggest target."

"Sixty years ago, they developed some corundum crystals that were dead ringers for natural rubies. Hard enough in formation to cut a topaz, they were. Thirty years ago, the Verneuil process came in. It takes an oxyhydrogen blowpipe and a coal gas flame temperature of two thousand degrees. They've built up gem rubies with it."

"But the electric furnace has gone still further. It's turned out synthetic diamonds, only they've been mighty tiny. With rubies, they've fused chips and small imperfect stones, added coloring oxide and built them up. They've even raised the question in law courts as to just what's an artificial gem."

"Only the cost would be too great to produce something first class. What's the good of a synthetic gem if it costs you more than a real one? Wait a minute, though – with those rubies, if you wanted to match them, maybe you could do it at about double what they're worth."

Copley paused for a moment, as if considering his own statement.

"Nope," he decided, "it couldn't be done, even with the originals to copy from. The Seven Drops of Blood are too big."

THE SHADOW drew the envelope from his pocket. Out of it, he produced clippings which he passed to Copley. On one of them, the jewel expert saw a picture of an elderly man with a white, spade-shaped beard. He chuckled.

"Old Professor Hanlock," identified Copley. "I'd know those whiskers anywhere. So you've fallen for his bunk, Mr. Arnaud. Whatever Antonius Hanlock says, is screwy. I've talked to the old boy."

"I suppose that you had," observed The Shadow. "One of those clippings states that certain of the professor's claims were substantiated by a dealer in imitation stones, who came from Cincinnati."

"Let me tell you about Hanlock," argued Copley. "The old prof started out with a lot of experiments. Built up some artificial rubies by an electric process. He managed a cheap job and got the right color into them. The thing that helped him was a special process involving chromium."

"That part of it was all right. That's why I said so. I kept going to see the prof – even though he moved to different places so much that it was always a tough job to find him again. He was promising that he'd produce bigger and better rubies; that he'd revolutionize the industry, with synthetic gems as big as doves' eggs, but costing under a thousand dollars at the most."

"Then one day, he told me how he'd do it. That was enough. I dropped him after that. His idea was to produce an artificial ruby that was like a honeycomb, little microscopic walls inside it. Filled with an oxide precipitate, a liquid thick like honey; and heavy, like mercury. He said that the shell would stand moisture; that it would take any heat test. I told him frankly that I didn't believe him. That's when he went violent. I was

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lucky to quiet him; but I knew he was off his trolley. Rather than try to humor him, I never went back."

The Shadow took one of the clippings that Copley held. He read an address that was printed there.

"It might be worth while to see Professor Hanlock," decided The Shadow. "If he could actually match two of the Drops of Blood, it would serve two purposes. Not only would the exhibit be complete, but the crooks who still hold two of the rubies would be badly puzzled when the gems showed up elsewhere."

"You won't find Hanlock at that address," remarked Copley. "He's moved twice since he left there. I'd never have traced him except for a letter he wrote me about a month ago. He's down and out, he said – living in a basement apartment with all his equipment there. Funny, him saying that he was down and out. It shows how his mind works. He couldn't be broke, because he had a lot of real gems and could hock them any time. Only he won't part with them."

Copley finished by producing pencil and paper. He scrawled Professor Hanlock's latest address, but remarked that he doubted that the old man would still be there. Copley was of the opinion that, by this time, friends must have taken Hanlock away for a rest cure.

The Shadow thanked the man from Cincinnati; tendered him a fee for his services. Copley was pleased with the amount. He packed his sample case and departed.

THE SHADOW was pleased with the results of his interview with Copley. Searching for a way to force all issues with the master crook, The Shadow had looked for certain information. Through old files, he had learned of Professor Antonius Hanlock; from Clark Copley, he had gained a lead to the old man's whereabouts.

Within the next twenty-four hours, The Shadow hoped to have new information that would reopen the trail to the master crook.

CHAPTER XIV. THE CHOSEN TRAIL

SHORTLY after noon the next day, The Shadow lunched in the coffee shop of the hotel where he was stopping as Arnaud. Glancing through a newspaper, he paused at the society page. There he found an item that pertained to himself. It stated that Lamont Cranston would be back in New York this evening; that he would be present at a late after-theater banquet to be held in honor of a prominent actor.

The Shadow was not surprised to read the notice. He had forwarded it to the newspapers himself, last night after his chat with Copley.

There was another paragraph, however, that was news to The Shadow. It concerned Tobias Berkland. The oil magnate had gone to Boston to attend the wedding of an old friend, an elderly gentleman who was embarking upon a third venture in matrimony. Berkland had gone to Boston alone.

Berkland's trip was not a surprising one. The vigil had been lifted at his house as soon as the coroner's inquest had produced a favorable verdict in the deaths of Marotte and Doxol. Nevertheless, it produced comment on another page of the newspaper.

Reading the chatter of a wiseacre columnist, The Shadow found a statement that suggested Berkland's trip to be a blind. According to the column writer, Berkland could well have gone to Boston to keep an appointment with some informant; perhaps the man who held the sixth ruby.

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It was good talk for the public, that suggestion; but it did not deceive The Shadow. He knew that the sixth ruby holder would not try the tactics used by Marotte and Doxol. They had referred to the fellow as one who had resolved to stick with the master crook.

AN hour later, The Shadow left the hotel. In his guise of Arnaud, he rode across town by cab, then took an elevated. He reached a location near the address where Professor Hanlock had last resided.

From then on, The Shadow's actions were deliberate. He did not approach the address that he wanted; instead, he sauntered about the neighborhood. There were old houses, here; some of them had been converted into apartments. As Arnaud, The Shadow made inquiries at places where apartments were for rent. In every case, he registered disappointment when he learned of the rental.

Today, The Shadow looked the part of a man who might be short of money. His clothes, though tidy, were old ones. When he passed a news stand, he paused to count pennies carefully, then decided not to buy a newspaper.

Eventually, The Shadow came to the address that Copley had given him. There, he immediately noticed a rental sign on a window of the basement.

Copley had conjectured that Professor Hanlock might have moved again. The Cincinnati man had made a good guess.

Any one watching The Shadow would not have been surprised to see him ascend the front steps of the old house and ring a bell marked "Janitor." As Arnaud, The Shadow had been steadily looking at apartments of a cheaper sort. It was natural that he had come to this one, the lowest-priced lodging in the neighborhood.

A portly woman answered the door, announced that she was the janitor's wife. The Shadow stated that he would like to look at the basement apartment.

The janitor's wife supplied a steady comment.

"The last tenant was an inventor, sir," confided the woman, "or something of the sort. People what come here called him 'professor.' And a professor he might well have been with the forgetful way his eyes looked and the beard of his that reached to the bottom of his collar."

"Rather an unusual tenant," remarked The Shadow. "I suppose that he preferred seclusion, and probably spent a great deal of time with his books."

"Books? No, he made jewelry, the professor did," she informed. "That's what he said once, when I asked him. He showed me diamonds, and rubies. They looked like they was real. He said he'd made some of them, but that others was the regular sort. He used them to copy from."

"When he left here, it was sort of sudden. With a month's rent owing. He went one night, and his machinery and other things was took out by the movers. My husband thought he had jumped the rent. But there was an envelope delivered the next day, here to me, and it had the money in it."

"Quite interesting," observed The Shadow. "I suppose that the professor had merely forgotten to pay his rent. Where did he go from here?"

"I don't know, sir. I wished I did know. I'd like to have thanked him for —"

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The woman paused; studied The Shadow again, then questioned:

"Do you know much about jewelry, sir?"

"Yes. Enough to identify the value of the average gem."

THE woman produced a handkerchief, unknotted it and placed a blue stone in The Shadow's hand. The jewel was a fair-sized sapphire, plainly cut with large facets.

"You know, sir," informed the woman, "the old professor said he expected to have money some day. He told me when he left he'd give me a real gem. When he sent the money, this was with it. Only I was afraid to show it to any one. I thought maybe that it wasn't real. That maybe if it was, I'd be questioned if I hocked it; on account of the newspapers being full of talk about stolen jewelry."

The Shadow's sensitive thumb and forefinger were turning the gem between them. He paused in the motion, detecting a slight roughness on one surface of the stone. Holding the sapphire to the light, The Shadow remarked:

"The stone is genuine. An excellent specimen for its size. As a collector, I would value it at two hundred and fifty dollars."

The woman gasped in amazement. The sum had overwhelmed her. She repeated the amount, half aloud.

"A pawnshop would not pay you a quarter of that sum," remarked The Shadow. "As a collector, I am willing to give the full amount. Would you care to sell the sapphire?"

"For that money, sir? In a minute!"

The Shadow drew a shabby wallet from his pocket. He opened it, pushed back a stack of bills that were of fifty-dollar and one-hundred-dollar values. Choosing a few twenties, he added tens and fives, made up the balance with some one-dollar bills. He counted the money into the hands of the astonished woman.

Pocketing the sapphire, The Shadow bowed and strolled out by the downstairs doorway.

Though his pace was deliberate, he was gone from sight by the time the woman peered out to the sidewalk. If any outside spy had been near by, he would have been too late to take up The Shadow's trail.

LATER, The Shadow reached his sanctum. There, he put the sapphire under a strong light and examined it with a microscope. The stone bulged to tremendous size under the powerful lens. The inspection told The Shadow that if the gem were synthetic, it represented a marvelous workmanship. It looked like a natural sapphire.

The similarity in chemical composition of sapphire and rubies indicated that the stone might be the product of Professor Hanlock's electric process; but The Shadow was more inclined to believe that it was a genuine gem that Hanlock used for comparison. The sapphire, however, possessed a feature that interested The Shadow more than did the composition of the stone.

Under the microscope, the roughened surface that The Shadow had felt was transformed into more than a mere series of scratches.

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Carved on the side of the sapphire were figures, and letters that formed abbreviated words. They represented a street address. Though the marks looked crude, they were intelligible; and their making had certainly required expert effort. They had been inscribed under a microscope, with a diamond-pointed tool.

Placing the sapphire aside, The Shadow produced a large scale map of Manhattan. He put it beneath the bluish light that shone down in the sanctum. There, The Shadow's long fingers traced to a given spot; it rested on a building that was shown in diagram on the map. The bluish light clicked off.

Soon afterward, The Shadow appeared on the street. He was Henry Arnaud no longer; he had resumed the guise of Lamont Cranston. He hailed a taxi and rode to Times Square; there, he transferred to a new, streamlined cab that was driven by Moe Shrevnitz.

The machine rolled smoothly toward the Cobalt Club; The Shadow was pleased with its pick-up. His purchase of a streamlined taxi showed foresight. The Shadow always wanted his cab to be inconspicuous, and the increasing popularity of the new type of taxi indicated that they would soon be more plentiful than the old styles.

Nearing the Cobalt Club, Moe slowed until other vehicles had passed, then hugged the curb and stopped abruptly so The Shadow could alight. It was close to dusk and The Shadow was taking no chances while he appeared as Cranston. He knew that his guise was known to a master crook, who might already have bought up a machine-gun crew to mow down Lamont Cranston on sight.

ENTERING the grillroom, The Shadow ordered a well-selected dinner of the sort that the club chef delighted to prepare. He had a while to wait before the first course arrived. During that interval, The Shadow sat in speculation.

Today's circumstances had been unusual. In his acquisition of Professor Hanlock's sapphire, The Shadow had gained a clue that chance alone had kept from the law. At any time during the past few weeks, the woman who had received the sapphire might have taken it to a jeweler or a pawnbroker. Any one examining the stone with a glass would have detected the engraved letters.

Had that sender foreseen that the janitor's wife would be afraid to pawn the gem for some time? Or had he counted upon the woman cashing in on the stone at once?

This question was important; like the others, it could not be accurately answered until further probe could be made. One fact alone was certain: The Shadow had acquired the sapphire sooner than it would normally have been gained by the law. Whoever had sent the gem had not anticipated that the woman would sell it to a chance visitor who came to inquire about an apartment.

That was why The Shadow saw no reason for hasty action. He planned to visit the address named; and he intended to make that expedition some time this evening, under cover of darkness. He would be willing, however, to postpone his trip, if some other errand should present itself.

The first course of the meal arrived. The Shadow dined in leisurely fashion, quietly enjoying his repast. Following dessert, he ordered coffee and lighted a cigar, intending to finish the smoke before he set out from the club.

While The Shadow was smoking, an attendant entered and came to his table.

The Shadow's first thought was that of a message from Commissioner Weston, who was attending an evening reception but expected to see his friend Cranston later. Instead, the attendant presented a telegram.

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The Shadow opened it; the yellow message was from Tobias Berkland.

The wire had been sent from Boston. It stated that Berkland would arrive home at eight o'clock, that he would like Mr. Cranston to visit him at that hour. The message carried the word: "Imperative!"

It was not surprising that Berkland should wish to see Cranston. Both were reputedly persons of wealth, who had a common interest in the collection of jewels. They had contacted at the time of the robbery at Pettigrew's; and Berkland, knowing that Lamont Cranston was a friend of Commissioner Weston might well regard The Shadow as a person close to the law.

There was a chance that hints in today's newspapers were correct: that, Tobias Berkland had gone to Boston on some mission that concerned the remaining rubies.

The situation promised a new trail – one that must be taken at once, if Berkland's telegram rated at its face value. Therefore, The Shadow decided to postpone the expedition that he had previously planned. He resolved to see Tobias Berkland first, to take up the matter of Professor Hanlock afterward.

With that purpose, The Shadow strolled from the club.

Events had given him a second trail, in preference to the first. The Shadow had chosen the new one. Where that chosen trail would lead depended entirely upon whatever The Shadow might learn at Berkland's.

CHAPTER XV. MOVES IN THE NIGHT

THE SHADOW made a prompt departure from the Cobalt Club. His limousine was absent tonight, but Moe's taxi wheeled up from a hack stand even before the doorman could summon it. Stepping in, The Shadow was whisked away in rapid fashion.

The cab nosed cautiously as it neared Berkland's. Peering from the window, The Shadow spied a policeman across the street from the house. The bluecoat was a special officer assigned to this block, to be available if needed. The law was guarding against new trouble at Berkland's.

The policeman's presence eased The Shadow's approach. Much though a hidden supercrook desired the death of Lamont Cranston, he would be too wise to take the risk of posting a squad of gunmen at a spot where the law was on the watch.

The cab stopped at Berkland's. The patrolling officer became alert. He watched The Shadow ascend the steps and decided that the visitor was all right.

After The Shadow entered the house, the policeman came over to talk with Moe. At the officer's question, the cab driver stated that his fare had come from the Cobalt Club and had told him to wait outside Berkland's house.

It was Ungler who admitted The Shadow. The secretary looked a trifle perplexed, when he recognized Lamont Cranston. He began an explanation.

"Mr. Berkland is not at home, sir," said Ungler. "He is in Boston. He will not reach the city until after nine o'clock."

The Shadow smiled. He produced the telegram that he had received at the club. Ungler's manner altered.

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"That explains it!" exclaimed the secretary. "Come up to the study, Mr. Cranston."

They reached the study. There, Ungler picked up a memo that he had written and placed on Berkland's desk. The Shadow read the message. It was addressed to Glen Mogridge and was signed by Tobias Berkland. The message stated:

Request caller to come to Tatterman's for his appointment. Imperative!

Ungler explained that the message was a copy of a telegram that had just been telephoned to the house. He added an apology.

"Since the message mentioned no person by name," said Ungler, "I did not know that it referred to you, Mr. Cranston. That is why I did not mention it when you entered. I thought it better to let you introduce the subject."

"QUITE right, Ungler," agreed The Shadow. "Nevertheless, you told me that Mr. Berkland would not arrive until after nine o'clock. My appointment, however, calls for eight."

"I can't understand it, sir," admitted Ungler. "Mr. Berkland is due at Grand Central Terminal at half past nine. It is odd that he did not inform us that he was taking an earlier train from Boston."

The Shadow observed that the telegram made no mention of the appointment hour. He noted the name Tatterman and recognized it.

"Does that mean Tatterman, the jeweler?" questioned The Shadow. "The chap who had the little downstairs office on a side street near Grand Central?"

"It probably does," replied Ungler. "Mr. Berkland deals with Tatterman. The shop is open evenings. What is more, sir" – Ungler was unfolding a time-table that lay on the desk – "there is a train from Boston that arrives soon after eight o'clock. If Mr. Berkland is on it, he might have decided to go directly to Tatterman's."

"I shall go there at once," declared The Shadow. Again noting the message, he added a question: "Will Mr. Mogridge be there?"

"I don't suppose so," replied Ungler, in a worried tone. "Mr. Mogridge was not home for dinner and I do not know where to reach him. He left this afternoon to meet Inspector Cardona. The police are making an investigation of pawnshops that fenced some jewels recently. They are questioning the proprietors about such men as Marotte and Doxol."

"Then no one but you knows of this telegram?"

The Shadow's question was casual, but it brought a suppressed twitch to Ungler's lips. The secretary replied:

"No, sir. No one."

The Shadow walked through the library, with Ungler accompanying him. They descended to the ground floor and The Shadow departed by the front door.

AS the taxi pulled away, Ungler stood peering from a little window beside the door. A tightened expression came to the secretary's face. His eyes followed the departing cab with a catlike gaze.

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Ungler, perhaps, had told the truth when he said that no one else had seen the second telegram from Berkland. The secretary's statement, however, was undergoing amendment at the very moment of The Shadow's departure.

A door had opened on the second floor. Lenore Berkland stole softly to the head of the stairs, looked down to see Ungler peering from the lower window. Swiftly, the girl went through the library and reached the study.

There she saw the message. She read it, then hurriedly took the telephone and dialed a number. A thickish tone responded. Lenore recognized Woolford's voice.

"Lawrence!" uttered Lenore, tensely. "You must go at once to Tatterman's. For some reason, father intends to be there. It may be another of his foolish appointments."

"What of it?" came Woolford's response. "Thass for the police to look after – not me. I'm not walking in on trouble again. No, shir."

"You've been drinking again, Lawrence –"

"No, I haven't, Lenore. Honest! Well, maybe a couple –" Woolford's tone had steadied. "But that's all. Don't worry about your father. He'll be careful."

"But I am worried. Lawrence, unless you promise –"

"Wait, Lenore. You promise me something. Stay right where you are, until I come there. Then we can talk this over."

Lenore looked at the message on the desk. She noticed that it specified no time. Remembering that her father had not intended to reach New York before half past nine, Lenore replied to Woolford:

"All right, Lawrence. I'll wait."

As she hooked the receiver, Lenore happened to spy the time-table that Ungler had left on the desk. In methodical fashion, the secretary had used a pencil to check his reference. Lenore saw a mark beneath the time of the train that arrived soon after eight.

The desk clock showed that the train was due within five minutes. If Lenore's father came on it and went to Tatterman's, he would be there before Woolford could even reach the house.

Lenore heard footsteps coming from the library passage. She made an instantaneous decision. She hurried through the doorway that led to the side stairs. Stealing down the steps, Lenore reached the side door. She went through the outside passage to the rear street. Already dressed for the street, Lenore had decided to undertake a prompt mission alone.

UNGLER, meanwhile, had entered the study. His face drab and expressionless, the secretary stood looking at the telegram, then the time-table. Three minutes ticked from the desk clock. Slowly, Ungler went from the study, up to the third floor.

When he returned, he was wearing a felt hat. The secretary went downstairs, through the kitchen and out by the back door, which he locked behind him.

More than five minutes before, Lenore had hurried to a corner.

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Ungler took the same route. Lenore, however, had gone unobserved. Ungler did not.

From a blackened house front across the street, keen eyes saw the secretary pass beneath a street lamp. Silently, a stalking figure followed Ungler's course.

The man reached the corner, apparently oblivious to the fact that he was being trailed by a being cloaked in black.

Ungler crossed the avenue and stopped beside a northbound bus sign. He waited patiently, watching an approaching bus that was some blocks distant.

The Shadow did not wait for the bus to arrive. He returned along the street, stepped momentarily into view beside a light. From another corner, a streamlined taxi rolled slowly along the rear street. The Shadow boarded it from the darkness. The cab swung southward as it reached the corner.

The bus had arrived. Ungler was entering it. As The Shadow's cab crossed the next corner, another vehicle approached it. This was a taxicab, slowing to make a left turn. From the darkness of his own cab, his cloaked form unnoticeable, The Shadow observed the occupants of the taxi that was turning into the street that ran in front of Berkland's.

There were two men in the cab. One was Joe Cardona; the other was Glen Mogridge.

THE SHADOW ordered Moe to halt by the curb, then to back up after the other taxi had made its turn. Moe followed the order. As the cab backed to the corner, The Shadow gained a view of Berkland's house. He saw Cardona and Mogridge alight from their cab.

Cardona talked briefly with the officer on duty. From his observation, The Shadow deduced that the bluecoat was telling them that a visitor had come from the Cobalt Club, and departed soon afterward. The officer knew nothing else.

Neither Cardona nor Mogridge seemed hasty, when they entered the front door of the house. They did not stop to ring. Mogridge simply unlocked the front door.

The Shadow knew that the pair were due for a surprise, when they found Ungler absent. Whether they would find the secretary's written version of the second telegram, was a matter of conjecture. Ungler might have carried it with him.

If they found the telegram, action would follow, but not with undue haste, for the message was one that would command some deliberation. Time still remained for The Shadow's own purpose. Quietly, the cloaked passenger gave an order. The cab started Southward.

A soft laugh whispered from The Shadow's lips. He foresaw a new adventure; one that could be handled best by wise approach. This time, The Shadow was confident that his work would not be complicated by the presence of chance persons.

Had The Shadow stationed himself in the rear street a few minutes earlier, he would have planned a different course. He had made a logical time allowance in watching for Ungler's departure, but his calculation had not allowed for Lenore Berkland.

The Shadow was to encounter problems that he had not foreseen.

CHAPTER XVI. THE MEETING PLACE

SOON after The Shadow's departure from the neighborhood of Berkland's, a cab stopped on a side street near Forty-second and Lexington Avenue. The passenger who alighted was Lenore Berkland. The girl had made a speedy trip from the corner near her father's house.

Despite its closeness to a lighted zone, this street was a desolate one. The side wall of a fortresslike hotel flanked it for two hundred feet; after that came old houses, gloomy and poorly tenanted. Across the street was a bakery shop and a little book store, both closed for the night. Next to them came a house, with a high first floor that had been transformed into a cheap barber shop.

The rest of the building was unoccupied, except for the basement; but that lower floor was Lenore's destination. Through its barred and curtained windows, the girl could see the glimmer of a light.

Few cars came along this street, for it was badly paved and traffic avoided it. A cab happened past just as Lenore was about to cross. The girl stepped back, then saw that the entire block was clear. She paused, however, conscious of a scrape on the sidewalk close beside her.

Lenore saw a pair of large ash cans that some neighbor had politely stowed underneath the high front steps of the nearest empty house. The scrape had sounded like a shift of metal. The girl shuddered, wondering if some creature lurked behind the cans.

Believing herself a victim of strained imagination, Lenore forced a smile and crossed the street. She reached the basement store, saw the name "Tatterman" in faded gilt letters.

PUSHING open the door, Lenore looked about, expecting to see Tatterman. She had met him here with her father. Tatterman was a withered old fellow who hobbled about and was always cordial to his customers. At present, he was not in the little store.

The girl saw a door that stood ajar; it was marked "Private," and indicated an inner office. She supposed that she would find Tatterman there.

The absence of any one in the main room did not surprise Lenore, for she knew how Tatterman did business. The old jewel dealer kept all his gems in a modern, strong safe. The girl knew that the safe was in the inner office, for in the past visits, she had seen Tatterman come from that room, bringing jewels. He always took great care to keep the outside door locked, when he displayed gems for customers.

Realizing that her father might already be in the inside office, Lenore rapped at the partly opened door. A sharp voice called:

"Come in!"

Lenore went through a small entry, which had no door at the inner end. She stopped as she crossed the threshold of a little room, where a man was seated at a desk near the safe.

Lenore stared in surprise, for she knew that the man was not Tatterman. The jeweler was frail and had a forward stoop; but the man at the desk was brawny and big-shouldered.

The man turned about suddenly; he displayed an ugly face that was coarse and chunky of feature. Lenore saw a pugilist's chin, a wide nose, a pair of eyes that glared from beneath heavy brows. The man's black hair was

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thick and mopsy. A brawny hand swung into view; clenched, it held a .38 revolver.

The man leered when he saw the fright that Lenore could not conceal. The words that he uttered were no longer an imitation that would have suited Tatterman. They came with a gruff snarl.

"A moll, huh?" quizzed the ruffian. "Guess you must be Berkland's daughter."

Lenore did not reply. She showed her nerve, as she faced the enemy who had trapped her.

"Sit down!" growled the chunky-faced man. "Over in that corner!"

Lenore did not budge. She learned her mistake when the man's hand swooped from its pocket.

With a quick, clamping motion, the ruffian plastered a wide strip of adhesive tape over her mouth. Lenore tried to wrench the tape away; when her captor grabbed her arms she clawed at his face.

For half a minute, she put up a valiant fight, but her battle was useless. Having effectively prevented her from making future outcry, the man was able to use both hands in binding the girl. He pinned Lenore's arms behind her, trussed them with a length of rope. Spilling her into the chair, he caught her kicking feet and tied them likewise.

The man went to the entry; Lenore heard him close the door that opened from the store. While he was gone, she looked to the back of the room, but saw no door there. There was a little window, high up, but it was closed with a steel shutter. There was no other opening in the paneled walls.

WHILE Lenore was viewing the closeness of her prison, the man returned.

"So you're Berkland's daughter," he grunted. "The big-shot said you might be sap enough to blow in here, although he didn't want it. Say – I guess I ought to be introducing myself to a ritzy dame like you. They call me Spark Lethro. I'm the bozo who makes a specialty of stringing the wires and shoving through the juice when the soup's all set. Blowing these things is my business."

He gestured toward the big safe.

"I'm the guy that blew up the escape tunnel at Pettigrew's auction house. If you don't believe it, take a gander at this."

The crook produced a ruby from his pocket. As he held it to the light, Lenore recognized the gem as the sixth Drop of Blood.

"Tonight, we're getting a lug who calls himself The Shadow," announced "Spark." "As soon as he blows in here, The Shadow's through. I'll tell you why. We've got the joint souped for him; not just in one spot but half a dozen – all on the same time switch. Old Tatterman was called out of town today. I came in by a back way that the big-shot knew about. I fixed the joint and opened up the store."

Lenore realized the meaning of the telegram on her father's desk. It was a false one, sent by someone other than her father. Somehow, she supposed, word of it was supposed to reach The Shadow.

Though she did not connect The Shadow with Cranston, Lenore recalled that the cloaked being had actually been in her father's house. She decided that crooks must have gained news that The Shadow intended to visit the house again.

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"When The Shadow comes in," chuckled Spark, "he'll try to pick his way through the door I just locked. That's going to take him plenty of time. I rigged it even better than Tatterman had it. Put another lock on the inside –"

A muffled buzzer sound interrupted. Spark pocketed his ruby; he fished back of the safe and produced a small switch that was affixed to the end of a wire. He held it in his left hand.

"This does it," announced Spark. "Five minutes after I give the juice, the joint goes up! Maybe The Shadow will still be working on the door; maybe he'll be through here. It don't matter either way; he won't know the difference. Neither will you. The bulls is going to think some boob tried to blow Tatterman's safe and went haywire with the soup.

"Maybe you wonder why I'm waiting, after hearing that buzz from the front door. I'm waiting to make sure it's The Shadow. There's a guy that's going to tip me off if it's him. He's casing the joint from across the street, the guy is. His name's Crawley Juke; and he can spot anybody, even The Shadow."

TO Lenore's frantic brain came a recollection of the noise behind the ash cans on the other side of the street. The man who had hidden behind the ash cans must be Crawley Juke. Spark said that Crawley would give the tip-off. That meant that the lurker must intend to come in by the back way that Spark had mentioned. Lenore realized why the lurker had stayed in his hiding place. He was watching for The Shadow.

If The Shadow had actually entered a few minutes ago, Crawley would arrive at any moment; unless the lurker had failed to see The Shadow. That seemed unlikely. Any motion of Tatterman's front door would certainly have been observed by Crawley.

Lenore fought against her bonds. Her struggles were hopeless. Though she continued to tug at the binding ropes. Lenore realized that the only chance to thwart Spark lay with The Shadow. If he managed to crack the passage door before Spark pressed the switch, The Shadow might still become a factor.

A thumping series of knocks gave Lenore a sudden hope. Sight of Spark's responding grin told the girl that the sound-signalized disaster instead of rescue. There were seven of the raps; Lenore did not locate the first ones. By the time they had finished, she recognized that they came from the paneled wall at the rear of the room, not from the barred door at the front.

The signal was from Crawley Juke. The spotter was giving the tip-off. The person who had entered the front was positively The Shadow.

Spark pressed back a section of woodwork between two panels. He unloosened a bolt that Tatterman had installed for protection while in the office. Spark, while waiting, had kept that bolt closed; probably by order of the big-shot whom he served.

Lenore thought that Spark intended to admit Crawley. She was wrong. Spark's purpose was departure. As proof of it, he clicked the switch in his left hand and tossed it, with its cord, across the desk. The time bombs were ignited; the last five minutes had begun.

As the barrier moved away, Lenore saw a hunch-shouldered man just beyond the threshold. Undersized and scrawny, the fellow was Crawley Juke. Lenore noted a pasty face staring into the room; an instant later, she observed an oddity about it. Crawley was staring with eyes that were shut.

Spark turned to crowd through the opening. He came face to face with Crawley; stepped back, to stoop and eye the rogue's oddly staring countenance.

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As Spark paused, Crawley moved, but not of his own effort. The spotter's huddled figure lost its balance; slowly, it folded forward. Gaining momentum with his topple, Crawley pitched headlong to the floor of the doomed office.

SPARK started to stoop, wondering at Crawley's collapse. He halted halfway to the floor and jumped backward suddenly, as though Crawley struck him as a victim of a plague. It was not Crawley's huddled form, however, that caused Spark's whipping move. Spark was looking upward, through the opened panel.

Lenore's eyes saw the sight that had astounded the crook. Where Crawley's figure had first crouched, there stood a being in black. Cloaked, with eyes that burned from beneath his black hat brim, the rescuer held a leveled automatic that squarely covered Spark.

The Shadow had crossed the crook's game. Like Crawley, the master avenger had arrived by the back route. His burning eyes showed no mercy for Spark Lethro. The Shadow was prepared to handle the sixth crook.

CHAPTER XVII. THE FIFTH MINUTE

TO Lenore Berkland, The Shadow's arrival at the paneled exit seemed miraculous. Lenore's imagination had become so strained that she had fancied she heard sounds at the door from the front of the store. She had pictured The Shadow there.

But The Shadow had spied the spotter in the front street. From the time of that discovery onward, The Shadow had turned the game to his own use.

Entering the front of the store, he had lingered there but briefly. Edging out to the street again, he had spotted Crawley sneaking from his hiding place. Unsuspected by the lurker, The Shadow had trailed Crawley to the back way, through passages to the paneled barrier.

Crawley had given the seven raps; but another thump had followed. A stroke unheard by Spark Lethro. That tap had been the solid jolt of The Shadow's automatic handle, squarely delivered against Crawley's skull.

Crawley had remained upright until The Shadow pushed his stunned form forward. Then, instead of Crawley, The Shadow occupied the door.

Although Spark's crooked brain took in these details simultaneously, Spark did not halt to consider them. Instead, he showed quick ability to cope with The Shadow. As he leaped away from the avenging figure that confronted him, Spark took a quick shot with his revolver. The jab was luckier than Spark deserved. His gun hand, in its motion, aimed almost directly for The Shadow.

With the flash of the gun, The Shadow was lunging forward. Spark's bullet punched a perfect hole through the side of the slouch hat brim, a sixteenth of an inch from The Shadow's ear. Only The Shadow's swift inward drive saved him from Spark's slug.

A roar from The Shadow's .45 dispatched a bullet that clipped the knuckles of Spark's right hand. The crook's fist jolted back and dropped.

Before Spark could tighten his losing grip on the revolver, The Shadow was driving toward him. Spark grabbed for The Shadow.

But defeat was inevitable for Spark Lethro.

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His gun hand wounded, Spark could do no more than retain a flabby hold upon his revolver while he tried to use it as a bludgeon. His left hand, clutching at The Shadow's wrist, was barely able to force back the muzzle that pushed closer to the crook's eyes.

Yet Spark possessed a frenzied fury in the unequal combat. The Shadow had not learned the reason. It was because Spark knew that two of the precious five minutes had passed.

Wrenching with a fitful tug, Spark managed to bob his head and get a momentary grip upon his gun. His thumb and trigger finger alone could function. They served Spark in the pinch. Two seconds more, Spark would have had opportunity to fire, point-blank, at The Shadow. Within that time limit, The Shadow acted.

Twisting his right wrist, The Shadow swung a back-hand blow that found Spark's chin. Weighted with the bulk of the automatic, The Shadow's heavy hand delivered a haymaker. Taking the gloved knuckles straight on the jaw, Spark floundered backward.

The Shadow released the crook, let him roll to the little passage that led to the front of the store.

AIDING the girl, The Shadow released her bonds. Lenore was frantic. She realized that The Shadow could not have learned about the threatening time bombs. A third minute had passed; there were less than two more before the blast would strike.

Without a second's hesitation, the girl gripped the loose end of the adhesive tape that covered her mouth. With a quick tug, she ripped the gag away just as The Shadow had freed her feet. Hysterically, Lenore pointed beyond the desk, crying out:

"The switch – Spark pressed it – the explosion – set for five minutes –"

The Shadow saw a coil of the wire that showed just past the desk. With a long, swooping motion, he plucked Lenore from the chair, steadied her on her feet.

Somehow, in that instant, The Shadow must have calculated the time element. He recognized that the interval was too short to make an escape by the long back passage. The one outlet that offered a way to safety lay through the front of the store.

A triple-locked door barred that route. Two locks and a bolt were accessible from the inside; but there would be delay in opening them. A quick glance, however, told The Shadow that the locks could be handled. Spark Lethro had reached the passage door. Half to his feet, the wounded crook was gripping one of the locks with his left hand.

The Shadow whisked Lenore straight into the passage. Just as Spark turned the single lock, The Shadow pushed the girl inside. Catching the second lock with one hand, the bolt with the other, The Shadow pulled. Spark had unlatched his lock. The door swung wide.

A snarl from Spark. Inadvertently, the crook had aided The Shadow. Spark clutched at the cloaked rescuer. Ignoring the crook's grip, The Shadow hurled Lenore through the open door. Instinctively, the girl kept onward, toward the street.

Spark's one thought was to hold The Shadow, that the black-clad battler might perish with him. The Shadow had a different idea. He wanted safety; with it, he wanted Spark alive. The final minute showed a strange conflict.

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With superhuman strength, The Shadow hoisted Spark straight upward. Bundling the bulky crook above him, he started for the outer door, keeping Spark's arm aloft. Spark's left hand was clawing wildly, but it could not reach The Shadow.

BELLOWING like a wounded beast, Spark's only thought was to balk whatever The Shadow intended. Spark gained his chance just before The Shadow reached the outer door. There was an old cabinet in the corner of the store. Spark grabbed a shelf as he was carried past the bulky, antiquated piece of furniture.

The move stopped The Shadow short; his shoulders jolted backward; Spark lurched almost free of him. Lenore shrieked a warning from the steps to the sidewalk.

Twisted sidewise, The Shadow looked up to see the cabinet toppling downward, straight for his head. That crash threatened a stunning blow that would mean final doom. There was only one way to avoid it.

The Shadow dived forward, hurling Spark from his shoulders. Off balance, the crook sprawled at an angle, missing the doorway toward which The Shadow headed. Spark rolled over as he reached a corner inside the little store. The Shadow struck the door frame with his shoulder, jostled through and sprawled upon the steps where Lenore stood.

The thudding cabinet flattened on the floor with a terrific crackle. Before The Shadow could turn to see the result; before he could make another attempt to bring out Spark, the smash of the cabinet was drowned by a more tremendous sound.

Like a rolling thunderclap, a subterranean blast quivered through the old store. Timed to strike as one, the explosions came with one muffled burst. The whole interior of the store was shaken. Floors heaved upward. Walls caved. In that one tremor, the place was completely demolished. Ceilings crumbled to bring down tons of debris.

The stone steps seemed to lurch. The door frame held for a moment, then buckled as brick walls cracked above it. Masses of masonry were beginning their downward deluge. They toppled, crashed like a stone cataract to the sidewalk.

In the second that it took for the flood to strike, The Shadow acted to save himself and Lenore.

Driving up from the steps at the moment of the doorway's buckle, The Shadow caught Lenore with one arm. The girl was spun from the danger spot. The Shadow's grip carried her clear to the curb. Staggering as she slipped free, Lenore rolled to the asphalt, five feet beyond the farthest reach of the bombarding masonry.

Shakily, she arose. She heard a weird whisper – a hissed tone that spoke a command for silence. Lenore understood. She was to forget the episode of the cloaked rescuer.

Nodding, she looked about, expecting to see The Shadow. The street was blackened. Her mysterious rescuer was gone. Awed, Lenore stared, hardly able to piece the details of her amazing adventure. The Shadow's quick departure left her dumbfounded.

FROM somewhere, sirens wailed. They were distant; but something occurred closer. Headlights cleaved the darkness of the street. A taxicab wheeled up beside Lenore. Two men scrambled to the street.

Lenore was gripped by strong arms as she began a dizzy sway. The man who caught her was Joe Cardona. Resting in the inspector's arms, Lenore saw the anxious face of the other man who had arrived. She gave a glad cry as she recognized her uncle, Glen Mogridge.

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Spasmodically, Lenore tried to tell that she had been captured, but had managed to escape. Pointing toward the ruins of Tatterman's store, she blurted the name of Spark Lethro. Cardona turned her over to Mogridge.

As the girl's uncle helped her into the cab, Cardona clambered into the massed debris. He stopped upon the brick-covered stone steps. Using a flashlight, Joe saw something move from beneath the shattered door frame.

A mashed face glared upward. Cardona recognized a countenance that had once been Spark Lethro's. He saw a left hand thrust forward, as if to make a convulsive throw. Lips coughed a last statement; all that Cardona could hear was the word "jinx." The left hand flopped. Spark was dead.

Cardona thrust his hand beneath the crook's stilled fingers. He caught a solid object that had the hardness of a small pellet. Grimly, Cardona closed his fist upon the object. He pocketed it as he turned to meet the arriving police cars.

Amid the slackening noise of sirens, Cardona thought he heard a whispered laugh, grim and mirthless, from the darkness close by. When Cardona stared, he saw no one.

BRISKLY, Cardona put officers in charge of the devastated scene. Boarding the cab, he ordered the driver to go back to Berkland's.

When they arrived at the oil magnate's residence, the occupants of the cab saw a parked coupe. Standing on the sidewalk was Lawrence Woolford, arguing with the policeman who guarded the house.

Woolford saw Lenore when she alighted with Mogridge. Immediately, the young man began words of explanation. He said that he had been delayed in coming to the house.

Cardona cut Woolford short; ordering him to come inside. The group went up to the study. There, Cardona learned the details of Lenore's telephone call. Lenore explained how she had noted the time-table after Woolford had hung up.

As Lenore completed her statement, Cardona heard a sound at the door from the library. He looked to see the tall form of Lamont Cranston.

The Shadow entered; his disguised face wore a solemn expression. Quietly, he pointed to the written transcription of the telegram that still lay upon the desk. He produced the one that he himself had received.

"The messages were for me," explained The Shadow. "I went to Tatterman's after I talked with Ungler here, but I did not go there directly. I have just come from the vicinity. I saw the results of the explosion."

"Lucky you didn't go there earlier, Mr. Cranston," observed Cardona. "Miss Berkland was nearly trapped in that blast. But what about these telegrams? You got one, Mr. Cranston; and one came here."

"The second one came just before my arrival," stated The Shadow, pointing to the desk. "It was addressed to Mr. Mogridge; but Ungler said that he was not here when it came."

"That's right," nodded Mogridge. Then, to Cardona: "I was with you at the time, inspector."

"We know that," returned Cardona. He turned to Woolford and snapped the quick question: "What do you know about these telegrams?"

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"Only what Lenore told me," replied Woolford. "She only mentioned the second one. I regarded it as none of my business. Lenore has already told you that."

Cardona eyed Woolford suspiciously. Joe was about to make a further quiz, when he thought better of it. Stolidly the ace declared:

"There's one man I want to talk to. That's Ungler. He's got something to explain. He did a sneak out of this house. I'd like to know where he went to —"

Cardona stopped short, staring at the door to the library. There, upon the threshold, his face wearing a smug smile, stood James Ungler. The returned secretary gave a courteous bow, then stepped aside to admit a man who was with him. Cardona saw Tobias Berkland.

"UNGLER has told me all about this," declared the oil magnate, stepping into the room. "I sent neither of those telegrams. Some other person must have sent them from Boston, unless they were faked. I did not come in on the train that arrived at eight. I was on the train that I intended to take: the one due at nine—thirty."

Cardona glanced at the desk clock. It showed exactly half past nine. He shot a questioning glance; Berkland smiled.

"Ungler showed intelligence," explained Berkland. "After Mr. Cranston had gone, Ungler doubted that the telegrams were genuine. He decided that I might be on the train due here at nine—thirty. He went to the station at One Hundred and Twenty—fifth Street. He wired my train at Stamford, telling me to get off when I reached One Hundred and Twenty—fifth. I met Ungler and joined him. We came here by cab."

Cardona stood bewildered. Again, the case seemed air—tight. The matter of the telegrams was simple; they could have been easily faked. But who was the man responsible for sending them?

As on a previous night, Cardona stared at faces. He saw Berkland's confident expression and realized again that the oil magnate could hardly have a purpose in stealing and returning his own gems. He noted Mogridge, remembered that the mustached man was Berkland's brother—in—law; also, that there was no need to question his recent actions. Mogridge had been with Cardona before either telegrams had been received; and he had stayed with Joe ever since.

Woolford had a simple story to which he could stick. He could claim no knowledge of anything until after Lenore called him and that was just before the hour set for disaster. As for Ungler, the secretary had explained all his suspicious actions by contacting Berkland when the oil magnate arrived from Boston.

To break the tension, Cardona dipped his hand into his pocket. His closed fingers came out; they approached the desk and opened. Cardona spoke the simple sentence:

"This was on Spark Lethro."

Berkland uttered an elated cry; he clamped his hand upon the sixth ruby and held it to the light. Showing it to Mogridge, Berkland nodded and declared:

"The stone is genuine. It is the sixth Drop of Blood!"

"There is still a seventh," put in Cardona, gruffly. Then, in a tone that he expected at least one man to understand, he added: "When we get the seventh ruby, we'll have the master crook."

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No one commented on Cardona's statement; but there were lips that showed the slightest semblance of a smile. Those lips were The Shadow's. They lacked agreement with Joe Cardona.

The Shadow knew that deeper plots must be uncovered before the identity of the master crook could be revealed and proven.

CHAPTER XVIII. THE SHADOW'S MISSION

WHEN The Shadow left Berkland's, he went directly to the Cobalt Club, there to meet Commissioner Weston. Later, as Cranston, The Shadow attended the scheduled midnight banquet in honor of a well-known actor. It was three o'clock in the morning when the affair ended.

Instead of traveling to the New Jersey residence where he lived as Cranston, The Shadow boarded his new taxi and made a change of make-up. When he left the cab, he was Henry Arnaud. In that character he went to the hotel where he had registered under the mythical name.

The Shadow had not forgotten his special mission. He still intended to locate Professor Antonius Hanlock, the missing expert who claimed a new process in the manufacture of synthetic gems. The message on the sapphire was as important as before; but haste was not essential. It was too late, tonight, for The Shadow to follow the plan that he had made for reaching Hanlock.

Moreover, tonight's events were ones that promised an aftermath tomorrow. The Shadow preferred to wait until another day had passed.

Summarizing the episode at Tatterman's little store, The Shadow saw plainly what a master crook had attempted; he also knew just how much the hidden criminal had accomplished. The supercrook had counted upon two results; he had gained only one.

The crime master had planned one more victim: to complete his course, he needed the death of Spark Lethro. To kill the bomb-setter was easy, for Spark did not suspect the big-shot's purpose. To put Spark's death to special advantage, the master crook had planned a way to pit the bomb-setter against The Shadow. The trap at Tatterman's was the result.

Though he had hoped to claim both victims, the big-shot had counted upon getting one if the other survived. Probably the master crook would have preferred the elimination of The Shadow. He at least had solace in the fact that Spark was gone. Also, he could comfort himself upon The Shadow's failure to drag Spark from the ruins. Spark, sixth of the half dozen whom the big-shot had doomed, had failed to divulge the name of the chief who ruled him.

The Shadow was the only threat remaining.

Knowing that, The Shadow had decided to disappear again from view. He did not want the game to be delayed. By dropping from sight, he was giving his enemy leeway. The Shadow would be ready when the master crook prepared a final move.

WHEN morning arrived, The Shadow read the newspaper accounts of the explosion at Tatterman's. Breakfasting as Henry Arnaud, The Shadow looked like any other guest at the hotel. All who had newspapers were interested in the accounts of the latest crime that involved the Seven Drops of Blood.

The Shadow remained at the hotel all morning. Lunchtime brought the early evening newspapers. They

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declared that the ruby reclaimed from Spark Lethro was genuine. Experts had examined it and tested it; they announced that it was the sixth of the seven stolen stones.

There was another item that interested The Shadow. Tatterman, arriving in New York, had reported promptly to the police. The jeweler had been called out of town by a telegram from Philadelphia. Like the ones attributed to Berkland, in Boston, that wire was a faked one.

The police had definitely proven the fact. Their theory was that Spark had seen to the details of sending the counterfeit telegrams. The Shadow conceded that the theory was right. Spark was the man who handled last night's trap. The chances were that the big-shot had given Spark the entire job.

The Shadow left the hotel soon after lunch. When he returned for dinner at half past six, he heard newsboys shouting wildly all along the street. The Shadow bought an extra hot from the press. Its headlines bore an announcement which The Shadow had anticipated.

The seventh of the stolen rubies was found.

Entering the hotel dining room. The Shadow ordered dinner; then read the details. The smile that showed upon the lips of Henry Arnaud was significant. Not only did The Shadow find certain of his own theories established, he was also intrigued by the ingenious way in which the master crook had returned the seventh Drop of Blood. He had done it in a manner that left no trace.

ALL day, the police had been burrowing in the ruins of Tatterman's store. They had reached the jeweler's safe and had found it intact. The steel box had been taken by truck to headquarters.

Tatterman was naturally pleased to learn that his safe was unopened. He went to headquarters, unlocked the safe and took an inventory of its contents. Among these were some small jewel cases that belonged to customers. Tatterman kept them all together and seldom opened them. On this occasion, he looked into the cases, at the request of the police.

In one small case, just large enough to hold a finger ring, Tatterman found a shining red stone neatly mounted on the green velvet interior. The jeweler recognized the gem immediately; so did Joe Cardona and others who were present. The stone was a ruby, the seventh Drop of Blood.

At first, the police thought that Spark Lethro might have opened the safe and stowed the little jewel case in it. That idea was dropped. As a cracksman, Spark had always depended upon dynamite in the form of "soup"; he lacked the velvety touch needed to open a safe by fingering the combination. The law looked for another answer – and Tatterman supplied it.

The jeweler remembered that he had left some jewel cases on his desk when he went into the front of the store to see a customer. That had been early yesterday. When Tatterman returned to the office, he had put the cases away. Undoubtedly, someone had entered the office by the rear panel, during Tatterman's absence. That person had placed the extra jewel case with the others.

This theory suited The Shadow. To it, he added an opinion of his own. The incident had occurred before noon, the day before. The man who added the extra jewel case was certainly the supercrook. That was one job that he would not have entrusted to Spark Lethro.

Therefore, Tatterman had been fortunate. Unquestionably, the supercrook must have remained at the secret panel to make sure that Tatterman did not discover the ruby. Had the jeweler found the gem, the supercrook would have been forced to murder him. Luckily, such crime had not been necessary.

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AFTER dinner, The Shadow showed no haste. He waited until nine o'clock, then bought the first edition of a next morning's newspaper. The Shadow expected to find new facts concerning the Seven Drops of Blood.

He was not disappointed. The ruby found at Tatterman's was as genuine as the other six. Tobias Berkland had turned it over to the International Association of Jewelers. They had paid him for it as they had with the others.

More than that, tomorrow would mark the opening of the exposition at which the Seven Drops of Blood were to be displayed. The famous gems would be shown to the public, under conditions that would make it impossible for any crook to steal them.

The newspaper contained a last-minute advertisement concerning the display. However much others might have suffered through the theft and return of the rubies, it was certain that the exposition would gain. Big gate receipts were predicted.

As for The Shadow, his wait was ended. He had acquired new facts. Darkness had settled. He was ready for his postponed mission.

Leaving his hotel, he entered his cab, which was stationed a few blocks away. The Shadow rode to a spot near the abbreviated address that he had learned from the sapphire message.

There, The Shadow followed a narrow street and blended with the darkness of an old office building. This was a neighborhood where the old mingled with the new. A few apartment buildings had replaced more ancient structures. None, however, exceeded a dozen stories in height.

The office building was slated for removal, and was, therefore, poorly tenanted. It was closed for the night; if a watchman had been placed on duty, he was certainly lax on the job, for The Shadow saw no sign of him. Entering through a ground-floor window, The Shadow reached a stairway and went up to the roof.

Cloaked and hatted, The Shadow stood invisible when he reached the low rail that girded the roof. Even the glow of the city did not reach him, for it was stopped by the wall of another structure that adjoined the office building. The adjacent building, was a half story taller than the one on which The Shadow stood.

Twelve feet across an open space; ten feet above his head, The Shadow saw the dim leg of a water tower. The support offered what The Shadow wanted. He was prepared to make use of it.

From his cloak, he took a yellow object, four-bladed. It was a cross-shaped boomerang. The Shadow delivered a deft forearm throw. The boomerang whirred past the post of the water tank, disappeared momentarily, then returned lazily, coming back to The Shadow's hand.

Attached to the bladed device was a spindle; from it, a slender cord had unwound. The Shadow attached a wire to one end, pulled the other end and drew the wire around the post. Attaching both ends of the wire to the roof rail the cloaked adventurer began a climb to the roof of the next building. His hand carried clamps that tightened under pressure when he gripped the double wire.

REACHING his objective, The Shadow remained in darkness, for the other roof was topped by a wall that loomed at The Shadow's shoulder. Whitish stone was barely visible; against it, darkened squares of metal. Feeling one of these, The Shadow discovered it to be a heavy steel shutter.

With a little flashlight, The Shadow examined the fastenings. The steel barrier was held in place by heavy metal screws. Working upon them, The Shadow loosened the edge of one shutter and swung it outward.

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Inside, he detected the glint of a window pane. He worked with the sash, unclamped it with a thin wedge of metal.

Raising the sash, The Shadow stepped across the sill. He found himself in a small room, with a door beyond.

Cautiously, The Shadow opened the door. He realized immediately that he had come through an empty storage room, for the lighted room ahead was a laboratory. It was equipped with an electric furnace, large retorts, huge pieces of machinery, fanciful in shape. One of these was close to the doorway.

As The Shadow stepped forward, there was a stir from behind the mechanism.

Out from hiding leaped a long-limbed, wild-eyed man, whose white hair formed a shaggy mass. The Shadow caught but a momentary glimpse of a hunted, tight-drawn face; then the attacker was upon him. Clawish hands gripped The Shadow's throat. The cloaked fighter was hurled back by the force of the old man's drive.

The Shadow had found Professor Antonius Hanlock – and the result was a maddened battle.

Twisting from Hanlock's grasp, The Shadow went back into the darkness of the room that he had left. Hanlock must have possessed a catlike ability to see in the dark, along with his feline stealth; for he was quick to seek another grip upon The Shadow.

Blackness blanketed the fray. With hands that gripped like steel, The Shadow sought to wrench away the claws that clutched him. Two figures floundered back and forth, tripped and went rolling across the floor. There was a gargling sound, followed by silence.

Darkness covered the outcome. In the gloom of that storeroom, no observer could have told which was the victor. The Shadow had pitted his strength against a wild man's fury.

The future was to tell the consequences of that short, but hard-fought, fray.

CHAPTER XIX. DROPS OF BLOOD

EARLY the next evening, Joe Cardona visited the Cobalt Club, there to meet Commissioner Weston. Together, they rode in the commissioner's official car to the exposition hall housing the jewelers exhibit. Traffic was heavy as they rode along. It seemed that all Manhattan had headed for the exposition where the Seven Drops of Blood were on display.

"I am worried, Cardona," announced Weston, as they rode along. "I can't imagine what has happened to Cranston. I expected him to dine with me this evening and then go on to the exposition."

"Maybe he will see you there, commissioner."

"Possibly. I hope so. He wasn't at the club last night; and when I called his home today, they said he was away."

"Looks like he may have gone out of town."

"He said nothing about a trip when I talked with him, two nights ago. He usually mentions it when he intends to go away."

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The car reached the exposition building; Weston and Cardona went through the formality of showing passes, which was scarcely necessary, for they were recognized.

Once inside, they went to see the exhibit of jewelry. Nearing it, they found huge throngs in line. So many persons wanted to see the Seven Drops of Blood that arrangements had been made to keep back the crowd.

The passes again proved useful. Weston and Cardona were admitted into the display. Guards were on duty, standing by long lines of showcases; but all the visitors were congregated at one end of the room. That was where the Seven Drops of Blood were on display. The rubies were the one attraction that the customers wanted to see. The exhibit was arranged close to the end wall, with a space beyond it. That passage was roped off, only privileged persons being allowed there. Commissioner Weston shouldered his way through to the back and Cardona kept close behind him. When they entered the roped space, the first person they met was Tobias Berkland.

The oil magnate greeted them with a smile. He pointed over the ropes and remarked:

"That's the way we should have kept the rubies at Pettigrew's. Look at the way these chaps have guarded them."

IN the center of a square stood a massive steel box that a dozen men could not have lifted. It was low and wide, like a squat pedestal. In its upper surface was a square hole, six inches across.

Beneath a thick sheet of bulletproof glass lay the Seven Drops of Blood. The rubies glistened from their strong box. Unmounted, the stones rested upon a flat, ornamental plaque.

"They looked better in their original setting," remarked Berkland. "But I must say, that they are remarkably effective when separated. Each stone stands out with individual perfection. Do you know, commissioner, I am beginning to feel sorry that I parted with those gems."

There was another who overheard the remark. Lenore Berkland had come into the reserved space. She shook her head sadly.

"I am not sorry, father," she said. "Those rubies have cost too many lives."

Berkland paid no attention to his daughter's remark.

Instead, he called Weston's attention to a feature of the steel case that held the rubies. It was equipped with hinged sheets of metal that could close over the glass from above; and up to the glass from beneath.

"They are controlled by photoelectric beams," remarked Berkland in an admiring tone. "If any hand should come within ten inches of the case, the beams will function. In addition, commissioner, the steel case is mounted on a special elevator, which can be dropped into a solid compartment under the floor."

Weston nodded. He had already heard the details of the device. The International Association of Jewelers were taking no chances with the rubies that they had purchased. There was a point, however, that interested Weston. He observed that, occasionally, the inside of the glass became clouded; then cleared. Weston asked Berkland about the matter.

"Ungler has some notes on that," remarked Berkland. "Where is Ungler?"

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He looked about for the secretary, but did not see him. Excusing himself, Berkland went from behind the reserved space. Another man stepped into view. This arrival was Glen Mogridge. Berkland's brother-in-law chatted with Weston; then asked Lenore:

"Where is Lawrence Woolford?"

"I expect him soon," replied Lenore, anxiously. "He said something about going to the theater, later."

Berkland was returning, followed by Ungler. The secretary showed Weston a typewritten sheet, which had come from the International Association of Jewelers.

"This will be printed in an announcement by tomorrow," explained Ungler. "You see, sir, the Association thought that the public would be interested in the method by which the gems were proven genuine. There is an intermittent spray that passes over the rubies, giving them an acid bath. That causes the cloudiness on the glass.

"All the while, the rubies are under great heat, which you can tell by the brilliance of the light about them. It serves as a heat test: and it also clears away the slight cloudiness that comes with each spray."

"Ingenious, isn't it, commissioner?" put in Berkland, who was standing beside Mogridge. "By the way, where is your friend Cranston? We were speaking about him at dinner."

"I haven't seen Cranston," replied Weston. "Perhaps he will arrive later, Mr. Berkland."

THERE was a stir in the crowd that flanked the other three sides of the square space. Joe Cardona heard a buzz of conversation; then saw the reason. Coming through were some representatives of the exposition; with them was a dark-skinned man who wore a turban with his tuxedo. Ungler pointed to his notes.

"His name is Rahman Singh," informed the secretary. "He represents the present Maharajah of Bolopore, whose grandfather was the owner of the Seven Drops of Blood. Rahman Singh arrived by liner from England, today."

"Good publicity," remarked Mogridge, "having that Hindu come here. He looks rather old. I suppose he may have seen the rubies when they were owned by the first maharajah to possess them."

That proved to be the case. Rahman Singh was conducted behind the exhibit and introduced to Weston and the others. Solemnly, impassively, the Hindu eyed the rubies. Then, in perfect English, he said:

"I have seen the Seven Drops of Blood. Once seen, those rubies can never be forgotten. Again, my eyes have viewed their splendid sparkle. Thank you, gentlemen, for this privilege."

With solemn bows, the Hindu departed, conducted by the men who had brought him. As he passed the exit in the ropes, he brushed against a man who had arrived just in time to hear his statement. Cardona, noting Rahman Singh's departure, observed that the newcomer was Lawrence Woolford.

Lenore hurried over to speak to her fiancée. Cardona saw Woolford shake his head.

"Sorry, Lenore," he said. "Couldn't get any tickets to the show. How about taking in a movie, later?"

Lenore agreed; then remarked:

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"I can go home with father first. Come up to the house, Lawrence, and meet me there."

"All right," agreed Woolford. "I may be pretty late, though. Still, there's always a feature that goes on after midnight. Say, though, who was that Hindu who just went out of here?"

Lenore explained about Rahman Singh. Woolford chuckled, remarked that it was lucky the jewels were well guarded.

"I'll bet that Hindu would have liked to have those rubies," he declared. "Those chaps hate to see any gems leave India. Well, Lenore, I'll see you later. I'm going to look around the exposition for a while."

CARDONA was pondering over what Woolford had said. It offered a new angle to the case that still kept Joe busy. At times, Cardona had jumped to wild theories regarding the identity of the master criminal responsible for the theft of the rubies. He remembered how seven gunmen had staged their robberies wearing beards and turbans. If Rahman Singh had arrived in New York a few weeks earlier, Cardona might have regarded him as a candidate to be unmasked as a master crook.

But Cardona had sense enough to know that an important man from India could not have faked his presence in London, or managed to fake a steamship voyage from England.

Glen Mogridge had left the reserved space. Tobias Berkland was ready to depart. Lenore waited while her father spoke to Ungler. The secretary showed Berkland some notes; after a short consultation, Berkland nodded. He went out with Lenore.

Cardona saw Ungler go in an opposite direction. Evidently, Ungler had suggested that he remain here a while and check the details of other gems that were on display. Part of the secretary's business was to list items that Berkland, as a gem collector, might wish to buy.

Officials of the exposition had surrounded Commissioner Weston. They were anxious to show other attractions to the commissioner. Cardona remained alone behind the end ropes. Deep in thought, Joe stared toward the steel case that contained the Seven Drops of Blood. The glint of the rubies seemed to tantalize him, as if the stones knew and could tell the identity of the master criminal who once had held them.

Fine, invisible spray must have bathed the gems, for Cardona saw the glass cloud above them. That, too, was typical of the mystery that had covered the actions of the master crook. Cardona saw the mist clear; he hoped that the same would be true to the hunt that lay ahead of him.

An instant later, Cardona's reflections ceased.

A change was coming over the Seven Drops of Blood!

THE rubies were no longer rounded. They had elongated; they were flattening. Leaning forward, his eyes unbelieving, Cardona saw the change continue. He could hear the loud, excited buzz of other witnesses, as they watched the uncanny contortions of the gems.

A glisten replaced the sparkle of the rubies. They looked like beads of thick glycerine, tinged crimson. They widened farther; spread like miniature hotcakes. The rubies were melting under Cardona's eyes!

Another spray; a trifling cloud upon the glass. When the heat ended the haze, the transformation was complete. The steel case and its photoelectric beams had become a travesty. Uselessly, those protective devices were guarding a chest that contained no treasure.

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Solid no longer, the supposed rubies had become completely liquid. Spread like blobs upon a windowpane, they bore no resemblance whatever to the precious stones that they had represented. Despite the examination of experts and the tests that had been made, those ruddy beads had been false.

Splotched objects on their ornamental plaque, the melted stones were worthless. But their new appearance exactly fulfilled the term by which they had been titled.

Seven Drops of Blood!

CHAPTER XX. CARDONA'S LUCK

IN the tense seconds that followed, a multitude of thoughts flooded Joe Cardona's brain. Though given to hunches, Cardona was not imaginary; nevertheless, the first conjecture that struck him was that some amazing thing had happened. He actually believed, for a moment, that an incredible force had been used to penetrate the bulletproof barrier and dissolve the rubies.

His thoughts flashed instantly to the Hindu, Rahman Singh, as if that visitor from the East possessed an eye of evil that could have delivered the malefactions of a dead maharajah. That thought ended. Cardona forgot the Hindu; he pushed out through the crowd to look for others.

Ungler might be nearer; Cardona remembered that the secretary had gone to look at other jewels. But Ungler had evidently stepped outside first. Cardona saw no sign of the secretary. Excitement was starting in the room. As guards hurried to learn the trouble, Cardona hastened outside.

Woolford had said that he intended to remain and view the exposition; but Cardona could not spy him. That was not surprising. Thousands of people were present; and more were coming.

Cardona needed someone to question. He thought of Mogridge, and remembered that the mustached man had left some time before and was probably gone. The last bet was Berkland. Cardona knew where to find him and tell him the news. Berkland had gone to his home.

There were telephone booths on the ground floor. Cardona entered one and called Berkland's home. There was no response. Perhaps the oil magnate had not yet arrived there.

Cardona decided to make a quick trip to Berkland's house. It was better than staying here. Nothing could be gained by contacting Commissioner Weston. As for Ungler and Woolford, Cardona was convinced that one or the other would be gone. The one who was missing would be the one he wanted.

By going to Berkland's, Cardona might be able to gain some thread of evidence. Perhaps Berkland could supply a lucky one.

With that thought in mind, Cardona tried to board a taxicab outside the exposition building. A big doorman stopped him. Cardona flashed a badge. The doorman's manner changed.

"Sorry, inspector," he apologized. "We've been having trouble with the crowd. They bunched around one taxi, because they saw a Hindu getting into it —"

"The Hindu!" interrupted Cardona. "Where did he go?"

The doorman stood with his hand on the doorknob of a taxi. He was trying to recall an address.

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"He went to some apartment house," he said. "I can't remember the address, but he gave a name, too. The place was called the Glastonbury –"

"Maybe the driver knows the place."

WITH that remark, Cardona boarded the cab and started south on Lexington Avenue. He quizzed the hackie; the fellow nodded and gave an address, which he was sure was the Glastonbury. He had taken passengers there before.

When Cardona's cab reached the address, the driver proved to be right. Cardona hurried into the Glastonbury Apartments, to find a dull-faced operator in an elevator. Cardona questioned about the Hindu. The operator stood stupidly for a few moments, then nodded.

"Guess that was him, all right," he said, "but he didn't have no turban. I remember him, though, 'count of him being sorta dark. He went up to the penthouse."

"Who lives there?"

"I don't know. There's a guy goes up once in a while, but I never took a good look at him. I just got the job here a few weeks ago. I don't know many of the people yet."

"Take me up to the penthouse."

The operator hesitated. Cardona flashed his badge. The fellow gawked and nodded. The elevator started a speedy upward trip, with Cardona aboard. All the way up, Cardona was congratulating himself upon his luck. If any one could reveal some peculiarity inherent to the rubies that had made them melt, Rahman Singh should be that man.

At the penthouse level, Cardona stepped into an entry. He opened a door ahead, looked in to see Rahman Singh standing by a window, studying the lights of Manhattan. The Hindu was oblivious to Cardona's arrival.

Joe motioned to the elevator operator, signaling that he could go down to the ground floor. Before the fellow could clang the big doors, Cardona stepped into the living room where Rahman Singh stood. Joe closed the door behind him.

Rahman Singh turned; he studied the arrival, then bowed politely. He looked puzzled, as though he had expected someone else to enter. When Cardona flashed his badge, Rahman Singh eyed it quizzically. He gave a musical laugh and nodded his recollection.

Ah, yes," he remarked. "I saw you when I was introduced to the police commissioner. Why have you come here, inspector?"

Cardona had already decided to be cagey. He preferred to ask a few questions before mentioning the fate that had overtaken the rubies. Joe put the first one.

"You have an appointment here," he announced. "Who is it with?"

"I am sorry," rejoined Rahman Singh, politely. "I have agreed to mention it to no one.

"I represent the law," reminded Cardona, grimly. "You'll be in a bad spot, Mr. Singh, if you hold out information. Anyway, I'm staying here until the fellow shows up."

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Rahman Singh looked troubled. His eyes became restless. Cardona followed his changing gaze; noted for the first time how small the penthouse was. It seemed to consist only of this living room. The wall beyond was solid.

"Very well," decided Rahman Singh. "I presume that it is my duty to answer your question. The name of the man who arranged for me to meet him here is –"

THE Hindu stopped. Cardona spun about, noting a change of the man's gaze. Facing the entry door, Cardona saw another man who had just arrived by elevator. A revolver in his fist, the newcomer held Joe covered. Above the gun were hard eyes, peering from a face that Cardona instantly recognized.

The man on the threshold was Glen Mogridge.

It took no mind-reading ability for Cardona to know that he faced the master criminal. Mogridge's glare, his ugly challenge, the very fact that he had arranged this secret meeting – all were proof that Berkland's brother-in-law had engineered the game.

Approaching with long stride, Mogridge pressed his revolver close to Cardona's chest. With his free hand, he found Joe's gun and yanked it from its pocket. With a nudge he pushed Cardona to a chair.

Keeping him covered, Mogridge produced a chamois bag and handed it to Rahman Singh. The Hindu opened the bag eagerly. Cardona stared, as he saw round, red pellets glisten in a falling trickle.

They were rubies! The gems that Mogridge had passed to Rahman Singh were the Seven Drops of Blood!

Rahman Singh examined the rubies carefully beneath a strong lamp. He poured them back into the bag, then bowed to Mogridge.

"These are the Seven Drops of Blood," declared the Hindu. "Our transaction is complete. The promised funds await your arrival in England. Mr. Mogridge, I have pledged the word of Rahman Singh."

Solemnly, the Hindu turned to leave. Cardona saw the pleased leer that dominated Mogridge's mustached face. Though Cardona could not understand the strange reappearance of the rubies, he recognized one certain fact. His own life would be ended by Mogridge – as soon as Rahman Singh was gone.

Again, Cardona looked hastily about the room – this time, hopeful for a route of escape. He saw no opportunity for exit. The walls, adorned with tapestries and paintings, formed a solid line, except for windows that were equipped with gratings. Mogridge blocked the way to the entry door, the way by which Rahman Singh intended to go.

CARDONA shot a quick glance toward the Hindu. Rahman Singh paused. His eyes showed pity; but his manner was firm. He intended to leave Cardona to his fate. Nevertheless, through courtesy, Rahman Singh decided to explain his action.

"In my land," said Rahman Singh, "we have a tradition which has long persisted. We believe that the Seven Drops of Blood bring death to those who are not their rightful owners. We also believe that the rubies are ours. Many years ago, they were taken from Bolopore. We have since tried to reclaim them.

"We were willing to pay the required price. That fact became known to Mr. Mogridge. He agreed to deliver the rubies. In return, the present Maharajah of Bolopore agreed to pay one million dollars; but he insisted that nothing be done that would lead to international complications."

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Rahman Singh paused. Mogridge, gloating, decided to add some remarks for Cardona's benefit.

"Sounded like a long order, didn't it?" jeered the gem thief. "I figured how to handle it, though. I found an old professor who could turn out synthetic rubies. Perfect matches for the Drops of Blood. All he had to do was copy them. He did it in one process; and I gave the phony rubies – six of them – to the crowd who helped me."

Cardona looked to Rahman Singh.

"You let him do that?" growled Joe. "Let Mogridge get away with murder, so you could buy the real rubies?"

"I regret all that has occurred." Rahman Singh's apology was sincere. "We of the East, however, do not judge matters by your standards. Mr. Mogridge has complied with our terms."

"But the fake rubies will make trouble for you –"

"Not at all," interposed Rahman Singh, blandly. "They will continue to pass as the Seven Drops of Blood. They have stood all tests. I, myself, have observed them. No one will ever know that they are substitutes."

Instantly, Cardona saw opportunity. Forgetting Mogridge, he rose halfway from his chair and exclaimed to Rahman Singh:

"You're wrong! Those rubies are known to be fakes! They're melted and I know now what made them. They were taking two tests at once – the heat and the moisture; that's what finished them. You call them Drops of Blood. That's what they look like – big gobs of blood, inside that steel exhibit box."

MOGRIDGE thrust Cardona back in his chair and snarled words to Rahman Singh.

"Don't let him bluff you," insisted Mogridge. "Handling this fellow is my business, Rahman Singh."

The Hindu hesitated; at last he bowed, as though convinced by Mogridge's words. Cardona made a last effort to gain Rahman Singh's cooperation. His life hung on whatever aid the Hindu might offer.

"What do you think brought me here?" demanded Cardona. "Can't you see that something happened down at the exposition? Call up the place from here. Find out for yourself what happened to the fake rubies."

"It's a stall," assured Mogridge. "Cardona took a chance on following you, that's all, Rahman Singh. He deserves what he's due to get. Remember our agreement."

Rahman Singh showed doubt. Cardona's words had impressed him. Mogridge saw it. He wanted the deal closed, so that he could dispose of Cardona. Mogridge did not believe Cardona's statements.

"I'll prove it to you, Rahman Singh," decided Mogridge, suddenly. "I'll show you how synthetic gems can stand both tests at once. Right here in my own laboratory."

Keeping Cardona covered, Mogridge stepped to a tapestry. He pressed a hidden spring; a frame swung outward from the wall, showing a blackened passage beyond it. Moving toward Cardona, Mogridge snapped an order:

"You go ahead. I'll follow with Rahman Singh."

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Cardona was staring at the Hindu. He saw Rahman Singh stiffen, his eyes fixed on the opening in the wall. Mogridge saw Cardona's gaze and the reason for it. A strange whisper reached his ears. Mogridge whipped about. He came to a halt, his gun hand lowered, as the whisper rose to a chilling tone of mirth.

A figure had stepped from blackness, straight into the room. Mogridge was covered by a leveled automatic, held by a being whom he had met before. The Shadow, after listening to all that had passed, had stepped from the depths of Mogridge's own lair to trap the master crook.

Joe Cardona's luck had not ended. Once again, The Shadow had come to his aid.

CHAPTER XXI. THE SETTLEMENT

GLEN MOGRIDGE stood helpless as he faced The Shadow. Gawking, the master murderer had lost the ease and confidence that he had held until this moment. He realized that The Shadow had ferreted his schemes in full. Proof of that was given when The Shadow spoke accusing words.

"Your hand was shown early, Mogridge," pronounced The Shadow, "even though the proof was not final. You, alone, would have been bold enough to enter Pettigrew's before the auction; there to overpower a watching detective. To gain entry, you needed an admittance card. You had one.

"You left the auction room. But Pettigrew and his assistant had seen you there. That was why you murdered them. Cleverly, you took the box that had the invitation cards. Thus you had your original card afterward. Woolford had no card. True, there was a blank guest card at Berkland's; but if Woolford had taken it, he would have had no opportunity to replace it.

"As for Ungler, he showed forgetfulness regarding that card. That was an unlikely pose for any criminal. Ungler would either have produced the card promptly, or he would have destroyed it earlier, so that the law would think it stolen by the person who cut the telephone wires."

The Shadow paused. The sourness of Mogridge's face showed the gem killer's chagrin. Suddenly, Mogridge began a snarled statement. The Shadow's whispered tone cut him short.

"You arrived at Pettigrew's soon after the crooks had fled," announced The Shadow. "Too soon, the law believed, for you to have transferred from a fleeing car to a taxicab. The law was right on that point; but the law overlooked a possibility. It did not occur to the police that one of the cars in the rear garage could have been a taxicab.

"That was the car you took, Mogridge, with one of your henchmen at the wheel. You rounded the block and arrived at Pettigrew's front door immediately. Your taxi was allowed to go its way. Later, you proved your weakness for cabs. You used one after you murdered Twitcher Killick. Your henchmen used cabs when they tried to ambush Rund."

This time, it was Cardona's turn to gape. The facts, as The Shadow put them, sounded obvious; yet they had never occurred to Joe.

"Luck served you at Berkland's," added The Shadow, to Mogridge. "Marotte and Doxol tried to expose you. You were itching, every instant, to fire at either or both. You held out while I disposed of Marotte and Woolford finished Doxol.

"If Ungler had been the master crook, he would have finished both when he had the chance; and all along, he

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would have carried a larger gun than his .22 pistol. If Woolford had been the man behind the game, he would have shot me along with Doxol. He had full opportunity to do so."

POINT by point, The Shadow had clinched the proof. Mogridge's face betrayed that he was beaten. What he regretted most was the fact that The Shadow had rescued Joe Cardona, in whose presence Mogridge had already admitted himself to be the master crook.

"As for Professor Hanlock," declared The Shadow, "I received his call for help, engraved upon a sapphire which you forwarded as a present, both to humor him and to make it look as though matters had gone well with him. As your prisoner, you forced him to match the Seven Drops of Blood. Knowing your game, he did not tell you that they would melt under simultaneous tests of heat and moisture.

"Last night, I came here and found Professor Hanlock imprisoned in the laboratory where you kept him. He thought me an enemy, at first. I was forced to overpower him. After that, he became my friend. I forced the front door of the laboratory, which he had never been able to open. Professor Hanlock will testify for the law."

As The Shadow finished, Hanlock stepped from the opened portal. His face was no longer wild and desperate. It showed steadiness, when he gazed wrathfully at Mogridge.

To Joe Cardona, all was plain except one point. Cardona found himself wondering why Rahman Singh had not negotiated with Tobias Berkland for the purchase of the rubies. Then Joe saw the answer without asking. He realized that Berkland's name had not been learned by Rahman Singh until after Mogridge had completed negotiations.

Mogridge had preferred to steal the gems and gain a cool million, rather than buy them from his brother-in-law at less than half the price. It was also plain why Mogridge had waited until the gems reached Pettigrew's before he sprang the robbery. Suspicion would have come too close to him, had he pulled the job at Berkland's.

To keep the police guessing, Mogridge had tried to divert investigation away from Berkland's. He was ready, though, in case it came there, to shoulder the blame on Ungler. That was why he had clipped the telephone wires. As for Woolford, he had merely chanced to come into the field of suspicion.

CARDONA snapped from his reverie. His job was to arrest a murderer, obligingly placed in his custody by The Shadow. As for Rahman Singh, Cardona felt no grudge against the Hindu, especially when he saw the man produce the bag of gems and calmly hand them forward. Rahman Singh's negotiations had not been of a criminal sort. Cardona reached to receive the bag of rubies.

It was then that Mogridge went berserk, as The Shadow had expected he might at Berkland's. Though a super-plotter, Mogridge was not of the underworld. In the tightness of emergency, he not only threw aside all caution; he also performed the unexpected. Instead of springing for The Shadow, who had him covered, Mogridge made a wild, twisting dive to grab the bag of rubies.

Cardona swung to meet him; he grabbed for Mogridge's gun arm, knowing that The Shadow would keep the crook covered. Mogridge fired a frantic bullet into the floor. Though it was wide, it served as a signal. The door from the entry was dashed open.

In came the elevator operator who had impressed Cardona as a dullard. With him were two others; all thugs, in Mogridge's private employ. This trio had aided him in abducting Professor Hanlock.

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The Shadow expected them, for he knew that Mogridge would not have entrusted the seizure of Hanlock to the men who had aided him in the robbery at Pettigrew's. Those dead henchmen had been kept uninformed of the professor who manufactured imitation jewels.

Ready for invaders, The Shadow was the first to fire. His .45 was pumping as the door slued open. The first man dropped, his gun unfired. The other two sprawled across him, wounded, jabbing futile shots as they fell. Their gun muzzles tilting to the floor, could do no harm.

As The Shadow swung to aid Cardona, there was a shot from Mogridge's gun. The Shadow had expected Cardona to handle the murderer, and Joe had. He had gripped Mogridge's revolver, to twist it backward.

Mogridge, grabbing for the jewels with his left hand, had not realized that his gun was turned about. He had stabbed a shot, thinking to clip Cardona.

Instead, the bullet found Mogridge's own chest. His left hand clutched; it had the rubies. His right hand loosened; its gun fell as Mogridge hit the floor. His left hand could hold no longer. It opened; the bag, clinging to his fingers, tilted and poured its contents to the floor.

Upon the thick, dark carpeting fell the reclaimed rubies – the Seven Drops of Blood that shone with full-hued crimson. Upon the light-colored chamois bag came drips of the same color. Those drops of blood were from the murderer's evil heart.

Glen Mogridge was dead, the proof of his crime upon him.

A solemn, mirthless laugh came whispered from the outer entry, beyond the bodies of the wounded thugs. The eerie echoes ended with the clang of the elevator door.

The Shadow's task was finished. The master avenger was gone. To Joe Cardona, worker for the law, remained the fruits of The Shadow's triumph.

But from one completed task The Shadow would go to another – uncompleted, until The Shadow investigated the mysterious workings of "Intimidation, Incorporated." Milked of millions, business men were in the clutches of an intimidator who would murder to gain his final end. But to The Shadow would come the completion of the case and the drawing aside of the curtain that unmasked "Intimidation, Incorporated."

THE END